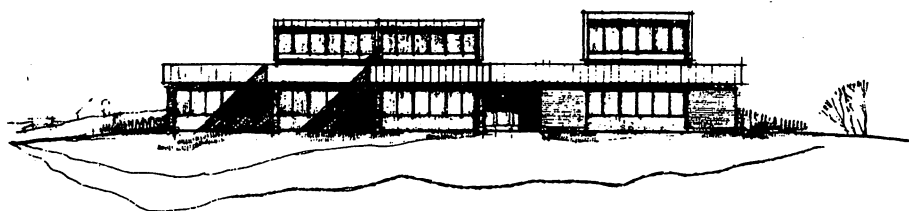


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The Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches

Robert D. Decker  
David J. Engelsma  
Herman C. Hanko

by  
Prof. Herman Hanko (editor-in-chief)  
Prof. Robert Decker (editor, book reviews)

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# EDITORIAL NOTES

With this issue of the *Journal* we begin our 26th year of publication and complete a quarter century of publishing. How quickly the time goes by! We express publicly our gratitude to our God Who has enabled us to continue this venture through these years.

\* \* \* \* \*

We have included in this issue the first half of a transcript of a speech delivered by Rev. Chris Coleborn of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. It was delivered at the International Reformed Conference which was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan during June of this year. At the Conference were representatives of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches in Singapore, England, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia (including Tasmania). Most of those who came for the Conference also attended the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches which was held at about the same time. Some attended the Synod as official representatives of sister churches. The theme of the Conference was "The Work of the Holy Spirit." Some of the addresses given at the conference were reprinted in *The Standard Bearer*. Rev. Coleborn is pastor of a congregation in Brisbane, Australia, and we thank him for making a transcript of his speech available for printing in our *Journal*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prof. David Engelsma has prepared an article on "Is Karl Barth a Modalist?" In it Prof. Engelsma examines the teachings of the great German theologian on the most basic of all doctrines, the truth of the Trinity. It is the conclusion of the article that Barth departs from the biblical and orthodox teachings of this important truth, a deviation which affects all of his subsequent theology. It is an important article, for it deals with an aspect of Barth's theology which most critics of Barth have ignored.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prof. Hanko continues his series on questions of recent Hermeneutics.

\* \* \* \* \*

Book reviews have become a regular part of our *Journal*. We call attention to two important reviews: one on Harry Boer's book, *An Ember Still Glowing*, and one on a book written by Howard VanTill, Robert Snow, John Stek, and Davis A. Young entitled, *Portraits of Creation*. They will give some insight into the apostasy so prevalent in the church world of our times.

...

# The Error of Pentecostalism

or Areas Where We Have a Biblical Problem with the  
Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement and See it as Inclined  
to Errors

*Rev. Chris Coleborn*

## INTRODUCTION

It seems to me that if we speak of "the error" of Pentecostalism, we may convey the notion that it is intrinsically a sect outside of saving and orthodox Christianity, or that it holds to *no* orthodox and sound doctrines. I am unable in good conscience to say these things in an unqualified way. And, lest we be misunderstood, and so detract from the real issue at stake, I wish to labor a point.

It is true that some expressions of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement have so far departed from the tenets of true biblical Christianity that we no longer are able to affirm that those who believe such things may be assured of salvation. They have become like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, or like classic Roman Catholicism, etc. They have so far departed from the biblical doctrines of Justification by Faith in Christ alone, etc., that we can no longer view them as holding to even the rudiments of saving faith. The marks of the true church cannot be seen in them at all.

Other expressions of Pentecostalism however have not so far departed from the essentials of saving Christianity that we can certainly say they are *per se* "error." Various of their congregations may even retain marks of the true church. What we understand concerning certain of their practices and doctrines is that to varying degrees we find they are inclined to error, if not in actual error, though still retaining sufficient truth for the marks of Christ's church to be discerned in them. For example, I personally have known of men and congregations which are really quite orthodox and Reformed in doctrine, yet who hold to charismatic tenets. Having discussed at length with them the great doctrines of the Word and saving Christianity, and having been able to observe their life, I can only conclude they are true believers. Some of them put me to shame with their love of the Word and their godly walk. I own that in various instances Pentecostalism is a work owned of God, though flawed theologically, and suffering in various ways

because of this. In these groups, and even in those we judge on the authority of God's Word to be most certainly the false church, we may yet find orthodox doctrines, such as the Infallibility and Inerrancy of Scripture, the Trinity, etc.<sup>1</sup>

I have found Jonathan Edwards' criteria for judging whether a work is of God or not, very helpful in judging the Pentecostal movement. Edwards, who wrote at the time of the "Great Awakening" in the United States of America, where there was much error as well as works of God's grace, reasoned that a work may biblically be known to be of God if certain marks could be discerned, even if there was also a mixture of error that should be condemned and opposed. In his *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards reasoned that any movement which: 1. exalts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior, and called on people to acknowledge and embrace Him as such; 2. opposes Satan's kingdom by weaning people from sin and worldliness, and points them to the moral law; 3. teaches people to revere and trust the Bible as the Word of God; 4. makes people feel the urgency of eternal issues and the depth of their own lostness without Christ; and 5. stirs up in people a love of the Lord and of others... must be a divine work at its heart, whatever other disfigurements they may have.<sup>2</sup>

Though having given the above qualifications, in the light of God's Word, our absolute rule of faith and life, I sincerely believe that Pentecostalism has tendencies in various areas of their faith and life that lead to the most serious error, and that detract from the glory of God and the good of His church. They become seeds of further error, and develop into more serious species of error. This is simply a matter of historical record, and so we must dissent from them in these matters, and contend earnestly with them over these issues.

I understand that whilst there is much said of the rapid spread of these movements, and great claims made, such as this spread being a sign from God that the movement is the most consistent expression of Christianity, yet the lofty rhetoric often disguises doctrines and consequences which are deeply and seriously at odds with sound biblical doctrine, and the true Christian life. A romanticized view of Pentecostalism being a return to early Christianity, needs to be judged not only by a sober evaluation of what was

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<sup>1</sup> An example of such a congregation was one formed some years ago by the late Dr. John A. Schep, who was Professor of New Testament and Pastoral Theology at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong for a time. Prof. Schep, turned to Pentecostalism, but to the end retained in so many other ways a profession of the doctrines and practices of the Reformed faith.

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, Jonathan, *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, Vol. I, *Select Works*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1965, pp. 109ff.; Packer, James I, *The Charismatic Movement*, a series of two articles in *Evangelicals Now*, ed. Horn, Thornton Heath, Vol. V., No. 3, pp. 12, 13.

the faith and practice of early biblical Christianity, but also by the whole counsel of God.

I have also taken the liberty of including the Charismatics in the title, and dealing with them in this paper, for they are distinct from Pentecostalists by their own definition, though we would see them as involved in the same errors as Pentecostalists, and may ordinarily identify them as the same. I will deal with this difference in the historical notes.

We thus seek to deal with *areas where we have a biblical problem with the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement and see it as inclined to errors.*

## A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO PENTECOSTALISM

It could be argued that the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement has become the most influential professing Christian movement of our age. At the same time, because of its relatively recent modern historical appearance, as distinct from its ancient historical appearance, its diversity, its trans-denominational character and complexity, we should bear in mind it is a difficult movement to study and to represent and criticize typically. However, we believe that it is possible to recognize several areas where these movements justly leave themselves open to severe criticism from a biblical and Reformed perspective.

To evaluate and understand Pentecostalism properly, we need to know something of its history, particularly its more recent history.

Pentecostalism, as a professing Christian movement which emphasizes a "Spirit" baptism as an experience different from conversion, and evidenced by speaking in tongues, and which holds that the extra-ordinary works performed by the apostles, such as "faith healing" and "prophesying," etc. are still ordinary, is not new. There were those in the early centuries of the church who also claimed such things. For example, the Montanists, who called themselves the *Pneumatics*, held to such beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

It is common in Pentecostal circles to claim that their views are really only those of the original Christians, and that the original beliefs and practices of the post-apostolic believers gradually died out. It is important, though, to take note of a point Warfield makes. He writes:

There is little or no evidence at all for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the post-Apostolic church; it is slight and unimportant for the next fifty years; it grows more

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<sup>3</sup> *International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (revised edition), J.D. Douglas, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978. Article: "Pentecostal Churches," pp. 763-764; Gromacki, Robert G., *The Modern Tongues Movement*, Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, pp. 11ff., Bugden, Victor, *The Charismatics and the Word of God*, Evangelical Press, Darlington, 1989, pp. 113ff.; VanderWaal, C. *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*, Paideia Press, St. Catherines, 1978, pp. 18ff.

abundantly during the next century (the third); and it becomes abundant and precise only in the fourth century, to increase still further in the fifth and beyond. Thus, if the evidence is worth anything at all, instead of a regularly progressing decrease, there was a steadily growing increase of miracle-working from the beginning on...there is much greater abundance and precision of evidence, such as it is, for miracles in the fourth and succeeding centuries, than for the preceding ones.<sup>4</sup>

There is historical evidence that this teaching has appeared at various times in history, up to our day — for example, the so-called French prophets around the 1770s.<sup>5</sup>

It has been argued that modern Pentecostalism had its rise in Edward Irving in England in the 1830s.<sup>6</sup> Most trace its origins to the Methodist Churches, and “Holiness Movement” of the United States of America at the turn of the century. The movement spread to Canada, England, Scandinavia, Germany, India, China, and particularly Latin America, as well as into the countries of eastern Europe and Russia. Eventually, various denominations embodying Pentecostal/Charismatic teachings and practices came into being. The largest is probably the Assemblies of God. Other major Pentecostal denominations that arose from this include the Church of God in Christ, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and the United Pentecostal Church International. These denominations spread to other lands. Pentecostal denominations arose in Europe and elsewhere, and they too spread to other countries. For example, the Apostolic Church was formed in Wales in 1916.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the distinction between “Pentecostalism” and “Charismatic,” we would do well to note the points made in the Introduction to the *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*.<sup>8</sup> There the editors write:

The term “Pentecostal” and “charismatic” are often used interchangeably. Indeed, they do have many features in com-

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<sup>4</sup> Warfield, B.B., *Counterfeit Miracles*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1976, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Bugden, Victor, *op. cit.*, pp. 147ff.

<sup>6</sup> Dallimore, Arnold, *The Life of Edward Irving*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1983; Bugden, Victor, *op. cit.*, pp. 179ff.

<sup>7</sup> *International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1ff; *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, General Editor, J.D. Douglas, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978, article, “Pentecostal Churches,” p. 764; Butler, C.S., *Test the Spirits; the Charismatic Phenomenon*, Evangelical Press, Welwyn, 1985, pp. 46ff.; *Creation and Redemption*, Robert Grand & Son, Edinburgh, 1893. This is a “Restorationist” book, which gives some history of the rise of charismatic practices and doctrines up until the late 19th century, see pp. 129ff; Gromacki, Robert G., *op. cit.*, pp. 23ff., 161, 162; Bugden, Victor, *op. cit.*, pp. 179ff.; Bruner, Frederick Dale, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, pp. 35ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

mon, and even for the expert it is frequently difficult to draw a dividing line. When points of delineation are decided upon and connected, the resulting line is invariably crooked, perhaps broken, and sometimes split into various branches. For one venturing into the field of Pentecostal and charismatic studies for the first time, some kind of tour-guide for distinguishing between the two is indispensable.

There are two approaches to differentiating between "Pentecostal" and "charismatic." One is theological, the other ecclesiastical. A theological differentiation might be along doctrinal lines, in particular "Spirit baptism" (also called the baptism in or of the Holy Spirit). It is oversimplified, but perhaps useful, to say that "Pentecostals" subscribe to a work of grace subsequent to conversion in which Spirit baptism is evidenced by glossolalia (i.e., speaking in tongues); for some, this baptism must also follow another act of grace, sanctification. "Charismatics," however, do not always advocate either the necessity of a second work of grace or the evidence of glossolalia as an affirmation of Spirit baptism. Yet both emphasize the present work of the Spirit through gifts in the life of the individual and the church.

An ecclesiastical differentiation especially concerns denominational affiliation. Thus "Pentecostal" describes those participating in classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), the Church of God in Christ, and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. "Charismatics" would characterize persons outside these classical Pentecostal denominations, whether they are within mainline denominations or are part of an independent group.

Practically every mainline denomination, including the Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and various Presbyterian/Reformed Churches now has a charismatic element.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the remainder of this paper, we will use the term "Pentecostal" to refer to both those who come from the Pentecostal denominations, and to charismatics who are within mainline denominations.

To understand Pentecostalism, we need to appreciate the doctrinal background that has led to the rise of these movements. To understand the "tree and fruits" of Pentecostalism, we must be aware of the "roots" that gave rise to, and nurtured that "tree." Pentecostal Churches, and most holding to their tenets, are baptistic, and almost always pre-millennial and dispensational. In many ways they are similar to Arminian Baptists, but

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Also *International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, *op. cit.*, article, "Presbyterian and Reformed Charismatics," pp. 724ff.

differ from such churches primarily on the subject of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalist hold to a belief in a distinct "baptism of the Holy Spirit," which gives access to various miraculous gifts. Most hold that the initial evidence of this baptism is speaking in other tongues. "Tongues" are normally not understood without "interpretation," nor does the user usually understand what he is saying.<sup>10</sup>

The biblical criticisms we then would have with Arminian, semi-Arminian, and Dispensational theology, we generally would have with Pentecostalism. Additionally and more specifically, the theological background of Pentecostalism that we would have problems with as Reformed believers, can be identified in five areas. Two Pentecostal academics have identified them in the following way. First, there is the Wesleyan notion of sanctification, in which "the strangle-hold of sin" is seen as "decisively broken," and a form of Christian perfection can be realized. Second, there is the doctrine of Charles G. Finney, and other "higher-life" teachers, who emphasized a second experience of grace subsequent to conversion, which enables believers to be endued with "power" for witnessing and service. This has often been called, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit." Thirdly, Pentecostalism has been formed by the influence of pre-millennialists, particularly the dispensational type that came from the Plymouth Brethren and the teachings of John Nelson Darby. Fourth, the rise of the "faith healing" movement, added another influence. The final and probably the most significant development was the "restorationist" doctrine that arose out of the interaction of all the above factors. This doctrine arose out of the hermeneutic of the "early rain" upon the early church, and the "latter rain" of the end of history, a concept taken from Joel 2:23. A return to what was perceived as the character of the early church was sought in this prophecy.<sup>11</sup>

Time will not permit us to give an exhaustive analysis of Pentecostal doctrine, nor a complete rebuttal of it. Our purpose now will be to spell out several areas where, as believers who are persuaded that the Reformed faith most consistently summarizes and expresses biblical Christianity, we believe Pentecostalism is in error, or inclined to and leading to error. We presuppose that the doctrines of our Reformed faith are true, and therefore we will not be seeking to establish at any great length our presuppositional doctrines. We simply seek to identify areas of Pentecostalism where we have grave problems in the light of those things most surely believed among

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<sup>10</sup> Humphreys, Robert, & Ward, Rowland, *Religious Bodies in Australia*, published by the authors, Melbourne, 1986, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, op. cit., p. 2; Koch, Kurt, *The Strife of Tongues*, Evangelization Publisher, Berghausen. On pages 9-13, gives some broader reasons for the rise of Pentecostalism. It is seen as a reaction, for example, against Modern Theology, Humanism, etc.

us. Of course, if we were to address ourselves to Pentecostals, we would need to substantiate our doctrines more fully from the Word of God, and from there seek to show how they are at variance with revealed truth.

## A TENDENCY TO MAN-CENTERED FAITH RATHER THAN A GOD-CENTERED FAITH

We believe Pentecostalism can be criticized on the basis that it is inclined to be centered in man, the creature, rather than God the Creator. This is seen not only in its Arminian-type theology, but also its emphasis on being so "experience" centered. An over-emphasis on feelings and the subjective elements of the Christian life makes its followers very inward looking.

So much revolves around themselves in their faith and life. Pentecostals speak and write, for example, of what "God will do for you," and of what "God wants to do if you will let Him"; "the Holy Spirit *needs* people," and such like.<sup>12</sup>

In worship we observe that the emphasis is on that which stimulates the senses and stirs the feelings, more than on the objective truth of God preached, and the soul stirred as we give the Lord, our Redeemer, the glory that is due to His name.

God's Word teaches us that we are to be God-centered, not man-centered. This is clear from Scripture. God does not stand in need of any creatures, and has made man for His glory. Thus, in Acts 17:24, 25 we are told, "God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, *as though He needed any thing*, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." In Romans 11:36 we read, "*For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*" In Revelation 4:11 we are taught, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power: *for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.*"

Pentecostalism with its generally held belief in man's free will, and the ability of man's will to accept or reject God's salvation, and to do spiritual good in one's own strength, is at variance with giving all the glory to God. In coming to salvation, a Pentecostal tends to see the decision to do so to be dependent upon the will of man and our ability. This is certainly not the construction of Scripture as we read and study it. For example, Romans 9:16, "*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,*" and Ephesians 2:8, 9, "For by grace are ye saved

<sup>12</sup> For example, see such booklets as Schevkenek, Alice, *Things the Baptism in the Holy Spirit Will Do For You*, End-Time Handmaidens, Engeltal, Jasper, 1977.

through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

This tendency is also seen in the common Pentecostal view of prayer. It is commonly believed by them that man has the power in prayer to change the will of God, or the ability to influence the will of God, and to bring His will subject to our will. There is little appreciation of the absolute sovereignty of God.

There is a real tendency to humanism and a man-centered faith in the concepts and practices of many Pentecostals. I recall speaking to a Pentecostalist about abortion, and she was saying it is because of the error of humanism that we have such things. In the main I agreed. This sincere person then told me that no matter what I could try to show her from the Bible why I did not accept the doctrines of Pentecostalism, she had had such an experience and felt so deeply about it, it had to be true. When I suggested that this was centering our authority and guidance in the creature, and making man and our feelings our ultimate authority, and that this was “humanism” too, she was not impressed. But sadly, it seems to me, this was the case.

### **A TENDENCY IN THE AREA OF AUTHORITY AND THE BELIEVER’S RULE OF FAITH AND LIFE TO BASE IT UPON THINGS OTHER THAN THE SCRIPTURES**

Pentecostals, whilst accepting the need of having an authority for our beliefs and conduct, and for the guidance in what we are to believe and how we are to live, nevertheless tend to compromise the great truth of *Scripture alone* as our rule of faith and life.<sup>13</sup>

We cannot overlook the fact that Pentecostals often put “orthodox” Reformed believers to shame at times in their level of commitment and desire to serve the Lord, and to know and do His will. We cannot criticize them for this desire. We do however have a problem with their rule and methodology of service and of knowing the Lord’s will.

All too often the rule of faith and life and for guidance is a subjective thing. That is, it is drawn out of self. The various promptings of feelings, impressions, and random thoughts are often perceived of as the “Spirit” moving and guiding believers. Whilst God is sincerely said to be our authority and guide, it is in this very subjective way. Thus, guidance is all too often based on self (the feelings), and not the objective revelation of God and the principles of the Word. In a sense some Pentecostals are at least *practically* committed to and accept a form of belief in immediate revela-

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<sup>13</sup> For a profitable discussion and illustration of how many of the Pentecostals misuse, and have wrong views of the Bible, see Butler, C.S., *op. cit.*, pp. 71ff.

tion! Butler documents how there is a real tendency to practice, if not believe, that the present canon of Scripture is incomplete, and that the Lord is still giving revelations on a par with Scripture.<sup>14</sup>

Circumstances of life (we would say "Providence") are also frequently seen and used as rules and authorities for conduct. It can become a very subjective, even mystical thing. (We understand that providence is to be a *guide* in decision-making, but not a *rule*. Scripture alone is to have that role, as we shall soon seek to show). Thus, many Pentecostals, when seeking guidance in a matter, often speak of the need for prayer, and at times fasting, to know God's will. It is thought that this will often produce a "sense" of God's will in our spirit or mind. Now we are certainly to pray, and at times to fast too, when it comes to knowing God's will. It is the leaving out of a close study of Scripture and its teachings and principles in the formula that is the problem.

