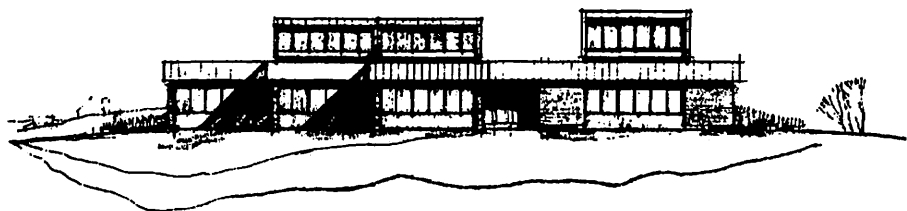


# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**



NOVEMBER, 1986  
Volume XX, No. 1

**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL  
OF THE  
PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES  
GRANDVILLE, MICHIGAN**

PROTESTANT REFORMED  
THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

---

NOVEMBER, 1986

Volume XX, No. 1

---

This *Journal* is published and distributed in limited quantities, at no charge, by the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Interested persons desiring to have their names on the mailing list should address the Editor, Prof. H. Hanko, at the address of the school:

4949 Ivanrest Avenue  
Grandville, Michigan 49418

Theological School  
of the  
Protestant Reformed Churches  
Grandville, Michigan

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Editorial Notes	
Professor H. Hanko . . . . .	2
A Comparison of the Westminster and the Reformed Confessions	
Professor H. Hanko . . . . .	3
Presbyterian Principles of Worship	
Rev. George Hutton. . . . .	19
The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (9)	
Professor H. Hanko . . . . .	33
Book Review	
Professor R. Decker . . . . .	35

## EDITORIAL NOTES

Last Spring, prior to the meeting of Classis West in South Holland, Illinois, another Officebearers' Conference was held to which the officebearers from Classes East and West were invited. The general subject discussed at the Conference was the differences and similarities between Presbyterianism and the Reformed faith. The occasion for a discussion of this sort was a decision by the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America to establish sister-church relations with the Bible Presbyterian Church of Larne, North Ireland, a congregation which holds the Westminster Confessions as its creedal basis — while the Protestant Reformed Churches, with their roots in the Dutch Reformed Churches, hold to the Heidelberg Catechism, the *Confessio Belgica*, and the Canons of Dort as their creedal basis.

The Officebearers' Conference was privileged to have present the pastor of the Larne Bible Presbyterian Church, Rev. George Hutton, who also presented a paper to the Conference. He was accompanied by a deacon from his congregation, Mr. John Clarke.

Specifically, the two subjects which were discussed were: 1) a comparison of the Westminster Confessions and the Reformed Confessions; 2) a defense of the distinctives of Presbyterian worship, the regulative principle of worship.

The discussion on these two papers was lively and interesting, made more so by the presence at the Conference of at least two other men from differing Presbyterian traditions in this country.

The Conference thought it profitable to have these papers published so as to give them wider circulation. They are, therefore, included, with some slight modification, in this issue of the *Journal*. We take special pleasure in welcoming Rev. George Hutton to the columns of this paper.

\* \* \* \* \*

While we continue in this issue the discussion of the history of the free offer, the article is more brief than usual because of the amount of other material. Nevertheless, this article concludes the material on the *history* of the well-meant offer; what remains is to offer an analysis and some conclusions.

# A Comparison of the Westminster and the Reformed Confessions

Prof. Herman C. Hanko

When the subject of this paper was assigned to me, it was somewhat different from the title which appears above. The committee suggested that I write on the differences between the Westminster Confessions and the Three Forms of Unity with a view to answering the question: "Do the Westminster Confessions meet the standard of a Reformed Confession?" We shall not deal with this question but shall assume that an affirmative answer must be given to it, if for no other reason than that they are creeds with their theological roots in the Calvin Reformation. This does not, however, preclude a comparison of these Confessions with our own Three Forms of Unity. And to this we now turn.

Before we enter into a more detailed comparison between these two groups of Confessions, it is good to make some more general remarks about the origin of these Confessions, the occasion for writing them, and how these elements affected the general character of the creeds. This will lead us to a comparison rather broad and general, but will help in understanding some of the more specific differences.

The Westminster Confessions were formulated within the Presbyterian tradition as it developed in the British Isles. In this respect it differed from the tradition of continental theology which produced such confessions as the Heidelberg Catechism, the *Confessio Belgica*, the *Confessio Gallicana*, and the Canons of Dort.

What is this Presbyterian tradition? How did it affect the Westminster Confessions? How does this tradition in placing its unique stamp upon the creeds which issued forth from it, cause these creeds to differ from our own Three Forms of Unity?

We cannot, of course, enter into this question in detail, for it would carry us far afield into other areas which are not crucial to our present discussion. But a brief look at this history will shed some interesting and important light on various broad differences which exist between these two groups of creeds.

Our Three Forms of Unity are all "continental" creeds, reflecting continental theology. The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563, arose

out of the controversy which tore at Germany because of the introduction of Calvinism into what was predominantly a Lutheran country. The immediate occasion was a fight at the communion table between the Lutheran Tileman Heshusius and Deacon Klebitz, a Zwinglian. When efforts to resolve the controversy failed, Frederick III entrusted the work of writing a Confession to Caspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus. The twofold purpose was: 1) to secure harmony of teaching in the Palatinate; 2) to prepare a foundation for the religious instruction of the upcoming generation.

The Belgic Confession, prepared in 1561, arose out of the persecution brought upon the Reformed in the Lowlands by Philip II. This persecution produced a number of martyrs which "exceeds that of any other Protestant Church during the sixteenth century, and perhaps that of the whole primitive church under the Roman Empire."<sup>1</sup> It was prepared by Guido de Bres with the aid of Adrien de Savaria (Professor of theology in Leyden and Cambridge), H. Modetus (chaplain to William of Orange), and G. Wingen. It was presented to Philip II in the hopes of gaining some toleration for the Calvinistic faith.

The Canons of Dort arose out of the controversy in the Lowlands between the Arminian system of the Remonstrants and the Calvinism which had taken root in that land. While it is an answer to the five points of the Remonstrants, adopted at Gouda in 1610, it is primarily intended to be an explanation of some points in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism which arose out of that controversy.

The occasion for the Westminster Confessions was different. Although Charles I had enjoyed considerable success in his efforts to impose prelacy on England, Scotland, and Ireland in the early years of his reign, gradually his fortunes waned, especially when the armies of Scotland entered the fray against him and his royal troops. As the war continued, gradually the Puritans became stronger both in the army under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell and in the nation as a whole, so that by about 1640 they were able to elect a majority to Parliament. This Parliament, sometimes called "The Long Parliament," called the Westminster Assembly of Divines together in Westminster Abbey for the purpose of establishing uniformity of worship and church polity throughout the kindgoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland. That it was a great Assembly no one can deny. Schaff remarks concerning this Assembly:

---

1 Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, (New York), I, p. 503.

Whether we look at the extent or ability of the labors, or its influence upon future generations, it stands first among Protestant Councils. The Synod of Dort was indeed fully equal to it in learning and moral weight, and was more general in its composition, since it embraced delegates from nearly all Reformed Churches; while the Westminster Assembly was purely English and Scotch, and its standards even to-day are little known on the continent of Europe. But the doctrinal legislation of the Synod of Dort was confined to the five points at issue between Calvinism and Arminianism; the Assembly of Westminster embraced the whole field of theology, from the eternal decrees of God to the final judgment. The Canons of Dort have lost their hold upon the mother country; the Confession and Shorter Catechism of Westminster are as much used now in Anglo-Presbyterian Churches as ever, and have more vitality and influence than any other Calvinistic Confession.<sup>2</sup>

There are several points concerning this Assembly and its work which have direct bearing on our subject.

There is no question about it but that the truth set forth in the Westminster Confessions was Calvinistic throughout. The divines who produced these Confessions were not only, for the most part, strongly committed to the system of truth as set forth by the great Reformer, John Calvin, but they were also fully aware of the development of continental theology from the time of the Reformation till the time they met. Even more strongly, they were fully aware of the Arminian controversy which had raged only a few short years earlier in the Lowlands, and they were in basic agreement with the Reformed position. The Confessions were, however, cast into English form, particularly in the sense that there was a conscious effort to establish continuity in English theology between the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England as interpreted by the Lambeth Articles (1595) and the Irish Articles of Faith, drawn up by Bishop Ussher of Dublin (1615). In fact, the Assembly spent the first part of its work in an attempt to revise the Thirty-nine Articles, and only abandoned this effort when the Scottish delegates took their seat; and, because these delegates insisted on a joint swearing to the National League and Covenant of Scotland, the Parliament instructed the Assembly to draw up a new confession.

This was both its strength and its weakness. It was the strength of the Assembly and the Confessions which they drew up because it directly developed the fundamental truths of the Calvin Reformation in an indigenous way, fit for the Church of Christ as she was called to give testimony to her faith in the context of the British Isles. It was the weakness of the Assembly and the Confessions, because it was inescapable that the product

---

2 *Op. cit.*, p. 728.

of the Assembly would bear the mark of the unique character of the English Reformation.

