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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Growing interest in the whole subject of the Protestant Reformation especially in the past years when several anniversaries have been celebrated will make Rev. D. Engelsma's article "Philip Melanchthon" of more than ordinary interest. Controversial figure that he was it has always been difficult to evaluate "Master Philip" (to use Luther's designation of his fellow reformer). This article will go a long way to aid in putting Melanchthon in the proper perspective of the whole glorious Reformation. Although the article is not concerned with the problem of modern ecumenicism, this article ought also to give some pause to the thinking of those within the Reformed community who are intent on union with Rome.

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While it is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in the church that the doctrine of inspiration is once again an object of criticism and scorn, this compels the Journal to make a defense of the truth of infallible inspiration. This is done in two separate articles, one dealing with the so-called "Synoptic Problem" which includes some remarks on how the question of the harmonization of the gospel narratives must be solved in the light of the truth of verbal and inerrant inspiration; the other evaluating the recent book by Dr. G.C. Berkhouwer entitled "The Holy Scriptures". The last mentioned article is of particular

interest because Dr. Berkhouwer is a theologian whose influence is growing within the church world. His denial of an infallible scripture is shown to be a fatal flaw in all his theologizing. The article should make clear the dangerous course of theological development in the Netherlands.

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The Seminary faculty was pleasantly surprised by the kind reception of the last issue of the Journal. Some have asked for copies of the issue but did not receive them because insufficient copies were printed. With this issue we are doubling the printing and hope to have sufficient to fill all present and future requests. If you would still like to receive the Journal, send your request to:

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May God grace these efforts with His indispensable blessing.

PHILIP MELANCHTHON
Rev. D. Engelsma

The only uncontested statements about the life of Philip Melanchthon (also, Melancthon) are those of his dates and places. As soon as one steps beyond the limits of his birth date and dwelling places, he steps into an arena of bitter dispute. Many condemn Philip so vehemently as to be unable to say any good of him; many laud the theologian so fervently as to be blind to any defects. The only other point on which all are agreed is that which ascribes to Melanchthon a gigantic role in the Reformation, one which approximates or equals the role of Luther.

Basis for the dissension among estimators of Melanchthon is to be found precisely in the man himself. He was a paradoxical, in fact, a contradictory person. On every fundamental issue, he either changed his view, uttered contradictory remarks, or differed in declaration and deed. This need not prove him to have been a sniveling and hypocritical sycophant. Of the many charges levelled against him, seldom if ever has he been accused of courting the favor of those who were in a position to advance his own personal cause. The character of the man combined with his awareness of conflicting considerations to produce a life of ambiguity. As soon as we have surveyed the pertinent facts of his life and death, it may be well to compare some estimations of Melanchthon, in the light of which our own judgment must be made.

The child who was to be the second greatest figure in the Lutheran Reformation was born in Bretten on February 16, 1497. His original name was Philip Schwarzerd, literally, Philip Black Earth. One indication of the influence which his great uncle, the famed humanist Reuchlin, had upon him is Philip's quick change of the name into the Greek equivalent, Melanchthon. A precocious lad, he obtained a master's degree in the arts in 1513. By that time he either was schooled or schooled himself in philosophy, rhetoric, astronomy, Greek, grammar, dialectic, ancient poets and historians, jurisprudence, mathematics, and medicine. He entered Pforzheim in 1507, the University of Heidelberg in 1509, and Tübingen in 1512. After 1516, Philip concentrated upon theological study. From Tübingen he was called to Wittenberg as Greek professor. This position he took up in 1518. This date also marks the meeting of the two who headed one of the greatest movements in the history of the Church, Luther and Melanchthon. Of their relationship there are opposite opinions. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who takes an extremely dim view of Melanchthon in general, maintains that Luther stood under Philip's influence.¹ The historian, Philip Schaff, who generally regards Melanchthon very highly, states that Philip Melanchthon was "carried away and controlled (sometimes against his better judgment) by the

¹Hoeksema, Rev. H., Reformed Dogmatics, p. 439

fiery genius of the Protestant Elijah."² There can be little doubt that the dominating figure was the "fiery Elijah," Luther. That Luther was cajoled by Philip into weak positions on predestination, as in Rev. Hoeksema's contention, is highly probable, however.

Overwhelmed by the enormity of the movement which centered in Wittenberg, Melanchthon flung himself and his valuable talents into the Reformation. Whatever of his humanistic youth he retained, the naturally irenic scholar never again experienced the easy and peaceful life of the typical humanist. With a passion scarcely equalled by any of his contemporaries, with the exception of John Calvin, Philip labored with body and mind, with mouth and pen in the cause of the Reformation. He was attacked and vilified by Catholic and Lutheran. At times, his life was imperiled and he was forced to flee. So intense was Philip in his studying that Luther once roared at him to cease or be excommunicated. The entire burden of composing confessional statements and conducting "negotiations" with the Catholics and the Zwinglians fell upon Melanchthon. The unanimous verdict upon this tireless and reproach-racked labor was that it was done out of sincere concern for the cause of God's Church. Maurice, Elector of Saxony, remarked that "he had never seen nor experienced anything like Melanchthon's conduct, who was not only too disinterested to ask for any thing but would not even accept it when offered."³ And

²Schaff, P., History of the Christian Church, 1910, Vol. VII, p. 192

³Quoted by Francis Cox, The Life of Philip Melancthon, p. 114

Luther, whose inaction in the confrontation with the Catholics was due to his odiousness in Catholic eyes, heaped praise upon his close friend, "He (Melancthon) is doing more than all the rest. He is the Atlas who sustains heaven and earth."⁴

Already at the Leipzig debate, Melancthon made his presence felt. With typical modesty, he called himself an idle spectator to the conflict between the Catholic, Eck, and Martin Luther. But he supplied Luther with so many arguments both before and during the speeches that the irritated Eck cried out, "Tace tu Philippe, ac tua studia cura, nec me perturba (Keep silence, Philip, mind your own studies and don't disturb me)."⁵ Melancthon was always less than fond of Eck and subjected him to rare but cutting animadversion: "No pious person could listen without disgust to the sophisms and vain subtleties of that talking mountebank."⁶ Between the Leipzig debate and Philip's death in 1560, Philip lectured to as many as 1500 students at a time, wrote theological treatises and confessions, headed Lutheran

⁴Manshreck, C.L., Melancthon: The Quiet Reformer, p. 273

⁵Cox, op. cit., p. 99

⁶Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VIII, p. 382

delegations at frequent colloquies, and attempted to live some kind of family life with Katharine Krapp, whom he married on November 25, 1520. One area into which he stoutly refused to enter was the ministry. He remained a layman until his death, although Luther urged him repeatedly to take up preaching.

After the death of Luther, Philip became the disputed head of the Reformation movement. He was the natural choice but his acceptance of the Romish stipulations contained in the Leipzig Interim, the "adiaphora," alienated a large segment of the Lutheran party. Under the leadership of Flacius, the Gnesiolutherans (the "real Lutherans") separated themselves from the "Philippists," who aligned themselves with Melancthon. The discord existent between these two factions was the cause of Philip's greatest misery. He died on April 19, 1560 at Wittenberg and was buried next to Luther in the Schlosskirche. His death-bed confession was firm, hopeful, and strikingly typical, "Thou shalt be delivered from sins, and be freed from the acrimony and fury of the theologians (rabies theologorum). Thou shalt go to the light, see God, look upon His Son, learn those wonderful mysteries which thou hast not been able to understand in this life."⁷

To subject a person of such great influence as Melancthon to critique demands that the sentimental not be

⁷The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. VII, p. 282

allowed to color the correct evaluation of his teachings. The nicest and the sincerest person may promulgate the most pestiferous heresy. The child of God of every age has the calling to try the spirits, even if the spirits are angels. An understanding of why Melanchthon thought and acted as he did can never replace, nor may it, a cold, hard look at what he believed and did. And the final judgment upon the man is God's to make. Yet, at the end of this brief sketch of Melanchthon's life, more details of which will follow, it is appropriate to quote the beautiful and stirring response of Calvin to the death of his friend and co-worker:

"O Philip Melanchthon! I appeal to thee who now livest with Christ in the bosom of God. . . I have a thousand times wished that it had been granted to us to live together; for certainly thou wouldst thus have had more courage for the inevitable contest, and been stronger to despise envy, and to count as nothing all accusations. In this manner, also, the malice of many would have been restrained who, from thy gentleness which they call weakness gathered audacity for their attack."⁸

* * *

⁸ Calvin, Opera IX 461, quoted by Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VIII, p. 398

The life-long, intimate friendship and mutual high regard which Luther and Melanchthon reciprocated foundered only once. That, ironically, was concerning the matter of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Although Melanchthon differed from Luther on several important counts, Philip's view of the Lord's Supper was the one doctrine in which he more closely approximated the Scriptural presentation than did Luther. This difference almost effected a breach between the two Reformers since Luther clung tenaciously and violently to consubstantiation. Soon after 1537, tension began to be felt. Amsdorf and others stirred up Luther's latent animosity against any variation on the Lord's Supper so that Melanchthon called himself "Prometheus chained to the Caucasus" and feared that he would be forced to leave Wittenberg. But the conflict was solved with the non-theological assistance of the secular powers and the close relationship between the two reappeared. The violence of Luther on this score always checked Melanchthon from approaching too closely or too overtly to the view of Calvin. Melanchthon found the Zwinglian and Calvinistic conceptions more rational and more Biblical than Luther's semi-papal view. Rather sadly, Philip went to meet Bucer in 1534 to discuss the doctrine of the Eucharist "as the bearer of another's view, not my own."⁹ And Calvin quite

⁹Manschreck, op. cit., p. 234

correctly hit upon the cause of Philip's ambiguous writings on the matter. Melanchthon was under Luther's domination; "Fearing the thunder which threatened to burst from violent men (those who know the boisterous blasts of Luther understand what I mean), he did not always speak out openly as I could have wished."¹⁰ As early as 1519, Melanchthon expressed dissatisfaction with the doctrine of transubstantiation, that is, even before Luther changed his view somewhat.

