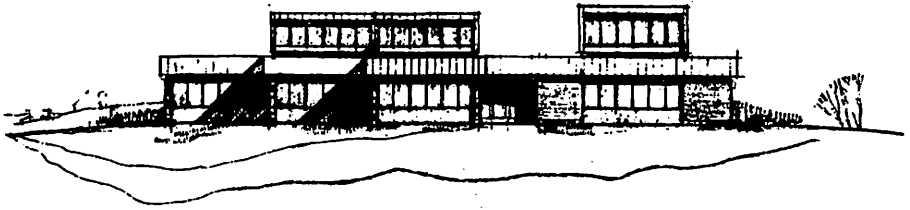


# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**



November, 1991  
VOLUME XXV, Number 1

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

# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**

Edited for the faculty of  
The Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches

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David J. Engelsma  
Herman C. Hanko**

by  
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The Protestant Reformed Theological Journal is published semi-annually, in April and November, and distributed in limited quantities, at no charge, by the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Interested persons desiring to have their names on the mailing list should write the Editor, at the address below. Books for review should be sent to the book review editor, also at the address of the school.

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## Editorial Notes

Because the name of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has become all but synonymous with sound biblical preaching, our readers will be interested in the continuing article of Prof. Decker. The series entitled "The Preaching Style of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones" was originally Prof. Decker's thesis for his Th.M degree.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prof. Engelsma begins a new three-part series in this issue of the *Journal*. This series will be a careful and detailed study of I Corinthians 7. Because this chapter is so decisive a part of the Scriptures for a biblical and Reformed sexual ethics, and because sexual immorality is a tidal wave of corruption which threatens to engulf our society and the church, this series will be of special interest to our readers.

It might not be amiss in this connection to remind our readers that Prof. Engelsma has authored a book on marriage entitled, *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church*. This book can be ordered from the Seminary.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prof. Hanks concludes his series on "Issues in Hermeneutics." All the issues facing the church today (homosexuality, feminism, evolutionism, etc.) finally come down to issues of Hermeneutics. How important it is that the church make no concessions to the prevalent higher critical methods of interpreting the Scriptures, but remain faithful to those principles held by the church from the beginning of her history.

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An Index (by subject and title) of the *Journal* is available. This index covers all of the issues from the beginning through this current issue. If you desire a copy, please write us (our address is on the inside of the front cover), and we will send the Index, free of charge. ▲

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# The Preaching Style of David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (2)

Robert D. Decker

## HIS VIEW OF SCRIPTURE (HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH)

### The Scriptures: Divinely Inspired

One looks in vain for clear, clean, crisp definitions in the writings of Lloyd-Jones. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that Lloyd-Jones was a preacher and not a systematic theologian. There is a significant difference between a dogmatist's lecture and a preacher's sermon. The difference is that a dogmatist presents a truth in logical or systematic fashion, as gleaned from the whole of Scripture. In a sermon the preacher is limited to an exposition of a specific text or passage. This does not mean that theology cannot be done in a sermon. It can and ought to be done. But in the nature of the case it will be theology as revealed in a specific text and its context. Most, if not all, of Lloyd-Jones' theology was done in the pulpit and must, therefore, be gleaned from his sermons.

From his sermons we are able to discern a clear and well-defined view of the origin, nature or character, and authority of the Holy Scriptures. He believed that the Scriptures were divinely inspired and therefore contained no errors. The Scriptures are the final authority for the faith and life of the Christian. These strongly-held convictions determined Lloyd-Jones' view of preaching.

There can be no doubt as to where "the Doctor" stood on the question of the inspiration of the Bible. Early in his ministry in an address given at the Royal Albert Hall in London on December 3, 1935, Lloyd-Jones had this to say:

The real cause of the present state of the Church is to be found in the Church's *voluntary* departure from a belief in the Bible as the fully inspired Word of God ....<sup>1</sup>

What Lloyd-Jones meant by his "belief in the Bible as the fully inspired Word of God," he stated clearly in a sermon on II Peter 1:19-21, entitled, "The Authority of Scripture:"

In other words, we have set out by Peter in this very explicit manner the great New Testament and Old Testament doctrine of revelation. The claim is made

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Declaring Evangelical Doctrine," *The Banner of Truth*, 212 (May, 1981): 19, 20.

here that God has been pleased in His infinite compassion and condescension to speak to men. The claim is made for this Book that it is absolutely unique, that there is no other book in the world like it. All other books are the production of man; they are the result of man's will, man's understanding, man's insight. But here is a Book which claims that it is the record of God speaking. And it claims this with regard to the message — revelation — and also the way in which the message was recorded — inspiration.<sup>2</sup>

This element, viz., that the Bible claims to be the record of God speaking, is crucial to Lloyd-Jones' understanding of the doctrine of inspiration. The Bible, he believed, is a unique book, and its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is not the production of man, but it is the record of God's speech to man.

The second element in his view of the doctrine of inspiration is that man cannot, because of his sin, arrive at a knowledge of God, but that God has been pleased to reveal the knowledge of himself to man. Lloyd-Jones explained it this way:

This is the second great fact on which we stand, and on which we decide that the whole of our life must be lived in terms of this Book. It is not human thought and understanding, with men trying to predict and prophesy what is going to happen. Here we find that the eternal God has been pleased to make known unto men certain things that are of vital importance. The teaching of the Book, in other words, is that, because of sin, mankind cannot arrive at a knowledge of God, but that, in spite of that, God has been pleased to grant this knowledge to man. This is not the time to study in detail the doctrine of inspiration, but we can put it like this — the Bible teaches us that God, who is inconceivable to man, has been pleased to reveal Himself to man in two main ways. First there is general revelation. ... But above all I would emphasize the fact that God has revealed Himself by speaking to certain chosen servants, and by revealing His message to them and by enabling them to record it — that is the claim for the inspiration of the Bible. We see that God guided men like Moses. Moses recorded facts. You remember how the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Heb. 11:3). Now that was a fact that was revealed by the Spirit of God to Moses. It was not Moses' imagination or idea or discovery; it was revealed to him, and he recorded it together with all the other facts in his books. The same is true of prophecy and prediction. Coming events are communicated to the prophets by the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that Lloyd-Jones believed that the doctrine of inspiration meant that God gave His message to certain chosen servants and they recorded this message. It is equally clear that Lloyd-Jones believed that these chosen servants recorded facts.

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<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons On II Peter* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 99.

Still more, the Doctor insisted that not merely ideas or the "Truth" were inspired, nor were merely the biblical writers inspired. The doctrine of inspiration, according to the claim of the Bible itself, means that the words were given to the biblical writers. Lloyd-Jones put it this way: "Not only was the man taken hold of, he was carried along, he was borne along. We believe that the words of Scripture are inspired by the Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup> In response to the objection that this view of inspiration is "mechanical," Lloyd-Jones said:

Does that mean, says someone, that these men were but amanuenses? Does it mean that they were just taking down what God dictated to them? No, we do not believe in a mechanical doctrine of inspiration, because you cannot read the Scriptures without noting the variation in style. When you read a certain passage you know that it has been written by Paul; you recognize Paul as you read it. In the same way, when you come to passages written by Peter, you say, "Obviously that is Peter." Anyone can recognize the style of John. Personality has not been effaced. ... Their own personality was given free play, but it was controlled by the Holy Spirit....<sup>5</sup>

In summary, then, Lloyd-Jones held to a belief in the doctrine of verbal inspiration. The Bible is a unique Book. It is not the production of men. It is the record of God speaking to men. God in His mercy has made Himself known to mankind. The Holy Spirit so moved men to write that what they wrote was the very Word of God. God did this without doing violence to the differing personalities and styles of the biblical writers.

### **The Scriptures: Infallible, Inerrant**

Lloyd-Jones' conception of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture led quite naturally to his conviction that the Scriptures as we have them today are without error. In the same sermon quoted above (II Peter 1:19-21), the Doctor asserted:

The doctrine means that these men were so controlled by the Holy Spirit that they were safeguarded from error; they were guided not only to a knowledge of the truth, but in their expression of the truth. Their own personality was given free play, but it was controlled by the Holy Spirit, and that guaranteed this ultimate result.<sup>6</sup>

Precisely what Lloyd-Jones meant by the inerrancy or infallibility of the Bible becomes clear from an incident which took place at a Theological Students' Conference, as reported by Leith Samuel, one of the preachers who often preached at Westminster Chapel during the summers. According to Samuel:

But the highlight of the conference came when the Doctor chaired a free-for-

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

all. The Scottish theologians were to the fore in hurling their questions at him. The sharpest minds included James and David Torrance and James Barr, all three of whom became well-known professors. James Barr waxed eloquent, apparently trying to tie the Doctor up in knots about the inspiration of Scripture. He and his friends suggested the Bible was like a regenerate man, with something from God which was holy and true, bound up with something that was still sinful and far from perfect. On this analogy we could expect to find true and wonderful things in the Bible, but also errors.

The Doctor's answer was a firm "No! You have the wrong model. The Bible is like Christ, with the divine and human elements united. As the human nature of Christ was without sin, so the human element in the Bible as originally written was without error, whether in geography, history, scientific allusion or any other aspect. In His providence God has allowed some copyists to make an occasional and remarkably rare mistake, for example in some numerals. But there are no textual mistakes that put any important truth at risk."<sup>7</sup>

Because the Bible is divinely inspired and therefore without error, it was for Lloyd-Jones all sufficient. In Scripture only and nowhere else do we find all that there is to know about God as a "Father and loving God ...."<sup>8</sup> Scripture, the Doctor believed, reveals all that we need to know about creation, man and his fall and depravity, Christ and redemption, the past and the future. To use his own words, Scripture is "a Word which in truth and in fact is the Word of God Himself ... it is not human understanding; it is God speaking. Let him who is wise hear the Word of God."<sup>9</sup>

### The Scriptures' Authority

The inevitable conclusion to Lloyd-Jones' views of the inspiration, inerrancy, and all-sufficiency of Scripture was that Scripture is the final authority. The authority of Scripture was defined by Lloyd-Jones as "... that property by which it demands faith and obedience to all its declarations."<sup>10</sup>

But to understand what the Doctor meant by this definition of the authority of Scripture one must grasp what he meant by the authority of Jesus Christ. Christ must be our starting point, said he: "... because He is the ultimate and the final authority." The gospels, Lloyd-Jones argued, all present the Lord Jesus Christ as this final authority. This is the message, for example, of John the Baptist. The fact that God conferred absolute authority upon Jesus Christ is also emphasized in the gospels. In this connection

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Catherwood, ed., *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Chosen by God* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1986), p. 191.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons On II Peter*, pp. 99, 100.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), p. 44.



Lloyd-Jones cited the baptism of Jesus when the Holy Spirit descended upon our Lord in the form of a dove and the voice of God was heard from heaven (Matt. 3:17); and he cited the transfiguration of Jesus when, again, the voice of God was heard from heaven, saying: "Hear Him."<sup>11</sup>

As further proof of his contention that Jesus is the "ultimate and the final authority," Lloyd-Jones pointed to the fact that Jesus repeatedly claimed absolute authority. Jesus was careful in all His teaching to speak of "my Father and your Father." Jesus emphasized: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). Jesus claimed: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 16:6). Lloyd-Jones cited the fact that in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) our Lord repeatedly said: "ye have heard ... but I say unto you." And in the conclusion of this sermon Jesus spoke of hearing and doing "these sayings of mine." This, according to Lloyd-Jones, distinguishes Jesus from the prophets who never used "I," but used rather the formula, "Thus saith the Lord."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus' miracles proved His authority. They were, Lloyd-Jones asserted, signs that Jesus gave "... to assert and to attest His own Person and His own authority." The fact that Jesus possessed the power to forgive sins and proved it by telling a man to "take up his bed and walk" testified to our Lord's authority. Lloyd-Jones continued the argument by citing passages which teach that the disciples recognized Jesus' authority (John 6:66-69, Matt. 16:16) and a passage which teaches that even our Lord's enemies recognized His authority (John 10:33). The resurrection from the dead is the "ultimate proof" of Jesus' authority, and His ascension is a "vital part" of the testimony to Christ's authority, the Doctor claimed.<sup>13</sup>

Not only the gospels but the other New Testament writers as well all testified to the authority of Christ. The Book of Acts, Lloyd-Jones asserted, is the record of what Jesus continued to do and teach. Christ is the "Builder of the Church," he believed. Lloyd-Jones contended that Pentecost is "... the final assertion of the supreme authority of Jesus Christ." The Apostles were deeply conscious of this fact, according to the Doctor.

After citing numerous passages of the epistles which testify to the authority of Christ, Lloyd-Jones concluded with these words:

Thus we see that the whole of the New Testament from Acts to Revelation is nothing but the verification and the out-working of His statements, "I will build my church," and "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-24.

Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew xxviii. 18-20). He has exercised and is exercising all authority and power. "He must reign till all his enemies shall be made his footstool."

"Christianity is Christ." It is not a philosophy, indeed not even a religion. It is the good news that "God hath visited and redeemed his people" and that He has done so by sending His only begotten Son into this world to live, and die, and rise again. Our Lord Jesus Christ is "the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last." In other words, He is the one Authority.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus Christ, the "final and supreme Authority," is the message of the Scriptures. This was Lloyd-Jones' firm conviction. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old, and therefore cannot be understood apart from the context of the Old Testament. This is evident from the fact that the apostles preached Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God and the Savior of the world from the Old Testament Scriptures. Likewise Jesus in His preaching and teaching was always showing how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Him. Lloyd-Jones was convinced that the great message which must be preached is Jesus Christ, His person and work, in the context of the Bible.<sup>15</sup>

After briefly discussing recent (late 1950s) attacks on the authority of the Scriptures, Lloyd-Jones presented what he considered "the right approach" to the authority of the Bible. The "right approach" includes four elements. First, the Scriptures must be viewed as a whole. Second, the question of the authority of the Scriptures is a matter of faith, not argument. While many useful, valuable arguments may be adduced in support of the Bible's authority, ultimately one either accepts its authority or rejects it. Third, because this is the case, Lloyd-Jones believed that Scripture's authority is a truth to be asserted, not argued. Fourth, the entire Bible is the Word of God. Lloyd-Jones held that one should believe the authority of the Bible because the Scriptures themselves claim that authority.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, Lloyd-Jones believed with all his heart that:

The choice for us today (1958, RDD) is really as simple as it was for those first Christians in the early days. We either accept this authority or else we accept the authority of "modern knowledge," modern science, human understanding, human ability. It is one or the other. Let us not be confused by the modern argument about a changed position. We are still left where believers have always been left. It is still "Christ or the critics."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

## Summary

Lloyd-Jones' view of Scripture, therefore, consisted of the following elements: 1) The Bible is the record of God's speech to man. 2) Not only was the truth inspired or the biblical writers inspired, but the very words were inspired. 3) The Bible contains no errors. 4) The message of the entire Bible is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the "final and the supreme Authority."

These strongly-held convictions had everything to do with Lloyd-Jones' view of preaching. From a negative point of view, he felt very strongly that the chief reason for the decline in preaching was "the loss of belief in the authority of the Scriptures."<sup>18</sup> Lloyd-Jones believed that in the Bible God has revealed:

... His own thoughts concerning man, and life, and the world. Here we are told how man came into existence, how all man's troubles are the result of sin, and what God has done about sin, and what God is going to do about sin. Here is a map of history. Here is a philosophy of the ages. Here we are told what is going to happen in the days that lie ahead....<sup>19</sup>

He was convinced that those great themes of Scripture had to be preached. Speaking in 1941, in the midst of the horror of World War II, Lloyd-Jones said:

We must rouse ourselves and realize afresh that though our Gospel is timeless and changeless, it nevertheless is always contemporary. We must meet the present situation and we must speak a word to the world that none else can speak.<sup>20</sup>

It is abundantly evident from the many volumes of his printed sermons that no matter where or in what context he was called upon to preach, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones never wavered from this conviction. He preached Christ, the Son of God, the "final and the supreme Authority," the only Savior from sin and death. ▲

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<sup>18</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons On II Peter*, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Plight Of Man and the Power Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 11.