While surely the time when the Westminster Assembly was called into session by the decree of Parliament was a time of unrest, war, and national confusion, the creeds which were produced are, from a certain point of view, quite different from the Three Forms of Unity. The Canons of Dort bear the strong imprint of their birth in controversy, in the battle to defend the faith against violent and bitter attacks against it. The Westminster Confessions give no evidence of this. This is partly the reason why the Canons have such beautiful and strong pastoral sections in them, while the Westminster Confessions, while not devoid of this pastoral character, nevertheless do not compare with the Canons in this respect. This is also partly why the Belgic Confession breathes the spirit of persecution and martyrdom as every article begins with the words, "We believe. . .," or "We all believe and confess. . .," or "We believe with our hearts. . ." The Westminster Confessions, in contrast to this, are distinctly objective in their approach and set forth the truth in objective, and, necessarily cold, phraseology. This is also why there is such a great difference between the warm subjective approach of the Heidelberg Catechism and the statements of the Westminster Confession. As beautiful as the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism may be ("What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."), it cannot compare with the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism: "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. . . ."

In close connection with this, the divines on the Westminster Assembly were by no means of one mind in all matters of faith and polity. Concerning matters of polity, the Assembly had represented Episcopalians (although most did not attend the sessions), Independents, Erastians, and Presbyterians. While this in itself had little effect upon the decisions (the views of the Presbyterians prevailed throughout), the differences in doctrinal viewpoint did affect the deliberations. Some who were present at the Assembly were more or less sympathetic to certain Arminian views, especially on the questions of reprobation and the extent of the atonement. While their views did not prevail and were not incorporated into the Confession, some softening of the position of the Calvinists is perhaps evident. It ought to be noted that men were present at the Assembly who belonged to the Davenant School and who were directly influenced by Amyrauldianism. When the Confession was completed, they were not hesitant to sign the Confession, even though they had not changed their



position. While we must treat this matter in greater detail a bit later, many students of the Westminster Confessions claim that the Confession deliberately left room for the views of these men.

All of this, however, cannot be understood except in the context of the purpose of the Parliament and the Assembly. Schaff writes: Puritanism "aimed at a radical purification and reconstruction of Church and State (underscoring is ours) on the sole basis of the Word of God. . . ."<sup>3</sup> It was manifestly the purpose of a Parliament and an Assembly, under the control of Puritan thinking, to establish Puritan theology and church polity as the basis of the kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland. The Ordinance issued by Parliament convening the Westminster Assembly also demonstrates this. The purpose for calling the Assembly reads in part: "for settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England."<sup>4</sup> While it was true that a national religion was also established in the Lowlands and other parts of the continent, the Puritan purpose, as defined by the National League and Covenant, was different. Whether and how this left its mark upon the Confessions we shall examine at a later point in the paper.

Puritanism also left its mark upon the Confessions in other ways. One need only compare the treatment, e.g., of the Christian Sabbath in the Heidelberg Catechism and in the Westminster Confession to understand that the chapter on Sabbath observance which appears in the Westminster Confession could only be written under the influence and within the context of Puritanism. The Puritan view of the Sabbath, not found in any continental creed and stricter than the view of Calvin himself, dominates in the Confession. The whole principle of "purity of worship," such a strong emphasis in Puritan thought, made possible, e.g., the denunciation of holy days which we find in Chapter XXI.

At the same time, because these Confessions were written some 90 years after the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, they demonstrate a maturity of thought and give evidence of a development of ideas which are not to be found in the earlier creeds. While the Canons were written only some 20 years before the Westminster Creeds, the Canons deal with a particular controversy and limit their development of doctrine to an answer to the Remonstrance of the Arminians. It is not

---

3 *Op. cit.*, I, p. 703.

4 Quoted from A.F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly, Its History and Standards*, (London, 1883), I, p. 111.

surprising, therefore, that we find in the Westminster creeds a greater evidence of development at some key points. Murray writes:

The Westminster Confession is the last of the great Reformation creeds. We should expect, therefore, that it would exhibit distinctive features. The Westminster Assembly had the advantage of more than a century of Protestant creedal formulation. Reformed theology had by the 1640's attained to a maturity that could not be expected a hundred or even seventy-five years earlier. Controversies had developed in the interval between the death of Calvin, for example, and the Westminster Assembly, that compelled theologians to give to Reformed doctrine fuller and more precise definition. . . . No creed of the Christian Church is comparable to that of Westminster in respect of the skill with which the fruits of fifteen centuries of Christian thought have been preserved, and at the same time examined anew and clarified in the light of that fuller understanding of God's Word which the Holy Spirit has imparted.<sup>5</sup>

The demonstration of this will be found in our more detailed consideration of these Confessions.

In our more particular discussion of a comparison between the Westminster Confessions and the Three Forms of Unity, we shall have to set up certain limitations to the discussion, for time prevents a detailed examination of all points of difference. The first limitation is this: we shall not deal, except here and there in passing, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Perhaps this is not necessary. The Larger Catechism, fundamentally an abridgment of the Westminster Confession itself, was intended to be used in the preaching; while the Shorter Catechism, in turn an abridgment of the Larger, was intended for the instruction of children. Matters of church polity and discipline are omitted from both. The Apostolic Confession is also omitted from both, although it was appended to the Shorter Catechism. In this connection it is interesting to note that a note was appended to the phrase, "He descended into hell," which explains this to mean that Christ was in Hades, i.e., the state of the dead, during the three days His body was in the grave. This differs markedly from the interpretation given by our Heidelberg Catechism, and is perhaps an indication of the lingering influence of the Thirty-nine Articles. We may also note in passing that the Larger Catechism is very detailed in ethical matters, again a reflection of Puritan influence.

The second limitation is quite obviously the inability in this paper to

---

5 John Murray, *Collected Writings*, (Great Britain, 1976), I, p. 317.

deal in detail with differences between the two groups of Confessions. We cannot proceed through the Confession article by article and examine in what respects the Confession differs from our own Reformed creedal heritage. A few remarks will have to suffice. In the doctrines of the Trinity and the Person and natures of Christ, the Westminster Confessions follow the tradition of Nicea-Constantinople, Chalcedon, and the *Symbolum Quicunque*, and differ in no significant respects with the Reformed Confessions. The same is true of the doctrines of the creation and fall of man and his salvation in Jesus Christ. We may however observe that the Westminster Confession is stronger than the Reformed creeds on the matter of the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin (V, 3) and, subsequently, on the truth of imputed righteousness (XI, 1. See also The Shorter Catechism, 18 and 33). The Westminster Confession also has an entire chapter devoted to the question of free will (IX), and another chapter on good works (XVI), which is an extensive and excellent treatment of this subject. A few rather interesting details appear in the treatment of soteriology. In X, 3 mention is made of regeneration, although this is identified with effectual calling, but in XIII, 1 the two are mentioned side by side. In X, 3 appears a rather strange statement which seems to imply that it is possible for elect adults to be saved without the ministry of the Word. In XI, 4 eternal and temporal justification are mentioned together. In XVIII, where the question of assurance of grace and salvation is discussed, 3 suggests that assurance does not belong to the essence of faith — a matter of considerable controversy among Presbyterians to this day. In the whole area of Ecclesiology and Eschatology, no significant differences appear between the two groups of confessions, although the Westminster Confession develops more extensively such ideas as the law of God (XIX), Christian liberty and liberty of conscience (XX), lawful oaths and vows (XXII), civil magistrates (XXIII) — where the authority to call Synods is given to the magistrates, Church censures (XXX), and Synods and Councils (XXXI). The Westminster Confession is also the only creed of importance in the Protestant tradition which labels the pope Antichrist (XXV, 6).

There are two important areas where the Westminster Confessions have a much more detailed treatment of vital doctrines than the Reformed Confessions. One is the doctrine of Scripture; the other is the doctrine of the covenant. A few brief remarks about both are in order.

No single Reformation creed has as detailed a treatment of the doctrine of Scripture as the Westminster Confession. In his book, *The Westminster*

*Assembly and Its Work*, B. B. Warfield devotes two lengthy chapters to a discussion of this matter.<sup>6</sup> In Murray's *Collected Writings*,<sup>7</sup> Murray says that the doctrine of Scripture in the Westminster Confession is formulated in such a way that it is relevant to today's disputes on Scripture.

The basic elements of Westminster's doctrine of Scripture are certainly found in the Three Forms of Unity. The Netherlands Confession, Arts. 3-7, contain, as does the Westminster, such truths as the canon of Scripture, its sole authority, and the proof of its authority. Canons V, 10 contains, as does the Westminster, the truth that God gives no revelation apart from Scripture. But in the Westminster some additional points are treated and some doctrines are treated more elaborately. I, 6 contains the striking and well-known statement: "The whole counsel of God. . . is expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." I, 8, in treating of the transmission of the original text, states that it was "by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages." This same article speaks of the need to translate the Scriptures into the vulgar language. I, 9 sets forth the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.

We have in the Westminster a beautiful and important statement concerning the doctrine of Scripture which is of value in our day when Scripture is subject to such bitter attacks of the enemy.

The Westminster devotes the whole of Chapter VII to a discussion of God's covenant with man. This more extensive treatment of the covenant undoubtedly reflects certain advances which had been made in the area of federal theology. At the same time, it is in this chapter that mention is made of the covenant of works. Art. 2, which deals with this subject, reads: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect obedience and faith." The covenant of works is once again mentioned in XIX, 1: "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it."

Several remarks are in order concerning this concept of the Westminster. In the first place, it is striking that the concept "covenant of

---

6 (Mack Publishing, 1972).