Because of this but-once-threatened rapprochement, many critics seize eagerly the many congratulatory expressions by Luther of Philip and heartily condemn the violent antipathy which Melanchthon experienced at the close of his life. They attempt, and generally successfully, to restore the glitter which the Gnesiolutherans ripped from the Melanchthon image at the close of his life and for a long while afterwards. So hostile was a large segment of the Lutheran party to Melanchthon that the epithet, "Philippist," became an expression of extreme opprobrium. In so far as that attack resided in distaste for Melanchthon's "crypto-Calvinistic" view of the Lord's Supper, it stands condemned. But the many who promiscuously wave Melanchthon's prestigious titles, "Preceptor of Germany," "The Theologian," and "Father of Ecumenicity," seldom conduct a thorough exploration of the principles which permeated his educational,

¹⁰Calvin, Opera IX 149, quoted by Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VIII, pp. 666, 667

theological, and ecumenical activities. Luther's oft quoted comparison of himself and Melanchthon,

"I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether warlike. I am born to fight against innumerable monsters and devils. I must remove stumps and stones, cut away thistles and thorns, and clear the wild forests; but Master Philip comes along softly and gently sowing and watering with joy, according to the gifts which God has abundantly bestowed upon him,"¹¹

invokes the question, "What was Master Philip sowing?" In response to this question, there are some who give anything but a favorable estimation of Philip. Karl Barth pointedly excludes Melanchthon from the line of Calvin, Luther, Paul, and Jeremiah. Barth lumps Philip with Schleiermacher (rather undesirable company) as those who did not possess "a clear and direct apprehension of the truth that man is made to serve God and not God to serve man."¹² Rev. G.M. Ophoff dissents from the opinion that Melanchthon's frequent concessions were nobly inspired by timidity and love (a la Schaff). Rather, Philip's concessions sprung from

¹¹Luther, Preface to Commentary on Colossians, quoted by Manschreck, op. cit., p. 54

¹²Barth, Karl, The Word of God and the Word of Man, p. 196

his one great resolve to settle the Roman-Catholic-Lutheran split by compromise and that of essential truths.¹³ On the other hand, historian Cox judges him to be "in all doctrinal points. . . a firm, enlightened, inflexible Protestant."¹⁴ Nor can Schaff find much of a shadow in the Melanchthon luster. Was Philip merely timid? Did he possess such a great quantity of charity that he wavered a little from the necessary doctrinal inflexibility? To come to a proper judgment of Melanchthon, it is necessary to examine the main tenets of his credo in the light of Scripture. Treading carefully, and respectfully, around Luther's frequent adulations (Melanchthon was "a divine instrument which has achieved the very best in the department of theology to the great rage of the devil and his scabby tribe."¹⁵), it will be necessary to evaluate Melanchthon somewhat differently than Luther often did:

"Philippus proceeds in charity, and I in faith. Philippus suffers himself to be eaten up, I eat up everything and spare nobody."¹⁶

¹³Ophoff, Rev. G.M., "Melanchthon and the Reformation," Standard Bearer, Vol. 18, pp. 204-206

¹⁴Cox, op. cit., p. 337

¹⁵Luther, quoted by Schaff - Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, p. 282

¹⁶Luther, quoted by Hildebrandt, F., Melanchthon: Alien or Ally?, p. xlx

Before proceeding to the two central matters of synergism and the "adiaphora," it is well to refer back, briefly, to Melancthon's view of the Lord's Supper. Here, as elsewhere, it is difficult to define precisely Melancthon's conception. With typical avidity, Schaff badly overstates Philip's position, since it is somewhat favorable, when he judges that the Heidelberg Catechism "gives clear and strong expression to the Calvinistic -Melancthonian theory of the spiritual real presence."¹⁷ Allowing for the fact that Ursinus was a beloved and devoted student of Philip, the Catechism exceeds anything Melancthon expressed about the Lord's Supper. James Good puts it more exactly when he writes that the Reformed view of the real spiritual presence of Christ was one in which "Calvin and Melancthon neared each other." Not that they harmonized, for "Melancthon. . .came to it from the Lutheran standpoint of the carnal presence. Calvin came to it from the opposite position, from the idea of a spiritual presence. . . . And Melancthon was tinctured with the idea of a carnal presence, while Calvin with a spiritual presence."¹⁸ Philip shied from the crass position of Luther that the real body of Christ was "bitten with the teeth." But he was far too impressed with the words of Christ, "This is my Body," to appreciate Zwingli's "memorial" conception. Of

¹⁷Schaff, Vol. VIII, op. cit., p. 669

¹⁸Good, J.I., Origin of the Reformed Church in Germany, p. 443

the Zwinglians, he said, "I would rather die than see our cause polluted by a union with the Zwinglians."¹⁹ Melanchthon leaned toward a spiritual presence of Christ but deliberately never became definite. He took refuge in the mystery involved. The fury of the "sacramentarians" developed in Philip an aversion to even discuss the subject and he decried the fact that that which was intended to unite believers should so divide them. An irate Italian, badgering Philip on the question of the real presence, drew the withering and witty reply, "how is it that you Italians will have a God in the sacramental bread-you, who do not believe there is a God in heaven?"²⁰ As a transition between Melanchthon's view of the Lord's Supper and the crucial matter of synergism, it should be noted that, according to Melanchthon, all who eat the Lord's Supper receive benefit. This touches upon Melanchthon's doctrine of salvation, the doctrine which draws upon itself the fiercest criticism of the detractors of Philip Melanchthon.

Although some claim to see the tread of heterodoxy running through Philip's entire life, he underwent some kind of change in regard to the salient doctrines of predestination, free will, and co-operation of the believer in salvation. Many elements enter in here and can properly be

¹⁹Manschreck, op. cit., p. 168

²⁰Cox, op. cit., p. 129

treated under the broad and familiar topic of "synergism." In the first flush of Philip's embrace of the Reformation, he turned with Martinistic fury upon the advocates of free will and the deniers of strict predestination. At the same time he excoriated the secular philosophers once held so dear. Works by Melanchthon during the years 1519-1525 rival Luther's in strength of language and purity of doctrine. The Loci Communes of 1521 drew Luther's astounding praise of being worthy of a place in the canon. But Melanchthon changed, and his change was progressive. The Loci of 1535 and the Loci of 1521 are at odds on the most basic of issues. The Augsburg Confession of 1530 and of 1540 reveals vital renovations in the thinking of "The Theologian." When Melanchthon in the Augustana Variata of 1540 demonstrated anew his constant revision of the Augsburg Confession, Luther remonstrated with him, "Philippus, the book is not yours, but the Church's Confession, therefore you have no power to alter it so often."²¹

Good makes an interesting and defensible sketch of Philip's departure from his formerly held position on predestination and free will. According to Good, Melanchthon gave up "determinism" for infralapsarianism in 1527, abandoned infralapsarianism in 1532, and embraced synergism in 1535.²² Certain it is that by 1535, Melanchthon spoke of a

²¹Manschreck, op. cit., p. 75

²²Good, op. cit., p. 113

will which could accept or reject the Spirit of God. This same doctrine he called "godless" in 1521. Double predestination came to be for him nothing else than Stoic fatalism. In a letter to Erasmus, Melanchthon confesses, "I have, during and after Luther's lifetime rejected the Stoic and Manichean 'deliria,' presented by Luther and others, that all works, good and evil, in all men, good and evil, had to come about by necessity. It is obvious that such phrases are against the word of God, harmful to all discipline, and blasphemous."²³ It is wholly in keeping with Melanchthon's general expression on the subject that he cannot describe predestination and sovereignty, except in terms of "necessity" and "fatalism." He seems never to have grasped the Scriptural manifestation that the fulfilling of God's will is qualitatively different from philosophic cause and effect. Melanchthon denied a secret will in God which damns some and saves others, except that "we may say that many have been reprobated from eternity, not however from any absolute hatred or decree of God, but because God foresaw that they would abide in their unbelief and impenitence."²⁴

²³Hildebrandt, op. cit., p. xxll

²⁴Loci Communes Theologici, quoted by H. Hoeksema, op. cit., p. 5. This is a statement not by Melanchthon but by the Lutheran theologian, Gerhard. However, it expresses Melanchthon's views.

Once predestination had been diluted to a mere scientia media, it became imperative for Philip to explain the obvious facts of salvation and damnation. The sovereign efficacy of God was replaced by synergism, or co-operation. He ascribed conversion (regeneration, or salvation in the narrower sense) to the co-operation of three causes, the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the will of man. In the activity of conversion, "three causes are conjoined: the Word, the Holy Spirit and the Will not wholly inactive, but resisting its own weakness... God draws, but draws him who is willing."²⁵ But Philip insisted that this co-operation of the sinner was not meritorious. Contradictory as it was, there was a constant rejection by Philip of any ascribing of merit to man's actions. Although he could write that "Spiritual righteousness is wrought in us when we are helped by the Holy Spirit. And we receive the Holy Spirit when we assent to the Word of God."²⁶, he yet abhorred "this profane, impious, and arrogant word, merit."²⁷ G.C. Berkouwer makes an attempt to explain why Melancthon left predestination and the bound will for "foresight" and co-operation.

