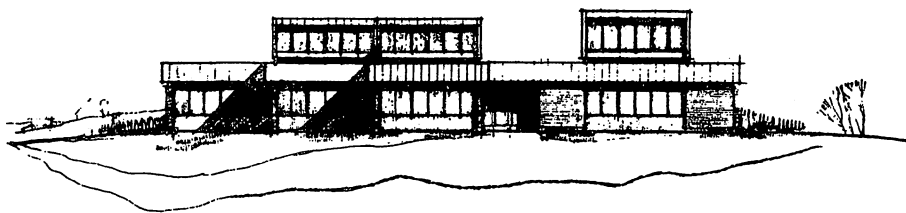


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Editorial Notes

With this issue of the *Journal* we begin our 27th year of publication. It hardly seems that long ago that we began this venture, but time passes swiftly. Since Prof. H. C. Hoeksema and I began it shortly after I came to the Seminary, many changes have taken place. Prof. Hoeksema has gone to heaven. Prof. Decker joined the staff while Prof. Hoeksema was still living; Prof. Decker begins this year his 20th year in the Seminary. Prof. Engelsma came to the Seminary in 1988 and has also been a regular contributor to *The Journal*. The format has also changed. I well remember the days when we ran *The Journal* on an old A.B. Dick and later a more sophisticated Gestetner Mimeograph machine. Now *The Journal* is set up by our office manager, Judi Doezema, on a new computer with desk-top publishing capabilities, and it is printed commercially by Mr. Jim Huizinga. Through all these years the Lord has blessed us. Our subscription list continues to grow and many write us expressing appreciation for the material. We begin a new year with confidence in our God who will continue to prosper our labors.

We cannot refrain from expressing a word of appreciation to all our people in the Protestant Reformed Churches who, through their assessments, make the publication of this *Journal* possible and who underwrite its costs so that our readers need pay nothing for it.

* * * * *

Prof. Engelsma begins in this issue his promised discussion of the history of the question of divorce and remarriage in the churches of the Reformation. In this issue he discusses particularly the influence of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, the spiritual father of the Protestant Reformed Churches, on the position which our churches now take. You will find this interesting and enlightening because Rev. Hoeksema came to his position only after careful searching of the Scriptures, a searching which forced him to alter his former position.

* * * * *

I continue my discussion of various questions which arise in connection with common grace. Particularly it is the concern of the present article to examine the question whether God's gifts of providence which He freely gives to all men are indeed manifestations of His grace to all men. Various interesting and important questions arise in this connection, not the least of which is the question: If the good things of God's providence are grace to all men, elect and reprobate, are the bad things of God's providence a curse to all men, elect and reprobate? How are we to explain these things? While all the answers are not given in this preliminary article on the question, I hope to pursue the matter further in our next issue.

* * * * *

Several important book reviews appear in this issue. Be sure to read them.

One book review deals with Clarence Boomsma's attempt to defend on the basis of Scripture the decision of the Christian Reformed Church to open the special offices in the church to women. It is a definitive work on the subject. Is it faithful to Scripture?

Another deals with Kenneth Gentry's attempt to bring together into one book all the arguments in favor of post-millennialism. The book has the value of summarizing the position of reconstructionist post-millennialism, a position which, if one can believe its proponents, is gaining ever wider acceptance.

A review of Dr. J. Beeke's doctoral thesis on the assurance of faith as taught by Calvin, the English Puritans, and the Dutch Second Reformation is written for us by Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the Independent Reformed Church of Cambridge, Ontario.

Dr. Philip Holtrop's doctoral dissertation on the Bolsec controversy is also reviewed. Our readers who have learned to be thankful for Calvin's great work for the Church of Christ will be interested in knowing what Dr. Holtrop says about Calvin, for Holtrop proves to be a friend of Bolsec and an enemy of Calvin.

Other reviews will also interest our readers and perhaps prompt them to purchase some of these important books.

A History of the Church's Doctrine of Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

David J. Engelsma

1 The Development of Herman Hoeksema

In the November, 1991, April, 1992, and November, 1992 issues of this *Journal*, I presented a doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage based on the teaching of I Corinthians 6 and 7.¹

In this series, I contended for a doctrine of marriage that views marriage as a lifelong bond established by God Himself. Only God may and only God can dissolve the bond that He has created. This implies that divorce in the sense of the breaking of the bond is not only impermissible but also impossible for man. The divorce that Scripture allows in Matthew 5:31, 32 and in Matthew 19:9 is a legal separation “of bed and board,” not a dissolving of the bond. Such a separation is permitted only in the case of fornication, that is, the sexual infidelity of one’s wife or husband. Even in the case of divorce on the ground of fornication, the bond made by God at the marriage of the two is not broken. The “innocent party” in the divorce, therefore, is not permitted by God to marry another. If the “innocent party” does remarry, his new relationship is an adulterous marriage.

According to the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:18-25, God’s act of marriage makes one flesh of the two and binds the two for life. The very nature of marriage, therefore, forbids all remarriage after divorce. Liberty to marry again comes only by the death of one’s marriage companion. The apostle wrote in I Corinthians 7:39:

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

¹ David J. Engelsma, “Sex for the Saints without and within Marriage,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 25, no. 1 (Nov., 1991): pp. 10-26; “Honorable Single Life and Holy Marriage,” *PRTJ* 25, no. 2 (April, 1992): pp. 42-54; “Desertion, Divorce, and Remarriage,” *PRTJ* 26, no. 1 (Nov., 1992): pp. 26-45.

The third article in the series that set forth this doctrine of marriage concluded with an “afterword”:

Regrettably, the forbidding of remarriage to the “innocent party” is not the Reformed tradition. To some extent, this is also true of the prohibition of remarriage to the one deserted by an unbelieving husband or wife. This is something that a Reformed church and a Reformed man will reckon with in their thinking on marriage, but it is not conclusive. For it is the confession of the Reformed faith that Scripture is the “infallible rule” by which all doctrine must be tested.... The “problem” of the Reformed tradition regarding remarriage raises the question of the history of the church’s thinking on remarriage after divorce. Since this history sheds important light on the issue of remarriage and since it refutes the notion that the forbidding of remarriage by the Protestant Reformed Churches is a novelty on the ecclesiastical scene, I intend to look at the history of the church’s doctrine concerning remarriage in (a subsequent) issue of this *Journal*.²

This promise of a history of the church’s marriage doctrine, I now begin to fulfill.

The doctrine of marriage that was set forth in three previous issues of this *Journal* and that has been briefly sketched above is not merely the personal conviction of the writer. It is the teaching of a denomination of Reformed churches. For the past forty years, the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in America have taught and practiced this doctrine of marriage with its implications for divorce and remarriage. This doctrine of marriage is church doctrine.

The PRC were led to this understanding of the biblical doctrine of marriage by Reformed theologian Herman Hoeksema. In a series of editorials entitled, “Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage,” in the periodical, the *Standard Bearer*, in 1956 and 1957, Hoeksema “showed from the Word of God that the marriage tie can never be broken except by death.”³

In a pamphlet published about the same time as the articles in the *Standard Bearer*, Hoeksema forcefully asserted his “stand” on marriage, divorce, and remarriage:

² Engelsma, “Desertion,” p. 45.

³ Herman Hoeksema, “Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage,” *Standard Bearer* 33, no. 8 (Jan. 15, 1957): p. 172. This was the concluding installment of the series. The articles that preceded appeared in the issues of Sept. 15, 1956 (pp. 485-487); Oct. 1, 1956 (pp. 5, 6); Oct. 15, 1956 (pp. 29, 30); Nov. 1, 1956 (pp. 52, 53); Nov. 15, 1956 (p. 76); Dec. 1, 1956 (p. 100); Dec. 15, 1956 (p. 125); and Jan. 1, 1957 (pp. 148, 149). These articles were published as a booklet, “Unbiblical Divorce and Remarriage” (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, n.d.).

My stand is that the marriage bond is absolutely unbreakable for life. My stand is that a man may certainly put away his wife if that becomes absolutely necessary, but she is still his wife, even after she is divorced. And my stand is that therefore when anyone marries that woman that is divorced, divorced even on Biblical grounds, say, that man also commits the sin of adultery.... Why? Because the marriage relation before God is absolutely unbreakable until death.⁴

In this pamphlet, as in the series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer*, Hoeksema grounded this stand, first, in the unbreakable covenant of grace between God and His people in Christ. An unbreakable bond of marriage follows from the unbreakable covenant because marriage is the earthly picture of the covenant: "Principally the marriage relation is unbreakable, because it rests in the reflection of God's unbreakable covenant."⁵

Second, the basis was the teaching of the New Testament on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Hoeksema pointed to Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; and I Corinthians 7:9. The second part of Matthew 19:9 was decisive for Hoeksema on the question, whether the "innocent party" may remarry. Christ's word is, "and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." By this word, the Lord forbids the woman whose husband has unjustly divorced her and has then sinfully married another woman to remarry.

This settles the matter conclusively. Notice that there are three parties here, or really four parties; but that second wife is not taken into consideration. There is the first husband, that puts away his wife. She didn't commit adultery. She was entirely innocent. She never violated the marriage bond by committing adultery. Nevertheless, he put away his wife. Secondly, he remarries, marries another woman. Now the second party enters in — another man. Notice: the man put away his wife and married another woman. May that first woman now enter into a marriage relationship with another man? On the contrary, for the Lord says: "And whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." That second party, therefore, may not marry the innocent woman. To marry her is also adultery. And why is that so? Why is this marrying with the innocent woman called adultery? Simply because she is still married to the first man, although he had already married another woman. This, therefore, is the plain truth of Scripture.⁶

⁴ Herman Hoeksema, "The Unbreakable Bond of Marriage" (Grand Rapids: Sunday School of the First Protestant Reformed Church, n.d.; repr. 1969), p. 17.

⁵ Hoeksema, "Unbreakable Bond," p. 10.

⁶ Hoeksema, "Unbreakable Bond," p. 16.

Hoeksema himself freely acknowledged that this stand represented a change in his thinking. Earlier in his ministry he had uncritically accepted and advocated the view that once generally prevailed in the Reformed tradition. This was the view that the adultery of one's marriage companion not only allowed one to divorce the sinning wife or husband but also to remarry. This view was popularly known as the right of the remarriage of the "innocent party."

I must confess that without considering the matter very thoroughly I used to agree with the old stand of the Christian Reformed Church, namely, that when a man committed adultery, the woman may not only divorce him, but may also remarry. At that time I did not confront the question very definitely, and did not consider it very deeply. . . . After considering the whole matter in the light of Scripture, however, I must now radically oppose this position. And against this stand I now take the position that marriage is forever unbreakable, is always for life, no matter what happens.⁷

In 1933 Hoeksema had publicly voiced the view that he would later renounce. He did this in two articles in the *Standard Bearer* in response to a question concerning the meaning of Matthew 19:9.⁸ In these articles, Hoeksema maintained:

1. that I Corinthians 7:39 does not teach that *only* death dissolves a marriage;
2. that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 means that

if someone divorces his wife on account of fornication and marries another, he does not commit adultery. The innocent party, therefore, in such a case has the right to divorce and also to proceed with a new marriage;

3. that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 cannot be explained as applying only to the prohibition against divorce. It applies also to the phrase regarding remarriage;

4. and that "Scripture indeed views fornication as the dissolving (Dutch: *vernietiging*) of the bond of marriage."

⁷ Hoeksema, "Unbreakable Bond," pp. 12, 13; cf. Hoeksema's "Unbiblical Divorce," pp. 20, 21.

⁸ The question and the first installment of Hoeksema's answer appear under the title, "Vragen," in the *Standard Bearer* 9, no. 16 (June 1, 1933): pp. 374-377. The second installment of Hoeksema's answer, "Antwoord Op de Vraag van Hudsonville," appears in the *Standard Bearer* 9, no. 18 (July 1, 1933): pp. 424-426. The quotations from these articles are my translation of the Dutch.

Significantly, even then Hoeksema was convinced that the second part of Matthew 19:9 prohibits the remarriage of the innocent wife whose husband has unjustly divorced her and married another woman. In 1933 Hoeksema took the position that the sexual unfaithfulness of one's wife or husband within marriage, that is, fornication, dissolved the marriage and gave to the "innocent party" the right to remarry. But he denied that an unjust divorce and the subsequent remarriage on the part of the divorcing husband or wife, that is, adultery, gave the "innocent party" the right to remarry. He denied this on the basis of the second part of Matthew 19:9.

