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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Comments-----	iv
Prof. H. Hanko	
James 5: 13-20-----	1
Prof. H. Hanko	
Calvin's Theory of <u>Semen Religionis</u> -----	25
Prof H. C. Hoeksema	
A Critique of Dr. G. C. Berkouwer's "Een Halve Eeuw Theologie"-----	38
Prof. H. C. Hoeksema	

## EDITORIAL COMMENTS

With this issue of the Journal we complete eight years of publishing. How swiftly the time has gone by! It seems but a short time ago that we began this new venture. And we are continually surprised by the growth of our subscription list and by the interest you our readers have shown in our modest publication. We hope that we may continue to hear from you from time to time. And if there are any who would like to receive the Journal regularly, you need only send in your name and address. We still are not charging for the Journal.

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Prof. Hoeksema has two articles in the present issue. The one entitled "Semen Religionis In Calvin" is an unpublished paper which was delivered some time ago at the student club of the Seminary. This article should prove of interest to all who stand in the tradition of Calvin, the great Reformer of Geneva. There is considerable confusion on this point which Prof. Hoeksema discusses, and we hope that his paper will help to clear the air on the matter.

His second article is the beginning of a review of the latest book by Dr. G. C. Berkouwer: "Een Halve Eeuw Theologie." ("A Half Century of Theology") There was no time for Prof. Hoeksema to prepare a thorough review of the book for this issue since he obtained the book only a short time ago. We can, the Lord willing, look forward to further comments in a later issue.

I have begun a series of articles on exegesis of James 5: 13-20. It is hoped that these articles on this very instructive and practical passage out of James' epistle will be helpful especially to pastors in their pastoral work.

Prof. Decker hopes to continue his series on the Sermon on the Mount in the next issue.

We seek your prayers and we would enjoy hearing from you when you have reactions to what you read between these covers.

## INTRODUCTION

In this and succeeding articles, the Lord willing, we hope to offer to our readers a detailed exegesis of James 5: 13-20. There are several reasons why this passage is worthy of our consideration. The first reason is that, at least in part, this passage<sup>1</sup> has been appealed to by Pentecostalism in support of its contention that Scripture promises us healing from physical diseases upon the prayer of faith. It is worth our while to investigate whether this claim of Pentecostalism is justified by the text. The second reason why we find this passage important is that there is in our day, especially within the more conservative church world, a renewed interest in discovering what the Scriptures have to say concerning the solution to the problems of life in which the child of God finds himself. This renewed interest has been brought about in large measure by the work of Dr. Jay Adams, professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. In various books which he has written, he has done service to the church by pointing out that it is only in the Scriptures that we can find our solutions to the problems of life which we face. It is his claim that modern day psychology and psychiatry have usurped the place which the church ought to occupy, in the treatment of those with mental problems, and that work which rightfully belongs to officebearers in God's church has been taken over by psychologists and psychiatrists. It is his contention, and with this contention we agree, that only a return to the Scriptures will give to us that which is necessary to solve the problems which the believer faces in the midst of his calling in this world. We believe that this passage in James 5 is of considerable help in understanding the problems which the child of God faces.

It is not our intention in this article to examine in detail the claims of Pentecostalism, nor is it our intention to enter into

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<sup>1</sup>. This is especially true of vss. 14, 15.

the whole question of psychiatric treatment and its relationship to behavior; it is our intention rather simply to let the text as we discuss it in detail speak for itself. This does not mean that we shall not, from time to time, make some remarks in these two areas, but the remarks which we have to make which deal with Pentecostalism and with the treatment of mental problems will be incidental to our exegesis of the passage which we hope to consider. It is our hope that we will discover that Scripture has a great deal to say about these matters.

#### THE MAIN IDEA OF JAMES' EPISTLE

The epistle of James as a whole has always presented some problems for the student of Scripture. It is a well known fact that at one time in his life Luther called the epistle of James, "a straw epistle." He did this because, failing to understand the main idea of the epistle, he came to the conclusion that what is taught in this book of the Bible stands in flat contradiction with the truth of justification by faith as set forth for example, in such books as Romans and Galatians. It was only later on in life that Luther understood the main teaching of the book of James and changed his opinion of it, and considered the book to be genuinely canonical. Others have claimed that, while perhaps James' epistle is canonical, nevertheless there is little or no gospel in James. It is the contention of these exegetes that James, with his emphasis upon the necessity of good works, has failed to include in his epistle the gospel of the cross of Christ. This too, is a serious misconception concerning James' letter. We proceed of course, on the assumption that the church has been historically correct in including this epistle in the canon of Scriptures. And, on the basis of this assumption, we insist too, that this epistle is part of the infallibly inspired Word of God. And, because it is part of the infallibly inspired Word of God, we maintain also that it is part of the infallibly inspired written record of the revelation of Jehovah God in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this is true, as we believe it is, we believe further that there is gospel in James. A careful reading of the text and a careful study of the thought of the apostle will demonstrate that this is indeed true.

James is addressing himself in this epistle to a peculiar problem that existed in some parts of the church in his day and that still afflicts the church of Christ to the present from time to time. The problem to which James addresses himself is this. There are always those in the church who, while they claim to have faith, nevertheless fail to manifest their faith in good works. It is James' contention that this is 'impossible. After all, faith is the bond which unites the believer to Christ. It is the living bond of fellowship between Christ and His people. As such, it is the living bond by which the life which is in Jesus Christ becomes the inheritance of those who belong to Christ. It is just because faith is the means whereby the life of Christ becomes the possession of the people of God that faith must also manifest itself in good works. The life of Christ in the hearts of His people comes to expression in their lives in works that are according to the law of God. There is an inevitability about this. The life of Christ cannot remain hidden. It must come to outward expression. Hence, those who claim to have faith but do not do good works quite obviously do not have faith at all. They have a faith which is a counterfeit faith, an imitation of true faith, a kind of faith which, although in some respects resembling true faith, is nevertheless not saving faith. It is not the faith which binds the believer to Christ. It is a dead faith. And it is unfruitful. This fundamental point of the epistle is emphasized especially by James in chapter 2: 14-26. And all the emphasis in the epistle on the practical life of the church of Jesus Christ is intended by James to demonstrate the importance of living out of a true faith. It is this main idea which is also carried through in chapter 5: 13-20.

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James 5: 13: Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.  
Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

Before we enter into the text as such it is probably somewhat important to ask the question: what is the connection between vs. 13 and the previous context? This is always an important question in the exegesis of any part of the epistle of James. It is

characteristic of his epistle that the connections between the thoughts are not always immediately evident. It seems oftentimes as if James turns suddenly from one thought to another and introduces an entirely different and unrelated thought without any break in the text. And so some commentators have concluded that this is also the case in vs. 13. These commentators have concluded therefore that no connection in the thought whatsoever exists. James is simply beginning an entirely new thought in this passage.

But it is usually true when one carefully considers the thought of the apostle that, while the connection may not be immediately evident, nevertheless there is a close connection in the thought which is not directly expressed. Some commentators have recognized this; and they have considered the possibility that the apostle is picking up in vs. 13 the idea of suffering evil which he already mentioned in vs. 10. There the apostle wrote: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." Indeed, the same word is used in vs. 10 which is used in vs. 13.<sup>2</sup> This is no doubt correct. In general we may say that James is turning here in this section to the subject of our immediate subjective reaction to the circumstances of life in which we find ourselves, and as the circumstances have been described in part in the preceding. James has, throughout the preceding context, indeed spoken of suffering evil. And in this and the following verses, he turns his attention to what oftentimes is and what ought to be our reaction to these afflictions which the Lord in His wisdom is pleased to put upon us.

It immediately becomes evident that in vss. 13 and 14 the apostle asks a series of three questions, "Is any among you afflicted? Is any merry? Is any sick among you?" The question also arises therefore, what is the relationship between these various questions. It is possible, of course, that James is merely

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<sup>2</sup>. κακοπαθῶ , which means, "to suffer evil".

describing various frames of mind in which the child of God finds himself, and that James gives instruction as to what must be done in these circumstances. In this case, there would be no internal connection between these questions at all. It is also however, possible that James means to use a particular order that goes something like this. Are you suffering evil? Then pray. Does this praying help so that you are cheerful? Then sing psalms. Or, is your mental frame of mind so depressed that you are ill and cannot pray? Then call the elders of the church so that you will be able to sing again.

No doubt, this latter idea is correct, for it is more in harmony with James' entire approach in the following verses. But you will notice, that if this is the case, then James means also to say, that, in any case, singing is the goal for which we ought to strive. If we may put it that way, James is saying that the norm for the Christian life is happiness. This is the spiritual norm. This is the norm for which God's people ought to strive. Indeed, this is so much the norm, that this is itself the command of the Scriptures. It is only when we are happy that we live in the proper spiritual frame of mind which is pleasing to the Lord. Hence the apostle means that if we are not happy but are rather afflicted, we must pray. We must pray because it is through prayer that we will once again become happy. There is then the closest possible connection between the two questions. Prayer is the means to bring us true spiritual happiness.

But James also considers the possibility that we find ourselves in such a spiritual frame of mind that we cannot pray. It is that to which he refers in the first part of vs. 14 when he asks: "Is any sick among you?" The answer to this question is: "Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." This then, is the relationship in which these questions stand to each other.



## THE PROBLEM OF AFFLICTION

In general, while singing is certainly the desirable and necessary frame of mind for the child of God, this is not always possible. Sometimes we cannot sing because we are afflicted. And it is to this problem that the apostle addresses himself.