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# Holiness in Marriage and Single Life: Interpretation and Application of I Corinthians 7

*David J. Engelsma*

## **1. Sex for the Saints without and within Marriage**

There is great need for a faithful witness in the churches of the West to the biblical teaching on the related subjects of sex, marriage, divorce, remarriage, and single life. Western civilization shows its fundamental paganism by its unashamed promiscuity and perversity. A disciplined, holy life regarding sex and marriage is not only crumbling in the churches, but also has in many churches already completely broken down. The impure and disorderly lives of the members meet with silence on the part of the churches' teaching office. Or the churches defend and justify the sexual uncleanness and marital infidelity of their members. Either the churches officially adopt reports that sanction the sexual activity of the unmarried; the unbiblical divorcing and the remarrying of the married; and the homosexual lust and conduct of married and unmarried, or the churches preach a grace of God in Christ that approves all this wickedness by tolerating it in the lives of professing Christians and in the fellowship of the congregation.

None of this is due to any fault in Scripture. Scripture speaks clearly, sharply, and extensively on those aspects of the holy life of the believer that consist of sexual purity and of the sanctity of marriage. One of the outstanding passages is I Corinthians 7. I intend to explain this passage in three consecutive articles in this *Journal*. In this article, I will set forth the teaching of I Corinthians 7 regarding sex in the lives of the saints both within and outside of marriage. The second article will treat of the chapter's teachings on single life and on marriage. The third article will consider the instruction of I Corinthians 7 on desertion, divorce, and remarriage.

As is indicated by the words that introduce the chapter, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me," the apostle is answering specific questions about marriage from the recent converts in Corinth, Greece. These new Christians had problems in their marriages and problems with marriage itself. Like all good pastors, the apostle is forced to be a marriage counselor. The chapter, therefore, is primarily practical. It differs in this respect from that other great chapter in Paul's writings on marriage, Ephesians 5:22ff., which is primarily doctrinal. However, the apostle answers the practical questions and solves the problems by applying the doctrine of the Word of God to the lives of the Corinthian saints. He does not accommodate the holy life of the believers in marriage or in single life to the prevailing culture in Corinth. He does not make concessions because of the situation of his questioners. He is not pragmatic, interested in what "works." Rather, he shows and insists upon the practice required by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Like the Corinthians, the people of God at the end of the 20th century must seek answers to their marriage problems from the apostles of Christ, that is, from the Word of God. Like the apostle, the churches must give the Word of God as the answers to these problems. The world is filled with advice and counsel about sex and about marriage. But the world's wisdom in these matters is not derived from the gospel of Jesus Christ. Listened to, this wisdom leads the saints astray. It is foolishness. It becomes increasingly rare that the churches and their teachers base their instruction and guidance squarely on the Word of God. Especially when church members find themselves in marital difficulties, the churches are ready to give counsel that deviates from, and even plainly contradicts, Holy Scripture. In the end, there is no difference between the advice of the unbelieving counselor and the advice of the supposedly Christian marriage counselor.

Christ has His own unique practice of marriage. Therefore, the church, taught to observe all things that Christ commanded the apostles (Matt. 28:20), has her own distinctive counsel concerning problems in this important area of human life.

Paul's answers to the questions of the Corinthians became part of the apostle's open letter to the entire congregation at Corinth and part of the inspired Scripture to the church of all ages. This, evidently, is instruction that all need and that all may have — married and unmarried; men and women; adults and children.

The presence of the 7th chapter of I Corinthians in the Bible guards against two dangers that churches can fall into. One is that the churches keep back sharp, strong teaching on marriage from their members because this teaching will offend some or because it will make the lives of some very painful. This is common. As divorce and remarriage become rampant in

almost all churches, the preachers see to it that they never proclaim God's hatred of divorce (Mal. 2:16) or the adultery of remarriage (Mark 10:1-12). It is a striking thing that often it is the very people whom the preachers are trying to protect who are dissatisfied with the churches' silence and who demand to know what the Bible really teaches.

Besides, if the churches teach faithfully, they can to a large extent prevent the sins and miseries that now are flooding the congregations.

The apostle was not hesitant to give the recent converts at Corinth the full, plain, unvarnished truth about marriage, even though for some this meant a difficult, painful life. Some had to remain married to unbelievers. Others had to remain unmarried as long as they lived.

The other danger ward off by the presence of I Corinthians 7 in the Bible is that the churches neglect to teach certain aspects of marriage because of squeamishness about sex.

Scripture is characterized by frankness and openness about sex both as regards its abuse outside of marriage, e.g., Proverbs 5 and 7, and as regards its use and enjoyment within marriage, e.g., Proverbs 5 and the Song of Solomon. Paul is open and blunt in I Corinthians 7. The subject of verses 2-5 is the sexual aspect of marriage and sexual behavior in marriage. John Calvin took note of this in his commentary on I Corinthians 7:5:

Profane persons might think that Paul does not act with sufficient modesty in discoursing in this manner as to the intercourse of a husband with his wife; or at least that it was unbecoming the dignity of an Apostle.

The churches also must be free to speak plainly and unashamedly about sex, especially since the saints at the end of the 20th century live in an impudent world. Yet, like their apostle, the churches may not trifle with the subject in a silly, jesting, crude, or embarrassing manner. The church has her own spiritual manner as well as her own sound message.

We must also learn from the answers to the Corinthians' questions about marriage, what truths about our own marriages are important. We must learn to ask the right questions. It is a real danger today that Christians learn their questions from the world. "How can I be happy in marriage?" "How can I find the greatest sexual pleasure and satisfaction?" "What may I do to deliver myself from the misery of a bad wife or husband?"

Scripture teaches believers to ask their own, and quite different, questions. "In what calling am I to please God—in marriage or single life?" "How can I please my wife or husband sexually?" "If I have a miserable wife or husband, what am I required by the Lord to do in order to honor His marriage ordinance?"

## The Warning against Fornication in Chapter 6

Immediately upon taking up chapter 7, we are directed to the background of the chapter in the warning against fornication in I Corinthians 6:13-20. The reason given for marrying in verse 2 directs us to this background: "to avoid fornication" (literally: 'on account of fornications').

In the New Testament, fornication (Greek: *porneia*, from the word for a whore) does not refer only to the sexual sin of unmarried persons before marriage. Often it refers to sexual sin of all kinds whether committed by unmarried persons or by married persons. In Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9, "fornication" refers to illicit sexual activity on the part of a married person. In Ephesians 5:3, it is used broadly to include all forms of transgression against the seventh commandment. Moulton and Milligan's *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* explains "fornication" as "applied to unlawful sexual intercourse generally. It was a wider term than *moicheia* (the Greek word for adultery — DJE)." Defending the explanation of "fornication" in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 as "extra-marital intercourse on the part of the wife, which in practice is adultery," the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* rejects the interpretation that makes "fornication" sexual sin prior to marriage as though "fornication" in the New Testament always refers exclusively to sexual activity of the unmarried.<sup>1</sup> The fornication against which Paul warns in I Corinthians 6 was intercourse with whores not only by the unmarried men of the Corinthian congregation but also by the married men.

This was so common in the pagan world of Paul's time, and especially in Corinth, that nothing was thought of it. It was accepted behavior, like eating and drinking. For this reason the apostle had to insist on a radical difference between eating and fornicating: "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord: and the Lord for the body" (I Cor. 6:13). The prevalence of fornication among the heathen and the heathen attitude toward it of taking it for granted were indicated by the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. This decision had to mention the sin of fornication, with certain matters of Christian liberty, as forbidden to the converts from heathendom.

In the fornicating world of that day, Corinth was notorious for sexual license. It was the San Francisco of that time. F. F. Bruce has written that Corinth's "name became proverbial for sexual laxity. The verb

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<sup>1</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964-1974), 6:592.

*corinthiazesthai*, lit. 'to play the Corinthian,' was current from the fifth century B.C. in the sense of practising fornication."<sup>2</sup>

As the decision of the Jerusalem Council made plain, it was a danger that Gentile converts to Christianity, having adopted the attitude of their society toward fornication, would carry that attitude with them into the church. They would then not view fornication as diametrically opposed to the Christian faith and life and as absolutely forbidden to disciples of Christ. Rather, they would regard it as something permitted to Christians and, therefore, would freely practice it. It was particularly the danger that these converts from heathendom would view fornicating as their freedom in Christ. This made it necessary that the apostle address the issue of Christian liberty in I Corinthians 6:12: "All things are lawful unto me," etc. Verses 13ff. make clear that fornicating is not a matter of Christian liberty. Fornicating is sin: "He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body" (v. 18). It is a gross and grievous sin against the Lord Christ and His gospel.

This points out that the situation of those to whom the Holy Spirit addressed I Corinthians 7, with its background in the condemnation of fornication in chapter 6, was the same as the situation of the saints today. Christians today live in a world saturated with fornication. It is no different from eating, except that more effort is put forth to stir up the appetite for fornicating than for eating. The result is that, at best, the members of the churches are inclined to view fornication indulgently. At worst, they practice it as an activity for which the gospel of Christ gives them liberty. This is found in churches that are evangelical and Reformed. Baptized young people fornicate freely, if not boldly, all the while maintaining their membership in the churches and thinking of themselves as Christians. If it has not come to such a pass that married church members visit the whores or sleep with other men than their husbands, as their freedom in Jesus, married professing Christians do publicly practice fornication as a gospel-right by divorcing their mates and remarrying the object of their lust.

The apostle of Christ breaks into this situation with the gospel's uncompromising condemnation of fornication and sharp warning against this sin. Here is evident both the moral purity of the gospel and its fearless courage, as well, of course, as the courage of the genuine preacher of the gospel. Christianity opposes the prevailing culture! The gospel is the sworn foe of sexual immorality! The true servant of the Lord makes no concessions

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<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 249.



to the fornicating age, offers no compromise with the world's thinking on fornication, and licenses no church member's fornication by appeal to the liberty of the gospel of grace.

The condemnation of fornication begins already in verses 9-11 of I Corinthians 6. Fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God in the Day of Christ. One specific form of fornication which, if impenitently continued in, will exclude those who have practiced it from the kingdom is homosexual activity ("effeminate ... abusers of themselves with mankind"). In verse 11, the power of the gospel to cleanse men and women from fornication is extolled. It forgives all past sins of fornication, including homosexual sins ("but ye are justified ..."); and it breaks the ruling power of the sin of fornication ("but ye are sanctified ...").

Whether the gospel has the power to deliver those who have the perverse desire for people of their own sex, so that they crucify this desire and resolutely refuse to practice it, is not even a question in the church where the gospel is known. The "name of the Lord Jesus and ... the Spirit of our God" have this power in every child of God who may have this unnatural desire, just as they have this power in the other children of God who struggle with natural sexual lusts.

The condemnation of fornication stated in verses 9-11 is fully worked out in I Corinthians 6:13-20. The starting-point of the careful exposure of fornication as unlawful for the Christian is the fundamental truth that the body of the Christian shares in the redemption of Christ: "ye are bought with a price ..." (v. 20). Because the believer has been bought with the blood of Christ, body as well as spirit, his body belongs to God: "... which are God's" (v. 20). It follows that the body of the believer is "for the Lord (Jesus)" even as "the Lord (is) for the body" (v. 13). The believer's body has the glorious, everlasting destiny of the resurrection (v. 14).

No less glorious is the present condition of the body. The believer's body is the dwelling — the "temple" — "of the Holy Ghost" (v. 19). By this indwelling of the Spirit, Who is the Spirit of Christ, the body is united to Christ so that the body as a whole and every member in particular, including the sexual organs, are "members of Christ" (v. 15).

The Christian is "joined unto the Lord (Jesus)" (v. 17); and this "joining" includes the body. The word in the Greek is *kollaoo*. It is the word translated "cleave" in Matthew 19:5, with reference to the one-flesh union of husband and wife in marriage as originally revealed in Genesis 2:24: "A man ... shall cleave unto his wife ...." Every believer is joined to Christ with his body, because Christ cleaves to him, body as well as soul, in the mystery of the real, spiritual marriage (cf. Eph. 5:22ff.).

This makes fornication an appalling, repulsive, almost unthinkable sin: The fornicating Christian unites the members of Christ with the whore:

"Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot?" (v. 15).

There is no such thing as "casual sex." According to verse 16, the fornicator is "*joined* (Greek: *kollaoo*) to an harlot." The fornicator does not merely "have sex" with a whore (who can be the professional prostitute or the "easy mark" at school or the adulterous woman in the neighborhood). But in the sexual act he is joined to her, cleaves to her, enters into a relationship with her that is something like the union of marriage.

This last is expressed when the apostle states that the fornicator becomes "one body" with the whore, on the ground ("for") that God said that the "two ... shall be one flesh" (v. 16). The apostle does not teach that sex with a whore constitutes marriage. Deliberately, he describes the relationship with the whore as "*one body*," not as one *flesh*. Becoming one flesh is a marriage. Becoming one body is not. Nevertheless, there is a union that parodies that of marriage. Because fornication uses sex in sinning, sex that belongs strictly, exclusively, and significantly to marriage, sex that is at the heart of marriage's unique union, every act of fornication involves a real, a close, and a significant union of the two. There is a shadow-union of marriage, a devilish counterpart to, and imitation of, marriage.

The horror is that the Christian does this with a body that is united to Christ, so that now Christ is united to a whore, through the fornicating Christian.

Against this, Paul reacts with his strongest expression of outrage and disgust: "God forbid" (v. 15). If the churches today are unable to make this "God forbid" their own, in their preaching and discipline, there is no love for Jesus Christ in them, nor any honor of the risen, all-glorious Lord.

Because of the utter "unbecomingness" of fornication for Christians and because of the prevalence and power of the temptation to fornicate, the apostle calls the saints, old and young, to "flee fornication!" (v. 18). This is a far stronger admonition than the demand not to commit fornication. Many sins, the Christian ought to stand up to. This one, even the holiest saint must run away from. The only way of conquering is the way of the abjectest cowardice. A brave man or woman here is a fool.

The saint flees by avoiding whatever incites to fornication, whatever could conceivably lead to it, and whatever is remotely connected with it. This includes dangerous physical proximity and contact, e.g., dancing. Banned are all books, magazines, and pictures that present fornication as good and that stir up the passion of illicit sexual desire — a desire that is powerful enough without any artificial incitement. The English word "pornography" is derived from the Greek word for fornication, *porneia*, indicating that this shameful product of a debauched culture (which some professing Christians evidently suppose they have the liberty to enjoy) falls

directly under the vehement denunciation of the apostle in I Corinthians 6. Prudent obedience to the command to flee fornication is a reason why the Christian does not watch many programs on television and most of the movies. Indeed, it is a reason why Christians ought seriously to consider not having a television set in their home. It is difficult to flee fornication when almost every program and every commercial trade on fornication and arouse unchaste thoughts and desires.

In addition the child of God flees fornication by running into marriage. This is the connection between the warning against fornication in I Corinthians 6 and the advocacy of marriage in I Corinthians 7. To avoid fornication, let every saint marry.

Before we look at the instruction of chapter 7 regarding sex in marriage, several observations on the warning of chapter 6 against sex outside of marriage are in order.

First, the warning is timely. This is so obvious to everyone that nothing more needs to be said about it.

Second, the warning is clear, sharp, and urgent.

