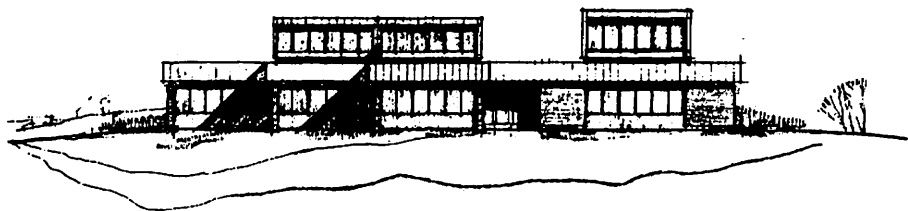


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The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (3)

Prof. H. Hanko

The Arminian Controversy and the Synod of Dordt

The Arminian controversy, which raged in the churches of the Netherlands during the last part of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth century, did not deal as such with the question of the free offer of the gospel. Nevertheless, there are two reasons why a consideration of this controversy is important for our discussion. In the first place, many of the identical issues which have been repeatedly raised in the discussions concerning the free offer were raised by the Arminians in the defense of their position. Especially in their views of the preaching and the relation between the preaching and the atonement, they set forth ideas which have been inextricably woven into the warp and woof of the free offer concept. Secondly, although the well-known Canons of Dordt were written over against the Arminian heresies, these same Canons have been repeatedly appealed to, especially in Dutch Reformed theology, in support of the idea of the free offer. It is said that the Canons themselves teach a free offer of the gospel. In fact, the Christian Reformed Church appealed to the Canons as confessional proof for the doctrine of the free offer in their decisions on common grace made in 1924.

While we cannot here discuss all the heresies which the Arminians taught in the Dutch Reformed Churches, there are especially three which have bearing on our subject and which we ought briefly to note.

In the first place, the Arminians taught a certain common grace, i.e., a grace of God which was imparted to all men.¹ This common grace is equated with the light of nature, which is the gifts left in man after the fall.

The Synod rejects the errors of those who teach: that the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which they understood the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, viz., the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself. And that in this way God on his part shows himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since he applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion (Canons, III and IV, B5).

1 It is interesting to note that, while many who stand in the tradition of Dordt also teach common grace and even appeal to the Canons in support of their views, the term itself appears in the Canons only in the mouth of the Arminians where it is condemned.

This light of nature shows God as ready to reveal Christ to all and by it God applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to the revelation of Christ, faith and repentance. Thus one must use the light of nature aright to become worthy of saving grace. It was at this point that the Arminians introduced the idea of free will. And the salvation of man, finally, was made dependent upon the exercise of his free will.

This same view, taught by the Arminians and condemned by the fathers at Dordt, has reappeared in Reformed theology in connection with an identification of general revelation and common grace. Wm. M. Masselink, e.g., taught this in his book, *General Revelation and Common Grace*,² and Herman Bavinck taught the same in his work, *Our Reasonable Faith*.³

In the second place, the Arminians taught a universalistic view of the atonement. Adopting a governmental theory of the atonement, they held flatly that in every sense of the word the atonement was for every individual person. However, this atonement only made salvation available and possible for all. In this way they denied the efficacy of the atonement.

The synod rejects the errors of those who teach: that it was not the purpose of the death of Christ that he should confirm the new covenant of grace through his blood, but only that he should acquire for the Father the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as he might please, whether of grace or of works. . . .

Who teach: that Christ by his satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that he merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.

Who teach: that all men have been accepted unto the state of reconciliation and unto the grace of the covenant, so that no one is worthy of condemnation on account of original sin, and that no one shall be condemned because of it, but that all are free from the guilt of original sin. . . (Canons II, B, 2, 3, 5).

In connection with these distinct views, the Arminians also promoted a particular view of the preaching. On the one hand, they challenged the Reformed position on especially two counts: they claimed that the Reformed could not preach because they preached only to the elect, but

2 Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1953.

3 Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1956. See especially chapters III and IV.

did not know who the elect were.⁴ And they claimed that the Reformed could not preach faith and repentance as the general command of the gospel. Their own views are set forth, not only in their writings, but in the "Opinions," which they themselves submitted to the Synod. We quote those "Opinions" which are relevant to the question of the calling.

Only those are obligated to believe that Christ died for them for whom Christ has indeed died. But the reprobate, as they are called, for whom Christ has not died, are not obligated to this faith, and can, by reason of their contrary unbelief, not be justly condemned, in fact, if there were such reprobates, they would be obligated to believe that Christ has not died for them (II, 4).

This article is intended to show the foolishness of the Reformed position which is caricatured. Written with characteristic vagueness — a vagueness which was deliberately intended, and setting forth what the Arminian considered to be the Reformed position, it is intended to prove that the Reformed, who insisted that Scripture taught an atonement only for the elect, could not confront all with the command to repent and believe. The reprobate could not be commanded to repent and believe in Christ, for they would be required to believe something which was not true, namely, that Christ died for them.

All those whom God calls unto salvation, those He calls seriously, that is, with an upright and altogether unfeigned purpose and will to save. And we do not agree with those who hold that God externally calls some whom he does not will to call internally, that is, does not will that they be actually converted, even before they have rejected the grace of the calling.

Notice that the Arminians specifically state here that it is their position that God calls all with the will and purpose to save all, that they disagree with those who make the external calling broader than the internal calling, that they disagree with those who teach that God does not will that those who are called externally actually be converted, at least, if this will of God is said to precede the rejection of the gospel by the wicked. Here is a clear statement of the Arminian conception of the theology of the free offer.

There is not in God such a hidden will which stands over against His will which is revealed in the Word, that He according to that will (that is, the hidden will) does not will the conversion and the salvation of the greater part of those whom He through the word of the gospel, and according to the revealed will, is seriously calling and inviting unto faith and salvation; neither do we here acknowledge, as some speak, a holy dissimulation, or a double person in God (III-IV, 8, 9).

4 How interesting and striking it is that this very objection of the Arminians against the Reformed is the same as is repeatedly hurled by the defenders of the free offer of the gospel against those who oppose this heresy.

It is interesting to note that the Arminians in their "Opinions" in III and IV, 9 refuse, as more recent defenders of the free offer do, to make a distinction between the hidden will of God and His revealed will. Calvin taught that according to His hidden will, God willed the salvation of the elect; and that, although God commands all who hear the gospel to repent and believe, nevertheless there is no conflict between God's will revealed in His Word and God's hidden will. Modern day defenders of the free offer of the gospel insist that according to His hidden will, God desires and wills the salvation only of the elect, and that according to His revealed will, He desires and wills the salvation of all men; these two wills stand in flat contradiction to each other and their harmony remains a mystery. The Arminians also insist that there is no conflict between God's hidden will and His revealed will; but they find the harmony in both by teaching that according to both God seriously desires and wills the salvation of all men.

All of these ideas, according to the Arminians, were rooted in a universal atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The price of salvation, which Christ offered to God His Father, is not only in and by itself sufficient for the redemption of the whole human race, but was also paid for all and every man, according to the decree, the will, and the grace of God the Father; and therefore no one is definitely excluded from the communion of the benefits of the death of Christ by an absolute and antecedent decree of God (II, 1).

Thus the following points were specifically made by the Arminians and condemned by the fathers at Dordt. Grace is offered to all men without exception in the preaching of the gospel. This is rooted in an unlimited atonement, i.e., an atonement which was for every man and for all. The acceptance or rejection of this offer depends upon the free will of man. The fathers condemned these heresies when they write:

The Synod rejects the errors of those who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching *that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ*; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, *this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception*, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace (II, B, 6). (Italics, ours.)

This free will, according to the Arminians, involves the exercise of faith which then becomes the work of man.

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, *not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at His pleasure. . . , or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects*

that man by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of salvation, and actually believe in Christ. . . (III-IV, 14). (Italics, ours.)

It is not surprising then that the preaching of the gospel is no longer the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), but is only an attempt on God's part to persuade the sinner to accept Christ and walk in obedience. That this is the teaching of Arminianism is evident from Canons III and IV, B, 7 where the fathers condemned the error of those who teach:

That the grace whereby we are converted to God is only a gentle advising, or (as others explain it), that this is the noblest manner of working in the conversion of man, and that this manner of working, which consists in advising, is most in harmony with man's nature; and that there is no reason why this advising grace alone should not be sufficient to make the natural man spiritual, indeed, that God does not produce the consent of the will except through this manner of advising; and that the power of the divine working, whereby it surpasses the working of Satan, consists in this, that God promises eternal, while Satan promises only temporal goods.

From all this it is clear that the Arminians, while not teaching precisely the idea of the offer as it is taught in more recent times, nevertheless held exactly to the same doctrines as those who maintain a general offer of the gospel. And it is well to remind ourselves of the fact that these Canons were the product of the entire Reformed church world of that day and were signed by all the delegates both foreign and domestic. A clearer confessional condemnation of the doctrines of the free offer can hardly be found. And this condemnation was the united opinion of all the churches of the Reformation.

What makes this all the more important is the fact that certain delegates from foreign countries, especially from England and Bremen, defended on the floor of the Synod the Arminian position.⁵ Although it is true that these delegates too subsequently signed the Canons, it is difficult to imagine how this was possible in the light of the fact that they consistently upheld the Arminian position. The point is, however, that the Arminian viewpoint was given a hearing on the floor of the Synod, not only when the Arminians themselves were permitted to speak, but also through the defense of the Arminian position by the delegates from Britain and Bremen. In spite of this, the fathers refused to adopt any Arminian viewpoint, but rather repudiated it consistently.

⁵ Among the British delegates was to be found a man by the name of John Davenant. We call attention to this because we shall have occasion, in a later article, to refer to the teaching of Davenant and what became known as the "Davenant School" — a school represented on the Westminster Assembly.