²⁵Manschreck, op. cit., p. 296, quoting Melancthon

²⁶Melancthon in the 1540 edition of the Augsburg Confession (Variata), quoted by Manschreck, ibid., p. 300

²⁷Cox, op. cit., p. 167, quoting Melancthon

He posits the "pendulum" nature of Melanchthon's thinking. In response to the antinomian struggle, Philip sought for human freedom and responsibility, only to swing to the extreme of synergism.²⁸ It is obvious that in keeping with his synergism, Philip veered towards Nomism in his attempt to steer the middle course between Nomism (Bona opera necessaria esse ad salutem) and Antinomianism (Bona opera noxia esse ad salutem).²⁹ The depth of feeling which Melanchthon had for some kind of reinstatement of the law is indicated in his exposition of Peter's compromise with the circumcision, "non fuit error doctrinae, sed fuit infirmitas ... Petrus recte docebat et sentiebat, fuit tamen infirmitas in usu." Of the same struggle, the expression of Luther is that Peter caused real offense, "non morum, sed fidei et aeternae damnationis."³⁰

The foregoing is the heart of theology. In Melanchthon's case it is a vulnerable heart, one that can only be assailed by the mighty defenders of the sovereignty of grace. Concomitant aberrations always appear. In Philip's case, there was insistence that Christ's atonement was a universal one, i.e., for all men. In fact, "the blessing of God must be recognized, in that the promise is general,

²⁸Berkouwer, G.C., The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, p. 349

²⁹Hildebrandt, op. cit., p. 41

³⁰Hildebrandt, ibid., p. 97

and that it is the will of God to save all."³¹ Christ was regarded as fulfiller of all worthy religions. Philip suggested the possibility of the salvation of noble pagans. The terminus a quo of this deterioration in Melanchthon's theological thought is a matter of dispute. Some berate him as a life-long humanist, forced to hide his true convictions by his contact with the implacable Luther. From 1527, Melanchthon displayed more and more the doctrinal conviction which militated against the true principles of the Reformation.

The final aspect of Melanchthon's life with which we will deal has to do with his position as the chief spokesman for the Reformation in its colloquies and consultations with the Romish Church. In this connection, his detractors hurl the accusation of "compromiser" against him. Usually, modern critics of Philip muffle criticism as regards Philip's willingness to compromise with the Zwinglians and Calvinists since his concessions in this sphere were more or less correct. Melanchthon's own expressions about the Roman Catholic Church were contradictory. In 1539, thinking himself to be about to die, Philip wrote in his will, "I also enjoin upon my children to abide in our churches and to flee the churches and society of the Papists." In conflict with this avowed wish was his letter to the papal nuncio, Campeggio, at Augsburg in 1530,

³¹Manschreck, op. cit., p. 300

"We have no dogma different from the Roman Church... We are prepared to obey the Roman Church, if only she with the clemency which she has always used towards all peoples, would modify or relax some few matters which we, even if we would, could not alter... It is but a slight diversity of rites which seems to stand in the way of concord. But the canons themselves say that the concord of the church can be retained even with such diversity of rites."³²

Philip's state of mind at the Colloquies of Frankfurt, Worms, and Regensburg (c. 1540) was anything but composed. He felt very keenly the responsibility of his position. His high regard for the visible unity of the Church and his awareness of the troubled condition of Protestantism since episcopal supervision was abolished lured him from the firm stand which was necessary. The want of discipline, the rapacity of the princes, and the furor among Lutheran theologians caused Melanchthon to overestimate that which the Romish Church offered, and to underestimate the dearness of the truth of Scripture. Besides, Melanchthon was always ready to concede a sort of papacy by human right (iure humano). But the entrenched Catholics would accept nothing but total surrender and the concessions of Philip availed

³²Hildebrandt, op. cit., p. 67

not at all.

The Diet of Augsburg (1530) told the same story. The same Philip who could write "that the Pope is Antichrist seated and ruling in the 'temple of God'", failed critically to defend the faith just won with difficulty. As the immediate prospect of unity presented itself, Philip conceded some truths and minimized or ignored others. Generally, he was ready to find some lowest common denominator upon which the radically different Lutheran and Roman Catholic groups might merge. At Augsburg, Melanchthon insisted that the group he represented was not opposed to Catholic doctrines but only to some abuses of practice. In response to Melanchthon's anxious queries from Augsburg, Luther sent hasty reply, "I am wondering what you mean when you say you desire to know what and how much we may yield to the Papists. According to my opinion, too much is already conceded to them in the Apology."³³ Time and again, Luther exhorted

³³Manschreck, op. cit., p. 195, quoting Luther. At this same time, Luther sent a letter to Spalatine in which he went to the heart of Melanchthon's willingness to exchange the birthright of the Reformation for the Catholic mess of pottage (external unity and carnal security): "our friend Philip Melancthon will contrive and desire that God should work according to and within the compass of his puny notions, that he may have somewhat whereof to glory. 'Certainly (he would say) thus and thus it ought to be done: and thus and thus would I do it.' But this is poor stuff: 'Thus I, Philip, would do it.' This (I) is mighty flat. But hear how this reads: I AM THAT I AM, this is his name, JEHOVAH; He, even He, will do it. - But I have done. Be strong in the Lord, and exhort Melancthon from me, that he aim not to sit in God's throne, but fight against that innate, that devilishly implanted ambition of ours, which would usurp the place of God; for that ambition will never further our cause."

his colleague to stand fast, to dispense with philosophical anxieties, and to herald boldly the truth of Christ. At Augsburg as at the previous Colloquies, the Catholics refused Philip's generous concessions.

That which heaped the greatest obloquy upon Melancthon, both at the time and long afterwards, was Philip's acceptance of the Leipzig Interim. The ill-fated Smalkaldian League (Protestant) had just been defeated by the Roman Catholic powers. The sturdy Luther had already died. To Melancthon, now titular head of the Reformation, it seemed as if all Protestantism was about to perish. Imperial troops menaced the entire country. In the light of this, Melancthon accepted the stipulations handed down by the Catholic powers. He was guarded in his view of the Augsburg Interim (May 15, 1548) but surreptitiously defended it. Much better it was, said Philip, to acquiesce in this "adiaphoristic" matter and wait for more advantageous times. Rather than risk the annihilation of the Lutheran movement, he would "mitigate a bad set of circumstances." The "adiaphora" which the Augsburg Interim demanded to be acknowledged were episcopal rule, seven sacraments, recognition of the pope as the interpreter of Scripture, transubstantiation, works of supererogation, invocation of saints, festivals, and various rites. Of this Interim, Schaff, an ardent supporter of Philip, has this to say,

"It is very evident that the adoption of such a confession was a virtual surrender of the

cause of the Reformation, and would have ended in a triumph of the papacy."³⁴

The following Interim of Leipzig was fully as demanding and more openly supported by Melanchthon. Calvin's high estimation of and deep friendship with Philip did not deter the Genevan from sternly rebuking him,

"You extend the distinction of non-essentials too far...you ought not to have made such large concessions to the Papists."³⁵

And the Gnesiolutherans under Flacius raged against Philip. From this point, two parties struggled within the Lutheran Church. The official decision of the Lutherans went against Melanchthon, as stated in the Formula of Concord (1580):

"In time of persecution, when a bold confession is required of us, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to adiaphora."³⁶

* * *

The pernicious ingredients inculcated through Melanchthon into the Reformation have devastated a large part of the movement. Yet, to cast the blanket judgment of "evil" upon the Reformer is to do him an injustice. One may very well suspect that Luther and Calvin were too

³⁴Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VIII, p. 603

³⁵Schaff, ibid., p. 39, quoting a letter of Calvin (1550)

³⁶quoted by Manschreck, op. cit., p. 292

moderate with him but one must still reckon with the fact that both of those perceptive and fearless theologians were moderate with him, although they knew his opposition to several of their chiefest doctrines. His talents and zeal played a large positive role in advancing the cause of the Reformation and everyone knew this well.

As far as concerns Melanchthon's incessant compromising, the heart of the trouble is revealed in this reproof of Philip by Luther. Melanchthon was inextricably enmeshed in the aberglaube of dreams and astrology. Before he would engage in important work, he must first investigate the favorability of the stars. At first, Luther let the superstition pass as a mere foible. Finally, however, the impatient Luther roared that it did not matter if the stars were favorable, what counted was that Christ was favorable.³⁷ The assurance, the confidence, the faith that moves mountains was not Melanchthon's. He wavered, he vacillated, he conceded, he compromised, to the detriment of the gospel and the defaming of the name of God.

At the very core of all Philip's spiritual ailments lay the heresy of synergism with its host of concomitants. Essentially, there is no difference between synergism and Pelagianism, as there is none between Pelagianism and Arminianism. Man is naturally good. Man is able to assist

³⁷Hildebrandt, op. cit., p. 70

God, indeed, God must wait for and depend upon man's acquiescence. Synergism dethrones God and replaces Him with the creature. With this comes the denial of God's absolute sovereignty. He does not elect and reprobate according to His own good pleasure. Melancthon carried the Lutheran Church with him on this score. The central position of Luther, who stated that the only truths he ever wrote were to be found in his Bondage of the Human Will and his Commentary on Galatians, finds little expression in modern Lutheranism. At the very outset of the mighty liberation of God's people from papal bondage, the false doctrines were present which were to harass the forces of truth continually, up to the present moment. There need be no repetition here of the occasions when the serpent of co-operation-in-salvation reared its ugly head against the truth of sovereign grace.

Philip Melancthon was a hard-pressed figure in harsh times. He was ambivalent, paradoxical, and contradictory. As person, he does not lend himself to judgment. Nor is that the calling of theological critics. But his teachings, his doctrines, his beliefs must be weighed and found wanting, both as they appeared in the 16th. century and as they reveal themselves today. Nor will they be found in the church alone. For Melancthon was highly influential in the establishment of the school movement. Wherever it be found, however it be clothed, by whomever it be sounded, the doctrine that denies "by grace are ye saved" is the doctrine that does not lead to the glory of God the Father.

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM
Prof. H. Hanks

It has been argued that the synoptic problem is of little importance to the study of Scripture. This assertion was based upon the fact that those who dealt with this problem were the liberal and higher critics of Scripture who abandoned out of hand the truth of verbal inspiration. To those committed to this truth, the synoptic problem was of minor concern. But, if at one time this may have been true, it is true no longer. Increasingly a consideration of the synoptic problem has gained the attention of conservative scholars and of those committed to an inerrantly inspired Scripture; but it has, at least to some extent, forced an alteration of the truth of inspiration. It is this fact which serves as justification for our treatment of this question.