Third, the warning is uniquely the warning of *the gospel*. It is a warning to believers and their holy children based on their status as redeemed, renewed saints in Christ. It is not a warning to all and sundry, because fornication ruins society and because fornication exposes physical life to deadly diseases. But it is a warning to those whom Christ bought at the price of His blood and in whom the Holy Spirit has taken up His abode (and who know themselves as such), because fornication dishonors their Lord Jesus, His Spirit, and His God. The question for the Christian, which alone has the power to keep him, or her, from the pleasure of fornication, is not, "Shall I risk AIDS, or pregnancy, or disgrace?" but, "Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a whore?"

This must be the approach of parents and churches with their young people. There is some place in this instruction for warning about the peculiar judgments of a holy God upon the body and earthly life of the fornicator. Proverbs 5 makes this plain. The father warns his son that if he fornicates with the strange woman he will "mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed" (v. 11). But the sex education of godly parents does not consist of recommending condoms to our sons and of helping our daughters obtain birth prevention pills. It is rather the teaching of the gospel, "Your body is for the Lord; therefore, glorify God in your body."

Sex outside of marriage is forbidden Christians as the grossest form of dishonoring the Lord Jesus. Fornication makes a cuckold of Jesus. It joins the holy Jesus to a filthy whore.

This condemnation of fornication forms the backdrop of the apostle's instruction concerning marriage in I Corinthians 7. The absolute, unquali-

fied prohibition of sex outside marriage serves the legitimization, indeed the advocacy, of sex within marriage. Chapter 7 recalls the warning against fornication. It does so explicitly in verse 2: "to avoid fornication." It does so implicitly in verse 5: "that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

### Sex in Marriage

The subject in chapter 7 is marriage, specifically the behavior or practice of Christians with regard to and in marriage. The apostle is led to this subject by practical questions concerning their marriage problems from the members of the church at Corinth. And the first question had to do with sex. This is apparent from Paul's opening answer: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (v. 1).

Some Christians questioned whether Christianity did not really forbid marriage altogether and whether it did not require single life. They were of that opinion because marriage is so "fleshly," so "unspiritual," on account of the "touching" of sex. Their question went something like this: "Paul, would it not be good for us spiritual Corinthian saints to avoid marital relations entirely? Should not the single be commanded not to get married? And should not those of us who are married separate or arrange a 'Joseph marriage'?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A "Joseph marriage" is a marriage without sexual relations. The name is derived from the Roman Catholic description of the marriage of the mother of Jesus and her husband Joseph. In the interests of their doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary ("*Virgo ante partum, in partu et post partum*"), itself a doctrine intended to support and encourage the worship of Mary by Roman Catholics inasmuch as virginity is supposed to be inherently more holy than marriage, Rome teaches that Joseph and Mary never had sexual relations. "Sexual intercourse was not an essential element in marriage, which continued to be a full marriage even when sexual intercourse played no part. The marriage of Mary and Joseph was the 'perfect marriage'" (Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1965, p. 291). Rome's view of virginity as an intrinsically higher spiritual state than marriage is expressed in The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Twenty-Fourth Session, "Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony," Canon X: "If any one saith ... that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony: let him be anathema" (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890, 2:197). Mary's perpetual virginity is confessed by Rome in many places. Article IX of the Profession of the Tridentine Faith (1564) speaks of "the perpetual Virgin the Mother of God" (Schaff, *Creeds*, 2:209). The Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius XII (1950), "*Munificentissimus Deus*," declaring it to be Roman Catholic dogma that Mary was assumed into heaven, body and soul, calls Mary "the ever Virgin Mary": "We pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, n.d., 19). In its "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965), quoting the Canon of the Roman Mass, declares that "the faithful must also venerate the memory 'above all of the glorious and perpetual Virgin Mary,

In Corinth, as in the early church generally, there was a tendency to disparage, and even forbid, marriage. The apostles had to contend with the morbid creation-denying and world-fleeing heresy of asceticism. The apostle fully analyzes and roundly damns this "doctrine of devils" in I Timothy 4:1ff. As I Timothy 4:3 shows, a characteristic feature of this anti-Christian philosophy is that it is always "forbidding to marry." This found permanent expression in Roman Catholicism with its celibacy of the clergy as the implication of its teaching that marriage is intrinsically unspiritual and that the single life, therefore, is inherently more spiritual and more holy than marriage.

One of the things that Paul must do in this outstanding chapter on marriage is to teach the fundamental doctrine that marriage is lawful; pleasing to God; perfectly honorable for all Christians; and, as a rule, the necessary mode of life for all Christians, clergy and laity, if they wish to avoid fornication. He affirms God's institution of marriage as a sexual union in creation (cf. Gen. 2:18ff.). He reminds the saints of Christ's approval of marriage in Matthew 19:3ff.

The apostle begins in I Corinthians 7:1b by conceding to the questioner that it is good for a man not to touch a woman. That is, for an unmarried man

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Mother of our God and Lord Jesus Christ" (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, trans. ed. Joseph Gallagher, New York: The America Press, 1966, 86). Thomas Aquinas thinks it necessary to "abhor the error" that dares to assert "that Christ's Mother, after His Birth, was carnally known by Joseph, and bore other children. For, in the first place, this is derogatory to Christ's perfection .... Secondly, this error is an insult to the Holy Ghost .... Thirdly, this is derogatory to the dignity and holiness of God's Mother.... Fourthly, it would be tantamount to an imputation of extreme presumption in Joseph, to assume that he attempted to violate (sic!) her ..." (*Summa Theologica*, Pt. III, Q. 28, Art. 3). Mary's perpetual virginity had been made part of the confession of the fifth ecumenical council, II Constantinople (A.D. 553): "the holy and glorious Mary, Mother of God and always a virgin" (*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Volume XIV, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Henry R. Percival, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d., 312).

There is no biblical evidence whatever for a perpetual virginity of Mary. Luke 1:27, 34 teaches the virginity of Mary at the conception of Jesus, not a lifelong condition of the mother of Jesus. Scripture refutes the Roman teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity and the fiction of the "Joseph marriage." Matthew 1:25 implies that Joseph did "know," that is, have sexual relations with, Mary after Jesus' birth: "And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son." To escape this implication, the Roman Catholic Bible translator Ronald Knox deliberately mistranslated, "And he had not known her when she bore a son, her firstborn." Matthew 13:55, 56 teaches that Joseph and Mary had four sons and at least two daughters after Mary gave birth to Jesus (cf. also Mark 3:31-35). This is offensive only to the church that is determined to break the first commandment by worshipping Mary and even then only if that church has a fundamental problem with the gospel's message that sex as a "creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (I Tim. 4:4, 5).

to refrain from sexual relations by never marrying is both permissible and, under certain conditions which Paul will mention in verses 7-9, preferable. The man for whom it is good that he not touch a woman sexually is an unmarried man. It is good for him to remain single, not as though the single state is holier than the married state, much less as though the single state is holy in contrast to evil marriage, but in the sense that the single life is an excellent, useful way of life for some Christians.

Nevertheless, single life is not the rule for Christians, but the exception. Ordinarily, the will of God for Christians is marriage. The apostle, therefore, exhorts the members of the church to marry: "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (v. 2). The reason is "to avoid fornication" (v. 2). The increased sexual desire of male and female is satisfied in marriage. Marriage is the earthly solution to the temptation of fornication.

This seems a prosaic, even ignoble, reason for marrying. It is not that the young man and the young woman want to reflect the union of Christ and the church. It is not even that they are attracted by romantic love. They are to marry "on account of fornications." Similarly, in verse 9, the apostle gives as the reason for marrying that for some who "cannot contain," that is, control their sexual desire, it is "better to marry than to burn."

Is the apostle in fact teaching that marriage is a "necessary evil," as the early church fathers held?

What the apostle teaches elsewhere about marriage must fill out the total picture of marriage as presented by Paul. Particularly, what the apostle teaches about marriage in Ephesians 5:22ff. must not be forgotten when one reads I Corinthians 7. The apostle who elsewhere is idealistic about the marriage of Christians, proclaiming it in the lofty terms of a symbol of the covenant between Christ and the church, is here very practical, down-to-earth, and indeed earthy in his description of marriage. Nor is this earthy description of Christian marriage unworthy of the apostle, or in the least at odds with the idealistic description in Ephesians 5:22ff. There is a perfectly healthy realism about the Word of God. It is practical wisdom to recognize the power of the sexual nature and desire. It is an honoring of God's work of creation to call Christians to marriage as not only the remedy for sexual burning but also the goal of the sexual nature of men and women as creatures of God.

The implied warning to those members of the church who deliberately refuse to marry for wrong reasons should not be overlooked. Some decline to marry because they enjoy the earthly freedom of single life and shrink from the responsibilities of marriage. The warning is that they are likely to fall, or run, into fornication. As a rule, the alternative to marriage is not celibacy, but fornication. In view of the dreadful wickedness of fornication,

as pointed out at the end of I Corinthians 6, this alone is good reason to marry.<sup>4</sup>

Within marriage, sex with its intense pleasures is good. As the Holy Spirit declares in Hebrews 13:4, in honor of His own work, sex fully partakes of the honorableness of marriage. Christians may enjoy it with full right and perfect freedom. However, also here, a certain distinctive, uniquely Christian viewpoint must prevail. This is the remarkable instruction of verses 3-5.

### **Paying the "Debt"**

Whereas prior to marriage it is good that a man not touch a woman

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<sup>4</sup> Disregarding this clear warning, the Roman Catholic Church has forbidden marriage to all its clergy. Rome, therefore, is directly responsible before God for the fornication that has always been and is today endemic to their clergy from priest to pope. Even the secular media in recent times have been noting the widespread sexual immorality, especially the homosexuality, of the Roman clergy. Many instances of sexual immorality are dragged into the light of public knowledge. Much more remains hidden until the things done in secret are publicized in the Final Judgment. And this does not yet take into consideration those who, although they may refrain from sexual relations with others, "burn," to use the language of I Corinthians 7:9, that is, are constantly on fire with sexual passion. This wickedness of the Roman clergy should surprise no one who has read I Corinthians 7:2. It is one of the truly humorous aspects of church history that Roman Catholic polemicists rail against the Protestant Reformation as an unchaste movement *because the Reformers advocated marriage for the ministers*. Luther, who well knew the uncleanness of the Roman clergy, ironically called attention to the Roman Catholic position in his commentary on I Corinthians 7:

But even though one were to defile a hundred married women, corrupt a hundred virgins, and keep a hundred whores at one time, still this man can be a priest, become or remain a priest — so remarkably holy is this priesthood! No sin or shame is so great or so widespread in the whole world as to prevent a man from being or becoming a priest, except the state of holy matrimony .... This one work of God has no place in the priesthood.

Dropping the irony, Luther went on to judge the Roman law of the celibacy of the clergy in sober truth:

And what do they expect to achieve by this, if not to defame the divine institution of marriage and pave the way for fornication throughout the world? And this is what is happening before our very eyes ... (*Luther's Works*, Volume 28, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973, 24).

John Calvin commented similarly on the Roman Catholic charge against the Reformers that "we have stirred up something like a Trojan War on account of women." Calvin was referring to the Roman assertion "that Luther and others, urged on by the itching of the flesh, not only created the freedom of marriage for themselves but also dragged a multitude of priests, monks, and nuns into the same allurements." Noting significantly that he would say nothing about the "unnatural lusts" that had free play among the Roman clergy, Calvin responded, "Certainly, to put it at the lowest, it is not necessary to go outside the papacy for those who like women." This is about as much humor as Calvin allowed himself in his writings (cf. *Concerning Scandals*, tr. John W. Fraser, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978, 102-106).

For an account of the Roman Catholic polemic against the Reformation as a sensual movement, confer James Atkinson, *Martin Luther: Prophet to the Church Catholic* (Exeter, Devon: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 3-20.

sexually, after a man has married abstinence is no longer good. Some married Corinthians, it will be remembered, were of a mind that the abstinence of married Christians would be a good thing, because the sexual relationship is beneath the dignity of truly spiritual people. The apostle does not so much refute this notion as demolish it by the startling assertion that sexual intercourse is a *duty* for married Christians. Sex is a "debt" that the husband owes his wife, and a "debt" that the wife owes her husband. This is clearly implied by the admonition in verse 5, "Defraud ye not one the other." One defrauds another by not giving him what is owed him.

That sex in marriage is a debt is expressly stated by another reading of verse 3 than that which appears in the King James Bible. The King James has, "Let the husband render unto the wife *due benevolence* ...." The reader probably understands this of a general kindness of word and deed that is obligatory upon husbands and wives. The other reading has, bluntly, "Let the husband render *the debt* ...." With this reading, there can be no misunderstanding the apostle's meaning: Within marriage, sex is a debt that each owes the other.

The meaning of the text is the same, regardless of which reading is adopted. If we retain the reading of the King James Version, the reference of "benevolence" is not to kindness in general. The mention of benevolence" in verse 3 occurs in the context of the treatment of the sexual aspect of marriage. Verse 1 establishes the subject of a man's touching a woman. Verse 2 requires marriage to avoid fornication. Verse 4 gives husbands and wives authority over the body of their mates. Verse 5 forbids married persons to withhold themselves from their mates sexually. In this context, "benevolence" cannot refer to kindness generally, but must refer to the sexual activity. This is a particular act of kindness springing from the love that the husband has for his wife and that the wife has for her husband. Also on the reading of the King James Version, this sexual kindness is "due," that is, owed — a debt.<sup>5</sup>

In sexual intercourse, each "pays off" the debt he or she owes the other. The word in verse 3 translated "render" literally means 'pay off that which is owed.' The attitude of the married Christian, therefore, may not be that sex is a favor that he or she graciously bestows upon the other. Sex is a marital

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek word translated "benevolence" by the King James Version in I Corinthians 7:3 is *eunoia*. Although the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* does not even consider the word as appearing in I Corinthians 7:3, since the *TDNT* recognizes the other reading as the correct reading of the text, it does, interestingly, note that *eunoia* is used "sometimes for sexual union," inasmuch as it can refer specifically to the "love between husband and wife." References are given to secular authors. Cf. *TDNT*, 4:972.



duty. Now it may be more than a duty. Indeed, it ought to be more than a duty. The Song of Solomon sings sex as a delightful pleasure that the husband and wife enjoy. But sex may not be less than a duty.

Paul is opposing a false and wicked spirituality that is not unknown in the church. Husbands and wives have left their mates in order to serve God in a more spiritual vocation. Or they live together, but one or the other refuses sexual relations because sex is carnal.

At the same time, the Word corrects believing men and women who neglect, or refuse, to live sexually with their mates for all kinds of other reasons. There are marriages, there are occasions in marriage, there are such strains upon marriages that make this command crucially important for the salvation of the marriages of the saints.

The ground of the exhortation, "Pay off the debt," is that married people now have authority over each other's body. This is verse 4: "the wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband," etc. "Hath ... power" is literally 'has ... authority,' 'has ... rights in.' The husband's body is no longer exclusively his own. It is now also his wife's. The same is true of the body of the married woman: It belongs also to the husband.

Underlying this assertion of mutual rights in each other's body is the fundamental truth about marriage laid down by the Creator in the beginning: "And they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Husband and wife are no longer two, but one. So intimately close are they, such is the divine fusion, that there are no longer two bodies, but one male/female body. Such is the union of marriage that neither may say about even his or her body, "Mine." But each must say, "Ours."

Because sexual intercourse is a debt owed, inasmuch as married persons have authority over each other's body, for one to withhold himself or herself from the other sexually is "defrauding" (v. 5). This is the same word that is used in I Corinthians 6:7 of the stealing of property or money. The husband who allows himself to lose interest in sexual relations with his wife or the wife who always has a headache is a thief, a defrauder. They are in a class with all deadbeats who do not pay their debts and thus steal from those to whom the debts are owed.