The Arminians with whom the Reformed Churches had to do were fundamentally rationalistic. This is important to understand. The system which they were defending was a thorough-going system which involved almost all points of doctrine. It was a theological position which proceeded from a rationalistic starting point and which, by rationalistic deduction, demonstrated that departure in one element of the truth leads to departure in every part of it. Arminianism was closely connected with Socinianism and later developed into it. Thus the Arminianism condemned at Dordt was somewhat different from the Arminianism which appeared later in England under the influence of the Wesleys. In an interesting article on, "Arminianisms," Rev. J.I. Packer correctly characterizes the Arminianism of the Wesleys as a Pietistic Arminianism which never developed into a complete theological system. Nevertheless, as Parker also notes, the basic ideas of both were the same.⁶

There are two or three questions which we ought to face in connection with our discussion of the Canons. The first has to do with Canons II, 3 where the fathers speak of the atoning sacrifice of Christ as "the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; (which) is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world." It has been sometimes maintained that here is one place where the fathers definitely speak of a general atonement in the sense of sufficiency. And, while this is certainly true, the following points must be remembered.

1) This article was included in the Canons because it was intended to serve as an answer to the Arminian charge that the Reformed in their doctrine of a limited atonement or particular redemption did injustice to the sacrifice of Christ and spoke disparagingly of its value. This accusation the fathers repudiate and in fact turn the tables on the Arminians and insist that not they, but the Arminians speak disparagingly of the atonement because the Arminians have a doctrine of the atonement which teaches that Christ's sacrifice, made for everyone, does not even actually save since many go lost.

2) That the fathers did not intend to teach that actual atonement was made for all men is clear from their statement: ". . . it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross. . . should effectually redeem. . . all those, *and those only*, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father. . ." (II, 8). (Italics, ours.)

3) As is plain from II, 3, the fathers looked at this "sufficiency" from

6 "The Manifold Grace of God," Papers read at the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 1968, pp. 22ff.

the viewpoint of the One Who offered this sacrifice — the eternal Son of God: “this death derives its infinite value and dignity from these considerations, because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only begotten Son of God. . . .”

4) It is evident therefore, that the intent of the article is merely to state that, taken purely by itself, without any reference to those for whom Christ died, Christ’s atonement, because He was the eternal Son of God, was of infinite value in God’s sight. It was sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world because it was God’s Son that died; and God’s Son cannot make a sacrifice which qualitatively speaking is a partial sacrifice.

5) But that this “universal sufficiency” was intended by the fathers to form the basis for a general offer of the gospel is totally foreign to their thinking.

The second question has to do with the claim of some that, after all, the Canons teach a general offer of the gospel. Those who maintain this refer especially to three articles in the Canons which we quote in full.

Moreover, the promise of the gospel, is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and to believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel (II, 5).

As many, however, as are called by the Gospel, are seriously called. For God has seriously and most truly shown in His Word, what is pleasing to Him, namely, that the called should come unto Him. He even promises seriously to all those coming to Him and believing rest of soul and eternal life (III-IV, 8).

That many who have been called by the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not converted — of this the fault is not in the gospel, nor in Christ offered through the gospel, nor in God Who calls through the gospel, and even bestows on them various gifts, but in the called themselves. . . .

The careful reader will notice that our quotation of the last two articles is not taken from the back of our *Psalter* where our Confessions are to be found, but from another translation which is more accurate. We have taken the translation offered by Prof. Hoeksema in his book, *The Voice of Our Fathers*.

Concerning these articles we point out the following:

1) There is no mention in these articles of the free offer of the gospel in the sense of an intention or desire or will of God, expressed in the gospel, to save all who hear the gospel. It is true that the word “offer” is used in III-IV, 9, but, as we have had occasion to notice earlier, this word was very commonly used to express the idea that Christ was *presented, set forth*, proclaimed in the gospel as the One through Whom God has

accomplished salvation. But the idea that God expresses in the gospel a general desire to save all who hear is an idea totally foreign to the Canons and can be read into them only by altering the clear language of the articles and imposing ideas upon the fathers of Dordt which they did not have.

2) II, 5 speaks emphatically of the promise of the gospel, but insists that this promise of the gospel is very particular; i.e., it is only to those who believe in Christ. And it is clear from the rest of the Canons that those who believe in Christ are only the elect ("That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree," I, 6), who are converted to God by efficacious grace merited in Christ's limited atonement.

3) II, 5 also speaks of the fact that this promise ought to be proclaimed everywhere, "to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel." So the article speaks very clearly of a *general* proclamation of a *particular* promise and this has always been the position held by the Reformed Churches.

4) II, 5 also speaks of the fact that this promise, generally proclaimed but particular in its contents, is proclaimed together with the command to repent and believe. In both II and IV, 8, 9 this is also said to be the call of the gospel. This call is described as being serious in nature. God requires of all men, through the preaching, that they forsake their sins and turn from their evil ways, that they believe in Christ Who has shed His blood for sin. Concerning this point there are two points which ought to be made.

a) In the first place, no one who stands in the line of Calvinistic and Reformed thought has ever denied this truth. This is important to understand. The Reformed have sometimes been charged with being unable to preach the gospel to all men because they insist that the promise of the gospel is for the elect alone and no preacher knows who the elect are. But this is a distortion of the Reformed view. The gospel must be generally preached both because it is the means whereby God calls out of darkness into light those whom He has chosen to everlasting life, and because, through this general proclamation, all men are confronted with the obligation to forsake their sins and believe in Christ.

b) Nor have the Reformed ever denied that this command or call is serious. God means exactly what He says. He is not joking when He comes to all with this command. He is not saying something in the gospel which is not really true. Quite the opposite is the case. Man was originally created perfect and upright. When man fell in Adam, he fell by his own sinful choice. His depravity which made it impossible for him any longer

to serve God becomes his lot in life because of God's just judgment upon the sinner. But God does not, on that account, require any less of man than He did at the beginning. God is God. He remains just and holy and righteous in all His ways. He does not now say: Oh, you are such a poor sinner, no longer able to do what I have commanded; I will no longer require of you that you serve me and flee from your sins. It is perfectly all right if you do less than you were originally required to do. Oh, no! Then God would not be just and righteous. God still insists that this man serve him. And man is confronted with that demand every time the gospel comes to him.

It is interesting and important to note that II, 5 speaks of the "promise, *together with* the command to repent and believe," as forming the contents of the gospel. It is exactly in this way that God works His purpose in His elect by enabling them to repent and believe, and it is exactly because of this that the wicked are responsible for their own failure to repent and believe. It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God Who calls, but the fault lies in the wicked themselves. And so God is also perfectly just when He casts the wicked forever from His presence.

It is not difficult to see that all this is a far cry from the free offer of the gospel as that is presented and defended in our times. Of this the fathers wanted no part. And it is a perversion of our Canons to try to find support for the idea of the free offer in this Confession. Even R.B. Kuiper⁷ has difficulty finding confessional grounds for his support of the free offer of the gospel. He can, finally, only point to two articles in the Canons: Canons II, 5, to which we have referred above and which cannot in any sense of the word be stretched into supporting a free offer of the gospel, and Canons II, 3 which speaks of the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ and which we have also discussed earlier in this article. It is interesting to note, however, that Kuiper argues from this statement on sufficiency to a position which sets forth the fact that Christ's atonement is also *suitable* for all, and from there he argues to the position that the atonement is, as far as its sufficiency and suitability are concerned, divinely designed for all. Once again it becomes apparent how the defenders of the free offer of the gospel must in some sense of the word make the

7 "For Whom Did Christ Die? A Study of the Divine Design of the Atonement," R.B. Kuiper: Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1982; pp. 78ff. This reference to Kuiper's book is a reference to chapter 5, which is entitled, "Scriptural Universalism" and which, in defense of the free offer of the gospel and of common grace, overthrows everything Kuiper has said in the preceding four chapters.

atonement of Christ universal. But Kuiper's argument from the Canons is specious.

To conclude, therefore, we see that although the issue of the offer as such was not an issue at the time of Dordt, the Confession of Dordt nevertheless holds up the idea of preaching which has always been Reformed and no appeal to these Canons can possibly support the idea of a free offer.

Amyrauldianism

Soon after the Synod of Dordt had condemned the Arminian corruptions of sovereign predestination and sovereign grace and had set forth the Scriptural teachings concerning these matters, a fierce attack was made against them by the school of Saumur in France. The chief light of this school was a man by the name of Moise Amyraut, who founded what became known as the Amyrauldian system of predestination.

The school of Saumur, of which Amyraut was the chief figure, was founded by John Cameron, Amyraut's teacher, who later taught in England and influenced the Davenant School there. Cameron was the one who suggested the lines of thought which Amyraut developed into a hypothetical universalism.

To understand the theological context in which Cameron and Amyraut did their work, we must see clearly first of all that Cameron and Amyraut were both persuaded that the true teachings of John Calvin, especially on the doctrine of predestination, had been distorted by his successors, notably Theodore Beza and the Theologians of the Synod of Dordt. Cameron and Amyraut were convinced that Beza was in large measure responsible for a shift in Calvinism to a scholastic theology, which had come to characterize Protestant thinking. This shift to scholastic thought had distorted Calvin's theology, especially on the question of predestination. Cameron and Amyraut therefore justified their departures from current Calvinistic thought by claiming that they were returning to pristine Calvinism and restoring Calvin's true emphasis which had been so badly obscured by men who claimed to be followers of Calvin but who in fact distorted his central teachings.

These men from Saumur offered as proof of their position the fact that Calvin had not discussed the doctrine of predestination at the beginning of his *Institutes* so that it was subsumed under the doctrine of God, but had treated it in connection with the doctrine of salvation. They claimed that Beza and Dordt had shifted this emphasis by moving predestination back to theology and had therefore made the doctrine speculative. They insisted that predestination indeed belonged to Soteriology

where Calvin had placed it and that it must be treated *after* the doctrines of grace as an explanation *ex post facto* of why some believe and others do not.⁸

It is interesting that this view, first proposed by John Cameron, has more recently been advanced by others who have had a quarrel with the truth of sovereign predestination and who have tried to make their attack against this truth sound more reasonable by a reinterpretation of Calvin. It is, however, rarely said by those who suggest this reinterpretation that it is a reinterpretation first proposed by Amyraut. This certainly casts suspicion on it from the outset.