7 *Op. cit.*, p. 318.

works," though certainly known in continental theology at the time of the Synod of Dort, was nevertheless, not incorporated into that creed.

In the second place, the whole idea of the covenant of works, from the time of Dort on the continent and from the time of the Westminster Assembly in England, has been an integral part of federal theology. The idea was never seriously questioned in any circles and by any Reformed or Presbyterian theologian until it was given careful analysis and subjected to thorough scrutiny by Rev. Herman Hoeksema. It ought not, therefore, to surprise us that it appears in the Westminster.

In the third place, the question arises whether the divines at Westminster meant by the concept "covenant of works" the same thing as covenant theologians of the last century or so. A case is sometimes made for the fact that this is not true; and as evidence, it is pointed out that while the Westminster speaks of the promise of life, it does not specifically mention eternal life in heaven and refers only to perpetual life in Paradise. If this is the case, so it is argued, one takes out of the concept the whole idea of merit — an idea which is a crucial part of the objection to the concept.

It is not so easy to determine the answer to this question. If one studies the history of federal theology both on the continent and in England, one discovers: 1) that the covenant of works entered the thinking of federal theologians because the whole development of the covenant was within the context of the idea of the covenant as an *agreement* between two parties: God and man. With this notion the idea of a covenant of works fits precisely. 2) Already at the time of Westminster, certain theologians in England who dealt with the doctrine of the covenant spoke of everlasting life in heaven as being the reward promised to Adam on condition of perfect obedience.

Nevertheless, it is also true that most covenant theologians, if not all, inveighed fiercely against any idea of merit in the whole work of salvation and in all God's dealings with man (see XVI, 4, 5). To us it is clear that the promise to Adam of everlasting life on condition of obedience and the idea of merit are woven of the same fabric. Whether it was so clear to the Westminster divines is another question.

There are three areas of the Westminster Confessions in which a more detailed analysis is in order. These three areas are: 1) the doctrine of God's eternal decree; 2) the idea of the "offer"; and, 3) the doctrine of the extent of the atonement. These three areas are, however, closely related to each other, as all commentators on the Westminster Confessions admit.

God's eternal decree is discussed in Chapter III, although mention is also made of this subject in Chapter V, which deals with providence. A

number of points ought to be made in connection with this subject.

In the first place, the Westminster Confession strikingly uses the word "predestinate" for God's determination to bring His elect to everlasting life, while the term "foreordain" is used with respect to the reprobate. Murray, commenting on this, says that the reason for this is not clear from the historical records.<sup>8</sup>

In the second place, the question arises whether the formulation of this doctrine follows the infra- or supralapsarian line. Murray writes:

The section just quoted (III, 6) from the *Confession* requires comment from another angle. On the question of the order of the divine decrees the *Canons of Dort* are infralapsarian. This would appear to be the purport of Article VII when it says that election is that whereby God hath "chosen in Christ unto salvation a certain number of men from the whole human race, which had fallen by their own fault from their original integrity into sin and destruction, neither better nor more worthy than others but with them involved in common misery." But it is clearly set forth in Article X when it is said that God was pleased "out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to Himself." The *Confession* might seem to have the same intent. "Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ." This would not be correct. The words, "being fallen in Adam," do not imply that the elect when elected were contemplated as fallen in Adam. The words simply state an historical fact which explains the necessity of redemption by Christ and the other phases of salvation. The *Confession* is non-committal on the debate between the Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians and intentionally so, as both the terms of the section and the debate in the Assembly clearly show. Surely this is proper reserve in a creedal document.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, all the language employed by the Westminster divines is infra language: "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life. . ." (III, 4); "Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ. . ." (III, 6); "The rest of mankind God was pleased. . . to pass by. . ." (III, 7). (See also VI, 1, where the sin of Adam is said to have been permitted.) And, of course, this is also true of the Three Forms of Unity.

In the third place, it is a matter of no little importance that the Canons, when speaking of both election and reprobation, use the singular,

---

8 P. DeYoung, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, (Reformed Free Fellowship, 1968).

9 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

“decree”: “That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God’s eternal decree. . .” (I, 6). While the Westminster Confession itself also uses the singular, it is striking that the Shorter Catechism uses the plural in Q. and A. 7, 8. Some have argued from this that the use of the singular or plural was not important to the divines of Westminster.<sup>10</sup> However, this is probably not true in the light of the fact that the Shorter Catechism, in its use of the plural “decrees,” is speaking also of the decrees of creation and providence.

In the fourth place, while it must certainly be maintained that the viewpoint of Westminster in the doctrine of reprobation is *infra*, reprobation is emphatically said to be God’s decree: “The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice” (III, 7). In fact, the Westminster is not even satisfied with defining God’s sovereign relation to sin in terms of mere permission: “The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding (Latin: *limitatio*), and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends. . .” (V, 4). On this point Cunningham observes:

In this statement there is apparent at once the deep conviction of the necessity, in order to bringing out fully the whole substance of what Scripture teaches upon the subject, to ascribe to God something more than a bare permission in regard to man’s sinful actions, combined with the felt difficulty of stating, with anything like fulness, and at the same time explicitness, what this something more is. . .<sup>11</sup>

The Westminster in this respect agrees completely with the Canons on this crucial point.

From the records left to us of the meeting of the Assembly it is

---

10 Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 126. See also A. F. Mitchell and J. Struthers, eds., *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, (Great Britain), I, p. 54ff.

11 William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, (Great Britain, 1979), I, p. 633.

evident that the statement, "to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin," was hotly debated in the meetings. Some, especially Dr. Whitaker, wanted this idea removed, then altered. But when it was retained unchanged Dr. Whitaker entered his dissent.<sup>12</sup> Murray is right, therefore, when he denies that the Confession refuses to distinguish between reprobation (judicial) and preterition and speaks only of the former, as some allege.<sup>13</sup>

From all this we may conclude that no fundamental difference exists between the Westminster Confessions and the Three Forms of Unity on this crucial point.

We turn now to the question of the extent of the atonement.

The direct references in the Westminster Confession to the extent of the atonement are found in III, 6, VIII, 5, 6, 8. Chapter VIII is, of course, the crucial chapter, because it deals with Christ the Mediator. The pertinent articles read as follows. VIII, 5: "The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, *for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.*" VIII, 6: "Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto *the elect* . . ." VIII, 8: "*To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption* he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same. . . ." But the reference in III, 6 is also important because it limits the extent of the atonement to the elect emphatically as being the only ones for whom Christ died: "As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. *Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.*"

As was true of the doctrine of God's eternal decrees, so it was also true of this doctrine that much debate swirled around it in the discussions on

---

12 Warfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 131ff.

13 *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, p. 155.



the floor of the Assembly. All agreed that the atonement of Christ was sufficient for all — as the Canons also express it (II, 3). But the question was, whether the divine intention was determined in its extent by the sufficiency of the atonement or by its efficacy. The latter was the view that prevailed in the Assembly, while the former was defended strongly by those who supported Amyrauldianism. That is, the view that prevailed was that the extent of the atonement, in God's intention, was limited to the elect alone for whom the suffering of Christ was efficacious. The Amyrauldians argued that the atonement was universal in God's intention, because its extent was determined by its sufficiency and it was sufficient for all men everywhere. Not only did such Amyrauldians as Seaman, Vines, Marshall, and Calamy defend this proposition, but Richard Baxter did the same. Shaw<sup>14</sup> speaks of this in quoting from Baxter.

The celebrated Richard Baxter, who favoured general redemption, makes the following remark upon this and another section of our Confession: "Chap. III, sec. 6, and chap. VIII, sec. 8, which speak against universal redemption, I understand not of all redemption, and particularly not of the mere bearing the punishment of man's sins, and satisfying God's justice, but of that special redemption proper to the elect, which was accompanied with an intention of actual application of the saving benefits in time. If I may not be allowed this interpretation, I must herein dissent."

Universalists, following Baxter, have since the time of the writing of this creed insisted that the creed left room for their position. Warfield<sup>15</sup> gives the rather involved argument which the Universalists used to prove their point, an argument into which we need not enter here. Of more interest to us is the fact that, subsequent to the adoption of the creed, a great deal of argumentation has appeared in support of this idea (that the Westminster does not specifically exclude universalism) because of the mention of the "offer" in the Westminster Confession. While we must say a few things about this matter of the offer a bit later, we ought here to consider it insofar as it has bearing on this question.

Schaff claims<sup>16</sup> that the idea of the offer contradicts, or at least leaves open, the question of the extent of the atonement as limited to the elect

---

14 Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, (Philadelphia, 1847), p. 71.

15 *Op. cit.*, pp. 143ff.

16 *Op. cit.*, I, p. 772.

as this is taught in III, 6 and VIII, 8. Mitchell and Struthers claim<sup>17</sup> that the Davenant men accepted the strict statement of the atonement because the articles on the offer left room for their view. And so the argument has continued until the present.

That the question of the offer is inseparably related to the question of the extent of the atonement is proved by the fact that Calamy argued on the Assembly that universal redemption was necessary to maintain the offer.<sup>18</sup> While we cannot answer this question without considering what the Confession teaches on the subject of the offer, we can point out here that whatever else may be true, the Westminster divines did intend to limit extent of the atonement in its efficacy to the elect only. This is clear from III, 6, quoted above. The question is: What is the extent of the atonement as far as the *intention* of God is concerned?

That brings us to the teaching of the Westminster Confession on the matter of the offer.