Not adultery but fornication is named in the text as a possible ground for divorce. We come, therefore, to this conclusion, that, if there is no fornication, husband and wife are bound to each other and commit adultery if the one divorces the other, that is, the one who divorces commits adultery and the one who is divorced also always commits adultery if she (or he) remarries. Even though a divorced woman, who has been divorced by her husband without any basis of fornication, is innocent, she can never again marry. If she does marry, she commits adultery. The Scripture views her as bound to the first husband. His adultery does not free her.

Careful study of Holy Scripture compelled Hoeksema to reject the position that he first adopted, namely, that the marriage bond is breakable in one instance; that fornication breaks the bond; and that the innocent party whose marriage companion has committed fornication may remarry.

Reconsideration of the traditional Reformed doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage did not take place overnight. Although Hoeksema publicly renounced this tradition and recanted his earlier espousal of it in the middle 1950s, he had been rethinking his position for some time. This is evident from the editorial that he wrote in 1943 in answer to the question, whether a confessing "member of a sound Reformed church may remarry, if he or she is divorced on biblical grounds." Whereas in 1933 Hoeksema had answered this question in the affirmative, now his mind has changed:

I must confess that I myself have gradually undergone a change of conviction on this point in the course of the years by investigation of Holy Scripture. Earlier, without making much personal study of the question, I shared the most common opinion, that the innocent party in a divorce may also marry again. I mean that this is the standpoint that is taken by most. It rests on the presupposition that divorce completely breaks the bond of marriage, so that the married parties are free from each other and, therefore, have also the right to proceed with another marriage. . . . But I no longer share that opinion. I am increasingly confirmed in the conviction that fornication does indeed give to the innocent party in the marriage the right to divorce the guilty party (although this does not have to take place and forgiveness and reconciliation

are indeed the requirement first of all), but that by this the bond of marriage is not broken as long as both parties live. And if this is the case, then it lies in the nature of the case that neither of the divorced parties may remarry another.

Already in 1943 Hoeksema's grounds for this position were those that he would put forward in his more decisive break with the tradition in 1956/1957.

In the first place, I think that in general Scripture represents marriage as a reflection of God's covenant with His people, that He never breaks. That people can sin in that covenant and thus commit spiritual fornication, but the covenant lies absolutely firm in God, and He never gives His people a certificate of divorce.

The second ground for his rejection in 1943 of the notion that fornication dissolves the bond of marriage so that the "innocent party" is permitted to remarry was the testimony of the New Testament passages that address this issue. Hoeksema mentioned Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11, 12; and Luke 16:18. Taken together, these passages are emphatic condemnation of all remarriage after divorce. With regard to the exception clause in Matthew 19:9, Hoeksema explained that it gives a ground only for divorce. It does not provide a ground for remarriage. Conclusive for the correct interpretation of the exception clause is the second part of Matthew 19:9. Even though the divorced woman is the "innocent party" in the divorce and even though her husband has contracted an adulterous marriage with another woman, this "innocent party" is forbidden by Christ to remarry.

If anyone ever can have the right to remarry, then it is certainly this woman. Her husband has, as much as lies in his power, totally broken the bond of marriage with his first wife, by living in adultery. And still this woman does not have the right to remarry. On the contrary, whoever marries her, even after her husband has entered another marriage, is said to commit adultery. Why? There can only be one answer to this question: despite the sin of the husband and despite her having been divorced, this woman is yet always bound before God to the living husband.

Already in 1943 Hoeksema was firmly convinced that all remarriage is forbidden during the life of two married persons. The reason is that marriage is a bond that is broken only by death:

Therefore my answer is that there are indeed biblical grounds for divorce before the law so that husband and wife live in separation from each other. But this can never be viewed as such a breaking of the bond of marriage that

either of the parties, guilty or innocent, can have the right to remarry until death separates them.⁹

It is worthy of note that Hoeksema, ever his own man when he was convinced that Scripture constrained him, came to this stand in spite of the opposition not only of the Reformed tradition but also of his own consistory. In the article in the May 15, 1943 issue of the *Standard Bearer* in which he expressed his conviction that the “innocent party” is not permitted to remarry after divorce, Hoeksema himself mentioned the disagreement of his consistory. Having referred to the point of view that the “innocent party” may remarry as the “most common opinion,” Hoeksema continued:

This is also the point of view that is adopted again and again by the majority of my own consistory and, therefore, by my consistory as often as a concrete case comes up in our congregation today.

He then added, “But I no longer share that opinion.”¹⁰

It is also worthy of note that Hoeksema resolutely maintained his position publicly in the face of opposition from a prominent member of his own congregation. Hoeksema’s editorial on the impermissibility of the remarriage of the “innocent party” drew a response from a member of his own congregation objecting to this position. This response resulted in a series of exchanges between the member and Hoeksema on the issue. The debate centered on the interpretation of Matthew 19:9, particularly the exception clause, “except it be for fornication.” Jesus’ prohibition against the remarriage of the divorced woman in the second part of the text was decisive for Hoeksema. The fundamental importance of this second part of the one text that might be understood as allowing the remarriage of the “innocent party” for the correct interpretation, Hoeksema indicated by the headings that he gave to the exchange: “And (What about) that Divorced (Woman) Then?”; “Once More: And (What about) that Divorced (Woman) Then?”; “Yet One More Time: (What about) that Divorced (Woman)?”¹¹

Hoeksema set forth his doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage

⁹ Herman Hoeksema, “*Hertrouwen Van Gescheidenen*,” *Standard Bearer* 19, no. 16 (May 15, 1943): pp. 364-366. The quotations from this article are my translation of the Dutch.

¹⁰ Hoeksema, “*Hertrouwen*,” p. 364.

¹¹ Herman Hoeksema, “*En Die Verlatene Dan?*,” *Standard Bearer* 20, no. 3 (Nov. 1, 1943): pp. 50, 51; “*Nog Eens: En De Verlatene Dan?*,” *Standard Bearer* 20, no. 4 (Nov. 15, 1943): pp. 74, 75; “*Nog Eenmaal: DIE Verlatene?*,” *Standard Bearer* 20, no. 5 (Dec. 1, 1943): pp. 96-98.

in its fully developed form in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. Explaining the Catechism's exposition of the seventh commandment of God's law in Lord's Day 41, Hoeksema treated specifically of the truth of marriage in two chapters, "The Covenant of Marriage" and "Divorce and Remarriage."

He defined marriage as

the union between one man and one woman for life, a union that is based on a communion of nature, on a communion of life, and a communion of love, which is a reflection of the covenant relation between God and His people and of the relation between Christ and His church; a union, moreover, that has its chief purpose in bringing forth the seed of the covenant.

He asserted in the strongest language that every marriage is indissoluble:

The marriage bond is absolutely indissoluble. It cannot be broken. No more than the union between Christ and His church can be dissolved, no more can the marriage tie ever be severed. It is a most intimate union of life and for life, which only death can dissolve.

Hoeksema denied that the divorce permitted by Scripture in Matthew 5:32 and in Matthew 19:9 is the actual dissolution of the bond before the face of God so that the divorced persons are permitted to remarry. He defined biblical divorce thus:

Biblical divorce I would define as a separation for life of married people, that is, a legal separation for life, on the basis of adultery or fornication.

He called attention to the fact that this definition of divorce is fundamentally different from the definition that permits one or the other or both of the divorced persons to remarry:

I put it this way intentionally, in distinction from others, who claim that a divorce is the dissolution of the marriage tie, so that after the dissolution the bond does no longer exist and the married people are and are permitted to act as if they were never married.... It is my conviction that according to the Word of God, divorce can never mean dissolution of the marriage tie. Even if people are legally divorced, they are in my opinion according to the Word of God still married. Only, they are separate married people.

Hoeksema did not hesitate explicitly to draw the conclusion concerning remarriage:

The Bible teaches without any doubt that the marriage bond is indissoluble, that it can only be dissolved in death, and that therefore remarriage while both parties are still living is condemned by the Word of God.¹²

Hoeksema published this doctrine of marriage in his commentary on the Catechism, knowing full well that it would circulate widely in the Reformed world, at the exact time — 1955 — when Reformed churches were beginning to relax their marriage doctrine under the pressures of the adulterous world in which the churches were living. What Hoeksema observed concerning the “laws of the land” at that time was beginning to be true also of the laws of the churches:

The laws of our land have fast retreated before the wild rush of the carnal lust of the nation, until they are no longer a protection of the sacred bond of matrimony.¹³

Convinced by this great theologian that the Word of God does indeed teach marriage as a lifelong, unbreakable bond in reflection of the everlasting covenant of grace, the Protestant Reformed Churches have steadfastly confessed and practiced this doctrine of marriage with its implications for divorce and remarriage to the present day. In doing so, they have broken with a significant aspect of the Reformed tradition. This tradition goes back to the 16th century Reformation itself, having its source in Calvin and Luther. It is a doctrine of marriage that views marriage as a breakable bond. Sinful human actions can dissolve what God has joined together. The sins that can break the bond are fornication and desertion.

(to be continued)

¹² Herman Hoeksema, *The Heidelberg Catechism (An Exposition): Love Thy Neighbor for God's Sake* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), pp. 81-107. This work has been incorporated in the reprint edition of the original 10 volumes of Hoeksema's commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. It appears in vol. 3 of *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), pp. 342-367.

¹³ Hoeksema, *Love Thy Neighbor*, p. 97.

Another Look At Common Grace (4)

Blessings For All Men?

Professor Herman Hanko

(In the article which appeared in the April, 1993 issue of The Journal we discussed the meaning of various concepts such as grace, mercy, longsuffering, etc., all of which are related to the subject of common grace. We now enter into the substance of the idea of common grace.)

Introduction

Although the whole concept of common grace involves many different subjects,¹ we turn our attention in this article to the good gifts which all men receive in this life. The question which confronts us is: Are these good gifts God's grace which is common to all?

It is pointed out repeatedly by those who hold to common grace that the unregenerate receive many good things from God: rain and sunshine, health and strength, riches and prosperity, the privilege of living in a land where people are able to live in peace, etc. These good things which all men without distinction receive are said to be evidences of God's grace to all men. The very fact that these gifts are good and are sent by God is indicative of God's favor and grace.

The question is somewhat complicated by the fact that many have spoken of God's providence as common grace. God providentially bestows many good things on men. This providential bestowal of good gifts is often called common grace. Does God's providential bestowal of good gifts imply an attitude of favor? Many say not. Can these good gifts then be called grace? As we noticed in our last article, grace indeed refers to an attitude of favor. Providence itself therefore is not grace in the biblical sense of that term.

The question which we face in this article is: Does Scripture teach that God's good gifts are evidences of His favor?

¹ A list of such subjects would include: the relation between common grace and the atonement of Jesus Christ, the free offer of the gospel, the internal operations of the Spirit in the hearts of all men, the restraint of sin, the civic good of the ungodly.

A Statement of the Idea

So that we may have a clear understanding of what is meant by common grace as the good gifts of God, we turn to various defenders of this position to hear what they have to say on the matter.

Already in 1924 when the Christian Reformed Church adopted the well-known "Three Points of Common Grace," the Synod spoke of "the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect," and "a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general."² In support of this teaching, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church quoted Psalm 145:9; Matthew 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 35; Acts 14:16, 17.

This same idea can be found in various writings of supporters of common grace, and this idea is made explicit in its application to various spheres of life.

Herman Bavinck speaks of the fact that the continued existence of the wicked is due to common grace, by which he means that God's favor to the wicked is evident in the fact that the wicked are not destroyed immediately.³ This grace of God was especially shown in the preservation of the nations outside Israel during the Old Testament, and was with a view to the salvation of a catholic church.⁴

This last idea of Bavinck is an important aspect of common grace to which he returns when he states that common grace prepares the way in the whole creation and in the human race for special grace by which the whole cosmos is saved.⁵

Bavinck places great emphasis on this preparatory aspect of common grace, for he discusses the same idea elsewhere. He writes: "It is common grace which makes special grace possible, prepares the way for it, and later supports it; and special grace, in its turn, leads common grace up to its own level and puts it into its service."⁶

Louis Berkhof treats common grace in detail and points out that by it he means God's attribute of grace which "appears also in the natural blessings which God showers upon man in the present life."⁷ Further, he states:

² Quoted from Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches In America* (Grand Rapids: R.F.P.A., 1947), p. 317.

³ Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," tr. by R. C. Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal*, p. 40.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 60ff.

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), p. 38.