The word "synoptic" comes from the Greek συνόψις which in turn comes from σύν and ὁρᾶν. The meaning of the word is therefore, "seeing with; taking the same view; seeing the whole together with a comprehensive view." The term is applied to the first three gospel narratives. It is generally agreed that Matthew, Mark and Luke present a rather general and similar picture of the life, ministry and death of Jesus. These gospels are consequently called the "synoptics". John, on the other hand, while not contradicting the other gospel narrators, approaches the life of Christ from quite a different viewpoint. He is not

therefore included with the "synoptics".¹

Thus in general the synoptic problem deals with the difficulty of harmonizing the first three gospel narratives. The problem has been variously stated. Dr. Bastiaan Van Elderen defines the problem in these words:

"The reader encounters an interesting and varied body of material in the (four) gospels. He is confronted by narratives reported two or more times which differ in details. Sayings of Jesus in one Gospel do not agree verbally with those in another Gospel. Pertinent and central details in one Gospel are ignored or omitted in another. Events are recorded in one Gospel in a totally different sequence from that found in another. These facts hardly contribute to a feeling of confidence regarding the reliability and authenticity of the Gospel records."²

Another New Testament scholar writes concerning the problem as follows:

"Every reader of these Gospels knows that

¹There is a mistaken assumption underlying this position concerning the relationship between the four gospel narratives. We shall return to this presently.

²Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord, Edited by Carl H. Henry; pp. 111 & 112.

they contain marked resemblances along with equally marked differences. This is true not only of the subject-matter and the vocabulary, but also of the order in which the materials are introduced. . . . We are . . . now concerned . . . about the obvious fact that these Gospels have much material in common, as also a considerable amount of material that is common to only two of them and some that is peculiar to each of the three."³

Merrill C. Tenney gives yet another description. He asks the questions: If the gospel narratives are independent in origin and development, why the similarities even to verbal agreement? And if there is a literary relationship, how can there be three independent witnesses?⁴

It is obvious from these descriptions of the problem that we are dealing basically with the question of the harmonization of the gospels. Yet, as will presently become clear, the question involves much deeper questions of the character of the inspiration of Scripture. We shall not, in

³Introduction to the New Testament, Henry C. Thiessen, pp. 101, 102

⁴New Testament Survey, Merrill C. Tenney, pp. 133, 134

this article, attempt a harmony of the gospels; we shall rather, in discussing the problem, draw the general lines within which any harmony of Scripture must take place.

A review of the various solutions to this problem will reveal immediately not only that the problem is (or, at least, has been made) very complex, but that the Scriptural truth of inspiration is involved.

It is usually conceded that the "Oral Tradition Theory" is the oldest proposed. Some simple variations of it had been proposed by early church fathers. The basic ideas in this view are that the gospel writers either had personal knowledge of Jesus or else heard the authoritative preaching of the apostles. The apostles who had witnessed the works and heard the words of Christ firsthand repeatedly told their story of Christ's life. This story was organized and memorized until a stereotyped tradition arose which became the basis of the gospel narratives. While it is no doubt true that the gospel was preached and taught before it was written, and while surely repetition makes for a stereotyped story, this theory certainly cannot explain the problem in all its complexities.

Secondly, the so-called "Mutual Dependence Theory" has been proposed. St. Augustine in the Fifth Century proposed some form of it. He made Mark a condensation of Matthew. The theory is basically that one gospel writer borrowed from another and that the third borrowed from either or both

of the two who preceded him. There is therefore one original gospel from which the others were taken at least in part. There are six possible combinations in this theory and there has never been any agreement which combination is the correct one.

A more recent attempt to explain the problem has been made in terms of primitive gospels. This attempt has had many forms. Some have held to one primitive gospel called "Urevangelium". Of these some have maintained that this "Urevangelium" was a document upon which all three gospel narratives were based. Others (G.E. Lessing, e.g.,) have maintained that the original gospel was written by Matthew, probably in Aramaic, and contained a short account of Christ's life for the use of missionaries. It has also been suggested that this original was translated into Greek, worked over and enriched until it took various forms in different redactions, three of which have come down to us.

A recent variation of this view has been proposed by the Roman Catholic scholar W.J. Harrington.⁵ He speaks of an oral tradition which was first in Aramaic, the language commonly spoken in Jesus' day in Palestine. But this oral tradition was soon also preserved in Greek. A written tradition appeared early both in Aramaic and Greek. The Aramaic gospel, traditionally attributed to Matthew, was a main source and was used for Palestinian catechesis and

⁵Explaining The Gospels, cf. pp. 25-33.

apostolic gospel preaching. A supplement soon appeared in the Greek containing mostly parables and sayings of Jesus. This Greek form was the common source used by Matthew himself and Luke. Mark however was the first gospel narrator. He followed closely the Aramaic version attributed to Matthew and gained some elements from Peter. Matthew followed with a Greek translation of the Aramaic version ascribed to him. But he used Mark and some supplementary source common to Mark and Luke. Luke was, in turn, based also on Mark and on the Greek translation of the version ascribed to Matthew and on some supplementary source.

It is evident that this kind of theory leads to a multiplication of pre-gospel sources. Every time a problem is raised a new source is invented to explain it. Some have thought that two sources were sufficient to explain the problems. This was the most popular theory until recently. These two primitive documents were designated in various ways. Some spoke of a "Ur-Markus", and others of a document called "Q" which stands for the German Quelle meaning "source". But the matter has not rested here. Other documents were invented until the list includes "M" which designates a document containing material peculiar to Matthew, "L" referring either to a "proto-Luke" or a group of notes which were the results of Luke's private research.

It is immediately evident that such solutions as these are no real solutions for they simply ignore the basic

problem by introducing documents of which there is no evidence and which are the fictitious products of the imagination.⁶

Turning now to more liberal thinkers, an entirely new approach has been taken in the solution of this problem. Our only interest in this group of thinkers is the influence they have had on conservative Bible scholars.

Actually, this group can be found to have its origin in the Nineteenth Century. A radical group of scholars, wholly under the influence of rationalism, led by Bruno Bauer, cast doubt on the historicity of Jesus and Paul. In the early part of the Twentieth Century this group was followed by another which proposed the theory of Formgeschichte or Form Criticism. Martin Dibelius is usually acknowledged as the founder of this school. Teaching in Heidelberg in the early part of the century, he defined Form Criticism as "the literary criticism of the forms in which ideas, thoughts, reports, descriptions, etc. are passed on orally and in writing." He maintained that the synoptic writers therefore, were only to a small extent actual authors. They were rather chiefly collectors and editors of tradition. The traditions upon which they worked were composed of anecdotes about Jesus, fragments of his teachings circulated among his followers and other materials found in various

⁶For a very involved and wearisomely difficult solution, cf. The Synoptic Problem and a New Solution by R.H. Crompton.

records. These editors used various types of literary forms to cast their work in its final copy. Basic to the whole story was the history of the passion of Christ. But they made use of paradigms which were examples used to support a particular teaching, tales including all the miraculous narratives and written to enhance the pleasure of the story, legends which were mostly narratives of saintly men embellished with tradition, heroic epics, etc., to produce their final work. The sayings of Jesus were put together in the gospels under various subject headings. Included were the interpretations of these sayings which had been given to them by the early Church. Various myths (including the virgin birth, the resurrection, the ascension, etc.) were also added. As far as the trustworthiness of these literary forms is concerned, their value varies. For example, the paradigms are somewhat trustworthy, but not entirely. The tales are not usually reliable. Most of what was written was merely for inspiration and exhortation without having any basis in fact. Thus various fragments were collected, put into a framework constructed by the author and woven into a gospel source or gospel narrative. The emphasis falls therefore on oral tradition, but as an incoherent mass of fragments.

Most recently Rudolph Bultmann has popularized this view. In his book "Jesus Christ and Mythology" he discusses his conception of the gospel narratives and shows how far the liberal school of thought has departed from the

truth of Scripture.⁷

In discussing the view of the kingdom of God which was held by Christ and by the early Church, he writes:

"The earliest Christian community understood the Kingdom of God in the same sense as Jesus. It, too, expected the Kingdom of God to come in the immediate future. So Paul, too, thought that he would still be alive when the end of the world was to come and the dead were to be raised. . . . We may cite Mark 9:1, which is not a genuine saying of Jesus but was ascribed to him by the earliest community. . . ."⁸

To demonstrate that Bultmann makes everything in Scripture which does not agree with the conclusions of modern science mythological, we cite what he writes on page 15:

"This hope of Jesus and of the early Christian community was not fulfilled. The same world still exists and history continues. The course of history has refuted mythology. For the conception 'Kingdom of God' is mythological, as is the conception of the eschatological drama. Just

⁷This book contains the Schaffer Lectures delivered at Yale University Divinity School and the Cole Lectures delivered at Vanderbilt University.