### **The Precedence of the Spiritual**

The one exception to the prohibition of abstaining from sexual relations is "with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer" (v. 5). Abstaining must be mutually agreed upon, not unilaterally imposed. It must be only "for a time." It may not be permanent. Nor may it be an indefinite period. The limit must be set. It must be for a spiritual purpose: "fasting and prayer."

Despite the noble spiritual purpose, the time of abstinence may not be

prolonged: "And come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your continency." "Incontinency" is literally 'lack of self-control.' Satan will tempt married persons who abstain for too long a time; and one or the other may prove to be unable to restrain himself or herself, so that he or she falls into fornication. The apostle is a realist. He knows the power of the sexual desire. He knows the weakness of the saints. He knows that the great enemy of the people of God is on the prowl seeking to devour them by means of the sexual desire. Satan has an interest in the sexual behavior of the saints as well as in their doctrinal beliefs. He places his agents in the bedrooms of the Christians as well as in the theological halls of the churches.

The striking exception to the rule of living together sexually, consisting of a short period of fervent prayer, brings out two intriguing practical truths about the sexual relationship of married Christians. First, such is the purity, the goodness, the honorableness of sex that it can easily and without any embarrassment consort with prayer. The husband and wife get up from their knees, where they have been worshipping God intensely, to renew their sexual relationship with equal intensity.

Second, the exception in favor of prayer and fasting clearly indicates that the spiritual aspect of the shared lives of married Christians — their worship of the God and Father of Jesus Christ — must both be present in marriage and have precedence over the physical, sexual aspect. The same is taught in I Peter 3:7, where the apostle Peter gives as the purpose of a husband's living rightly with his wife, "that your prayers be not hindered."

How many believing husbands and wives have recently abstained from sexual relations for a time in order to give themselves more ardently to prayer? How many have ever done this?

The ignoring of the provision that sexual relations be interrupted for "prayer and fasting" should not lightly be laughed off. Christian marriage is in dire straits at the end of the 20th century. In many evangelical churches the rate of the breaking up of marriages is the same as in the world around the churches. And the rate is high, scandalously high. Invariably, the break-up of a marriage means that one or both of the married persons has fallen, or will fall, to fornication. But the threat to marriage in the churches is not mainly sexual. It is spiritual. For solid, healthy, Christ-honoring, and, yes, happy marriages, the spiritual life shared by husband and wife is basic — the life of worship; of the reading and study of Scripture; of seeking to do the will of God; of dealing at once with sin's influence upon the marriage and home. And for this vibrant, strong spiritual life, prayer is necessary, prayer intensified, perhaps, by temporary abstinence from food and from sex.

### **Concluding Observations**

I conclude this installment of the study of I Corinthians 7 with the

following observations.

First, the apostle of our Lord limits sexual intercourse strictly to the marriage relationship: "let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (v. 2). Outside of marriage, every sexual relationship is fornication.

Second, within marriage, sex is good and of great importance. It is not shameful, but neither is it of trifling importance. It is of great importance both for the extremely important avoidance of fornication and for the extremely important expression and enjoyment of the unique intimacy of the marriage bond. The sexual union of husband and wife is of great importance altogether apart from producing children. Procreation is not the only purpose, or even the primary purpose, of sex. Much less is it true, as some of the church fathers thought, that sex is redeemed and justified by the begetting of children. That which God has made and the gospel has blessed needs no "redemption" and "justification."

Third, the gospel has its own unique viewpoint regarding the activity of sex in marriage. Relentlessly, the gospel brings its demand that the Christian live, not for himself, but for his neighbor into the sexual relationship. Husband and wife must view themselves as belonging to the other. Each then must have the concern and determination to please the other, rather than exclusively, or even mainly, to gratify himself or herself. This is the force of verse 3: "Let the husband pay off the debt owed to the wife ... likewise also the wife ...." This viewpoint on sex is the exact opposite of the viewpoint of human nature: "Let the husband take from the wife what he can get; likewise, let the wife gratify herself by the husband." The gospel's viewpoint on sex is that one gives rather than gets and that one pleases the other rather than gratifies himself.

Failure to practice this is the cause of serious trouble in marriage. The husband ignores the sexual needs and desires of his wife, is inconsiderate of her different makeup as a female, and pleases himself by means of her. He uses her. Or the wife, giving no thought to her husband's sexual wants, regulates their sexual relationship simply by her own feelings. She forgets him.

Fourth, although husband and wife have authority over each other's body, this authority must be exercised in love, as all the rights of Christians must be exercised. Neither may abuse or force or humiliate the other. In Ephesians 5:28, the apostle calls on the believing husband to nourish and cherish his wife. Implied is that married couples speak freely about the sexual aspect of their marriage and, particularly, about the pleasing of each other in the sexual relationship.

Fifth, this marvelous intimacy — a good gift to Christians from the Creator and a gift sanctified to the use and enjoyment of the saints by the

Redeemer — points to the essential truth about marriage, namely, that marriage is a one-flesh bond. This and the exceptional state of single life will be the subject of the second article on I Corinthians 7 in the next issue of this *Journal*. ▲

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# Issues in Hermeneutics

## (Conclusion)

*Herman Hanko*

### Introduction

In past articles on this subject we have examined the various issues which arise out of higher criticism in the area of biblical Hermeneutics. We have pleaded for a view of Hermeneutics which rests firmly on the truth of infallible inspiration, particularly the truth that the Scriptures as the infallibly inspired Word of God, contain no human element.

For this reason, we have adopted a method of Hermeneutics which we called the Spiritual-Grammatico-Historical method, a method which gives priority to the word "Spiritual." By this, as we pointed out in the last article, we mean that the Holy Spirit, who is the One who has inspired the Scriptures, is also the Scriptures' sole Interpreter.

That the Holy Spirit is the sole Interpreter of the Scriptures means two things: It means that the Holy Spirit interprets the Scriptures with His own book, the Bible itself: the principle of "Scripture Interprets Scripture"; and it means that the Holy Spirit interprets the Scriptures by His saving work of grace in the heart of the human interpreter so that his mind is enlightened, his will made conformable to the will of God, and his entire life a readiness to be subject to the authoritative rule of the Scriptures.

We have yet to discuss that aspect of the Scriptures which involves the "Grammatico-Historical" elements of proper Hermeneutics. To this we turn attention in a concluding article.

### The Basis for the Grammatico-Historical Method

Among higher critics, all attention is paid to the aspect of biblical interpretation called the "Grammatico-Historical" method. It is often argued that, though the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, they are also written by men. These men did not function as mere automatons, so it is said; nor were they merely amanuenses of the Holy Spirit. They were rational and moral men who lived in a certain ancient culture, believed current ideas, possessed their own unique gifts and personalities, addressed

their writings to specific circumstances in the culture in which they lived, and reflected all these unique characteristics in their writings. The Holy Spirit used them as they were. Hence, they were the human "authors" of the Scriptures, and the Scriptures, consequently, possess a human element. Hermeneutics, so it is said, must take this into account. The Grammatico-Historical method of Hermeneutics does exactly that.

While, as we pointed out in an earlier article, those who take such a position concentrate so exclusively on this human element that the work of the Holy Spirit is all but ignored, and thus all but denied in practice, the question remains: Do the Scriptures carry in them this impress of the men whom God used to write the Scriptures? And if they do, is it not legitimate to consider this element in any proper interpretation of the Scriptures?

Both of these questions must be answered in the affirmative. The Scriptures indeed carry with them the impress of their human writers; and, indeed this must be taken into account if one is to understand the Scriptures properly. Anyone who has even a passing acquaintance with Holy Writ knows that the Psalms of David are the songs of a poet and differ sharply from the careful reasoning of the apostle Paul, who was trained at the feet of Gamaliel. The soaring prophecies of Isaiah are markedly different from the writings of the shepherd of Tekoa. The writings of the intuitive apostle John stand in sharp contrast to the passionate writings of James, the Lord's brother.

God willed the Scriptures to be written in this way. The men whom God used functioned as men, not robots. Their writings reflect their culture. Their personalities are indelibly stamped on what they wrote. This is part of the wonder of Scripture. We must not be tempted to deny this element in the Scriptures because of the perverse use of it made by those who defend higher criticism.

However, when higher critics, addicted to literary-historical criticism or any other kind, apply the Grammatico-Historical method of Hermeneutics to biblical interpretation in such a way that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is effectively denied, they automatically open the door to "errors" in the Scriptures. Critics use this method to find much in the Bible which is "time-bound" and "culturally conditioned." Thus one not only finds in the Scriptures grammatical, historical, and scientific errors, but much of the Scriptures, while true in their own time, are no longer relevant and authoritative for our day. What is relevant is limited to the basic truths of redemption and salvation, although it remains a serious question: Who is to determine what in the Scriptures belongs to salvation?

It is this very line of argumentation which lies behind the support of evolutionistic teachings in today's colleges, universities, and seminaries. It is argued that creation is not something related to redemption; that, therefore,

we must not look to the Scriptures for any information on the question of how the worlds came into being. For such information we must look only to science, and science shows conclusively that higher forms of life evolved from lower forms.

It is also this line of reasoning which is used to support the position that women may hold the special offices in the church. The most honest of those who support this position admit that the Scriptures are opposed to it. But they argue that, in these respects, the Scriptures speak only to their own times, reflect the position of the Scriptures' human authors, and address themselves to current problems in the church of that day. But any application of these verses to our modern situation is erroneous, for the Scriptures are, after all, time-bound and culturally-conditioned.

One often hears the charge that those who ascribe the Scriptures to God the Holy Spirit alone are guilty of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is an ancient new dispensational heresy which denied the reality of the human nature of Christ and claimed that the human nature of Christ was only an appearance. In a similar way, those who claim that the Scriptures are God's Word alone, with no human element in them at all, and who interpret the Scriptures as only God's Word, are said to do injustice to and even deny the human element in the Scriptures. They are said then to be guilty of Gnosticism.

The charge of Gnosticism is a serious one which we emphatically repudiate. The charge is based upon an analogy between the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures — an analogy which everyone has to admit has no biblical basis. But let us suppose for a moment that the analogy is acceptable. If it is, and if it is used to support the idea of human authorship, it in turn becomes a kind of Nestorianism.<sup>1</sup> Although it is true that Christ possessed not only a divine nature but also a true, complete, and perfect human nature, these two natures were nevertheless united in the one person of the second person of the holy Trinity. The eternal Son was the person of the human nature as well as the divine, and the subject of all the activity of the human nature. Or, to put it a bit differently, God the Son is the subject of all the deeds of Christ's human nature.

If, therefore, the analogy is allowed to stand between the incarnation and the inspiration of the Scriptures, the analogy would apply to the Scriptures in this way: God the Holy Spirit, though He used men, remains the sole Subject of the whole of the Scriptures so that no human authorship or human element remains in it.

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<sup>1</sup> Nestorianism is the name of a heresy which appeared in the fourth century and carries the name of its chief proponent, Nestorius. It so separates the two natures of Christ that it ascribes to Christ two distinct persons, a divine and a human.

However all that may be, a more fitting analogy is the analogy between the inspiration of the Scriptures and the work of salvation in the hearts and lives of the elect for whom Christ died.

The legitimacy of this analogy rests upon the fact that the inspiration of the Scriptures belong organically to the work of salvation and are a part of it. God gave the Scriptures as a part of His work of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Consider the following points.

1. If we may speak hypothetically for a moment, Adam's fall was the immediate historical occasion for the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> That is, if Adam had not fallen, no Scriptures would ever have been given. The Scriptures are given as part of the work of the salvation of fallen man.

2. The content of the Scriptures is the infallibly inspired record of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus who is the divine Son in our flesh through whom all salvation is accomplished.

✓ ③ 3. The Scriptures are given by God to the church. They have as their central message salvation in Christ. They are given by God that His elect people may know the salvation revealed in and accomplished through Christ. While surely the Scriptures have a broader application in their divine call to all men to follow the way of repentance and faith, this does not detract from the fact that the Scriptures are meant for the elect people of God. Even the call to repentance and faith, which comes to the elect as well as to the reprobate, has its primary purpose in the salvation of the elect. The Scriptures are the "love letter" of the Bridegroom Christ to His elect bride.

4. The Scriptures are the means by which God saves His church. The Scriptures are the instrument of salvation as they are preached. God never saves in any other way than through the Scriptures. They contain the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe.

5. The Scriptures are the rule for the faith and life of the saints. Departing from the Scriptures leads to everlasting hell. Faithfulness to the Scriptures brings salvation in this life and in the life to come.

Hence, all of salvation is wrapped up in the Scriptures just as God intended when He gave the Scriptures to His church as an organic part of their salvation.

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<sup>2</sup> Without going into detail on this point, we call the attention of the reader to the fact that a distinction must be made between "revelation" and "inspiration." God did not begin to give the Scriptures to His people until the time of Moses, 2,000 years after the fall. But during that entire period before Moses, God revealed Himself to His people through the promise of Christ in sacred history. Revelation always precedes inspiration. God made Himself known in many different ways (see *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 19). This revelation was infallibly recorded for the church through the miracle of inspiration.

✓ / Hence, we may compare the inspiration of the Scriptures to the work of salvation.

This has two aspects to it.

On the one hand, an elect child of God is saved in such a way that he is saved as an individual with the personality and character which God has given him. Salvation does not change him physically and psychologically. It changes him spiritually from a corrupt and depraved sinner to a saint. He remains the same person from birth to death and on into eternity. So true is this that even the good works which he does are distinctly and uniquely his own so that no one else is capable of performing them in exactly the same way he performs them. They are *his* good works, for which he shall be rewarded.

But on the other hand, the whole work of salvation is the work of God. Not only is this true in the sense that salvation is earned for the undeserving sinner by the cross of Jesus Christ; but that salvation is sovereignly applied to the elect sinner by the efficacious work of the Spirit so that the whole work of salvation is God's work alone. The sinner contributes nothing to his salvation. It is all of grace. Ephesians 2:8-10, in explaining that salvation is of grace alone and not of works, describes the place which works occupy in the life of the believer by ascribing them to God's workmanship. The Canons of Dordt (III, IV/14), in speaking of the crucial place which faith occupies in the work of salvation, rejects the notion that faith is offered by God to be accepted or rejected at man's pleasure; it rejects the notion that God bestows the power or ability to believe, and "then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of salvation" and actually believe. It rather insists that God, "who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also."

This work of salvation the Canons describe as "a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead" (III, IV/12).

So it is with the inspiration of the Scriptures. It is solely God's work which He performs, so that the Scriptures are the very work of God Himself and are God's infallible and inerrant Word. Even the fact that God used men to write the Scriptures does not negate this, for God works in giving the Scriptures in the same way in which He works in salvation. Just as there is no human factor or element or authorship in the work of salvation, so there is no human factor or element or authorship in the preparation of the Scriptures. They too came into being in a "most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable" way.

He who interjects a human element in the Scriptures interjects a human



element in salvation and falls into the trap of Arminianism.

It is in this way that the use of men must be understood in the work of the inspiration of the Scriptures. And it is in this way that the grammatico-historical method must be understood.

### **The Grammatico-Historical Method in the Light of Divine Inspiration**

The Grammatico-Historical method of interpretation implies certain truths about the Scriptures.

1. It implies, in the first place, that God used men to write the Scriptures, men of differing personalities and character, men of different gifts and callings, men of different education and abilities. Each has left the stamp of his own character on what he wrote. That the Scriptures nevertheless remain God's Word is possible because each man is himself God's creation. God chose him from all eternity as one whom God determined to use to write the Scriptures. God elected him as a member of the church. God redeemed him through the blood of the cross. God gave to each his own character and ability, perfectly suited for the task of writing that part of the Scriptures which God had determined he should write. God controlled, through the wonder of providence, all the man's upbringing and education, all the man's gifts and abilities, all that was necessary for that man to write the portion of the Scriptures which God used him to write. All this was God's work. He shaped and formed the instrument.