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 435.

common grace is revealed in “those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure it seems good to Him.”⁸

In summarizing Herman Hoeksema’s views of common grace, James Bratt castigates Hoeksema for holding a view which denies that “those things usually seen as common gifts from God — a man’s talents, for instance, and the bounties of nature — were blessings only to the elect but curses to the reprobate since they were merely means to spiritual ends.”⁹ Without any proof that Hoeksema was indeed haunted, Bratt insists that “in a phrase that came to haunt Hoeksema, it was ‘utterly inconceivable’ that God could show any favor to the reprobate.”¹⁰

H. J. Kuiper, shortly after the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church made its decisions on common grace, preached a series of sermons in support of the doctrines outlined in the Three Points.¹¹ He defines common grace as “the grace or favor which God, for the sake of Christ and His Church, shows to those who do not possess saving grace and through which He (negative) postpones their merited judgment (outward) . . .” and “(positive) bestows temporal blessings upon them . . . (outward).”¹² In connecting common grace with the free offer of the gospel, Kuiper says: “He sends the wicked *earthly* blessings as the fruits of His kindness, in order to convince them of His sincere willingness to bestow upon them the *greater* gift of salvation in Christ.”¹³

Donald McCleod insists that common grace includes blessings enjoyed by the reprobate and explains this in terms of God’s love for all. God does not always love the elect, McCleod says, just as He does not always hate the wicked. “His attitude towards them (the elect) is not simply one of love.”¹⁴

⁸ Ibid., p. 436.

⁹ James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984) p. 111.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ H. J. Kuiper, *Sermons Delivered in Broadway Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: no publisher given). In the forward Kuiper says: “Our real purpose was to explain and defend the 3 points.”

¹² Ibid., p. 11.

¹³ Ibid., p. 15. For Kuiper this is evidence of God’s universal love. He writes: “There is no one here in this audience who can say, ‘God hates me.’ Suppose you knew that you will ultimately be lost; even then you could not say, ‘God does not care for me.’”

¹⁴ Donald McCleod, *Behold Your God* (Christian Focus Publications, 1990), pp. 117, 126.

Apart from our discussion of God's good gifts, it is horrible to contemplate that God does not always love us. What assurance do we have that we shall finally be saved if this is the case?

John Murray not only speaks of the outward blessings of grace shown in the good things of life, but he does not hesitate, as some have,¹⁵ to connect these blessings to the cross of Christ. Because of Murray's influence over the years, we quote him at some length.

Murray too believes that common grace and special grace are related. Although common grace has other purposes, one surely is that it "provides the sphere of operation of special grace and special grace therefore provides a rationale of common grace."¹⁶

In discussing the benefits which all receive by virtue of common grace, Murray writes:

Many benefits accrue to the non-elect from the redemptive work of Christ. There is more than one consideration to establish this proposition. Many blessings are dispensed to men indiscriminately because God is fulfilling his redemptive purpose in the world. Much in the way of order, equity, benevolence, and mercy is the fruit of the gospel, and the gospel is God's redemptive revelation centered in the gift of his Son. Believers are enjoined to 'do good to all men' (Gal. 6:10) and compliance has a beneficial result. But their identity as believers proceeds from redemption.... Furthermore, we must remember that all the good dispensed to this world is dispensed within the mediatorial dominion of Christ. He is given all authority in heaven and in earth and he is head over all things. But he is given this dominion as the reward of his obedience unto death (cf. Phil. 2:8,9), and his obedience unto death is but one way of characterizing what we mean by the atonement. Thus all the good showered on this world, dispensed by Christ in the exercise of his exalted lordship, is related to the death of Christ and accrues to man in one way or another from the death of Christ. If so, it was designed to accrue from the death of Christ. Since many of these blessings fall short of salvation and are enjoyed by many who never become the possessors of salvation, we must say that the design of Christ's death is more inclusive than the blessings that belong specifically to the atonement. This is to say that even the non-elect are embraced in the design of the atonement in respect of those blessings falling short of salvation which they enjoy in this life. This is equivalent to saying that the atonement sustains this reference to the non-elect and it would not be improper to say that, in respect of what is entailed for the non-elect, Christ died for them.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., K. Sietsma, *The Idea of the Office* (Paideia Press, 1985), 27, 33.

¹⁶ John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), p. 116. See also p. 113.

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 63, 64.

After referring to Hebrews 10:26, 27, Hebrews 6:4, 5, and II Peter 2:20-22 in support of this view, Murray goes on to say:

But this suffices to show that there are benefits accruing from the death of Christ for those who finally perish. And in view of this we may say that in respect of these benefits Christ may be said to have died for those who are the beneficiaries. In any case it is incontrovertible that even those who perish are the partakers of numberless benefits that are the fruits of Christ's death and that, therefore, Christ's death sustains to them this beneficial reference, a beneficial reference, however, that does not extend beyond this life.¹⁸

Explaining Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27, 35, Murray writes:

There is a love in God that goes forth to lost men and is manifested in the manifold blessings which all men without distinction enjoy, a love in which non-elect persons are embraced, and a love that comes to its highest expression in the entreaties, overtures and demands of gospel proclamation.¹⁹

In explaining further the relation between these benefits to the ungodly and the atonement, Murray states that "the non-elect enjoy many benefits that accrue *from* the atonement but they do not partake of the *atonement*."²⁰ Thus, a distinction is to be made in the love of God. The love of benevolence is love which saves; the love of complacency is love which is conditional.²¹

Differing from Charles Hodge, Murray wants a broader definition of common grace: "Any gift or favor bestowed upon, and enjoyed by creatures"; "gifts bestowed upon other creatures as well as upon men"; "every favor of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."²²

Taking his cue from Herman Kuiper, Murray distinguishes between a universal common grace "which is common to all the creatures who make up this sin-cursed world ... a grace which touches creatures as creatures"; a general common grace which is "common to all human beings in distinction from the rest of God's creatures ... a grace which pertains to men as men"; and a covenant common grace which is "common to all elect and non-elect covenant members."²³

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 70-72.

²² Ibid., Vol. II, p. 96.

²³ Ibid., pp. 96, 97.

Among many other elements, common grace also includes the fact that the creation is the recipient of divine bounty²⁴ and that men themselves are the recipients of favor and goodness.²⁵ The benefits mentioned in Hebrews 6 are “non-saving grace at its very apex.”²⁶

We need not quote any more from proponents of common grace. The ideas referred to above are commonly and generally held.²⁷

A summary of the views of proponents of common grace with respect to the question of God’s good gifts to men would include the following elements: 1) Common grace is identified with many other attributes of God, all of which are also common. We may mention specifically, love, mercy, kindness, benevolence, favor, and longsuffering. 2) This grace or favor is shown to a) God’s creatures in the brute creation, b) mankind in general, c) both elect and non-elect within the covenant.²⁸ 3) The blessings of common grace include the continued existence of the wicked in the world, the natural bounties of the creation, man’s talents, and a postponement of judgment. 4) Common grace prepares the way for special grace. While it is not always clear precisely what is meant by this, it seems as if those who teach this idea refer not only to the fact that common grace creates a climate in which the gospel can be preached successfully, but that also the effects of common grace have some *internal* significance upon man to make him more receptive to the gospel.²⁹ 5) Murray especially maintains that common grace is rooted in the atonement and endeavors to prove that the atonement is an expression of God’s love for all men. 6) Various texts from Scripture are quoted in support of these positions.

Various Problems

Before we enter into an analysis of these views, we note that it is clear that the whole presentation creates serious problems, especially for the child

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 106, 107.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 110.

²⁷ On can cf., e.g., David Silversides, *Paper on Common Grace*, (unpublished), pp. 35, 47; Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinist Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959), pp. 239, 240; John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing The Word Of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN, Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), pp. 130, 131; *et. al.*

²⁸ There is some difference of opinion on the question of whether the elect also are the recipients of common grace, or whether common grace is only bestowed on the reprobate, with the elect recipients only of special grace.

²⁹ Common grace convinces men of God’s willingness to save them. Cf. Kuiper, *Sermons*, p. 15.

of God. We intend to treat in detail not only the different aspects of this view of common grace, but also the texts used in support of it. But before we do so, questions naturally arise which are scarcely, if ever, treated in connection with this doctrine.

One of the great questions is: If the natural bounties of the creation are grace or favor or love towards the non-elect, how does one explain the judgments of God in the creation? Not only does God send rain and sunshine, He also sends floods and drought. Not only does God send flourishing crops, He also sends hail and insects. Not only does God send fair weather, but He also sends foul weather in tornados and hurricanes which leave paths of destruction in their wake. It is true that parts of the world experience peace, but war rages in other parts, leaving devastation, starvation, and death in countless villages and cities. The judgments which God sends seem often times to be more widespread and seem to affect more people than the bounties of nature. America is, generally, wealthy and enjoys a level of prosperity not found elsewhere in the world. But poverty and sickness, starvation and war, natural disasters of every sort, and pestilences of every kind are present throughout the world. Is God more gracious to America than to those in the slums of Argentina? Is God more gracious to the farmers of the Midwest than to the suffering people in Bosnia? Is the Nile Delta blessed while the Sahara is cursed?

The difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that both prosperity and calamity are the lot of all. Not only do the elect enjoy prosperity, but also the reprobate — which is obvious and forms the ground of common grace. But the opposite is also true. Not only do the reprobate receive God's judgments, but the calamities of judgment come upon the elect as well. If God has His people throughout the world, the elect in Bangladesh suffer as well as the wicked.

How is all this to be explained?

The problem becomes acute if one looks at it from the viewpoint of the personal experience of the people of God. If prosperity is to be equated with favor and love, then it would seem to follow that adversity and suffering must be equated with hatred and the curse. And if this proposition is true, then God both loves and hates the wicked, but also, as McCleod claims,³⁰ God both loves and hates the righteous.

This problem becomes the more pressing when we consider what Asaph wrote as a general principle for all time. As far as the wicked are concerned, Asaph "saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men;

³⁰ See above.

neither are they plagued like other men . . . Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish . . . Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches" (Psalm 73:3-5, 7, 12). But as far as the righteous are concerned, Asaph opines that he has cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocency, "for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (Psalm 73:13, 14). So great a grief was this to the Psalmist (i.e., before he understood the matter rightly) that he could not bear to think about it, for it was too painful for him (v. 16). And, indeed, if natural gifts are to be equated with blessings, then the admonition of Psalm 37 rings hollow: "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity" (v. 1).

This is a problem of no small import. When a godly farmer sees his wicked neighbor receive an abundant harvest while his own land lies stricken with drought, he can only conclude that the blessing of the Lord rests on the wicked while he himself is cursed. Where then is the experience of God's love for him? It vanishes with the hailstorm that destroys his crops. And for the prosperity of the wicked he has no solution.

It may perhaps be argued that the conclusion I drew above that grace is in the mere possession of earthly and natural gifts is unwarranted. But consider the fact that all the proponents of this view insist that these natural bounties are *in themselves* evidences of God's favor and love. It may further be argued that, while natural bounties are blessings, natural calamities may not necessarily be construed as curses. But consider then the conclusion that these calamities and natural disasters are blessings upon all. Can this ever be a tenable position? No one in his right mind would claim such.

The problem is aggravated again by a consideration of the final judgment of hell which comes to the wicked. No man who is in any respect Reformed denies that the wicked are to be sentenced to everlasting judgment in hell.³¹ The question will not disappear: How can God love a man in this life, show him kindness and mercy, give him favor and grace, bestow upon him countless good gifts, and then, when the man dies, throw him into hell?

The answer to this may very well be that God punishes a man for his rejection and misuse of the good gifts which he has received. And this is surely true. But the fact remains that this leaves us with a changeable God who loves men in this life and destroys them when they die. There is a kind of cruel irony in this: God manifests His love in countless ways to ungodly sinners, but hurls them into hell when they depart this life. And again, if God

³¹Increasingly in evangelical circles eternal punishment in hell is being denied. Is this perhaps the natural outcome of a commitment to common grace?

is thus changeable, and bounties are blessings while calamities are curses, how does the righteous man know that perhaps God will not also change with respect to him and cast him at last into hell? If people whom God loves can be punished in hell, perhaps the same fate awaits the Christian.

The whole matter comes down to the question of whether God is Himself changeable. Reformed theology has always insisted that God's eternity implies His immutability. God is the changeless One: "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). It is, after all, a cruel God who loves men in this life and puts them in hell for eternity.

One could wish that the proponents of common grace would give an answer to these perplexing problems.