Guidance and decision-making should not be mystical. Some Pentecostals show a mystical use of the Bible for guidance. For example, I know an instance of a keen young man from an Arminian-type college in Australia, who wanted to know God's will as to how he should travel on a journey; should it be by land, sea, or air? He let the Bible fall open and came upon a verse where the word "fly" (as in flee), occurred, and took from that that it was God's will that he should go by airplane on his journey. In the face of such things, one is not sure whether to laugh or cry.<sup>15</sup>

Scripture teaches us that it *alone* is to be our rule of faith and life. Its objective teachings are to be our absolute authority in all things. That is where we can be sure we hear the voice of God, not in man whose heart is so deceitful. For example, in Isaiah 8:20, we "hear" the Lord instructing us. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." The Lord teaches us in Psalm 119 of the Scriptures' being our absolute guide. For example, verse 105, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Thus Paul teaches us in II Corinthians 10:5, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Our understanding of God's Word on this matter is summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Article VI, where we read:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Also pp. 132ff. See also Chantry, Walter J., *Signs of the Apostles*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1979, pp. 24ff.

<sup>15</sup> Bruner, Frederick Dale, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 21.

consequences may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Because of this tendency of Pentecostalism to a subjective rule, rather than the objective rule of God's Word, and to bring all thoughts and feelings captive to it, we find that many Pentecostalists are anti-doctrinal, and tend to play down the importance of doctrine. Experience is made the central thing, and the basis for our rule of faith and life as well as guidance. As Brunner writes:

It is important to notice that it is not the *doctrine*, it is the *experience* of the Holy Spirit which Pentecostals repeatedly assert that they wish to stress. Indeed, the central attraction of the Pentecostal movement, according to one of its major leaders, consists "purely of a powerful, individual, spiritual experience." The final words of this remark — "powerful; individual; spiritual; experience" — contain the dominant experiential *notae* of Pentecostalism.<sup>16</sup>

This explains why there can be such diversity of doctrinal understanding and persuasion among Pentecostalists, and why it does not generally worry them. One can observe some Pentecostalists ranging in doctrinal beliefs from the "five points of Calvinism" to Roman Catholicism and Mariology almost to eastern mysticism. Yet all are seen as "brothers" if there is the common denominator of "spirit baptism" or "tongues," etc. Experiences all too often become the basis of fellowship rather than the "faith once delivered to the saints," and the faith, hope, and love that is taught in the objective Word of God.

A further result of this tendency to be anti-doctrinal, and to be subjective in the area of authority and our rule of faith and life, is to be anti-Confessional.

## A TENDENCY TO HAVE A DEFECTIVE VIEW AND PRACTICE OF HERMENEUTICS

Pentecostalists tend to err in not applying the Scriptural rule of "The analogy of Faith," and to interpret Scripture by the Historical-grammatical-spiritual method.<sup>17</sup>

This means, when they come to proofs for their position, they err, we believe, because of misunderstanding Scripture, and of mis-interpreting it. Many are dispensationalist, and have little or no sense of the historical development of revelation. We cannot under-emphasize the problems that

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<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this point, see Butler, C.S., *op. cit.*, pp. 93ff.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of this understanding of Hermeneutics, refer to Prof. Herman Hanko's Protestant Reformed Seminary Lecture notes, Michigan.

occur when we impose a dispensational framework on the Scriptures, and try to squash it into that mould. Vanderwaal gives a succinct description and rebuttal of this matter in his book, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy*.<sup>18</sup>

Gaffin, illustrating how a lack of a historical, grammatical, spiritual hermeneutic greatly influences our view and use of the book of Acts, for example, writes:

Of first importance, hardly capable of being overemphasized, is a general hermeneutical consideration concerning the way Acts is to be read. If, as is too often the case, Acts is read primarily as more or less random samplings of earliest Christian piety and practice, as a compilation of illustrations taken from the early history and experience of the church — a more or less loose collection of edifying and inspiring episodes, usually with the nuance that they are from the “good old days, when Christians were really Christian” — then we will tend to become preoccupied with the experience of particular individuals and groups recorded there, to idealize that experience, and to try to recapture it for ourselves. But if, as ought to be the case, Acts is read with an eye for its careful overall composition and what we will presently see is one of Luke’s central purposes in writing, then these passages and the experiences they record come into proper focus.<sup>19</sup>

One of the sad consequences of this faulty hermeneutic is to destroy or deform the doctrine of God’s covenant. Because we believe that this doctrine is so basic to understanding God’s relationship to man, and man’s understanding of the Bible, to err here is to err most seriously. We believe that a right appreciation of the doctrine of God’s covenant is essential to the health and welfare of the church. Dispensationalism must stand or fall with its view of God’s covenant. Many of the teachings and practices of Pentecostalism are rooted in dispensationalism, and the collapse of this hermeneutic would be a mortal wound to the movement.

Crenshaw and Grover, referring to Dabney, draw out various tendencies that either accompany or are inherent to dispensationalism. Among those mentioned are: defining saving faith as being mental assent; assurance of salvation as mental assent and having nothing to do with fruit in one’s life; justification not based on the active obedience of Christ to God’s law but only on His Cross-work; sanctification an optional work of grace that begins if the saints obey some command, sometimes called the victorious life; regeneration is the adding of something new but not the

<sup>18</sup> Vanderwaal, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 18ff.

<sup>19</sup> Gaffin, Richard B., *Perspectives on Pentecost*, Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, p. 23. See pp. 13ff.

changing of the person himself, resulting in two natures; “literal” hermeneutic; no Christian Sabbath and rejection or weakening of the moral law; discovering God’s will very often by prayer or by some mystical feeling of the heart; and pre-millennial and pietistic retreat from involvement in the world.

Whilst we agree that there are differences of administration in the history of God’s dealing with man, they are essentially one Covenant. Our view of the church is profoundly affected by dispensationalism. Our view of eschatology is affected. How we live, and our world-and-life view, are also seriously affected. A faulty hermeneutics has far-reaching practical consequences.<sup>20</sup>

These same writers deal with several areas where Pentecostals leave themselves open for criticism in the area of hermeneutics. For example, their “literal” hermeneutic.<sup>21</sup>

...to be continued

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* See also Crenshaw, Curtis I., & Gunn, Grover E., *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, Footstool Pub., Memphis, 1987, pp. 82ff. & Cox, William E., *An Examination of Dispensationalism*, Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> Crenshaw, Curtis I., & Gunn, Grover, *op. cit.*, pp. 9ff. For some works dealing with exegesis and the hermeneutics of “tongues,” and other extra-ordinary acts, see: Decker, Robert, *Pentecostalism*, Evangelism Committee, South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, 1972; Warfield, B.B., *Counterfeit Miracles*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1972; Rice, John R., *The Charismatic Movement*, Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, 1977; MacLeod, Donald, *The Spirit of Promise*, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 1986; Butler, C.S., *op. cit.*; Budgen, Victor, *op. cit.*; Gromacki, Robert, *op. cit.*; Knight, George W., *Prophecy in the New Testament*, Presbyterian Heritage Publications, Dallas, 1988; Gaffin, Richard, *op. cit.*; Bruner, Frederick Dale, *op. cit.*

# Is Karl Barth a Modalist?

by David J. Engelsma

At all costs, the doctrine of the Trinity! If I could get the right key in my hand there, then absolutely everything would come out right...(*Zwischen den Zeiten*) will become interesting only when this battleship shows its plumes of smoke on the horizon. All our present activities are...as yet nothing but skirmishing.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Karl Barth is widely regarded as the greatest trinitarian thinker of the 20th century, if not of the period from Augustine to the present. The editors of his *Church Dogmatics* claim that Volume I/1 in which Barth develops his doctrine of the Trinity may well be “the greatest treatise of the kind since the *De Trinitate* of St. Augustine.”<sup>2</sup>

There is good reason for this judgment. Barth himself regards the doctrine of the Trinity as the fundamental doctrine of the church. He begins his *CD* with the doctrine, putting it not only before his doctrine of Scripture but also before his doctrine of the being and perfections of God. Barth calls attention to the fact that “in putting the doctrine of the Trinity at the head of all dogmatics we are adopting a very isolated position from the standpoint of dogmatic history.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, he treats the doctrine of the Trinity as prolegomena (which he regards as part of dogmatics proper, and not as preliminary to dogmatics). He then constructs the entire dogmatics according to the trinitarian scheme, so that his doctrine of the Trinity is in actuality the foundation of dogmatics. Barth’s treatment of the doctrine is a novel,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth in a letter to Eduard Thurneysen in 1924. Quoted in Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century*, R.A. Wilson, translator (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 2nd edition, G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, editors (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), p. ix. Hereafter, references to the volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* will be given as *CD* with the number of the particular volume.

<sup>3</sup> *CD*, I/1, p. 300.

fertile rethinking of the Trinity.

But is his doctrine of the Trinity orthodox? This is the force of the question, "Is Karl Barth a Modalist?" for the church has judged modalism to be a trinitarian heresy. Barth claims to maintain the classical trinitarian orthodoxy of the early church and of the Reformation. He is at pains to defend the ecumenical creeds. He defends such intricate and controversial trinitarian elements as the *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* teaching and the *filioque*. Even as regards his startling rejection of the term, "persons," to describe the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in favor of "modes of being," Barth insists that he is faithful to the intention of the early church:

...the concept "person" should be dropped in the description of this matter, because in all classical theology it has never in fact been understood and interpreted in the sense in which we are accustomed to think of the term to-day. The Christian Church has never taught that there are in God three persons and therefore three personalities in the sense of a threefold Ego, a threefold subject.<sup>4</sup>

Barth explicitly rejects modalism:

And when we turn finally to the Modalist Monarchians, Noetus of Smyrna, Praxeas, especially Sabellius, and then Priscillian, in whose steps Schleiermacher and his school have walked in the modern period, we find that they did indeed assert the substantial equality of the trinitarian "persons" but only as manifestations behind which God's one true being is concealed as something other and higher, so that one may well ask whether revelation can be believed if in the background there is always the thought that we are not dealing with God as He is but only with a God as He appears to us.<sup>5</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity means on the other side, as the rejection of Modalism, the express declaration that the three moments are not alien to God's being as God. The position is not that we have to seek the true God beyond these three moments in a higher being in which He is not Father, Son and Spirit. The revelation of God and therefore His being as Father, Son and Spirit is not an economy which is foreign to His essence and which is bounded as it were above and within, so that we have to ask about the hidden Fourth if we are really to ask about God....Modalism finally entails a denial of God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> CD, II/1, p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> CD, I/1, p. 353.

<sup>6</sup> CD, I/1, p. 382.

## MODALISM

Despite Barth's criticism of modalism, the question whether his doctrine is in fact modalist is occasioned by his bold rejection of "person" to express the threeness of the Trinity and his equally bold adoption of the terminology, "mode of being" (German: *Seinsweise*). This is the characteristic language of modalism. Modalism (also called modalistic monarchianism and patripassianism) as taught especially by Sabellius in the early third century A.D. was the teaching that God, Who is one person and one person only, successively manifested Himself by three impersonal modes — the mode of the Father, the mode of the Son, and the mode of the Holy Spirit. Sabellius taught that "as there are 'diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit,' so also the Father is the same, but is expanded into Son and Spirit."<sup>7</sup> According to Adolf Harnack, "the central proposition of Sabellius ran that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were the same. Three names accordingly were attached to one and the same being."<sup>8</sup> Zealous for the oneness of God, modalism sacrifices His threeness. As B. B. Warfield puts it, modalism sinks the persons in the unity of the Godhead.<sup>9</sup>

## BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF THE "THREE MODES OF BEING" OF THE GODHEAD

Barth rejects the term, "person" (Latin: *persona*), as the answer to Augustine's famed "*tres quid?*" ("three what?") and substitutes "mode of being." For Barth, God is one in being and three in modes of being.

...by preference we do not use the term "person" but rather "mode (or way) of being"....The statement that God is One in three ways of being, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, means, therefore, that the one God, i.e. the one Lord, the one personal God, is what He is not just in one mode but...in the mode of the Father, in the mode of the Son, and in the mode of the Holy Ghost.<sup>10</sup>

The reason for rejecting "person" is that the modern conception of "person" as an individual center of "self-consciousness" has rendered the word unserviceable. "Person" in the sense in which it was used by the early

<sup>7</sup> Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, Vol. 1 of the series, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Volume III, James Millar, translator (London and Edinburgh: Williams & Norgate, 1897), p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> B.B. Warfield, "Antitrinitarianism," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Volume I (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), p. 203.

<sup>10</sup> CD, I/1, p. 359. For Barth's treatment of the terms, "person" and "mode of being," cf. pp. 355-360. "At this point," writes Barth, "we...enter upon the most difficult section in the investigation."

church is now obsolete. To speak of the Trinity as “persons” in the sense in which “person” is understood in contemporary thought is to be guilty of the heresy of tritheism. Barth has a dread of tritheism and is jealous for the oneness of God. In what are virtually the opening words of the section, “The Triunity of God,” Barth warns:

The doctrine of the triunity of God...does not entail—this above all must be emphasised and established—any abrogation or even questioning but rather the final and decisive confirmation of the insight that God is One.<sup>11</sup>

He continues:

The meaning of (the Church doctrine of the Trinity) is not, then, that there are three personalities in God. This would be the worst and most extreme expression of tritheism....we are speaking not of three divine I’s, but thrice of the one divine I.<sup>12</sup>

Barth explains his fear:

What is called “personality” in the conceptual vocabulary of the 19th century is distinguished from the patristic and mediaeval *persona* by the addition of the attribute of self-consciousness. This really complicates the whole issue...the attribute of individuality when it is related to Father, Son and Spirit as such instead of the one essence of God, the idea of a threefold individuality, is scarcely possible without tritheism.<sup>13</sup>

He concludes: “The ancient concept of person...has now become obsolete.”<sup>14</sup>

Barth takes comfort from the fact that, although they used the term, both Augustine and Calvin expressed some dissatisfaction with the word and concept, “person.”<sup>15</sup>

The judgment that Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is modalist cannot, however, be based simply upon his rejection of “person” and adoption of “mode of being,” suspicious as this may be. For, in the first place, it is possible that Barth does indeed mean by “mode of being” what the church has always meant by “person.” This is Barth’s claim:

Therefore by preference we do not use the term “person” but rather “mode (or way) of being,” our intention being to express by this term, not absolutely, but relatively better and more simply and clearly the same thing as is meant by “person.”<sup>16</sup>

In the second place, trinitarian orthodoxy has sometimes spoken of the

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<sup>11</sup> CD, I/1, p. 348.

<sup>12</sup> CD, I/1, p. 351.

<sup>13</sup> CD, I/1, pp. 357, 358.

<sup>14</sup> CD, I/1, p. 366.

<sup>15</sup> CD, I/1, pp. 355, 357.

<sup>16</sup> CD, I/1, p. 359.

threeness of the Godhead as “modes of being,” although invariably in the context of their being real, distinct persons.<sup>17</sup>

What clearly exposes Barth’s trinitarian doctrine as a (new) form of modalism, in connection with his explicit rejection of “person” and his open espousal of “mode of being,” are the following considerations.

1. Barth denies three individuals, three I’s, in the being of God:

The triunity of God does not mean...the existence of a plurality of individuals...within the one Godhead.<sup>18</sup>

...we are speaking not of three divine I’s, but thrice of the one divine I.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, even if the Father and the Son might be called “person” (in the modern sense of the term), the Holy Spirit could not possibly be regarded as the third “person.” In a particularly clear way the Holy Spirit is what the Father and the Son also are. He is not a third spiritual Subject, a third I, a third Lord side by side with two others. He is a third mode of being of the one divine Subject or Lord.<sup>20</sup>

2. As some of the quotations above make plain, Barth holds that God is one person—not only one being, but also one person: “...God is...a person, the One, the speaking and acting Subject, the original and real I.” This is affirmed in the context of the denial “that there are in God three persons”.<sup>21</sup>

3. In what is to my mind an extremely important passage on this point, Barth denies that the three “modes of being” are the subjects of their subsistence in the one being of God, asserting rather that the (one-personal) being of God subsists in these three “modes of being.” That is, whereas the church has always said, “Three persons subsist in one being,” Barth says, “The one being subsists in the three ‘modes of being.’ ” Referring to the definition of “person” in Art. I of the Augsburg Confession, “*quod proprie subsistit*” (“that which properly subsists”), Barth states:

The “*quod*” in this definition must in fact be put in brackets.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1950), pp. 110ff. Riissen is an example: “A divine *persona* signifies neither essence only nor a mode of subsistence only, but the essence to be found in such a mode.” We remember too Calvin’s warning against a readiness to fight over the terms themselves of trinitarian doctrine: “Really, I am not, indeed, such a stickler as to battle doggedly over mere words...(we are warned) against forthwith so severely taking to task, like censors, those who do not wish to swear to the words conceived by us, provided they are not doing it out of either arrogance or frowardness or malicious craft” (*Institutes*, 1.13.5). This being said, the fact remains that a theologian who chooses to use the language of modalism in describing the Trinity must expect to be closely examined whether the language of modalism is also promoting the theology of modalism.

<sup>18</sup> CD, I/1, p. 350.

<sup>19</sup> CD, I/1, p. 351.

<sup>20</sup> CD, I/1, p. 469.

<sup>21</sup> CD, II/1, p. 296.

What *proprie subsistit* is not the person as such but God in the three persons, God as thrice *proprie subsistens*.<sup>22</sup>

Because the three “modes of being” are persons neither in the modern nor in the ancient sense, they cannot be the subject of their own subsistence in the being of God, but are merely passive modes of the subsistence of the one person.

4. There is also the matter of Barth’s reinterpretation of the church’s doctrine of the *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* of the human nature of Jesus. This is the doctrine that Jesus’ human nature is impersonal as such, having as its person the person of the eternal Logos. In other words, this is the doctrine that Jesus has (or is) one person and that this person is the person of the eternal Son of God. Although Jesus is a real human with a complete human nature, His person is not human, but divine. Barth reinterprets this crucial doctrine in such a way that he is free to speak of Jesus as a human person. Responding to the modern attack upon the church’s doctrine of the *anhypostasis and enhypostasis* of the human nature of Christ as docetic (if Christ is not a human person, He is not a real man), Barth makes fatal concessions:

What Christ’s human nature lacks according to the early doctrine is not what we call personality. This the early writers called *individualitas*, and they never taught that Christ’s human nature lacked this, but rather that this qualification actually belonged to true human being. *Personalitas* was their name for what we call existence or being. Their negative position asserted that Christ’s flesh in itself has no existence, and this was asserted in the interests of their positive position that Christ’s flesh has its existence through the Word and in the Word, who is God Himself acting as Revealer and Reconciler.<sup>23</sup>

This is misinterpretation of the doctrine of the *anhypostasis and enhypostasis* of Jesus’ human nature. The church never meant by it generally to deny that Jesus’ flesh has existence in itself. Rather the church meant specifically to deny that Jesus’ flesh has a human person. For Barth to defend the church’s *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* doctrine against the attack upon it that consists of charging it with docetism by granting that in fact Jesus has a human *personalitas* betrays a critical weakness in Barth’s doctrine of Christ: Christ is a human *person*. The only proper defense against the modern attack upon the doctrine that Jesus’ human nature is personal in the person of the eternal Son of God is to assert and demonstrate

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<sup>22</sup> CD, I/1, p. 361.

<sup>23</sup> CD, I/1, p. 164.

that the lack of a human person in no way detracts from the real humanity of Jesus.

Barth does not hesitate expressly to state that Jesus is a human person: "The question may be asked whether He was not then a person like other human persons.... He is a human person."<sup>24</sup> This introduces all the confusion into the doctrine of Christ that the church cleared up by its careful *anhypostasis/enhypostasis* doctrine: Is Jesus then only a human person and not a divine person? Is He both a human person and a divine person as Nestorius taught? If so, how are the two persons united and how can there be one, unified work of redemption? Or is His one person a mixture of divinity and humanity, so that Jesus is neither God nor man but a monstrous "God-man," His I being neither the I of the eternal Son nor the I of a genuine human, but a *tertium quid*?