There is a *prima facie* case against this position, especially as it concerns Theodore Beza. The simple fact of the matter is that Calvin and Beza worked together for a number of years prior to Calvin's death, that Beza was Calvin's successor in the Academy in Geneva by Calvin's express request, that Calvin surely knew Beza's view on predestination, and that Calvin would never have approved of Beza's position in the Academy if Beza diverged so greatly from what Calvin taught. It is impossible to conceive that Calvin would have never once spoken out against Beza's views and would not have protested vehemently Beza's appointment to the Academy if Beza was guilty of such great distortion of what Calvin taught. There is here an improbability which no amount of argument can overcome.

While it is true that Calvin developed his views on predestination in connection with soteriology, it is also true that Calvin did not develop them as an *ex post facto* explanation of why some believe and others do not, but rather that predestination is the fountain and cause of faith by which the elect believe and the divine explanation of why others do not. That this is true is evident from Calvin's very teaching concerning predestination in his *Institutes*; from the fact that, although predestination is developed in connection with soteriology, it is nevertheless mentioned repeatedly throughout the *Institutes* — also in connection with the doctrine of God; and from his treatment of this truth in his pamphlet on predestination which he wrote against Pighius and Gorgias. Historically, this position is absolutely untenable.

However that may be, this was the motivation behind the teachings of Cameron and Amyraut.

Cameron proceeded from a covenantal position and taught that God established a twofold covenant: one, an absolute covenant, unconditional

⁸ We cannot in these articles go into this question in detail. For a treatment of them, confer my article in the *Protestant Reformed Seminary Journal*, Vol. X, No. 2.

and rooted in antecedent love; the other a hypothetical covenant, dependent upon man's condition of love. The latter was the important covenant because it was the covenant of experience. However, the power of man's love is always God's antecedent love.

It was on the basis of this distinction that Amyraut developed his hypothetical universalism.

Moise Amyraut was born in 1596 and died in 1664. He followed Cameron in his views of the covenant and agreed that the hypothetical covenant was the important one because it is the covenant of revelation and experience. Within this covenant the essential elements are obligation and promised reward, the latter conditioned by the former.

An important distinction must be made, according to Amyraut, between the Mosaic covenant which was legal and the gracious covenant of the promise. In connection with the latter, all mankind are the contracting parties, the condition for its fulfillment is faith, the promise is eternal life, the Mediator is Christ, and the efficacy is God's work of mercy.

From this idea of the covenant follow Amyraut's views on predestination. These views were developed especially in his *Treatise on Predestination* which was published in 1634 – fifteen years after Dordt had adjourned. In this book he developed his idea of two wills in God: one a particular and unconditional will and the other a universal and conditional will. These two wills of God, so he said, were basically unreconcilable and part of the hidden mystery of God's decree.

This double-will idea, Amyraut claimed, was taught already by Calvin and was in fact fundamental to Calvin's teaching. We may note in passing, for we have already discussed this question in connection with Calvin's teachings on the free offer, that it is true that Calvin made a distinction between the will of God's decree and the will of God's precept: but it is also true that Calvin specifically repudiated the idea that these two wills stand in contradiction with each other – something which Amyraut insisted was true.

On the basis of this distinction between God's particular and God's universal will Amyraut went on to teach that predestination as universal and conditional was a part of providence. It was a part of what are really "new counsels" in God which He took because of the fall. According to this universal and conditional will, God wills the salvation of all men and promises salvation to all upon the condition of faith. It is only because God knows that man is not able of himself to believe that God also wills particularly and unconditionally to save the elect.

Amyraut admits that he emphasized Calvin's conditional will more

than Calvin himself did, but that this was necessary because orthodox and scholastic theologians repudiated it altogether and he could restore the true balance of pure Calvinism only by emphasizing that which was so sorely neglected. He writes: "These words, 'God wills the salvation of all men,' necessarily meets with this limitation, 'provided that they believe.' If they do not believe, He does not will it, this will of making the grace of salvation universal and common to all men being in such a way conditional that without the accomplishment of the conditional it is completely inefficacious." Or again: "God wills all men to be saved. . . . He invites them to repent. . . . He extends His arms to them. . . . He goes before them and calls them with a lively voice."

Here we have the essence of the free offer of the gospel as proposed by Amyraut. As we have had occasion to notice, the essential idea of the free offer is the idea that God desires the salvation of all men without exception, or, if that is too broad, God desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel and expresses that desire in the gospel. Amyraut proposed exactly that idea with his hypothetical universalism.

Hence, because the gospel expresses the universal will of God to save all men, it comes to men as an offer to all. At the Synod of Alencon, before which Amyraut was called to appear and answer for his views, he said:

So that those who are called by the preaching of the Gospel to participate by faith in the effects and fruits of His death, being invited seriously, and God vouchsafing them all external means needful for their coming to Him, and showing them in good earnest, and with the greatest sincerity by His Word, what would be well-pleasing to Him; if they should not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but perish in their obstinacy and unbelief; this cometh not from any defect or virtue or sufficiency in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, nor yet for want of summons or serious invitation unto faith and repentance, but only from their own fault.

The external call of the gospel, therefore, according to Amyraut, speaks of a sufficiency of salvation for all, a universal will of God to save all, and an objective grace for all which is needful for their coming to Christ. The subjective grace of salvation is dependent and conditioned upon faith. The objective grace is an offer of pardon to all while the subjective grace of salvation is conditional and only for those who come to Christ. These two graces correspond to the double will of God. The universal grace objectively given corresponds to God's universal will to save all, while the subjective grace flows forth from God's particular will to save only the elect.

All of this is rooted in the atonement. The atonement is universal in sufficiency, in intention, and in scope and merits the grace which is

objectively for all, but is subjectively given only to those who fulfill the condition of faith.

In his book, *The Extent of the Atonement*, F. Turretin quotes Testardus, a disciple of Amyraut:

Some of our ministers teach "that by Christ's atonement a new covenant was established with all, their salvation rendered possible and an offer of it made to them in the gospel."⁹

He quotes Amyraut himself as saying:

Since the misery of the human family is equal and universal, and the desire which God has to free them from it by the Redeemer, proceeds from the mercy which He exercises towards us as His creatures fallen into destruction, in which we are all equal; the grace of redemption, which He has procured for us and offers to us, should be equal and universal, provided we are equally disposed to its reception.¹⁰

Such are the views of Amyraut.

There are several remarks to be made by way of summary and evaluation of these views.

It is interesting and significant that at the heart of Amyraut's views lies his conception of the double will of God. And it is particularly interesting that it is this view of God's double will which was then and is now so closely linked with the idea of the gospel offer. It is not difficult to see why this should be so. Those who maintain a gospel offer teach that God desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel and expresses this desire in the preaching of the gospel. Thus it is God's will that all who hear the gospel be saved. But at the same time, if one wants to maintain a semblance of being Reformed and Calvinistic, one must also insist that it is God's will according to the decree of election to save some only. The only way to include both these ideas in one system of theology is to posit an irreconcilable contradiction within the will of God. On the one hand, God wills that all be saved; on the other hand, God wills that only some be saved.

It will not do to appeal to Calvin in this connection as if Calvin also taught such a double will of God, because it has been proved that he did not. While Calvin made a distinction within the will of God, he found perfect harmony and unity between these two aspects of God's will.

Defenders of the double-will theory will have to admit that their conception of this idea is not a conception which stands in the line of Dordt and Calvin; rather it is to be traced back to Amyraut and his hypothetical universalism.

9 Baker Book House, 1978, p. 121.

10 *Idem*.

Yet this lies at the basis of the free offer. We notice that earlier in the history of the Reformers and of Dordt, certain ideas which were closely related to the free offer were brought up, but that no specific doctrine of the free offer was taught. The ideas which stand related to the free offer were brought up especially by the Arminians, and these views were condemned by Dordt. But Amyraut is the first to set forth a clear and clearly worked out conception of the free offer of the gospel. The defenders of the free offer ought to take note of this. Their doctrine is not a doctrine which stands in the line of the Reformed faith through Dordt; it owes its origin to Amyrauldianism and the heresy of the theologians of Saumur.

Inseparably connected with the idea of the free offer stands the idea of the universality of the atonement. Dordt spoke, as we noticed, of a certain infinite value to the sacrifice of Christ. But Saumur went beyond this and taught a universality as to sufficiency, intention and scope. Only efficacy was limited to the elect. The connection between this and the idea of the free offer is clear. If God offers salvation to all in a serious and well-meaning way, then it follows that this salvation must somehow be rooted in the cross. And that can mean only that in some sense the atonement is universal.

But behind the atonement stands the decree of predestination. We do not want to discuss at length the whole idea of hypothetical universalism as taught by the Saumur theologians, but we ought to notice that a defense of the free offer of the gospel inevitably involves one in a denial of the truth of sovereign predestination. The two may perhaps be maintained side by side in some happily contradictory way for a time, but the inevitable consequence is that sooner or later such contradictory ideas cannot both be maintained and predestination falls by the way. This was true of the school of Saumur and it is equally true today. And no wonder. How can the doctrine of sovereign predestination be maintained when a double-will theory is taught? How can one consistently and clearly maintain God's sovereign choice of His people and His sovereign damnation of the wicked in the way of their sins when it is also taught that God wills the salvation of all men according to His revealed will? This is utterly impossible.

At the same time, the question of grace also stands connected to this whole question. Amyraut taught a universal objective grace and a particular subjective grace, both merited in the cross. While he did not call it that, this universal objective grace is strikingly similar in idea to what has in more recent times come to be known as common grace. And it is very significant, as we shall have occasion to notice in our further discussions of these matters, that throughout history the idea of the free

offer has more often than not been connected with common grace. This too ought not to surprise us. If God sincerely wills the salvation of all men, or at least of all who hear the gospel, then through the gospel He shows to them His own favor and love, His own grace and mercy — i.e., to *all* who hear the gospel and not to His people only. It ought to give the defenders of common grace pause to think that this view has always been a view taught in connection with the free offer. And it ought to give the defenders of both pause that both ideas have their origin in Amyrauldianism.