⁸op. cit., pp. 13, 14

as mythological are the presuppositions of the expectation of the Kingdom of God, namely, the theory that the world, although created by God, is ruled by the devil, Satan, and that his army, the demons, is the cause of all evil, sin and disease. The whole conception of the world which is presupposed in the preaching of Jesus as in the New Testament generally is mythological; i.e., the conception of the world as being structured in three stories, heaven, earth and hell; the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the course of events; and the conception of miracles, especially the conception of the intervention of supernatural powers in the inner life of the soul, the conception that men can be tempted and corrupted by the devil and possessed by evil spirits."⁹ "The preaching of the New Testament proclaims God but first of all his person, which was mythologized from the very beginnings of earliest Christianity."¹⁰ "His person is viewed in the light

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 16

of mythology when he is said to have been begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, and this becomes clearer still in Hellenistic Christian communities where he is understood to be the Son of God in a metaphysical sense, a great, preexistent heavenly being who became man for the sake of our redemption and took on himself suffering, even the suffering of the cross. It is evident that such conceptions are mythological. . . .¹¹

"These mythological conceptions of heaven and hell are no longer acceptable for modern man since for scientific thinking to speak of 'above' and 'below' in the universe has lost all meaning. . . ."¹²

Because therefore, the expectation of Jesus, the apostles and the early Church of a kingdom of heaven was mythological, Bultmann goes on to describe this hope merely in terms of what may be called

"readiness for the unknown future that God will give. In brief, it means to be open to God's future in the face of death and darkness."¹³

¹¹Ibid., pp. 16, 17

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 31

He then adds:

"This, then, is the deeper meaning of the mythological preaching of Jesus--to be open to God's future which is really imminent for every one of us; to be prepared for this future which can come as a thief in the night when we do not expect it; to be prepared, because his future will be a judgment on all men who have bound themselves to this world and are not free, not open to God's future."¹⁴

In describing this mythological process Bultmann points out that Jesus taught mythologically and that this was preserved in the early Christian community. However, the process of demythologizing was begun by Paul and was given tremendous impetus under the labors of John. Paul was only partially on the right track for he still expected a parousia, but John was radical. John correctly identified the resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost and the parousia as being one event and, denying the literal historical character of these events, spoke clearly of those who believe this view as having eternal life.¹⁵

It is evident that this demythologizing consists in stripping away the erratic and time-conditioned views of Jesus and his followers to get at the real message of the

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 31,32

¹⁵Bultmann finds the justification for his own demythologizing in the fact that this was begun already by Paul and John.

gospel.¹⁶ In the words of Bultmann:

"It is, of course, true that de-mythologizing takes the modern world-view as criterion. To de-mythologize is to reject not Scripture or the Christian message as a whole, but the world-view of Scripture, which is the world-view of a past epoch. . . . To de-mythologize is to deny that the message of Scripture and of the Church is bound to an ancient world-view which is obsolete. . . . For the world-view of Scripture is mythological and is therefore unacceptable to modern man whose thinking has been shaped by science and is therefore no longer mythological. . . . Nobody reckons with direct intervention by transcendent powers."¹⁷

While in this book Bultmann does not deal directly with the synoptic problem, he nevertheless lays down a theory here which is at the root of modern solutions. In fact, there are parts of this theory which have been taken over in the so-called Sitz im Leben theory of the synoptic problem.

While this view is gaining currency, we illustrate what this theory is supposed to teach from the writings of Bastiaan Van Elderen. This is the more interesting because

¹⁶For a criticism of this method from a literary point of view, cf. "Christian Reflections", by C. S. Lewis, p. 152 ff.

¹⁷Bultmann, op. cit., p. 36

he is considered a conservative New Testament scholar, currently teaching New Testament subjects in Calvin Theological Seminary.

Van Elderen distinguishes between two distinct Sitze im Leben in the gospel narratives: the Sitz im Leben Jesu ("situation in the life of Jesus") and the Sitz im Leben des Verfassers ("situation in the life of the author") Concerning the former he finds that this is very difficult to recover; in fact,

"The Sitz im Leben Jesu . . . can never be wholly recovered, but some tentative formulation can certainly aid the interpreter in his understanding of the passage."¹⁸

He finds greater significance in the Sitz im Leben des Verfassers.

What is this Sitz im Leben?

First of all the fact must be recognized that the gospel narratives were written some time after the actual death and resurrection of Christ. The earliest gospel was written at least thirty years after these events. During these years the church spread over the known world and expanded greatly in numbers. Besides, added to a predominantly Jewish Church was also a large number of Gentile converts from all levels of society. Hence the Sitz im

¹⁸Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord, ed. by Carl F. H. Henry, p. 113

Leben Jesu differed from the Sitz im Leben des Verfassers.

Jesus was addressing His words to the Jews of Palestine while the gospel writers (as well as the apostles) were speaking to an entirely different kind of people under entirely different circumstances. Included in this Sitz im Leben therefore, is the specific intentions of Jesus and the gospel writers in speaking and writing, the needs and problems of the audience and readers to whom the message of the Lord and the gospel writers was addressed, their ecclesiastical and cultural environments, etc. And the differences between their writings may therefore be explained by the fact that they adapted the content of their preaching and writing to these various elements in the Sitz im Leben of their audiences.

Now there is an element of truth in this. But Dr. Van Elderen draws several conclusions from all this with which we cannot agree. In the chapter entitled "The Teaching of Jesus and the Gospel Records" he already suggests more than this. He writes:

"Can the Gospels still be described as inspired writings? Most assuredly so. These were written under and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Spirit of Jesus through the Evangelists is interpreting the ministry and sayings of Jesus to meet the peculiar needs that had arisen in the Church

some thirty years after the resurrection. Hence, these are authoritative and trustworthy accounts and interpretations. In some cases it will be impossible to recover the ipsissima verba of Jesus, since at times these have been adapted and interpreted to meet the needs of the Sitz im Leben des Verfassers. However, it is more honest and respectful to Scripture to recognize this than to engage in dubious harmonizations which the genre of New Testament literature scarcely allows."¹⁹

Or again:

"In conclusion, it is possible to speak with confidence regarding the Gospel records. They contain the teaching of Jesus, although it is interpreted and modified."²⁰

The uneasiness which one committed to divine inspiration experiences in these words is surely warranted. Without entering into a lengthy and space-consuming analysis of these various views, it is evident that the chief error is a denial of verbal inspiration. So all-pervading is this Sitz im Leben either of Jesus or the writers of Scripture that erroneous views held at that time appeared in their

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 118

²⁰ Ibid., p. 119

writings and therefore appear on the pages of Holy Writ. Additional evidence of this is to be found in an article written by the same author in the November, 1966 issue of the Calvin Theological Journal in an article entitled "New Perspectives in Biblical Research". While the matter is carefully stated and while the author is at pains to point out that he maintains inspiration, nevertheless throughout he leaves abundant room for repeated errors in Scripture, errors which arise out of misconceptions held by the writers because of their own Sitze im Leben. No wonder then that Dr. Van Elderen can define his view of Scripture in the following words:

"Any discussion of biblical research immediately involves one's view of the Bible. In order to have the proper perspective regarding the ensuing discussion, I would like to make a simple but forthright statement regarding my views of the Scriptures. I consider the Bible to be the Word of God. It is in this book that I have been confronted with a call to repentance in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit I have heard the voice of God speaking to me in the Bible. Since this book has the unique role of revealing the way of redemption in Jesus Christ, it, as the Word of God, is authoritative, trustworthy, reliable--the product of the inspiring

guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because of this experience of redemption revealed in this book, I accept it in faith as the Word of God and recommend, defend and proclaim it as such. It is with this conviction and commitment that I carry on my research and studies. I thank God for this redemption in Christ, his revealed Word, the Bible and the opportunity for service in teaching and research."²¹

Notice that the one key element lacking in the above personal statement of the author is the element of infallible inspiration. Apart from anything else the author states, he does not make (apparently carefully omitting) any statement concerning plenary, verbal inspiration with its consequent teaching of inerrancy. The whole position of the Sitz im Leben Theory will not permit this. It is but one step removed from the destructive criticism of Bultmann."^{22,23}

²¹Calvin Theological Journal, Vol 1, No. 2, "New Perspectives in Biblical Research", pp. 165,166

²²In the same issue of the Calvin Theological Journal Prof. John Stek carries this same view over to the Old Testament and particularly to the creation narrative to deny a creation in six days of 24 hours. cf. pp. 253 ff.

²³This same view has been incorporated into the "Confession of 1967" recently adopted by the United Presbyterian Church. The pertinent statement reads: "The Scriptures are the words of men, conditioned by language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history and the cosmos which were then current."

It is for this reason that we insist that the entire synoptic problem must be solved within the framework of the truth of divine, infallible, plenary inspiration. We shall not enter into a thorough discussion of this here for it would carry us too far outside our present purposes.²⁴

Within this framework, this basic presupposition of faith, we come to the following conclusions:

In the first place, we must not make a false distinction between the first three gospel narratives and the gospel of John. While it is customary to call the first three gospels "Synoptics" and leave John's gospel out of the discussion, we find this a false distinction. The four gospels belong together and constitute a unity. (Cf. our remarks at the end of this essay.)

In the second place, we must not discount the use of other sources in the writing of the gospel narratives. There certainly was an oral tradition in the early church which contained much of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. In fact, the Jews were noted for their emphasis on the accurate preservation of oral tradition. Throughout their generations they had preserved a clear and accurate account of the works of God. Each new generation (especially before any of the Scriptures were written) was required to memorize this tradition without error so that it could

²⁴For a thorough discussion of this cf. "In the Beginning God. . . ." by Prof. H.C. Hoeksema, and Prof. Hoeksema's article in this issue of the Journal.

be faithfully preserved. There is no doubt that this was also done in the early Church. Surely an effort would have been made by the saints to preserve as accurately as possible the works and teachings of Christ.

There is no doubt either that much of this oral tradition came directly from the apostles. They were with Christ during the years of His public ministry and were eyewitnesses of all He said and did. It is quite possible, e.g., that Mark received parts of his gospel from Peter.²⁵ And the same thing may have been true in the case of Luke. But it is also possible that some of this oral tradition which was incorporated into the gospels came from others who were closely associated with the Lord during His earthly ministry. Luke speaks in the prologue of his gospel of "those things which are most surely believed among us. Even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word." Luke 1:1, 2. Paul, in Acts 20:35, refers to a saying of the Lord which is not recorded in the gospel narratives but which was apparently well-known in the Church.