2. In the second place, the Grammatico-Historical method implies that each man wrote within a given culture, under given circumstances, to a given people, for a given purpose. The Psalms were written in connection with the temple worship of the old dispensation, to be sung in connection with the worship of God in the temple. Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians as a corrective against the errors of Judaism which had crept into the churches in this eastern part of Asia Minor. Moses wrote in the early days of Israel's history. Matthew wrote as a record of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus which he had witnessed. Luke wrote in the days of the Roman empire. Haggai wrote after Judah's return from the captivity. Each wrote in connection with the times, the historical events, the circumstances, the culture of his time and place in the world.

3. Furthermore, each wrote in a human language, whether in the Hebrew which Israel spoke, or in the Greek which was the universal language during the period of the *Pax Romana*.

Yet, although all this is true, the Word which each wrote is the very Word of God Himself.

4. The languages in which the Scriptures were written were not simply men's inventions, nor part of the evolutionary development of the human race. They were languages which were specially prepared by God to serve

as the vehicles of divine revelation. They were uniquely adapted for that purpose. They were given to men that they might serve as the verbal means to convey God's revelation in written form. The eternal Word of God, centrally Christ, was given in human form.

Some have objected to verbal inspiration on the grounds that the infinite God cannot be made known through finite forms or finite languages. The infinite (God) cannot, they say, be contained in that which is finite (human language). This is a flat denial of revelation. After all, the whole creation, formed by the Word of God, reveals God. So also the Scriptures. In human languages God spoke so that these human, finite words convey the true and full knowledge of God Himself and the work of salvation which He performs in Christ.

No one who believes in infallible inspiration would deny that this is also miraculous. But it is no less miraculous than that God should make the waters of the Red Sea open before Israel, the iron axe head swim, the leper be cleansed, the dead rise, the sun and moon stand still at the prayer of Joshua. If God can make the walls of Jericho fall and bring water out of the rock, God can give His own Word in Christ in the form of human language.

It is true that God, to use Calvin's expression, stoops down and talks to us in baby talk. But this does not detract from the fact that what God says is very truth, truth as it is in Himself. And the greatest wonder of it all is that God, through that Word, saves sinners. This is a miracle which compares in power and efficacy to the creation of the worlds when God called into being things that were not as though they were. He who denies the Scriptures must of necessity deny any miracle, not the least of which is the miracle of the salvation of sinners.

If we believe in providence then we must also surely admit that all the cultural and historical circumstances under which the Scriptures were written were ordained by God and brought to pass by His sovereign direction and control. And that these circumstances were of such a kind that they served as precisely the circumstances under which and within which God chose to reveal Himself ought not to surprise us. Revelation belongs to history. God's revelatory Word was spoken in history. But no less is it true that history itself is the work of God in its most minute details. The two belong together. God not only created all things, but He brings all things to pass according to the counsel of His will. As a part of that history, not in any dualistic sense, God caused the Word of Christ to be spoken in every age. The Word of Christ itself is a part of history. The creation and history are the stage on which is enacted the great drama of salvation through Jesus Christ. The protevangel was spoken in history to our cowering and fearful first parents. The moon and sun stood still in our solar system. Water came out of the rock in Rephidim, in the desert of Sinai. Elisha raised the son of

the Shunamite in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Christ was born in the cattle stall in Bethlehem while Caesar Augustus ruled the world. His cross was planted on Calvary just outside Jerusalem in the year of our Lord, A.D. 33. He rose from Joseph's garden and ascended from Mount Olivet, places in this earthly creation where history takes place. All is a part of history, interwoven with it, belonging to it according to the purpose of God.

And the writing of the Scriptures are also a part of history. David wrote Psalm 23 while sitting on a rock near the pasture where Jesse's sheep grazed. Jeremiah re-wrote his prophecy after Judah's king had burned it page by page in his fireplace. Paul took pen in hand while in prison in Rome to write his letter to the saints in Philippi. The Scriptures, as the record of revelation, were themselves written as a part of revelation; and both are so intertwined with God's history that they form not only a part of it, but the central meaning of all of it.

All Scripture was written with particularly historical purposes in mind. But the occasions for the writing of each part were also sovereignly brought into being by the hand of God. God wanted songs to be sung in the temple — and the sweet singers of Israel wrote them. God brought Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem — and inspired Jeremiah to bring the Word of God to Judah under those circumstances. God raised the Judaizers in the Galatian churches and inspired the apostle to write against them.

And so the Scriptures were written in the language of the times, under the circumstances of the historical moment, with historical occasions in mind, by men who were men of their times, not twentieth century Christians. They walked the roads of Palestine and the Roman Empire. They dressed according to the accepted dress of the day. They spoke Hebrew and Greek. They watched farmers sow their seed. They witnessed apostasy and spiritual battles. They heard the cries of soldiers fighting with swords and arrows. They lived in homes such as every man lived in. They saw the bustle of the cities and the quiet hush of eventide on the Sea of Galilee. They were not unfamiliar with the flora and fauna of Palestine and the near East.

And all these things they wrote about and described as they wrote the Word of God. They spoke, as they wrote God's Word, of hyssop and the Rose of Sharon, of towering mountains and fertile valleys, of belts tied around the waist to hold up long flowing robes, of earrings, nose rings, bracelets, and what ever else was used to adorn women. They used quill pens and papyrus paper to write, and addressed those to whom they wrote in keeping with all the culture of the day. But they wrote God's infallible Word which enters thunderously into this world's history by the wonder of grace. They walked with Christ and talked with Him, and understood that a cataclysm had taken place when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. They wept at the foot of Calvary and saw their hopes dashed into a thousand pieces, but

shouted aloud for joy when they gloried in nothing else but Christ crucified. They stood with mouths agape at the empty grave, but exalted in the truth that now is Christ risen from the dead. They carried their loved ones to the grave and did so in the hope of the resurrection.

Thus, though the Scriptures are written in a given time and under given circumstances, they are the Scriptures that are eternally relevant to the church of all ages. Jacob's struggle with the angel at Peniel is of relevance to twentieth century man. God's Word through Isaiah to Moab is a Word which still thunders against the kingdoms of this world. Christ's lofty teachings concerning the wide and narrow gate still summon believers everywhere to a life of humility and self-denial. Paul's sharp castigation of immorality in Corinth echoes into our sex-saturated twentieth century culture.

How can it be that a Word spoken so long ago is a Word of relevance today?

The basic reason why this is true is that the Word of God is always and eternally the same. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever" (I Pet. 1:24, 25). It is that one Word which God speaks to reveal Himself. It is the Word spoken through Christ by which God reveals the riches of His own trinitarian life by the great work of salvation in Christ. Every part of the Scriptures are that one Word of Christ. That Word is given to us in the Scriptures. Even though that Word was spoken and inscripturated from the beginning of history to the final revelations of the apostle John, and, therefore, also spoken in specific cultural settings, it is the living and abiding Word of God which can never change.

That Word is, therefore, always relevant and always authoritative. History advances; man increases in culture; times change; but one Word of God remains the same. And, although change is an integral part of life, and although the twentieth century A.D. is different from the fifth century B.C., there is, after all, nothing new under the sun. Human nature is always the same, for man from the moment of the fall is a totally corrupt and depraved man who is incapable of doing any good and who commits the same sins in every generation—even though those sins may take on some different forms as man uses different inventions to give expression to the corruption of his heart. Man is still an idolater, an image worshiper, a blasphemer, a Sabbath desecrator, a hater of authority, a murderer, an adulterer, a thief, a slanderer, and a covetous man.

The elect church of Christ is always saved in exactly the same way through Jesus Christ. Salvation is always in the way of regeneration, faith, conversion, justification, sanctification, and the hope of everlasting life. The

patriarchs looked for a better city, that is, an heavenly; so do we. It is all the same, for salvation is always by grace through Christ.

The calling of the church in the world is always the same. It is always to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and minds and souls and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Noah was called to this holy calling; so are we. Whatever the circumstances of life may be, in whatever age we live, in whatever period of history God calls us to walk our pilgrimage, this calling remains the same.

The problems of life which every believer faces are the same. The battle of faith is the same in every age, for the enemy is the same enemy: the devil, the wicked world, our own sinful flesh. The weapons we use in this battle are the same: the weapons of the Word of God and prayer. The heresies are never any different. Paul had to warn the Galatians against the heresy of Judaism which taught a salvation by works. Today Rome teaches the same, and the error reappears throughout history in Pelagianism and Arminianism. Still today as always the believer is beset by temptations, is burdened with the cares of life, endures sorrow and heartache, faces death as the last enemy; but he also is called today as in the days of the Lord Jesus, to walk in quiet trust in God, to submit to God's will, to look to the city which hath foundations, to humble himself under the mighty hand of God, to take up his cross and follow Christ.

In every age God's people, though saved by grace, are saved incompletely. They still sin with the same sins of the Old Testament saints. They still must confess their sin, flee to the cross, and find forgiveness and pardon in the blood of their Savior.

Truly the glory of man is as the flower of the field. But the Word of the Lord endures forever.

### Particular Points of the Grammatico-Historical Method

The Grammatical Method of Hermeneutics presupposes that the Scriptures are written in human language. And because they are written in human language, the ordinary rules of language apply to the interpretation of the Scriptures as well as to any written document. The rules of grammar, syntax, and logic apply to the Hebrew and Greek of the Scriptures just as they apply to any document written in these languages. The same rules applied to Virgil's *Aeneid* which apply to the Scriptures.

While this rule may seem at first glance to be obvious, it is the basis for the great Reformation principle that the literal meaning of the Scriptures is the correct one, a rule so obviously violated in our day in an effort to make the Scriptural account of creation agree somehow with the findings of evolutionistic scientists. And because the literal meaning of the Scriptures is the correct one, the simple and obvious meaning of the Scriptures is the

meaning of the Holy Spirit.

We need not go into detail here, but it is well to point out that when we speak of the literal meaning of the Scriptures, we do not mean to ignore the fact that the Scriptures contain thousands of ordinary figures of speech, that the Holy Spirit was pleased on occasion to reveal the riches of salvation through visions and dreams with their many symbols, that in the old dispensation the truth was revealed typically. The Scriptures are not a mathematics textbook or a technical scientific journal. They cannot be such for they are the infallible record of revelation given in history.

Furthermore, that revelation came to the church in history means that it came in such a way that all that is said about revelation is from the viewpoint of the place which the earth occupies in God's world and the place which man occupies on the earth.

Many, who are intent on giving the Scriptures some meaning other than their literal one, appeal, e.g., to Joshua's prayer that the sun and moon stand still over Gibeon and the valley of Ajalon. Higher critics are quick to point out that the sun does not revolve around the earth, but that the earth is in orbit about the sun. Thus, it is claimed, Joshua was bound by an unscientific world-view. This appeal is childish and pedantic. Do such want Joshua to pray that the earth cease momentarily its revolutions on its axis which is tilted  $23\frac{1}{2}$  degrees to the plane of the sun? Would Joshua express in the fervency and urgency of his prayer astronomical expressions which are scientifically precise? Or, is it not more in keeping with the Scriptures that Joshua would use expressions similar to the same expressions which we still use today in our modern scientific era when we speak of the sun rising in the East and setting in the West? It is the nonsense of unbelief which would think otherwise.

The literal meaning of the Scriptures is the correct one. It had better be so, for if this is not true, the ordinary believer can no longer understand the Scriptures which were written for him. If the literal meaning of the Scriptures is not the meaning of the Holy Spirit, then the Bible is a closed book to everyone who is not an expert in the fields of the natural sciences, in archeology, in rabbinic writings, in ancient pagan and Greek thought, in the technicalities of literary composition, and whatever else higher critics deem important for a proper understanding of a complex book.<sup>3</sup> The Scriptures are an open book to every child of God, be he but a toddler, when the Spirit of Christ fills him.

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<sup>3</sup> This does not in any way deny the fact that the Scriptures are an inexhaustible treasure of truth the depths which will not be plumbed before the Lord returns. We have discussed this in an earlier article when we dealt with the question of Scripture's perspicuity.

One of the beauties of the Scriptures is the fact that they contain different kinds of literary material. They contain historical books, poetic books, prophetic books, and epistolary books. These different types of literary genera have their own distinct literary rules of interpretation within the general rules of grammar, syntax, and logic. But in every case they are written in such a way that every child of God can understand them. Does a ten-year old girl of the covenant need to understand the rules of poetic composition to know what the Scriptures mean when they say: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want"?

That proper Hermeneutics takes into account the Historical Method means exactly that revelation is given *in history*. Christ entered our history and lived in our history. He was born in history, lived, suffered, and died on the cross in history, and rose from the dead in history. And all the revelation of God which has its focal point in Christ comes in history.

The books of the Bible were written for different people with a different way of life, in a distant time, with a specific historical purpose. Revelation was woven into the warp and woof of history, for it is God's purpose in Christ to make all history serve the great salvation which shall be revealed when Christ comes again. The Psalms were written by David and Asaph and other poets in Israel for use in the temple. The prophets spoke of particular conditions in the nation of Israel and surrounding nations. The epistles were written to historical churches with problems which they faced.

And all this requires that the faithful believer of the Scriptures understand as much as he can of the historical background of the Scriptures. It will help him to know what David means when, with heart-wrenching sobs, he prays: "Purge me with hyssop," if he knows what kind of a plant hyssop is. It will help the believer to know what Jesus meant by the parable of the four kinds of soil if he understands how seed was sown in Palestine in the days that the Lord was on earth.

This brings up an important question. Does an understanding of the Scriptures *depend upon* such knowledge? The devotees of literary-historical criticism seem to think that it does. Must a believer have a firm grasp of the flora and fauna of Palestine and the geography of the Near East to understand God's Word? Must one read and master Edersheim's *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* in order to understand the parable of the ten virgins? So it would seem if one pays too much attention to what scholars write today of Hermeneutics.

But all this is nonsense. It is true, of course, that an understanding of these things helps in understanding the Scriptures. But it is not crucial.

Perhaps an illustration will help to clarify this point. While biology has always interested me, I have never had the time to engage in such a thorough study of it that I can speak of the maple tree in my front yard with

any scientific precision. I do not know anything about the various layers in the trunk. I cannot explain the process of photosynthesis and the chemical formulas involved as that maple takes in water and carbon dioxide and, under the power of the sun, manufactures sugar which in turn is changed to starch and stored in the roots. But I know that tree is different from the black walnut tree in the back yard. I know that it is a beautiful creation of God. I know that its colors in the Autumn are magnificent. I know that it gives delicious shade from the heat of the sun. I know that it can be cut down and the wood used to build many things. I know that it grows taller every year. In short, I know that tree. And, what is more important, I know that tree is a magnificent creation of God.

I would never deny that my appreciation and knowledge of it would still be greater if I understood all that the scientist knows about that tree. But I comfort myself in the certain knowledge that the world's most knowledgeable biologist does not know all there is to know of that tree. He cannot even explain the principle of life in it which makes it grow and flourish. Is an exhaustive knowledge of all God's creation necessary before we can know anything about it? Obviously not, for, if this were the case, we would know nothing at all about anything until the Lord returns.

So with Scripture. There can be no question about it that the more one understands of the historical background of the Scriptures, the more fully one can know the Scriptures. But the depths of the riches of the Scriptures will never be discovered on this side of the grave and of the return of the Lord. But such knowledge is not necessary to *know* the Scriptures. A little child, just barely able to understand language, already knows that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. He knows it with absolute certainty. He knows it as a marvel of the God who gave us Christ. So we know. And as we increase in knowledge and understanding we know more. But always we see through a glass darkly. And only beyond the grave shall we see Christ face to face. It is more important for me, who will never have the time to take courses in biology, to know my maple tree as God's gift to our family, than to understand photosynthesis. It is more important for God's believing and trusting saint to know Christ crucified than to understand rabbinic writings, something he will probably never have the opportunity to study.