But there is another side to this coin. It is interesting to notice too that Amyraut's whole conception necessitated the teaching of a *conditional* salvation. The revealed covenant, according to Amyraut, was conditional; the revealed will of God to save all was conditional; the offer of salvation was conditional; and the promise of Christ was conditional — in every case the condition being faith. This connection between conditional theology and the free offer is also an idea which ought not surprise us. The idea of conditional theology has always been inseparably related to the free offer and an integral part of a conception which presents God as willing the salvation of all men. Nor is this hard to understand. If it is true that God wills the salvation of all men, how is it to be explained that only some are saved? The answer to that question is: only those are saved who believe. Salvation is conditioned by faith and given only upon the exercise of faith.

While we shall have occasion to discuss this more fully in subsequent issues, it is important that we understand now that this is a basically Arminian conception. One might object to this by saying that Amyraut (and all who try to maintain a conditional salvation at the same time as they try to maintain a sovereignty and particularism in the work of grace) insisted that the efficacy for believing was in God's mercy and grace. While salvation was prepared for all, offered to all, and willed to all, it is dependent upon faith for its realization in the hearts of those who accept Christ. But that faith, so it is said, is actually worked by God. It is in this way that the sovereignty and efficacy of grace is said to be maintained. But this is specious nonsense. It is nonsense to say that God wills the salvation of all and then actually gives the grace to believe only to some. It is nonsense to say that Christ died (in some real sense) for all and that His cross is efficacious, but that only some are actually saved because its efficacy is limited to some. It is nonsense to say that God entreats all to be saved as His most earnest will, but promises salvation only to those who believe — when He is the One giving faith. And all this is nonsense because we stand before one fundamental question: Is faith a part of salvation or is it not? Is election conditioned upon faith as the Arminians

teach? If it is then election cannot be the fountain and cause of faith as Scripture teaches, for it cannot be both the condition to election and the fruit of election at the same time. Is faith a part of salvation, or is it a condition to salvation? It cannot be both. If it is a condition to salvation, then it is not a part of salvation. And if it is not a part of salvation, then it is not worked by God, but by man. To maintain both at the same time is patent nonsense and impossible for any intelligent person to believe. Is faith a part of the promise proclaimed in the gospel, or is it a condition to the promise? That is, when through the gospel God promises salvation, does He promise it to all upon condition of faith? Then faith is not a work of the promise of salvation, but a condition to it. But then it is also man's work. Or is it rather true that faith is a part of the promise of salvation, one of the gifts of salvation — of a salvation which is promised only to the elect, proclaimed through the gospel? The latter is Calvinistic and Reformed. The former is sheer, undiluted Arminianism.

Conditional salvation and a general offer go hand in hand. And they go hand in hand because they are both Arminian and Amyrauldian.

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The Simplicity of God's Will and the "Free Offer" (10)

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

[In harmony with our intention announced in Volume XV, Number 1, we continue with our translation of Rev. Herman Hoeksema's polemic against Prof. W. Heyns entitled *The Gospel, The Most Recent Attack on the Truth of Sovereign Grace*. We continue here with the translation of chapter VII, "The Gospel According to the Scriptures."]

We must understand this well: for the pure preaching of the gospel hangs in the balance precisely at this point. Reconciliation is the objective blotting out of our guilt through satisfaction in the blood of Christ. It is therefore also purely an act of God. It is not a fact which comes into existence through an act on God's part *and* an act on our part. It comes

into existence only by a work of God. Among men reconciliation is a reciprocal action. Men cannot blot out sin. Therefore men reconcile with one another. But this may never be applied to the idea of reconciliation with respect to God and His people. We do not reconcile God. Neither do we reconcile ourselves with God. Neither does God reconcile Himself. One finds all these confused and incorrect presentations frequently in writings and in preaching. And by all such false presentations men always and again conciliate Arminianism and meet it half way. No, there is but one correct, Scriptural presentation of reconciliation: God has reconciled us unto Himself. Reconciliation is not a possibility, but an accomplished fact. We enter into reconciliation by faith. But never may reconciliation as such be presented as a possibility, neither as far as the power and completeness of that reconciliation is concerned, nor as far as the participants in that reconciliation are concerned. For Christ has died for the elect; God has reconciled the elect unto Himself through the blood of Christ, not imputing their sins unto them. That reconciliation, therefore, is also not conditional. It does not depend upon our faith; it does not come into existence through our faith; it is not made void through our unbelief; in all its significance it is an historic fact, the fulfillment of the sure promise of God, and must be proclaimed as such.

And this is not only true of the objective fact of reconciliation and atonement, but of the entire central fulfillment of salvation in Christ Jesus, of the resurrection and the ascension and the sitting at the right hand of God and the victory and reign of Christ over all things. Christ's resurrection is the resurrection of the elect: for they are in Him, and He is their head. We are then also raised with Him and set with Him in heavenly places; with and in Him we have the victory and are more than conquerors through Him Who has loved us. Exactly for that reason also it is not correct to speak of the militant and the triumphant church: for also the church on earth is triumphant. We *are* come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel, Hebrews 12:22-24. All of this belongs to the content of the gospel of God which He proclaims concerning His Son. It is the fulfillment of the promise which is and must be proclaimed by the gospel.

But there is also a subjective side to the gospel which is according to its content the fulfillment of the promise. To the content of the promise belongs also the fact that God makes us actual partakers of all the benefits

of salvation in Christ Jesus, and that, too, through the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Christ. The promise is after all also the promise of the Holy Spirit. And this promise of the Spirit is again first of all and centrally fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, and thereupon and through Him also to the church, which is His body. He has received the promise of the Spirit and poured out that Spirit in the church on Pentecost, and through that Spirit is come to dwell in His own. And it is through that Spirit that He imparts Himself and all His benefits to the church. Hence, also all the work of the Holy Spirit belongs to the promise, belongs to the content of the gospel and to true gospel-preaching. Regeneration and the effectual calling through the Word unto true life and light, justification and sanctification, along with perseverance to the end and the final glorification, life, love, faith, and hope and all that belongs to the life of the Spirit of Christ as He accomplishes it in the church — all of this belongs to the content of the promise of God to His people and must be proclaimed as the work of God, the sure work of God in us through His grace, in the preaching of the gospel. Also here you do not do justice to the work of God should you want to present this as an uncertain or conditional offer. As little as the objective benefits of salvation in Christ may ever be presented as depending for their realization upon the will of men, so little also can the subjective benefits of salvation ever be proclaimed as a general offer. God, Who cannot lie, has also promised these benefits to the heirs of the promise and has sworn to them with an oath. That God fulfills the promise of the Holy Spirit to the elect as certainly as He has centrally fulfilled it to Christ must be proclaimed in the preaching of the gospel.

We understand very well that the content of salvation, that the blessedness of God's covenant and kingdom, bears a spiritual, ethical character, and that we are taken up into the whole of God's work of salvation as rational, moral beings. If the work of salvation were simply a deliverance from hell and a being taken to heaven, then it could in last instance take place outside of us in the sense that our inner soul-life, our ethical consciousness, had nothing to do with salvation. But now that is different. Through the work of salvation we are translated out of darkness into light, out of death into life. Through that work a radical change takes place, a change which reaches into the very root of our life and of our person. A change in our judicial and spiritual, ethical relation to God! Therefore that spiritual benefit comes to us as rational, moral creatures. Therefore also it comes to us through the Word of God. And through that Word God speaks to us. Through the Word He brings that salvation to our inmost consciousness. He addresses us. Through the Word He directs Himself to our understanding. And with that Word He places

Himself before our will. He teaches, enlightens, instructs, reveals, warns, demands, admonishes, calls to the obedience of the gospel, invites, allures, even prays, encourages and comforts, awakens and calls to the battle of faith to the very end. Never are we stocks and blocks. Also the proclamation of the gospel places us always and again before the unavoidable: Yes and No! And seeing that this proclamation of the gospel by men comes to many more persons than to the elect, the ungodly reprobate are also compelled to say Yes and No, sin comes to manifestation as sin, and God is justified when He judges. But that does not change the fact whatsoever that the preaching of the gospel is not a general offer of God to all men, but the proclamation of the content of the promise which God surely fulfills to the heirs of the promise.

Thus it is also to be understood that this gospel has been there from the dawn of history and was proclaimed by the Lord God, but that its fulfillment has nevertheless come about in the way of an historical process. Therefore also the Catechism speaks of "the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by his only begotten Son." Two things always go together in the history of the holy Gospel: God fulfills the promise, and He declares to the heirs of the promise what He does, that is, He proclaims to them the gospel.

Thus it was already at the setting of the sun in the first Paradise when the world sank into the night of sin and unrighteousness. Beautiful it had been in Paradise. An image of the heavenly things, not those things themselves, God had formed at the beginning of the world. For Adam was an image of Him Who was to come. He was of the earth earthy, not the Lord from heaven. The tree of life was an image of the tree which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Paradise itself was a figure of God's eternal dwelling with men as that shall presently be revealed in its full heavenly glory. But also that image was beautiful; and the first man, as he was of the earth earthy, nevertheless tasted the life of the friendship of God and could reign as God's friend-servant over the earthly works of God's hands. At the dawn of creation the sun shone in glorious splendor. But the sun set again when it was scarcely risen. It set at the eastern horizon in the morning of creation. Adam sank into a night of misery, of guilt and sin, of curse and suffering and death, from which no escape appeared possible. And he bore the seed of the promise in his loins. With him also the heirs of the promise descended into the night of fearful suffering which spread its dark cloak over the world through the fall. But God had in view for them something better than the first Paradise, and that something better

begins immediately to be fulfilled. God begins the work of His holy gospel. And He also immediately proclaims to the heirs of the promise what He is doing: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This is the very first proclamation of the holy gospel, the proclamation of the promise, that the Sun shall presently rise again, and that, too, in everlasting and glorious splendor!