The term itself is used in VII, 3: "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely *offered* (Latin: *offert*) unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe." The term appears again in X, 2, although the Latin uses a different word: "This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man; who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace *offered* (Latin: *exhibitam*) and conveyed in it." In Q. and A. 86 of the Shorter Catechism the word "offer" also appears: "What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is *offered* (Latin: *offertur*) to us in the gospel."

There is no question about it that these uses of the term "offer" have often been appealed to in support of the idea that the Westminster divines held not only to an intention on God's part to save all men, but that the idea of a general atonement was not specifically condemned so as to make the offer sincere. Whether this is a correct and honest interpretation of

---

17 *Op. cit.*, I, p. 58.

18 Warfield, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

the creed is another question.<sup>19</sup>

There are several considerations in this connection which would seem to militate against this.

In the first place, the word "offer" as used in X, 2 is clearly not at issue here. The Latin *exhibitam* shows that the framers of the Westminster had something quite different in mind than any idea of God's intention to save all men.

In the second place, the word "offer" need not have the connotation it was given by the men of the Davenant School and is given today by the defenders of the free and well-meant offer of the gospel. This is evident, in the first place, by the fact that the term itself in the Latin means "to present." And, in the second place it is used in this sense in the Canons in III & IV, 9.

In the third place, there is evidence that the meaning given to "offer" by the Davenant men was not the meaning of many on the Assembly. According to Warfield,<sup>20</sup> Rutherford, a prominent member of the Assembly, seems to have used the term only in the sense of the preaching of the gospel. Warfield also claims<sup>21</sup> that Gillespie, another gifted divine, spoke of "offer" in the sense of preaching or in the sense of command when he claimed, during the debate, that command does not always imply intention. For example, when God commands all men to repent of sin and believe in Christ, this does not necessarily imply that it is God's intention to save those whom he commands. Shaw argues the same point and claims that the Assembly used the term "offer" only in the sense of "present."<sup>22</sup>

In the fourth place, Schaff may claim that the Westminster divines may have contradicted themselves by limiting the atonement on the one hand to the elect, and introducing on the other hand the idea of an offer, something which requires a universal atonement. But there is a *prima facie* case against this. The Westminster divines knew their theology too well to

---

19 See, for a detailed discussion of this point, my article on "The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (4), *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, XVII, 2.

20 *Op. cit.*, p. 141.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

22 *Op. cit.*, p. 104.

commit such a blunder. And, if conceivably this were possible, the very fact that the point was argued on the floor would preclude any such conclusion. If then the Westminster divines were intent on limiting the atonement only to the elect, and if they knew that an offer in the sense of God's intention to save all required a universal redemption, they would certainly not have included any such idea into the creed.

Finally, the language of the article itself all but requires a favorable meaning to the word. The phrase, "requiring of them faith in him that they might be saved" certainly is intended to explain the phrase, "wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ."

From these considerations we may conclude that the use of this term in the Westminster Confessions has the same meaning as its use in the Canons.

There is, however, one other matter to which attention must be called in this connection. X, 4 speaks of common operations of the Spirit: "Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore can not be saved. . . ." It is quite clear from the remainder of this article that the divines had in mind *good* influences. It is also clear that later Puritan thinking, especially the Marrow men, connected this with the well-meant offer of the gospel. In fact Cunningham<sup>23</sup> is so bold as to say that all Calvinists maintain that certain benefits of the atonement accrue to all men.

The Westminster divines do not give any further explanation for this statement, and we are left to speculate what they may have meant by it. It is possible that they referred to the fact, common in later Puritan teaching, that the preaching of the law can and usually does have some kind of influence upon the unregenerated hearer so that he is able to see his sin, even sorrow to some extent for it, show an interest in Christ as the One through Whom he can escape from sin, and even have a certain longing for the blessedness of which the gospel speaks. In its reaction to the cold dead orthodoxy of the Church of England and the terrible worldliness which characterized so many of her members, and because the Puritans possessed a defective view of the covenant, religious experience was to them a crucial aspect of salvation. And their view of the effect of the gospel, especially the preaching of the law, was influenced by this. If this is indeed true, this idea is condemned by the Canons in III & IV, B, 4. But we can only speculate.

---

23 *Op. cit.*, II, p. 409.

Taking all these things into consideration, it is our conviction that, while the Westminster Confessions are clearly Presbyterian and while differences certainly exist between English Presbyterian theology and continental Reformed theology, these differences are of such a kind that they are non-essential, that no barriers to true unity exist between those who hold to them in their doctrine and life and those who maintain the continental Confessions as their confessional basis, and that they stand solidly in the tradition of the Calvin Reformation. ■ ■

# Presbyterian Principles of Worship

Rev. George Hutton

We could not do better, in order to introduce this subject, than draw attention to the subordinate standard for all true Presbyterians, namely, the Westminster Confession of Faith. In chapter XXI, under the title, 'Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath-day,' we find the following:

The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone: not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and, since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.

Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men, and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue.

Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter, but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also the due

administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: besides religious oaths and vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner.

Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is, now under the gospel either tied unto, or made more acceptable by, any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped every where in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the publick assemblies, which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God, by his word or providence, calleth thereunto.

As it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

This sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs before-hand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the publick and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

The part of the Confession just quoted expresses fairly adequately the thoughts of Presbyterians, as to the principles that ought to govern the Church of Jesus Christ in her worship. Nevertheless, we shall endeavour to amplify and elucidate a little, by considering the subject to hand under the following heads.

1. The SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS in the Scriptures regarding worship.
2. The SPIRITUAL NATURE of true worship.
3. The SIMPLICITY REQUIRED in worship.
4. The SOBRIETY NECESSARY when worshipping.
5. The SABBATH ORDAINED for worship.

These are five basic principles, upon which Presbyterian worship is established. Let us then consider firstly, something of the SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS in the Scriptures regarding the matter of worship.

As Presbyterians, we are of the firm conviction that God in his word, has given to his people very clear instructions and definite guidelines as to how they ought worship him. Once this is established in the mind and heart, the natural and logical question becomes, "What saith the scrip-

ture?" (Romans 4:3). The true Presbyterian attitude is, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

In the Old Testament, when we look at the first formal acts of worship as witnessed in the lives of Cain and Abel, we are compelled to take note of the fact that Jehovah God, by his acceptance of one offering and the rejection of the other, established for all time and for all men, the reality, that they cannot worship him as they themselves deem fit. Even in this incident, God is stating very clearly that acceptable worship is such, only on the basis of the shed blood of atonement. The offerings of the tabernacle, along with the activities of the priestly office, again emphasize this important truth that only those who approach God upon the merits of the blood can find acceptance. These types, of course, only serve to point us forward to the one who brings his people nigh to God, the one who is clearly in the mind of the apostle when he writes to the Ephesians of their acceptance in the beloved (Ephesians 1:6). God's word leaves us in no doubt that the only acceptable approach unto him, and thus worship, is that of his redeemed people who are sprinkled with the blood. Only the blood-bought church worships God in reality. The fact is, none else truly can.

Referring back again to the Old Testament, we understand that the children of Israel were required to give attention to the detailed instructions delivered to them regarding all aspects of their religious lives and their acts of worship, centering as they did in the tabernacle. God told Moses, "look that thou make them after their pattern which was shewed thee in the mount" (Exodus 25:40). This statement was with reference to the instruments and implements employed in the tabernacle worship, and proves that our God is a God of detail, who does not leave the details regarding worship offered to himself to the whims and fancies of men, even should they be the wisest and godliest possible. The God of Israel was very specific when giving the pattern to Moses, so that he was not left with a vague idea, around which he was to develop regulations and practices for worship as best he could. If we understand anything of the origin of worship, we know that this would be an impossibility anyway, not only for Moses but for any mortal for that matter. Before there was any creature, there was worship of the holiest character and purest substance, within the company of the divine Trinity. We have what I believe is a reference to the eternal Son, adored by the Father, as he himself rejoices before his eternally adorable Father, in the Book of Proverbs. "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" (Proverbs 8:9). Pure worship originates

within the activities of the glorious covenant Trinity and therefore sinful men can know no more of it, than they can of God himself. The totally depraved sinner can only know God, when God himself condescends to reveal himself to such. Only when a poor sinner is given the knowledge of God can he possibly have any idea as to what constitutes that worship that is acceptable with God, being as it must be, in harmony with his divine nature and holy character.

The worship of God is foreign to the mind of fallen men. We are reminded of this, from the words of the apostle Paul who when writing of the vain imaginations, as well as the foolish and darkened hearts of men, wrote of those "who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Romans 1:21, 25). This is all the unregenerate sinner ever really does or is capable of doing. As it is natural however, for Christ the eternal Son to worship the Father, so those in Christ by faith, through grace by the Holy Spirit, naturally, as a result of the Spirit of Christ indwelling them, become worshippers of the living God, in the true sense. Jesus speaks to the woman of Samaria of true worshippers, in contrast to those who considered themselves to be such. "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). The Saviour is for one thing telling this woman, and indeed us as well, that the eternal God makes specific requirements of those who worship him, just as much now as at any other time.