The word *κακοπαθέω* means literally, "to suffer evil". It thus has a broader meaning than the translation of the Authorized Version, "affliction." This is why various translations render this word differently. The Revised Standard Version reads, "Is any among you suffering?" Both the Phillips translation and the New English Bible translate: "Is any among you in trouble?" The Dutch has: "Is iemand onder u in lijden." At any rate, the meaning of the word which the apostle uses is broader than mere "affliction." To suffer evil is actually to experience some kind of evil; and surely affliction, if looked at from the subjective viewpoint, is the result of suffering evil. The Authorized Version is therefore correct insofar as it implies the subjective effect as it relates to our frame of mind. The meaning of the word therefore is not simply a reference to the objective circumstances in which we find ourselves and which we would call evils, but the word also includes the subjective reaction or the subjective spiritual frame of mind in which the child of God finds himself because of this evil which he is called upon to suffer.

These evils are many. Without going into detail concerning them, we may notice that James himself refers to some of them in the preceding context. Especially he refers to persecution which is often the lot of the people of God here below. In vss. 1-6 he refers especially to the persecution of the people of God which comes at the hands of the wealthy. But more in general he refers to persecution of all kinds. For he holds before our eyes the example of the prophets who spoke in the Name of the Lord and serve us as an example of suffering affliction and of patience. But he refers also to the case of Job. God gave Job temporarily into the power of Satan, and Satan took from Job everything he had including his health. He lost all his possessions and all his wealth; he lost all of his children; and he was afflicted with grievous boils. Even his wife urged him to curse God and die. So no doubt to these

things especially the apostle refers. Nevertheless, we may include in this list of evils all such evils which befall the people of God of every conceivable kind. Sometimes these are the evils of poverty, then again the evils of sickness and bodily suffering; then again the child of God is weighed down with the many problems of life so that his way seems dark and difficult to walk. Or, the Lord may take from him some loved one so that he is plunged into the midst of great sorrow. All these are, objectively considered, evils which befall God's people. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 34: 19: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." We may even include in this list of evils the evil of sin. The apostle himself refers to this in vs. 15 when he writes: "and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." It is not at all surprising that the child of God finds that the sins which arise out of his sinful nature and which continue to plague him all his life here below become for him a great evil, a heavy burden which must be borne, an occasion for much affliction and suffering.

These objective evils result in a subjective, spiritual frame of mind. So often it is true that the child of God, beset by these evils, is filled with pain and anxiety of heart and mind. Oftentimes he is lonely. Doubts and fears, perplexities and anxieties fill his soul. Oftentimes Scripture itself gives expression to these experiences of the saints. Jacob, for example, complains in Gen. 42: 36: "Ye have bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." Especially the Psalms give expression to this. We read for example in Psalm 42: 7: "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." Or again, in vs. 3 of the same Psalm: "My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, where is thy God?" In Psalm 77, Asaph writes: "I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart:

and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" vss. 2-9. Or again, to cite but one more passage, we read in Psalm 88: 1-9: "O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee."

Every child of God at one time or another has found his own deepest experiences echoed in these Psalms which are incorporated into the Scriptures. We know that all these complaints are wrong. There is sin involved when our hearts are so deeply troubled. We fail to see God's hand which governs all our life and makes all things work together for good. We fail to walk by faith and we fail to live in quiet childlike trust. Nevertheless, these passages and many others are found in Scripture because they so often find an echo in the subjective experience of the child of God who is beset by many evils.

That there is an element of sin involved is especially emphasized by the fact that in other passages in Scripture we have examples of saints who were happy even in most trying circumstances. The three friends of Daniel were filled with peace and joy even at the prospect of death in the fiery furnace. See Daniel 3: 16-18. Paul and Silas sang psalms at midnight in the prison in Philippi though their backs were raw and bleeding because of the stripes of the jailer and though their hands and feet were bound in stocks. See Acts 16: 25. The apostles could give thanks that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. See Acts 5: 41.

The Scriptures make clear that our proper attitude toward all the sufferings and evils which the Lord places upon us must be of patient and humble submission to His will and must be one of happiness even in life's most trying hours.

Nevertheless James knows that these times come into our lives when we are afflicted and to this problem he turns.

#### PRAYER THE SOLUTION TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS

What then is the solution when we are afflicted? The solution, James says, is to pray.

In general, we ought to notice first of all that this is Scripture's advice which comes to us in the midst of our afflictions. This is not the advice of the world. If you go to the world for advice in the midst of these afflictions you will find different kinds of suggestions to cure you of your many sorrows. Some will tell you to drown your sorrows in pleasure, to get the most out of life while you can, for the happy moments of life are few and far between. Others will tell you to keep a stiff upper lip and bear as best you can with stoical resolve the troubles which are your lot. In our day it is increasingly popular in the midst of these many afflictions to consult a psychologist or a psychiatrist who will prescribe tranquilizers or some other therapy in an effort to resolve our problems and troubles. Elaborate and extended theories are spun out by learned men in an effort to assist us in coming to grips with the problems which we face. But the problems are spiritual, and a cure prescribed by Scripture alone will do.

In the second place we ought to notice that the verb which the apostle uses here is in the present tense.<sup>3</sup> By the use of the present tense, the apostle James means to indicate continuous action. We could probably translate this: "keep on praying." The Scriptures often emphasize the necessity of this in different ways. There are times when the Lord is not pleased to give us immediately what we seek from Him. And when we do not immediately

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<sup>3</sup>προσευχέσθω : present imperative.

receive from the Lord that which we seek from Him, the Scriptures urge upon us to persevere in prayer. It is easy for us to become discouraged when we do not immediately receive that for which we seek. And it is easy for us to conclude therefore that the Lord will not hear us anyway, and that we might just as well cease praying. But in different ways the Scriptures urge upon us the necessity of continuing to pray. When Jacob wrestled with the angel at the Brook Jabbok, he sought the blessing of the Lord. But he said to the angel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." And because of his perseverance the angel said to him: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." See Gen. 32: 26-28. The Syrophoenician Woman who sought the Lord in order that He might heal her daughter was almost coldly rebuffed by the Lord: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." But she persisted nevertheless in her petitions: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." And she received that for which she sought. The same truth is taught by the Lord in the parable of the friend at midnight recorded in Luke 11: 1-13. In that parable, the Lord admonishes us: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." See vss. 9, 10.

Prayer is a wonderful blessing and privilege of grace. The wonder of prayer is earned for us by the cross of Christ. Christ has merited for us on His cross both the right to pray and the ability to pray. Neither do we have of ourselves. Of ourselves we have no right to appear before God, for we are sinners; and no sinner has the right to stand in the presence of the Holy One of Israel. Christ has given us this right through His perfect atonement. But no less do we lack the ability to pray. It is impossible for the man devoid of grace to offer any prayer at all which is heard by God. The power and the ability to pray, earned by Christ on His cross, is given to us through the operation of the Spirit in our hearts.

This wonderful privilege of prayer is God's means to keep us

in fellowship with Him. As the fruit of the Spirit in our hearts, the Spirit stirs up our hearts and arouses within us the desire to enter into God's fellowship. Prayer is the way to covenant communion with God. Through the Spirit, God teaches us to pray. He shows us through prayer His greatness and glory, His grace and love, His tender concern for us in all our needs. He gives us all we ask and teaches us the truth of His Word. It is through prayer that we are comforted in our many afflictions.

We often fail to understand the wonderful blessing which prayer really is. It is the channel of communication with our heavenly Father. We need to write no letter when we wish to express our needs to God. We need to dial no telephone in order to establish connection with the switchboard in heaven. We need to make no appointment in order to gain access to the throne of grace. God is always present when we pray. Whether it be in the daylight or in the deepest hours of the night, whether it be when formally we bow our heads in prayer or when our spirits breathe forth prayer as we go about our daily tasks, the ears of the Lord are ever open to the cries of His people. How great is the gift of prayer which is given to us; yet how seldom really do we pray.

Nevertheless this is the divine cure for affliction. We have the promises of the Scriptures that through prayer our afflictions will be taken away. This does not mean of course, that God will necessarily alter the circumstances of our life. He does not promise us that He will necessarily change that which brings affliction and suffering. If we are sick and suffer bodily pain, He does not necessarily promise to make us better. If our way is filled with difficulty, He has not promised to remove the obstacles of life. If He has plunged our souls into sorrow through the loss of a loved one, He does not promise to restore such a loved one to our side. But whatever may be the way of life in which the Lord is pleased to lead us, He will give us the grace to endure. He will give us surcease from sorrow, joy and happiness in the midst of our tears, and the assurance of His favor. He will give us faith to believe that all things are for our good. And though we continue to suffer evil objectively, nevertheless the afflictions

which trouble our souls will be taken from us.

Of this also the Psalms often speak. We need cite only one instance. In Psalm 116, the Psalmist again gives voice to his many complaints. He writes in vs. 3: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow." But the Psalmist prayed. And he writes in vs. 4: "Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." What is the fruit of this? The fruit of this is that the Psalmist says: "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." vss. 5, 7.

Hence, prayer and prayer alone is the solution to life's problems.