²⁵Cf. e.g., Mk. 16:7. It would not be at all surprising that the apostle Peter, weighted down with grief because of his denial, particularly remembered that the angel at the sepulchre had specifically mentioned his name in conveying the words of the risen Lord and told Mark of this. Rev. Hoeksema suggests this interpretation in his book Man of Sorrows. p. 120

In the third place, much material was gained by the personal observation and research of the gospel writers. This would, of course, be especially true of Matthew and John who were themselves apostles. John in fact, writes only of the things to which he was an eyewitness. This is the explanation for the large gap in the crucifixion narrative of John--a gap of events which transpired while John was bringing Mary to his home. Cf. John 19:35.

In the fourth place, there may have been short written accounts in existence at the time when the gospel narrators wrote. Luke suggests as much in his prologue: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us. . . ." Luke 1:1. These may have, to a greater or lesser extent, been used by the gospel writers.

In the fifth place, other records were also available. We have in mind the records of the geneology of Christ recorded in Matthew 1. And Matthew may have consulted these in his work.

Nevertheless, while we do not deny all this, it remains a fact that the gospels were written under the infallible guidance of the Spirit of Christ.

This has several important implications.

In the first place, we must not reject the truth that the Holy Spirit surely could have and no doubt did reveal to the gospel writers things which they had not known before they wrote. This is rejected out of hand even by conser-

vative students of the synoptic problem. But why? Is there any legitimate ground, given the truth of inspiration, on the basis of which to reject this assertion? Surely it had happened repeatedly in the Old Testament when the prophets were given, by the Spirit, knowledge which could come to them in no other way than by inspiration. There is no reason to suppose that God could not have revealed to the gospel writers things which they did not know. This is true, we believe, of historical facts as such. But it is especially true of the interpretation of these historical facts. How different, e.g., is the Peter before Pentecost and the Peter after Pentecost. Before the outpouring of the Spirit he had only the vaguest idea of the meaning of the cross and resurrection. Suddenly, after Pentecost, he understood it all and could preach a beautiful sermon in which he saw all the work of Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy. The same thing was true of the transfiguration. On the Mount Peter foolishly suggested the building of some tabernacles. When he wrote his epistle he understood the full meaning of the transfiguration as a revelation of the glory of Christ which He would afterward receive in glory. Cf. II Peter 1:16-21.

In the second place, the Spirit also guided the authors of the gospel narratives in such a way that their memories were quickened so that they recalled events of Jesus' ministry accurately. They were given infallible guidance to

remember and record these events with precision. John especially makes a point of reminding his readers that the Lord had promised this. Cf. John 14:26, 12:16, 16:13, 14. Their memories were infallibly quickened and the writings were infallibly guided so that their narratives were accurate and without error.

In the third place, the Spirit also infallibly guided them in such a way that the selection of the materials to be included in each gospel narrative was done by the Spirit Himself. This is not to say that the gospel writers did not work as conscious agents of the Spirit and that they wrote consciously using materials which served their purpose. But the fact remains that the selection of material was not left to their own discretion and fallible judgment. They did not even write all they knew. Cf. John 21:25. But they wrote those things which the Spirit led them to write so that the selection of the material which they made was governed by divine inspiration.

Finally, the Spirit also guided the writers in the arrangement of the materials. This also, no doubt, was determined to a considerable extent by the different purposes for which the gospels were written. But the inspiration of Scripture does not cease with the written word; it embraces also the order of arrangement of the material used.

In this context we must find the explanation for the similarities within the four gospel narratives. Even the

verbatim similarities are no longer a problem when one accepts without reservation an inerrant Scripture. Surely the same events could and did serve the varied purposes for which the gospels were written. The similarities between the gospels are to be explained chiefly therefore because of the work of the Spirit. The result is that Scripture is the Word of God and not the Word of man. There is no human element to be found in Scripture at all from this point of view.

Turning now briefly to a discussion of the differences within the gospel narratives, we must note first of all in general that the gospels form one organic whole. They are surely not a collection of myths and fables which prompt the church to engage in a "quest for the historical Jesus", a quest which can be undertaken only by tearing away the covering of tradition with which the nucleus of truth is weighted down. Nor are the gospels biographies of the life of Christ. To make them such flies in the face of their very character. They tell us very little of the life of Christ itself. They are most emphatically not compositions related in a way a definitive historical work ought to be related. In this respect the gospels do not even supplement each other. Nor can the differences be explained by some sort of different Sitz im Leben pertaining to the different writers.

Rather the gospels are a four-fold portrait of Christ. And taken together they are a complete and organic whole

which give to us the revelation of God in Christ as the fulfillment of all God's promises.

It is true that the gospels were written for historical purposes. They were written with definite occasions in mind and were addressed to particular audiences. But the fact remains that they were also written under the direction of the Spirit so that they are the revelation of Christ for the church of all ages. God determined also the circumstances of the church in the age of their writing. And he worked in such a way that, though written for particular reasons, they are altogether adequate to bring to the saints of all time the perfect revelation of Christ as the face of God.

It is within this context that we must understand that there are differences within the gospel narratives. Sometimes the gospel writers do not give an entire discourse of the Lord. Sometimes they take but part of an event.²⁶ Sometimes the Lord spoke similar words under different circumstances.²⁷ But always what was recorded was accurate and without error.

These different purposes for which the gospel writers wrote can be briefly explained. Matthew wrote for the pur-

²⁶Cf. e.g., the superscription on the cross.

²⁷Cf. e.g., Matthew and Luke's account of the "Sermon on the Mount..."

pose of demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy; particularly as the promised King, the Son of David. Mark, writing quite possibly for the Romans, wrote to emphasize Jesus' action and the power of His works. Emphasizing the busy-ness of the Lord's ministry, Mark shows that Christ destroyed all the works of Satan conquering sin and death. Berkhof is undoubtedly correct when he writes:

"Mark gives the church the assurance that the future is entrusted to One Who has shown Himself a mighty conqueror, and Who is abundantly able to save to the uttermost all who believe."²⁸

Luke, writing most likely for the Greeks, emphasized the perfect and complete humanity of Christ. Here is found the repeated use of the name "Son of Man." Here is pictured Jesus as One with the people, a friend of publicans and sinners, come to seek and to save those who are lost. For the Church of all ages Christ is described as "an high priest which can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; and was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15. While John is not included among the "synoptists" nevertheless it is evident that John emphasizes throughout Christ's essential and personal divinity. He is most emphatically the Son of God,

²⁸New Testament Introduction, Louis Berkhof, p. 88

the Word made flesh.

Here is the explanation for the differences to be found within the gospel narratives. But it must be remembered that, taken together, the gospel narratives, because they are infallibly inspired, present a complete, organically whole revelation of Christ Who has come in the Father's name to reveal God as the God who sovereignly saves His people. There is nothing lacking in this portrait. There are no lines undrawn, no features missing, no vague and undistinguishable outlines, no blurred perspectives. There is no extraneous material, no incorrect and unsuitable background, no distracting and unnecessary elements. The picture is complete and perfect. This is not to say that the picture painted by the gospel narratives taken together are complete in the sense of exhaustive. But they are complete in the sense in which Article VII of our Belgic Confession defines the completeness of the whole of Holy Scripture: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. . . . For since it is forbidden, to add unto or take away anything from the word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. . . ."

Together they give to us a most beautiful and glorious picture of Christ and the full revelation of God, of Jehovah Who saves His people from their sins. To know it is

to know Christ and through Him, God; and thus to have
eternal life.

BOOK REVIEW

In Defense of the Faith?

(A review of Dr. G.C. Berkouwer's "De Heilige Schrift,"
Volume I; J.H. Kok, Uitgeversmij, Kampen, The Netherlands;
Price, f 15,75.)

Dr. G.C. Berkouwer is undoubtedly a theologian to be reckoned with. He must be listened to. This is not the same, however, as saying that he is a theologian whose theology must be heeded and followed. In fact, this reviewer would say the opposite. He is a theologian who must be listened to very carefully and critically; but his theology must be rejected. Moreover, this reviewer is increasingly of the opinion that both the theological method and the theology proper of this widely recognized and widely hailed theologian constitute one of the gravest threats to the Reformed faith that has appeared on the Reformed scene in recent years.

This is admittedly a bold statement. Perhaps it has a polemical sound which is rather unexpected with respect to a theologian who is not generally known as a polemicist in the ordinary sense of that term. And perhaps in an age which is inclined to think of itself as having outgrown polemics, such a statement will be characterized as distasteful and unduly severe. So be it. This reviewer happens to believe that theologizing must be more than polite dialogue and an abstract scientific pursuit, that it involves a trying of the spirits according to the norm of Holy Scripture, and that it necessarily involves an approval or a disapproval, an acceptance of or an opposition to, those spirits, in order

that the faith once delivered to the saints may be defended and preserved and in order that there may indeed be theological development, but always in the line of that faith. In that same vein, he believes that while there may indeed be many elements of truth and many helpful insights in Dr. Berkouwer's writings, the over-all evaluation of his many theological works must be that they do not constitute a service, but a disservice to the Reformed faith.

Who Is The Author?

For the benefit of any who may be unacquainted, Dr. Berkouwer, born in 1903, is a product of the Gereformeerde Kerken of the Netherlands and of the Free University of Amsterdam, where he received a doctor's degree cum laude in 1934. He sat at the feet of Dr. Valentine Hepp (whom some will remember for his part in the polemics which ultimately led to the formation of the Liberated Churches under the leadership of the late Dr. K. Schilder); and in 1945 he succeeded Dr. Hepp in the chair of dogmatics at the Free University.