Everywhere throughout the scriptures, our God is specific and definite when he says anything to his people about the worship they are obligated to give him. The God of the Old Testament in no way rescinds this principle when we come to the New Testament. Just look at texts such as, John 4:24: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him *must* worship him in spirit and in truth." Hebrews 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God *must* believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Hebrews 12:28: "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God *acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*" These texts should be sufficient to emphasize the fact that we have no more liberty to offer to our God the offerings of our own devising than Cain had, nor are the details of the spiritual tabernacle to be of less importance than those of the tent in the wilderness. Paul, having detailed the requirements of the gathered church when he wrote to Timothy, told him, "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest *know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,* which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14, 15). God in



his word sets the standard and makes the rules; it is he alone who has the divine right to tell us what he will accept. It is for us as mere creatures, to conform and comply.

In our Westminster Larger Catechism, question 5 asks, "What do the scriptures principally teach?" The answer is, "The scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." When we as Presbyterians believe this, we take our stand on the ground that if God requires us to worship him, and we believe he does, then we maintain that what he requires of us in worship is taught in the scriptures. We depend upon the scriptures as our only safe and reliable guide. Where better could we in fact go than to the scriptures? Paul says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16, 17). The sufficiency of the scriptures was the very basis of the Reformation, and I am pretty certain that the strongest and most lasting reformation work was accomplished by those men who stuck most rigidly to this rule. This principle, known to us as 'The Regulative Principle,' was adhered to as the only course by which the church in the various areas of her life and witness, including worship, could possibly be reformed. Some branches of the reforming church were guided by the rule, if a thing was not expressly forbidden in the scriptures, then it was permissible. This was not so with the Presbyterians. Their position was clear; unless they had biblical warrant for their practices, they had no right or reason for them. Principal William Cunningham, of New College in Edinburgh from 1847 until 1861, speaking in defence of this attitude and rule of conduct, once wrote, "The practical effect of it, if it were fully carried out, would just be to leave the church in the condition in which it was left by the Apostles, in so far as we have any means of information."

Because God has said in his Word, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32), we rest assured that God in his wisdom has told us all we need to know and has overlooked nothing. As far as we can see, to do otherwise is nothing short of an insult to Jehovah's integrity. If we therefore want to know what God requires in his worship, we are confident we can find the answer in the scriptures. When we are seeking to know what the various elements of worship are, we turn to the word of God, with the solid belief that he will not fail to inform us of them all. Whatever it is that the church needs to know, whether it is about praise, prayer, preaching or pronouncing the benediction, God himself has told us through precepts and examples in the scriptures precisely what our duty

is. In order then to serve him acceptably and worship him with his own approval, we are obligated to stick strictly to the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

As we move on now to consider our second point, the SPIRITUAL NATURE of true worship, we are to consider the very heart, as it were, of that worship which is acceptable with God. It seems to me that it is exactly here that the church has often gone astray, failing to understand the true nature of worship. Those who place overmuch emphasis on outward forms and liturgical niceties must bear a large part of the responsibility for the fact that the spiritualness of worship is often lost sight of. However, it is also my contention that when all formality and order is abandoned, so that liberty is given for free and unrestrained expression in worship, the spiritual nature of it is just as much at risk, because then the emphasis is overmuch on feelings. This inevitably leads to confusion, as everyone strives to discover within himself and from others of like mind what he believe to be the most appropriate way to worship God. The scriptures of course make it abundantly clear that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (I Corinthians 14:33). In order to maintain the proper balance between formality and feeling in worship, and I'm sure both have their place, the church must weigh them carefully in the scales of divine wisdom. Again, God alone knows the right amount of each ingredient to be put into worship so that it glorifies and pleases him. Feelings without formality in worship is a farce and formality without feelings is fruitless. True worship, which is spiritual worship, necessitates both.

Spiritual worship, which is a must with God (John 4:23, 24), is worship rendered according to the forms as dictated by God but with the heart and soul of the worshipper absorbed in God himself. True worship is that of the one who responds like the psalmist in Psalm 27:8: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, thy face, LORD, will I seek." Spiritual worship is the worship of the spiritual man or the new man. It is therefore Spirit originated, Spirit activated, and Spirit motivated admiration and adoration of the great God upon whom the affections of the soul of the worshipper are set. The carnal mind which is at enmity with the mind of God can and does imitate and innovate, but only the blessed Spirit of God can produce a worshipping soul. This fact has always left a deep impression on the minds of Presbyterians when approaching the subject of worship, and has stood as a stumbling stone to the worldly minded in every generation within the church.

True worship is not so much a duty as a delight; it is not something to be endured, but rather to be enjoyed. Because it is a spiritual exercise

and experience, only those who are spiritually minded do really delight in it and find enjoyment while engaged in it. Paul reminds us that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Corinthians 2:14). It is therefore a recipe for disaster when the church allows the ungodly and worldly minded with their carnal, ignorant ideas to decide and dictate how she shall worship. So often this is exactly what happens. The church, goaded on by the false notion of 'common grace,' thinks she can be appealing to the unregenerate by doing things in a way that meets with their approval and still remain spiritual. We must make no mistake about it, when the professing church of Jesus Christ adopts such an attitude, she is guilty of a devilish offence against her God. Listen to the Saviour's words of strong rebuke to Peter when he approached spiritual matters with a worldly mind: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:23). I fear that much of what is called worship today is nothing short of a wicked insult to God. The carnal mind, Paul tells us, "is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). If ever the carnal minds of the worldly gain the upper-hand in the life of the church, including her worship and how it should be conducted, the church at that point sets herself on a collision course with her God and King. It is absolutely vital then, that the church keeps her eyes sharply focused on this very important matter, that true and acceptable worship is spiritual worship.

Once it is established in the minds of men that the worship of God is essentially spiritual, it has the effect generally of simplifying it, at least in its outward form. For this reason we follow logically from considering the spiritual nature of worship to thinking about the **SIMPLICITY REQUIRED** in worship.

Prelacy and Episcopacy have historically been breeding grounds for every kind of man-centered innovation in worship. Much stress has been laid upon pomp and ceremony while the minds of the devotees have been captivated by time-honoured ritual and useless rigmarole. Parades and pageantry have sustained an interest among the multitudes of those who know nothing of the gracious saving and renewing work of the Spirit of God within their souls. Presbyterianism in stark contrast has given little credence to such activities, maintaining that if the Apostolic Church had no use or need for them, then there should be no more place for them in the church now. This Presbyterian simplicity has been offensive on many many occasions in the past and I suppose it will continue to be so, as long

as it is maintained. King James VI, enraged by these 'Puritans,' as the Presbyterians were often called, declared them to be "pests in the church." It was said of Scottish Presbyterianism that it was not a fit religion for a king; it was considered to be much too plain and austere for a gentleman.

While there have been many complaints about the severity of Presbyterian worship, it has not altered the stance of those seeking the reformation of the church in this area of her life. John Knox gratefully exclaimed on one occasion, "All praise to God alone! We have nothing within our churches that ever flowed from the Man of Sin. Our first petition was that the reverent face of the primitive and Apostolic Church should be again presented to the eyes and knowledge of men; and in that point we say that God has strengthened us till the work was finished, as the world may see." This plainness and simplicity in the worship of Presbyterians is not accidental but is the result of a very determined effort on the part of our reforming fathers to purge the church of all the abuses and corruptions of Popery. The reformers were convinced that the church had over the centuries wandered far from the truth and the only way to reform her was by a complete purge with nothing but the bare New Testament essentials being necessary for the proper order and functioning of Christ's Kirk. Calvin represented the Presbyterian understanding of the matter when he declared, "Such is our folly, that when we are left at liberty, all we are able to do is to go astray. And when once we have turned aside from the right path, there is no end to our wanderings, until we get buried under a multitude of superstitions." Believing as they did that this was exactly what had happened, the reformers, content with simplicity in worship as they had discovered it in the Apostolic Church, set about making a clean sweep of the church.

It has been traditional among Presbyterians when referring to their attendance at the place of worship to speak about 'attending upon the means of grace.' As Presbyterians, we maintain that worship is not just an obligation that we fulfill, so much as a God-ordained means whereby his people actually grow in grace and increase in the knowledge of God. For this reason then it is sufficient for us to retain in both private and public worship those things that we are certain God has ordained and the saints in Scripture have made use of to their profit. We believe that the one who created the soul is the one best fitted to tell us what is good for it as well as the methods and mediums by and through which it can best express its holy devotion to God.

If we by God's grace are enabled to perform satisfactorily in the eyes of the Lord that which men foolishly speak of as being too plain and simple, we shall discover it is complicated far beyond our human comprehension

and ability to perform. When we therefore speak of the simplicity required in worship it is not with the idea that it is easy or without beauty. True worship has a spiritual beauty all of its own. That beauty and majesty will never be appreciated by carnal minds so that they will never cease attempting to improve on what in their opinion are unimpressive and unattractive exercises. Once they interfere of course, worship so called, while perhaps appealing to worldly men, becomes spiritually a monstrosity.

Simplicity in the religious exercises of the church is recorded in plenty throughout the scriptures. We can cite many incidents and examples when God shows his approval of such activities. When, for example, Jesus told his disciples "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20), this must surely have impressed upon their minds the fact that great crowds and grand ceremonies were not to be of concern for them when they would go forth in his name to establish his church. The Saviour's presence was to be as much a reality where the few met in simple fashion as where his people were more numerous, meeting perhaps in grander surroundings. Again, God shows his approval of the simple exercises of the godly as they are recorded for us in the prophecy of Malachi. We read, "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16). Isaiah recorded for us the encouraging words of the Lord himself to his people, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15). The penitent Psalmist David tells something of what he knew of that simple worship but which proceeds from the heart and, therefore, finds acceptance with the Lord. In a state of contrition before his God, the Psalmist cried out, "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:15-17). These are but a few of the many places in Scripture where we are shown divine approval of and satisfaction with simple but genuine worship from the heart.