Hermeneutics is really all very simple. When everything is said and done, it is as simple as receiving the Scriptures as the Word of God, bowing in humility before them, submitting one's self to them, and daily giving thanks for them. Then these Scriptures, for every saint, are a lamp unto his feet and a light upon his path. ▲



## Book Reviews

**The Thousand Generation Covenant: Dutch Reformed Covenant Theology and Group Identity in Colonial South Africa, 1652-1814**, by Jonathan Neil Gerstner. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991. 280 pages. Hardcover. 135 gulden (about \$70). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

It is the contention of Reformed theologian Dr. Jonathan Gerstner that an erroneous doctrine of the covenant on the part of many early Dutch Reformed theologians contributed significantly to the "heresy" of apartheid in South Africa. This erroneous covenant doctrine is the belief and teaching that the inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant, which is the basis of infant baptism, refers to a living, spiritual union of the children with Christ by the renewing of the Holy Spirit already in infancy. Gerstner calls this "the internal holiness" view. This "dangerous misunderstanding of covenant theology" was a theological cause of the evil of apartheid inasmuch as it "identified the entire community as redeemed from their earliest days while those outside were evil from their birth" (p. 262).

Gerstner's own covenant conception is that of the "*nadere reformatie*" ("continuing reformation"), sometimes called "Dutch Puritanism." Inclusion in the covenant for the children of the godly,

signified by infant baptism, merely means that the children have an external relationship to the church institute and to the means of grace. Because of this formal relationship, it is more likely that they will be converted when they grow up than is the case with the children of unbelievers. The children are merely set apart from all other children outwardly. Gerstner calls this the "external holiness" view. This covenant doctrine, we are assured, would have worked against the development of apartheid in South Africa.

Only a covenantal view which acknowledges that children of believers, though set apart for God, are still born dead in trespasses (and) in sins together with all humanity and equally in need of converting grace which God alone can sovereignly bestow in his time, can safely maintain the worship of the God of Scripture in all his awe without degenerating into viewing grace as a birthright (p. 262).

A prominent purpose of the book, therefore, is that "zeal for Continuing Reformation may be reborn" (p. 262).

A large and valuable part of the book is the author's thorough investigation into the covenant doctrine of the early Reformed theologians, particularly the Dutch theologians. The specific question that Gerstner wants to answer is, "What was their conception of the place of

the children of believers in the covenant?" Or, to put it differently, "What did they understand by the assertion in the Reformed baptism form, that the children of believers are "sanctified in Christ"?

Gerstner frankly acknowledges that, almost without exception, the view of the early Dutch theologians, like that of the early Reformed theologians generally, was that of "the internal holiness" of the infants of the godly. Among those who held that the children of believers were (to use Gerstner's term) "redeemed" already in infancy, that is, regenerated, were Bullinger; Ursinus; Olevianus; Beza; DeBres; Voetius; Bastignius; DeWitte; and others. This is no insignificant cloud of witnesses for the covenant doctrine that Gerstner rates so roundly as a "misunderstanding" of the covenant teaching of the Bible.

What makes the case from history for the "internal holiness" view even stronger is that some whom Gerstner likes to enlist for the "external holiness" view express themselves in language that sounds suspiciously like the "internal holiness" view. Gerstner himself notes this with some astonishment in the instance of Willem Teelinck (cf. p. 127).

Added to this should be the fact that at least one whom Gerstner confidently claims for the "external holiness" view of the "*nadere reformatie*" very definitely taught that some infants of covenant parents are born again in tenderest in-

fancy. This is Aegidius Francken, author of the popular catechism, *Kern der Christelijke Leer, dat is de Waarheden van den Hervormden Godsdiens*t (the English title would be: *The Essence of Christian Doctrine, that is, The Truths of the Reformed Religion*; it was first published in 1713). Gerstner appeals to Francken's teaching that the first benefit of the covenant is the call as proof that Francken taught that "children are not redeemed (that is, regenerated — DJE) without God's using the means of the proclamation of the Word" (p. 144). But Gerstner overlooks that in this entire section, Francken is referring only to elect, believing *adults*. In the chapter, "Concerning Regeneration," Francken asks (I translate), "In what time of life does God regenerate His own?" His answer is: "In different times of their life; for some God regenerates in their infancy, before their use of their understanding, as in the case of John, who was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15)." This is "internal holiness" theology.

Not only the Dutch Reformed, but also the French Reformed maintained that "sanctified in Christ" means the regeneration of covenant children by the Spirit: "Suffice it to say that one has evidence to assume that the internal holiness view dominated the French Reformed too . . ." (p. 221).

The early theologians are instructive. But the Reformed creeds are authoritative for the faith of the

Reformed churches. Gerstner examines the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, and the Reformed baptism form and concludes that they too teach that the children of believers are included in the covenant in the sense that they are regenerated in infancy.

Concerning the Belgic Confession, Gerstner writes:

One sees that the Belgic Confession was clearly composed from an internal holiness view of covenantal holiness. The baptism of infants of believers rested on assumed election and assumed internal holiness. The children of believers were separate from the children of the world internally as well as externally (p. 16).

Although Gerstner finds the Heidelberg Catechism less clear on the point in the all-important 74th question and answer ("Are infants also to be baptized?"), he judges that it is "more likely that the Catechism . . . (teaches) that the children of believers already possess the Holy Spirit in a regenerating sense . . ." (pp. 18, 19). Since, as Gerstner notes, the only possibility of explaining the 74th answer of the Catechism differently is to take the promise of God to the children as a *conditional* promise, those who believe the covenant promise to be unconditional cannot understand the Catechism in any other way than as teaching that infants are redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit already in infancy.

The Canons of Dordt also teach

the "internal holiness" view. Gerstner is critical of the well-known 17th article of the first head of doctrine, on children dying in infancy, but he acknowledges that the article teaches the regeneration of infants.

The Reformed baptism form is, if anything, even clearer and stronger in affirming the rebirth and sanctification of infants. "The baptism form . . . is clear in its affirmation that children of believers have been redeemed at least by the time of the prayer of thanksgiving after the baptism" (p. 48).

It would seem to be impossible to dispute Gerstner's analysis of the Dutch Reformed tradition and creedal position:

The deeply rooted Dutch Reformed tendency towards internal holiness views of their own children remained central, buttressed so strongly by the baptism form itself. "We thank you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins" (p. 249).

This is no small problem for Gerstner and other Reformed theologians who reject this covenant doctrine for the radically different view of the "*nadere reformatie*." Not only is the "external holiness" conception contrary to the Reformed tradition, but also it conflicts with the creeds, major and minor, which are binding within the Reformed churches.

Why then do they reject the "internal holiness" view?

Is it that they fail to see that the Reformed creeds, following the inspired line of the apostle in Romans 9:6ff., mean the elect children when

they speak of "our children" and of "infants (being) included in the covenant"?

Is it that they leave out of sight that the "internal holiness" view, rightly understood and applied, implies that covenant children are called to holiness of life from their earliest childhood, so that those baptized young people who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly must be excluded from the church by anti-theological preaching and by discipline?

Is it that they suppose that the church and parents who regard the children as really sanctified, and not merely outwardly set apart, will be careless in instructing the children and will have little concern for the children's conversion? This is the impression that Gerstner leaves. From the fact that someone diligently teaches baptized children to read and learn their catechism, desiring that they be brought to the knowledge of God, Gerstner concludes that this person "sees baptism as a sign of infants being set apart to be brought to the true knowledge of God, rather than already being redeemed" (pp. 182, 183). But this does not follow. One who believes that his children are redeemed by the blood of Christ and renewed by the Spirit of Christ already in infancy will be powerfully motivated to rear them in the truth of Christ. His desire will be that by means of this instruction the children will early come to know and honor God as their Father through living faith in the Savior.

There is absolutely no reason

to suppose that the "internal holiness" conception is a whit less interested in the conversion of covenant children than the most ardent advocate of the "*nadere reformatie*." The prayer after baptism in the Reformed baptism form is proof of this. On Gerstner's own reading, the prayer views the baptized infants as regenerated: "Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins." Is the prayer, therefore, uninterested in the conversion of the covenant child? Nothing could be further from the truth. Read what follows in the prayer:

We beseech Thee ... that Thou wilt be pleased always to govern these baptized children by thy Holy Spirit, that they may be piously and religiously educated, increase and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ, that they then may acknowledge thy fatherly goodness and mercy... and live in all righteousness... and manfully fight against, and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion....

This is an ardent prayer for conversion, second to no prayer that ever came out of the "*nadere reformatie*." It is exactly not due to uncertainty about the salvation of the covenant children, but rather to certainty about them: God has received them "as members of (His) only begotten Son." It is exactly not a request for a future salvation of children regarded as dead, but rather a request for the activity, development, and experience of the life of Christ that they already share: "in-

crease and grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Gerstner's attempt to hang South Africa's separation of the races on the "internal holiness" doctrine of Dutch Reformed theology is unconvincing. If it is true that an abuse of Reformed theology contributed to apartheid in South Africa, it is by no means evident that the specific doctrine that was applied wrongly was the teaching of the "internal holiness" of covenant children. Nor is it apparent that the covenant view of the "*nadere reformatie*" would have withstood apartheid.

The error of the Dutch Reformed in South Africa was that they transformed the spiritual separation implied in the covenant with themselves and their children into a physical separation. A separation that consists of holiness was made a racial matter. A separation that ought to distinguish church from world was made a policy for organizing national life. A separation that ought to work itself out in everyday life in this way, that the sanctified freely keep themselves from the unholy world spiritually, became an instrument of coercion, to force a certain race — the blacks — to separate themselves from the whites physically. This is a corruption of the truth of the covenant. But it is a corruption to which any Reformed view of the covenant is prone, not only that view that holds the elect children of believers for regenerate.

One evil among the Dutch

Reformed both in The Netherlands and in South Africa that Gerstner amply demonstrates was the practice of baptizing the children of parents who plainly showed themselves to be unbelieving and unholy. The fiery Reformed preacher with a most remarkable name, Engelbertus Franciscus Le Boucq, charged that

Holy Baptism is so shamefully abused here that it is an abomination. It is performed on everyone, without distinction, not determining if the mothers or fathers be Christians, or without passing appropriate acts of adoption. Indeed one has good reason to believe, that if the Governor sent a sheep in human clothing to the ministers, that they would have baptized it (p. 232).

Reverend Engelbertus Franciscus Le Boucq spoke of conditions in South Africa. But the same was going on in The Netherlands. A reason for the "abomination" was the close, unholy union between church and state in both countries. But it was an "abomination." The holy signs and seals of the covenant of God are not for everyone, but only for believers and the children of believers. The same abomination abounds in Reformed churches today. Not only "liberal" churches, but also "conservative" churches knowingly baptize the children of parents who plainly show, and even openly admit, that they are not true believers. This is profanation of the covenant, every bit as much as the admission of unbelievers to the Lord's Table. The consequence is

the same: The wrath of God comes down upon the whole congregation (and denomination). ♦

**A View of the Covenant of Grace**, by Thomas Boston. Introduction by Rev. Malcolm H. Watts. Lewes, E. Sussex, England: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1990. 232 pages. Paper. About \$12. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Thomas Boston was a Presbyterian minister in the Church of Scotland from 1699 to 1732. He is well-known for his *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* and for his involvement in the "Marrow Controversy," a doctrinal controversy in the Church of Scotland in the early 1700s.

*A View of the Covenant of Grace* is his thorough, excellent treatment of the biblical truth of God's covenant with His people in Christ. It is one of the best studies of the covenant to come out of the Presbyterian tradition.

Since Boston was convinced, correctly, that the covenant is the central, unifying truth in Scripture and since he rightly viewed the entire mystery of salvation as covenantal, his "view of the covenant of grace" takes in the whole panorama of biblical revelation. Boston relates all to the covenant of grace. The thoroughness of the study is indicated in the complete title: *A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records wherein the Parties in that Covenant, the Making of it, its Parts, Conditionary and Promis-*

*sory, and the Administration thereof are Distinctly Considered together with the Trial of a Saving Personal Inbeing in it, and the Way of Instating Sinners therein, unto their Eternal Salvation.*

Boston sets forth Jesus Christ as head, surety, kinsman-redeemer, and testator of the covenant. He shows how Christ is prophet, priest, and king in and on behalf of the covenant. There is an incisive section on the function of Christ as king to exercise discipline on the covenant people (pp. 187, 188).

Writing to the people with God's glory and their salvation as his purposes, Boston uses language that is clear, warm, urgent, and practical. Both the warmth of Boston's style and his relating everything to the covenant are evident in a moving passage on death:

O! but the passage betwixt the two worlds is a dark, dangerous, and gloomy one! Who can without horror think of the Jordan of death, and the darksome region of the grave! But withal, God's covenant-people should remember, that their Lord hath business in that passage, as well as on either side of it. The line of the covenant is drawn through it, making a path by which the redeemed safely pass. So there also is the scene of Christ's administration of the covenant: he hath the keys of hell and of death, Rev. i.18. It is great weakness, to think that he doth only, as it were, stand on the other side of the river, directing the believer in his passage, and ready

to receive him when he comes ashore: nay, it lies on him, as administrator of the covenant, even to go into the water with the passenger, to take him by the arm, and going between him and the stream, to break the force thereof unto him, and to bring him safe ashore: Psalm xxiii.4, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me" (p. 157).

In sharpest contrast with many Presbyterian and Reformed churches and preachers today, Boston contends vigorously that the covenant with Christ's people is unconditional. The sole condition, if one would speak of conditions at all, was the satisfaction that Christ accomplished by His lifelong obedience and by His death.

The covenant of grace is absolute, and not conditional to us. For being made with Christ, as representative of his seed, all the conditions of it were laid on him, and fulfilled by him (p. 26).

The Presbyterian doctrine of total depravity rules out the very possibility of a conditional covenant:

Dead souls cannot perform any condition for life at all which can be pleasing to God. They must needs have life before they can do any thing of that nature, be it never so small a condition: therefore a conditional covenant for life, could not be made with sinners in their own persons; especially considering, that the conditions for life were so high, that man at his best state was not able to perform them (pp. 22, 23).

Faith and obedience, rather than being conditions in or unto the covenant, are themselves benefits promised to the elect by the covenanting God on the basis of Christ's satisfaction:

Faith and obedience are benefits promised in the covenant, upon the condition of it, as hath been already evinced; and, in virtue of the promises of the covenant, they are produced in the elect: therefore they cannot be the condition of the covenant. And elect infants are saved, though they are neither capable of believing nor of obeying: howbeit, the condition of the covenant must needs be performed, either by themselves who are saved, or else by another in their stead. Therefore Christ's fulfilling all righteousness, which is the only obedience performed in their stead, must be the alone proper condition of the covenant (pp. 65, 66; cf. also p. 54).

At stake in the controversy with the teaching of a conditional covenant is the gospel of grace and salvation itself. Boston's warning is awful, but biblical — and necessary:

Thus many, thinking that eternal salvation is proposed to them in the word upon the condition of faith, repentance, and sincere obedience to God's law, do consent to these terms, and solemnly undertake to perform them: just binding themselves to such and such duties, that God may save their souls: and so they make their covenant. And while they can persuade themselves, that they perform their part of the covenant, they look for life and sal-

vation thereupon. This doth quite overturn the nature of the covenant of grace: for "to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt," Rom. iv. 4; and "if it be of works, then it is no more grace," chap. xi. 6 The sinfulness of this practice is great, as overlooking Christ, the great undertaker and party-contractor by the appointment of the Father; and putting themselves in his room, to do and work for themselves for life. And the danger of it must needs be great, as laying a foundation to bear the weight of their salvation, which divine wisdom saw to be quite unable to bear it. The issue whereof must be, that such covenanters shall lie down in sorrow. So the apostle determines, Gal. v. 4, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (p. 59).