Since that time, Dr. Berkouwer has written voluminously. While he has devoted more than one volume to Roman Catholic theology and to the theology of Dr. Karl Barth, undoubtedly his most important works have been several volumes under the general title, "Studies in Dogmatics," most of which have already been published also in English by Eerdmans. (I would expect that the current two volumes on Holy Scripture will also see an English translation in the near future; and those

for whom Dutch reading is too laborious will then be able to read these volumes in English, although my general impression is that Berkouwer's works have lost something in the process of translation.) These dogmatical works are not systematic, either in the order in which they have appeared or in their contents. Berkouwer does not write a "systematic theology," and, I take it, does not purpose to do so. Not only do the various volumes of this series follow no systematic scheme in their order of appearance, having appeared rather helter-skelter,--apparently according to what subject the author deemed to be in need of discussion at a given time;--but also each monograph itself does not constitute a systematic, objective, dogmatical treatment of a given doctrine,--not, at least, in the ordinary sense in which we might expect dogmatics to be written. This is undoubtedly not accidental, but due to Dr. Berkouwer's apparent aversion for what some (and he himself, too) would call abstract, and even scholastic, theology. It is due to Berkouwer's method, which is said to have its key idea in the correlativity of faith and theology, as well as the correlativity of theology and the church's proclamation. Sometimes this has been reduced to the well-known and often-mentioned kerugma-faith motif. This idea even comes to expression in the titles of some of these monographs, as, for example: "Faith and Justification" and "Faith and Sanctification." But it certainly comes to expression in the contents of all of these dogmatical studies.

It is very difficult, however, to form and to state a systematic and objective conception of Dr. Berkouwer's method. He has not produced any dogmatical "prolegomena," or introduction; and sometimes I not only doubt whether one will appear, but also whether Berkouwer's very method would allow for such a formal and objective statement of method. However this may be, Berkouwer's peculiar method makes his dogmatics very difficult to analyze, frequently, very difficult to "pin down." It would appear difficult to me, for example, to use these monographs as textbooks in dogmatics; certainly, they could never serve to imbue students with a systematic theology, interesting and instructive though these studies may be in many respects. Rather, however, than to attempt a formulation of his method (something which Berkouwer himself does not do), we shall have to learn his approach to theology inductively, from a study of his various works and from a consideration of the dogmatical contents of each specific work.

That Berkouwer is a theological force to be reckoned with is evident not only from the fact that his work is widely hailed both in Reformed churches in the Netherlands and in our country, but also from the fact that he is recognized as a theologian of no mean worth outside of the Reformed community. Besides, Berkouwer exercises great influence in his own churches with respect to the many issues which confront those churches, such as the World Council issue, the matter of Assen-1926, the on-going conflict about

evolution and the relation between Scripture and the natural sciences, questions involving the doctrine of election and reprobation as set forth in the Canons of Dordrecht, etc. Moreover, I have no doubt that the so-called liberal wing in Calvin Seminary and in the Christian Reformed Church will in large measure claim to be disciples of Dr. Berkouwer. Hence, it is well to know what this dogmatician teaches and how he goes about it.

This is especially true of his volumes on Holy Scripture, since matters such as the inspiration and authority of Scripture, both in connection with the so-called Genesis question and in connection with what is called the synoptic problem, continue to occupy a large place in current theological discussions.

The present review deals only with Volume 1. I have noted a large measure of attention being paid to Volume 2 while very little attention is paid to Volume 1. I suppose this is due to the fact that it is not until Volume 2 that Prof. Berkouwer enters upon a discussion of the inspiration of Scripture and the so-called attributes of Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, I feel that it is already in Volume 1 that Dr. Berkouwer chooses position, and that his second volume will only explicate the position which he takes already in the first volume. Hence, we turn, in this review, to the first volume.

The Contents in Brief

It is not easy to sum up a Berkouwer volume. This is

due, I think, to more than one factor. In the first place, "Berkouwer" is scattered throughout the volume. He appears now and then in the form of a brief comment on the opinions and writings of others. He appears through the means of a kind of running commentary or dialogue. And, I feel, he appears through quotations from other theologians and through the way in which he uses these quotations. Very seldom is there any lengthy section in this book which is directly and purely Berkouwer; and never is there a section of detailed, systematic development of a certain phase of doctrine.

But let me attempt a summation.

This book contains four chapters: 1) Holy Scripture and Certainty. 2) The Testimony of the Spirit. 3) Holy Scripture as Canon. 4) Authority and Interpretation.

A student of dogmatics will sense at once that here we have no ordinary dogmatics, i.e., no systematic and objective development of the doctrine of Scripture. This is plain from the very choice of subjects and from the order in which they are treated. But remember: this is quite in harmony with Berkouwer's method; and it is plain that Berkouwer holds consistently to this method (in as far as it can formally be called a method) throughout his work. He himself recognizes this departure in his approach, and he opens his first chapter by offering an explanation of the fact that he begins with this treatment of the certainty-issue.

The main burden of the first chapter is to show that there is no such thing as a separate, formal, objective

ground of certainty of faith in a formalized inspiration and authority of Scripture. Faith and its certainty are always to be related to the content, the message, of Scripture. Just as one is convinced of the truth and believes and accepts it only when he walks in the truth, so it is possible to speak of "Scripture-faith" only when one in his confession of the authority of Scripture gives answer in faith to Scripture's witness, its gospel. The "genesis" of faith in its being bound to Holy Scripture, the listening to God's voice, is never to be explained from a preceding guarantee concerning the power of the assurance with which the Word of God is concerned. No aprioristic theory can establish certainty. The way to certainty and to Scripture-faith is the way of which Jeremiah testifies in his meeting of God: "O Lord, thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed." (Jer. 20:7) The way of the Christian faith is the way of a being bound to the Gospel, to the Christ of the Scriptures, from which only can a consideration concerning Holy Scripture flow forth. (pp. 36-38) This is but a brief summary of the thrust of this chapter. There is a wide-ranging treatment of the history of dogma in connection with this chapter, as there is throughout the book. Moreover, fundamentalism, with its insistence on the divine character of Scripture, comes in for rather sharp criticism. Besides this, already in this chapter Dr. Berkouwer opens the way for a sympathetic treatment of historical criticism. Probably it should be noted that again Berkouwer does something for which he was

severely criticized earlier in the Netherlands (by Dr. M. Arntzen): he cites Dr. Bavinck to support a warning that opposition to Scripture as the Word of God need not come in its strongest form from the quarter of the critics, but can indeed arise from dead orthodoxy. This is like warning someone of the danger of measles when the real danger is a flu epidemic already present, or warning theoretically of the danger of fire when the actual and present danger is a tornado. In his "De Crisis in De Gereformeerde Kerken" Dr. M.J. Arntzen correctly points out that a warning against dead orthodoxy is hardly necessary when the real threat and the great danger is coming from the critics who are attacking the authority of Scripture directly. Finally, it should be noted that Dr. Berkouwer very uncritically speaks repeatedly,--as do many others,--of a so-called "human" element, or factor, in Scripture. This last is probably a key factor in Berkouwer's view, even though there are very many other theologians who freely speak of such a human factor. If one begins with the presupposition of such a "human factor," he necessarily will run into problems with respect to inspiration and authority and infallibility in trying to account for that human factor and for the significance of it. This, by the way, points up a major flaw in Berkouwer's approach. If only he had treated this question of whether or not there is a human factor in Holy Scripture, i.e., if only he had treated the question of the nature and the source of Holy Scripture first, this would have affected all that he had to say about related matters.

The second chapter, on the Testimony of the Spirit, is probably the least controversial chapter of this book,--at least, when its thrust is considered in isolation from the direction of the book as a whole. This is not to say that the same motif is not found in this chapter; it surely is. Berkouwer quotes Bavinck with evident approval when the latter points out that the testimony of the Spirit does not furnish any direct certainty concerning authenticity and canonicity and even the inspiration of Holy Scripture, still less about historical, chronological, and geographical data as such, or about the facts of salvation as nude facts, or about the closed character of the canon. Much rather is this testimony inseparably connected with faith and the salvation given in Christ. There must be no dualism between Scripture-faith and faith in Christ. (page 47). Every separation between faith in Christ and Scripture-faith is excluded by the confession of the testimony of the Spirit. (page 69) The testimony of the Holy Spirit does not stand over against the self-testimony of Scripture, but forms a unity with it, arising out of the sense of the witness of the Spirit as it is directed toward Christ and His salvation. (page 73) On page 76 mention is made of an "earnest warning" against the thought that a traditional Scripture-faith could remain in existence when the living tie with the message of Scripture does not rule one's life to the very heart. For, according to Berkouwer, Scripture-faith is only according to the will of God when it is the response to the preaching of the mystery which "now is made manifest, and

by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith," Rom. 16:26. Notice, therefore, the same motif of correlativity.

The question remains, however: in what direction is Dr. Berkouwer going with this emphasis? Will he not end with a kerugma which is distilled from Scripture and which is not in every respect co-extensive with the complete contents of Scripture?

The third chapter deals with the problem of the canon. Again in this chapter there is a detailed treatment of many of the problems and the proffered solutions to these problems which have arisen in connection with this subject. Likewise, there is extensive attention paid to some of the opinions of the newer theology. But again the key to everything is found in the correlation of faith and gospel. Just one quotation will illustrate this emphasis: "The way of faith, is the way of the meeting and confrontation with the Word of God, which as message of salvation may not for a moment be left out of consideration when one ponders the canon."

Chapter 4, "Authority and Interpretation," is, to me, the most interesting and the most important of the book. The same theme is followed, that of the correlation of faith and the content of Scripture, the message of salvation. But it is in this chapter that all the current hermeneutical questions are introduced. Here Berkouwer approaches the "scopus" idea that is being severely criticized in reviews

of his second volume. Here he makes room for the "literary genre" approach to the discussion of Genesis 1-11. Here he makes room for the kerugma-history distinction with respect to the gospel narratives. Here he justifies the influence of alleged great scientific progress and its widening horizons of knowledge upon the interpretation of Scripture. And all this is done in the name of the fundamental principle, "Scripture is its own interpreter." Apparently Dr. Berkouwer is willing to accept at face value and as an honest attempt at interpretation of Scripture any theory and any interpreter who claims to adhere to this exegetical principle, and to allow all such theories a legitimate place in the church and a legitimate claim to the faith of God's people. There is no warning sounded against the danger that along these paths we will lose Scripture; on the contrary, he says that it would be lamentable if people would begin to hear the word "kerugma" as an almost heretical word. (page 211) Now there is nothing wrong, of course, with the word kerugma. But in the present situation in hermeneutics and exegesis, I believe that the warning is in order that when the word "kerugma" is sounded, a Reformed man should immediately put up his Reformed antennae and suspiciously wonder whether some heresy of the new hermeneutics and the new theology (which is not really new, but principally very old) is being foisted upon him; he should be suspicious whether perhaps in the name of legitimate inquiry into the nature of authority and inspiration and under the motto of "Scripture is its own interpreter" heresy is

being smuggled into the church. Berkouwer attempts to allay fears in this chapter, and he expresses understanding of the fact that there may be such fears. But he does nothing substantial to calm the fears, in this reviewer's opinion.