All this brings up the question of God's hatred. That Scripture speaks of God's hatred against the wicked is evident. Psalm 5:5 is decisive: "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

Sometimes there is some confusion on this question. The confusion lies in the failure to distinguish properly between wrath and hatred. God is indeed filled with wrath against the wicked; but He is also angry with His people. David complains: "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure" (Psalm 38:1). Yet, in His wrath towards His people, God still loves them. This is evident from the following considerations. 1) Wrath is not incompatible with love. A father may be very angry with his son who walks in sin and may as a result of that anger chasten his son. But this anger and chastisement, if it is godly, is a manifestation of love. In fact, the opposite is also true. If an earthly father did not chasten his son for wrongdoing, but allowed his son to continue in a way of sin, this would not be a manifestation of love at all, but of hatred. His hatred would be evident in his utter unconcern for the spiritual welfare of his son. It is love which makes him angry. 2) The text itself speaks exactly of such chastisement. As is so often true in the Psalms, Psalm 38:1 is also an incident of Hebrew parallelism. The last clause of the text is an explanation of the first. God's wrath is His hot displeasure, and God's rebuke is His chastisement. When His people walk in sin, God does not, in love, allow them to continue in their sins, but He turns them again to Himself through the rod of His chastisement. Chastisement hurts; it hurts very much; it hurts so much that David fears it, as is evident in his anguished plea. But this does not alter the fact that chastisement is visited upon sons, for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

But hatred is different from wrath. Hatred includes wrath—of course. God's wrath is upon the wicked reprobate, but the wrath of God upon the wicked is hatred, not love. Only sons are chastened in love. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the

father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7).

How is it possible for the proponents of common grace to deal with these questions?³²

Is the Atonement For All?

The problem of the relation between common grace and the atonement of Christ has always been a perplexing one. Those especially who have stood in the Reformed tradition have hesitated to say that common grace is merited for the wicked in the cross of Jesus Christ. Their hesitancy has reflected their fear of universalizing the atoning work of the Savior.

There is good reason for this hesitancy. It strikes at the very nature of the atonement. The Reformed churches both on the continent and in the British Isles who have stood in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation have understood the Scriptures properly that the death of Christ was a substitutionary work of Christ so that He stood in the place of those for whom He died, bearing the wrath of God for them and paying the full penalty for sin. The atonement of Christ is so complete and perfect that for those for whom Christ died, sin and guilt exist no longer and righteousness and everlasting blessedness is merited for them.

Thus the work of Christ accomplished two things: Christ bore away all the wrath of God against those for whom Christ died; and Christ, by His perfect obedience, secured all the fullness of salvation.

Those who taught (and teach) that the atonement of Christ is for every man head for head are of necessity compelled to alter this essential characteristic of Christ's atoning work. They stand confronted with the obvious fact that not all men are actually forgiven and not all men are saved. But if not all men are forgiven and if not all men are saved, then Christ did not secure for them who are not saved forgiveness of sins and everlasting blessedness. Hence, those who promote universal salvation must fall back on a different conception of the atonement.

Various theories of the atonement have been suggested over the years³³ and it is not our intention to discuss this question in detail. The works written on the subject are many. But, whatever the particular theory may be, the

³² It is true that increasingly in evangelical circles what is called "process theology" has come to the fore. This view of God sets aside God's attributes, especially His attribute of immutability, and teaches that God only reacts with favor or disapproval to what man does with God's good gifts. This is a denial of God's eternity and unchangeable being. Has common grace brought about this view of God?

³³ As, e.g., the moral theory of the atonement or the governmental theory of the atonement.

heart of it all is that Christ accomplished only one thing on the cross: He only made salvation *available* for all. He did not actually secure forgiveness and salvation; He only made these gifts available. They actually become the possession of those who, hearkening to the overtures of the gospel, accept Christ as their Savior by an act of their own will.

This conception is sheer Arminianism, and Reformed people have always, with good reason, shied away from it and condemned it as useless for their salvation. It has been well said: "A Christ for all is a Christ for no one."

This is the dilemma which the proponents of common grace necessarily face. God is a holy God who hates sin and must, to preserve His essential holiness, punish the sinner with death both temporal and eternal. If God would do anything to the sinner but punish him, His holiness would be besmirched and He would no longer be God. The only possibility for God's favor to rest upon man is if someone would come to bear himself the punishment which is justly due the sinner. This is the work Christ accomplished.

But now, so common grace teaches, God loves all men, is kind and merciful to them, bestows upon them many good gifts in this life, and blesses them with many temporal blessings which flow from the fountain of His grace and mercy. He loves and blesses those who are not saved and bestows good gifts on those who go to hell. How can this love and favor of God come upon those for whom Christ did not die and for whom Christ did not earn blessing?

It is obvious that such favor and blessing cannot come apart from the cross. And so, sensing the force of the problem, many have concluded that the death of Christ is, after all, for all men in some sense of the word. This is the position which John Murray takes.

Many benefits accrue to the non-elect from the redemptive work of Christ.... Thus all the good showered on this world, dispensed by Christ in the exercise of his exalted lordship, is related to the death of Christ and accrues to man in one way or another from the death of Christ. If so, it was designed to accrue from the death of Christ.... This is to say that even the non-elect are embraced in the design of the atonement in respect of those blessings falling short of salvation which they enjoy in this life.... It would not be improper to say that, in respect of what is entailed for the non-elect, Christ died for them....

It is incontrovertible that even those who perish are partakers of numberless benefits that are the fruits of Christ's death....³⁴

³⁴ Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I, pp. 63-65.

The idea is, therefore, that while Christ actually accomplished salvation full and complete only for the elect, the suffering and death of Christ was so stupendous in its efficacy that additional blessings were also merited for the non-elect. It is (the figure is mine) as if Christ filled to overflowing the cup of salvation, but the overflowing blessings fall upon the reprobate as well.

But there are serious objections to such a conception of the cross.

On the one hand, it seems impossible for these blessings of common grace to come to the reprobate apart from the cross. If these blessings are rooted in God's love and mercy and are expressions of His favor, such love, mercy, and favor can come only through the cross.

On the other hand, it is impossible to see how these blessings which are in their very nature of a temporal kind can be merited by Christ when He died for sin.

The very first objection is that this view has no Scriptural basis. It is a logical deduction without biblical foundation.³⁵ It is striking that Murray offers not one shred of evidence from Scripture for such a universalizing of the atonement. He argues for it in this way: 1) The reprobate receive many blessings; 2) These blessings flow from the love and mercy of God; 3) There can be no love and mercy for anyone apart from the cross; 4) Therefore, in some sense Christ died for every man. This is, in itself, sound argumentation; the problem is with the first premise: The reprobate receive many blessings. This is simply not true.³⁶ And, if the first premise is not true, the need for a universal atonement is not true. We may safely conclude that Scripture gives not the slightest hint that Christ's meritorious work on the cross accomplished the meriting of temporal blessings for all mankind.

Secondly, the question is one of *merit*. The Scriptures teach that the work of Christ is meritorious. He earned and merited for the elect that which they could not merit for themselves. He did this great work in obedience to the Father. The elect were given Him from all eternity as His own possession. When He died on the cross, the names of all His elect were in His heart and thought. He consciously and willingly died for each one of them. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep.... As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14, 15).

³⁵ It is ironic that those who hold to common grace often accuse the Protestant Reformed Churches of rationalism, while they themselves often argue rationally.

³⁶ We have not discussed this question as yet, but intend, the Lord willing, to do so.

This is a great blessedness for God's people. They, when by faith they flee to the cross for their salvation, know and understand that their names were on the lips of Christ when He entered into the depths of hell to die for them. He loves them more than any other person can possibly love them. When, therefore, Christ cried out: "It is finished," the believer understands that 2000 years ago on Calvary all his sins were completely taken away so that they exist no longer. At that point all his sins are gone, completely gone, forevermore. Salvation full and free was earned for him so that he can look forward in certainty to everlasting blessedness in heaven. Christ merited this for him.

If then, the cross of Christ was also for the reprobate, did Christ have also all the names of the reprobate in His heart and mind? When He said to God: "I offer the perfect sacrifice for the sins of my people by enduring the fury of Thy wrath," did He also say, "Father, I offer myself as the sacrifice for those who are not Thy people in order that I may earn for them temporal blessings, even though their end is hell?" This is manifestly absurd.

Thirdly, one may carry this whole idea back to God Himself and His love, mercy, and grace, for that is our starting point when we discuss this question of common grace: common grace flows from a universal love, mercy, and grace.

Did God out of His own eternal and sovereign love for the elect give them to Christ so that Christ might accomplish salvation for them? That is the heart of salvation, and, indeed, this is the blessed truth to which every child of God clings. But, in addition to that, did God give also the reprobate to Christ from all eternity, out of eternal love, in order that Christ might also die for them — even though the death of God's own Son is for temporal blessings for the reprobate and their end at last the suffering of hell?

Put in this form, it becomes obvious that such cannot be the case. We may, rather abstractly, discuss the extent and the design of the atonement; but put in the concrete form of the believer's relation to Christ, the whole question strikes at the heart of His faith.

Finally, although the proponents of this universalizing of Christ's atonement are careful to limit it in such a way that only certain temporal blessings are earned for the reprobate, the fact remains that once having universalized the atonement, even in a limited way, the outcome is bound to be a complete universalizing of the atonement so that the Arminian position is once again brought into the church and a Christ for all is preached from every pulpit. Then salvation is not *accomplished*; it is only *available*, and salvation depends upon the will of man.

Various distinctions have been made to try to justify a line of argumentation which makes temporal blessings flow from the cross. Such distinctions have been applied to the love of God. Murray, e.g., distinguishes

between a love of benevolence which saves and a love of complacency which is conditional.³⁷

Similar distinctions have been made in the atonement of Christ, distinctions between such ideas as the extent of the atonement, the design or intent of the atonement, the efficacy of the atonement, etc. Very clearly, Murray speaks of the design of the atonement as being inclusive of the reprobate, although he uses also the term "extent" when he speaks of the blessings which God sends to the reprobate. He writes:

The topic is sometimes spoken of as the design of the atonement. In the discussion the term 'design' is frequently the appropriate and convenient term. But there is also an advantage in the term 'extent'; it has a denotative quality and serves to point up the crux of the question: who are embraced in that which the atonement actually accomplished? For whom were obedience, sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption designed?³⁸

Another distinction is made between temporal blessings and eternal blessings, the former for all men, the latter for the elect only. But whether the blessings are temporal or eternal, they remain blessings for all that.

Yet another distinction has been made between the sinner and his sin. God loves the sinner, but hates his sin. God loves the sinner as creature and, therefore, this love for the sinner as creature is the same as His love for all His creatures, including rocks and elm trees. But the sin of the creature God hates.³⁹

Yet these distinctions too are made in an effort to give some support to common grace without any Scriptural basis. It is impossible to find in Scripture any distinction in the love of God. It is impossible, as we have noted, to find any references in Scripture to the effect that the atonement has a broader referent than the elect. It is impossible to find in Scripture any distinction between sin and the sinner. In fact, to state that Scripture teaches that God loves the sinner, but hates his sin is in flat contradiction to Psalm 5:5: "Thou hatest the *workers* of iniquity."

These distinctions, therefore, can only confuse. They are impossible to maintain. And the result is that the people in the pew come to believe that

³⁷ Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II, pp. 70-72.

³⁸ Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I, p. 63.

³⁹ Cf. Kuiper, *Sermons*, p. 11: "God hates the wicked *as wicked*, but he loves them *as His creatures*." Although Kuiper does not make the distinction between sin and the sinner, his idea seems to be the same.

God loves everyone,⁴⁰ that Christ died for every man head for head, and that blessings come to all. The argumentation ends in blatant universalism.

The lines of Scripture are sharp and clear. God eternally loves His people in Christ. He gives them to Christ as Christ's possession. For them Christ sheds His blood and earns for them forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. Through Christ and His cross the blessings of God come upon those for whom Christ died. They are the blest, while "the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked" (Proverbs 3:33).

Common Grace and Special Grace

Many supporters of common grace have spoken of a relationship between common grace and special grace. An example of this may be found in Murray who writes:

We may say that in the operations of common grace we have what we may call the vestibule of faith. We have as it were the point of contact, the *Anknüpfungspunkt*, at which and upon which the Holy Spirit enters with the special and saving operations of his grace. Faith does not take its genesis in a vacuum. It has its antecedents and presuppositions both logically and chronologically in the operations of common grace.

Both in the individual sphere and in the sphere of organic and historic movement, the onward course of Christianity can never be dissociated from the preparations by which it is preceded and from conditions by which it is surrounded, preparations and conditions that belong not only to the general field of divine providence but also to the particular sphere of beneficent and gracious administration on God's part, yet gracious administration that is obviously not in itself saving, and therefore administration that belongs to the sphere of common grace.⁴¹

It is admittedly somewhat difficult to understand precisely how Murray views the relationship between common grace and special grace in these remarks. But it would seem that his argument is that, because God's common grace is indeed grace (and mercy, love, kindness, etc.), it is not only an outward attitude towards mankind in general, but also an inward operation of the Spirit which not only creates an objective "climate" in which the gospel can be more effectively preached, but also makes the sinner more

⁴⁰ Note H. J. Kuiper's comment referred to earlier: "There is no one here in this audience who can say, 'God hates me.' Suppose you knew that you will ultimately be lost; even then you could not say, 'God does not care for me.'" Kuiper, *Sermons*, pp. 15, 16.