In accordance with his view that God has made the covenant with Christ as the head of the covenant and in accordance with his view that the covenant is unconditional, Boston holds that the covenant is made with the elect alone.

Contrary to the contention of some that the traditional Presbyterian view of the place of children in the covenant is that they are merely outwardly set apart for God, without any work of grace in their hearts as infants, Boston insists that elect infants of believing parents are in the covenant in the sense that the Holy Spirit indwells them, that is, that they are regenerated in infancy.

And hence it is, that infants, not

capable of actual believing, nor of knowing what the covenant is, yet having the Spirit of faith, are personally entered into it, and instated in it; forasmuch as that Spirit of faith is effectual in them, to a real uniting them with Christ (p. 209).

It is cause for sorrow that Boston spoils this beautiful piece of work on the covenant by introducing the error of the "Marrow" doctrine (pp. 151-155; pp. 168ff.). Basically, the "Marrow" doctrine as applied by Boston to the covenant is the teaching that Christ wills to realize the covenant personally with every human without exception. Boston puts it this way: "The object of the administration of the covenant is sinners of mankind indefinitely" (p. 151). The promises of the covenant are for all. God well-meaningly offers the covenant and its blessings to all without exception. A man's inclusion in the covenant and reception of the promised blessings depend upon his acceptance of God's offer by believing.

Basic to the "Marrow" doctrine is a deceptive, but distinct, form of universal atonement: God has made a grant of Christ crucified for the salvation of all sinners without exception (cf. pp. 151, 152, 222). Boston enlarges on this familiar theme by asserting that Jesus Christ, the Testator of the new covenant, has named as legatees in His testament (the biblical reference is Heb. 9:15-17) all human beings without exception. Named as beneficiaries of Christ's death, intended recipients



of the covenant and its benefits are all men (cf. pp. 168, 169).

Election does not regulate the administration of the covenant.

The effect of this intrusion of the "Marrow" doctrine upon Boston's view of the covenant of grace is that conditionality, once banished, reappears; the grace of the covenant, formerly so vehemently defended, is sacrificed; and Boston, ardent champion of free grace, plunges willy-nilly into free will.

The Scottish theologian makes these implications of the "Marrow doctrine" explicit. A covenant intended for and offered to all alike, depending for its actual realization upon the sinner's acceptance and taking hold by faith, is not a gracious covenant, but a covenant of works. The work is man's faith.

In a passage that is nothing less than astounding in view of Boston's earlier condemnation of the notion of a conditional covenant, the "Marrow" theologian adopts conditionality in the covenant after all.

And hence it is, that the covenant being thus administered to all promiscuously, there is an use of conditional phrases in the administration thereof; though in the covenant itself there are no conditions, properly so called, but what were fulfilled by Jesus Christ in his own person. The word of the covenant coming with alike warrant to the elect and the non-elect; to them who certainly will believe, and to them who will continue in their unbelief; the administering of it equally to both

in the gospel-proclamation, must needs be by proposing the promises indefinitely as to persons; the which must at length be resolved into conditional phrases (p. 183).

The administration of the covenant, that is, the actual realizing of it with particular persons, is conditional.

The end of this road is the heresy of free will. And Boston takes the road to the very end. In support of his contention that Christ intends the covenant for all, offers it to all, and promises its blessings to all by "conditional phrases," Boston appeals to Revelation 22:17: "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." He writes:

Finally, as for the willingness which you are afraid you are defective in, surely, in all other cases, he that saith, Whosoever will, let him take such a thing, will, according to the common sense and understanding of such words amongst mankind, be reckoned to offer that thing unto all, and to exclude none from it; however it may bear an intimation, that it is not to be forced on any. Why then should this manner of speech, Rev. xxii. 17, be thought to limit the gospel-offer to a certain set of men? (p. 219)

If Revelation 22:17 is Christ's offer of salvation to all men, inasmuch as all men are supposedly willing to drink the water of life, or are supposedly able to will to drink the water of life, the text teaches that the unregenerated sinner does after all have the spiritual ability to will, or desire, Christ and eternal life. Luther,

Calvin, the Reformation, the Canons of Dordt, and the Westminster Confession were wrong. Erasmus, Pighius, Rome, and the Arminians were right.

The obvious answer to Boston's question, "Why then should this manner of speech . . . be thought to limit the gospel-offer to a certain set of men?" is, "because only a certain set of men ever will, or can will, that is, desire, the water of life, namely, those whom the Spirit of Christ regenerates as He wills" (cf. John 3:8). However, his question should be rephrased, "Why should the call of *Revelation* 22:17 be thought to be addressed to a certain set of men?" There is a call of the gospel that is addressed to all who hear the preaching, elect and reprobate alike (cf. Matt. 22:14). But this is emphatically not the call of *Revelation* 22:17. The call of *Revelation* 22:17 is the gracious, particular call to the spiritually thirsty and to the spiritually willing.

At bottom, Boston's error is his denial that the administration of the covenant is determined by election. Boston rejects an election theology of the covenant, at least as regards the realizing of the covenant with particular persons. He should have been warned off from this error by the biblical figure that he makes use of, the figure of the last will and testament. No human testator leaves it indefinite in his will who his heirs are and who the beneficiaries shall be. When we make our will, the one thing that we are concerned about

more than any other is to specify definitely the precise persons to whom our estate shall come upon our death.

And are we then to think that the Christ of God left it indefinite in His testament who should receive the inheritance of the covenant? Are we to suppose that, having come to earth to do the Father's will of saving the elect (John 6:37ff) and having gone to the cross to give eternal life to the elect (John 17:1, 2), Jesus made out His testament to sinners of mankind universally and indefinitely? The notion is not only wicked, but absurd.

It is perfectly clear that the doctrine of the "Marrow" that Boston here applies to the truth of the covenant is the 18th century equivalent of the theory of the "well-meant gospel offer" so popular with Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the 20th century. This too makes *A View of the Covenant of Grace* important reading for Presbyterian and Reformed Christians. Although one makes a good beginning and has the best intentions, to introduce into the doctrine of salvation the element of a love of God for all and a desire to save all is to ruin all. ♦

**Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures**, by A. A. Hodge. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990. 402 pages plus index. Hardcover. \$20.95. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

*Evangelical Theology* is a re-

print of the book originally published in 1887 as *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes*. As the original title indicated, the book consists of popular lectures given by A. A. Hodge on basic Presbyterian doctrines. Hodge followed the standard Presbyterian format, beginning with the doctrine of God and concluding with the doctrine of the last things. Subjects treated included the doctrines of Holy Scripture; of the Trinity; of predestination; of the covenants; of the offices of Christ; of sanctification; and more.

Archibald Alexander Hodge was the illustrious son of the renowned Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge. A. A. Hodge was professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary from 1877 to 1886, when he died. The reader of this volume, therefore, will catch something of the flavor of the Princeton theology in the time of its glory.

Added to the original volume in this reprint is the memorial discourse of Francis L. Patton upon Dr. Hodge's death. This is a valuable, brief biography of Dr. Hodge. Since Dr. Patton was himself a professor of theology (also at Princeton Theological Seminary), it is permitted to him to jibe at the preaching of professors of theology: "(they) preach old sermons full of the bones of theology which, like those of Ezekiel's valley of vision, are very many and very dry" (p. xxviii).

Unfortunately omitted in this reprint is the entire last section on

prayer that appeared in the original work. Pages 107-116 of the original work were a refutation of "prayer-cure," or as we would say, "faith-healing." In the course of this refutation, Hodge stated excellently the Presbyterian position on the *charismata*, or extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. At a time when notions of "prayer-cure," faith-healing, and the presence in the church of the *charismata* are gaining popularity among Presbyterian and Reformed people, it would have been useful to have included Hodge's criticism of them.

Hodge gives sound explanation and good defense of certain of the fundamental biblical truths covered in the book. The reader will learn something about Presbyterianism and, therefore, about biblical Christianity. There is also incisive comment on contemporary issues. Hodge gives a damning indictment of irreligious public education (p. 245) and passes a devastating judgment upon Christian parents who send their children to public schools:

Who is responsible for the new doctrines of secular education which hand over the very baptized children of the Church to a monstrous propagandism of naturalism and atheism? (p. 247)

Nevertheless, the evangelical theology of A. A. Hodge is weak and erroneous in basic areas of the Reformed faith — astonishingly so. Like the Princeton men in general, Hodge is concessive toward evolutionary science. He is open not only to a very old earth but also to the evolutionary origin of all things, in-

cluding man, although he insists on the creation of man's soul. He virtually concedes that Genesis 1-11 is pre-history, thus calling into question, if he does not outrightly deny, the historicity of these chapters.

He does not think that the doctrine of predestination as set forth in the Westminster Standards is fundamental to the Christian faith. In his treatment of predestination, he does not even mention reprobation. The explanation of Jesus' priestly office emphatically teaches universal atonement in important respects, although Hodge also likes to salvage particular redemption. When he comes to the issue of the freedom or bondage of the will, he vigorously defends freedom of the human will as the position of Calvinism. What he has in mind is "psychological" free will, not spiritual and moral free will. But the latter is the real issue in the conflict; and this is what Hodge ought to be addressing by a vigorous defense of the bondage of the will.

Fallen man retains the image of God, we are told, inasmuch as Hodge identifies the image with man's intelligence and will. Not averse to drawing out the astounding implication of this doctrine, Hodge assures us that "the devil is in the image of God, because he is an intelligent spirit" (p. 155). This is to reduce the concept of the image of God to meaninglessness, if not to absurdity. The implication ought to have sent Hodge back to the theological drawing-board regarding the content of the image of God.

The lecture on "God's Covenants with Man" is completely unsatisfactory. It is Arminian to the core. The essence of the covenant is supposed to be a conditional promise (p. 166). Accordingly, in the covenant with Adam — a covenant of works according to Hodge — "God offered to man in this gracious covenant of works an opportunity of accepting his grace and receiving his covenant gift of a confirmed, holy character, secured on the condition of personal choice. God gave Adam and Eve the best chance he could ..." (p. 168). In the covenant of grace, "which makes human redemption possible," God gives salvation through the gospel "upon the condition of faith" (p. 172). This is to make the covenant of grace in reality another covenant of works. The work now is faith.

Hodge's doctrine of the church is very broad. Arminians are the spiritual brothers of Presbyterians inasmuch as the Arminian party "holds all essential truth" (p. 136). The better class of Arminians complements Calvinism and is necessary to "restrain, correct, and supply the one-sided strain" of Calvinism (pp. 136, 137). "Romanists" are also the brothers of Presbyterians since they practice the one baptism with Calvinists (p. 338). Hodge disparages the institute of the church; advocates the pluriformity of the church; and minimizes doctrinal differences. He denies that Christ ordained a specific form of church government and church organization.

This is latitudinarianism with a vengeance. It gives support to the ecumenical efforts of the World Council of Churches. It has difficulty justifying the separation of the churches of the Reformation from Rome. It conflicts with Article 29 of the Belgic Confession on the marks of the true and of the false church. It differs with the judgment of the Canons of Dordt on Arminianism as the heresy of Pelagius out of hell (II, Rejection of Errors/3). It cannot be reconciled with the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching that those who look to the saints for part of their salvation are unbelievers and that the church that practices the mass is guilty of accursed idolatry and a denial of the one sacrifice of Christ (Questions 30, 80).

If this was the theology of old Princeton in the days of its glory, the refusal of hundreds of Presbyterian ministers to condemn fundamental departures from the faith and to take a stand for the truth in the early 1900s becomes understandable. Indeed, it is understandable that the Presbyterian Church apostatized into modernism. And if this theology is the theology of evangelicalism at the end of the 20th century —and the sounder evangelicalism at that —evangelicalism today is in no better shape. Nor is its future any brighter.



**The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate,** by David Otis Fuller, Theodore P. Letis, Wilbur N. Pickering, and oth-

ers. Ed. Theodore P. Letis. Fort Wayne, IN: The Institute for Reformation Biblical Studies, 1987. 210 pages (paper). \$8.95. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The positive thrust of this collection of essays, reviews, and articles is that the Masoretic (Hebrew) text of the Old Testament and the *Textus Receptus* (Greek) text of the New Testament are the authentic copies of the inspired originals of Scripture. Since these are the texts that are faithfully translated in the King James Bible, the King James Version is the faithful, reliable, and authoritative translation of Scripture in the English language.

Basic to this view of the text of Scripture is the avowed, vigorously defended belief that the text of Scripture has been providentially preserved. The Author of the Bible has wonderfully preserved His written Word, particularly as regards the Greek text, in the Byzantine text that was universally used by the churches of the Reformation from the early 16th century to the late 19th century. Appeal is made to the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ... being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical ..." (1.8). The creed bases its confidence concerning this "singular care and providence" on the promise of Christ in Matthew 5:18: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot

or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

*The Majority Text* takes sharp issue with the prevailing opinion in Protestant churches today regarding the Greek text of Scripture. This opinion holds that the Greek text used by the King James Version, as well as by Luther's German translation and by the "Staten" Bible of the Reformed churches in The Netherlands, is a woefully inferior text that has been replaced by older Greek manuscripts discovered after the King James Version was written. The King James Version, therefore, must be discarded by all English-speaking Protestant churches and people.

Protestant Christians, including pastors, have generally been left in ignorance of the fact that there are solid textual and theological grounds for defending the *Textus Receptus* and the King James Version and of the fact that there are weighty reasons for rejecting the Greek text used by the modern versions and, therefore, the modern versions themselves.

*The Majority Text* is a good introduction to these issues, vital because they bear directly on the English Bible that will be used in the worship services of the congregation, in the instruction of the Christian school, in the family worship of the covenant home, and in the study of personal devotions. Although some articles are clearer than others, the book is not addressed to textual scholars but to the "seminarian or pre-seminarian." Making up the heart

of the book and laying bare the fundamental issues, both theological and textual, are two essays by the editor, Theodore P. Letis. The first is "Theodore Beza as Text Critic: A View into the Sixteenth Century Approach to New Testament Text Criticism." The second is "John Owen Versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism." The reader with little or no knowledge of the subject of the book will find it beneficial to read the articles in the following order: first, Fuller's "Foreword," Eng's "Preface," and Letis's "Introduction"; then, the essays in "Part Three," including the articles by Letis mentioned above; next, the essays in "Part Two"; and, finally, the essays in "Part One."

Theodore P. Letis, presently obtaining the PhD degree from the University of Edinburgh, is establishing himself as a worthy disciple of, and successor to, the learned, believing, but largely ignored textual scholars, John William Burgon and Edward Freer Hills. The book is dedicated to the memory of Hills.

Within the camp of those who defend the Greek text of the King James Version are two distinct parties. One advocates the "Majority Text" — the text of the majority of the extant Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. This party appeals to the scientific principle of "statistical probability." The other party, represented by Letis, advocates that specific form of the "Majority Text" that constitutes the *Textus Receptus*.

This party appeals to God's preservation of the text in His providence and to the recognizing of this text as "canonical" by the churches of the Reformation. This difference too is opened up in *The Majority Text*. The first part of the book is a defense of the "Majority Text" position by one of its leading proponents, Wilbur N. Pickering.

The churches that come down from the Reformation cannot leave these matters of the authentic text of Scripture to the experts. The modern versions of Scripture themselves force the churches to reexamine hitherto uncritically accepted "principles" of textual criticism. These versions ought to be disturbing to the churches in several important respects. Some of these reflect directly upon the Greek text of the New Testament that is used in their translation. One is their intolerable weakening of the truth of the Deity of Jesus and, therefore, of the doctrine of the Trinity. The version that bids fair to become the received Bible of evangelical churches is the NIV (New International Version). The NIV omits "begotten" from the description of Jesus in the gospel and epistle of John (cf. John 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; I John 4:9; etc). It changes "God was manifest in the flesh" in I Timothy 3:16 to "He appeared in a body."