There are some very real tensions in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands; and to an extent those tensions are being transplanted to this continent, particularly to the Christian Reformed Church. Moreover, judging from what is coming out of the Netherlands--and who does not think of the names of Kuitert and Koole in this connection--there is very serious reason for these tensions. The defense of the faith is at stake. And while there is, as Dr. Arntzen puts it, a crisis in the Gereformeerde Kerken, there is to date little indication of more than a crisis. It would seem to this reviewer, however, that where there are tensions of as serious a nature as these, something must give way; where there is a real crisis, something must break. And if those who hold to the faith do not attempt something to resolve the crisis in favor of the Reformed faith, the new theology will win the field.

Evaluation

First of all, and positively, a favorable word may be said about this book because of its wide-ranging sweep of the history of dogma. This is characteristic of Berkouwer's works. One simply stands amazed at the evidence of his thorough acquaintance with the views and writings of theologians from the distant past down to the present day. From

this point of view alone, if from no other, a book of this kind is worth studying. It furnishes an interesting and often penetrating survey of the history of dogma with respect to the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

At the same time, even in this connection I would sound a word of caution. For one thing, one must not allow himself to be overwhelmed and swept off his feet by the sheer erudition and learning of the author. This, I think, is not an entirely imaginary danger when one sits admiringly at the feet of a scholar. Secondly, the book suffers from a certain amount of confusion because of the way in which Berkouwer quotes from and refers to others. Sometimes the author uses others to express his own thoughts; sometimes he does not. Sometimes he will refer to views of others without directly expressing a judgment when one might expect a rather severe condemnatory expression; and the question arises whether Berkouwer in such cases gives tacit approval, or whether he minimizes an erroneous view or whether he concedes it some kind of legitimate place under the dogmatical sun. Thirdly, there is a doubt in my soul as to whether Berkouwer always uses his quotations and references correctly. The reader will find that Berkouwer frequently seeks to support himself from Bavinck. This may be open to debate: but more than once while reading the book I pulled my "Bavinck" from the shelf and checked up on a reference. And while perhaps Bavinck could be interpreted to mean what Berkouwer would have him say, and while this may indeed be

possible because Bavinck reveals much of the same irenic spirit as Berkouwer, nevertheless to me the total impression left by Bavinck in context is different,--let me say "sounder,"--than that left by Bavinck-through-the-eyes-of-Berkouwer. Of course, this is always a problem in study and research. If one wants to know Bavinck's views on Holy Scripture, then the best source is Bavinck read in toto, not another theologian's presentation of Bavinck. These strictures, however, are not meant to detract from what was said above about the value of the wide-ranging study in this book.

In the second place, there is the matter of Dr. Berkouwer's approach and method. Again, I believe that words of appreciation can be expressed, from a certain point of view. There is something warm and even dynamic about the emphasis that theology and faith are closely related, and that theology and preaching may never be separated. Dogmatics must never be allowed to become a barren theoretical pursuit; and it must in the healthy sense of the word be practical. There may never be a cleavage between theology and the faith; nor may there be a cleavage between theology and faith. But does this mean that there can be no systematic, objective development and presentation of the truth? This seems to be Berkouwer's position. Must everything always be expressed and formulated in terms of the kerugma-faith tension? It seems to me that even as faith lays hold upon objective facts, truths, realities, so there can also be,--and, in fact, there must be,--an objective and orderly accounting of those realities, a body and a system of truth.

To illustrate in connection with this work on Holy Scripture: suppose it is true that faith apprehends the authority of Scripture only in and through its confrontation with the content of Scripture, the message of salvation, does that make the authority itself any less real and objective, and does that make it impossible to formulate an objective dogma of the authority of Scripture per se? Suppose it is true that it is impossible to speak of Scripture-faith apart from faith in Christ: that certainly does not make it impossible to say that we believe without any doubt all things contained in Scripture. Nor does it change the fact that objectively all things contained in Scripture are true. In fact, the latter is necessarily presupposed unless one wishes to fall into stark subjectivism. This, it seems to me, Berkouwer ignores. And this, to me, is so serious that Berkouwer's method, if followed to its consequences, would mean the end of all dogmatics. Perhaps this is even the reason why he only produces "Studies in Dogmatics" rather than a full-fledged dogmatics. Further, it would appear to me that Berkouwer's method would mean principally the end of the creeds, at least of such creeds as follow an objective method and order, such as the Canons of Dordrecht. Is this perhaps the reason also why Dr. Berkouwer applies the scopus-idea to the creeds as well as to Scripture?

But I have more criticism of this method.

First of all, I find a very limited idea of faith in Berkouwer's use of correlativity. It appears to me that he limits faith to the act and the activity of faith, and

thereby lays himself open to the charge of subjectivism and philosophical relativism, both of which charges he denies,-- and, I think, both of which evils he strives (but sometimes vainly?) to avoid. And will he not land himself and the churches squarely in the realm of subjectivism ultimately with regard to Holy Scripture? That is, will the result not be ultimately that only what the individual believes and determines to be believable will be held for true? In the same vein, I am critical of Berkouwer's construing of the kerugma-faith relationship so often as confrontation. Our confessions indeed speak of the demand of the gospel proclaimed. But again, there is much more to the gospel and to the preaching of the gospel than a divine demand. There is always the gracious operation of the Spirit which makes the gospel proclamation effectual in the case of the elect. And there is the aspect of gospel proclamation which is expressed by the term "means" and which definitely points us to the divine employer of this means. But of this one never hears in connection with this kerugma-faith tension. And this is not a Reformed emphasis. Thirdly, in spite of the fact that the very motif of Berkouwer is supposed to be the correlativity of faith and the Word of God, and in spite of the fact that this kind of theologizing has been widely hailed as being truly Biblical, I find this book to be rather barren of any extensive exegesis and exegetical foundation. There is much more of a dogmen-historical approach. Sometimes one almost gets the impression that Berkouwer is rather eclectic and even syncretical, picking and choosing

from among various views and putting together an element of this and an element of that. But this exegetical weakness is surely a fundamental weakness in any dogmatical study, especially in one that is hailed as Biblical in distinction from older theologies which are criticized as scholastic.

I believe that the net result of Berkouwer's approach to the doctrine of Scripture is that already in this first volume he has essentially conceded the Reformed doctrine of Scripture to the critics. If only he had begun at the beginning, if he had treated such subjects as revelation and inspiration, and done so in the light of Scripture and the confessions, first, the outcome might have been different. I have not yet completed a study of his second volume, but some of the reviews which I have already read seem to confirm my worst fears, namely, that Berkouwer's treatment of the doctrine of inspiration will hardly constitute a sturdy maintenance of the Reformed line. It seems to me that after volume one, it must needs follow that volume two, while it will be an important work, will be disappointing to a Reformed man.

There are various other points of criticism which may be mentioned. It seems to me that Berkouwer fails to take proper cognizance of the fact that Scripture is the written record of the Word of God, not the Word of God in its total conception. The contents of Holy Scripture is the contents of God's speech, the record of what God spoke. Careful distinction must be made here.

It is also a serious lack in Berkouwer's conception (though this is bound up again in his method) that he consistently speaks of Scripture in terms of the message of the gospel (boodschap des evangelies), and never speaks of the broader and more basic concept, the revelation of God in Christ. The former expression is more limited and is soteriologically oriented, of course. Besides, it fits in with his "scopus" idea.

But the underlying question with respect to all that he writes is: what is at the root, dogmatically speaking, of all the weaknesses in Berkouwer's presentation?

My answer is that Berkouwer, like many other Reformed theologians, proceeds from the basic recognition of a human-ness of Holy Scripture, a human element, a human factor. There is not a separate treatment in volume one of this subject. But the mention of this human element runs as a thread throughout the book. For a while, as I was reading, I checked in the margin all the passages where it occurred; but I gave up because they were so numerous. But right here is the key error. I submit that the moment you grant the existence of such a human element in Holy Scripture, at that moment you have conceded the battle for the Word of God to the critics.

Berkouwer, of course, is not unique in this regard. I dare say that even some of his severe critics will speak uncritically of a human element, or factor, and even of so-called secondary authors. And not always do evil results come from such usage, due to the fact that these ideas are

not always carried to their logical consequences. But here is the crux of the matter. As soon as you in any sense make Scripture an admixture, rather than solely the Word of God, you are in fundamental trouble. I submit, too, that the Bible never presents itself as anything other than the Word of God, even when it recognizes that this revelation of God came to us through men and in the course of the history of men and of mankind.

Let me close with a quotation from H. Hoeksema's "Reformed Dogmatics," page 476: "No, the Scriptures from beginning to end are the infallible record of the Word of God, the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not even safe to speak of a divine and a human factor in Holy Scripture. It is true, of course, that the revelation of God, as we have it in Scripture, came to us through men and in the course of a human history. But we may never forget that also the cloth on which this divine work of revelation was embroidered by the Holy Spirit is not from man, but from God." And any discussion of the "est" in "Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei" is necessarily confined within the above limits.

Regretfully, my answer to the question which heads this review must be negative.

--H.C. Hoeksema