And may a theologian thus cavalierly ignore the Spirit's leading of the church down through the ages? May he thus blithely set aside the church's confession in the Symbol of Chalcedon and in the Athanasian Creed? Is it indeed the true development of theology that the church in the 20th century must start again from scratch as it were and work her way once more through the whole doctrine of Christology as though nothing has been decided? What an odd state of affairs! Every other science builds on the advances of the past. Theology, the one science with the promise of the guidance of the Spirit of truth, is doomed forever to be reinventing the wheel.<sup>25</sup>

But my purpose in pointing to Barth's affirmation of the human person of Jesus is to argue that this accords well with a denial of three distinct persons in the Godhead and lends weight to the charge that Barth's

<sup>24</sup> CD, III/2, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> The massive, contemporary assault on classical Christology is indicated in Gerald O'Collins, *What are They Saying about Jesus?* revised edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), pp. 9, 10: "It costs little time to ferret out the difficulties that cluster around 'person.' Even though Chalcedon did *not* call Christ a 'divine person,' traditional theology has interpreted its confession in that sense. Christ is not a human person, but a divine person who assumed human nature without assuming human personality. But, as Schoonenberg argues, can Christ be completely human if he is not a human person? To deny his human personhood seems tantamount to denying that he is man. Moreover, nothing can be done to conceal the real shift between the ancient and modern concepts of 'person'.... We repeat the traditional word ('person') at our peril...." In light of this assault, the Dutch Reformed theologian, Klaas Runia, concludes that "there are clear indications that the Christological battle of the ancient church needs to be fought all over again" (*The Present-Day Christological Debate*, Leicester, England, Inter-Varsity Press, 1984, p. 114). Apparently, such an orthodox theologian as Gordon H. Clark has already surrendered to the modern assault on the Christology of Nicaea and Chalcedon, specifically the charge that Jesus cannot be a real man unless He is a human person. With sharp criticism of the Symbol of Chalcedon, Clark affirms that Jesus is a human person and that He must be a human person in order to be a real human being (*The Incarnation*, Jefferson, Maryland, The Trinity Foundation, 1988, especially pages 6, 15, 31, 70, 72, 73).

trinitarian doctrine is modalist.

5. In light of the above considerations, Barth's characteristic descriptions of the threeness in God are redolent of modalism: "threefold repetition"; "thrice the one divine I"; "God a second time"; and similar expressions. These descriptions refer to a God of one person, to a Godhead in which there is only One Who says "I." The "modes of being" are not distinct, different persons, but only repetition of one and the same person in a threefold way. This is not the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity of God. This is not the true God revealed in Scripture.

To be sure, Barth's is a new form of modalism, differing significantly from that of Sabellius. Whereas Sabellius taught that the three modes were only three ways in which God manifested Himself to the world, but that behind these three "masks" is the one person and undistinguished being of the Godhead, Barth holds that the three modes are eternal relations in the being of God (the immanent trinity), and not only modes of revelation (the economic trinity). Also, in contrast to Sabellius' view that the modes are successive revelations of God, Barth maintains that God subsists in the three modes simultaneously.

Barth is mistaken, however, when he thinks to escape Sabellianism by locating its essential error in the teaching of "three mere manifestations behind which stood a hidden fourth."<sup>26</sup> The fundamental error of Sabellianism (modalism) was its denial of three, real, distinct, and eternal persons in the one being of God, i.e., the denial of the threeness of God, with its necessary consequences for the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth. That this is the error of modalism and that therefore Barth does not escape it is plain from the official condemnation of modalism by the early church at the Synod of Braga in the sixth century:

If anyone does not confess that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are three persons of one essence and virtue and power, as the catholic and apostolic church teaches, but says that they are a single and solitary person, in such a way that the Father is the same as the Son and this One is also the Paraclete Spirit, as Sabellius and Priscillian have said, let him be anathema.<sup>27</sup>

Adolf Harnack calls modalism "the really dangerous opponent" of orthodox trinitarian doctrine in the period between A. D. 180 and 300.<sup>28</sup> Philip Schaff calls Sabellius the most original, profound, and ingenious of the ante-Nicene unitarians and his system, the most plausible rival of

<sup>26</sup> CD, I/1, p. 355; cf. also p. 382.

<sup>27</sup> Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, pp. 181, 182.

<sup>28</sup> Harnack, *History of Dogma*, p. 51.

orthodox trinitarianism.<sup>29</sup> On this reckoning, the trinitarian theology of the original, profound, and ingenious Barth is the most plausible and most dangerous rival of trinitarian orthodoxy in our day. Barth's influence becomes evident in "evangelical" teaching on the Trinity. The recent book, *Understanding the Trinity*, by the highly acclaimed and popular Alister E. McGrath in fact presents a new understanding of the Trinity along the lines of Barthian modalism:

The word "person" originally derives from the Latin word *persona*, meaning an actor's face-mask—and, by extension, the role which he takes in a play. By stating that there were three persons but only one God, Tertullian was asserting that all three major roles in the great drama of human redemption are played by the one and the same God. The three great roles in this drama are all played by the same actor: God. Each of these roles may reveal God in a somewhat different way, but it is the same God in every case. So when we talk about God as one person, we mean one person *in the modern sense of the word*, and when we talk about God as three persons, we mean three persons *in the ancient sense of the word*.<sup>30</sup>

In passing, two interesting observations may be thrown out. The first is that Barth's bete noire, Friedrich Schleiermacher, was a Sabellian who spoke of a being of God in Jesus (*"ein eigentliches Sein Gottes in ihm"*).

The second is that unitarianism is always universalist, and Barth's theology is universalist.

Of more importance is the accounting for the cause of Barth's modalism. In addition to whatever spiritual and theological causes play their part, the cause of Barth's heretical trinitarian doctrine is his erroneous methodology, i.e., the way he goes about to arrive at the doctrine. Barth spins off the doctrine of the Trinity from the concept itself of revelation. He develops the doctrine by analyzing the proposition, "God reveals Himself as Lord," or the still briefer statement, "God speaks." He does not proceed by considering the full, rich testimony to Jesus of the entire Scripture so that he comes to ask the question in all astonishment, "Who is this Jesus?" This was the point of departure of the early church in its development of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is striking that throughout the elaborate, finely spun doctrine of the Trinity in *CD*, I/1, with the exception of a few isolated references, one is not confronted with the divine works of Jesus as set forth in the synoptic gospels; with the divine claims of Jesus in John's gospel; with

<sup>29</sup> Philip Schaaf, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), pp. 580ff.

<sup>30</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 130, 131.

the prophecies of the divine Christ of the Old Testament; indeed, with the Jesus Christ of Scripture in all His glorious fulness. Instead, there is abstract “revelation” and “unveiling.”

The fact is, and Reformed theologians ought to have insisted on this fact from the very beginning, that the Trinity of Scripture cannot be deduced from the bare proposition, “God reveals Himself as Lord.” It is conceivable that one reveals himself to others as lord, so that there is the revealer, revelation, and revealedness, but that he is and remains one person. An example would be a man who reveals himself as lord to his family.

Barth acknowledges that his procedure differs radically from that of Calvin and from that of the Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 25 even though all three claim to base their doctrine of the Trinity on revelation: “in appealing to revelation Calvin and his followers meant only that like much else the triunity of God is attested in Scripture.” In contrast, Barth means that “revelation *as such*...is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity...(emphasis added).”<sup>31</sup> “We arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity by no other way than that of an analysis of the concept of revelation.”<sup>32</sup>

To put it bluntly, Barth does not derive his doctrine of the Trinity from the Bible. There is a reason why he chooses not to do so. Barth has little faith in the Bible’s teaching about the Trinity.

This doctrine as such does not stand in the texts of the Old and New Testament witness to God’s revelation. It did not arise out of the historical situations to which these texts belong. It is exegesis of these texts in the speech, and this also means in the light of the questions, of a later situation. It belongs to the Church. It is a theologoumenon. It is dogma.<sup>33</sup>

Barth’s faith in the fulness and clarity of Scripture’s testimony to the Trinity suffers in comparison with the faith of the Reformed believer as confessed in Article 9 of the Belgic Confession:

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures that teach us to believe this Holy Trinity are written in many places of the Old Testament, which are not so necessary to enumerate, as to choose

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<sup>31</sup> CD, I/1, p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> CD, I/1, p. 312.

<sup>33</sup> CD, I/1, p. 375. But neither does Barth have much faith in the church’s exegesis of the biblical texts in the “later situation,” i.e., at Nicaea, at Constantinople, and at Chalcedon. For he readily acknowledges that “in the controversies before and after Nicaea a very considerable part was played by very non-theological antipathies in ecclesiastical and civil politics, in court relations, and in national and certainly economic matters as well”; that “the development of the dogma of the Trinity is unquestionably a chapter in the history of the philosophy of later antiquity, and offshoot of Stoic and Neo-Platonic Logos speculation”; and that “the belief in revelation of the Christian world in which this dogma arose was shrouded beyond recognition in the mists of an ancient mystery religion nourished on Orientalisms of every possible kind...” (CD, I/1, p. 376).

them out with discretion and judgment.

The Reformed believer is able to see the doctrine of the Trinity clearly in an abundance of texts *in the Old Testament!* The only obscurity concerns the number of the persons in God. The relative obscurity of the Old Testament concerning the number of persons in the Godhead, the Confession continues, is cleared up in the New Testament so that it is "very plain" that there are "three persons in one only divine essence."

## THE TRUTH OF THE THREEENESS OF GOD

In opposition to Barth, it is necessary to believe that there are three, distinct persons in the being of God. These are three individuals Who say "I." It makes no difference whether person is understood in the ancient sense as an individual subsistence<sup>34</sup>, or in the modern sense of a self-conscious center, or as Barth defines it, "a knowing, willing, acting I."<sup>35</sup> Each of the three persons subsisting in the Godhead is a knowing, willing, acting, and self-conscious individual according to the teaching of Scripture.

With consciousness of Himself and in the consciousness of the Father as another "I," the person of the eternal Son of God says, "I am," in John 8:58. In John 17:5, the person of the preexistent Son puts His "I" in juxtaposition to the "I" of the Father: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

Each of the persons differs from the others by His own, peculiar, personal property. The Father begets the Son and breathes forth the Spirit. The Son is begotten of the Father and breathes forth the Spirit. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Accordingly, each has His own, distinctive, powerful personality with the result that each makes His own, distinctive impression upon the believer. In a remarkable phrase, Article 9 of the Belgic Confession recognizes the believer's familiarity with the three persons "from their operations, *and chiefly by those we feel in ourselves.*"

Insistence upon this genuine threeness is no threat to the oneness, since the oneness is the oneness of being which each of the three persons shares in full. Nor does even the strongest emphasis on the reality of three, distinct, divine subsistences risk tritheism. I wonder whether the warning of tritheism in Barth is not a theological bugbear. The Sabellians were wont to accuse the orthodox of their day of ditheism. Jurgen Moltmann observes that " 'tritheism' was the reproach levied against Christian belief in the

<sup>34</sup> The wording of Boethius' definition, "individual *substance*," is unsatisfactory since "substance" has come to be the equivalent of essence. His definition, therefore, results in the positing of three essences, i.e., three divine beings — three gods.

<sup>35</sup> CD, II/1, p. 284.

Trinity from the very beginning....As the history of theology shows, there has never been a Christian tritheist. Even Barth does not name any...."<sup>36</sup> The oneness of God in the trinity is not maintained by weakening the threeness, just as justice is not done to the threeness at the expense of the oneness. God is truly and emphatically three in one. And God is truly and emphatically one in three.

The reality of the three persons is what I would call the "covenantal Trinity." There is eternal, living fellowship in love among the persons in the Godhead—the mutual knowledge of love and seeking of each other by the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. This is the trinitarian truth of John 1:18: "...the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father...." Eternally begotten in love of the Father, the beloved Son eternally casts Himself in love into the bosom of the Father (the preposition in Greek is not "in" but "into," expressive of the movement of love toward the object of love: "into the bosom of the Father"). This "into the bosom," this embrace of Father and Son, is the Holy Spirit.

This is God. This trinitarian God of fellowship, the only begotten Son "declares," according to John 1:18. Jesus Christ makes known the fellowship of God to the church by giving her to share in it. In love, God begets them unto His children (John 1:12,13). They commune with God in the Spirit as part of the family. This fellowship is then reflected in the life of the church among themselves—in marriage; in family life at home; and in the communion of the saints at church.

Fellowship is impossible for a God of one person. Claude Welch draws out the implication of Barth's denial of the three persons when he says that the "communityness" of Father and Son "does not refer to a fellowship of selves, but to a communityness of God in Himself."<sup>37</sup> But there can be no mention of "communityness" in a God without "selves," only a haunting, boring, lifeless solitariness.

It is not good for God to be alone.

The problem, it seems to me, is to explain how God can speak of Himself both as "I" and as "We." He does. He says, "We." "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26). "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). He says, "I." "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Is. 46:9). "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Is the "I" the personality of the Godhead as He, the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, stands over against and in relation to men as Father (or Judge)? And are the "We" the three persons in their intra-trinitarian life with

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<sup>36</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 203.

each other? Might a faint reflection of this mystery be the family in which there are several persons who say "we" among themselves, but which also has its own "personality" as a whole and faces the outside world (if all is well) as a unified entity, as an "I"?

Whatever our understanding of this may be, Karl Barth got the wrong key in his hand as regards the Trinity. As a result, everything has not come out right.

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# Issues in Hermeneutics

## (2)

*Prof. Herman Hanko*

(In the last issue of the *Journal* we discussed various issues that were current in the field of Hermeneutics. We turn now to a more detailed discussion of some of the positions taken by "conservative" Bible scholars and a positive discussion of the issues involved.)

### REDACTION CRITICISM

As we noticed in the last issue of the *Journal*, many theories have been proposed as ways to interpret Scripture. We are not now interested in the more liberal views which have been held by Bible critics over the years, views which blatantly and openly deny infallible inspiration; we are concerned about the views of those who claim to hold to a conservative position on Scripture, i.e., a position which affirms the inspiration of Scripture and its infallibility, but who adopt some kind of biblical criticism and claim that this is not incompatible with Scripture's infallible inspiration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We do this because we are concerned in these articles, not with outright denials of Scripture's infallible inspiration, but with the Hermeneutical approach of those who claim to confess the truth of inspiration, but hold also to some form of biblical criticism. This is of primary interest to our readers. It is our thesis that the truth of Scripture and a proper Hermeneutics cannot be maintained if one accepts any kind of biblical criticism.

Before we proceed with our discussion, it might be well to define some terms.

One form of biblical criticism currently in favor is called "redaction criticism." Redaction criticism is of particular interest because it embraces many other types of criticism as well.

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In the October 18, 1985 issue of *Christianity Today*, a symposium was published on redaction criticism in which five scholars participated and in which the whole idea of redaction criticism was thoroughly discussed. The participants were Kenneth Kantzer, dean of the Christianity Today Institute and professor of biblical and systematic theology at Trinity Divinity School who moderated the forum; D. A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Divinity School; Harold W. Hoehner, professor of New Testament literature and exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary; Vern S. Poythress, then associate professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia; and David M. Scholer, professor of New Testament and dean of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Downers Grove, Illinois.

A definition of redaction criticism was offered as follows:

A synonym for redacting is editing. Someone who redacts a piece of writing edits it, as a newspaper editor polishes a reporter's news story.

"Criticism" in this case means a study of what these early "editors" did.

Thus redaction criticism is the study of how editing has been done. It's the attempt to ascertain the viewpoint of a gospel writer/editor: How did he select his material? How did he arrange his material? How did he phrase the material and direct it toward particular themes or purposes? Note that we're not talking about the editor creating new material. We're talking about selection and focus (p. 2-1).

One of the participants in the symposium related redaction criticism to other forms of criticism and demonstrates that various forms of criticism are not incompatible with each other; all can be used in the one process of redaction criticism.

Text criticism looks at what happens after the completion of the final product, the actual book of the Bible.

Redaction criticism explores the step before that final editing.

Source criticism looks at the step previous, where the author chooses his sources, usually written.

Form criticism looks at the oral stage in back of that (p. 3-1).

While warning against the excesses and wrong applications of redaction criticism, all the members of the symposium agreed that there was a proper use of this tool in biblical interpretation. For example, the moderator of the symposium writes:

... it is not principles distinctive of redaction criticism that have led to these objectionable conclusions but rather their faulty presuppositions and invalid applications (p. 11-1).

And in the course of the discussion it was observed:

Some critics say that the method of redaction criticism itself is wrong. What's really wrong are some of the presuppositions some redaction critics start with (p. 6-1).

It is striking, however, that one major plea for the use of redaction criticism was the insistence that only in this way can evangelicals effectively communicate with other scholars. In response to the suggestion that, instead of "trying to reclaim the term for use by evangelical scholars," it might be well to "do away with it altogether and use another," the following reactions were given.

I don't think that works.

The term redaction criticism is simply too broadly used in biblical scholarship to try to mount a campaign to do away with it. It's better to define responsible redaction criticism.

... If you want to influence liberal scholarship, you must be able to communicate — and that means using their terms, but defined so we can accept them. If you don't, communication becomes almost impossible (p. 6-1).

It is clear that all the participants agreed to a proper use of redaction criticism with all that implies, even though issuing words of caution.<sup>2</sup>

The viewpoint of redaction criticism (which includes form criticism, source criticism, literary and historical criticism) approaches Scripture from a distinctive viewpoint. It argues that, because God was pleased to use men in the writing of the Scriptures, the proper understanding of Scripture involves a careful and detailed analysis of how they did their writing. This careful analysis involves many different aspects. It involves determining what sources the secondary authors of Scripture used: what written sources and oral sources. It involves determining how Matthew and Luke, e.g., put

<sup>2</sup> One writer in this issue of *Christianity Today* disagreed with redaction criticism: Robert Thomas, Professor of New Testament in Talbot Theological Seminary. He wrote his caveat in a separate article and did not participate in the symposium.

the material they collected together. It involves how the gospel writers depended upon each other's writings (the so-called synoptic problem). It involves the purpose each had for writing — which consideration in turn includes those to whom a particular book of the Bible was addressed and what problem in that group was the chief consideration in writing. It involves a careful analysis of the type of literature they used: whether they used poetry, letter-form, narrative, or prophecy. It involves all the final work and editing which Mark (or any other writer) did in order to put his document in its final form. It is a lengthy and involved study to learn the history of a document and to subject it to careful literary and historical analysis. Without finding answers to all these questions, it is impossible to come to a clear and definite answer to the meaning of Scripture.

### THE CONSERVATIVE DEFENSE OF REDACTION CRITICISM

The question is: How do those who support this method of biblical interpretation square it with their commitment to infallible and inerrant inspiration?

While repeatedly assuring us that they indeed do believe in infallible inspiration, a discussion of this question is not easy to find in their writings. The answer we give, therefore, is, at least in part, our own deductions from what they write.

The argument goes something like this. The church has, from a time very early in the history of the New Testament period, adopted what has been called the "grammatico-historical" method of exegesis. It was first developed by the school in Antioch, practiced by such great preachers as Chrysostom with more or less consistency, firmly maintained by the Reformers and followed by all the great preachers in the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions. It was a method of exegesis which was developed out of the character of Scripture itself. Scripture is, though divinely inspired, a book which was written in human language (the Hebrew of the nation of Israel and the Greek spoken in the world of Christ and the apostles) by human authors for particular and definite purposes. The Psalms were written to be sung in the worship of God in the temple; the letters of Paul were written to historical churches or persons with problems which Paul addressed. Galatians, e.g., was written to the churches in Eastern Asia Minor to combat errors of Judaism which threatened the truth of salvation through the cross of Christ alone. Not only was the language used the common language of the people of the time in which Scripture was written, but the whole setting of Scripture reflects the culture of these times. For example, Jesus, in His parable of the four kinds of soil, spoke of broadcasting seed as it was then done, not as it is done today with tractors and multi-row planters. Furthermore, because God used men to write the Scriptures. God used men

in such a way that their own personality was indelibly impressed upon their writings. Isaiah's soaring prophecies reflect his personality; Paul's close argumentation differs markedly from John's intuitive gifts; David's poetic soul produced poetry of unparalleled beauty, and it is inconceivable that he could write the down-to-earth prophecy of Amos, the herdsman from Tekoa.

And there is more. The men whom God used were not mere automatons who simply wrote by dictation, almost always penning ideas and stories of which they had no knowledge other than through divine inspiration. John was, as he himself testifies, an eyewitness of everything which he wrote. Matthew could very well have consulted the genealogies in the records of Bethlehem in order to construct the genealogy of our Lord which he included in his gospel account. Luke who had no firsthand knowledge of the events of Jesus' life may very well have received some knowledge of the events which he records from others.