#### OUR CALLING TO BE HAPPY

The word which James uses here<sup>4</sup> comes from two separate Greek words. The one word<sup>5</sup> is the general word for passion or feeling. The other word<sup>6</sup> means "well." Thus literally, the word means well-passioned, or of good feeling. The word "merry", which is used in the text, is not really a good translation, for in the usus loquendi it has come to have carnal connotations. To translate this by the word "cheerful" is almost too weak. Perhaps our English word "happy" is the best translation we can find. The Revised Standard Version translates this word by "cheerful". The New English Bible reads: "is any in good heart?" The Dutch has: "is iemand goedsmoeds?"

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<sup>4</sup> εὐθυμῆν .

<sup>5</sup> ὁ θυμός.

<sup>6</sup> εὖ

There is a kind of worldly or carnal merriment which is present in the relationships between men. This worldly or carnal merriment is often meaningless and superficial. It is expressed in silly laughter, ribald jokes, superficial merriment which is only on the surface. One finds it even in such expressions as, "Merry Christmas", or, "Happy New Year." There are several things about this earthly and superficial merriment which are worth noting. In the first place it is often a merriment which is an attempt to cover up an anguished and fear-stricken soul. The wicked experience consciously the wrath of God from which they constantly attempt to flee. And their flight, they think, is aided by external laughter. In the second place the jokes of the world, as often as not, are laughter over life's tragedies, or laughter about the sins which are present in the world. This is even evident in comic strips. The world makes jokes about the disobedient son, the Dennis the Menace. Or the world laughs over the hen-pecked husband who does not know his proper God-given place in the family, but is browbeaten by his wife. In this way the world attempts to escape from life's tragedies or to make a joke of life's sins. This type of laughter is evil.

This is not to say that the Christian may never laugh. Laughter has a legitimate place in the life of the child of God. There are many ways in which laughter is an expression of the joy of the Christian and even of delight in one another's fellowship. But the nature of the happiness of the Christian is fundamentally different from the merriment of the world. Such happiness arises from a heart that is contented and at peace with God and man. It is the happiness of serenity and spiritual tranquility. It is not the happiness that necessarily expresses itself in boisterous laughter, but it is a deep happiness which comes to expression in a profound and joyful life which characterizes the people of God. Such a happiness is not necessarily determined by the outward circumstances of life. One can find this true spiritual happiness in a person who lies upon a bed of unrelenting pain. One can find such happiness at the side of the grave. One can find such happiness in the life of the family that lives in a hovel. All of this is true because it is a happiness which is the fruit of an



experiential appropriation of the truth of the Scriptures.

In all the world, the child of God is really the only one who is truly happy. This is because the blessing of the Lord is upon him. He rejoices in the consciousness of God's favor no matter what the circumstances of his life may be. This is therefore also the calling of the Christian. The people of God sometimes seem to be the saddest of all, the most grumpy and complaining. Yet they, of all men, have the only reason to be happy.

Many times the Scriptures press upon us the calling to be happy. The Psalms for example, do this again and again. We are urged to enter into God's presence with singing; to make a joyful noise unto the Lord; to rejoice before the face of God; to sing even when judgments come on the wicked. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 48: 11: "Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments." But all of Scripture carries this same note. Isaiah writes in chapter 66: 10: "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her." Zechariah, in chapter 9: 9 writes: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation."

The same is true in the New Dispensation; for example Jesus urges His disciples, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Matt. 5: 12. Paul speaks of the saints as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." See II Cor. 6: 10, 11. Peter speaks of the saints as rejoicing even when they are in the midst of fiery trials. I Peter 1: 6-9. And Paul sums it all up when in Philippians 4: 4 he says: "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice."

This then is what Scripture considers to be the spiritual norm of the child of God. This is not to say that the child of God is not called also by Scripture to be grieved over his sins. James himself in chapter 4: 9 says: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness."

And indeed a broken spirit and a contrite heart is pleasing in God's sight. Nevertheless, the child of God appropriates by faith the promises of the Scriptures. In sorrow for sin he lays hold on Christ and experiences the joys and blessedness of forgiveness. In the midst of his afflictions he hears the word of God which speaks to him of God's promises which are his inheritance. And therefore, whatever the circumstances of his life may be, he is called upon to be happy.

#### THE CALLING TO SING PSALMS

What is the child of God to do when he is happy? James says according to the text: "let him sing psalms."

The word which James uses here<sup>7</sup> is a word from which we get our English word psalm. The word itself comes from a verb which means, "to pluck" or "to pull". And the reference is to plucking the strings of a stringed instrument to make music. From this basic meaning, the verb has come to mean, "to sing with accompaniment." And hence it refers to the singing of praises to God.

Once again, the apostle means to stress that this must be continuous on our part, for he uses the present tense of the verb indicating continuous action. We must continuously sing praises to God.

In the New Testament church the word which James uses here came to refer to particular songs of the church. The reference was to the songs of Zion which the church always sang and which the church still continued to sing in the days after Pentecost. These songs are the songs which are found particularly in the Biblical Psalter. There are, of course, other songs recorded for us in Scripture. The church has always been a singing church. We have recorded for us in the Scriptures for example, the songs of Miriam after Israel's passage through the Red Sea, of Deborah and Barak after their victory over Sisera, of Hannah at the time of the birth of Samuel, of Habakkuk the prophet, of Mary and Zacharias and Simeon. The Old Testament singing was an integral part of worship in the temple where choirs, musicians, and composers were

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7. ψαλλέτω.

employed. In fact, it appears from the Old Testament that the singing in these worship services of the temple was limited to special choirs which did the singing for the congregation. But now in the New Testament, because the church has the Spirit of Christ, the church no longer needs choirs in her worship services, for the church herself is able to sing. Scripture even pictures the church in heaven as a choir which sings together the songs of Moses and the Lamb. See Rev. 5: 11-14; 7: 9-12; 11: 17; 14: 1-5.

Music itself is a wonderful gift of God. It is the harmony of sounds. Just as a picture is the harmony of lines and colors used to express the truth of God's world, so is the harmony of sounds expressive of some truth in this world in which we live. When words are added to lyrics, the words express the truth of the Scriptures; and along with the lyrics, if the two are in harmony with each other, they become a powerful expression of the inmost life of the saints. Music has an intellectual aspect; that is, music itself. By its very power, it conveys thoughts and ideas. But especially music has an emotional aspect. It conveys <sup>these</sup> through figures, images, rhythm, harmonies, major and minor keys, etc. It is therefore a most powerful force, easily underestimated in its impact on our lives.

The singing of the child of God is a gift of the Spirit. Only the church can know and love the truth and can sing the songs of Zion from the heart. By means of songs, the child of God expresses therefore the truth of the Scriptures, his praise to God Who has saved him, the deepest longings and needs of his heart and life, and expresses them in such a way that his whole being is taken up in it. Hence, singing is the way in which the child of God expresses best the happiness which is within him. And it is to this James refers when he admonishes us in our happiness to sing psalms. For by means of singing the songs of the church, we express that our happiness is rooted in the salvation which God has given to us in Christ Jesus. And expressing the happiness which is ours in this glorious inheritance, we, by our songs, express praise and glory to Him Who alone is worthy of all praise and glory forever and ever. The idea is therefore, that not only is happiness the spiritual norm of the Christian life for which the child of God must

strive, but this happiness which is deeply in his heart and mind must be expressed in praise to God. All his happiness is the result of what God has done for him. There is no happiness apart from this. And this must be expressed in the songs which he sings.

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James 5: 14: Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

#### INTRODUCTION

In general, this is one of those texts in Scripture which has been so much abused and misinterpreted that it is very difficult to see what the Word of God has to say to us in it. It is not only a text appealed to in support of faith healing by Pentecostals, but it is also appealed to in support of the Romish doctrine of extreme unction.

It is well perhaps to take a closer look at this idea of faith healing as it finds its support in this passage. The underlying mistake is the claim that James is here speaking of physical sickness. It is true that in the times of the apostles there were miracles of physical healing performed. Sometimes, although not always, this was done through prayer and pouring on of oil. The Jews used oil extensively for its medicinal and cosmetic value. (See the parable of the good Samaritan.) Apparently the Jews believed, superstitiously, that oil could even chase away demons, though there is no trace of this in Jesus' teaching. Hence this text is used to support healing through prayer and anointing with oil.

Without going into this matter in detail, we ought to notice the serious mistake which is made. The miracles in Scriptures always served a specific purpose. Miracles were pictures of the power of the gospel of the cross of Jesus Christ to heal the people of God of all their spiritual diseases. Hence, miracles were added to the gospel in the days when the canon was not yet complete as signs and confirmation of the truth which the gospel proclaimed. With the passing of the apostolic period and the completion of the canon, the need for miracles is gone. This is not to say that God

cannot perform miracles anymore; surely He can should He so desire. But there is no need to perform miracles anymore because we have the completed canon as the full confirmation of the gospel. And this is sufficient for the people of God. The miracles which Pentecostals claim to perform are quite different from the miracles of Scripture. They are showy, ostentatious, and in no way are connected with the preaching of the gospel. They seem indeed to represent the same kind of clamoring for a sign which characterized the wicked Jews. But they have nothing to do with the truth of the gospel.

Also the Roman Catholics in their theory of extreme unction appeal to this passage. This view teaches that when it seems evident that a person is going to die, he must be anointed with oil. A priest anoints the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, kidneys, and feet with consecrated oil. This is intended to ease the burden of sin and guilt and thus to make easier the last trip through death and purgatory to glory. We need not take the time to refute this view. James says nothing of all this in the text.