Knowing from the scriptures what the mind of the Lord is on the matter of worship, Presbyterians, at least in their better days, have been happy and content to meet in any place, even under the canopy of heaven itself on many occasions, to worship the One in whom their souls de-

lighted. In times of adversity they were content with plain worship services when they managed to meet together, and in times of prosperity they maintained a vigilant guard against the introduction of anything that they had reason to suspect would detract from God's glory. They refused to admit any activity that gave the appearance of exalting man or which focused attention on human ability. For this reason there was no place for choirs or soloists in their services. They could not find room for the gifted organist or pianist; neither could they accommodate the instruments that would enable such to manifest their talents to their fellow worshippers in the presence of God. Our Presbyterian forefathers were convinced that simplicity and plainness, both in the place of worship as well as the actual worship itself, was the surest way to preserve God-centered worship, which to them was the only real worship. To them God had declared, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8). Let our generation say what they will, our reformed fathers were men, jealous for the glory of God, who endeavoured to mortify the flesh not only in themselves individually and personally in private but also in the place of public worship. Simplicity in worship, they believed, contributed to the exaltation of God in their midst and also acted as a defence against the intrusion and ultimate invasion by man-centered religion.

From the simplicity required in worship, we move on to give some consideration to the SOBRIETY NECESSARY when worshipping.

For the stranger to the Presbyterian form of worship as it is still maintained here and there throughout the world by a remnant who see no need to exchange the practices of their fathers for a more modern style and approach, its most striking feature is usually its whole tone of sobriety. There is no doubt about it that the simplicity of form coupled with the gravity of the worshippers produces a seriousness and a sobriety extremely difficult to overlook. This gravity of the worshippers results from their understanding of what it is for the creature to come into the presence of his sovereign Creator. Since the angelic beings who cannot be accused of sin cover their faces crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts," when they are in the presence of their Maker, we, who are sinners by nature and by practice, have in a certain sense need of even more sobriety, if such is possible, and at least an equal reverence. I am certain that it is impossible to have knowledge of the eternal throne occupied by the thrice holy God and surrounded by such activities as are described in Scripture, without a response similar to that of Isaiah the prophet. When he saw the exalted throne of Jehovah and witnessed the behaviour of the angelic worshippers, he was made conscious of his own filthiness and unworthiness. It is recorded that he said, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I

am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: *for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*" (Isaiah 6:5). When the Mediator between God and men brings his people near to God by his reconciling power they as none else can be are made aware of the awesome and glorious majesty of his person and throne. The true worshippers of God are those who, as we have already pointed out, are brought near to him in Christ Jesus. This must result in knowledgeable worship, which though different perhaps in content, must inevitably be of similar spirit and attitude as those who in the scriptures are worshippers in the presence of the same God. It is very true that Christ changes the relationship of those for whom he died by reconciling them to God and making peace between God and men, but this in no way at all changes God's being or holy character. In no way is our God less exalted just because Christ our Saviour has taken the rightful fear of the criminal from our hearts. Because there is "now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," this does not mean that such are granted a license to take liberties with the divine eternal Being, by treating him as if he is like to themselves.

Many places of worship so called today seem to me to be little short of a religious circus. No understanding appears to exist that "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalm 89:7). Presbyterians however hold to the opinion that since public worship is in a very real sense "the assembly of the saints," their services or meetings for this purpose should always manifest a distinct reverence and sobriety.

Central in Presbyterian worship must be the faithful preaching and exposition of God's word and this plays a major role in sobering the spirits and thoughts of the worshippers as they endeavour to be like the psalmist when he said, "My heart standeth in awe of thy word" (Psalm 119:161). A serious frame of mind will go to the place of worship with those who seek to remember the words of the Saviour, "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18). I think a lot of the lightness and frivolity found in churches today results from a gross ignorance both of the majesty of God and that also of his Word. It seems to me that few know how to preach the word and few know how to listen to it even when it is faithfully preached.

Once again Presbyterians, as indeed all Christians, must give an important place to prayer in worship, which truly brings a sobriety over the spirits of those who know anything of their dependence upon the Holy Spirit's help in this activity. Paul tells us, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but

the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26, 27). When the reality of what Paul writes is fastened in the mind of a worshipper, he or she will be very necessarily sober.

Worship would no doubt be incomplete, at least in the public assembly, without singing of praise. In Psalm 92, which is entitled "A Psalm or Song for the sabbath day," we find the joyful expression accompanied by the solemn sound in verses one to three. Our worship should contain singing in the joy of the Lord, but joy should not be considered as the antagonist to sobriety. The man who has been sobered about his sin by the blessed working of the Holy Spirit and brought to cry sincerely to God for forgiveness and mercy must be, when reconciled by the blood of the cross, the happiest man alive. The power of sin, the subtlety of the devil, and the deceitfulness of the human heart keep him sober, but the power and propitiatory work of his Saviour set him rejoicing.

A final word from Scripture should be sufficient to underscore, as it were, the necessity for sobriety when worshipping God. It is taken from Ecclesiastes chapter five and verses one and two: "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for *God is in heaven, and thou upon earth*: therefore let thy words be few." These are words well worth remembering every time we venture to the place of worship, whether in private within our families or in the public assembly of the Lord's people.

Coming to our concluding point, we want to make a few comments upon the SABBATH ORDAINED for worship. We believe that God, our Creator, who knows exactly what these human frames of ours can endure ("he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" [Psalm 103: 14]), has ordained one day in seven to be a day of rest and refreshment. The Sabbath or Lord's Day, as we often call it, is intended therefore to be a day in which we mortals, by proper observance, should benefit greatly. Negligence regarding Sabbath observance, I'm convinced, can mean nothing but harm and damage to those responsible for it. Conscious of this, Presbyterians have generally been conspicuous for the way in which they have kept the Sabbath and have sought to make use of it for their good. (We have to confess to our shame that many who call themselves Presbyterians today do not regard the Sabbath as they ought and in some



instances even deliberately slight the Presbyterian Sabbath of the past.) In order to do this, of course, they have taken into consideration the whole man. The Sabbath is intended by God to be a day of profit, not just for the physical man, as many seem to advocate, but for the complete man, moral, spiritual, and physical. Physical rest without spiritual refreshment or the relaxing of the mind without the restoring of the soul must not be thought of as sufficient for the needs of man as God created him. Whatever we may gain during the Sabbath, if at the end of the day we cannot personally testify to our own soul's spiritual advantage, resulting from diligent attendance upon the God ordained means of grace, we are in the final analysis losers. Spiritual men will always value the Sabbath, because they value their souls. What a man thinks of the Sabbath and how he observes it is a pretty good indication of his spiritual state and of what worth he places on his soul.

The church as it exists in the dwelling places of the righteous throughout the week (Romans 16:5, I Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, etc.) comes together on the Sabbath for the mutual benefit of all its members. When the exhortation of Paul is heeded, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Corinthians 14:26), then the public worship of the gathered church is an event and an experience that no spiritual man, woman, or young person can have any satisfaction in missing. The Christian who willingly absents himself from the public worship services on the Sabbath has a serious spiritual problem. One who cares for his soul and loves his Saviour will always be saying, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, *where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon*" (Song of Solomon 1:7). When the Psalmist David declared, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD" (Psalm 122:1), he was expressing the delight that the child of God should experience upon the return of every Lord's Day. Freed for a day from the toils and labours of the week that have wearied the body and perhaps exhausted the mind, he feels his spirit uplifted within him as he contemplates a day of communion with his God and seasons of fellowship with the Lord's people.

In the past the Sabbath has been so prized and valued that a great deal of activity was witnessed in the homes of the godly on the evening previous: shoes polished, shirts ironed, baths for all the family, the men all shaved, food prepared, and the family's best clothes all laid out in readiness. No day or event was as important as the Sabbath of the Lord. The godly in the past could not imagine an occasion of such importance as that when, from all the families in the community, the saints made

their way to the 'Meeting House' for worship. It has been customary for Presbyterians to speak of their buildings for public worship as Meeting Houses. This in itself is an indication of what they understood to be the purpose of their assemblies. The building was simply a meeting place for the 'Church' that had existed in their houses or homes throughout the week. It was their sacred place of public worship, because they expected when in it to meet not only with their fellowsaints, but above all with their God. They went to the Meeting House earnestly beseeching the Great Shepherd of their souls to meet with them and lead them beside the still waters and into green pastures. What a pity that the church has lost so much of this. To a large extent, in many places, worship is not what it used to be or ought to be because the Sabbath is far from what it used to be and should be among those who profess to be the Lord's people. Presbyterian worship and the Presbyterian Sabbath have always been like sacred twins that could only be separated by the mutilation of one or both of them. Desecrate the Sabbath and it affects worship; mutilate worship and it renders the Sabbath pointless.

The principles we have considered have guided the church in the past through the dark as well as the bright days of her pilgrimage and have contributed so much to the majesty of Presbyterian and Reformed worship. As her heirs we, who claim to be of like faith and fortitude, should never be ashamed to hold to the same precious principles that have served Christ's bride so well and have proved their value in the life of the Reformed Church.