Because all this is true, so the argument goes, it is not only legitimate but very essential to know and understand all these things in order to come to a proper understanding of Scripture. One can hardly preach, e.g., on the text, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Psalm 51:7) unless he has also some knowledge of the hyssop plant which was native to Palestine. The grammatico-historical method of exegesis, so long in use in the church and accepted by every orthodox theologian throughout the entire new dispensation, implies that Scripture be interpreted by taking all these things into account. Redaction criticism, if rightly understood and not abused by those who are not committed to destructive criticism which denies infallible inspiration, is nothing else but a more exact application of what is meant by the time-honored method of exegesis called the grammatico-historical method.

In fact, so the argument goes, if you repudiate redaction criticism or literary-historical criticism, you are *ipso facto* committing yourself to a theory of inspiration which denies the great truth that God used men in writing of this magnificent book. You are committing yourself to a dictation theory of inspiration which fails to do justice to what kind of a book Scripture actually is. And, worst of all, you are becoming guilty of the horrendous sin of bibliolatry.

Because, therefore, the grammatico-historical method of exegesis has a long and noble history, because every orthodox theologian of all time has used it, because it alone does justice to the obvious character of Scripture as written by human men, it is that method of biblical interpretation which leads to a correct understanding of Scripture. Redaction criticism is no different essentially from the grammatico-historical method of exegesis. It simply applies the revered grammatico-historical method in some detail. Redaction criticism is the only justifiable way to engage in biblical interpre-

tation.

So goes the defense of redaction criticism.

## THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST REDACTION CRITICISM.

What are we to say about all this?

Let it be clearly understood first of all that we agree with much that has been written about the Scriptures being written in the particular historical setting of old dispensational and early new dispensational times. Not only do we agree with much of all this, but it is an obvious fact that no one of any standing in the whole history of the church has to my knowledge ever held to any kind of dictation theory of inspiration — a theory which simply ignores the fact that God used Moses and Habakkuk, e.g., with all their gifts and abilities, their training and upbringing, their culture and personality to write His Word. The great exegetes and preachers of all ages have held to this view and it would, on the very face of it, be insane to deny it.

We will even go a step further. If all this was not true, Scripture would not really be Scripture. Not only is it the beautiful book that it is because of the way it was written, but it could not be the Word of God to the church of all ages unless it was written in exactly the way God chose to write it.

We agree, therefore, that Obadiah wrote differently than Jonah, that Peter wrote in a way in which James could never write, that each book bears the imprint of the man whom God used to write it. It is too obvious to belabor.

We agree too that Scripture was written in the language of the day, the street language, if you will. It was not written in some unknown tongue. It was not even written in the jargon of professional classes. It was written for "the man in the street," in language which he can understand.

It was also written by people who lived in a particular time in the world's history, were a part of a particular culture, made use of all the historical, geographical, biological, zoological, cultural, and ecclesiastical characteristics of their time. Scripture is full of such references, and the argument need not be pursued.

We also wholeheartedly adopt the obvious truth that Scripture contains various literary genera: poetry, historical narrative, prophecy, etc. God was pleased to write Scripture, not as a mathematical textbook, not as a work in Dogmatics, not as an essay, but in many different literary forms, all of which were used to bring out the truths of revelation in all their riches and beauty.

It is also true that the men whom God used to write the Scriptures received some information from other sources. Peter was surely acquainted with Paul's writings (II Peter 3:15, 16). Matthew may have consulted the

genealogical tables of Bethlehem to write his first chapter. Mark may have received information for his gospel from Peter (see Mark 16:7).<sup>3</sup> The acts of the kings of Israel and Judah recorded for us in the two books of the Kings and the two books of the Chronicles could very well have been written, at least in part, by consulting the written records that were kept as part of the official archives of the kingdom.

And we do not hesitate to affirm that a knowledge of all these things is helpful in understanding the text of Scripture. All this is indeed implied in the grammatico-historical method of exegesis.

What then is our argument? Why are we so insistent that redaction criticism be cast far from us as a plague on exegesis and Scripture?

Before we enter the substance of our answer to redaction criticism, some less important, though crucial points must be raised.

The members of the symposium referred to above speak again and again of the dangers of redaction criticism even though, without exception, they are prepared to adopt it. The moderator of the panel, in a concluding essay, entitles his article, "Redaction Criticism: Handle With Care." The fear of danger is not only rooted in the fact that the term "redaction criticism" is used by destructive critics who give to the term freight which more conservative Bible scholars refuse to carry. The concept itself is fraught with danger. One can, so it is argued, carry this method itself too far even though one rejects the presuppositions of liberal Bible critics. It is a worthwhile tool, but handle with care. It is a good hammer, but don't pound too hard. This sort of an argument does not impress me. When we are dealing with Scripture, God gives us a right method to interpret His Word. There are right methods and wrong methods. Use the right one with all your vigor and enthusiasm. Shun the wrong one like a plague. If redaction criticism is right, use it without fear. I would find it extraordinarily difficult to teach my students a right method, but then try to show them how they must handle it with care lest it lead to a denial of infallible inspiration. The very fact that it can be used wrongly ought to give one pause before he employs this method.

Another difficulty with redaction criticism is its obvious limitations. It simply is a fact that the answers to the questions which redaction criticism seeks to find are often unavailable to us. We do not know with certainty (or even at all) who wrote many of the books of the Bible. We do not know who wrote Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, many of the Psalms, Hebrews, and others. We can make educated guesses, and many

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<sup>3</sup> The intensely personal and moving touch of the words, "and Peter" may very well have been branded on the soul of the disciple of the Lord who had denied Him so shamelessly and who received these words from the mouth of the risen Lord as balm to his wounded soul.

have been made. But the answers are as varied as the men who engage in guessing.

We do not know why many of the books were written, if we are considering the matter from a purely historical viewpoint. We do not know why Esther was written by whomever wrote it if there was a historical reason for writing it rooted in the times and circumstances of Israel's history. We may guess and may even come up with reasonable answers. But we do not know, we just do not know.

We can never be sure about the sources (if any) which were consulted in the writing of books. Maybe Matthew did consult the genealogical records of Bethlehem, but who can tell with certainty? He did not follow them slavishly — that we know. Maybe Mark did get some of his information from Peter, but we can never be certain. What role did oral tradition play in the formation of books? We cannot tell.

It might be well to pause here and take note of the fact that in connection with this matter of sources, there is a hidden presupposition of some importance. That presupposition is that the men whom God used to write Scripture wrote *everything* with the knowledge which they acquired from various sources. That is, they wrote only what they knew. But this is not true and is incompatible with divine inspiration.

If we are wholeheartedly convinced that God is the Author of Scripture, there is no reason in the whole world why God could not have communicated to those whom he used to write the Scriptures things which they did not know apart from direct communication from God. Even Isaiah was astounded at the truth of the suffering Servant of Jehovah (Isaiah 53:1). The prophets searched diligently their own writings in order to understand them better, for they themselves did not fully know what they were inspired to write (I Peter 1:10-12). That God revealed to them many truths concerning the work of salvation in Christ which they could never have known from a thousand sources is an obvious fact. That God revealed to them historical data from the past or from their own times that came to them directly by inspiration is not only possible, but almost certainly true. Moses surely received information concerning God's work of creation which could not have been known in any other way than through direct revelation from God. Sources containing this information were simply non-existent.

At any rate, learned men may write lengthy treatises speculating about all sorts of things concerning sources, but the interpretation of Scripture does not ultimately depend upon this.

That this is true is evident from the fact that a great deal of knowledge which we have acquired which is relatively certain concerning the background of Scripture has only recently been discovered. If our understanding of Scripture depends upon all this, then it follows with inescapable logic that

the church for centuries and even millennia did not really know what Scripture was all about. They had no access to such knowledge.

Even if the matter is a relative one, it remains an unanswered question whether the proponents of redaction criticism with their wheelbarrows full of books about sources and literary genera have a better understanding of Scripture than Calvin did. I think not.

These things are not essential to an understanding of Scripture. And they are not essential simply because God did not see fit to reveal them to us. If a knowledge of the author of a book is crucial and decisive to an understanding of it, why did not God (Who gave us Scripture to be understood) tell us who wrote Hebrews? Now you can have your pick. Paul? Apollos? Peter? Aquila? Priscilla? All have been suggested. Every one has been defended in a most learned way. But we do not know. We cannot tell.

And this brings up the important point of Scripture's perspicuity. While it is not our purpose to discuss this doctrine in detail at this point, the position of redaction criticism touches on this truth. If the redaction critics are right, then it simply is true that the uneducated and untrained child of God cannot understand Scripture. We have discussed this already in our first article, and we need not repeat what was said there. But let this clearly be understood. If one must find his way through the labyrinthian passages of redaction criticism one gets lost no matter what the quality of his scholarship. It is a matter of every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Everyone disagrees with everyone else not only, but no one can follow the involved and convoluted arguments in favor of this theory of dependence or that one. It is a hopeless task. Not only has the Bible been effectively taken out of the hands of the untrained child of God, but it has even been taken out of the hands of the man who devotes his life to a study of Scripture, for the questions that need answering have no answers. The Bible remains an enigma. The stirring cry of Tyndale then takes on a hollow ring: "If God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth a plow shall know more of the Scriptures than thou doest."

The issue of perspicuity is an important one. Herschel P. Smith writes of "Form Criticism and Reformed Theology" and addresses himself to that question.

There is no question that to require a reader to know the "history" of a document and to play an input and feedback game with the text to arrive at the correct understanding is diametrically opposed to the Reformed doctrine of the Scripture. . . .

If understanding is necessary for salvation, and if we cannot arrive at the correct understanding of Scripture without the aid

of elite theologians and their literature games, then we have returned to the days in which a "Romish" clergy can portion out salvation as deemed appropriate.<sup>4</sup>

Smith is correct. The Reformed doctrine of Scripture means that God gave His Word to the least of His saints. It is theirs to know it and understand it. Any theory that takes Scripture from them is anathema.

## THE CRUCIAL ISSUE

Yet all of these matters do not bring us to the heart of the issue.

We can perhaps call the method of Hermeneutics which has been used in the church throughout the ages the grammatico-historical method, but this really does not do justice to what exegesis is all about. I am not sure that a better name can be found, nor is that really necessary, for we are not all that concerned about names as such. Perhaps the name grammatico-historical-spiritual method is better, although it is not immediately evident from the addition of the word "spiritual" what we have in mind.

The point is that exegesis has as its primary goal the study of Scripture which results in learning the meaning of the Holy Spirit. And this is what we mean by the addition of the word "spiritual."

The rules for the interpretation of Scripture are determined by Scripture itself. The character of Scripture determines how Scripture must be interpreted.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper discusses in his Encyclopedia the whole field of Hermeneutics and speaks of the fact that, after all, the science of Hermeneutics can be applied to any written and spoken word. But he faces the question of whether it is possible to speak of Hermeneutics as a theological science in distinction from Hermeneutics in other branches of learning. He argues that it is indeed correct to speak of Hermeneutics as a theological science because of the unique character of Scripture. He writes:

Just exactly therefore, it is difficult to see with what right one would maintain Hermeneutics as a theological science when one emphasizes the rule that Hermeneutics, in relation to the writings of the Old and New Testaments, is and must be the same as for other writings. Hermeneutics is applicable in each science which has to do with texts, but in the organism of science it has its own proper place only in the science of Philology. To the remaining sciences is hardly to be applied what the science of Philology finds in it. Thus if nothing else takes place in the exegesis of Holy Scripture than that one applies philological

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<sup>4</sup> The Trinity Review, Number 58, November/December, 1987.

Hermeneutics to it, then there can be even less talk of a theological than of a medical, juridical or physical Hermeneutics. Then Hermeneutics would be for theology, just as for jurisprudence, nothing but a helping-science borrowed from elsewhere which is not connected organically with the principle of theology. In opposition to this however, is the historical fact that Hermeneutics, much more yet than in Philology, has found her students exactly in the theological discipline; so much so that upon hearing of Hermeneutics, not a few think exclusively of Biblical Hermeneutics. If Hermeneutics can also in the future maintain itself as a theological branch of study, then it must be demonstrated that an element comes into play in the interpretation of Holy Scripture with which general Hermeneutics cannot reckon since this element does not exist in the interpretation of other documents; and further that the treatment of this element belongs not to Philology but to Theology. This element is due exclusively to the special factor which connects itself to natural life in the area of revelation without proceeding out of this natural life. First because of it surely this element would be "in a class by itself" from the elements with which general Hermeneutics has to reckon; and exactly out of this "unique class" proceeds then the right to speak of a theological or Scriptural Hermeneutics.<sup>5</sup>

The point which Kuyper is making is that the unique character of Scripture gives to Hermeneutics, when applied to Scripture, its own unique principles.

Now it is evident that the principles of Hermeneutics are not found explicitly stated in Scripture. This would be out of keeping with the nature of Scripture, which is the written record of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Scripture is not a textbook, not even of Hermeneutics.

But the character of Scripture determines the rules for its interpretation. This is, of course, true of any book. In a way, the rules for the interpretation of a discourse, whether written or oral, are unconsciously applied by the hearer or reader. They are implicit in the language itself and in the fact that language is a means of communication. And, while mostly one is unconscious of the rules of interpretation which he subjectively applies to any discourse, these naively applied principles can be explicated, organized, and examined.

The same is true of Scripture. Scripture is written in human language with all the rules of grammar, syntax, and word usage which apply to any

<sup>5</sup> The translation is mine. The Dutch quotation is taken from the syllabus used in our Seminary and prepared by Rev. Herman Hoeksema.

language. But in connection with Scripture, we face an additional fact, a fact which we are forced to face because of Scripture's unique character. ✓ Scripture is, on the surface, like any other book in the world. But at the same time it is also the written record of the revelation of God in Christ given by the infallible inspiration of the Spirit.

( An important question which arises in this connection is: How do we know that Scripture is infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit?

The answer to this question has a great deal to do with our discussion of Hermeneutics, and we ought to give an answer to that question before we go on in our discussion.

The answer to this question of how we know that Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit is the testimony of Scripture itself. It is not an exaggeration to say that every page of Scripture testifies of its divine origin. One cannot read the Scriptures without hearing this testimony ringing loud and clear. Every child of God who has taken the Scriptures in his hand will testify of this.

Yet, at the same time, this presents a problem. Critics have argued that this line of argumentation is basically a false argument. It is, so it is claimed, a *petitio*, i.e., an argument in a circle. How do we know that Scripture is God-breathed? Scripture itself says so. But how can we believe that this testimony of Scripture concerning its divine inspiration is true? Is it not possible that Scripture makes a claim for itself that is not true? The answer is: No, for Scripture is infallible, and its testimony that it has come from God is itself infallibly inspired. But this is arguing in a circle. We presuppose what we are trying to prove. We accept as true that which needs to be demonstrated. Hence, Scripture's claim that it is the Word of God has to be proved on other grounds than Scripture's own claim.

Now this argument is, *in itself*, true. From a certain point of view we admit its cogency. But that is by no means the whole story.

And yet, this argument has apparently had force with students of Scripture. And by virtue of the force of the argument, efforts are continuously being made to prove, with evidence *outside of Scripture* that Scripture's claims are true.

Even "conservative" students of Scripture fall repeatedly into this trap. One can find many who attempt to "prove" Scripture's divine inspiration by means of appeal to historical and literary criticism. They will, e.g., argue that Scripture is trustworthy in all its *historical* claims as is evident from the findings of archeology. They will argue that countless men throughout the centuries have accepted Scripture as God-breathed. They will go into detailed argumentation to prove that the gospels, in fact, do not contradict themselves, that there is an abundance of historical material, taken from secular writings of the period in which Scripture was written,

which demonstrates the truth of Scripture's claim.

A good example of this is to be found in the discussions with which almost every recent commentary is introduced concerning the authorship of a given book. The epistle of Paul to the Colossians is said, in the sacred writing itself, to be written by Paul: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse. . ." (Colossians 1:1, 2). Now if Scripture is infallibly inspired, then these words are also infallibly inspired. That means, obviously, that because the text says so, this book was written by Paul. And yet commentators will go to great lengths to refute the attacks of higher critics which question Pauline authorship. They will marshal abundant evidence that proves, from an historical and literary viewpoint, that Paul indeed wrote this epistle. In other words, the mere testimony of Scripture is not enough. Data outside Scripture have to be summoned to prove the truth of the simple statement in Colossians 1:1, 2.

It is this whole method of interpretation which we categorically reject. And it is our contention and firm conviction that this line of argumentation basically destroys biblical interpretation. Defenders of this view may indeed come to the conclusion that Paul surely did write Colossians, but their conclusions are based on a line of argumentation which lies outside Scripture's own testimony. They may even cite this proof from literary and historical considerations as additional proof that the Scripture is accurate in all its says. But we repudiate this nonetheless as a major and fundamental error which concedes the argument of higher criticism. We refuse to accept the Pauline authorship of Colossians on any other basis than the simple fact that the text itself says so.

The error which is made is important and crucial for the argument.

By "proving" with historical and literary arguments that Colossians was written by Paul, critics simply affirm that the proof lies outside of Scripture itself. This is an implicit denial of infallible inspiration, all caveats to the contrary notwithstanding.

This line of argumentation is an implicit denial of infallible inspiration because it is a basically rationalistic approach to Scripture; i.e., it is an effort to place Scripture under the judgment of our own minds. It is an effort to subject Scripture's own claims to our rational scrutiny and prove by means of rationalistic argumentation that which Scripture itself claims for itself.

If this approach is consistently followed, the results will be that we often find the evidence less than satisfactory, and we have entered the morass of higher and destructive criticism.

It is said by those who defend this approach that this is the only way to deal with genuine higher critics who make misuse of redaction criticism.

We must, so it is said, meet the arguments of the unbelievers and those who deny infallible inspiration. It is said that if we refuse to follow this line of argumentation, we take a less than scholarly approach and make our writings irrelevant to current discussions in the field of Hermeneutics.

In answer to the question of whether we ought to use the terminology of the higher critics, specifically the term "redaction criticism," D. A. Carson argued, "However — and this is an important point — by mixing it up in the international scholarly marketplace, we can help provide not only good scholarship, but a buffer for the next generation of students coming through. . . . The writings of Leon Morris. . . gave me more credence with my professors than I might have had otherwise."<sup>6</sup>

The Reformed student of Scripture believes firmly in scholarship. Scripture itself requires the most careful study simply because it is the Word of God. But if scholarship means concessions to higher criticism, then scholarship is anathema to the Reformed man. If scholarship according to higher critical standards is the only way to receive recognition in scholarly circles and Journals, the price required is too high to pay. The truth of God's Word may not be sacrificed on the altar of scholarship. And he who is willing to do this is unfaithful to God's Word and to God Himself. Those who are willing to argue with higher critics on their ground allow the enemy to choose the battlefield. And every officer in every army knows that to allow the enemy to choose the battlefield spells disaster. If we are relentlessly committed to defend Scripture on the fundamentally rationalistic grounds of higher criticism, we have lost the battle before we begin.

What is the proper approach?

How do we know that Scripture is the Word of God? How do we know this with that total conviction that brings the child of God into humble submission to the Word? How do we know this truth so that we are willing to lay down our life for it? Because some skilled and knowledgeable redaction critic has proved it with an involved argument from literary and historical sources? God forbid.

We know this by faith. Faith believes the Scriptures and the testimony of the Scriptures. Faith alone bows in humble submission to God's Word.

This is not to say that the argument of the critics that to rest one's case on Scripture's testimony is a *petitio*, an arguing in a circle, is correct. Basically we reject that charge. To accept Scripture on the basis of the testimony of Scripture itself is not, in any true sense, a *petitio*. This can be easily demonstrated. Even in a court of law the self-testimony of a man or of a document is accepted as true unless there is overwhelming and utterly convincing proof to the contrary. Then a man is proved to be guilty of

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<sup>6</sup> *Christianity Today*, *op. cit.*, p. 7-1.

perjury and a document is branded a forgery. And those are after all the options. Scripture is what it claims to be or it is a forgery. One or the other must be true. When a book claims to be written by a certain author, when I pen to this article my name, it is accepted by all that the claim is true. It is not considered necessary to summon all kinds of other evidence, whether literary or historical, to substantiate the claim. The claim stands and is only rejected when there is unassailable proof that the claim is false. Such self-testimony is the strongest kind of evidence which can be presented.