With that promise of the holy gospel the heirs of the promise must sojourn in the night and must walk as pilgrims of the night in this dark world, living in hope. The night is dark, and the battle with the children of darkness and the night of sin is dreadfully fearful; but they walk by faith in the light-path of the holy gospel. And although the way is dark, the light of the promise becomes steadily brighter. For God follows a straight course in the fulfillment of the promise; and according as the final fulfillment approaches, He also proclaims in an ever richer gospel His work to the heirs of the promise. Thus it was before and through the flood. Heavily did the curse descend upon the world and upon the ground which the Lord had cursed; fearful was the battle between the seed of the promise and the children of darkness; but in Noah comes a seed which shall comfort them concerning that curse and in that battle and shall give them rest. He finds grace in the eyes of the Lord. God makes him victorious and heir of the world when He saves him through the waters of the flood. With him and with his seed God established His covenant; and He proclaims to him the holy gospel, giving him the sign of this in the bow which is set in the clouds, a promise of the day which shall finally break through the night of curse and suffering and death. Not a common grace sign is that bow in the clouds, but the sign of the promise of God to the heirs of the promise that they shall be heirs of the world, a sign of the breaking through of His all-conquering grace, a sign of the holy gospel.

Dark is the night and fearful is the struggle when the mighty of the world in proud contempt set out to build the tower which shall reach to heaven, when mighty, sinful man sets out to maintain and to realize his kingship and the accursed world. And also thereafter, when God has made vain that attempt of the world and has called His friend Abraham out of Ur and Haran, it nevertheless remains dark. For in reality Abram and Isaac and Jacob become strangers in the earth. The holy patriarchs dwelt in tents and did not obtain the promise. But in the light of the gospel which God proclaimed to them they saw the promise afar off and believed and died in faith. Dark it is when presently the seed of Abraham is oppressed in Egypt and threatened with destruction. But the Lord fulfills the promise given to Abraham and his seed. He leads Israel out of the

house of bondage by His great power. He leads them through the fearful wilderness by the Angel of His presence to the land of the promise. There He dwells in the midst of His people. There He constantly proclaims the promise in type and shadow; but the reality still tarried. And also the shadow presently disappears. More and more it becomes plain that in the earthly Canaan the rest which remaineth for the people of God is not yet attained. Presently Israel goes into captivity. The glory of David's house fades and disappears. The temple is destroyed. The city of God lies in ruins. But also in that fearful Babylonian captivity the heirs of the promise continue to look forward to the final fulfillment. For according as the shadows disappeared, God proclaimed in ever clearer terms that the time was at hand and that the promised seed would come speedily. Presently a remnant returns out of Babylon, but only to become the plaything of the nations round about. And in the fearful time of Antiochus Epiphanes the heirs of the promise are killed all the day long. Indeed it seemed as though the light would never dawn over Zion. But hoping against hope they continued to look forward to the fulfillment of the promise, walking in the light of the gospel. And with ever increasing expectation they inquired of the prophets of old: "Watchman, what of the night?"

And the Lord God fulfills the promise! When the need appears at its greatest, when there is nothing left of the house of David but a root out of the dry ground, when the sceptre is well-nigh departed from Judah, when there is no strength to bring forth, God the Lord fulfills the holy gospel and Immanuel is born at Bethlehem. And again the proclamation of the gospel goes hand in hand with the fulfillment of the promise. Who would have had even the slightest inkling that there in Bethlehem the Wonder of grace came to pass and that in that Babe in the manger one might contemplate the fulfillment of the promise? But the angels descend in order to proclaim the holy gospel to the shepherds, heirs of the promise, who perhaps, yea, very likely had repeatedly asked and inquired after the time of the promise. And multitudes of heavenly hosts caused the night to ring with the song of the everlasting dawn: "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth in men of God's good pleasure!" But presently the Sun again goes down! He of Whom the heirs of the promise had hoped that He should deliver Israel descends into the depth of suffering and by wicked hands is crucified and slain. Dark, dreadfully dark it is at the cross of Golgotha. But the heirs of the promise could have known it; it had after all been proclaimed to them that the way to the light lay through the pitch black darkness of the cross of the Savior, that the way to life lay directly through His death. And the promise is fulfilled! For He is raised

from the dead; He is taken up into heaven; He is exalted at the right hand of the Father and has now received a name that is above every name. The Seed of the promise is become heir of the world!

But still the full revelation of the fulfillment of the promise has not been reached. Still there are always heirs of the promise who walk in the night of this world, bowed down under the suffering of this present time. But God has now proclaimed to them the full gospel, the fulfillment of the promise in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ! He draws them out of the darkness of sin and death and causes them through faith to walk as those who are justified in Christ Jesus. He comforts them and encourages them in the battle, causes them to walk as citizens of heaven, with their eye on high and their heart directed above, looking forward to the day when the Lord their God, Who is not ashamed to be called their God, because He has prepared for them a city, shall make all things new, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men forever!

That is the gospel!

The glad tidings concerning the promise! The *Euangelion* of the *Epangelia*!

The gospel which God has proclaimed concerning His Son. The gospel of Jesus Christ, of the glory of the only blessed God, of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the gospel of the kingdom, of peace, of salvation. The gospel that does not come with a weak and miserable offer that would have to be dependent upon men for the fulfillment of its content, but the glad tidings of God concerning the fulfillment of the unspeakably rich and eternal and sure promise to Abraham and his seed!

That gospel now must be proclaimed by men. It must be preached. Thus Holy Scripture teaches. Heyns himself concedes that Scripture never speaks of an offer of grace. That should have given him food for thought instead of simply continuing with his writing concerning the most commonly used terms of men whereby they describe or indicate the gospel. The gospel cannot be offered. In the first place, this is already impossible because according to its content it is a promise, and a promise is surely fulfilled by Him Who promises. But, in the second place, this cannot be because there is literally nothing in the gospel, whether you consider it from its objective or from its subjective side, which can be fulfilled by man. It is from beginning to end, in its objective realization and in its subjective application, the gospel of God. But it is also a fact that nowhere do we read of such an offering of the gospel in Holy Scripture. And this is not because Holy Scripture does not speak at all of the proclamation of the gospel. On the contrary, Scripture speaks of this often. But always Scripture employs a word which means to proclaim, to

preach, to testify, to speak, never a word similar to offer. Of the Savior we read that He preached the gospel of the kingdom, Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:15; 26:13. Paul preached the gospel among the heathen, Galatians 2:2; I Thessalonians 2:9; or he speaks the gospel to them, I Thessalonians 2:2; or he testifies the gospel of the grace of God, Acts 20:24. Frequently also a word is used which really means to *proclaim glad tidings*, as in I Corinthians 15:1; II Corinthians 11:7; Galatians 1:11; Revelation 14:6. But always the same idea is expressed: the gospel must simply be proclaimed. Of an offer we read nowhere.

And that gospel must also very emphatically be preached in such a way that the heirs of the promise know that it is intended for them. In practice the proclamation of the gospel in the form of an offer of grace, such as Heyns wants, is also very pernicious. It lies in the nature of the case that not a single soul more than those whom God has chosen is saved through the preaching of the gospel: for it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. Even though Heyns offers his gospel and the grace of God never so broadly, though he begs and pleads with men to accept the grace of God and though he twists and turns in all kinds of contortions, there is not a single soul saved more than those whom God effectually calls. Heyns therefore gains nothing with his general offer, for God does not act according to the general offer. But the elect are also through such lax and unsubstantial preaching not built up and strengthened and assured of the firmness of God's promise for them. Therefore we maintain that the gospel is for the heirs of the promise and that it must also be proclaimed in such a way that they are called by name. No, understand well, we do not hold the view, as some have only too foolishly accused us, that we should preach only for the elect. This would not only be impossible, but it is also contrary to the will of God. The proclamation of the gospel is general, though it is ever so particular in content. But the heirs of the promise must indeed be named according to their spiritual name in the preaching of the gospel, in order that they may appropriate to themselves the promise. It is those who mourn in Zion, the hungry and thirsty, the weary and heavy laden, those who complain because of their sins, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who are saved. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They must be satisfied and comforted, and assured in their faith, walk in the hope of everlasting life, fighting the good fight of faith, in order that no man take their crown!

Chapter VIII OFFER

We have in our opinion plainly demonstrated that the description

which Heyns offered us of the gospel, though indeed in harmony with the most commonly used terms and manner of speaking among men, is nevertheless not in harmony with Holy Scripture. He who does not wish to live by human reason, but by the revelation of Holy Scripture will therefore not be able to cling a moment longer to the view of Professor Heyns.

We must now review the proof which the professor claims to find in Scripture for his assertion that the gospel is a general offer of grace, well meant for all men on God's part. But in order to prevent all misunderstanding we shall first attempt to learn from Heyns what he really means when he speaks of an "offer." (The Dutch term here is *aanbod*. HCH) There is considerable difference of opinion concerning this term. Sometimes it is claimed that the difference between us and those who want to cling to the view that the gospel is a general offer of grace is really only a difference of terminology. That this is not the case will become plain when we first allow Heyns himself to say what he understands by that term, in order then to present our own view over against it.

Prof. Heyns writes as follows:

That the term *offer of grace*, as a term which implies that the gospel is not simply a bare proclamation that there is forgiveness of sin, but an *offering* of the forgiveness of sins to the sinner to whom the gospel comes, is entirely in harmony with Scripture and the Confession, appears from this, that both employ words and expressions which mean the same thing and that even in a more emphatic sense.

Distinction is to be made between what can be called being placed objectively and subjectively in possession and being objectively and subjectively in possession. That the words objective and subjective are particularly happy expressions for what is meant cannot be said, but there do not seem to be better terms. What is meant is this:

There is a difference between participating in the goods of an inheritance *before* the death of the testator and participating in those goods after the testator has died and the inheritance has been divided according to the stipulations of the last will and testament. Before the death of the testator the heir does not have control over so much as a penny; it is possible that he is even in a condition of poverty. But that is not to say that the heir really has no advantage over a stranger, for the contrary is the case. The heir has a right of possession to the inheritance that the stranger would gladly have but does not possess, a right of possession which guarantees to him, unless he should be disinherited, the full possession in the future: for at the determined time on the ground of that right of possession his portion will be dealt out, and then he shall have full control.