#### THE SICKNESS TO WHICH JAMES REFERS

The entire meaning of the text hinges on the meaning of "sick".<sup>8</sup> In general, this text is interpreted as if this passage refers to physical sickness. But if this is taken in the context of the whole verse, there is a false assumption. The assumption is that if we pray earnestly enough when we are made sick, we shall indeed be cured of our diseases. Or, as it is sometimes said, if a large group gathers together for a prayer meeting, desired results can be obtained whether the prayer is for healing or for someone in danger or for any other reason. That is, the notion is held by many that by a storm of prayer from a multitude of people, God can be prevailed upon to do what we ask. This is a very carnal and unscriptural conception of prayer.

This does not mean that we cannot pray for recovery when we or someone we love or someone in the church is ill. But when we

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek uses here the word *ἀσθενέω*.

pray for recovery, it is then an expression of our deepest desire which we bring to the throne of grace. And we bring this to the throne of grace, not for carnal reasons, but for spiritual reasons. And for this reason, we bring this petition to the throne of grace always adding, "Thy will be done. Give us grace to submit with thankfulness to Thy will."

Although it is true that the word which the apostle uses here is oftentimes used in Scripture for physical sickness, this is by no means always the case. We read for example in Rom. 8: 3: "For what the law could not do, in that it weak through the flesh...."<sup>9</sup> It is obvious that the word "weakness" in this passage, which is identical to the word which James uses, cannot possibly refer to physical illness. Stronger yet, in Romans 4: 19 we read: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead...." Here the same word which James uses is emphatically used of spiritual weakness, of the weakness of faith.<sup>10</sup> This word and its cognates is therefore often used in Scripture to refer to spiritual weakness. See such passages as I Cor. 2: 3; Heb. 5: 2; 7:28; 4: 15; II Cor. 7: 5-9.

That this word can refer to more than physical illness is also evident from its etymology. The word itself comes from the Greek word τὸ σθένης, which means strength plus the alpha privans. Thus, etymologically, the reference is to any kind of lack of strength whether physical or spiritual. In the third place, the context refers very emphatically to sin: "and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." It is therefore in keeping with the context that the reference is to a weakness which is due to the lack of the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins, and is therefore a spiritual weakness.

Finally, the text speaks emphatically and without qualification of this prayer being answered with healing. But it must be remembered that we have in all the Scriptures no promise of God that He

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<sup>9</sup>. ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός.

<sup>10</sup>. καὶ μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει.

will always make us better when we are physically sick. Not even faith healers dare to claim this absolutely.

We conclude therefore, that the reference of the text is to spiritual weakness. This does not mean that there is not often-times a relationship between physical and spiritual weakness. Certainly it is true that all our physical sicknesses are the direct result of the entrance of sin into the world. And we also know that there are certain particular sins which are always punished with physical illnesses of one sort or another. This is true of drunkenness, of chronic immorality, of drug abuse. Furthermore God sometimes sends His people physical illnesses to chastise them in order to purge them from their sins, to strengthen their faith, and to teach them to trust in Him and to walk in His ways. Besides all this, it is also true that God's people, because of the close relationship between body and soul, are in times of great physical weakness because of suffering and pain, also spiritually weak.

Yet there is no hard and fast rule. There are many people of God, guilty of many sins, who are not given any physical chastisement in the sense that they are chastised with physical sicknesses. And there are saints who are called upon to suffer the severest physical trials with no apparent spiritual reason, and whose faith shines as a bright and shining light.

But the point which James is making here is clear. In vs. 13 he has described the norm of the Christian's life as being one of happiness. And he has admonished the church that, when they are happy, they must sing psalms. But he has considered the possibility that sometimes in the midst of many afflictions in which the Lord is pleased to place us, we are unable to sing psalms because we are unable to be happy. The prescription of the Scriptures in these circumstances is that we are then to pray. Prayer will be the means whereby happiness is once again restored to the hearts of God's people. But James considers the possibility that some of the saints will say to him, "But James, what if we cannot pray? What if our afflictions and anxieties are so great that prayer becomes impossible for us?" As every child of God knows, this sometimes happens. He turns to the Lord in prayer, but he seems unable to pray. He knows not what he should pray for as he ought. Or, the

words of his prayers stick in his throat. Or, although he is able to go through the motions of prayer and although he is able to utter the words of prayer, nevertheless, his prayers do not seem to get above the roof of the room in which he prays, and they seem unable to carry him into the presence of God. What then? What under those circumstances must the child of God do?

This inability to pray is the spiritual sickness or weakness to which the apostle refers. Such spiritual weakness may come for various reasons. It may be the result of days or months or even years of suffering and pain. It may be the fruit of great trials of sickness when we are brought nigh unto death. It may also have its root in some spiritual cause. It may be the result of our failure to live a life of faith and trust in God. It may be because of the fact that there is some particular sin which we cannot or will not forsake. All these reasons and many more may result in an inability to pray.

The result is that we become spiritually weak. We lose the joy of salvation, the assurance of God's love, the confidence of faith. We lose the peace of heart and serenity of soul that comes with the knowledge of God's love. We are thrown into deep and dark turmoil of soul so that we cannot pray. Prayer does not carry us into the presence of God and fails to bring us into the sanctuary of heaven. As the Psalmist expressed it: "The thought of God brought me no peace, but rather made my fears increase." See Psalm 77.

#### THE CURE OF SCRIPTURE

The apostle answers the question of what we must do if we are spiritually weak by saying: "Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." It is well to remember at the outset that this is the course of action which is prescribed by the Scriptures. And because this is the course of action prescribed by the Scriptures, it is this course of action which alone will bring solutions to our problems.

When the apostle speaks of the elders of the church, he refers to both ministers and elders, for the former are teaching elders



while the latter are ruling elders. Both may be called.

We do well to emphasize the importance here of the elders in the church of Christ. The elders are those who are called and appointed by Christ to rule and to teach in Christ's Name in the midst of the saints. Christ does not rule directly over His people, for He is in heaven and we are on earth. And He, as God so often does, binds Himself to the use of means in the rule which He extends over His people. Nevertheless, through the elders, it is Christ Himself Who very really rules over the lives of His people by means of His Word and Spirit. When therefore, the people of God call to themselves,<sup>11</sup> they very really call Christ.

Thus the elders are entrusted with the spiritual care of the saints. They are the shepherds of God's sheep, the guardians of their souls, the caretakers of their spiritual well-being, the overseers of their life from a spiritual point of view. In a very real sense, when the saints call the elders they call Christ Himself. This must be emphasized, for we have here an admonition.

There is implied at least, a certain responsibility which falls upon the elders in this connection. They are the elders of the church of Christ. As elders of the church of Christ, the responsibility for the care of the sheep of God falls upon them. They must therefore be always available when the sheep call. They must be available first of all in that they are always able to come at any time the sheep summon them in their need. There is nothing at all which may interfere with this. But they must be available too in the sense that they are spiritually ready to come to the assistance of the sheep in their need. It would be a terrible thing if a saint summoned an elder to come to him to pray for him because he himself could not pray, only to have the elder say to him: "But you had better get someone else, because I can't pray either." The elders in God's church must therefore be spiritually available. They must be themselves constantly in a spiritual frame of heart and mind so that they can bring Christ Who alone can solve the problems of His people and restore to them the joy of salvation.

Christ comes to His people when the elders bring the Word of

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<sup>11</sup> προσκαλεσθω , aorist middle imperative, third person singular. The verb is apparently the reflexive middle, and means "let him call to himself."

God. This too is important to emphasize. How rarely is this done in our day. On the one hand, officebearers in the church of Christ often quickly sluff off their responsibilities when the people of God are in trouble and steer the people of God to others. If the problems of God's people involve their marriages, the elders quickly send them to a marriage counsellor. If the problems involve troubles which plague young people, the elders send them to those who are supposed to be skilled at dealing with the problems of the young. If children seek the help and the advice of elders, teachers are consulted who are supposed to be some kind of elite especially adept at dealing with the problems of children. If the problems which the people of God face and which make it difficult for them to pray are problems of mental affliction, the elders hastily summon the aid of psychiatrists and commit their sheep to the care of those who are skilled in psychiatric technique. Or, on the other hand, if the elders themselves attempt to deal with the problems which they encounter, they play the role of doctor or psychologist or psychiatrist. They come to their sheep with words of worldly wisdom. They leave their Bibles in their pockets and the Word of God in their studies and they come with words of men's wisdom. But this is of no avail to the people of God in the midst of their afflictions. The elders in the church of Christ have only one power; and that is the power of the Word of God. It is with that Word of God that they must come.

What must the elders do? The text says: "let them pray over him."<sup>12</sup> Literally the text reads: "let them pray upon him." And the idea is that the officebearers of Christ must pray on behalf of God's people as intercessors. They come to God's people in their needs, deeply conscious of, and understanding fully these needs of God's people. But because the people of God in their trouble cannot pray, they act as intercessors. This prayer must be in the Name of the Lord.<sup>13</sup> There is a question whether Christ or God is referred to here by the name "the Lord." Probably

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<sup>12</sup>. καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ' αὐτόν.

<sup>13</sup>. the phrase ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου apparently modifies the entire clause and not only the participle, ἀλείψαντες .

however, the reference is to Christ, for this was the case in the preceding context, and is again the reference in vs. 15. Yet it makes no essential difference, for we always go to God through Christ. If God is referred to, the emphasis falls on the fact that the prayer is an intercessory calling upon the Name of Jehovah. Thus the officebearer stands between the sick and God.