As office-bearers in the Congregation of the Lord, we have a grave and perhaps even daunting responsibility laid upon us, particularly in view of the awful chaos and confusion to be witnessed throughout Zion. I think the words of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel sum up for us what that responsibility is: "Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them" (Ezekiel 43:10, 11).

■ ■

# The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (9)

by Prof. H. Hanko

It is especially in the first point that the free offer of the gospel is mentioned, and then it is mentioned somewhat in passing. When the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church offered its proof for "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general," the Synod turned to the Canons of Dort which, in Synod's judgment, spoke of the free offer.<sup>1</sup> So the reasoning of the Synod was, apparently, that the free offer of the gospel is proof of God's general attitude of favor and grace to all creatures.

Notice that the Synod spoke of a general grace: i.e., a grace which is shown to God's creatures in general, by which latter expression Synod apparently meant not trees and stars, grasshoppers and bedbugs, but people. Thus common or general grace is an attitude of favor or grace on God's part which is shown to elect and reprobate alike: "...toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect..." This grace is different from saving grace and must not be confused with it. From the Scriptural proof which Synod offered (Ps. 145:9, Matt. 5:44, 45, Luke 6:35, 36, Acts 14:16, 17) it is clear that Synod included in common grace also such things as rain and sunshine and all God's good gifts. Nevertheless, there is no mention of these things in the doctrinal statement proper. The only evidence, according to the wording of the first point, of God's general grace is the free offer. So the free offer is especially the way in which God's attitude of favor or grace is shown to mankind in general. Thus, God shows that He is favorably inclined to all men without exception by offering them Christ in the gospel. The conclusion is inescapable that this means and specifically refers to God's desire (in His love and grace) to save all who hear the gospel. God manifests Himself as a loving and gracious God, full of mercy and compassion to all, in His offer of the

---

1. With this interpretation of the Canons we do not agree. A cursory reading of the Canons themselves in these three articles and a study of the Canons in their historical context will clearly show that the appeal to these articles was a vain effort to find some Confessional proof for Synod's contention.

gospel to them. Thus the salvation in Christ which God prepared through the cross has universal availability: it is there for all as far as God is concerned. That all do not in fact receive this salvation is due to its conditionality. Only those who fulfill the condition of faith and accept that which is offered actually receive it as their own possession.

The second point speaks of a restraint of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all men. This is, it must be remembered, also a part of God's universal attitude of favor. God shows His favor also to all men, elect and reprobate, by giving His Spirit so that sin is restrained in them. Now, while the connection between the teaching concerning the free offer and this restraint of sin is not clearly set forth in these statements, the conclusion is obvious. The free offer and the internal and subjective restraint of sin in the heart are both manifestations of the same grace of God. Hence, there is at least suggested here the idea that this grace which restrains sin is a kind of preparatory grace which makes one amenable to the gospel in which Christ is offered. And this is in keeping with what Bavinck taught in the reference to his writings earlier in these articles. So this internal and gracious operation of the Spirit puts every man into a position where he is able to accept or reject the gospel. This idea is strengthened by the third point where it is specifically taught that, as a result of these restraining, though not saving, influences of the Spirit, man is able to do good. It is true that the synod specifically stated that this good is not spiritual but civic good; but the fact remains that it is good — good in the sight of God. And the idea that this good is somehow of such a kind that man is more susceptible to the gospel offer is implicit in the formulation and was indeed taught by defenders of this theory.

Concerning these doctrinal statements we must make some conclusions.

In the first place, these statements laid to rest the controversy which had raged in the Christian Reformed Church between the Kuyperians in their view of common grace and the people of the *Afscheiding* and their views. In a rather neat way, these points of doctrine combined the two into one doctrinal teaching, unfaithful to the genius of Kuyper, but satisfying to all. The common grace (*gemeene gratie*) of Kuyper which had nothing to do with the free offer and the general grace (*algemeene genade*) of part of the *Afscheiding* tradition were merged into one doctrinal statement.

In the second place, while the Synod spoke boldly of this teaching as being the teaching of all Reformed theologians in the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, the Synod was badly over-stating itself. It offered no proof for this bold contention, and none can be found. The simple fact of the matter is that this view is not to be found anywhere in

early Reformed theology; it is rather an innovation of a rather late date and must be traced back, not to Dort and Calvin, but to Arminius and Amyraut. It is, without question, a serious and fundamental departure from the genius of the Reformed faith.

In the third place, as the doctrine of common grace and the free offer developed in the Christian Reformed Church, the Arminianism inherent in it soon came to clearer manifestation. Not only did free-will Arminianism begin to flourish in the Christian Reformed Church, but in the 1960's Prof. H. Dekker could openly teach and write that the atonement of Christ was universal in its extent, availability, and intention, although he limited the efficacy of the atonement to the elect alone. He could do this without ecclesiastical penalty and thus committed the Christian Reformed Church to an explicit universalism. And because the love of God was manifested in the cross (so Dekker), the saving love of God was universalized.

In the fourth place, this had serious consequences of the basic and fundamental doctrines of sovereign grace. The truths of total depravity, sovereign predestination, irresistible grace, limited atonement, and the perseverance of the saints were not only seldom heard any longer, but were in many instances openly denied.

Finally, because Rev. Hoeksema continued to deny these aberrations in the Reformed faith he was ultimately deposed from office and put out of the denomination even though the same Synod which adopted these doctrinal statements testified of him that "he was basically Reformed, though with a tendency towards one-sidedness." It was this deposition and ultimate ouster that was the historic occasion for the beginnings of the Protestant Reformed Churches. □ □

## Book Review

Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker

PREACHING WITH PURPOSE, by Jay E. Adams; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids: 1982; 162 pp., \$7.95 (paper).

The author is Dean of the Institute of Pastoral Studies, Christian Counseling and Education Foundation and Director of Advanced Studies, Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California. He has written more than fifty books on pastoral ministry, preaching, counseling, Bible Study, and Christian living. Adams informs us that this book "... is the result of over 25 years of intensive analysis and thought about

preaching. Both my doctoral degree and my master's degree were acquired in the area of preaching. Throughout the time that I taught counseling at Westminster Theological Seminary I also taught (even more) courses on preaching. Now I plan to develop, direct, and teach a D. Min. program on preaching at the newly established western campus of Westminster Seminary in Escondido, California" (p. vii). In spite of Adams' preaching and teaching experience, his prestigious position at Westminster West, and his impressive academic background we are of the opinion that it is presumption bordering on sheer arrogance for him to say:

In my opinion, there has not appeared in the English language a significant textbook on preaching since John Broadus, a New Testament scholar, wrote his landmark book, *The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. (This work, mind you, was first published in 1870! It was revised by Dr. E. C. Dargan, a student of and successor to Dr. Broadus as Professor of Homiletics at Louisville, in 1897. The "new and revised edition" by J. B. Weatherspone, Th.D., D.D.; was published in 1944 by Harper & Brothers, R.D.D.) I make that statement advisedly after studying and teaching preaching intensively for over 25 years. Many good books on preaching have been published. Each is helpful in its own way, but none has done for contemporary preachers what Broadus did for his fellow ministers in his day. . . . But his approach to preaching hardly begins to meet the problems ministers must face today, and certainly not in a form that is pertinent to the contemporary scene.

Moreover, in all candor it must be said that, like those who preceded him, and many who have followed, Broadus by-passed a number of important matters and, at the same time, retained much of the scholastic approach, which has served to weaken rather than strengthen the preaching of those who have adopted it. Scholasticism, Rome's dubious legacy to Protestantism, was mediated to us through the English Puritans, who took a number of wrong turns in preaching — some of which have brought us to the present sorry plight in which the evangelical church finds itself.

That last statement points up a major reason why I have been impelled to assume the task that has produced this book. My goal has been to develop a textbook on preaching for pastors, seminary students, and other Christian speakers that, I hope, will make an impact in our day significant enough to change preaching substantially. . . . This book is not a mere restatement of past ideas and practices in contemporary language. It takes a new turn. . . . My hope is that this textbook on preaching may be even more influential in its area than *Competent to Counsel* has been in counseling. There is every bit as great a need for a change in preaching as there was in counseling. (pp.ix-xiii)

We find this presumptive in light of the fact that there are several standard textbooks in Homiletics (M. Reu's *Homiletics* out of the Lutheran tradition, e.g.) which have appeared after Broadus' work. Adams, himself, is guilty of the very "sin" of which he accuses Dr. Broadus, *viz.*, of "by-passing several important matters." Nowhere in the book does Adams offer definitions of such essential concepts as preaching, the

sermon, the preacher, the objects of preaching, i.e., the congregation. There is neither a bibliography nor an index of Scriptural references, two major deficiencies in a textbook intended for teaching on a graduate level. In addition, there is not even a passing reference to Romans 10:14, 15a with its genitive object of the verb, *akouoo*, much less an exegesis of this key passage.

This reviewer fails to find what Adams calls "a more radically (at the root, R.D.D.) biblical perspective" in this book or "the new turn" which he says it takes. Obviously Adams means by this "the centrality of purpose" in preaching. But what he says about this surely is not new. It's been said before and even stressed at length. We shall return to this point.