Why is it then that when the Bible claims to be written by God this is rejected? Why is every other book in the world accepted as written by the man who says he wrote it, and the claims of the Bible are rejected? The answer, very simply, is: Unbelief. One either accepts the claims of Scripture at face value or one rejects these claims. To attempt to support Scripture's claims by appeals to historical and literary arguments is basically to reject what Scripture itself says.

But this very truth makes the whole matter of faith the crucial issue. The battle which has been joined in our century is not a battle between two opposing groups in which battle the outcome is determined by who has the best arguments. The battle is simply one phase of the great battle of the ages, the battle between faith and unbelief. There the battle must be fought. And that is why faith can never be vanquished, for faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

That immediately brings up also the question of what we mean when we speak of faith. What is the faith which accepts without doubt and questioning the Scriptures as God's very Word?

Various definitions of faith have been offered over the years. Some explain faith to be the acceptance of that which is unprovable. While, of course, the question is: What is meant by "unprovable," we reject that definition. It is argued, e.g., that the doctrine of the trinity cannot be proved, but we accept it nonetheless. And what is meant is, obviously, that the doctrine of the trinity cannot be proved by any line of rationalistic argumentation. So we accept it on other grounds.

And while it is true that we accept the doctrine of the trinity on the grounds that Scripture teaches it, nevertheless, we must not think that this constitutes the basic idea of faith.

Some who wish to emphasize the idea of faith as trust or confidence use other figures. A grade-school teacher once illustrated faith to her class by saying that when we put a letter into a mail box we lose control of the letter, but nevertheless expect that it will arrive at its destination because we have faith (i.e., trust and confidence) in the postal service. And while it is true that faith is such trust, this is not the essence of faith either.

The Scriptures teach that faith is fundamentally the living bond that

unites the elect child of God to Christ. The knowledge of faith and the confidence of faith both arise out of this fundamental characteristic of faith. By faith we are united to Christ in Whom are all the blessings of salvation. By faith we belong to Him, live in Him and out of Him, receive all our salvation from Him, and rest upon Him in life and in death. By faith we are incorporated into the body of Christ and become members of that body. Only when that aspect of faith is understood, can we also understand why faith is so essential to our discussion.

✓ Faith is the *proof* then that Scripture is the Word of God. Perhaps that can be illustrated. The knowledge of faith is not an abstract, theological “scholarly” knowledge which resembles our knowledge of the Pythagorean Theorem. The knowledge that is a part of faith, just because faith is the living bond between the believer and Christ, is a personal and intimate knowledge of fellowship and communion. It is the knowledge from personal acquaintance. It is the knowledge of friendship. It is the knowledge that a husband and wife have of each other. It is a knowledge that rests on infinitely higher “proof” than rationalistic argumentation.

If I am standing in the rain waiting for a bus, cold, wet, shivering, and wretchedly uncomfortable, and someone comes to me and asks for proof that it is raining, my answer would be, provided that I could restrain myself from hitting him in the nose: If you cannot tell that it is raining when you stand there as I do, wet and miserable, there is no proof which I can muster which will convince you that it is raining.

Or to use even a more appropriate figure: if I am sitting on the sofa with my wife talking with her about things of importance to the family, and someone has the courage to ask me for proof that the woman with whom I am speaking is my wife, then my response is not a long line of rational proof that she is indeed my wife, which includes hauling out our marriage license and various pictures of my wife taken at the wedding. My answer is: I know with such total certainty that she is my wife that if you cannot believe this, there is no line of proof which can convince you of it.

When a reporter once asked a prominent preacher for his opinion of the then current “God-is-dead” theology, his response was, appropriately, “I know He is not, for I talked with Him just this morning.”

If a critic had come to Adam in Paradise I and asked him for proof that God exists, Adam would have been compelled to say: “If you cannot hear His voice in the singing of the birds, in the shining of the sun, in the trees and flowers and animals, how can I find proof that will convince you?”

Faith brings the believer into communion with Christ, and through Christ with God. It is that intimate and personal fellowship which *knows* God. Faith hears the Word of God in Scripture. Faith recognizes it as God’s Word. Faith has no doubts about it at all, for God speaks to Him.

How crucial and important this is.

Faith is the power of salvation. The one who has faith has salvation. The one who has no faith has no salvation. The unbeliever, void of faith, is the enemy of God and of His Christ. He hates God, hates His Word, hates all that belongs to God. This is what we all are in ourselves. To be saved is to be given that priceless gift of faith. It is to have hatred and rebellion, sin and opposition to God forever banished from our lives. It is to be brought into fellowship with God and into submission to His Word. It is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent. It is to have eternal life.

It is that faith which receives Scripture as God's Word, simply because God says it is His Word. Faith makes this possible. Faith removes rebellion and opposition. Faith knows because faith is worked by the Holy Spirit. We receive the Scriptures, therefore, as God's Word, as all the Reformed Confessions testify, because of the objective testimony of the Spirit in the Word itself and the subjective testimony of the Spirit in our hearts:

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling (Belgic Confession, Art. V).

If I am separated by circumstances from my wife and I receive a letter from her, I need not summon all kinds of evidence from sources outside the letter itself to prove that indeed the letter is from her. I know, with an unassailable certainty, that she has written it. To enter into endless discussions concerning the authenticity of the letter would prevent me from hearing what the letter says and would cast doubt and suspicion on her. The Scriptures are that kind of a letter, a love letter from the Bridegroom in heaven to His beloved bride. His bride takes that letter with joy and receives it from Him. She knows it is His, for His love has been shed abroad in her heart.

It reminds me of a story. An old minister was preaching on the Scriptures as the Word of Christ when he was interrupted by a critic who scornfully asked for proof for his assertions, proof that the Bible was indeed Christ's very Word. The minister responded rather gently, but much to the point: "I understand why you have these questions. You have been opening and reading someone else's mail."

The conclusion is that the correct Hermeneutical principle of interpretation is not simply the grammatico-historical method, but the spiritual-grammatico-historical method.

This principle has many implications for the true method of interpreting Scripture. But this must wait for a further article.

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## Book Reviews

**An Ember Still Glowing: Humankind as the Image of God**, by Harry R. Boer. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990. 187 pages. Paper. \$14.95. (Reviewed by Prof. David J. Engelsma.)

In 1983, Christian Reformed theologian Harry R. Boer wrote *The Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans). The book was a denial of the doctrine of reprobation as taught by the Reformed creed, the Canons of Dordt. Toward the end of the book, Boer noted the obvious fact that denial of reprobation as an eternal decree appointing certain men to damnation has implications for the doctrine of election. He hinted at a future work on election that would spell out these implications:

*Obviously, my unqualified rejection of the doctrine of reprobation is bound to affect my view of election if only because for me the electing God is seen not to be a reprobating God. I therefore did not say that I had no reservations on the Dortian doctrine of election (in his gravamen against the doctrine of reprobation in the*

*Canons to the Christian Reformed Synod of 1977—DJE), but that I stand wholly committed to the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men—which I understand to be the basis of election....What bearing such rejection (of eternal reprobation—DJE) might have had on the Reformed doctrine of election could have been taken up as the need for this might press itself upon the church once the rejection had taken place (The Doctrine of Reprobation, p. 67).*

*An Ember Still Glowing* makes plain the implications for election of the denial of reprobation as an eternal decree.

The main subject, however, is not election, but the image of God. All mankind is the image of God. Every human shares in this image by virtue of being human. Although the fall into sin has adversely affected the image, every human still possesses the image as a measure of goodness and as the spiritual ability to respond positively to God as God offers Himself and salvation to humans, not only in the gospel but also in the revelation of Himself in creation. This goodness and spiritual ability remaining in every man

from creation is the "ember still glowing":

*We must here face quite explicitly a central thesis of this book. It is that Man as imago Dei—and therefore all participants in the imago, that is, all members of the human race—has the competence to respond affirmatively to the proclamation of the gospel. Every hearer of the gospel has the spiritual resource to believe the gospel and become a living member of the body of Christ. In this sense, he can decide to be born again (p. 85).*

Taking his stand on this understanding of man as the image of God, Boer launches an all-out assault upon the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed faith confessed in the Canons of Dordt: "The pages that follow test basic Reformed teachings by this standard. I have found again and again that these teachings do not in fact stand up under examination (p. ix)." Because of the glowing ember in every man, "the expression 'total depravity' as applied to Man must be viewed as biblically, religiously, and theologically untenable" (p. 55). Whereas the Reformed faith has taught salvation by effectual calling and irresistible grace, "in the thesis here propounded, the addressee can yield to the effectuating Spirit; he can also resist and reject him" (p. 94). Comfort for an African concerned about the salvation of his ancestors who died in their paganism consists of the question, "Did Jesus not die for all mankind?" (pp. 107, 108)

Boer reserves his fiercest denunciation for the doctrine of an eternal decree of predestination. The Reformed doctrine of predestination has placed the proclamation of the gospel "under a fearful disadvantage" (p. 74). The problem is not only the "horrible" doctrine of reprobation, but also "election in its classic formulation" as a decree referring to "a fixed and unchangeable number of persons" (p. 75). Reprobation can be ignored, "because the Bible does not teach it" (p. 75). The Bible does teach election. However, the meaning of election is quite different from that presented in "Reformed scholasticism," i.e., the Reformed creeds. Now Boer drops the other shoe. Election is not an eternal decree at all, but an act of God in time. It is not a choice of individuals, but a choice of Christ and of the church made up of those who believe in Him:

*There is no indication...that "the elect" are referred to as individual persons who are taken up in an eternal decree of God and thus distinguished from the reprobate (p. 177).*

Rather, "believers...see themselves elect in Christ as the inevitable consequence of genuine faith" (p. 179).

This view of election ties in with the ember still glowing in every man in this way that, rather than faith's being dependent upon God's eternal, gracious election of some particular persons (as Reformed orthodoxy has taught), election depends upon faith:

...every human being has the capacity for faith in Christ. There is no question here of a secret divine decree destining some for salvation and others for perdition. However laden with consequence in eternity faith and unbelief may be, they are not grounded in a pre-creational divine decree. Both take their rise in time. Whoever hears the gospel is, because of his sinful nature, disposed to reject it, but because of the light and life vouchsafed to him as participating in the *imago Dei*, he is also capable of believing it. The intent of the witnessing Spirit is the same for all—it is salvation (p. 96).

The perseverance of the saints undergoes transformation as well, but in a surprising, if not astounding, manner. In the theology of Harry R. Boer, it no longer refers to the preservation unto eternal life of a certain, definite number. For there is no certain number of the elect. But neither does Boer adopt the Arminian option — the possibility of the perishing of the saints. Instead, he proposes sheer universalism, the eventual salvation of all of mankind. Those who never heard the gospel can be saved by their positive response with the glowing ember of their free will to the revelation of God in creation:

*The possibility of salvation outside the church and knowledge of the gospel lies in the reality of the existence of the imago Dei (p. 121).*

The last word in the book is the hope of the “revelation of God’s possibil-

ity,” namely that God will “redeem the entirety of mankind, person for person” on the other side of eternity (pp. 185, 187). This hope is born of Boer’s central thesis, for in the view that all mankind without exception makes up the image of God is implied God’s purpose for the salvation of all mankind without exception. He intends the final glory of His entire image.

If one asks whether all of this does not constitute rejection of the Reformed faith, Boer replies that these basic Reformed teachings “have been overtaken as stages in the development of doctrine and as such must be replaced” (p. ix). This change in doctrinal truth stands closely related to the changing of God Himself Who is always adapting Himself to new situations in time (cf. pp. 131ff. on “The Ad Hoc God”).

There are several features of *An Ember* and its author that a Reformed man or woman appreciates. One is their candor. This is refreshing in an age in which men, chafing under the yoke of the Reformed creeds, especially the Canons, and feeling themselves oppressed by their vow in signing the Formula of Subscription, express their disagreement with the “five points of Calvinism” with great caution, out of the public eye, and by means of carefully veiled and ambiguous statements. Boer is open and forthright. He detests the doctrines of sovereign grace confessed in the Canons and says so in plain language. Of course, he has a problem too, for as a Christian Re-

formed minister he has sworn to the church that he heartily believes and is persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the Reformed creeds, notably the Canons, do fully agree with the Word of God; that he will diligently teach and faithfully defend these doctrines; and that he will never contradict them, by preaching or writing. But he, at least, is candid about breaking his vow.

Boer's recognition of the logical nature of truth is a second feature of the book that commends itself to the Reformed reader. For a long time now in the Reformed community, men have justified the intrusion into the Reformed body of truth of elements that stand diametrically opposed to the basic doctrines of the Reformed faith on the ground that truth is illogical and contradictory. Specifically, the paradoxical nature of truth was supposed to validate "common grace" both in its teaching that the God of predestination yet desires to save all men and in its teaching that totally depraved man is nevertheless good and able to perform good works. Boer will have none of this. In a chapter entitled, "Why 'Common Grace'?" Boer demonstrates that the doctrine of common grace is an artificial invention of some Reformed theologians to palliate the doctrine of total depravity. Common grace, says Boer correctly, exactly means that there is not one single person who is, in reality, totally depraved:

*No person has ever, in the experi-*

*enced reality of life, been totally depraved. . . . For none was) utterly bereft of common-grace goodness. The idea of a totally depraved humanity always hovers in the Reformed theological mind as a disembodied specter that it can never come to grips with (p. 61).*

Likewise, Boer shows that rejection of reprobation entails rejection of election as the eternal choice of a certain, definite number. If God has not reprobated some in the eternal decree, either He has chosen all or there is no eternal decree of election.

Boer sums up this aspect of his argument by stating, "The Canons, whatever one may think of them, are a masterpiece of logical unity. . . . The Canons of Dort constitute one indivisible piece" (p. 167). To this one can only respond, "Whatever one may think of the theology of Harry Boer, this statement is honest theological analysis."

Also, the book is useful for pointing out the theological future of the Reformed churches in the United States that have lost their first love for the gospel of sovereign grace. There will be those who attempt to deal with the book by dismissing the author as a maverick theologian. They will only be fooling themselves. The theological thinking of Harry Boer is where theology "is at" in the most prominent Reformed churches today. The roster of theologians recommending *An Ember* on the back cover of the book shows this: Hendrikus Berkhof; Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Heiko

A. Oberman; and Gabriel Fackre.

Where nominally Reformed theology "is at" today, however, is quite unimpressive. The theology of *An Ember* represents no development of doctrine, but a transparent repudiation of the Reformed faith for the rankest Arminianism with a curious addition of outright universalism.

This does not minimize the significance of the work. *An Ember* is the first explicit, public defense of free will by a leading Christian Reformed theologian.

As for the foundation upon which Dr. Boer builds his case — the image of God in fallen man — fallen man has lost the image. The unregenerate is wholly devoid of the image. Neither is he partially salvaged from his condition of spiritual death by "common grace." The natural man is totally depraved. The glorious flame of the image — righteousness, knowledge, and holiness — went out that dreadful day in a garden eastward in Eden. No ember glows. This is the misery of man. Nothing less. Even the glimmering of natural light — our humanity — is changed into spiritual darkness.

The salvation of the sinner, therefore, is not a matter of the sinner's turning up somewhat the glow of his ember. Neither is it a matter of Jesus' fanning the glowing ember into a lively fire. But Jesus must cause the light of spiritual life to shine in one who is only darkness and spiritual death. Jesus Christ must re-create the sinner in the image

of God by a work that is not a whit less sovereign than the work of creation in the beginning. And the sinner has as little to do with his re-creation as Adam had to do with his creation.

This is to say that salvation is by the sovereign grace of God, not by the free will of man.

My proof, I choose deliberately. It is the Reformed creed to which I am gladly bound, but which also binds Harry R. Boer as a Reformed officebearer, though it be against his will:

*... for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not: where St. John calleth men darkness. Therefore we reject all that is taught repugnant to this, concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin; and has nothing of himself, unless it is given from heaven (Belgic Confession, Article 14).*

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*Introduction to the Study of Dogmatics*, by Hendrikus Berkhof (translated by John Vriend); Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985; 114pp., \$7.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

Since Liberalism has swept the church, extensive changes have taken place in the field of Dogmatics. These changes have infiltrated a great deal of evangelical and Reformed theology. Its chief characteristic is that

Dogmatics has been cut loose from its firm anchorage in an infallibly inspired Scripture and has been subjectivized completely. Dogmatics has become an instance of "every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." This book, by a noted Dutch theologian, is an astonishing instance of such a Dogmatics. Although I was aware of the devastating effects of liberal thought in the field of dogmatic studies, this book left me astonished and saddened that even Reformed theology could come to such a pass.

The book, as is obvious from its length, is not intended to be a treatment of Dogmatics as such; it is rather intended to be an *introduction* to Dogmatics, i.e., a setting down of the framework within which Dogmatics must be done. But, of course, such an introduction is crucially important, for it sets the entire direction of further Dogmatic studies.

Basically, the book is divided into three main sections: the first deals with (to quote the blurb on the cover) "the context within the perspectives of faith and science, and in time and space." The second deals with "the foundations of dogmatics — that is, the framework within which dogmatics should be studied." And the third section deals with "material dogmatics — the building on that foundation." Berkhof briefly treats the main subjects of Dogmatics which he considers to be: God, Christ, Israel, the Holy Spirit and other lesser themes such as, the atonement, the personal ap-

propriation of salvation, the church, and eschatology.

The author gives himself away immediately when he defines Dogmatics as "systematic and thorough reflection on the content of the relationship which God has established with us in Christ" (p. 9). The key phrase here is, "reflection on the content of the relationship." No mention is made here of Scripture and the Confessions.

One may well ask: What role does the Bible play in constructing one's Dogmatics? The author speaks of this in a number of places. We quote two sections which precisely express Berkhof's view of Scripture. The first is taken from page 16.

*For the believing Christian, of whatever church or creeds, the Bible will — perhaps not in a psychological-chronological sense but certainly logically — be the foremost source of nourishment. That is where it started: there one finds the center, Jesus Christ; there one can hear the speech of the primary witnesses concerning the Way on which we have to travel.*

Notice that no mention is made of the Bible as the infallibly inspired record to the revelation of Jehovah God in Christ. Rather the Bible is "the speech of the primary witnesses." It is the opinion of men who have somehow heard God and who have taken the time to record what they heard.

On page 18 we find the following:

*The Bible is a library, full of*

*divergent and sometimes, to our minds, even contradictory viewpoints. People who take its authority to be a kind of law that requires that we read the Bible as a book of precise and internally coherent information can no longer claim they are reading the text for what it really says, and are bound to mess up exegetically. The authority of the Bible is not the authority of a code but that of a road. For it describes the way God pointed to and went with his people — before Christ, in Christ, and in the earliest churches. Not everything on that journey by far has the same authority for us.*

This rejection of Scripture as the infallible Word of God and as the foundation of all Dogmatics is found explicitly also on pages 77, 78. The result is that the revelation of God is interpreted in the Barthian sense of the word, i.e., as a personal encounter between the speaking God and the man who hears God's Word and reacts to it (pp. 78-81).

So the Bible does nothing else but give to us some information about what ancient peoples thought about God and His Christ. Dogmatics is effectively cut loose from Scripture. Scripture only serves as a handbook of interesting observations concerning other people's religious experiences.

But Berkhof is not satisfied with this. He must also cut us off from the confessions of the church.

*To speak of "Scripture and Confession" as the basis of preaching, faith, and also dogmatics may have a liberating as well as a*

*shackling effect upon dogmatics. If the idea is that our understanding of the faith has no authority in itself but spurs us on to a way of listening to the Scriptures (man's record of his religious experiences, HH) that transcends the confession, then the dogmatician knows himself called to freedom within the tradition of his confession and entitled, if necessary, to contradict his own confession from within the Bible. . . .*

*. . . Dogmaticians are expected to play not the role of church-ideologists but that of pioneers and pathfinders. They are at liberty, if they think it necessary, to criticize their own tradition. . . .*

*When the dogmatician places himself above the confessions, he places himself outside the reality in terms of which, and on which, it is his calling to reflect. He must gratefully think through and give expression to the soundings-in-depth and the related decisions of his church or confession. But they have no final authority. Scripture is above them and may, through the medium of dogmatic reflection, complement, criticize, and relativize the confessional tradition (pp. 19, 20).*

And so one has cut himself free from Scripture and from the guidance of the Spirit of truth in the church of the past. His moorings are gone; he has no longer a firm ground into which to sink his anchor. What now?