The result of this intercessory prayer will be that the sick are led to God. The sick are brought, through the prayers of the elders, to the throne of grace so that they can be brought consciously into God's presence. Thus, as it were, they are taken on the wings of the prayers of the elders into the sanctuary of heaven. When they themselves cannot pray, the elders in the church of Christ, by means of their prayers, pray for them, and carry them into God's presence where they cannot go by their own strength.

The apostle adds, "anointing him with oil."<sup>14</sup> This phrase must not be taken in the literal sense of the word. James uses many such Old Testament figures which he does not intend to be taken literally, but which must be taken in the spiritual sense. For example, in chapter 4: 8 the apostle refers to Old Dispensational forms of cleansing when he says: "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded." Rather, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. And anointing with oil in the Name of the Lord means that the prayer which is offered as an intercessory prayer by the elders is a prayer for the Holy Spirit. It is a prayer that the Spirit may come upon the sick and restore those sick to spiritual health. This is really the purpose of the prayer of officebearers, and this is the cure for the afflictions which come upon the people of God.

And so in this way the people of God will be once again restored to that spiritual condition in which they will be able to pray. And if they are themselves once again able to pray, they will also once again be able to be happy. They will be happy in spite of what the external circumstances of their life may be. And in their happiness they will be able to sing songs of praise to their God.

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<sup>14</sup>. ἀλείψαντες ἐλαίῳ.

## Calvin's Theory Of Semen Religionis

--Prof. H.C. Hoeksema--

In Book I of his Institutes Calvin treats the subject of the knowledge of God; and it is in this section of the Institutes that the subject of a semen religionis finds its place. We can do no better, therefore, with a view to understanding the context of this theory of Calvin than to quote from the General Syllabus of the Institutes, Vol. I, pp. 41, 42:

So the first book is on the knowledge of God, considered as the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe at large, and of everything contained in it. It shows both the nature and tendency of the true knowledge of the Creator--That this is not learned in the schools, but that every man from his birth is self-taught it--Yet that the depravity of men is so great as to corrupt and extinguish this knowledge, partly by ignorance, partly by wickedness, so that it neither leads him to glorify God as he ought, nor conducts him to the attainment of happiness--And though this internal knowledge is assisted by all the creatures around, which serve as a mirror to display the Divine perfections, yet that man does not profit by it--Therefore, that to those, whom it is God's will to bring to an intimate and saving knowledge of Himself, He gives His written word; which introduces observations on the sacred Scripture--That He has therein revealed Himself; that not the Father only, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit united, is the Creator of heaven and earth; whom neither the knowledge innate, by nature, nor the very beautiful mirror displayed to us in the world, can, in consequence of our depravity, teach us to know so as to glorify Him. This gives occasion for treating of the revelation of God in the Scripture, of the unity of the Divine Essence, and the trinity of Persons.---To prevent man from attributing to God the blame of his own voluntary blindness, the Author shows the state of man at his creation, and treats of the image of God, freewill, and the primitive integrity of nature --Having finished the subject of creation, he proceeds to the conservation and government of all things, concluding the first book with a full discussion of the doctrine of divine providence.

It is in connection with this general subject that Calvin refers to what he calls the semen religionis, or seed of religion, and also speaks of the sensus divinitatis, sense of the divine, or sense of Deity.

That this subject is of importance in connection with the whole subject of revelation and the knowledge of God will be evident as we proceed to discuss it and come to an understanding of Calvin's view. It is also evident from the fact that various Reformed theologians have referred to this idea of Calvin. And inevitably they do so in connection with the whole subject of the knowledge of God, as well as in connection with the subject of so-called common grace. Thus, Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr., speaks of it in his Dictaten Dogmatiek, I, Locus de Deo, Chapter 1, a chapter on the subject, "Mogelijkheid Om Kennis Van Het Eeuwige Wezen te Verkrijgen (Possibility Of Obtaining Knowledge Of The Eternal Being)." And he speaks of it in connection with his distinction between a cognitio Dei insita and a cognitio Dei acquisita. He identifies the cognitio Dei insita with Calvin's semen religionis, claiming that the semen religionis of Calvin constitutes a starting point for theology. To this we shall refer subsequently.

Dr. H. Bavinck refers to Calvin's theory of a semen religionis in Vol. I of his Gereformeerde Dogmatiek under Principia der Dogmatiek. In Chapter 2, where he treats the Principium Externum, he deals with the subject of Algemeene Openbaring. He claims, p. 330, that it is exactly general revelation which puts us in a position and gives us the right to acknowledge all the elements of truth which are present in heathen religions. He claims that earlier the study of religions stood exclusively in the service of dogmatics and apologetics, and that originators of religions, such as Mohammed, were simply held to be deceivers, enemies of God, and instruments of the devil. But since these religions came to be more thoroughly and more precisely known, this explanation, according to Bavinck, has appeared untenable, as being in conflict with history and with psychology. According to Holy Scripture, Bavinck claims, there is also among the heathen a revelation of God, an illumination of the Logos, and an operation of God's Spirit. And he claims that Reformed theology is in a proper position to explain this. He writes (I translate):

The Reformed were better off through their doctrine of common grace. By it they were, on the one hand, protected against the error of Pelagianism, which taught the sufficiency of natural theology and connected salvation with the keeping of the law of nature; but, on the other hand, they could nevertheless acknowledge all the true and the beautiful and the good which was also present in the world of heathendom. Science, art, ethical, family, social life, etc., were derived from that common grace, and were with thankfulness acknowledged and extolled. Usually this operation of common grace was seen in the ethical and intellectual, the social and political life, but less frequently in the religions of the heathen. Then there was mention only of a certain *religio naturalis*, *insita* and *acquisita*, but the connection between this and the religions was not demonstrated. The religions were derived from deceit or demonic influences. However, not only in science and art, in ethics and justice, but also in the religions there is an operation of God's Spirit and of His common grace to be observed. Calvin spoke correctly of a semen religionis, a sensus divinitatis. Surely, the originators of religions were not deceivers and instruments of Satan, but men who, being religiously inclined, had a calling to fulfill for their time and for their people, and who often exercised a favorable influence upon the life of the peoples. The various religions, however much error there is also mixed in them, have to a certain degree satisfied the religious needs and supplied comfort amid the sorrow of life. Not only cries of despair, but also notes of confidence, hope, acquiescence, peace, submission, patience, etc., meet us from the world of heathendom. All the elements and forms which are essential to religion, an idea of God, consciousness of guilt, need of deliverance, offering, priesthood, temple, worship, prayer, etc., appear distorted, but nevertheless appear also in the heathen religions. There are even here and there unconscious predictions and striking expectations of a better and purer religion. Christendom, therefore, does not stand exclusively antithetically over against heathendom; it is also fulfillment of it. Christianity is the true, but

therefore also the highest and purest religion, it is the truth of all religions. (H. Bavinck, Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, I, 330-332)

Also G. C. Berkouwer in his Dogmatische Studien, in the volume on De Algemene Openbaring refers to Calvin's conception in the chapter on Openbaring en Kennis, p. 125. In the American Edition, entitled General Revelation, this section is translated as follows on pp. 152, 153:

...Yet, life is not left undisturbed by the power of divine revelation. The sensus divinitatis is not an organ of the knowledge of God which transcends the corruption of human nature; it is an unavoidable impression left on man by the prevailing power of God. It is especially Calvin who translated the language of Scripture accurately on this point. He said that the human mind possesses some sense of a Deity, so that "no man might shelter himself under the pretext of ignorance." (Calvin, Institutes, I, iii, 1) All men have a sense of religion, and there is "no nation so barbarous, no race so savage as not to be firmly persuaded of the being of a God." (Calvin, Institutes, I. iii, 1) But Calvin is far from going on from here to construct a natural theology. He goes on rather to say that the idolatry of the heathen is an excellent proof of the universality of the religious sense. The "representations" God gives of Himself are clear enough, but "their conceptions of Him are formed, not according to the representations He gives of Himself, but by the inventions of their own presumptuous imaginations." (Calvin, Institutes, I, iv, 1)

Calvin makes bold, as does Paul, to speak of blindness and vanity. The fruits of their foolishness lead to a worship of "the creature of their own distempered imaginations, wherefore the apostle pronounces a vague and unsettled notion concerning the Deity to be ignorance of God." (Calvin, Institutes, I, iv, 3) The kernel of religion bears sour fruit. And thus Calvin concludes that, though the prayer of despair shows that heathen are not altogether ignorant of God, "what ought to have appeared before had been surpressed by obstinacy ." (Calvin, Institutes, I, iv, 4) He uses the illustration of a man in

sleep. A thousand things can occur round about a man in sleep, but he is oblivious of all of them. In this way Calvin can reject a natural theology and still confess the reality of general revelation. Only by distinguishing between general revelation and natural theology can we do justice to the message of Scripture.

Without entering into Dr. Berknouwer's treatment of "General Revelation" we may note here that he refers to Calvin's idea of a semen religionis with approval, even though in connection with a somewhat different subject, namely, that of the possibility of a natural theology.

But from the above it is clearly evident that Calvin's theory of a semen religionis has had an influential place in Reformed theology.

It is the purpose of this paper, therefore:

- 1) To examine the teachings of John Calvin on this subject in the Institutes and to inquire into his meaning.
- 2) To evaluate these teachings both negatively and positively.