Another disturbing feature of the modern versions reflecting on the Greek text used in their translation is their omission of a number of passages in the New Testament, some

of them lengthy (cf. in the NIV Mark 16:9ff. and John 7:53-8:11).

The issues raised in *The Majority Text* are especially important to churches that steadfastly retain the King James Version in the teeth of the increasingly strong pressure to abandon it for a modern version. Letis notes the commitment to the King James Version on the part of the Protestant Reformed Churches:

At least one Reformed community has not bowed the knee to the NIV, namely, the Protestant Reformed Church. This staunch Dutch Reformed group recently treated this issue of the text in their journal, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 15 (April 1982): 3-40.... They have been using exclusively the Authorized Version from their inception to the present (p. 18).

These churches have always recognized the faithfulness, clarity, and beauty of the translation of the Authorized Version. They should also be aware that there are doctrinal and textual reasons for keeping the King James Version and rejecting the modern versions. *The Majority Text* serves well to introduce such churches to these considerations. ♦

**Call the Sabbath a Delight**, by Walter Chantry. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991. 112 pages, \$5.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This little paperback is must reading for Reformed believers in our day. It may be true that our

Reformed fathers were a bit legalistic in their views of the proper observance of the Lord's Day. Father would shave on Saturday evening and mother would peel the potatoes and bake the roast for Sunday's dinner on Saturday evening. On the Lord's Day itself the children were not allowed to play either in the house or outside. The two worship services were attended. Children were given Bible passages to memorize. Even works of necessity and mercy were severely limited. If all this and more tended to be rather legalistic, the days of our fathers were better than ours! To the vast majority of Christians, also those who are Reformed, Sabbath observance is a thing of the past. One may or may not attend worship services as he or she pleases. Those who attend only once per Sunday or who attend only occasionally are not disciplined. The Lord's Day is used for all kinds of activities: travel, recreational pursuits, dining out, and more. The second service on the Lord's Day attracts only a handful of people in many a Reformed congregation which boasts a membership of hundreds, even thousands. These practices are slowly making inroads into some of the more conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches and, alas, into our Protestant Reformed Churches as well. For this reason this book is must reading.

Walter Chantry, longtime pastor of Grace Baptist Church (Reformed Baptist) in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, insists that the Fourth Com-

mandment of God's law requires people to devote one entire day (the first day of the week) to the worship of God, prayer, and meditation on the Holy Scriptures. The failure of the evangelical church to observe the Lord's Day has had devastating effects on the church. Writes Chantry, "In their pride, men have dismissed God's perfect law. His Decalogue requires the habit, the steady routine, the practice, the discipline of a day of worship and service to God. It is such a habit, routine and discipline that will give men both a knowledge of God and moral standards by which to live. It is just such a Sabbath Day that will strengthen families and social institutions. No wonder the church herself is devotionally, doctrinally, and morally weak. Even Christians will not devote a day each week to their Lord" (pp. 11-12).

"Time for the Lord is the issue about which the Fourth Commandment speaks," Chantry says (p. 16). He makes an excellent point in this connection when he points out that God is very "reasonable and generous" in the giving of the Fourth Commandment. God requires only one day in seven for His service. God gives us six days in which to be involved in our work and legitimate recreation, but asks that we devote only one day per week to the worship and service of Him. There are four simple principles which are to govern our observance of the Lord's Day. These are: 1) we are to remember the Sabbath Day. It is to be kept in mind as an important obligation



and commitment. 2) The Day is to be kept holy. 3) We may do no work on the Lord's Day. This means we may not engage in any activities which would make it impossible to devote the entire day to the Lord's service. 4) And, we must not require others to work for us on the Lord's Day (pp. 19-23). Chantry reminds us that since God is, "the lawgiver and judge it is his prerogative to institute the moral law. It is advisable that every creature take note of this reminder that the Almighty has personally set aside one day in seven for himself. All who must one day stand before him to have their everlasting destinies announced have need to hear the standard he devised to judge them. How many excuses of ignorance, of being too busy to pray, of not having time to read Scripture, to become acquainted with the saints, to bring one's family to worship will die on the lips of the guilty before this commandment? When in his awesome majesty the Lord says, 'I made the day holy,' who will plead exemption from Sabbath practice?" (pp. 28-29).

Chantry emphasizes that Sabbath keeping is a great joy and that many blessings accrue to the saints who keep God's day holy. He warns that Sabbath keeping is not inactivity. Rather we cease from our own work in order to devote all of our time and energy to the work of worship and praise. Sabbath keeping involves works of piety and worship, works of necessity, and works of mercy.

In his fourth chapter, Chantry offers an excellent exposition of Mark 2:27-28 over against the false claims of the dispensationalists that what Jesus had to say concerning the Sabbath applied only to the Jews and, therefore, the New Testament says nothing to us about Sabbath keeping.

The author points out that the Sabbath was strictly enforced in both the Old and New Testaments (chapter 5), but in the New Testament without the civil punishments under Moses. This is because the Old Testament church was an immature child (Galatians 3, 4), while the New Testament church is grown and mature. The civil punishments would be inappropriate for the church which now possesses the full revelation of God and the fullness of the Spirit. At this point Chantry is weak. His erroneous view of God's covenant (Chantry would say "covenants") becomes obvious and he fails to take into account the *typical character* of the Old Testament.

Sabbath keeping is not a legalistic or outward observance of a list of do's and mostly don'ts. The Christian keeps the Sabbath out of profound thankfulness to God for the redemption He has provided for him in Jesus Christ. In various contexts Chantry warns his readers against all Phariseeistic legalism while stressing that the Sabbath was given by God to His saints as a day for them to worship God and commune with Him.

Again a good book on this subject. Whether one agrees with

the author on all points or not he will profit from a careful reading of this little book. ♦

**The Trinity**, by Gordon H. Clark; the Trinity Foundation, 1990; 175 pages, \$8.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

This is the second edition of *The Trinity*, the first edition having been published in 1985. We are informed that this edition is "augmented by the addition of both topical and scriptural indexes."

This book is not easily read. Not only is the treatment of the doctrine in the course of this history of the church difficult to read, but Clark's own view of the trinity is difficult going. One had better be prepared to don his thinking cap before swimming in these waters.

A major section of the book (nearly 100 pages) is devoted to an historical survey of the truth of the Trinity. In this section various heresies and orthodox thinkers are treated. There are sections on Sabellianism, Athanasius, Augustine, the Athanasian Creed, Hodge, Berkhof, Bavinck, and VanTil. In connection with the latter, Clark accuses VanTil of denying the Trinity of persons within the Godhead. Although Clark quotes two short passages from VanTil's *Junior Systematics* which appear to support his allegation, this reviewer is not persuaded that his accusation is correct. Not only have I not found in VanTil's writings any denial of the truth of the

Trinity, but VanTil is at great pains to associate himself with the teachings of the church of the past.

However that may be, Clark himself is less than orthodox in his views of the Trinity. This becomes abundantly clear when he develops his own conceptions.

Perhaps most fundamental to Clark's errors is his definition of "Person." He defines "Person" as a collection of thoughts. He writes:

Accordingly the proposal is that a man is a congeries, a system, sometimes an agglomeration of miscellany, but at any rate a collection of thoughts. A man is what he thinks: and no two men are precisely the same combinations.

This is true of the Trinity also, for although each of the three Persons is omniscient, one thinks "I or my collection of thoughts is the Father," and the second thinks, "I or my collection of thoughts will assume or have assumed a human nature." The Father does not think this second thought, nor does the Son think the first. This is the qualitative theory of individuation, as opposed to the space-time theory....

Several romantically inclined students, and a few professors as well, have complained that "this makes your wife merely a set of propositions." Well, so it does. This suits me, for I am a set of propositions too....

Naturally, human beings are mutable: Their thoughts or minds change. The three Persons of the Godhead are immutable because their thoughts never change. They

never forget what they now know, they never learn something new, in fact they have never learned anything. Their thought is eternal. Since also the three Persons do not have precisely the same set of thoughts, they are not one Person, but three... (pp. 106, 107).

While it certainly is true that "Person" is a difficult concept to define (H. Hoeksema defined it as "An individual subsistence in a rational, moral nature"), Clark's definition of Person as a collection of thoughts will not do. A person is the *subject* of thinking and of thoughts, not the thoughts themselves. This basic idea of Clark is in agreement with what he wrote in his book on the incarnation of Christ when he discussed the Person and natures of our Lord.

In keeping with this strange and abstract definition of person, Clark also errs in his conception of the Personal attributes of the three Persons in God. "Thus the begetting of the Son occurs, and the Son as a Person exists, by a necessity of the divine nature — the nature of the divine will" (p. 112).

This heresy was taught very early in the history of the church by the Alexandrian heretic Origen. He too made the generation of the Son an act of the divine will, but Origen was clear enough in his thinking to recognize that this implied a certain subordination of the Son to the Father. This subordination of the Son to the Father paved the way for the heresy of Arius who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. It is, however,

difficult to see how, in Clark's thinking, a "collection of thoughts" can generate, by an act of the will (How can a "collection of thoughts" do any willing?), another "collection of thoughts."

This teaching of Clark that the generation of the Son is an act of the divine will is closely connected with another error. Clark makes all the works of God *ad extra* (i.e., works which God performs outside His own divine being) *necessary* works.

First of all, this is applied to God's counsel (pp. 111ff.). Clark argues that either we introduce time into God's trinitarian life to make God's counsel free (and so fall into the error of Arminianism), or we maintain that God is eternal, that His counsel is eternal, and that, therefore, His counsel is necessary. Here again Clark's intellectualism wins the day over the biblical givens. Scripture teaches both that God and His counsel are eternal, *and* that His counsel is the sovereignly free determination of His will. This may be difficult to understand; but God is the infinite One whose ways are past finding out. But there is no inherently logical contradiction between the two propositions: 1) God's counsel is eternal; 2) God's counsel is sovereignly free.

But because God's counsel is necessary, so also is creation and all of history necessary.

This is not "the best of all possible worlds," as Leibniz claimed: It is the only possible world, as Spinoza claimed....

Since God's mind is immutable, since his decree is eternal, it follows that no other world than this is possible or imaginable (pp. 118, 119).

But the inevitable consequence of this position is Pantheism. Apart now from the question of how a "collection of thoughts" can have a counsel or can create, if creation is necessary, it flows from the being of God Himself. This is Pantheism, and it is not strange that in the quote above, Clark speaks with approval of the Pantheist Spinoza.

There are many things in Gordon Clark which are soundly biblical; but the more I read of him, the more I become convinced that his thinking is dangerous and inimicable to the Reformed faith.

It takes a certain amount of intellectual arrogance to set one's

self up as an authority against the whole tradition of the Christian church and brush this tradition aside with a wave of the hand, then to promote ideas which are more philosophical than biblical. The latter is not an exaggeration. One looks in vain in Clark's book for references to Scripture when he is developing his own views.

Clark is not, however, only overly intellectual in his writings; he also writes in a very cavalier way which rubs me wrongly. He easily and cuttingly dismisses those who disagree with him as being intellectual pygmies, but he writes about the dearest and most precious truths of the Christian faith with an off-handedness and an all-but-joking fashion that is out of keeping with the great glory of God and the insignificance of puny man. ♦

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## Book Notices

**Jonathan Edwards On Knowing Christ**; Banner of Truth Trust, 1990; 276 pages, \$7.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Jonathan Edwards was undoubtedly one of the greatest and best-known preachers in the history of America. He worked as a pastor of the congregation in Northampton in the first half of the 18th century, during which time he participated in

the "Great Awakening" in New England. He was an ardent Calvinist standing in the Puritan tradition.

This volume contains ten of his sermons, some of which were preached during the revival in which he was active. His well-known sermon on Deuteronomy 32:35, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," is also included. This sermon has become so popular that it is even required-reading in many American

Literature courses in the colleges and universities.

The collection of sermons found in this volume will give the reader a flavor of Puritan preaching. Generally, after a rather lengthy Introduction, the sermons are divided into two parts: a section on "Doctrine," followed by a section on "Application," called by various names such as "Use," "Application," "Reflections," or such like. It will soon become evident that Edwards adopted the Puritan view of "preparationism" (see, e.g., p. 74), with all its weaknesses.

Yet Jonathan Edwards is always worth reading, and one can learn a great deal of Puritanism in America by studying this volume — as well as other writings of this great thinker and preacher. ♦

**Creation and the History of Science**, by Christopher Kaiser; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1001; vii + 316 pages (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

It is the author's contention that the controversy between the doctrine of creation and the discoveries of science reflects tension that has persisted throughout the history of the New Testament church. In tracing this history of the development of science and theology, he argues that theology has, throughout its history, leaned heavily on ancient philosophical cosmologies; while science, in its turn, has assumed much more of theological presuppositions

than it has been willing to admit.

While the author (who has an advanced degree in both astro-geophysics and theology) gives a survey of the entire field from the time of the ancient church till today's battles, it is too broad a sweep to deal specifically and helpfully with crucial turning points in the history of the church and too concerned with minutiae to be of great help in understanding fully the problem.

Further, the book is lacking in any helpful suggestions to resolve the conflict; its interest is primarily historical. If one is looking for guidance in solving the problems of the relation between science and theology, he must look elsewhere.

The value of the book is its historical material. ♦

**A Commentary on Ephesians**, by Charles Hodge. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991, xviii + 294 pages, \$21.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) is another giant among Reformed theologians. This nineteenth century Presbyterian is probably the best dogmatician Princeton Seminary ever had on its faculty. Hodge is perhaps best known for his massive, three-volume *Systematic Theology*. Hodge was also a fine expositor of the Scriptures.

Anyone looking for a good commentary on Ephesians would do well to add this volume to his library. ♦

**Faith and Life**, by Benjamin B. Warfield. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990. viii + 458 pages, \$23.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

Two traits characterize every believing, competent theologian: clarity of expression and a conviction of the truth of Holy Scripture. These traits are abundantly evident in the writings of B.B. Warfield (1851-1921). Warfield, who taught at Princeton Seminary for over thirty years, remains one of the giants among Reformed theologians.

On Sunday afternoons Warfield conducted informal, devotional classes with the seminary students in which, in his own words, "the deeper currents of Christian faith and life" were explored. This book contains some of the more memorable addresses he gave on those occasions.

Warfield had a childlike faith in his Savior. He once told his students, "In your case there can be no either/or, either a student or a man of God. You must be both." Warfield was both, as this book clearly reveals.

The book will be a blessing to believers of all ages. Seminarians and ministers of the gospel will find profound exegetical insights which will enrich their preaching. Warfield was a careful, competent, and believing expositor of the Scriptures. The book is intensely devotional as well. It is well worth the price. We thank the Banner of Truth Trust for

making it available to us. ♦

**A Guide to the Westminster Standards**, by James E. Bordwine; the Trinity Foundation, 1991. Trade paperback, xx + 356 pages, Index, notes, \$13.95. [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

James Bordwine, professor of Old Testament and Historical Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, has prepared a helpful study guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism. The *Guide* includes a brief summary of the Westminster Confession, the entire text of the Confession along with the text of the Larger Catechism, the Scriptural proofs, all of which are quoted in full, the words of the original (1647) version of the Confession where they differ from the American version, inserted in brackets and italics, and, what is perhaps of most value, a one hundred page index to both the Confession and the Larger Catechism.

For those in the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions who make the Westminster Confessions the object of their study, this book will be of great assistance. For all Christians who, for the first time, delve into the riches of these Confessions, this book will serve as an excellent help. It should be in all theological libraries and on the shelves of ministers and Seminary students. ♦

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