Well, Berkhof has the answer.

The dogmatician must do all sorts of things before he can formulate his Dogmatics. He must have a

true ecumenical experience so that he familiarizes himself with every conceivable ecclesiastical tradition in order to appreciate fully what many others have contributed to the dogmatic enterprise (pp. 21ff.). He must give proper credence to faith which arises out of experience (here "experience" is cut loose entirely from Scripture) for no dogmatizing can be successful without taking into account one's own personal experience in life (pp. 23ff.). He must work out his Dogmatics by being in contact with the mastering both of philosophy and of other world religions (such as Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.). This latter is very important for Berkhof, for all world religions have truth in them with which the theologian must make himself acquainted. He must make his Dogmatics relevant to history. We ought, I think, to quote Berkhof here, for this reveals Berkhof's position clearly. He speaks freely of the fact that Dogmatics is a relative matter containing no objective and changeless truth, but being an on-going body of material that changes with the times. Berkhof insists that this is even true of the doctrine of God, by which God loses His changelessness and simply becomes a changing Being Who adapts Himself to life and history.

*In the present period the urge to produce timely and relevant theology has reached a zenith. Many scholars are so eager to do their theologizing vis-a-vis the themes of our time (such as "revolution," "liberation,"*

*"emancipation") that they make the gospel into a confirmation if not an echo of answers already available in the culture apart from the gospel. The task of playing a contrapuntal melody on behalf of the gospel, a task with which dogmatics stands or falls, has then been given up. Datedness has then swallowed up permanence. It is true that real dogmatics must be willing to — in fact, must — enter upon a discussion of all these questions. But it must not, in meeting the challenges, be totally absorbed by them, because the answers come from the Word that transcends, delimits, and transforms our questions. It is to this conflictual and liberating encounter between the Word and the questions arising from our sense of our present situation in life that dogmatics has to be serviceable. This means that dogmatics, while giving datedness and relevance its due, has to make room for the preponderance of eternity. All present-day concepts must be forged in the direction of Christ. To do the reverse is to betray the dogmatician's mandate.*

*Still, actuality and eternity must walk side by side in dogmatic thought. But how can they? The dogmatician who, because the Word became flesh, takes the conjunction of the two seriously, knows where his limits lie. . . .*

The author then goes on to say that there are two directions one can go: either the direction of completely relevant Dogmatics, which will become outdated after a few

years; or a more objective Dogmatics, which is hopelessly irrelevant. Somehow a balance must be struck.

It is obvious, however, that Berkhof leans towards a completely relevant Dogmatics, for, in further discussion, he speaks approvingly of a "contextualization" of Dogmatics (pp. 71-73). In fact, this is the real solution to the problem. And, in "contextualizing" Dogmatics, he does nothing but develop his theology in the "context" of all modern thought, modern problems in sociology and psychology, and modern insights in the fields of science and current thinking.

Dogmatics becomes nothing but some sort of vague religious reaction to all the problems which beset our globe in all different cultures.

In the third section, Berkhof, following his own thinking, opts for changes in the doctrine of God which make God more involved in our life. Further, he advocates presenting new answers, different from traditional ones, in doctrine and ethics which take cognizance of modern science, psychology, and sociology and the problems which these new ideas create for us.

One is, while reading the book, dumbfounded at the terrible departure which even "Reformed" theologians have introduced into Dogmatics. But then, after pondering the whole matter, one falls on his knees in thankfulness to God Who has preserved His church in the midst of all this and Who keeps His people faith-

ful to that one faith once for all delivered to the saints.

...

*The Joy of Preaching*, by Phillips Brooks (Introduction by Warren W. Wiersbe). Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989. 237 pages. \$8.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) was born in Boston and educated at Harvard and the Protestant Episcopal Seminary in Virginia. He served three churches: Church of the Advent (1859-1861) and Trinity Church (1861-1869), both in Philadelphia, and Trinity Church in Boston (1869-1891). From 1891 until his death in 1893 Brooks was Bishop of Massachusetts.

In 1877, at the height of his career as a preacher, Phillips Brooks delivered the Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale Divinity School. This book is a reprint of those lectures first published in 1895 under the title, *Lectures on Preaching*.

Brooks does not approach the subject from the formal and technical point of view of Homiletics, but speaks of preaching from his own experience as a preacher. For this reason the book lacks system. Probably for the same reason there is a bit more repetition of thoughts and ideas than one would like to find in a book of this nature. For example, Brooks repeatedly stresses in various contexts the necessity of the preacher

sympathizing with his congregation. The point that the preacher must be a child of God and an exemplary Christian is repeated several times throughout the book. Brooks emphasizes as well that the preacher must have a broad background in the liberal arts and in the sciences. He must be widely read and continue to read throughout his ministry. So strongly did Brooks feel about this latter point that he admonished the students to whom he was speaking,

*Oh, my fellow students, the special study of theology and all that appertains to it, that is what the preacher must be doing always; but he never can do it afterwards as he can in the blessed days of quiet in Arabia, after Christ has called him, and before the apostles lay their hands upon him. In many respects an ignorant clergy, however pious he may be, is worse than none at all. The more the empty head glows and burns, the more hollow and thin and dry it grows (p. 51).*

In this connection Brooks warns against the danger of studying the truth for its own sake. The minister must,

*... receive the truth as one who is to teach it. . . the result of such a habit will be . . . a deeper and more solemn sense of responsibility in the search of truth; a desire to find the human side of every truth, the point at which every speculation touches humanity. . . (p. 52).*

Brooks' definition of preaching as "the communication of the truth by man to men" may seem

inadequate. As he develops the idea throughout the course of his lectures one comes to appreciate what he means by "communicating the truth by man to men." Lectures two and three, which deal with the preacher himself and his work, and lecture eight, which deals with the "value of the human soul," are worth the price of the book.

Whether Brooks chose the title of the book or not we do not know. What we do know is that he regarded preaching not as a burdensome task, but as a joy. Said he in his opening lecture to the students,

*I cannot help but bear witness to the joy of the life which you anticipate. . . let us rejoice with one another that in a world where there are a great many good and happy things for men to do, God has given us the best and happiest, and made us preachers of His Truth.*

The book is enhanced by a brief, delightful biographical introduction by Warren W. Wiersbe.

Kregel Publications is to be commended for making this book, one of the classics on preaching, available. It ought to be read by seminary students and preachers. It can be read with profit by lay persons as well.

...

***Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, Wolfhart Pannenberg, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1990. 170 pages. \$12.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Bernard Woudenberg.]**

In recent years the study of metaphysics has fallen into disrepute. At one time, and for many centuries, it dominated philosophy — and theology as well; but few any more give it much thought. Nevertheless, this is not to say that its concepts do not determine the serious thinking of everyone, be he a philosopher or not.

The object of metaphysics is the determination of what it is that constitutes the essential reality of things, that is, what it is that is *meta*, or necessarily “with,” the *physika*, or nature of things that exist. Through the ages it was believed that there must be some single underlying reality that gives rise to all that exists; and this reality was usually identified in one way or another with God. Its study did much to bring philosophy and theology together, providing a kind of common ground upon which they meet in a union which continues to this day, as this book seeks to make evident.

Wolfhart Pannenberg is a modern German theologian. Teaching at the University of Munich, in this post-Barthian age, he has surged into an increasingly important position, as German theologians often do, until he has become one of the most eminent theologians of the day. This book intends, apparently, to set forth the heart of his theological views.

It is not an easy book to read, and is suited only for those who are willing to work their way slowly through the mental gymnastics and

technical jargon of modern theological/philosophical thought. And yet it has its value. This is the stuff of which modern theology is made; and, like it or not, its effect does trickle down through the whole of the Christian world. In one way or another, sooner or later, it is going to have to be dealt with.

In chapter two Pannenberg deals with the proofs for the existence of God, particularly in terms of Descartes’ effort to demonstrate that one can know the finite only in terms of the infinite, which must then be identified with God. It was a conclusion which Kant rejected, but which Hegel sought to restore with a number of arguments to which Pannenberg is attracted. Accordingly, regarding Hegel he remarks,

*Treating the finite in the light of its dependence on another resulted for Hegel in the demand that the truly infinite must exclude all dependence on another (p. 35).*

And

*from now on, the only understanding of God that can be called monotheistic in the strict sense will be that which is able to conceive the one God not merely as transcending the world; at the same time, this “God beyond” must be understood as immanent in the world (p. 36).*

One can only smile, for these conclusions, which Pannenberg presents as something new when made by Hegel, are nothing more than truths long before known from Scripture. In fact, David and Isaiah had set them forth by revelation before

Greek philosophy ever really came into its own; and yet, because Hegel set them forth in a philosophical framework, Pannenberg seems to see them as some new and remarkable discovery. But even Hegel goes too far when he goes on to identify the absolute with "spirit." That becomes too patently biblical, and even Pannenberg parts company with this, his favorite philosopher.

Just how the Absolute may be introduced he brings out in his next extended treatment, that of the self and self-consciousness. Very carefully he goes through the philosophical/psychological development of these concepts in modern thought. He deals with the personal relationships with the objective world, and with society, in the development of consciousness, as well as the matter of preservation and self-preservation. In this he finds the great contribution of Christianity in that through the concept of resurrection it provides a sense of eternally continuing importance for the self. But once again it is the human concept that provides validity to Christian truth and not vice-versa.

Just how true this is comes out even more when we enter the chapter which deals with the relationship between being and time. As Pannenberg acknowledges, even though he deals rather extensively with older Grecian views, it was Augustine, the Christian theologian, who set forth the basic concept of time.

(In fact, we know from his "Confessions" and "City of God"

that his view of time and eternity were rather simple, built as they were on the distinction between the eternity of God and the temporal nature of the creature. The eternity of God, as Augustine saw it, involves his unchanging presence in all aspects and phases of his work; everything is always present or "now," without past or future, to God. It is with and for the creature that time exists, the process of change through which he passes as he experiences the actions of God moment by moment.)

But this is not what interests Pannenberg. He has no place for an unchanging God, and his concern is only with Augustine's treatment of time from the viewpoint of human experience. For man the experience of time is a sort of "time bridging present" which brings together the memory of the past with the anticipation of the future, at which point Pannenberg brings forth an interesting illustration:

*For Augustine, the central examples of this sort of time-bridging present are to be found in the understanding of spoken discourse and in listening to music. Spoken discourse is articulated within the flow of time; nonetheless, we grasp it as a whole when we comprehend the unity of a sentence. Likewise, a song can be heard and sung only insofar as the whole of the song is already present to me before it begins, and insofar as what has already sounded remains in my memory (p. 79).*

It is this psychological experience, the bridging of the past to the anticipation of the future, which is to Pannenberg the key; and it is this which he goes on to identify ultimate metaphysical reality in the last chapter in this section of his book.

We can see how he does this with a few quotations.

*Given the presupposition that the thing will appear in its full form sometime in the future, in the anticipation the thing is already present. . . . Not only our knowing but also the identity of things themselves are not yet completely present in the process of time. . . . The decision concerning the being that stands at the end of the process has retroactive power. When one considers that the telos is at the same time the reality of the thing, its idea (eidos), then one must grant that this entelecheia which is already present in the process of becoming is a form of presence of the thing's essence, although the thing will be completely there only at the end of its becoming. . . the retroactive constitution of the essence of a thing that is becoming from its end. . . is . . . the starting point for a new definition of the concept of substance, one that would consider the viewpoint of time and becoming as the medium that constitutes the whatness of things. Things would then be what they are, substance, retroactively from the outcome of their becoming on the one hand, and on the other in the sense of anticipating the conception of their process of becoming, their history (pp. 104-107).*

Here, it would seem, we have the heart of Pannenberg's "theology," the idea of anticipation which he believes to exist at the root of all reality. His metaphysics consists of finding as the root of all existence a process of change by which an individual being is moved by the anticipation of what will be, and that that moving force of anticipation is the essence of whatever is. In turn, although he doesn't mention it, we can hardly help but suspect that the goal of doing this is to find at the heart of all existence the dynamics of evolution. That is, he, as most of modern theology, would like to demonstrate or prove that evolution, the process of change from the more simple and primitive form to the more complex and advanced form, is the very metaphysical essence of reality; and that this process is to be identified in one way or another (and they do not seem all that concerned with how) with the *divine*, with *God*. What is evident is that this concept forms the conclusion and climax of the first and most important part of this book appearing under the subtitle, *The Idea of God*; and through all of it there is nothing that is spoken of as God that would seem to come closer than this.

\* \* \* \* \*

The second section of this book, "Metaphysics and Theology," consists of three essays, each in its own way connected to this underlying theme.

In the first, Pannenberg turns his attention to the modern preoccu-

pation with "Process Philosophy." One is at first led to expect that he is to be quite adverse to it; but soon it becomes apparent that his criticism is not with Process Philosophy as such, but only with that particular presentation of it which was given by Alfred North Whitehead, the one usually considered to have fathered this school of thought during the first half of our century, and also to have given it a certain theological twist.

Process philosophy is that philosophy (or "theology") which would find ultimate reality in the process of becoming; and Pannenberg's criticism centers rather harshly on Whitehead's identification of primary reality with an event — an activity — rather than with a material thing existing in space and time. Pannenberg goes on at some length, and with very technical language, to point out numerous inconsistencies in Whitehead's presentation; but in the end he must rather grudgingly admit that, in spite of its inconsistencies and inadequacies, it

*offers constructive new perspectives upon which to build. . . . Whitehead's analyses do illuminate our understanding of processes whose phase certainly must be thought of as temporally successive, yet in which the goal of becoming for the form has always been present. . . . By anticipating its essential form in the process of its own formation, a being's substantial identity is linked together with the motion of process (p. 125).*

This is too close to Pannenberg's own idea to be passed by or ignored.

His next essay deals with logical categories; and after a general discussion of philosophical categories, he finally concentrates on those of "Parts" and "Wholes" as most important for his purposes. After following through a number of efforts to deal with these categories and their relationship to each other in the history of philosophy, he begins to speak at the only real point in the whole book of "God." But what he says does little more than to find a possibility of identifying "God" with what he calls the "unifying unity," that is, with that principle which unifies the whole with its parts without being either one of them. And he does this, it would seem, with a sense that he had accomplished something by finding some place in the overall philosophical framework where God could be made to fit, and to do so without the presumptuous baggage of distinctly Christian thought — as though that were the ultimate sin.

And so he comes to his final essay, one built around the modern concern with "meaning," based somewhat on the 1928 theology of Paul Tillich with its emphasis on "the ground of meaning"; but also on the views of Viktor Frankl, the Jewish psychologist who, in living through the concentration camps of the Second World War, found that those who on the basis of religious convictions found meaning in life had also been those most apt to sur-

vive the rigors of the camps.

Pannenberg's approach to the matter is built on an analysis of the meaning of words and sentences, pointing out that meaning is not found in the speaker or hearer, but in the relationship of that which is said to be the real experiences in life. And so, even as a word has meaning only in the context of the sentence in which it appears, and the sentence has its meaning in terms of the totality of what is said, so the moments of life have their full meaning only when the totality of life and history is finished. And so religion is that consciousness and faith that even when this finish is not apparent yet, it will come to be.

\* \* \* \* \*

One reads material such as this with the same uneasy feeling Isaiah must have experienced when he saw, 44:10-20,

*The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers. . . the carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass and maketh it after the figure of a man. . . . He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh. . . and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image. . . and saith, Deliver me for thou art my god.*

The instruments may be different — thoughts, ideas, and logical relations instead of tongs, compasses, planes and hammers — but in the end is it not all the same? A

little is taken from the ancient Greeks, a little from the medieval scholastics, some from old pagan religions, and much from enlightenment thinking and modern science; but in the end what is devised is but that of one's own imagination.

And Pannenberg himself seems conscious of the fault, as defensively he seeks to ward it off,

*The contemporary question of meaning that arises out of the experience of absence of meaning should not simply be dismissed by Christian theology as an idolatrous question. . . . the sort of knowledge of the whole of reality that remains conscious at the same time of its own finiteness reaches consummation in a knowledge of a God distinct from human subjectivity. The idea of God as such is always an answer to the question of the meaning of reality as a whole (168-170).*

And one shakes his head in bemused amazement; is this all the great theologians of our day have left? Might they not much better simply bow and repent?

...

***The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths***, edited by R.A. Torrey and updated by Charles L. Feinberg. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990. 714 pages. \$16.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. David J. Engelsma.]

Early this century, a series of twelve volumes appeared setting forth

the "fundamentals of the Christian faith." The books were intended to combat the spreading theological modernism, i.e., unbelief and heresy. Two rich Christian businessmen distributed three million individual volumes, without charge, to pastors, missionaries, Sunday School teachers, and others in influential positions in the churches. This book is a reprint of those works, updated for readers at the end of the 20th century.

Since modernism did not surrender in A.D. 1915 but has, on the contrary, been gaining victory after victory in Protestant churches and schools, including Reformed churches and schools, believing, orthodox preachers, professors, and teachers will find this book helpful. Also the concerned church member can profit from the book. What really is higher criticism of Scripture? What do modernists teach about the first eleven chapters of Genesis, indeed about the entire Old Testament? What in the end is the effect of modernism upon Christianity itself? Positively, what is the Bible's own teaching on its inspiration? on the Godhead of Jesus? on the resurrection of the body? These questions, and more, are answered clearly and pointedly in short chapters.

Writers include James Orr (on "Science and Christian Faith"); B.B. Warfield (on "The Deity of Christ"); R.A. Torrey (on "The Personality and Deity of the Holy Spirit"); Thomas Boston (on "The Nature of Regeneration"); John Ryle (on "The

True Church"); the lawyer, Philip Mauro (on "Modern Philosophy"); and many others.

The book has serious weaknesses. These weaknesses were, in part, the reason why the churches of the "fundamentalists" have lost the war to modernism. They are also the reason why "fundamentalism" is not enough for a Reformed or Presbyterian church.

First, there are fatal concessions to modernism. James Orr concedes to evolutionary science that Genesis 1 and 2 are no factual account of creation but "a sublime picture" of God's (progressively creative) activity over "vast cosmic periods" (cf. pp. 133, 134). This is the loss both of the doctrine of creation and of the doctrine of inspiration.

Second, the "fundamentalists" include the dispensationalist C.I. Scofield, whose chopping up of God's work of salvation and of Holy Scripture is scarcely preferable to modernism. Scofield writes the article on "The Grace of God." He shows himself a thorough-going antinomian, denying that the law of God is the rule for the life of the child of God (cf. p. 404).

Third, the "fundamentalism" of *The Fundamentals* does not include the Reformed doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace alone. There is no article on divine predestination. All the articles on the atonement carefully avoid teaching limited atonement. No one criticizes the basic modernist tenet of free

will. The same is strikingly true of "conservatives" contending against modernism in Reformed churches today. They are silent concerning the modernist denial of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Not the denial of reprobation, not the affirmation of a desire of God to save all sinners, not the widespread preaching of universal atonement, not the acceptance within their churches of free willist organizations, evangelists, and tactics, but the denial of creation and the criticism of Scripture receive all the attention. This is an attenuated fundamentalism that contrasts sharply with the robust insistence of the Reformed faith on *all* the fundamental doctrines of the gospel.

Fourth, there is no call to churches to discipline the modernists. Without excommunication by the church, the war against the unbelief of modernism — and war it is, to the death — is lost. Modernists will allow fundamentalists to talk and write forever, as long as the modernists may occupy the seats of power in the church.

This criticism does not minimize the usefulness of the book for the orthodox. Many of the issues remain crucial issues in the struggle of the true church with apostasy today. The death of churches that succumbed to modernist teachings in the 80 years since the book was originally published confirms the warning that it gives. There is death in the pot of theological modernism. And the fundamentalist authors do warn of

the seriousness of the demand to stand fast particularly against modernism's view of Scripture as a human book:

*If this modern criticism were true, then away with all so-called Christianity, which only deceives us with idle tales! Away with a religion which has nothing to offer us but the commonplace teachings of morality! Away with faith! Away with hope! Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die! . . . What does it (modern criticism of the Bible — DJE) offer us? Nothing. What does it take away? Everything. Do we have any use for it? No! It neither helps us in life nor comforts us in death; it will not judge us in the world to come. . . (pp. 32, 33).*

...