In Book I of the Institutes, after an introductory chapter on the connection between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves, Calvin in Chapter ii approaches the subject of the nature and tendency of the knowledge of God. A correct understanding of Calvin on this score is essential to a proper understanding of Calvin's teaching concerning religion and concerning the seed of religion. The question is: what does Calvin mean by religion when he speaks of the semen religionis? And then we may answer, in the first place, that Calvin tends to speak of religion and of the knowledge of God as an abstraction. He does not mean the fear of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nor does he teach that the true knowledge of God and religion are possible or conceivable for fallen man simply from the manifestation of God as Creator. But he seems to speak of religion and of the knowledge of God as such. The term religio here means, therefore, the true knowledge and fear of God and the service of love. That this is Calvin's presentation is evident from the Institutes, I, ii, 1:

By the knowledge of God I intend not merely a notion that there is such a Being, but also an acquaintance with whatever we



ought to know concerning Him, conducing to His glory and our benefit. For we cannot with propriety say, that there is any knowledge of God where there is no religion or piety. I have no reference here to that species of knowledge by which men, lost and condemned in themselves, apprehend God the Redeemer in Christ the Mediator; but only to that first and simple knowledge, to which the genuine order of nature would lead us, if Adam had retained his innocence.... Therefore, since God is first manifested, both in the structure of the world and in the general tenor of Scripture, simply as the Creator, and afterwards reveals Himself in the Person of Christ as a Redeemer, hence arises a twofold knowledge of Him; of which the former is first to be considered, and the other will follow in its proper place.... For this sense of the divine perfections is calculated to teach us piety, which produces religion. By piety, I mean a reverence and love of God arising from a knowledge of His benefits.

Here already Calvin is vague. He seems to refer here to a religion apart from Christ which would have developed had Adam retained his innocence. And it is very evident that when Calvin speaks here of knowledge of God and of religion and piety, he does not only speak of an objective knowledge and an objective religion, but includes the subjective response to that knowledge in the fear and love of God. But let us notice that this kind of knowledge of God and religion is simply speculative and abstract. Calvin speaks of "that first and simple knowledge, to which the genuine order of nature would lead us, if Adam had retained his innocence." The fact of the matter is, however, that Adam did not retain his innocence: and therefore this kind of knowledge and religion is nowhere to be found. Besides, also Calvin himself teaches emphatically that in reality there is no true knowledge of God and religion possible outside of Christ Jesus and by grace in Him. In Institutes, I, ii, 2, Calvin distinguishes this knowledge from a mere speculative knowledge, which he calls "cold and frivolous." He writes:

Cold and frivolous, then, are the speculations of those who employ themselves in disquisitions on the essence of God, when it

would be more interesting to us to become acquainted with his character, and to know what is agreeable to his nature. For what end is answered by professing, with Epicurus, that there is a God, who, discarding all concern about the world, indulges himself in a perpetual inactivity? What benefit arises from the knowledge of a God with whom we have no concern? Our knowledge of God should rather tend, first, to teach us fear and reverence; and, secondly, to instruct us to implore all good at his hand, and to render him the praise of all that we receive. For how can you entertain a thought of God without immediately reflecting, that, being a creature of his formation, you must, by right of creation, be subject to his authority? that you are indebted to him for your life, and that all your actions should be done with reference to him? If this be true, it certainly follows that your life is miserably corrupt, unless it be regulated by a desire of obeying him, since his will ought to be the rule of our conduct. Nor can you have a clear view of him without discovering him to be the fountain and origin of all good.

At the end of this paragraph he describes religion as follows:

See, then, the nature of pure and genuine religion. It consists in faith, united with a serious fear of God, comprehending a voluntary reverence, and producing legitimate worship agreeable to the injunctions of the law. And this requires to be the more carefully remarked, because men in general render to God a formal worship, but very few truly reverence him; while great ostentation in ceremonies is universally displayed, but sincerity of heart is rarely to be found.

We must remember that Calvin is still speaking of knowledge of God as such, in the abstract--in the same sense in which he spoke of it in I,ii, 1. And he is here describing the nature of that knowledge. He here describes it from the subjective point of view. From this same paragraph we learn that this religio subjectiva implies, according to Calvin the following elements:

- 1) Confidence and complete surrender to God;
- 2) Seeking of refuge in Him and expecting all good from Him;
- 3) Acknowledgment of His majesty and seeking of His glory;
- 4) Fear of sinning against Him and incurring His wrath;

5) Loving Him even in His righteous wrath;  
 6) Loving God as a Father and revering Him, and honoring and worshipping Him as Lord;  
 7) Abhorrence of offending Him even though there were no hell.

From all this it is evident that Calvin is not speaking of the knowledge and fear of God as actually existing, as it becomes a reality through Christ and by grace; but he is discussing the quality, or the nature, of the knowledge and fear of God as such, apart from Christ and apart from the reality of sin. He speaks--in the abstract, of course,--of the knowledge and fear of God as it would have been if Adam had not fallen.

Book I, Chapter iii is on the subject, "The Human Mind Naturally Endued With The Knowledge Of God." And in I, iii, 1 we read the following:

We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by natural instinct, possesses some sense of a Deity. For that no man might shelter himself under the pretext of ignorance God hath given to all some apprehension of his existence, the memory of which he frequently and insensibly renews; so that, as men universally know that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, they must be condemned by their own testimony for not having worshipped him and consecrated their lives to his service. If we seek for ignorance of a Deity, it is nowhere more likely to be found, than among tribes the most stupid and furthest from civilization. But, as the celebrated Cicero observes, there is no nation so barbarous, no race so savage, as not to be firmly persuaded of the being of a God. Even those who in other respects appear to differ but little from brutes, always retain some sense of religion; so fully are the minds of men possessed with this common principle, which is closely interwoven with their original composition. (Note: The expression "sense of religion" could more correctly be rendered "seed of religion," as is evident from the Latin, which reads: "Et qui in aliis vitae partibus minimum videntur a belluis differre, quoddam tamen perpetuo religionis semen retinent....")

In I, iii, 1 we also read this statement:

Now, since there has never been a country or family, from the beginning of the world, totally destitute of religion, it is a tacit confession, that some sense of the Divinity is inscribed on every heart.

Here again, as in the opening sentence of this paragraph, above, you find the expression sensus divinitatis, which is variously rendered either "sense of the divinity" or "sense of the Deity."

In I, iii, 3 we read:

It will always be evident to persons of correct judgment that the idea of a Deity impressed on the mind of man is indelible. That all have by nature an innate persuasion of the Divine existence, a persuasion inseparable from their very constitution, we have abundant evidence in the contumacy of the wicked, whose furious struggles to extricate themselves from the fear of God are unavailing.

In the same paragraph we read:

For the world, as will shortly be observed, uses its utmost endeavours to banish all knowledge of God, and tries every method of corrupting His worship. I only maintain, that while the stupid insensibility which the wicked wish to acquire, to promote their contempt of God, preys upon their minds, yet the sense of a Deity, which they ardently desire to extinguish is still strong, and frequently discovers itself. Whence we infer, that this is a doctrine, not first to be learned in the schools, but which every man from his birth is self-taught, and which, though many strain every nerve to banish it from them, yet nature itself permits none to forget.

While the above certainly is lacking in clarity and sharp definition, the following statement, though perhaps also lacking in the desired clarity, nevertheless is worthy of note in as far as it sheds light on Calvin's meaning. This is from I, iv, 1:

While experience testifies that the seeds of religion (This is the same term, semen religionis. HCH) are sown by God in every heart, we scarcely find one man in a hundred who cherishes what he has received, and not one in whom they grow to maturity, much less bear fruit in due season.

It is to be noted here that Calvin says, "We scarcely find one man in a hundred who cherishes what he has received." But

this certainly implies that there are those who cherish this knowledge in their heart, be it only a few, and even though this seed of religion does not grow to maturity in them or bear fruit in due season.

From this point on, Calvin proceeds to show that all men corrupt this knowledge of God, so that there is no true fear of God left in the world. Moreover, according to Calvin, this semen religionis only serves to leave men without excuse.

It is this theory of a semen religionis that has been taken up by various Reformed theologians and has been developed in connection with the subject of so-called general revelation and so-called common grace to a point to which Calvin himself evidently did not develop it, and apparently did not want to develop it. For strange as it may seem, both in view of Calvin's statements about this semen religionis and in view of Calvin's acknowledged teaching of a certain common grace, if there is one thing which Calvin emphasizes without compromise, it is the truth that there is no good left in the natural man, the truth that the natural man is wholly corrupt, incapable of any good, prone to all evil, and always corrupt in all his deeds. In this respect Calvin differs radically in his teachings about a "common grace" from present day theologians. Dr. Bavinck certainly draws consequences from this semen religionis which Calvin himself does not draw and would not draw. But also Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr., seems to appeal to Calvin justifiably when he compares the cognitio Dei insita (innate knowledge of God) with the semen religionis of Calvin. We find the following on p. 43 of the Dictaten Dogmatiek, Vol. I:

Calvin not unhappily stamped that cognitio Dei insita with the name of semen religionis, such a happy term because exactly in semen the potential character of that knowledge is expressed. For the seed has in it the possibility of sprouting forth, bearing blossoms, and bringing forth fruit. Nevertheless in itself the seed has neither blossom nor fruit. If I shut up the kokkos in a box, then nothing happens. But if I permit that kokkos to acquire all the elements which lie in terra, in aere, in sole, in pluvio then the fruit ripens. Thus also he who only would have the semen of religion would have no thought concerning God, much less be able to

express that thought and words. Only if there is first added from without the cognitio acquisita, can the cognitio Dei insita ripen to a notio Dei clara ac distincta.