⁴¹ Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. II, pp. 115, 116.

receptive to the gospel.

Grace is, after all, an *attitude* of favor on God's part towards men. This attitude does not mean a thing unless the object of that attitude himself knows it and experiences it. I may have an attitude of love for a widow in Bangladesh who has just suffered the loss of her family in a terrible flood; but that attitude means nothing unless she knows of it through my own care for her and provision for her earthly and spiritual needs in a time of disaster.

Thus, the wicked are made more receptive to the "overtures" of the gospel because they themselves know that God loves them and is mercifully inclined to them so that they are made more receptive to the offer of the gospel.

That this is probably the meaning is evident from the fact, in the first place, that common grace is always connected with the free offer of the gospel; and, in the secondly place, from the fact that the "Three Points" of common grace connected God's general attitude of favor to all with both the free offer and the inward operation of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men restraining sin.

It is not our purpose to go into this aspect of the question in detail. First of all, it is not our intent in these articles to discuss the free offer; and, secondly, the subject will come up again when we discuss in some future article the whole idea of the restraint of sin.

Nevertheless, it is important to note already here that such a line of argumentation opens the door to blatant Arminianism. The simple fact of the matter is that the gospel *does* come to men in a spiritual "vacuum." It comes to sinners, totally depraved and unable to do any good. It comes as the power of God unto salvation. It comes to transform sinners into saints and blasphemers into those who humbly confess their sins and seek salvation in the cross.

To speak of a general operation of grace in the hearts of all to prepare men for the gospel so that they may be more receptive is to open the door to the worst form of Arminianism. All who receive such common grace are in a state of receptivity because of a divine work of grace. Whether or not they actually accept the gospel depends upon their choice. The choice is possible because God has done all He can to make them receptive. He has, through the gospel, expressed Himself as willing and ready for men to believe. He has, by His Spirit, made them capable of receiving the gospel. Now the choice is in man's hand, and his eternal destiny is determined, not by God's sovereign determination, but by man's choice. This is Arminianism. It is to be rejected by anyone who loves the truth of Scripture.

We have not yet dealt specifically with the question of temporal blessings. Nor have we examined the texts which are quoted in support of such temporal blessings. This will have to wait till our next article.

Book Reviews

Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate; ed. by Harvie M. Conn (Baker Book House, 1988) 276pp., paper. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

This volume is written by the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary with the stated purpose of keeping ministers abreast of Hermeneutical developments, but also in an obvious effort to demonstrate that Westminster's faculty holds to the doctrines of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. This latter purpose becomes evident, in the first place, by the fact that the book is dedicated to Dr. Cornelius Van Til; and, in the second place, by a paragraph with which each chapter begins which is taken from the writings of the first generation faculty at Westminster.

Whether the book actually accomplishes this latter purpose is another question. One can find various passages in the book in which the truths of Scripture's inspiration and infallibility are set forth, something one would expect; but much of the book is given over to a description of the complexities of higher criticism in various areas of Bible studies.

All this in itself would not be so bad, especially because the stated

purpose of the book is to bring ministers abreast of current thought in the field of Hermeneutics. But what one does expect from authors claiming to be committed to inerrancy is a sharp and unambiguous refutation of higher criticism and a detailed and firm exposition of the truth of infallible and inerrant inspiration. For these one looks almost in vain. Rather, the authors, without exception, believe, as they state repeatedly in the book, that higher critical methods can be of help in interpreting the Bible. This is disappointing.

The starting point in this approach to Scripture is stated in the first chapter when Harvie Conn informs us that a change of emphasis has taken place from what Scripture *means* to *how we can determine* what Scripture means. This, says Conn, gave new direction to Westminster Seminary thought and opened the door to critical studies — although he claims that inerrancy is still held (p. 27).

We will give a few instances of this change of direction which are taken from various authors.

D. Clair Davis raises one's eyebrows already in chapter 2 when he claims that Westminster Calvinism is emphasis on providence — i.e., on God's sovereignty and man's

responsibility, and on the relation between the Christian and his surrounding culture. Such a description of providence leaves one wondering whether his assertion that Westminster today is the same doctrinally as it was in the old days is true; but more disconcerting is the fact that Davis tells us that the doctrine of Scripture must be discussed within the context of his definition of providence.

Moises Silva argues for the need to include the author's (human) purpose in writing a particular passage, which, while true in itself, makes it possible for him to allow for a less than historical interpretation of Genesis 1-3. He thus argues, though weakly, that commitment to inerrancy does not preclude higher criticism.

Vern Poythress asks the question, assuming that Scripture has two authors: Is the meaning and intent of both authors the same? He solves this problem by asserting that "Each points to the other and affirms the presence and operation of the other" (p. 83); and concludes: "We cannot simply ignore the human author and try to concentrate only on what God is saying" (p. 83).

Dan McCartney discusses how New Testament writers interpret the Old Testament and comes to the conclusion that their methods of interpretation were similar to those used in the Qumran community (p. 108). His thesis is that the world view of the New Testament writers shaped their interpretive methods so

that we have to discover their methods to learn what they mean (p. 110). This involves general revelation "informing" special revelation (p. 111).

Tremper Longman III openly admits that various secular literary criticisms can help us explain a text because of common grace (p. 147).

As a sidelight we may note that this was precisely the position of Dr. Ralph Janssen in the early 1920s. Although he was fired from the theological faculty of Calvin Seminary for his views on Scripture, his use of common grace as a defense of his position was not challenged.

Raymond Dillard explains "discrepancies" in the narratives of I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, and I & II Chronicles as determinations on the part of the human authors as to what to include or exclude in their writings, which determination was made on the basis of their purpose in writing (pp. 154, 162).

Richard Dillard has some strange remarks to make about the subject of canonicity. After arguing that inspiration cannot be a criterion to determine canonicity because other inspired books were written during the time of special revelation and because each of the 27 books of the New Testament must be proved to be inspired, he allows room for an open canon — in the sense that other inspired books may yet be found (though this is unlikely). He seems at first to reject apostolicity, but then returns to it as the only acceptable criterion.

One would expect at this point

a treatment of the pertinent articles in the Belgic Confession, but no such references are to be found.

While the authors many times in their discussions come down on the right side of the question of biblical interpretation, a strong feeling of uneasiness persists as one reads. The question lingers: Are the authors completely committed to the truth that the Bible is the infallibly inspired Word of God?

When one thinks about the whole matter and reads carefully the book, one becomes convinced that the problem is exactly in the author's views on inspiration. Far too much prominence is given to the human authors, and insufficient attention is given to the divine authorship of Scripture. This inordinate emphasis on the human element opens the door finally to higher critical methods of interpretation, methods which, in the end, make biblical interpretation very difficult, if not impossible. I state this in the full consciousness of what it means. The constant emphasis of the book is on the fact that a true understanding of the Word of God is possible only when higher critical methods are employed.

But what does this do to Scripture's perspicuity? Would the authors of this book state unequivocally that the relatively uneducated child of God is able to understand the Scriptures? Is a child able to understand God's Word? Is an elder who had nothing but five years of grammar school able to understand the Scriptures? (I was privileged to work

in a congregation with such an elder; his understanding of God's Word exceeded by far the learned treatises of this book.) Let the faculty answer those questions. And should their answer be in the affirmative, which I hope it would be, then let them justify their insistence that higher critical methods are necessary to understand the Word of God.

The problem, as I have insisted in other articles on Hermeneutics in this *Journal*, is simply the fact that the authors are committed to a human element in Scripture. They argue that this is necessary, partly because Scripture gives evidence of its human authorship in the personal characteristics of the men whom God used to write Scripture, and partly because the church has historically employed the grammatical-historical method of interpretation.

If one is to argue successfully against the approach of this book, it must be asserted without qualification that Scripture is God's work exclusively. Scripture is only a divine book. The Holy Spirit is its Author. The book came into existence by divine inspiration.

I cannot go into these matters in detail in this review. One can consult what I have previously written on the subject in earlier issues of *The Journal*. But we may make the following points briefly.

Although God used men with their own distinct gifts and personalities, training and upbringing, historical and cultural influences; al-

though God caused these books to be written for specific historical purposes, God remains the sole Author through the Holy Spirit.

When one considers this truth, one must remember that God's predestination and providence stand above all Scripture, so that God chose and prepared men to serve as fit instruments of revelation.

If the question arises how this is possible, one must remember that the Scriptures too are miraculous. They belong to the wonder of grace. They are a work of God which is part of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Nowhere does Scripture so much as suggest that the Bible is in any sense at all of human authorship. All Scripture attests with one voice to the fact that Scripture is "God-breathed"; that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"; that Scripture nowhere expresses the opinions of the men whom God used to write it for "no Scripture is of any private interpretation."

To apply this to some of the assertions of the author: The methods of interpretation used by the New Testament writers in making use of the Old Testament were the Holy Spirit's methods of interpretation. The Holy Spirit determined the purpose of each book — also its historical purpose. The Holy Spirit determined in every instance what was to be included in the book and what was not to be included.

Our Belgic Confession makes a number of statements about Scrip-

ture, among which are: "We receive all these books [the 66 books of our present canon], and *these only*, as holy and canonical." We receive them as such "because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves" (Article 5). "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God ..." (Article 7).

Confessional loyalty to the heritage of the church would give to the authors of this present book an entirely different perspective.

If the authors should argue that their Seminary is based on the Westminster Confessions, then I call attention to I, 1-10 of the Westminster Confession where it is repeatedly stated that God is the Author of Scripture. One could wish and should expect that a treatment of the doctrine of Scripture from Westminster's faculty would include a careful analysis of these articles. Nothing of the sort can be found.

Harvie Conn, in chapter 11, discusses the problem of how to make the Scriptures, which are culturally relevant for another time, relevant to our own culture. He opines that the "plain meaning" of Scripture is different in different cultures. What now to do?

While Conn speaks of the need of the Spirit in interpreting Scripture he does not explain this truth as it ought to be explained. If the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit, as Luther already affirmed, is the *only* Inter-

preter of Scripture. This means two things. It means, first of all, that the Holy Spirit interprets Scripture with Scripture. He interprets His own writings with His writings. Secondly, the Holy Spirit is the Interpreter of Scripture as He dwells in the church and in the individual believer. While Conn mentions this, he does not do full justice to it. We have that great heritage of the truth, given to the church of all ages as the Spirit led the church into the truth, a heritage written in our Confessions, a heritage of the Spirit Himself, to aid us in our interpretation of God's Word. That is a precious gift of great assistance in understanding the meaning of God's Word. If only this book had had some respect for this great heritage, the book would have been entirely different.

Let the church which desires to be faithful to the Scriptures hold fast to these truths. Then higher critics will be sent scurrying away with shame and the church will remain faithful. ♦

He Shall Have Dominion, by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. (Institute for Christian Economics, 1992) x1, 584, \$19.95. [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Our readers who are interested in the post-millennial movement will want to read this book. Not only is it a very readable summary of the entire post-mil position, but the author

spends a great deal of time in attempting to refute the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches, attacking the writings of our ministers who have at any time written or spoken on the subject. In fact, so much attention is given to Protestant Reformed writings that one would think that, apart from pre-millennialists, the Protestant Reformed Churches are the chief antagonists of the post-mil and reconstructionist position on eschatology.

The book continues the practices of Gary North (cf., e.g., North's criticism of the Protestant Reformed position in *Biblical Economics Today*, Vol. XIV, No. 3) of opposing those who differ with reconstructionist post-mils by calling them and their views all sorts of names. To Gary North the position of our churches is "ghetto eschatology"; to Gentry the familiar derogatory names of "defeatists" and "pessimists" come readily to his mind (See, e.g., pp. 16, 17, 25).

A large part of the book is, however, given over to "proof" of the post-mil position. That our readers may know the line of the book, we offer here a summary of this proof.

There is some irony in Gentry's proof from the ancient church fathers. After deriding pre-mils for claiming that the early church fathers supported the pre-mil position, Gentry finds an abundance of "proof" that, after all, the church fathers were post-mil. The proof he offers is, however, so inconclusive that only a post-mil himself, attempting to find

historical support for his position, could possibly find post-mil doctrine in the fathers.

Calvin too is summoned to the witness chair in support of the post-mil position, but Calvin's witness is limited to one quote in which it is doubtful to say the least that Calvin had anything of post-mil thought in his mind.

He does considerably better with Scripture, although Scripture is made to teach strange things in support of his position.

The Old Testament is extensively quoted. We offer here a few samples of the line of proof which Gentry employs.