Thus by being placed objectively in possession and being objectively in possession is meant a placing in possession as that with which a testator benefits someone by putting that person's name in his will, and a being in possession as that of an heir as long as the testator lives. It is in such a way that

the sinner by the Gospel as offer of grace, is placed in possession, and is in possession of the righteousness of Christ and the benefits of salvation. And by being placed in *subjective* possession and being in possession is meant a placing in possession and being in possession such as is brought about by the death of the testator and the distribution of the inheritance, as that takes place through the application and impartation of the Holy Spirit in the way of faith and repentance. Thereby the sinner receives the full possession of the righteousness of Christ in such a way that he is justified by God, is acquitted of guilt and punishment, and receives the right to everlasting life.

That the possession of the benefits of salvation through the Gospel as offer of grace is an objective possession, a possession which indeed bestows a right as that of an heir to the righteousness of Christ and even to the actual being made a partaker of it by the Holy Spirit, a right freely to come and to take the bread and the water of life, which he could not have without that offer of the Gospel, but not a possession that can be the ground for his justification, appears abundantly from the fact that the Gospel always and again comes with the emphatic demand of faith, and connects salvation not to the offer but to true *faith in the offer*, adding thereto that he who does not believe shall go lost, shall be condemned. He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16); that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16); he that *believeth* on the Son hath everlasting life (John 3:36); he that *believeth* in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live (John 11:25); on the contrary: he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16); he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.

For this being placed in objective possession we use the term *offer of grace*. Far from that expression being unbiblical or unreformed, the Word of God and the Confessions employ words which express even more strongly than *offer* expresses that indeed the benefits of salvation are by the Gospel placed in the possession of the sinner to whom the Gospel comes in such a manner. We refer to the words *give, bestow, being bestowed, being forgiven*; and that those words denote a being placed in possession is not to be contested.

Now it may be difficult to form a clear conception of the matter itself which the professor here expounds, and still more difficult to grasp how a Reformed believer can even allow such things a place in his thoughts, but what the professor here writes is plain enough. This must be said for Heyns, that after his description of the meaning of the term *offer*, we do not have to ask any more what he really means by it. For him the offer of grace is an objective placing in possession (an objective bequest) on God's part of salvation in Christ to all men. This is plain from the figure of the testator and the heir. The testator has inscribed the names of the heirs in his will. These, therefore, have an actual right to the inheritance. That they received this right did not depend on the heirs, but only on the disposition of the testator. Applied to the matter under discussion, the presentation of Heyns therefore would have it that God, the Testator, has

given to all men, the heirs, the right to eternal life, the right to the blessings of salvation in Christ Jesus, and even the right to the bestowal of those blessings, to the application of salvation by the Holy Spirit. The testator has arranged in his will that after his death the goods of the inheritance shall indeed be distributed among the heirs mentioned by name; thus God has in His testament arranged that the Holy Spirit shall impart the benefits of salvation to the heirs, that is, to all men. Do not say now that we present Heyns incorrectly. If his words, which we quoted above, mean anything, then they certainly mean all that we have said of them. Read for yourself: "The possession of the benefits of salvation through the Gospel as offer of grace (is) an objective possession, a possession which indeed *gives the right as that of an heir* to the righteousness of Christ and *even to the actual being made a partaker of it by the Holy Spirit.*" It can indeed be that Heyns himself does not rightly realize the full significance of that which he here writes, although I am convinced that he indeed really does realize it and also intends to teach and always has taught what is expressed and included in the words quoted above; but in any event he is responsible for his words. And his words are influential in a broad circle, not only through the articles which he wrote in *De Wachter*, but even much more through the instruction which he has given for years in the Theological School of the Christian Reformed Churches. What Heyns here writes has been imbibed by many young men who are at present ministers in the Christian Reformed Churches and is proclaimed in most of the pulpits of those churches. That is the sad and the hopeless aspect of the condition of those churches.

For what is quoted above of Heyns is pure Arminianism!

Nothing else.

God gives all men the right to the benefits of salvation. He has given to all men a right to that which Christ has merited. And He has given to all men the right to the application and bestowal of that salvation, to being made partaker of it by the Holy Spirit. Pay attention to what this means. For this can mean nothing else than that Heyns also presents that grace of the Spirit as resistible. If Heyns does not mean that, his words are pure nonsense. Notice what it means if I say that God, Who cannot lie, has given to all men the right to the *irresistible* grace of the Holy Spirit. God has given to all men the right by the irresistible grace of the Holy Spirit to be regenerated, to be called, to be justified, sanctified, glorified. And, of course, God maintains that right. He does not withdraw that right. For God is God. What then is the undeniable consequence? This, that all men actually become partakers of salvation. That is as clear as the day. If Heyns wants to maintain the irresistible grace of the Spirit, then all men

are surely saved. For if that grace is irresistible, and all men have the right to it, a right bestowed on them by God, then there is also absolutely nothing in man that can make him lose that right. All men, then, are surely saved.

But this is not what Heyns means. That speaks for itself. He knows all too well that all men are not saved.

What Heyns means is that although all men indeed have a God-given right to the grace of the Holy Spirit whereby the benefits of salvation are indeed bestowed on them, they nevertheless do not receive that grace. And that they do not receive that grace of the Spirit to which God gave them the right, that is then to be ascribed to the man who does not will to receive that grace. In other words, Heyns indeed presents the matter thus, that the grace of the Spirit whereby He makes men partakers of the benefits of salvation is resistible. God offers that grace of the Spirit (the objective right to it). Man refuses to accept that grace of the Spirit. And therefore the heirs do not receive the inheritance.

That is the end of the matter as far as Heyns' view is concerned.

But from this it also appears clearly how thoroughly Arminian the presentation of Heyns is. This was after all the real point of the Remonstrance of 1610. In that Remonstrance everything seemed so Reformed! Apparently much more Reformed than the presentation of Heyns. Man was wholly corrupt, wholly incapable of any good. In order to be saved he was wholly dependent on grace, pure grace. And that grace must be imparted to him from beginning to end by the Holy Spirit. But whether that grace was irresistible, notice, that the Remonstrants wanted to make disputable! Before they would believe and confess that, the matter had to be investigated without bias. And what now is the difference between the presentation of the Remonstrance and that of Heyns? This, that Heyns no longer presents it as disputable. He wants it to be preached: God offers you the grace of the Holy Spirit; He has given you the right to it; you are all heirs, whoever you may be, for God wills that all men shall be saved; if you are not saved, then this happens because you resist the grace of the Holy Spirit Who will impart to you the benefits of salvation!

That is the gospel of Heyns.

That is the idea of the "offer of grace."

And against that presentation we have various objections.

In the first place, the objection that this presentation clashes diametrically with the doctrine of predestination. It is a denial of it. I am well aware that Heyns will answer this objection with the silencer which one can always hear nowadays in so-called Reformed churches and circles, namely, that we may not reason in rationalistic fashion from God's

counsel. Purposely I have in these chapters therefore avoided even all appearance of wanting to reason from predestination. But Heyns also may proclaim no doctrine which clashes with the truth of predestination and is in fact a denial of it. And that his presentation is indeed such will be plain to everyone who does not willfully close his eyes to the danger of Arminianism with which we are threatened by the conception of Heyns. For if God in the gospel has given to all men the right to the benefits of salvation in Christ and to the subjective application of those benefits by the Holy Spirit, then that is also the case in God's eternal decree. Then the matter also stands thus in God's counsel that God has really decided to save those who shall believe in Christ. The Remonstrants also said this. Then the decree of God is conditional. Then there is no absolute election, still less an equally absolute and sovereign reprobation. If there is a reprobation, then God has in His eternal decree certainly not given to all men the right to the benefits of salvation in Christ. And if the Lord God has not done this in His eternal and unchangeable decree, then He certainly does not do it either in the gospel. I understand very well that Heyns wants to present this thus. In God's eternal decree the sovereign God gives the right to the inheritance only to the elect. In the book of God's counsel there are only the names of the elect. But in the gospel God lets it be proclaimed that all men are heirs of the promise, that they have the right to salvation. And Heyns then calls that a mystery. Whoever will not accept that mystery is rationalistic. Now I do not accept that presentation, and I also refuse to accept that there is a mystery in that view. What is indeed in that view is this, that Heyns makes God a liar.

Let me apply for a moment the figure of the testator and the heirs which Heyns uses. A testator makes his will and seals it to the day of his death. He has a hundred relatives, all of whom could expect that they would come into consideration as heirs. The testator, however, gives the right to the inheritance to only twenty-five in his will. However, while matters stand thus in his sealed, as yet unopened, will, he lets it be proclaimed to all his hundred relatives that they have received from him the right to his goods and that he will distribute them among them all. What is your judgment concerning such a testator? You say: he is a liar. But that is exactly the presentation which Heyns offers us of God. In His eternal counsel God has mentioned by name the elect, and those alone, as heirs. In the gospel God lets it be proclaimed that He has given to all men the right to the inheritance. What is your judgment? This: Heyns makes God a liar.

Of course, also Heyns does not want this. Indignantly Heyns would cast it from him if you would accuse him that he wants to present God as

a liar. Only, in his dogmatic conception he indeed presents God as a liar. And whereas Heyns indeed knows, and all who present the matter thus also know, that God is not a liar, therefore this entire presentation in the practical situation of preaching and instruction comes down to this that men are silent about predestination and speak only of that offer of the gospel in which God gives to all men the right to the benefits of salvation. That this is not merely an abstract conclusion which we draw from the presentation of Heyns, but is concrete reality is plain from the preaching in the Christian Reformed Churches.