Whether or not Kuyper correctly and fairly applies the notion of cognitio Dei insita to Calvin's notion of semen religionis is beside the point in this discussion. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Kuyper's explanation of the idea of semen as expressing the potential character of the knowledge of God in man is a fair conclusion, an idea which lies in the very idea of seed. And when he goes on to apply the figure of a seed, to explain that it has the possibility in it to spring up and to blossom and to bring forth fruit, he also draws a fair conclusion from the terminology of Calvin. This at the same time points up the danger of this expression, namely, that it seems to teach that there is something in man, something in every man, some principle of the knowledge of God and of religion in the true sense of the word that is still present in the natural man. This seed is in itself good and in itself capable of springing forth and blossoming and bearing fruit. It may be true that Calvin nevertheless teaches that this semen religionis never does thus spring forth and blossom and bear fruit, and that he emphasizes that this knowledge is corrupted, so that there is no true fear of God left in the world; nevertheless, the fact remains that the seed, the principle, is there. And this idea is both incorrect and dangerous. Dr. Bavinck evidently seizes on this notion, adds to it a goodly measure of common grace, broadens out on it, and ends by denying that the Christian religion stands exclusively in a relation of antithesis to the heathen religions.

From all of the above we may conclude the following as far as Calvin's meaning is concerned:

1) What Calvin teaches here is at best rather vague and general. He draws no definite lines and develops no concepts. The religion of which he speaks is an abstraction which never has existed and never shall exist. For it is a religion which would have developed IF Adam had not sinned. In connection with the semen of which Calvin speaks, he makes no distinction between natural light and spiritual light, nor any distinction between a mere awareness of God and the true knowledge of God, nor any

distinction between religion in the true sense of the word and religion in the false sense.

2) By religio Calvin refers to the objective knowledge of God as well as to the subjective response to that knowledge in the fear and love of God and in the service of God, and that, too, in its original form, apart from the fall and apart from Christ.

3) By semen religionis he refers to a positive principle of true religion in this original sense, which, if it were only properly cultivated, would develop and bring forth positive fruit. Such a semen religionis, Calvin maintains, is present in every man from birth. However, according to Calvin, in no man is that semen properly cultivated, so that it develops into positively good fruit, the fruit of the love of God and the fear of God; but in all men it is so corrupted--or rather, men so corrupt it--that there is not true piety. By way of criticism, we may say, negatively, that if this interpretation of the expression as it occurs in Calvin is correct, we object:

1) That there is indeed in all men the awareness that God is and that He must be feared and glorified.

2) That man as a rational, moral being, who is adapted in his very nature to be the bearer of the image of God, surely responds to that awareness of God with all his heart and mind and soul and will and strength. It is a matter of his very nature that he does so and that he reacts. This belongs to his being a rational, moral being. In this sense he is responsible: he is a being who must and who does give an answer to God and concerning God. And, in this sense, therefore, man is also accountable.

3) This habitus, or disposition, of man, however, cannot be called a semen religionis (speaking now of "religion" in the true sense of the term): for the natural man is wholly corrupt, and that corruption is a matter of his very nature. His reaction to this awareness of God, therefore, is always the reaction of enmity against God. There is nothing left in fallen man that can be properly cultivated and that could produce positive fruit. The natural, fallen man, acting from his natural habitus, always reveals himself in the very antithesis of religion, which is idolatry.

From a positive point of view, we submit:

1) That religio from its subjective side is the positive reaction of the whole man, with heart and mind and soul and strength, with all the emotions and desires, to the knowledge of the true God, that is, it is the response in love to the knowledge of God in Christ. Thus it is presented in Scripture. Scripture speaks of it as: יִרְאָה, the fear of Jehovah. Thus in Prov. 8: 12, 13, "I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate." Thus also Prov. 9: 10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

θεοσέβεια, godliness. Thus in I Tim. 2: 10, "But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works."

εὐσέβεια, also rendered "godliness". Thus in I Tim. 3: 16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." φόβος τοῦ Θεοῦ, the fear of the Lord. Thus in II Cor. 5: 11, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord (should be: the fear of the Lord), we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences."

λατρεία, service. Thus in Rom. 12: 1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

θρησκεία, rendered "religion". Thus in James 1: 27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

2) The semen, or seed, or principle, of this religion is the seed of regeneration. It is found in those who are ἀναγεγεννημένοι οὐκ ἐκ σπορᾶς φθαρτῆς ἀλλὰ ἀφθάρτου διὰ λόγου ζῶντος Θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος. I Peter 1: 23. Or, the principle of such religion is the principle of the ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, the love of God. And the habitus, or disposition, of that true religion is πίστις, faith.



A Critique of Dr. G.C.Berkouwer's Een Halve Eeuw Theologie, Chapter IV

-- Prof. H. C. Hoeksema --

On October 12, 1973 Dr. Berkouwer retired as professor of the Theological Faculty of the Free University of Amsterdam. This event occasioned his looking back upon a half century of being busy within the Gereformeerde Kerken and in Theology. And the book under discussion is the result of his retrospective look. In these theological memoirs he gives account of his motives in his theological and ecclesiastical labor, and he offers a review of the important currents in theology from 1920 until today. In a way this is not a typical Berkouwer book. While in the nature of the case there are many references to the views of others, at many points there is much more of Berkouwer in this book than in some of his Dogmatical Studies. Through reading this book one certainly obtains a better insight into the theological approach and views of the author.

Our concern in this article is not with the entire book, but with the chapter in which Dr. Berkouwer deals with the doctrine of election, Chapter IV, entitled Om Het Hart Der Kerk. And we do not even intend to review and criticize in detail this entire chapter. Rather our concern is with a very interesting and enlightening section of this chapter in which Dr. Berkouwer reviews his own development with respect to the doctrine of election over against the views of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, whom he credits with helping his own development, but by way of contrast.

First of all, we wish to present the pertinent section of this chapter. After tracing rather detailedly various currents of theology with respect to the doctrine of election, and after presenting various "problems" in connection with the views of others, Dr. Berkouwer writes as follows (we translate):

Before we enter into the gravamina which were registered during the last twenty years against certain expressions of the Canons and in which all the questions and concerns as it were, were exacerbated, we wish to consider somewhat more closely the 'backgrounds' which formed the occasion for these gravamina. I wish the more to do that because I am aware of being much involved in all sorts of accusations

and criticism--as though the freedom of God would be limited in various views. My concern is not as such in a defense over against sharp criticism, but because of the importance of the matter in its theological and then also pastoral aspects. Indeed everyone who gives account to himself of the tradition of the doctrine of election will perceive in himself a desire for more clarity, and in that desire certain contrasting works most often play a large role--even as with other dogmas--various solutions being presented in these works which one more and more begins to experience as being unacceptable and impossible from the viewpoint of the gospel. In such confrontations, besides the danger of polarization, there can be a helping and healing element, a shock-moment, caused by the caricatures, and through which one does not initially see the way yet clearly before him, but goes about discovering which courses are impassable. For me personally --everyone has his own experiences in this regard--an important role was played by the undoubtedly keen theological thinking of the American Rev. H. Hoeksema, who busied himself extensively in countless articles in the 'Standard Bearer' with the confession of election, in close connection with his conflict with the Christian Reformed Church (the Synod of Kalamazoo 1924), and in close connection with various discussions about common grace. After his death in 1965 his Reformed Dogmatics was published (1966), in which the sovereignty of God is presented as central and, over against all relativizations, is described as 'complete and absolute sovereignty' (p. 158), with all the consequences thereof in what he himself calls the supralapsarian position as 'the Scriptural and the only consistent presentation of the decree of God's predestination' (p. 164). I met him only once in Grand Rapids (in 1952) and then came anew under the impression of the impossibility of his line of thought concerning election. Kamphuis has said that I made it easy for myself by choosing this discussion-partner, because in his view Hoeksema is by reason of his supralapsarianism tempted to unwarranted conclusions concerning the place of reprobation in the preaching. Over against this I would place the fact that I have seldom met a theologian who so consistently reasoned things through from an adopted standpoint, because he with a view to that standpoint never hesitated. He--one of the few--drew therefrom consequences which especially have bearing upon the preaching of

salvation to all. This universal preaching was not possible because of the apriori decree of election and reprobation, because on account of the seriousness and well-meantness of the offer of grace it could have no relevancy for men who by virtue of God's decree stood outside of salvation. If the gospel is generally proclaimed, then that is possible and meaningful only because no one knows who 'the elect' are 'head for head, soul for soul'. The glad tidings can really only go forth to the 'electi' and find their true addressees only in them. According to Hoeksema this is so clear because in his view Scripture everywhere speaks of election and reprobation and teaches that outside of those elect there can only be mention of an 'eternal, sovereign hatred of the good pleasure'. He pointed out that in logic the consequences may not be denied, and he himself has also drawn them without hesitation and maintained them over against those who took note of them with fright and deep concern. I did not choose this discussion -partner, but he came on my path; and thus he has--indirectly--helped me farther along a way which he himself regarded as intraversable and for which he earnestly warned me and others. The suggestive power of his arguments forces itself upon everyone who takes serious note of them. Nor do I believe that he arrived at his excessive formulations because of a separate 'supralapsarianism' present in his thought (Kamphuis), but because his line of thought rests in his vision of double predestination. The problems are set in clear light by the attitude which Schilder adopted in these questions. It would be incorrect to identify his views with those of Hoeksema and to say that he allowed himself to be influenced by Hoeksema in their many contacts and points of contact in the common grace dogma. They came into contact with one another, however, not only with respect to common grace and the opposition of both of them to Kuyper, but also in what for Hoeksema was a central given, namely in his view of the general offer of salvation. In this Schilder came to different conclusions than Hoeksema, who connected the general offer of salvation with taking into account of the fact of our not knowing who are chosen and who are rejected.