Talking of the creation mandate, Gentry maintains that man continues to fulfill his creation calling (179) and that, in the fulfillment of this calling, the kingdom of Christ will be realized here upon earth. This is a serious error, for it fails to reckon with the fact that man's total depravity and the curse upon the creation itself, make it impossible for the original "cultural mandate" to be carried out. It is apparently to make it possible for man to carry out the cultural mandate that Gentry introduces the idea of common grace (188).

Although Gentry is hard-pressed to find post-mil ideas in God's covenant with Abraham, he finally discovers them in the promise to Abraham of the land of Canaan, which is said to be "a type of the whole earth" (192). The fact that this promise includes nations is also proof

that the kingdom shall be earthly (193). This same argument is used repeatedly in Gentry's interpretation of the Psalms, as, e.g., in Psalms 2, 22, 72, 110 (196ff.).

Also the law proves that the kingdom of Christ shall be realized on this earth, for the law is for all nations (136ff.), and the entire post-mil view is "undergirded" by the objectivity of covenant blessings in this world. In support of this thesis, Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 are quoted.

Although Gentry rejects a literal interpretation of prophecy in his vendetta against pre-mils, he adopts the same literal interpretation when he turns to prophecy as support of a post-mil position (200 ff.) Isaiah 65:17-25, e.g., is said to refer to the millennium: "The new heavens and the new earth" refer to "a redemptive economy that will gradually transform the world ethically and spiritually" (361).

Also the New Testament is extensively quoted in support of the post-mil position, while other interpretations of key passages are rejected.

The key passage in Matthew 24:4-33, which deals with the signs of Christ's coming, is said to have been fulfilled in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem was captured by the Roman armies. In this interpretation, Gentry does not differ from other post-mils who have explained the passage in a similar fashion (cf., e.g., J. Marcellus Kik, *The Eschatology of Victory*).

While Gentry himself does not want to be a universalist in the sense that all men will be saved, he nevertheless uses the so-called universalistic passages as proof of his position (264 ff.) This is strange and alarming. Does John 3:16, e.g., ("God so loved the world...") refer to God's love for all men? If this refers to an earthly kingdom, does the giving of God's Son so that believers may have *eternal* life refer to all men head for head? Or does it refer to an eternal life in an earthly kingdom? What does Gentry believe? But, strangely, all such passages which mention "world" or "all" (II Cor. 5:17, e.g.) are made to apply to this earth for, in Gentry's reasoning, their very universalism makes them earthly.

Especially the great commission refers to the post-mil kingdom here on earth because the text "speaks of the Christianization of every area of life" (261). But where is the proof of such an assertion?

Even the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-5) is referred to this earthly kingdom on which the post-mils pin their hope (363).

Without any attempt to explain their meaning, Gentry also claims that Luke 17:20 ("The kingdom of God cometh not with observation"), John 18:36, 37 ("My kingdom is not of this world..."), Matthew 27:11, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3 ("And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it") in no way deny an earthly kingdom. This is hard to believe; a man

who claims to base his view on Scripture refuses to explain these texts.

Gentry also takes issue with the interpretation, generally accepted by Reformed churches, of the passages which speak of persecution, the Antichrist, and the end of time.

Not only is Matthew 24:4-33 a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but the whole book of Revelation has already been fulfilled.

The passages which speak of Antichrist do not speak of one man of sin who shall appear at the end, but refer rather to a "contemporary, heretical tendency regarding the person of Christ that was current among many in John's day" (374). Revelation 13 and 17 refer to Rome and Nero; II Thessalonians 2 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

To talk about persecution is "pessimistic" (457), and, according to Gentry, the Scriptures never speak of tribulation as the lot of God's people in the world (338 ff.). It is difficult to imagine how a man can make such bold statements when Jesus Himself tells us that "in the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33); the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name (Acts 5:41 — Is this an indication of pessimism?); Paul explicitly tells us that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22); and every page of Scripture assures God's people that it is God's purpose that they suffer for Christ's sake.

It is sad how Scripture can be

twisted to fit a pre-conceived position. Matthew 7:13, 14 ("Enter ye in at the strait gate ...") refers to Jesus' time and is not a general principle in the New Testament (475). How can Gentry say this when the very sermon on the mount (in which this passage is found) is the constitution for the kingdom of heaven?

Luke 18:8 ("Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?") is said to be either a statement of the Lord which requires self-examination, or a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (481).

The sad part of all this is that Gentry makes it very clear that post-mil really means a social gospel. I recall, many years ago when I criticized post-mil theology for being a social gospel, I was severely reprimanded by post-mil thinkers for identifying conservative post-mil theologians with liberal social activism. Now it comes out that, after all, this is what Gentry wants.

Already when he properly distinguishes between pietistic post-millennialism and theonomic post-millennialism, Gentry makes clear his commitment to a social gospel. Pietistic post-mil speaks of the earthly kingdom of Christ coming through revival and is promoted especially by those who publish and support *The Banner of Truth* (72). Theonomic post-mil, which Gentry advocates, speaks of "a total transformation of culture through the application of Biblical law" (72). Although Gentry tries to distance him-

self from liberal social gospelism (445 ff.), he does not succeed. The very idea of post-mil that the kingdom of Christ shall be realized in this world by a "total transformation of culture" requires that the institutions of society shall be Christianized and brought under the rule of Christ. If this is not social gospelism, I do not know what it is.

The post-mil theologians are preoccupied with this world. Gentry's book makes a few passing references to the fact that the kingdom is spiritual (225) and that perhaps the earthly kingdom will be preserved in the heavenly though transformed (301), but he has no time for this heavenly kingdom. He is preoccupied with this earth. The post-mil thinker will do all in his power to bring about this earthly kingdom.

This notion stands in flat contradiction to the whole tenor of Scripture. God's purpose as He eternally determined it is to glorify Himself through Christ in the heavenly realization of the glorious kingdom which Christ came to establish. The original creation, the fall, salvation of the elect and the cosmos through the cross, all serve the purpose of God as He determined to realize it when Christ comes again.

In the meantime, God's people are called to engage in the work of the gathering of the church, in representing the cause of God in a wicked world, in walking as pilgrims and strangers in the earth (cf. I Peter), in suffering for the cause of the gospel,

and in seeking those things which are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1-3). Their hope is fastened upon the full perfection of all things when the world shall be destroyed, the wicked cast into hell, and the glorious kingdom established in the new heavens and the new earth.

It is ironic that those who live by this hope are called "pessimists." What could be more pessimistic than the view of the post-mils? All the saints who have already gone to glory will not participate in that earthly kingdom in which righteousness shall prevail. Thousands of saints, yet unborn, will not participate in that kingdom, for they will die before that kingdom is realized. The kingdom itself will still have in it "birth, aging, death, time, sin, and curse" (363) though the kingdom will be "a redemptive economy that will gradually transform the world ethically and spiritually" (361). That is a very pessimistic future to say the least. Quite frankly, I have no interest in a kingdom in which I will still be a sinner, suffer disease, labor under the curse, and die. It is not much to look forward to. If this is Christ's kingdom, Lord deliver us from it.

But the Scriptures are optimistic. They hold forth for the believer a glorious promise. The believer is saved from death and hell already in this life. He is given the privilege of witnessing to the cause of Christ in the world. He is *blessed* with persecution (Matthew 5:11, 12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you,

and persecute you..."). He walks as a stranger in a world gone mad with sin. He lives out of the principle of hope that when he dies he shall be with Christ. He looks forward to the day when Christ shall come again and when all the elect shall be saved, this cursed world shall be destroyed, the wicked shall be punished, his body shall be raised from the grave, heaven and earth shall be made one in glory and unimaginable blessedness, God will wipe away all tears from his eyes, and he shall live forever and ever without sin in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ, there to praise the riches of the grace and mercy of the God who has saved Him by sovereign power. That is the kingdom for me! ♦

Male and Female, One in Christ: New Testament Teaching on Women in Office, by Clarence Boomsma (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) 105 pp., (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Now that the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has officially opened all the special offices in the church to women, we may expect a spate of writings in support of this position. Boomsma's book brings the first few sprinkles of rain; the heavy shower will, I think, follow.

From the viewpoint of a defense of women in ecclesiastical office, the book is an important one. It lays down the basic arguments that

will be used. It needs looking at — and answering.

While various and sundry arguments are raised in support of women in ecclesiastical office, one main argument dominates the book. It is to that argument that we give our attention in this review. If this argument falls, the whole case for women in office falls with it.

We shall, therefore, as clearly as possible, spell out Boomsma's argument.

Boomsma begins by pointing out that the teachings concerning women in office in the New Testament Scriptures present two ideas. Although Boomsma does not say so, he suggests that these two ideas appear to be contradictory. He writes:

Thus, there are two lines of thought in the New Testament. On the one hand, there is the testimony of the Gospels, the history of the New Testament church, and the theological teaching of unity and equality in Christ as expressed in Galatians 3:28, which appear to affirm the full equality of women to exercise their gifts in the life of the church. Only the presence of this line of thought in the fledgling church can account for women pressing for equality in the community of believers. On the other hand, there is the restraining line of Paul's explicit prohibitions restricting women from authoritative areas of the church's life, teaching them to be subservient to men (p. 27).

The linchpin of the argument, not surprisingly, is Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." It is the linchpin because the text "does not stand by itself, but embodies the entire New Testament teaching on women" (p. 26).

Because of the importance of this text, Boomsma gives an extensive treatment of its meaning and concludes that while

Galatians 3:28 may not answer the specific question of whether women may serve in the offices of the church, its theology of their equality in Christ and the evidence of the changed attitude toward women does indeed require clear biblical justification to withhold from women the opportunity to exercise their gifts as elders and ministers. Unless this can be done, Galatians 3:28 is the Achilles' heel for those who oppose women in office (p. 41).

What then is one to do with those passages which speak of "Paul's explicit prohibitions restricting women from authoritative areas of the church's life, teaching them to be subservient to men" (p. 27)?

The answer is found in many different passages in the book, from which we choose two or three.

On page 18 the thesis of the entire book is stated.

I have come to see that Paul's

prohibition against women believers teaching and exercising authority in the church is rooted not in a timeless principle of female subordination. Rather, as in the case of slavery, it is based on the timeless principle of not fostering unnecessary offense that would hinder the furtherance of the gospel by going against prevailing social customs.

Yet it is also the apostle Paul whose teachings in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2 (the most important texts) place restrictions on the leadership of women in the life and practice of the early church. He did so apparently in response to the dissension and controversies that arose in the congregations out of the changed attitude toward and among women in the light of the gospel (p. 27).

The last sentence in this quote lies at the heart of the issue. The apostle, so Boomsma argues, while teaching the right of women in the New Dispensation to hold ecclesiastical office, includes the passages from I Corinthians 11 and 14 and I Timothy 2 because various women in the congregations of Corinth and Ephesus, conscious of their new status under the gospel, became unruly and domineering. They had to be put in their place. Further, because in the ancient world women occupied a subordinate position to men, immediately granting women their full rights under the gospel would have been too revolutionary an idea to be

accepted in the ancient world, and would have hindered the progress of the gospel.

Women in the early church, having received the Holy Spirit and having been baptized into the church, recognized the significance of the gospel's teaching and sought to exercise their new found liberty in the life of the congregation. Indeed, the women in Corinth and Ephesus may well have become so aggressive and abrasive in their demands for equality, that grasping for the prestige of teaching and leadership they caused serious dissension among the members in their congregations.

In 1 Corinthians 11:16 Paul makes reference to those who want to be contentious about the relations of men and women in the churches. This behavior is the only reasonable explanation for the familiar passages of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2. They are Paul's response, in his time and circumstances, to the assertive behavior of women that was causing disruption and dissension in the congregations (pp. 39, 40).

Referring specifically to I Timothy 2, Boomsma writes:

Women who were influenced by the false teachers and feeling themselves emancipated by their freedom in the gospel, engaged in noisy, disruptive, and offensive behavior in the worship services, parading their new status in a

usurping, domineering attitude toward the men in the congregation. This would account for Paul continuing in verse 12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (p. 69).

It would appear to be an acceptable interpretation that Paul is forbidding a woman from domineering teaching that would be highly offensive in a male-dominated society . . . (p. 73).

Added to this line of argumentation, Boomsma makes much of the institution of slavery and finds in this institution an analogy to the whole question of women in office. His argument is that although Scripture condemns slavery, the cultural situation was of such a kind that to abolish slavery during the years of the early church would have been revolutionary in the empire and would have brought shame on the gospel. So, just as Paul refused to condemn slavery even though it was contrary to the gospel, so Paul also curbed the aspirations of women who had every right under the gospel to hold offices in the church (chapter 3).

What are we to make of all this?

Several points have to be made.

In the first place, the whole line of argumentation brings up the question of the infallible inspiration of Scripture.