***Saved by Grace***, by Anthony A. Hoekema; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989, 277pp., \$22.95. [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

This book, by the late professor of Systematic Theology in Calvin Seminary, is really a treatise on that part of Dogmatics which we generally call Soteriology, that is, that part of theology which deals with the doctrine of salvation.

It cannot be doubted that the book is a thorough discussion of the doctrines of soteriology. It not only discusses in some detail such doctrines as calling, regeneration, conversion, repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and perseverance, but it also has discussions on

related topics: the role of the Holy Spirit, union with Christ, the assurance of salvation, to mention but a few. Yet it is evident from the book that Hoekema was not an original thinker. There is little in the book which has not been said before by others. This is not, of course, necessarily bad — it is always worthwhile to reiterate the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. And if Hoekema had done that with faithfulness to the heritage of the Reformed faith, one could only be thankful.

However, this is not always the case. While Hoekema claims allegiance to the historic Reformed truths concerning salvation, there is in the book a glaring synergism which robs it of its value for the believer who is concerned about being genuinely Reformed.

This note is sounded in the very first chapter, entitled "Orientation." Hoekema is emphatic about salvation being God's work. But he insists on presenting another side to the question. "The application (of the blessings of salvation) is nevertheless *primarily* (underscoring is ours) the work of the Holy Spirit" (p. 4). The underscored word makes one raise his eyebrows and wonder what is coming. And one's suspicions are not unfounded. On the very next page Hoekema writes:

*It would be better to say that in these aspects of our salvation (distinct from regeneration) God works and we work. Our sanctification, for example, is at the same time one hundred percent God's work*

*and one hundred percent our work.*

And this theme is retained throughout the book. In fact, a few of the chapters include a paragraph similar to one found in the chapter on repentance which is entitled, "Repentance the Work of God and Man."

Now all of this would presumably not be so bad if Hoekema merely wanted to emphasize that God saves us in such a way that our rational and moral nature is preserved and that we are called by Scripture to repent of sin, be converted, persevere in the faith, etc. But a genuinely Reformed man would, at this point, insert an important discussion of the relation between God's work and ours, a discussion which would explain fully how our work is always the fruit of God's work. Our Canons, e.g., (III-IV, 14) insist that while indeed we believe, God not only gives us the ability to believe, but works in us and produces both the will to believe *and the act of believing also*. Hoekema never discusses this truth. This is synergism.

It is not surprising therefore that this synergistic theme appears again and again in the book and that Hoekema is compelled to fall back on the tired ploy of appealing to "paradox." In fact, in justification for this, appeal is made to Calvin, though Calvin is not quoted. Paradoxes indeed abound. Conversion is the work of God and man (114, 115). Repentance is the work of God and man (129). Faith is response to the gospel call by accepting Christ (140)

and faith is the work of God and man (145). Sanctification is also the work of God and is our responsibility (199), without any regard to the relation between God's work and our calling.

In this connection also Hoekema reiterates a position he took earlier that Romans 7 refers to a regenerate person describing his struggle prior to his regeneration, a struggle of a Phariseeistic Jew who is trying to be saved through works. This is basically the interpretation which Arminius gave to the passage when minister of the Reformed Church in Amsterdam, an interpretation which was challenged by his colleague Plancius, but which revealed his fundamentally unReformed position. Hoekema also speaks of the fact that the Christian no longer has an old man, but is fully new, although the new man is not perfect. His writings on this subject (pp. 209ff.) are somewhat confusing and not in keeping with such statements in the Heidelberg Catechism as these, that we have only a small beginning of the new obedience, and that our best works are corrupted and polluted by sin.

Hoekema's work is singularly poor in references to the Confessions, an astounding thing for a professor of Systematic Theology in a Reformed Seminary, for appeal to the Confessions is surely the Reformed way of working in theology. Perhaps more appeal to the Confessions would have made the book a genuinely Reformed book.

The book includes some theological errors: Hoekema identifies the effectual call with the internal call only, and identifies regeneration in the narrow sense with the effectual call — both of which are exegetical impossibilities, as H. Hoeksema has pointed out. Although he interprets justification in the forensic sense, he writes that justification takes place only at that moment when we accept Christ. And in this connection he speaks only of our organic union with Christ and seems to deny that Christ is our legal or forensic Head.

There is in all his book only one reference to Herman Hoeksema, and that is Hoekema's vendetta against Hoeksema's position on the free offer of the gospel. To this position he is fiercely opposed. But Hoekema will not give Hoeksema credit for doing great work in the area of soteriology, not even so much as to mention him. Hoekema joins in what sometimes seems to be a conspiracy of silence. I am not asking that Hoekema agree with Herman Hoeksema; but no one can deny that Herman Hoeksema has done great work in the field of Reformed Theology. Anyone must recognize that if he loves the Reformed faith. When no mention is even made of Hoeksema, other than to lambast him on the question of the free offer, one wonders indeed whether an author wants sincerely to be Reformed.

...

***God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government***, Gary Scott Smith, Editor. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1989. 300 pages, \$13.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. David J. Engelsma.]

The four views of civil government and its duty, all held and advocated by Reformed men, are theonomy; principled pluralism; Christian America; and national confessionalism. Greg L. Bahnsen presents the case for the theonomic position. Gordon J. Spykman argues for the position of pluralism. Harold O.J. Brown contends for the Christian America position. And William Edgar defends the view of a national confession. Each sets forth a prominent view in Reformed circles today as to what the Reformed faith requires the U.S. government to be and to do. The subject is the intriguing and controversial issue of the Reformed view of civil government. What makes the book especially interesting, and clear as regards the differences among these four views, is that the controversy is made an integral part of the content. Each of the first four chapters consists of the presentation of one of the four views, followed by response from the spokesmen for the other three positions. The fifth and concluding chapter contains responses by the advocates of the various positions to the criticisms raised by the others.

The book is the fruit of a

"Consultation on the Biblical Role of Civil Government" held at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania in 1987. The purpose of the conference was "to challenge the evangelical Christian community, and especially Reformed Christians, to think about what implications Christ's lordship held for civil government." The intention of the sponsors was "to clarify areas of agreement and divergence among Reformed Christians in order to achieve consensus where possible and, where not possible, to promote further discussion of differences." The book indicates that the conference served this worthy purpose well.

The various positions that claim to be the Reformed view of civil government are clearly described and ably defended. The criticisms leveled by the proponents of the other views serve to clarify the differences and to highlight the problem areas of each view. This is a very useful, and usually very interesting, work on Reformed Christianity's doctrine of the state.

If I were asked, however, which of the four views represents the biblical, and therefore Reformed, doctrine of the state, my answer would be, "None of the above." A pervasive weakness of all four views is the failure to determine the nature of the state and its calling from Christ, the King of kings, by careful exegesis of the New Testament passages on civil government, especially Matthew 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7; and I Peter 2:13-17. There is in addition a fun-

damental assumption, shared by all the writers, that it is the calling of Christians to transform this world, or to reclaim every sphere of life for the King, or to re-lay the biblical foundations on which our society is based. For this, of course, Christians must somehow get hold of the mighty engine of the state, in order to re-tool it into an instrument that will effect this transformation of society and its life.

That every believer must live and work in every sphere of earthly life in obedience to the will of the Lord Christ — law! — as His will is revealed in Scripture is the clear, compelling calling of the gospel. That believers must transform the United States of America, or any nation, into a kingdom of Christ is a commandment of men. The notion is replete with errors, of which it is not the least that the kingdom of God realized in the blood of the Crucified and coming in the preaching of the gospel is made an earthly, carnal kingdom.

Of particular interest to me is the theonomic view of Greg L. Bahnsen, the most biblical, reasoned, moderate, and therefore persuasive of the major champions of theonomy, or “Christian Reconstruction.” Excellent as his description of the state’s limited mandate is on pages 44, 45, positively and negatively, his insistence that the state in the New Testament must enforce the civil and judicial laws binding on Israel in the Old Testament shuts him up to the position that the state

must punish all idolatry with death. Not only all unbelievers and heathen worshipers of other gods besides the God and Father of Jesus Christ, but also all false Christians, who corrupt the pure worship of God, must be judged and executed by the state. Does Dr. Bahnsen believe that God gives this mandate to the state in the New Testament? Does the state have this authority and competency? I know that the Belgic Confession (in the original wording of Article 36) and the Westminster Confession (in Chapter 23) go in this direction. But does the Scripture permit the state so to intrude itself in the business and warfare of the church; so to undertake the defense of the gospel and the overthrow of false doctrine and idolatrous worship; and so to make of the steel sword of the state the spiritual sword of the heavenly kingdom?

In the interests of his earthly, postmillennial kingdom, Bahnsen denies that the kingdom of Christ is identical with the church. How does he reconcile this denial with the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Days 31 and 48 that the kingdom and the church are identical? How does he harmonize his denial with the confession of his own creed, the Westminster Confession, in Chapter 25: “The visible church...is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ...”?

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***Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation;*** by Howard J. Van Till, Robert E. Snow, John H. Stek, Davis A. De Young; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990: 285pp., \$14.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

Everyone who has any knowledge of what is going on in the Reformed church world knows that professors in Calvin College have taught and are now teaching the most blatant form of evolutionism. Two of the authors of the book here under review are also authors of other books in which their evolutionism is open and undisguised. The parts of this book authored by Van Till and Young contain nothing essentially new.

The book does, however, contain one very interesting chapter written by John Stek, professor of Old Testament in Calvin Theological Seminary. Our readers will recall how, over the years, questions have been put to such men as Van Till and Young concerning how they square their evolutionism with Scripture. Oftentimes the answer came: "That is not our field. We are scientists. Those questions belong to the theologians." Well, in this book John Stek, theologian, has taken up the challenge and added a chapter to tell us how theologians square evolutionism with Scripture. It matters not to them, apparently, that Scripture is in the process effectively denied, so determined are they to find some way to make God's Word

fit the lie of evolution.

But before we take a look at that important chapter, a few things ought to be said about the other chapters in the book.

The first point that comes to one's attention in the book is the open and blatant denial of what Scripture says concerning creation and the flood. A few instances to demonstrate this will not be inappropriate.

Davis Young spends a great deal of time in the book "proving" from geology why a universal flood is impossible. He concludes this long line of proof with the remarks:

*If rocks are historical documents, we are driven to the related conclusion that the available evidence is overwhelmingly opposed to the notion that the Noahic flood deposited rocks on the Colorado Plateau only a few thousand years ago or that the rocks were formed from a diminishing ocean. The global deluge hypothesis fails to account for fossil mudcracks, soil zones, unconformities, pure quartz sand deposits, frosted and pitted quartz grains, thinly varved muds, karst topography, lithification, the distribution of terrestrial fossils, folds, igneous intrusions, and many other features. . . . The Christian who believes that the idea of an ancient Earth is unbiblical would do better to deny the validity of any kind of historical geology and insist that the rocks must be the product of pure miracle rather than try to explain them in terms of the flood. An examination of the Earth apart from ideo-*

*logical presuppositions (this is Young's disparaging term for the faith of the child of God, spoken of in Hebrews 11:3, a faith by which he humbly and savingly clings to the Word of God, H.H.) is bound to lead to the conclusion that it is ancient (pp. 80, 81).*

While the authors are obviously parading their evolutionism for all to see, they cannot refrain from showing their contempt for the plain teaching of Scripture. There are three aspects to this question: 1) One looks in vain for any discussion on the part of the authors of *how* God actually comes into the picture, either in creation or providence. In fact, the authors make some startling statements in this connection. 2) Not only is the truth of the work of creation denied, but it is openly mocked. What makes this so ironic is that, towards the end of the book, the authors plead for toleration and amicable discussion of the issues (see p. 266). Evidently, the kind of toleration and amicable discussion which they want is a total intolerance for Scripture and a tolerance only for devilish heresy; amicable discussions which rule out the truth of God's Word but incorporate only the evil inventions of men's minds. And this is indeed the way it is with heresy in every age. It bursts through the doors of the church with loud and boisterous cries for tolerance, all the while showing an ugly intolerance for the truth. 3) The authors all the while, as they have so often, profess their undying faith in Christ, their humble submission to His will, and

their loyalty to the cause of the gospel of their Lord and King. This is mere hypocrisy. If they love the Lord, they would be obedient to His Word. When they profess to love the Lord and at the same time mock His Word, their profession is hypocrisy. If I profess to love my wife, but sneeringly throw her letters into the open fireplace, no one will believe nor ought to believe that my profession of love has a grain of truth in it.

But let us take a closer look at a couple of these points.

The closest the book comes to any kind of discussion of creation or providence is found in a brief discussion of Van Till on pp. 113, 114 in which Van Till on the one hand defends the big-bang theory of the development of the universe, and on the other hand accepts a *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing). The difficulty is that he claims that the two ideas really have nothing to do with each other. "Creation *ex nihilo* is a rich theological concept not merely about temporal beginnings but concerning the fundamental identity of the world and the source of its existence at all times" (p. 114). But the "big-bang model is a theoretical scientific concept limited to the description of selected aspects of the formative history of the physical universe" (p. 114). Then he adds: "A big-bang beginning and creation *ex nihilo* cannot be equated. In no way do they offer answers to the same question" (p. 114).

This is about the extent of any discussion of creation and providence

in the book. Committed, as they claim, to these truths, they steadfastly refuse to discuss them.

The difficulty is that, although Van Till never expressly says so, the very strong impression is left that he does not even believe in any doctrine of creation or providence. He claims that the universe is some 15 billion years old; he claims that the universe as we now know it developed from a "big-bang" of original matter; he claims that it all developed according to evolutionary processes. But he does not seem to believe even that God created the original matter (or energy) which exploded and thus began the whole process of evolutionary development. Nor does he anywhere in the book indicate that the evolutionary development was under any kind of providential direction and control.

The whole concept of creation *ex nihilo*, according to Van Till, was used by the church only for polemical purposes to combat dualism and emanationism (p. 113). It is not, therefore, a biblical doctrine, but simply a means to defend the truth (whatever now that truth may be) against heresies. But that this idea of creation *ex nihilo* came to be connected with "a historical act of divine inception at the world's beginning" was a mistake of a serious kind, at least if one means by this a doctrine of creation as set forth in Genesis 1 & 2. For, says Van Till, "Within the bounds of this theological perspective one could meaningfully consider a diversity of histori-

cal scenarios for the manner and timetable that God might have chosen to perform his creative activity" (p. 113).

All this is pretty complicated; but the idea is clear. The concept of creation *ex nihilo* is only a polemical tool used to defeat philosophical heresies. It is not in itself true. Surely this polemical tool must not be connected with any specific ideas of how God engaged in His creative activity. Apparently we know nothing about that. One can spin many different theories, all of which are meaningful, to explain it; but surely Genesis 1 & 2 tell us nothing concerning the historical event of creation.

At the very best, Van Till is Deistic when he discusses these things.<sup>1</sup> On pages 119, 120, he writes,

*... The evidence to which we have referred. . . very strongly suggests that our presence on planet Earth, as creatures with bodies having a particular chemical makeup and requiring a particular physical, chemical, and biological environment, is dependent upon the presence of the entire physical universe and the occurrence of the whole of cosmic history. . . .*

*As a descriptive scientific concept, cosmic evolution need not be rejected by the Christian community. While it may call for the abandonment of a medieval picture*

<sup>1</sup> Deism teaches that God's relation to the creation is analogous to the relation of a watch-maker to a watch. He makes it, winds it up, and lets it go by its own inner laws and powers.

*of the cosmos as being an arena for the preservation of immutable forms, it need not require, or even suggest, the abandonment of a biblically faithful theological doctrine concerning the cosmos as God's Creation. . . .*

Incidentally, in boasting about how scientists know a great deal about the way in which the universe came into existence through the big-bang, Van Till makes some downright silly statements. On pages 108, e.g., Van Till writes: "Many technical details remain to be worked out, particularly for the first 0.01 second, but the broad outline seems rather securely in place."

The open mockery of the Scriptural account of creation is perhaps what angers me the most. A few examples will demonstrate the point.

In the editor's introduction to Robert Snow's chapter, the truth of creation is called an "eccentric and puzzling perspective." On pages 176ff. the author claims that those who hold to the truth of creation are "sectarian," callously ignoring the fact that the church of Christ for over 5000 years of her history has confessed her faith in creation. In a footnote on page 192 Snow dismisses the truth of creation as probably being a "populist movement" for "Creationism has a number of characteristics that suggest this. . . ." In a concluding chapter by Van Till, entitled, "Where Do We Go From Here?" the traditional hermeneutics of the church of Christ, which hermeneutics, when faithfully followed,

leads to an acceptance of Genesis 1-11 as historical fact, is dismissed as a "mischievous form of 'folk exegesis' . . . which denigrates the more scholarly approaches as being 'fanciful interpretations,' or as being outright rejection of 'what God has plainly said' " (pp. 275, 276).

This is serious business. It is serious not only because the same men who sneer at the truth of creation piously prate about the need for tolerance and for earnest discussion on these questions; but it is serious because these men are not simply content with pushing their heresies into the church, but now turn viciously against the believing child of God who in faith bows before God's holy Word, and they heap on that faith their contempt and hatred.

But we have yet to discuss the contribution of John Stek, who has taken up the challenge to explain how such blatant evolutionism can be harmonized with Scripture. The chapter which he writes, entitled, "What Says The Scriptures?" is an extremely important chapter. It clearly tells us what view of Scripture is held by evolutionists. There need be no doubt about it any longer. There it all is, set forth clearly by the church's theologian, professor of Old Testament in the Seminary.

It comes as no surprise that, to accomplish this mighty task, Stek must reject Scripture as the Word of God. Stek has committed himself entirely to the wicked and destructive principles of higher criticism, and, refusing to accept Scripture as

God's infallibly-inspired record of His own self-revelation in Jesus Christ, he proceeds to explain Scripture as being only another human document.

While we urge every one interested in this question to read the chapter for himself, for we cannot repeat here everything Stek says, a few references will prove the point.

Stek's starting point is that a knowledge of ancient culture is absolutely essential to an understanding of the Scriptures (p. 206). Having settled that, Stek dismisses Hebrews 11:3<sup>2</sup> as an interpretation of creation which was made under the influence of Hellenism (p. 220). This is an important assertion for Stek, because in fact Hebrews 11:3 destroys with one mighty blow every form of evolutionism; and yet he makes this assertion without a shred of proof. Genesis 1:1-2:4a "is a piece of postexilic priestly (P) theology," a view which, according to Stek, "has become a virtual article of faith" (p. 223). This old theory of Welhausen to which Stek appeals is not only wholly destructive of Scripture, but has itself been repeatedly proved nonsense. However that may be, the result of this line of reasoning is that the creation narrative is simply an expression of what the author (not Moses) believed concerning creation (p. 221); it makes this whole narrative a very late tradition (p. 226) borrowed from Babylonian

thought (p.229).<sup>3</sup> In a rather silly way, Stek explains Genesis 1 & 2 by putting the narrator in heaven and having him describe events which he sees, but which he cannot say in earthly language (pp. 235ff). Although Stek cannot determine the precise literary genre of the creation narrative, he is absolutely certain that it is not history (p. 241). In fact, Stek seems to me to suggest that he believes in an eternal matter which is worked on by God in some evolutionary way. At the same time, however, divine causality is excluded: "*We must methodologically exclude all notions of immediate divine causality*" (p. 261).

So this is how we harmonize evolutionism and Scripture: we abandon Scripture and deny that it is God's Word. What we have left is the proud teachings of the scientists, but God in heaven says nothing.

One more point has to be made, a point we have hinted at earlier in this review. The whole question of the relation between Scripture and science involves the question of the relation between faith and the scientific enterprise. From a certain point of view, this is the very heart of the

<sup>2</sup> "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

<sup>3</sup> It is rather interesting that John Stek should hold to this. He is surely not at all original in posing this. The same idea was taught by Ralph Janssen back in 1918-1922 when he was professor of Old Testament in Calvin Seminary. (See my book, *The Janssen Controversy*.) However, Janssen was deposed for teaching this and other higher critical views. Stek continues to teach. The Christian Reformed Church ought either to depose Stek, or to confess its sin of deposing Janssen.

issue. And the book has a great deal to say about this — as has other books written by Van Till and Young, along with their colleague Menninga. These men hold a specific position on these questions, a position spoken of also in Stek's chapter. It is a position on the basis of which they justify their open commitment to evolutionism, while all the time professing faith in Christ and in the Scriptures.