(to be continued)

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Pastoral Care of the Sick

Prof. Robert D. Decker

Introduction

Pastoral care of the sick among God's people must be viewed in the light of the principles of pastoral care. All of these principles which we mentioned earlier in this series apply also to the visiting of the sick. Caring for the sick belongs to the official care of the people of God. This is the care of individual people of God. The pastor must come with the Word of God to those who are sick. The child of God who is sick must meet his Lord and hear His Word through the means of the pastor's visit. The particular place of the care of the sick within the whole of pastoral care must be found in this: there is a very specific need involved with the sick. In close connection with this is the fact that this is a time of great stress, fear, and often anxiety and depression. It is certainly a time, perhaps more than any other save for times of bereavement, when the sheep need their shepherd. All of the weaknesses of the flesh which are always borne by God's people are brought to sharp expression in times of illness. For these reasons God's people who are sick need Christ especially at this time.

This means that the work of visiting the sick *must never* be neglected by the pastor. When the sheep are sick they need the shepherd. To neglect them is a very serious sin. No matter how busy the pastor may be this work must receive all of the time necessary. From a practical point of view therefore the pastor must take this aspect of his work and calling very seriously. He must work at it diligently. And, certainly he must

pray for the necessary strength, wisdom, and ability to function as the minister of Christ at the sick bed.

Finally, by way of introduction it may be said there is no way to anticipate the host of problems, questions, and circumstances a pastor will encounter in his ministry to the sick. There is no way a course in pastoral care can prepare a pastor for all of these various circumstances. All we can hope to accomplish is to set down certain basic principles and trust that God will give His servants the grace to put these into practice when the time is there and as the circumstances dictate.

Some Basic, Biblical Principles

From a negative point of view it is not the pastor's calling to give medical advice or to provide physical care for the sick. This is rather easily done. The pastor in the course of his ministry meets all kinds of sicknesses and learns to recognize symptoms. He must leave the medical advice to the doctor. The pastor may offer advice, for example that a parishioner go to the Mayo Clinic and he may even arrange for this, but he must not get involved in the diagnosis and treatment of his parishioner. This is not his business at all. The pastor is always the minister of Christ, the spiritual under-shepherd of the great Shepherd. The pastor cares for the people of God in their spiritual need. Nor is it the pastor's calling to be a psychiatric counselor. His task as the servant of Christ is not to provide psychotherapy for the sick. There is of course a close connection between the physical and the psychical. Some illnesses produce depression. There is, for example, the very common post-operative depression. The pastor must recognize that a parishioner's state may not in every instance be spiritually rooted. But in any event he must remember that the real, root need in sickness transcends both the physical and the psychical and is far more important than either of these.

Positively therefore the pastor must remember his office as the minister of the Word of God. The pastor is always the ambassador of Jesus Christ, the great, the good, the chief Shepherd of the sheep. This in turn means the pastor must always bring the Word of God and the prayer of faith which saves the sick (cf. James 5:14, 15). The pastor must remember that the need of the people of God in sickness is fundamentally spiritual. This is really the whole point of the oft disputed passage found in James 5:14, 15: "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: 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." Without going into a detailed exegesis of this passage let it be noted that the

problem here is that on account of sickness one is unable to pray. In this situation this person must call the elders of the church so that they may pray over him, "and the prayer of faith shall save the sick." This prayer of faith does not save the sick from his physical illness but it saves him from his sins, "they shall be forgiven him." That this is true, that the need of the sick is fundamentally spiritual, is also clear from the fact that Scripture connects sickness with sin, the fall, and the curse of God on account of our sin. This is true from the very beginning: "The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," God warned (cf. Genesis 2:17). Sickness belongs to the dying. And that dying is the punishment of sin. Sickness, therefore, is the fruit of sin. (This must be borne in mind as well for the proper understanding of James 5:14, 15.) It is true that in Christ the child of God has the victory over sin, death, and the grave. For this reason the child of God has the victory also in sickness. It must be remembered, however, that this victory is possessed by the child of God always and only in principle. The Christian shares in the sufferings of the present time. Inasmuch as he always carries about the "old man," the "flesh," the Christian also is subject to sickness in all its forms. The pastor must visit the sick in this awareness and point them to Jesus Who "heals our diseases" because He "forgives our iniquities" (cf. Psalm 103, Isaiah 53).

This principle is also true in specifics and at this point we are involved in the whole question of the "why?" of sickness or if you will with the "problem of pain." It cannot be laid down as a general principle of Scripture that suffering is never connected with particular sins. In some instances this is very obvious. Fornication and adultery often result in venereal disease. Drunkenness may lead to brain damage or cirrhosis of the liver. This is because of the judgment of God with respect to those specific sins. The same is true of the sin of homosexuality and A.I.D.S. We ought to note in this connection that the punishment of God exactly fits the sin. What may be observed with respect to the sins of fornication or drunkenness or the use of drugs, viz., that the punishment (venereal disease, brain damage) exactly fits the sin, is also true with respect to cases we are unable to observe. Still more, what is true of punishment is also true of the chastening which God always applies to those whom He loves (cf. Hebrews 12). Always all of our suffering is directly connected not only with sin in general but with our own particular sins. This means therefore that there is suffering for the child of God. Were the child of God perfect there would be no suffering. Certainly part of the glory of the new creation and the life of resurrection is that there shall be no more pain. This is beautifully put in Revelation 21:4 where we read: "And

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." When the old nature is finally shed through death or at the resurrection at the return of our Lord Jesus Christ all of the effects of sin will be abolished.

This presents us with a very practical question: should the pastor try to find that sin and/or point out the specific sin to his sick parishioner? In general terms the answer is affirmative. It is perfectly proper to lay down the connection between our sins and our sicknesses from the point of view of the sickness being the "chastening of the Lord" (cf. Hebrews 12). This has a very salutary effect on the child of God. It causes him to meditate upon his own sinfulness and to say with the Psalmist: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:17). Such meditation has a sanctifying effect on the child of God. It teaches him to mortify his old man. This is especially true in the case of "besetting sins." Besides, this meditation causes the Christian to appreciate the faithfulness and the goodness of God. It inspires him to confess: "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psalm 119:75). This causes the Christian to trust the more in the God of his salvation: "Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant" (Psalm 119:76).

As far as specific instances are concerned two factors are involved. There are instances where a concrete connection may and even must be pointed out, for example the sin of drunkenness and its physical effects. But beyond that the pastor ought not go. The pastor must never sit in judgment for the Word of God must always do the judging. Specifically this means that the pastor must not tell someone that his suffering is due to a specific sin or sins. It is not the pastor's duty to establish the relationship. Where there is a relationship between a specific sin and illness it must be left to the secret life of the individual Christian. That is between him and his God. If a parishioner asks whether there is a particular sin being punished by his suffering the pastor ought to give the question back to him. If then the parishioner opens up and suggests a certain sin he may be dealt with and counselled on that basis.

It must never be forgotten, however, that the above is only part of the answer to the why of sickness in the life of the child of God. Suffering is due to our sin. It is also true that in the way of suffering God chastens those whom He loves (cf. Hebrews 12). Still the question persists: why must God's children still reap the effects of sin? Why must the believer also die? If all of our sins are forgiven and all of our death is conquered,

why? The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day XVI, Question and Answer 42 gives a beautiful answer to that question: "Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die? The answer: our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life." When the child of God experiences death he experiences that death as the expression of the wrath of God. Death is "the last enemy." Why is this? Surely it is true that sickness and death teach us that we are vanity, that the "here below" is perishing, that we must number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom (cf. Psalm 90). But there is even more. Even in our dying there is no more wrath for Christ bore it all away. Christ through His suffering and death upon the cross gained for us the forgiveness of sins and also removed all the effects and fruits of sin. Not only so but because of the "it is finished" of the cross and resurrection God now causes all things to work together for our good (Romans 8:28). Therefore sickness has a sanctifying effect in the life of the child of God. It belongs to the shedding of the old nature through death. It is precisely in the experience of suffering and in the horror of death that the Christian experiences the unspeakable blessing of life eternal.

Practical Suggestions

The question we wish to face at this point is, how ought the pastor go about his work of visiting the sick? How must he conduct such a visit? What procedure ought he follow? As a general rule the pastor ought to wait until called by the parishioner involved or his spokesman. If the pastor goes uncalled, others expect him to come uncalled. This leads to difficulties since the pastor is not always aware of sickness or accident. Nor does the pastor know the seriousness of the illness if he gets his information secondhand. When the pastor is called he must be prompt! "The faithful pastor prefers making a necessary visit to the sick at an unusual hour or inconvenient hour, rather than later have to reproach himself with a neglect which it is perhaps too late now to repair" (J.J. Van Osterzee, *Practical Theology*, p. 557). How true! One may be called in the middle of the night and delay the visit until a more convenient hour only to have the parishioner die before he gets there. Let the congregation know, therefore, that you are available at any hour of the day or night and that you want to be with them in their times of crisis. Observing these suggestions the congregation will come to call upon the pastor naturally.

The pastor must be natural in his approach. He ought to avoid overbearing solemnity. He must strive to be "Christ-like." The pastor must demonstrate as much as possible the genuine care, concern, and compassion of Jesus. The pastor ought to take what the sick say seriously. The

pastor must never minimize their problems. To those who are sick their problems are serious. The pastor ought to avoid visiting hours at both hospitals and nursing homes so as to see the parishioner privately. The pastor must be sure to listen to the parishioner so as to determine his need. He ought not dominate the conversation to the point that the parishioner is not able to express himself. The pastor must, however, guide the conversation in order to keep it on a spiritual level. As a very practical point, the pastor ought to call the hospital before going lest he make an unnecessary trip because the patient is undergoing tests, surgery, physical therapy or the new mother is nursing her baby. The pastor ought to be on good terms with the hospital staff. He ought to respect their rules and regulations and interfere only when absolutely necessary. The pastor ought to be friendly and courteous with the staff. This will greatly help him in going about his work in caring for his sick.