We quite agree with Dr. Adams assessment of much of what is called preaching in the evangelical tradition. "Poor preaching predominates." Much preaching is "dull, unarresting, unedifying, and aimless" (p. xi). We do not think that the fault lies in the lack of a good textbook. Nor do we think the professors of practical theology (Homiletics) and the seminaries are to blame. This may be the case in part, but certainly it is not the main reason for all the "mediocrity or worse" found in contemporary pulpits. Preachers themselves are to blame! The problem lies with preachers who lack the motivation and self-discipline to work hard in their studies wrestling with God's Word in order to be prepared to say on the Lord's Day, "thus saith the Lord." I too speak from over twenty years' experience in the ministry. I have served as pastor of two Protestant Reformed congregations; the first a small rural church in Northwest Iowa and the other a fairly large suburban church on Chicago's south side. Since 1973 I have been teaching Practical Theology (including Homiletics and "Practice Preaching") in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Since assuming the chair of Practical Theology I have preached an average of three or four services per month in area churches. Seminaries, at best, can only provide aspiring preachers with the basic theological foundation out of which they must preach and the basic tools (Hermeneutics, exegesis *from the original languages* of Holy Scripture, Homiletics, Practice Preaching, Poimenics, etc.) with which they must preach. Seminaries must not be blamed for what men do or fail to do with these tools when they become pastors. I am one professor of Homiletics (though my teaching is in need of constant improvement) who refuses to assume that burden. Pastors today, at least many of them, ignore the original languages of Scripture. They do not take the time to exegete thoroughly from the Hebrew and Greek. Nor do they take the time to organize their sermon material in good outline form, nor do they take the time to think about what they are going to say and *how* they are going to say it on the Lord's

Day. Many pastors, far too many of them, are caught up in what I would call the "counseling craze" that has swept through the evangelical tradition during the past decade or so. If pastors would do as the Lord commands them: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2), God's people would have the grace and spiritual strength with which to handle themselves the many problems with which they now burden their pastors. Preaching, after all, by biblical definition is the chief means of grace, the means by which it pleases God to save them that believe (cf. I Corinthians 1:21). Preaching, this means, is also and emphatically the means God uses to save us from our marital, parental, and all other sins. The great preachers in the evangelical tradition (specifically, I mean the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition) in the past not only understood this but labored under this conviction. Men like Calvin, Knox, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, Barnes, Volbeda, Hoeksema, *et. al.* spent little time counseling and a great deal of time preparing to preach. The fruit was abundantly evident in their congregations.

All of this is not to say this is a bad book. It isn't and it ought to be read by pastors and seminary students. If those who read it take to heart and strive to put into practice what Adams says they will improve their preaching.

The first chapter is titled, "The Centrality of Purpose." Adams begins this chapter by making two very serious charges:

First, there is a need to examine and to stress purpose because there is so much purposeless preaching today in which the preacher has only the vaguest idea of what he wants to achieve. The members of congregations who are subjected to this sort of preaching for any length of time, as a result, both individually and corporately, themselves, become aimless and confused.

Secondly, the amazing lack of concern for purpose among homiletics and preachers has spawned a brood of preachers who are dull, lifeless, abstract, and impersonal; it has obscured truth, hindered joyous Christian living, destroyed dedication and initiative, and stifled service for Christ (p. 1).

Assuming these charges are indeed true Adams expresses his greatest concern in his choice of the title of this book as follows:

I am convinced that purpose is of such vital importance to all a preacher does that it ought to control his thinking and actions from start to finish in the preparation and delivery of sermons. It is my purpose in this book, therefore, to make the reader aware of this all-important role of purpose in preaching and to demonstrate to him that he must be aware of it from now on in all of his preaching endeavors. This is how basic purpose is. . . Whatever you do in a sermon, you should do consciously and deliberately to achieve some purpose. In other words, everything should have its objective, and you ought to know what that is (pp. 1-4).



At this point Adams does not tell us what the purpose of preaching is.

Chapter two faces the question (and this is the title of the chapter), What is preaching? At this point, it seems to me, a clearly stated definition and discussion of the art or act of preaching would have been appropriate. In answer to the question "what is preaching?" Herman Hoeksema offers the following definition: "preaching is the authoritative proclamation of the gospel by the church in the service of the Word of God through Christ" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 637-641). This definition is also found in the syllabus, *Homiletics*, pp. 4ff., by Homer C. Hoeksema, printed by the Protestant Reformed Seminary. In this same syllabus H.C. Hoeksema defines "the sermon" as "an orderly, concatenated address, or discourse, proclaiming the whole counsel of God on the basis of Holy Scripture from the viewpoint of a particular text or passage" (*Homiletics*, pp. 12ff.). In both instances these definitions are followed by a careful explanation of the various elements involved in each. This type of definition and explanation is lacking in this book. To my mind this is a serious deficiency. How can one speak of the purpose of something if one does not know what that something is?

Instead Adams discusses preaching in terms of three New Testament words used to refer to preaching. The words *keerusoo* (to herald) and *euangelizoo* (announcing the gospel) always refer to what Adams calls "evangelistic preaching," i.e., preaching to the unsaved. *Didaskoo* (to teach) primarily refers to preaching to those who already believe the gospel, what Adams distinguishes as, "pastoral preaching" (cf. pp. 5ff.). But, is this true, i.e., does this distinction hold? In I Corinthians 1:21 the genitive singular form of the noun, *keerugma*, is used, "that which is promulgated by a herald, a proclamation." The emphasis in this passage is on the content of the message rather than on the act of heralding. It is, however, highly doubtful that Scripture refers here only to that which was proclaimed to unconverted hearers or to what Adams calls evangelistic preaching. Surely the reference is to the Corinthian congregation, its officebearers and members and their sins and problems, particularly the sin of schism in that body of believers. Similarly, in verse 23 of the same chapter the first person plural, present active form of the verb, *keerusoo*, is used in the phrase translated, "... but we are preaching Christ crucified. . . ." Paul refers here to apostolic preaching. While the apostles certainly preached (perhaps even for the most part) to unbelievers, they also preached in established churches. One makes a serious mistake if he limits these terms to "evangelistic preaching."

In addition, in this whole discussion Adams misses an important aspect or element in the meaning of *keerusoo*. We have in mind the element of

*authority*. The herald proclaimed the official message of the king or government. He did not herald his own word or even his own version of the word of the king, but the king's very words. So the preacher proclaims (or *must* proclaim) the official and, therefore, authoritative Word of God in Jesus Christ. This is done by prayerful, careful exegesis of the inspired, infallible Holy Scriptures.

The rest of chapter 2 concerns what is involved in preaching. Adams lists five elements and stresses that the fifth is most essential: "1. Content, in the form of a biblical message; 2. A preacher; 3. An occasion (in which I include time and place); 4. Listeners; 5. The Holy Spirit" (p. 7). When Adams stresses the fact that the Holy Spirit uses means and requires the best efforts of a preacher, the point is well taken.

Chapter 3, *The Purpose of preaching*, deals with two questions and answers. Why should a pastor preach? The answer given is because God ordained preaching. What is the essence of a faithful fulfillment of the task of preaching? To edify or build up the congregation individually and corporately (pp. 11, 12). Adams concludes this chapter: "The purpose of preaching, then, is to effect changes among the members of God's church that build them up individually and corporately" (p. 13). Edification, Adams explains, involves both teaching and "to observe" (cf. Matthew 28: 20). Preaching must present "truth translated into life" (p. 15).

Of particular value for any seminary student or preacher are chapters 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14, and 20. No one should ignore what Adams writes in chapter 6 concerning the importance of determining the *telos* of Scripture as a whole and of any particular portion of Scripture.

Chapter 12, "Evangelistic Invitations," is at best weak. I find no invitations in the Bible. I do find a host of imperatives. There is a significant difference between an invitation and a command! God does not approach people with options or choices. God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe.

For the rest Adams makes several statements which every preacher and aspiring preacher ought to believe with all his heart and practice with all his strength. For example:

Preachers today have no authority for preaching their own notions and opinions; they must "preach the Word" — the apostolic Word recorded in the Scriptures. Whenever preachers depart from the purpose and the intent of a biblical portion, to that extent they lose their authority to preach. In short, the purpose of reading, explaining, and applying a portion of Scripture is to obey the command to "preach the Word." In no other way may we expect to experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our preaching. He did not spend thousands of years producing the Old and New Testaments (in a sense, the Bible is peculiarly *His Book*) only to ignore it! (p. 19).

Determining the Spirit's *telos* of a passage is one of the most important obligations in preaching, perhaps the greatest of all, about which I shall have more to say in the next chapter. But, for now, let me say that a failure to do so constitutes an affront to the Holy Spirit (p. 25).

To speak of the preacher "applying" the truth of Scripture to a congregation, therefore, is to miss the mark, if by that is meant *you* are the one who determines the application. The truth, *when given*, was already applied to the whole church by God, who Himself determined its application. It is not as though it is necessary for you to *find* some way to apply it. You must apply truth as God does. . . . All of this is to say that because, as I Corinthians 10:11, 13 proves, basically people and their problems (as well as God's solutions to them) remain the same in all generations, there is a circumstance today that corresponds to the original one, to which God *also* directed His Word. When God delivered His message then, He did not direct it only toward the people to whom it was given originally but toward the church in all ages to follow. . . (p. 133).

I say again we heartily endorse statements such as the above. But are these points taking "a new turn?" We think not. There are good textbooks available (since Broadus' work) which stress principles such as, *Scriptura Scripturae Interpres* and the necessity of preaching a text or portion of Scripture in its context and as it applies to the lives of God's people.

Hence, we think the book useful, a contribution to the field, and a book that ought to be read and studied. WE do not think it to be, however, the last word to date on the whole subject of Homiletics.