What is their position?

On page 120 Van Till first suggests this position when he speaks of evolutionism as true only in the scientific sense. By this view, Van Till (and his colleagues) mean to make separation between the scientific enterprise in which they engage and their own personal faith in Christ. A few quotes from pages 149, 150 will make this clear.

*Religious commitments, whether theistic or nontheistic, should not be permitted to interfere with the normal functioning of the epistemic value system developed and employed within the scientific community. Great mischief is done. . . .*

All that this fancy language means, of course, is that when one engages in his scientific pursuits he lays his faith aside as he would a suit of clothes and refuses to allow his faith to have any part in his scientific work.

*Science held hostage to any ideology or belief system, whether naturalistic or theistic, can no longer function effectively to gain knowledge of the physical uni-*

*verse. When the epistemic goal of gaining knowledge is replaced by the dogmatic goal of providing warrant for one's personal belief system or for some sectarian creed, the superficial activity that remains may no longer be called natural science. One may call it "worldview warranting," "creed confirmation," or "apologetic science," or one may put it into the category of "folk science," but it no longer deserves the label of "natural science" because it is no longer capable of giving birth to authentic scientific knowledge. Science held hostage by extrascientific dogma is science made barren.*

*. . . Because . . . Science and religion have different domains of competence and concern, each needs to learn from the other concerning what lies outside of its own domain.*

Robert Snow also faces the question of how it is possible for one to function both as a Christian and as a scientist when these two areas of his life must be kept separate (pp. 186ff.). After a fairly lengthy discussion and a great deal of irrelevant jargon, the question is answered merely by affirming that there must be some communication between the scientific and the religious community.

But Stek, the theologian, comes clearly to the fore and offers the solution. In a rather short statement, but one with serious implications, Stek says:

*. . . To exercise our stewardship of the created realm . . . we*

*must methodologically exclude all notions of immediate divine causality. As stewards of the creation we must methodologically honor the principle that creation interprets creation; indeed, we must honor that principle as "religiously" as the theologian must honor the principle that "Scripture interprets Scripture" — or, since Scripture presupposes general revelation, that revelation interprets revelation.*

So the evolutionists who claim to be Christian are saying two things. They contend, first of all, that the life of the Christian is sharply divided into two parts, neither of which has anything to do with the other. I am, on the one side, a Christian who has faith in Christ. But I am, on the other side, a scientist who engages in the scientific enterprise. When I enter my laboratory or prowl around in the world to examine rocks and stars, I leave my faith on the end table in my office. I may not allow my faith, with its presuppositions, to interfere with or determine my scientific work. When I go to church or pray with my family, I leave my science in the laboratory and classroom, for it has nothing to do with my religious life.

In my scientific work I discover that the world is about 15 billion years old and that it took on its present form through evolutionary processes. I believe this to be scientifically true. My Christian faith on the other hand says that God created the world. You ask me how both can be true? You may not ask

that question. You may ask: How did the world come into existence? But my answer will depend on where you find me when you ask the question. If you ask the question in my laboratory, then the answer is: Through evolutionary processes. If you ask the question in church, then the answer is: God created all things. Do not, please, ask me how I harmonize the two; that is the task of the church's theologians, and I am a scientist.

But now the church's theologian speaks up and he resolves the dilemma. He has the answer. We must, he says, answer this in terms of the relation between general revelation and special revelation; in terms of the relation between the language of God in creation and the language of God in Scripture. But the language of God in Scripture presupposes the language of God in creation; and so we must interpret Scripture in the light of creation. If, therefore, any conflict appears between the two, God's speech in Scripture must be interpreted in the light of God's speech in creation. But, as Stek's attempt to harmonize the two clearly demonstrates, the only way really to interpret God's speech in Scripture so that it meshes with God's speech in creation is to deny that Scripture is, after all, God's speech. And this Stek proceeds to do with systematic ruthlessness.

It is not difficult to point out the errors in all this. Such an approach to the whole question basically denies everything that belongs

to the Reformed faith.

Is it true that man's life can be so divided that he has a religious side to him and a secular side? Is it true that his faith has nothing to do with his life in the world? Is it true that he may not allow his faith to interfere in his scientific enterprise?

It is interesting that this same solution to other problems was first proposed by the modern rationalistic philosophers, beginning already with Malebranche. The men (Descartes, Leibnitz, etc.) who invented elaborate philosophical systems were often in conflict with the Christian faith which they also professed. When they were asked to explain how they could teach theories which conflicted with their faith, their answer was the same as that of Van Till: When we work in philosophy, we use reason as our tool, and our faith has nothing to do with what we are trying to do in philosophy. Our faith lies in a separate area which belongs to our life as members of the church. We believe and hold to the truth as set forth by our church, but we cannot allow that faith to interfere with our attempts to give reasonable and rational interpretations of reality as a whole.

Now, already in those days such a disjunction proved impossible. The rationalists could not divorce their life of faith from their philosophical enterprises. The result was that rationalism destroyed their faith and, when it entered the church (as it did also in the Netherlands), it destroyed the church. It is not without significance that higher

criticism is the direct result of rationalistic philosophy.

That such a disjunction in the life of man is impossible is evident from the fact that man is created by God as one living soul (Genesis 2:7). He cannot chop up his life into parts. In everything he does he stands in relation to God his Creator. From his heart are the issues of life. In every thought, every desire, every word, every deed, he is either one who obeys his God or one who hates his Creator. He acts out of love or hate. He worships, prays, eats, drinks, runs a drill press in the shop, brings forth children, studies the creation in such a way that every activity is an act of love or hate. The fulfillment of the whole law is to love the Lord his God with all his heart, but also with all his mind and with all his soul and with all his strength. Therefore, his faith or lack of faith is determinative for every activity in which he engages. And the object of faith is always the Scriptures, while the lack of faith is hatred of the Scriptures. So, if he is a man of faith, he carries Scripture with him in everything he does so that Scripture may tell him how to pray, how to raise children, how to work in his shop, how to study in school, how to examine rocks, how to look at stars through the telescope, how to explain the processes of photosynthesis, how to interpret what he sees in the strata of rock formations. Scripture is a lamp unto his feet wherever he goes and a light on his path wherever that path leads.

If he does not take Scripture with him into all these endeavors, then he shows by that that he hates Scripture, regardless of how he may speak to the contrary. He does not want Scripture to tell him what to do and how to act. He rebels against the idea of Scripture governing and ruling him in his scientific pursuits. He insists on being on his own, autonomous man, capable of working without God and outside of God's direction and control. He will not confess, as the Reformers insisted, that Scripture is the rule and canon of all of faith and all of life. By doing this, he shows that he not only hates Scripture, but also the God Who wrote the Scriptures.

And that bring us to the heretical position which John Stek takes as he attempts to harmonize evolutionism with Scripture. Now the theologian speaks. The fact that he speaks is in itself evidence that, after all, faith and science cannot be put into two different areas of life where ne'er the twain shall meet. They do belong together; they will be merged — also in the life of a man. Science says something about faith, just as faith inevitably says something about science.

Stek says that special revelation (Scripture) presupposes general revelation (creation and history). I am not sure what he means by this, for he really never tells us; but it seems as if what he means is this: Scripture arises out of general revelation, must be explained as to its origin by what goes on in general

revelation, especially history, and must be interpreted in the light of general revelation. If this is what he means, it is stuff and nonsense of the worst sort, without an iota of proof, a surrender to the crassest form of higher criticism that one can imagine, and a denial of the whole doctrine of the inspiration and authority of God's Word.

Stek denies, by implication, the following important and crucial principles of the Reformed faith. 1) He denies that with the fall of Adam the curse came upon the creation so that, while God speaks yet through the creation, He speaks in the loud speech of the curse; the speech of His holy anger and wrath against sin. Hence, while a man can know God's power and divinity in creation, this is made known to him only that he may be without excuse, for "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" (Romans 1:18ff.). 2) Stek denies that man has fallen into sin and become utterly blind to the truth of God. He denies that man's reason (used in his scientific enterprise) is so corrupted by sin that man cannot discover any of the truth of God. Of course, he can, from a merely formal point of view, discover some "truths" in the creation itself — i.e., some "truths" which have to do with the relationships of the various creatures in God's world. But Stek ought to know, and undoubtedly does know, that we always and only know any given thing in the relationships in which it stands to other things. We cannot know a thing *qua* thing. And

to know anything in the true sense of the word is to know a thing as it stands in relation to God its Creator. It is this latter true knowledge which is impossible for the totally depraved sinner. 3) Stek denies, therefore, that the revelation of God in Christ, infallibly recorded for us in Holy Scripture, is a radical, world-altering, descent of God into this sin-cursed creation by the power of His saving grace to redeem and restore His elect church and the whole creation by bringing them and it into the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. This revelation of Christ, recorded in every part of Scripture (including Genesis 1-11), is a power which does two things. a) It gives such light to shine in the darkness of the sin-cursed creation that one (who has faith) can understand the creation itself as it ought to be understood in the light of God's creative, redeeming eternal purpose in Christ. b) It gives light in the dark and depraved hearts of God's people so that they can embrace the Scriptures by faith, understand them, and use them (as Calvin says) as spectacles by which we are able to see God in creation. The Scriptures explain the creation. But this would do no good if our blindness were not taken away. The Scriptures do that too. They are a light shining in this dark world, but they are also a light shining within the hearts of God's people.

Stek denies all this. The result is that he denies the Scriptures, denies faith, and in the process becomes a rationalist. And so is every one who

holds to evolutionism. They are rationalists who exalt in the power of man's mind to discover truth. They need not God to reveal truth. They find it by their own great ability. It is the pride of sin which has infected them. God tells us how He has formed all things. His Word is simple, straight-forward, able to be understood by the smallest child who can understand a few words. But these proud men do not want what God says. They say: We know better. Our minds have searched the worlds and we have discovered the truth. God is wrong; we are right. Faith is not necessary to know; our human minds will do. And so they sneer at the simple but godly saint who bows before God's Word and says, I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

But they tell you: What are you going to do with our scientific discoveries which clearly show an old earth? The only answer for such people is the answer of Scripture itself: "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar!" (Romans 3:4).

Can a Christian do the work of a scientist? In spite of all the mocking words of this book which deny that one who is committed to the truth of creation can do science, we affirm with all the conviction within us: The believing child of God who holds to Scripture is the *only* one who can properly engage in science and discover the secrets and mysteries of the universe to explain them in such a way that God is glorified in all His works.

# Book Notices

*Commentary on Matthew*, by John A. Broadus. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990. 610 pages, \$18.95 (paper); \$24.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

One would be hard pressed to find a more thorough and detailed exposition of the *Gospel According to Matthew* than this commentary by Broadus. Broadus was a competent exegete who was fully committed to the inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture. This commentary is a phrase by phrase exposition of *Matthew* from the Greek. It would be useful for both lay persons and those able to work with the Greek.

John Albert Broadus (1827-1895) was born in Virginia and educated at the University of Virginia. A Baptist scholar, teacher, and preacher, Broadus was assistant professor of Latin and Greek at the University of Virginia as well as pastor of a Baptist church. In 1859 he became professor of New Testament Interpretation and Homiletics (art and science of preaching) at the newly founded Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and served as its president from 1859 until his death. Broadus also wrote a book entitled, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, which has become a classic in the field of Homiletics.

The Commentary is enhanced

by a lengthy introduction and by very helpful author, topic, term, person, and place indices.

Though Broadus was Arminian in his theology, the Reformed reader will be able to use this commentary with profit.

Kregel Publications is to be commended for making this commentary, which was first published in 1886, available for today's Bible student.

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*Diakonia: Mutual Helping With Justice and Compassion*, by Jaap vanKlinken; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing & J.H. Kok, 1989; 134 pages, no price included (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

The author of this book is the general manager of the Diaconal Office of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and writes from the perspective of this denomination and the Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk) which two denominations are seeking closer fellowship.

While the author includes in the book some biblical data on the office of deacon in the church and some historical material on the development of the office, his approach to the question of diaconal help is totally modernistic. He proceeds from the false and un-biblical assumption that all men are the image-

bearers of God and that, therefore, the work of mercy in the church is universal in that it extends to all our brothers.

This is a fatal flaw and leads to all sorts of erroneous conclusions. It is true, of course, that the church's work of mercy ought, under specific circumstances, to extend even to those outside the household of faith. But vanKlinken's approach deals with the work of mercy in an entirely different light. He departs from the Reformed conception of the office entirely and speaks of the work of mercy strictly in terms of this world and the healing of the wounds caused by oppression, greed, and capitalistic domination of the down-trodden and under-privileged. It makes of the work of mercy a strictly earthly work with no relation to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the church in preaching the gospel in the church and on the mission field. VanKlinken has no conception of the church and her glorious calling in this present life.

Because of his approach, vanKlinken uses a lot of the jargon of modern psychology and sociology — a jargon which almost no one can understand. To give a rather random sample of this, I quote from page 22.

*Needs are social when social factors (within a multi-conditional configuration) lead to a situation in which persons or groups are not able to achieve or maintain social integration without assistance. "Without assistance" implies that their own resources and existing facilities available to them*

*are unable to achieve the desired solution.*

*Social factors do not operate in isolation. When I referred to a multiconditional situation above, I meant to point out the presence of different factors, for example, spiritual, psychological, physical, and other elements. Multiconditional thinking prevents the simplistic interpretation of concrete needs from a single point of view. As in the pathogenesis, one must look not only at the causa but also the conditio. . . . The absence of multiconditional thinking could easily lead to philanthropy. Needs that evoke a quick response and a short-run answer cannot be helped by a multiconditional analysis; but those who seek to be potential helpers in emergencies should be aware of the long-run assistance that multiconditional thinking can give.*

Taking the approach which we outlined above, vanKlinken has his own particular view of Scripture. Scripture's principles must be adjusted to our modern culture and made to fit the demands which we face in the 20th century. This implies, quite obviously, that vanKlinken is strongly in favor of women office-bearers because the texts of Scripture which forbid this practice in the churches are culturally conditioned and have no relevance to the church today (p. 59).

The book is, therefore, of very little use to an understanding of the office of deacons in the church. Its sole value is a negative one: it tells us what modern thinking, even in

the Reformed churches, is like and warns us of the dangers of departing from the Scriptures in our life and calling. . . .

***The Basic Ideas of Calvinism***, by H. Henry Meeter. Revised by Paul A. Marshall. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990. 221 pages, \$12.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. David J. Engelsma.]

This is the 6th edition of a book on fundamental truths of Calvinism in the areas of theology and political theory.

Meeter finds the central thought of Calvinism in its "great thought of God," specifically "the absolute sovereignty of God" (pp. 17, 18). He has fine passages on the relation of general and special revelation and on the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Generally, however, the doctrinal tenets of Calvinism are inadequately treated.

The Calvin College professor was an ardent advocate of common grace. Common grace dominates the Calvinistic life in the world — in science; art; work; and government. Common grace for Meeter was a basic idea of Calvinism.

The second half of the book — the larger half — investigates and suggests a Calvinistic political theory and corresponding practice. Reckoning with John Calvin's prohibition to the citizen against resistance to the civil government (as many writers on the subject inexcusably fail to do) and noting Calvin's

allowance to the lesser magistrates to check tyranny, Meeter distinguishes between lawful and illegal uprisings in history by Reformed peoples against the rulers. The Dutch resistance of 1568, the "Glorious Revolution" of the English of 1688, and the American Revolution of 1776 pass the test. The revolt of the French in the 16th century does not.

Paul Marshall of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto has added three new chapters to the book in the section, "Political Ideas of Calvinism."

Peter DeKlerk has provided a fine, new bibliography on the life and teachings of John Calvin. Included are works by Protestant Reformed writers.

. . .

***Truth Applied: Application in Preaching***, by Jay E. Adams. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990. 144 pages, \$1.59 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

Adams, who taught Homiletics for many years at both Westminster Theological Seminaries (Philadelphia and Escondido, California), defines "application" as that

*process by which preachers make scriptural truths so pertinent to members of their congregations that they not only understand how those truths should effect changes in their lives but also feel obligated and perhaps even eager to implement those changes (p. 17).*

The weakness of this definition is that it asserts that preachers "make scriptural truths pertinent to members of their congregations." Scripture is pertinent to the members of the congregation. Preachers do not make the Bible pertinent. It is the preacher's task to show the congregation how a particular text applies to them and to do that in an interesting and arresting way. Perhaps Adams meant something different from what is actually stated in the definition, for he himself makes this very point a little later in the book when he stresses that God gave us the truth in *applied form* and that the preacher must "uncover those situations in our time and place to which it (the text, RDD) *already does apply*" (p. 49).

In spite of this weakness this is a good book and ought to be read carefully by seminarians and preachers. Chapter 5, "The Holy Spirit and Preaching," is excellent. In this chapter Adams emphasizes that we must glean the principles of preaching from the Scriptures — especially from the recorded, inspired sermons in the Book of Acts. The Spirit's concerns in preaching are that it be solidly based on Holy Scripture, clear and bold, wise, and correctly timed. There must be a "readiness to present the message that is needed *when it is needed*." In chapter 6, "Applicatory Introductions," Adams offers many fine suggestions that if followed will improve any preacher's sermon introductions.

The three or four hours it would

take to read this little book would be time well spent for any preacher or would-be preacher interested in improving his preaching.

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*Theology of the Reformers*, by Timothy George. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988. 377 pages, \$21.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is a book for all who want to learn what the main Protestant Reformers taught. It is also the book for those who can benefit from a fresh, solid reexamination of the teachings of the Reformers. No layman need fear that this study is over his theological head. In fact, church librarians may well order the book for the congregation. But it is likely that the pastor will be first in line to check it out.

Church historian and historical theologian, Timothy George, gives us the central teachings of Martin Luther, of Huldrych Zwingli, of John Calvin, and of Menno Simons (not "Simmons" as in the table of contents). Although not a biography, the book does bring in important and interesting incidents in the lives of the four that are helpful in understanding their ministries.

Outstanding virtues of the book are its thorough knowledge of the material and its faithfulness in presenting it, especially the latter. In contrast to those who ignore Luther's doctrine of predestination, or who minimize the place of predestination in Luther's theology, or who

even deny that Luther held double predestination, George (a Southern Baptist!) asserts and proves that predestination was central in Luther's theology.

*Luther did not shrink from a doctrine of absolute, double predestination, although he admitted that "this is very strong wine, and solid food for the strong." . . . Against the objection that such a view turns God into an arbitrary ogre, Luther answered — with Paul — "God wills it so, and because he wills it so, it is not wicked. . . . Let God be good," cried Erasmus the moralist. "Let God be God," replied Luther the theologian. . . . Luther never softened his doctrine of predestination (as did later Lutherans). . . . (p. 77).*

Although the Reformed reader will not have the interest in Menno Simons that he has in the other three men, he likely has more to learn about the theology of this anabaptist leader than he does about the theology of the others.

George's style is clear. He

skillfully intersperses key quotations from the Reformers themselves. The quotation from Luther, giving spiritual counsel to a woman troubled by the question of her election, is a classic (pp. 78, 79).

One criticism: In one line, George gives some slight credence to the infamous tactics of Suzanne Selinger and William Bouwsma. Selinger and Bouwsma are engaged in the unscientific and scurrilous work of explaining away Calvin's ministry and theology by means of their analysis of his alleged psychological problems. George pays deference to this psycho-biography (psycho-fiction!) when he writes, about Calvin: "This no doubt contributed to his sense of personal anxiety and unrest" (cf. p. 168 and appended footnote). This kind of biography resembles the Roman Catholic practice in time past of exhuming the corpses of the hated saints in order further to mutilate and destroy them. It is unworthy of Dr. George—even one line.

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**Contributors for this issue include:**

***Rev. Chris Coleborn*** is pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Brisbane, Australia.

***Prof. Robert D. Decker*** is professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

***Prof. David J. Engelsma*** is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

***Prof. Herman C. Hanko*** is professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

***Rev. Bernard Woudenberg*** is pastor of the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.