The pastor must bring the Word of God to those who are sick. He must bring the Word briefly, pointedly, and simply. A sick room is not the place for a long and detailed exegesis and exposition of the Scriptures. The pastor ought to read a few verses and explain and apply these verses and/or verse to the sick. This calls for prayerful preparation and an understanding of the parishioner and his spiritual need. Whatever the pastor does he must not allow a sick call to become a social visit. In this connection the pastor must always pray. He must do this even under adverse situations. Sometimes he will need to do this in a busy, noisy emergency room. The need of the sick must be brought to the throne of grace. We confess with the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day XLV: "God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who with sincere desire continually ask them of him and are thankful for them." The visit of the sick must not as a general rule be lengthy or drawn out. Still less must it be hurried. The visit of the sick must be kept brief. The pastor ought never give the impression, however, of being pressed for time and in a hurry. It is far better to come more often than to stay too long. This is true especially in the case of the very seriously ill who cannot tolerate a visit of more than a few moments. In the event of serious or major surgery: open heart surgery or brain surgery, for example, the pastor ought to visit the person before the surgery. Preferably this visit should be an hour or so before the surgery is scheduled. The pastor might also visit the person the night before so that he may be prepared for the surgery. If the pastor visits the parishioner the evening before the surgery a very appropriate passage to read and bring to his attention is the fourth Psalm especially the last verse which reads: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." If at all possible and unless the

family wishes otherwise the pastor ought to be with the family at the hospital during the surgery itself. If this proves impossible the pastor should check with them during the waiting period and come during the last hour or so. The advisability of this is based upon the fact that this proves to be a very trying time for the loved ones. They need the support of the Word of God and the calm, quiet influence of the pastor's presence. If the patient fails to survive the surgery the pastor will be desperately needed. Hospital patients as a general rule ought to be visited once per week. If the person be critically ill there ought to be more visits, daily visits if necessary. If death appears imminent the pastor ought to remain with the patient and his family. The pastor when visiting the sick ought to maintain his ministerial dignity. He must remember that he is, after all, an ambassador of Jesus Christ. He does this by bringing the Word and leading the sick in prayer. A fitting conclusion to this subject may be found on page 561 of Van Oosterzee's *Practical Theology*: "Let no one be discouraged by the apparent fruitlessness of so many a labor. The need of counsel and solace upon the bed of sickness is urgent, and there is nothing but our gospel which can permanently satisfy it."

Terminal Illness

In the event of terminal illness obviously the parishioner must be prepared to die. The needs of the terminally ill are different. Some are apparently very ready to die and very submissive to the will of God. These must be encouraged. Others are afraid to talk about it. These must be encouraged to express their fears and/or doubts. Others try to avoid the subject and attempt to act as normally as possible. These act as if it really were not going to happen. In most cases this is a masking of their terror at the prospect of dying. The pastor must carefully and tactfully lead such people to face the reality of their deaths. Still others are not told of their impending death either at the doctor's orders or the family's wishes or both. This ought not be. The pastor ought to convince the family, if at all possible, to allow him to inform the patient of his imminent death so that he may be prepared to meet his Lord. In this same connection the loved ones of the dying need the pastor's care and must not be ignored. They too, perhaps as much or more than the one who is ill need to be prepared for the reality of the coming death.

Death and Bereavement

There are many aspects to this since the circumstances of the death of the saints are so different. There is sudden, unexpected death. There is the death of the very young. There is the expected and often longed-for death of the elderly. The relationship between the one who has died and the bereaved affects all of these categories. As far as the dying person is

concerned the pastor ought never forget that no matter the circumstances death is always to one degree or another a struggle also for the Christian. Death is after all the last enemy. The pastor must be aware of this and be prepared to bring the comfort of the Word of God: "Death is swallowed up in victory, O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55). Not every child of God has the same difficulties. One may be terrorized while another may be relieved. Yet death is a struggle physically and psychologically and also spiritually. The pastor must deal with each of these. This means that the Word of God must be applied to each case and need. To the one fearful of death on account of his sins the pastor must bring the word of forgiveness and of God's abundant mercy. The parishioner must be led to the cross of Jesus Christ to pray: "God be merciful to me the sinner." When one is experiencing extreme pain so that he longs for death he must be comforted in the truth that Christ heals our sicknesses and pains and that glory is worked by affliction (II Corinthians 4). When the person is on the verge of death he often lapses into a coma. In that case the pastor ought never cease attempting to reach him. Jesus promises never to forsake us and says: "My sheep hear my voice." The very last which is lost is the spiritual. Even when unable to respond orally the unconscious patient sometimes will respond by the mere squeeze of the hand. The pastor ought therefore to read the Scriptures and to pray with the dying. A very brief passage ought to be read, perhaps just a verse or two. Or the pastor might quote a verse or a line of the *Psalter* or Catechism and then pray briefly and simply. In bereavement there are widely varying circumstances all of which have a bearing on the pastor's calling. The reaction of people to the death of a loved one varies greatly too. Some people become hysterical. These often lose their grief as quickly as it came over them. Some are stunned and shocked or benumbed and begin grieving somewhat later. There is always too, a measure of selfishness in grief. Some more than others tend to feel sorry for themselves. These people dwell on the loss. The question of the fairness of God's dealings with them is constantly before them. They may become withdrawn and very depressed. The pastor must deal with all of this patiently and in the sympathy and love of Christ. Sometimes it takes months or even years before the sorrowing one recovers from the loss. The pastor ought never neglect to visit the sorrowing. The pastor does this not to pay the last respects to the dead, but as the minister of the Word of God. He ought to make this call as private as possible. He ought to call on the family as soon after the death occurs as possible. The pastor often can meet the family at the hospital or at the home shortly after the loved one has died. He ought to call on

the family at the funeral home. On these calls the pastor must listen first in order to determine the particular need of the grieving. Especially when people are greatly upset the visit ought to be made briefly. The pastor must bring the Word of God pertinently, directly, calmly. He must have as his purpose to quiet and calm the bereaved. If he detects a tendency to rebel the pastor must not hesitate to caution against this firmly but sympathetically. The pastor must remember too that frequently, if not always, the bereaved need comfort after the funeral. This is especially true of widows, widowers, and parents who have lost young children.

The content or "what to say" of the comfort at both the funeral and to the sorrowing on pastoral calls is obviously extremely important. The pastor must remember always to speak to the living and not to or about the dead at funerals. The same holds true for the pastoral calls to those in grief. The main question is not whether the departed dear one is in heaven or not. Nor is the main comfort for those left behind the fact that the loved one is in glory. As much as possible the pastor ought to lead the thought in a different direction. God leads all things in a way which is good not only for the departed but for the living. Teach God's people to say that their only comfort lies in the fact that they belong to Jesus Christ for whose sake all things are for them and nothing can be against them, not even death. This blessed truth of the gospel, and not the fact that their dear one is in heaven is the comfort of God's sorrowing children. The real test comes, of course, when one who all his life revealed himself to be an Esau, dies. In any event the pastor must concentrate at the funeral on the comfort of the Word of God for the living and occasionally he must sound a warning. This latter he must do especially at the death of the young. But in any case the pastor ought not eulogize. He must not be cold or insensitive, impersonal, but he must speak the Word of God to the living. The funeral service itself ought to center in the Word of God. The pastor ought to make the exposition of the Word the center and heart of the service. The service ought to be as simple as possible. The pastor should not go into long and involved exegesis. But he ought to keep the message brief, about twenty minutes or so. The pastor must open the service with prayer, and read the Scriptures. Sometimes the audience will sing or there will be special music. But whatever the format of the service the speaking of the Word of God and prayer must have the emphasis. At the grave site the pastor should read a brief passage of the Word of God, and pray. Sometimes it is appropriate to recite the Apostles' Creed. We sorrow not as those who have no hope but even in grief we confess our catholic, undoubted, Christian faith.

Recovery

The question of recovery presents its own problem. The question is may it be hoped for, longed for and prayed for? Is it proper to pray for recovery as long as one prays, "Thy will be done"? Or is it proper to avoid all reference to the matter of recovery? The pastor ought to take great care to emphasize that the main question for the suffering child of God is not his recovery, i.e., not something physical, but spiritual. The real question is whether one is content and even happy in the way of the Lord and whether he minds spiritual things and can receive his lot thankfully because it is good for him. It is certainly not wrong to express all of our desires to the Lord. We must do that for God wants us to do that freely, openly and frankly. But always our concern must be that we conform to the will and way of God and respond to every circumstance out of faith. Also here, "whatsoever is not out of faith is sin."

Chronic Illness

Chronic illness almost invariably involves the patience of the patient. One becomes in such circumstances despondent so that he may easily become spiritually dissatisfied with the Lord's way with him. These problems become very intense if the person happens to be young. This reaction ought to be viewed by the pastor with sympathy. Such people are cut off from the mainstream of life. In some cases they are removed from the regular fellowship of the people of God and from the means of grace. In addition they bear the burden of pain. And all of this they bear usually without any hope for recovery. The pastor must give these people special attention. His visit to them ought to be frequent, weekly, or at the very least bi-weekly. These visits should be systematically arranged. The pastor must select carefully the Scripture passages so as to meet the need of the ill. He can often make good frequent use of the Psalms. The pastor might profitably discuss the Sunday sermons and texts, especially ought he do this if the patient has no other access to the means of grace. These visits should not be more than a half hour. If properly conducted and faithfully, they often prove very pleasant and rewarding and enriching for the minister.

Mothers and Childbirth

Never neglect to visit mothers in the hospital. One ought never minimize the tremendous significance of childbirth. It is a very serious experience especially for the mother from every point of view: physically, psychologically, and not least spiritually. A visit to the mother is important because not infrequently these go through a period of rather deep

depression just after giving birth. Besides, it is the mother who is with the child the most during his most formative years. There are cases, too, where children are stillborn. Mothers of stillborn or retarded children have special needs which ought to be met by a sympathetic and compassionate pastor. It ought to be emphasized to mothers that children are the heritage of the Lord who are lent to us for a time (cf. Psalm 127). Jesus told us: "of such is the kingdom of heaven." And Jesus, therefore, said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not" (Mark 10). The aspects of thankfulness and joy which ought to characterize covenant parents as well as the awesome responsibility of bearing and rearing children of God's covenant must be emphasized on these visits. All of this must be done in the light of God's faithful promise: "to bless us and our children in the way of faithfulness to his word, to be a God unto us and to our children after us."

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