Boomsma claims to believe this doctrine. In fact, he is so bold as

to say that those who deny the right of women to hold ecclesiastical office are the ones who deny Paul's authority as an apostle and the truth of infallible inspiration (p. 64). This is a bold statement and an obvious effort to turn the tables on his opponents.

But the argument will not wash.

Boomsma is himself not committed to this doctrine. This is evident from the fact, in the first place, that the argument he uses to overthrow the force of I Corinthians 11 and 14 and I Timothy 2 is really a retreat to the position that the writings of Scripture are culturally conditioned; i.e., these passages have no authority for today, but were written in the cultural situation of Paul's time.

While this argument is really the only one which a defender of women in office can use in the light of the clear injunctions of the apostle, it is dead wrong. Boomsma goes so far as to say that the whole of I & II Timothy is addressed to the cultural situation which prevailed in Timothy's day.

Paul's intent (in writing I Timothy) was to give practical instructions for the peace and good order of the church in the critical situation that existed in the early church....

Paul's epistles to Timothy are not general, all-purpose letters on church organization and polity as, for example, the epistle to the Romans, which addresses Chris-

tian doctrine and life. The instructions of 1 Timothy are directives to deal with the difficulties in Ephesus, as well as in other churches in the New Testament era, which arose out of the conflict between the teaching of the gospel and the prevailing cultural conventions, especially as the conflict collided with the furtherance of the gospel. These restraints are not then necessarily meant to be literally observed by the church of all ages and in all places (p. 74).

Boomsma's criterion on the basis of which one must decide whether a given instruction in Scripture is normative for the church of all ages or whether it pertains to the cultural situation is whether *the instruction is rooted in doctrine or not* (p. 54). Some instructions are rooted in doctrine; some are not. If they are, they are normative; if they are not, they pertain to the cultural situation.

What a strange and untenable position to take. By any reading of Scripture, how can the instructions of Romans be said to be rooted in doctrine and the instructions of Timothy and Corinthians not rooted in doctrine? What strange criterion is this which Boomsma introduces into the thinking of the church?

Scripture is an organic whole. It contains the revelation of God as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ. It speaks of the great work of grace in the salvation of the church. It addresses itself to those who are saved to tell them of the riches of

their salvation. And, in connection with all this, it instructs God's people on how they are to live the whole of their life as the redeemed of God in Christ.

Romans contains doctrine and I & II Corinthians does not? Romans contains doctrine and I & II Timothy does not? By what kind of a reading can Boomsma not find doctrine in Paul's epistles to Timothy? Has he not read the letters?

But, from a practical point of view, to push Paul's letters to Timothy aside as being of no normative value to the church, Boomsma destroys the very foundation of all biblical church polity. And if such a treatment can be accepted for I & II Timothy, what is to prevent a man from saying that Galatians also contains no doctrine; and that, therefore, Galatians 3:28 (on which Boomsma hangs his whole argument) is not normative for the church? It is a relativizing of the whole of Scripture.

But there is more.

In discussing I Timothy 2, Boomsma deals with Paul's appeal to Genesis 2. Here again the author comes up with something very strange — strange to one who solemnly professes to believe in infallible inspiration. He not only does not believe that the argument from Genesis 2 is relevant; he believes that Paul was mistaken in even using it: "The apostle's argument from Genesis 2 is without support in the text (i.e., in the text in Genesis, H.H.) (p. 58). Although he assures us that

Paul was not in error in doing this (p. 59), nevertheless, Genesis 2 does not support the position which Paul takes when he states, on the basis of the creation of woman from man, that women must keep silence in the church.

Because, in the second place, Boomsma's whole argument rests on his interpretation of Galatians 3:28, we must take a look at that passage.

The argument, you recall, is this. While Galatians 3:28 does not, in Boomsma's judgment, itself prove that women are to be admitted into ecclesiastical office, it is a summation of the entire New Testament which teaches the equality of women with men in every area of life. In fact, Boomsma is so bold as to state that his interpretation is "the consensus of all competent commentators" (p. 31). That means, of course, that any commentator who does not agree with Boomsma is automatically ruled out as "incompetent." This is a rather difficult argument to overcome. Nevertheless, I shall refer to some "incompetent" commentators to prove that Boomsma's argument is not the correct explanation of the text.

R. C. H. Lenski, a Lutheran commentator, writes:

Paul says: Since you Galatians are all sons of God by faith, clothed in Baptism with Christ's righteousness, all these and similar distinctions and differences are wiped out *as to your spiritual standing* (emphasis is mine). This

does not involve a physical mutation. Christians of Jewish or of Greek descent retained their descent, free man and slaves kept their social positions, men and women kept their sex. The Gospel changes nothing in the domain of this world and this natural life. When Paul's words are made to apply to this domain, a monstrous perversion results. In a way the Gospel effects changes also in this domain, — it has driven out slavery, and has elevated the status of woman. But here Paul speaks of the spiritual domain, of God's household, in which all believers are equally sons of God."

Ridderbos (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) writes:

This is not to maintain that the natural and social distinction is in no respect relevant any more. From the point of view of redemption in Christ, however, and of the gifts of the Spirit granted by Him, there is no preference of Jew to Greek, master to slave, man to woman.

Eadie speaks the same language.

The Jew is not to the exclusion of the Greek, nor the Greek to the exclusion of the Jew ...; the bond (servant) is not accepted to the refusal of the free, nor the free to the refusal of the bond. Not that in themselves such distinctions cease to exist, but they interfere

not with spiritual oneness and privilege. They are so noted in the world as to divide society: Jew and Greek are in reciprocal alienation; bond and free are separated by a great gulf; to the male much was accorded in prerogative which is denied to the female, such as the ordinance on which the Judaists insisted; but these minor characteristics are not merged in a high unity among the children of God. Such differences were specially prominent and exclusive in ancient times.

J. B. Lightfoot briefly comments:

In Christ ye are all sons, all free. Every barrier is swept away. No special claims, no special disabilities exist in Him, none *can* exist. The conventional distinctions of religious caste or of social rank, even the natural distinction of sex, are banished hence. One heart beats in all: one mind guides all: one life is lived by all. Ye are all *one man*, for ye are members of Christ. And as members of Christ ye are Abraham's seed, ye claim the inheritance by virtue of a promise, which no law can set aside.

G. C. Lubbers (*The Free-born Sons of Sarah*) makes the point explicit.

Here we breathe the pure air of liberty in Christ. There is here not a different category for the different nationalities, social distinctions or difference between male

and female. In the Old Testament, under law, there was this difference. For instance, only the male members in the church bore the sign and seal of the covenant and of the righteousness which is by faith: circumcision. But now both male and female are baptized. No, they are not baptized as male and as female; they are baptized as *believers* and their seed. The sole question is: does one believe in Christ. Hence, this does not put away the social and God-ordained difference between man and wife, slave and master, between Jews and Greeks, as the clamoring civil-rights people assert, and as is the bold assertion of those, who champion for the equality of men and women in church and State, but this only means that this unity in Christ is such that all of these relationships are embraced in a higher spiritual unity.

We shall quote one more "incompetent" exegete, Martin Luther (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 26, Lectures on Galatians, 1535).

With the words "there is neither Jew," then, Paul vigorously abolishes the Law. For here, where a new man comes into existence in Baptism and where Christ is put on, there is neither Jew nor Greek. Now he is not speaking of the Jew in a metaphysical sense, according to his essence; but by "Jew" he means someone who is a disciple of Moses, who is subject to the laws, who has circumcision, and who observes the form of worship commanded in the

Law. Where Christ is put on, he says, there is no Jew any longer, no circumcision, no temple worship, no laws that the Jews keep....

Thus no matter how diligently a slave performs his duty, obeys his master, and serves faithfully; or if a free man directs and governs either the commonwealth or his private affairs in a praiseworthy way; or whatever a male does as a male, getting married, administering his household well, obeying the magistrate, maintaining honest and decent relations with others; or if a lady lives chastely, obeys her husband, takes good care of the house, and teaches her children well — these truly magnificent and outstanding gifts and works do not avail anything toward righteousness in the sight of God.... None of these can take away sins or deliver from death or save.

As all these commentators insist, the equality which believers enjoy in Christ is a spiritual equality. No one, so far as I know, has ever denied this spiritual equality in Christ. It is an equality which is brought about by the Holy Spirit of Christ who is given to believers and by whom all become one in Christ. All those in Christ receive the Spirit, whether Jew or Gentile, slave or master, man or woman, parent or child, old or young, rich or poor. That equality in the Spirit of Christ is a true spiritual equality in which all function in the office of believers, all receive the very same blessings of salvation, all are heirs of eternal life,

and all look forward in hope to being with Christ in heaven. This glorious equality is the fruit of the work of Christ in accomplishing redemption for the church.

Within that unity of the church, there are countless diversities. These diversities, which are spoken of so often in Scripture, are what makes the church the glorious body that it is. There are diversities of race, nation, language, and culture. There are diversities of character, personality, gifts, and abilities. There are diversities of office and status in life. There are diversities of gender. There are diversities within the family, within society at large, within the sphere of employment, within the schools, within the church. The rich diversity among the saints makes the communion of the saints possible. And it is only when each occupies his own God-given place that the diversity means so much to the welfare of the church.

This rich diversity comes from God who gives to each one his or her own place in the body of Christ. Some of this diversity rests in the creation ordinance. Boomsma rejects the idea of subordination of the woman in creation. He claims that this subordination came about because of the curse, and that with redemption the curse is lifted. He is wrong on two counts. It is clear that this subordination is the result of creation, and Paul is right (while Boomsma is wrong) in appealing to Genesis 2 in support of his contention that women must keep silence in

the church. The curse altered the relation, not fundamentally, but spiritually. Man became a tyrant because of sin. Redemption cures these evils, but subordination remains as part of the creation ordinance.

Paul makes this abundantly clear in Ephesians 5:21. The marriage of a believing man and a believing woman reflects the relation of marriage between Christ and His church. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so is the wife subordinate to her husband.

Boomsma argues that submission here does not imply obedience. The wife is not bound to obey her husband. All that is implied is mutual respect (p. 95). What nonsense. Let Boomsma carry out the argument. The wife is to respect her husband and need not obey him, just as the husband must respect his wife, but may not rule over her. So, the church is to respect Christ but need not obey Him, just as Christ must only respect the church but may not rule over His church. How can any one who has respect for the Scriptures read the text this way? "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." That is Scripture, a Scripture which Boomsma does not want.

The injunctions, therefore, of I Corinthians 11 and 14 and I Timothy

2 stand as the unalterable Word of God. And he who will not receive them, but twists them, "wrests the Scriptures to his own destruction" (II Peter 3:16).

Why do those who support women in office always want to equate subordination with inferiority? The whole of life is filled with such relationships of subordination. Citizens are subordinate to their magistrates; employees to their employers; children to their parents and teachers; people of God to their elders; wives to their husbands. God has so ordained it because all God's people are subordinate to Christ. Within the church equality of salvation exists between magistrates and citizens, employers and employees, parents and children, people of God and officebearers, husbands and wives. But Christ is pleased to rule over us through those whom He puts in authority over us. We must show all honor, love, and respect to all in authority, for Christ is pleased to rule us by the hand of those who are placed over us (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 104).

To turn upside down the ordinances of God leads to confusion and trouble — as the world is coming to realize. Shall we introduce such confusion and trouble into the church of Christ? God forbid.

Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice, by Andrew Cornes. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing

Company, 1993. 528 pp., \$24.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is a careful, thorough treatment of Scripture's teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Although concentrating on marriage, the book does justice to the single life as a blessed, preferable way of life for some Christians. Following the 300-page section of biblical exposition is a 200-page section devoted to instruction of officebearers and congregation concerning pastoral practice.

Anglican minister Andrew Cornes demonstrates that it is the doctrine of Christ and Paul, that is, the New Testament, that divorce is permitted only in the case of the sexual infidelity of one's mate and that remarriage is always forbidden as long as one's husband or wife is still living. Taking sharp issue with virtually all of Protestant thinking today, Cornes contends that the Bible forbids the remarriage also of the so-called innocent party.

This book is convinced that in Matthew 19:9 — as in Mark 10:10-12, Luke 16:18, and Matthew 5:27-32 — Christ prohibits remarriage even in the case of divorce for adultery ... (p. 305).

The one text that might possibly be understood to allow for the remarriage of the "innocent party" is Matthew 19:9. Cornes rejects this popular interpretation and convinc-

ingly shows that Jesus in fact is teaching that "it is always wrong to remarry in the lifetime of your divorced partner" (p. 220). Especially the surprise of the disciples at Jesus' teaching and Jesus' response to this surprise (vv. 10 ff.) lead Cornes to the conclusion that Matthew 19:9 teaches that "a man may divorce his wife for marital unfaithfulness, but anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman — for whatever reason — commits adultery" (p. 236).