After this the author continues his discussion of the differences between Schilder and Hoeksema, with appeal to the inaccurate

evaluation of Alexander C. De Jong in his doctoral thesis on the views of Hoeksema and Schilder. Then, after explaining his discovery of agreement between himself and H. N. Ridderbos in connection with the latter's treatment of Romans 9-11, Berkouwer goes on to a discussion of the gravamina against Canons I, 6 and 15 in the Hervormde Kerk and in the Gereformeerde Kerken--with which gravamina he expresses essential agreement.

This brings us to the central fact which must be kept in mind in connection with Berkouwer's discussion, namely: Berkouwer denies double predestination. He has stated this forthrightly in connection with a recent visit to the synod of the Hervormde Kerk at the time when the so-called Testimony of Faith (forerunner to a new confession) was presented there. If it was not clear from his work, Divine Election, or is not completely clear from the present work, let that be established. He has said, "We say No to double predestination." It is this fact that should be clearly discerned also in connection with this chapter of Berkouwer's most recent book. After one has threaded his way through all of the discussion of various views, and has followed Berkouwer through his rather interesting explanation of his development of his own views, occasioned by the "shock-moment," caused by the alleged Hoeksemanian caricature of predestination, then one fact stands out clearly, a fact which must be apprehended in all its significance. Berkouwer has attained the ultimate polarization: the denial of double predestination, and, therewith, the denial of any predestination worthy of the name.

Why is this significant? Why do I call this the "ultimate polarization"?

This polarization of Berkouwer to the "pole" opposite to that of the doctrine of double predestination means that he has abandoned the confessional Reformed position in favor of what is essentially the Arminian position. But what is essential to recognize is the fact that whatever description Berkouwer's position deserves, it is emphatically NOT the Reformed position. It is not the position of the Canons--no matter how much Berkouwer may attempt to use the Conclusion of the Canons in order to destroy the position of the Canons proper. And it certainly is not the position of Calvin, no

matter how much Berkouwer and others may try to discover inconsistencies in Calvin's explanation of the relationship between reprobation and the general preaching of the gospel. And it is not the position of those recognized theological giants of the Gereformeerde Kerken, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Let this be clear to all. It is of the utmost importance that Berkouwer's position be recognized not as a tremendously brilliant development of the Reformed doctrine of predestination, but a radical departure from all that has ever been recognized as Reformed with respect to the dogma of predestination.

In this connection, in the second place, let it be noted that, for all his disagreement with Herman Hoeksema and in spite of the disparaging references to his position, Berkouwer nevertheless pays him a "left-handed" compliment. He classifies Hoeksema as a theologian who has most consistently spelled out the consequences of the double predestination doctrine, even discounting Hoeksema's supralapsarianism as having anything essential to do with these consequences. In other words, Hoeksema has spelled out the consequences of the Reformed doctrine of double predestination as such, regardless of whether one is supra- or infra-. True, as far as Berkouwer is concerned, this is at best faint praise: for Berkouwer is at odds with Hoeksema's position. In fact, Berkouwer admits really to having developed his own position in reaction to Hoeksema's. Nevertheless, this is a significant testimony. Frequently the very fact of opposition is a testimony that one occupies a correct position, for the very reason that otherwise one's position would not be attacked. Think, for example, of the fact that the accusation that "this doctrine makes men careless and profane" would never be brought against an Arminian, but only against one who maintains the absolute sovereignty (unconditionality) of predestination. In this instance we have not only the fact of Berkouwer's opposition, but also the testimony of Berkouwer himself that Hoeksema consistently develops the consequences of the doctrine of double predestination.

Let those who have been inclined to classify Hoeksema as an extremist or who have been inclined to blame his supralapsarianism take note of this.

What is of even greater significance is the fact that Berkouwer here confirms what we have always claimed in connection with the error of the general well-meant offer of grace, namely: that theological consistency (in the light of Scripture and the confessions) forces one to choose between the well-meant offer of grace and the truth of sovereign (double) predestination. In the past many theologians have attempted to follow a double-track theology, with the practical result that while they did lip-service to the truth of sovereign predestination, they actually forgot that "track" and concentrated on the well-meant offer "track" in their preaching and teaching. Bear in mind that the alternatives are emphatically not the general, or promiscuous, proclamation of the gospel and double predestination. About this, see below. But the alternatives are the general, well-meant offer and double predestination. These, we have always insisted, are mutually exclusive. But Berkouwer has at last--and consistently--chosen for the general offer and has denied double predestination. His position is dead wrong and constitutes a break with the Reformed tradition, but it is at least consistent. And by this open and consistent choice he has confirmed what we have always maintained in this regard. Would that everyone who wants to maintain the general, well-meant offer of grace were as consistent as Berkouwer. Then, at least, we would all know where we stand in relation to one another!

Meanwhile it should not be overlooked that Berkouwer's alleged reaction of fright and deep concern to Hoeksema's position is, in fact, in some important aspects a reaction to a caricature of Hoeksema's position. Indeed, this caricature is so grotesque as to make one ask whether Berkouwer has ever read Hoeksema carefully. This question forces itself upon one all the more because Berkouwer mentions only Hoeksema's many articles in the Standard Bearer and his Reformed Dogmatics, while there are many more writings of Hoeksema pertinent to this subject. To mention but two, there are his Triple Knowledge and his God's Eternal Good Pleasure. This is not the place to expound in detail the importance of the matters mentioned below; besides, it would require many pages of explanation of things which Hoeksema explained again and again in his writings.

But let me mention some items which contribute to Berkouwer's creation of a grotesque caricature of Hoeksema's position:

1. Berkouwer repeatedly confuses the concepts universal preaching and universal offer. The former Hoeksema steadfastly maintained; the latter he steadfastly denied. Indeed Hoeksema subscribed (with more than lip service) to Canons II, 5; but he always pointed out that Canons II, 5 does not speak of a general, conditional offer, but of the general proclamation of a particular promise. What Hoeksema denied was that the nature of the promiscuous proclamation of the gospel was that of a general, well-meant offer of grace. Hence, the following statement of Berkouwer is a total misrepresentation of Hoeksema: "This universal preaching was not possible because of the apriori decree of election and reprobation, because on account of the seriousness and well-meantness of the offer of grace it could have no relevancy for men who by virtue of God's decree stood outside of salvation."

2. Berkouwer completely misrepresents Hoeksema in the following statement: "if the gospel is generally proclaimed, then that is possible and meaningful only because no one knows who 'the elect' are 'head for head, soul for soul.'" If Hoeksema ever mentioned this idea, it was usually in reply to the false charge that he preached only to the elect--a thought which to him was utterly ridiculous for its impossibility. But I deny flatly that Hoeksema ever taught that the general proclamation of the gospel is possible and meaningful only because no one knows who the elect are. One could without difficulty point to a dozen passages in Hoeksema's writings which give the lie to this claim of Berkouwer. The fact of the matter is that Hoeksema rarely made mention of this fact of our not knowing who the elect are. He certainly never taught that this was what made the general proclamation of the gospel possible and meaningful. And still more certainly, he never taught that this general proclamation was possible and meaningful only because of this. Numerous times Hoeksema emphasized that it was God's sovereign good pleasure that the gospel also be proclaimed to the reprobate--not that this was due merely to the preacher's inability to identify the elect. Numerous times Hoeksema emphasized that the preaching of the gospel has a positive purpose also with respect to the

reprobate, namely, the manifestation of the sinfulness of sin, the hardening of the reprobate, and thus the historical realization of God's counsel of reprobation, and ultimately the theodicy. I dare say that as often as Hoeksema expounded this subject of election and reprobation in relation to the preaching of the gospel, he emphasized this. And almost as often as he spoke or wrote on the subject of preaching and its purpose, he made mention of the fact of the two-fold purpose and effect of the preaching. How Berkouwer can write as he does is a mystery to me. He refers to Reformed Dogmatics. Did he never read pages 470, 471 and pages 654, 655?

3. Finally, Berkouwer leaves the impression that Hoeksema teaches that the preaching of the gospel is addressed to the elect qua talis and the reprobate qua talis. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In the moment of the preaching both the elect and the reprobate are addressed according to their spiritual character and as historically existent. Otherwise, of course, the preaching would never have any real addressability.

It is only by thus presenting a caricature of Hoeksema's view that Berkouwer can seemingly justify his opposition to Hoeksema to an unwary reader, and thus seemingly justify his own position as the only viable alternative. But this is an old ploy of enemies of the truth of sovereign (double) predestination. No informed Reformed man will be fooled by this ploy, nor will he follow Berkouwer in his parting of ways with the Reformed doctrine of sovereign election and reprobation.