The basis for this view of divorce and remarriage is the biblical truth about marriage. Marriage is an unbreakable bond between one man and one woman formed by God Himself. Death alone as the dissolving act of God breaks the bond. Divorce in the sense of the dissolving of the marriage is, therefore, not only forbidden, but also impossible. Accordingly, every subsequent remarriage is adultery.

Jesus' teaching (in Mark 10:1-12 — DJE) also means that divorce — at least in the sense in which the Pharisees thought of it — is not only wrong (9) but is impossible. Again, it is of course perfectly possible to secure a divorce that is valid from the legal point of view. But it is not possible to undo what God has done. God has joined a man and his wife together (9). He has created a marriage "yoke" (9) or unity (8) or bond (I Cor. 7:39). Since, even after divorce, to marry someone else is to commit adultery (11,

12), clearly this marriage bond still remains, even after legal divorce. Therefore full divorce — in the sense of the “dissolution” or elimination of the marriage bond — is not something which any legal process is capable of achieving. Only death dissolves the bond (Rom. 7:3; 1 Cor. 7:39) (p. 193).

The reason why the churches and their theologians, ministers, and marriage counselors permit remarriage is that they do not know the reality of marriage: “People today do not understand the New Testament position on divorce and remarriage because they have never understood what, according to the Bible, happens at marriage” (p. 288).

The one area of weakness in this powerful, courageous presentation is Cornes’ tolerance of those who are already divorced and remarried as members of the church, especially if they remarried in ignorance of the biblical teaching. This tolerance is cautious and unenthusiastic, even grudging. It demands repentance for the sin of adultery in every case. It seems to call for stripping remarried officebearers of their office. But there is this tolerance.

Repentance will not mean breaking up a remarriage that has already been entered into, but it will mean recognizing that this second marriage — however much it is, rightly, a cause of praise to God — should not have been embarked upon, and attempting

to be reconciled — to ask, to receive and to give forgiveness — with one’s first partner (p. 412).

Cornes ignores the truth that on his own (biblical) view those who are remarried after divorce are involved in an ongoing adulterous relationship. He also fails to note that genuine repentance invariably consists of turning from the sin that is repented of. His tolerance of (repentant) remarried persons in the church runs the author stuck. He rightly condemns “a service of blessing” for a remarriage, that is, a ceremony in which the pastor or church blesses the remarriage that has just been performed by a civil magistrate since the church refused to be involved. But Cornes is forced to approve the church’s subsequent prayer on behalf of this remarriage:

Can it be right later on to pray for the healing of a second marriage that has run into difficulties or for the continued growth of a happy remarriage? We saw in chapter 10 that the new couple have entered into a marriage covenant. They should not have done so, but they have; and that covenant is now binding on them. They cannot repudiate it at will; they should not repudiate it, even if they subsequently realize it was a mistake (cf. Eccles. 5:4-7). Therefore it is entirely right that Christians should pray for a second marriage that has run into difficulties to be sustained. But it cannot be right at the very beginning of the mar-

riage for the Church to give its seal of approval (which is how it is inevitably seen) by offering a service of blessing. This must be withheld (pp. 483, 484).

Like the section of biblical exposition, the section on pastoral practice is outstanding, with the exception just noted. Cornes pleads for education of the members of the church in the truths of singleness, marriage, divorce, and remarriage. He calls for a "caring" that sympathetically helps those in marital distress and that dares to discipline those who sinfully divorce and who remarry. Reconciliation must be the church's aim, although this involves strenuous effort. In a culture dominated by the thinking and behavior of the world, the church must see her calling to be that she "bear(s) witness to God's standards, to Christ's teaching" (p. 465).

This is a splendid, timely, and rare book. Above all, it is a book that is uncompromisingly faithful to Scripture in a matter — marriage — that is simply crucial to the life of the Christian and to the existence of the church. It is the best book that I have read on the subject, and I have read many.

Published by Eerdmans (to their credit), it will have to be acknowledged by evangelicals who have long since abandoned the biblical principles that the book advocates and who approve the same easy unfaithfulness on the part of married persons to God and to each other that

the book condemns. What will these evangelicals say about it? ♦

Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation, by Joel R. Beeke. New York: Peter Lang, 1991. Pp. xvi, 518. \$42.95 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Jerome Julien.]

Assurance of faith is a subject which touches the practical nerve of every believer. Every pastor knows of sheep in his care who struggle, in fact sometimes even weep over their experience relating to assurance. Although some believers may wish to downgrade the importance of this subject, it is not one which can be ignored. It is not a dry doctrinal issue to be inspected as if it were in a museum. It is a living issue, one very close to the heart of the believer.

In dealing with assurance of faith one discovers that there are numerous approaches. Most of these in one way or another bring difficulty because they do not grow out of God's Word. Only the Reformed, the confessional approach, will bring peace, and that is because it seeks to be faithful to all that Scripture teaches.

However, even in the Reformed tradition there is not unanimity. There are variations in how to understand this doctrine and how to experience it. In recent Calvin studies a thesis has been developed that modern Reformed theology has departed from the thought of Calvin

himself, through the work of Beza and Perkins. More recent explications of this view include the work of R.T. Kendall, the present minister of London's famed Westminster Chapel.

It is Dr. Beeke's intent to answer this contention (and he does!). He writes:

With regard to the doctrine of assurance, the pages that follow implicitly repudiate the sharp distinction contemporary scholarship has drafted between Calvin and Calvinism. It is my contention that Calvinism's wrestlings with assurance were *quantitatively* beyond, but not *qualitatively* contradictory to, that of Calvin. That is to say, notwithstanding differences in *matters of degree* on the doctrine of assurance between Calvin and the Calvinists, there is little difference in *substance* (p. 2).

To show that there was this development rather than change, Beeke begins his study by looking at the theology of the early and medieval church. The influence of the Schoolmen strengthened the Pelagianism and sacramental tendencies that emphasized free will and participation in the sacraments. The Roman Catholic thinking which developed did not emphasize assurance except to make individuals feel dependent on the church as God's channel of grace.

The Reformation changed this with its return to the Scriptures. Luther made it clear that assurance

of faith/personal salvation was the birthright of every healthy Christian. This assurance is based on Christ and His atoning work, not on man. The viewpoints of Melancthon, Bullinger, and Zwingli are also briefly explained.

Then the historical study moves on to Calvin. For Calvin, faith is not just assent. It is knowledge and trust. It "is not historical knowledge plus saving assent as Beza would imply, but a *saving and certain* knowledge conjoined with a saving and assured trust" (p. 47). Faith has its origin in the Word of God. Thus faith is to receive Christ and to appropriate the promises of God — a gift and work of the Holy Spirit. Assurance is of the essence of faith. Although the believer has struggles in his daily life, faith has the victory, and the experience of this is rooted in the Word. For Calvin, self-examination is always to direct us back to Christ and His promise.

When Beeke turns to Beza, he admits that Beza went beyond Calvin in certain theological issues. But the reason for this was that new questions were being raised, questions that had not been raised earlier. As far as faith is concerned, both Calvin and Beza agree as to its essential nature, yet there is a difference in emphasis. Concerning the assurance of faith, the difference

lies in pastoring the believer who is anxious over his inability to know his election, who cannot

call upon God as his "Father" with any degree of freedom, and who does not feel any confirmation of the Spirit's internal testimony that he is a child of God (p. 83).

Calvin seldom addressed this issue. Beza did. No doubt this was because the "first blush" of the Reformation was past and there was a movement to second and even third generation followers. Elsewhere Beke remarks that the second and third generation followers took saving grace for granted and a dead orthodoxy arose. This is always a danger. Along with the development of dead orthodoxy, the spiritually sensitive have many questions develop in their hearts and minds.

As the author moves on to the development of this doctrine in the English Puritan and Dutch Second Reformation tradition, he looks at the work of William Perkins and Willera Teelinck, respectively. For Perkins the grounds of assurance were 1) the promise of the gospel, 2) the testimony of the Spirit, and 3) "the *sylogism* which rests partly on the gospel and partly on experience" (p. 108). His view is patterned after that of Beza and Zanchius. He went beyond Calvin by distinguishing between an objective assurance (belief that our sins are forgivable) and a subjective assurance (a full assurance of the personal application of Christ's work). Perkins developed various steps to conversion, *viz.*, humiliation, including preparation,

faith in Christ, repentance, and new obedience. Although he did not depart from the basic teaching on faith and assurance as taught by Calvin, he placed more emphasis on the covenant and fulfilling the "conditions" of the covenant (p. 118). This emphasis grew out of the pastoral concerns he had for the believers.

Teelinck "yearned to move the Reformed church beyond reformation in doctrine and policy to reformation in life and practice" (p. 119). His intense emphasis on godly living in a sense "out-puritaned" the "father" of Puritanism, Perkins. For Teelinck, one arrives at assurance by means of sanctification. "The Christian who lives uprightly and piously may reflect upon the marks of grace God has worked in his life and draw assurance from them," the author summarizes. In Teelinck there are elements of both Calvin and Perkins.

The point that the author makes in his chapter on the Westminster Confession and English Puritanism is:

Though not departing in essence from the teachings of the Reformers, the WCF's chapter 18 does systematize emphases and distinctives that were minimized by Calvin (p. 141).

In answer to those who contend that the Westminster emphasis was a departure from Calvin (*e.g.*, Kendall), he points out that no

significant debate arose in relation to the adoption of this chapter on assurance. Thus the historic position of Calvin was not being questioned. In this lengthy chapter Beeke analyzes the Westminster teaching on assurance. He points out that Calvin emphasized the certainty of salvation in Christ, while the Puritans emphasized how believers can be assured of their own salvation in Christ. Again, he emphasizes that this was because

When the throes of the initial Reformation had subsided, a pressing need arose for detailed pastoral guidance with regard to how objective truth is certified in the subjective consciousness (p. 157).

Following his analysis of the 18th chapter of the Westminster Confession, Beeke spends considerable time on the views of John Owen, Alexander Comrie, and Thomas Goodwin. He is careful to point out their particular views and where they differed from the Reformers. Yet, he also points out how these men, representatives of others, were faithful to the truth as it was opened up by the Reformers.

Beeke explains the differences between the English and the Dutch development of the doctrine of assurance (pp. 369-71). For example, the English emphasized the marks of grace (the evidence of the Spirit's working), while the Dutch emphasized the steps of grace (the stages one goes through to experience

grace). The Dutch were more ready to "schematize" the work of grace than the English.

He is aware that to emphasize too heavily the post-Reformation approach to assurance may "degenerate into unbiblical mysticism." At the same time, too much emphasis on the objective can lead to a "well-stocked 'head' but ends with an empty heart" (p. 376).

Again, what it comes down to in this historical development of the doctrine is a pastoral concern.

As Beeke concludes his study, he writes that the

emphasis on separating the promises of God from the evidences of sanctification lies at the heart of the present evangelical debate over lordship salvation and is reminiscent of antinomianism's distrust of inherent graces for strengthening assurance (p. 376).

Then he adds:

The practical message which emerges from our studies is simply this: Assurance is the cream of faith. It is inseparable from each exercise of faith. It grows by means of faith in the promises of God, inward evidences of grace, and the witness of the Spirit (p. 377).

Before he concludes his study, Beeke provides an appendix on "The Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*).¹" Briefly but carefully he explains this development in

Dutch Reformed Church history. This movement "sought to *apply* Reformation truths to daily life and 'heart' experience" (p. 383). He points out that Hendrikus Berkhof is simplistic when "he states that the Second Reformation resulted merely from 'the practical piety of the English Calvinists blowing over to the Netherlands'" (p. 385). Instead, the *Nadere Reformatie* was a result of the volkskerk (people's church) idea in the Netherlands which had a very open view of church membership, one in which conversion was not stressed. Hence, the *Nadere Reformatie* emphasized that the Reformed doctrine had to be seen in life! This emphasis led to a decrease in communicants and a greater emphasis on the personal life and relationship with the Lord.

The section on the Second Reformation is unique to theological literature in English, apart from some excellent articles in periodicals. For the first time, English readers can read about this significant development in the history of the Netherlands churches.

But in reality, this whole volume is unique to theological literature in the English language. This is the first volume in English on this important theme.

While Dr. Beeke does deal with the historical development of this doctrine, he also warns about the dangers connected with wrongly emphasizing the doctrine.

The bibliography which runs almost one hundred pages is most

valuable for the professional, as well as for the casual student.

This volume, scholarly and carefully argued as it is, is worthy of study, not just by theologians, teachers, and students, but also by ministers serving in the pastorate. They need to be challenged to think again — beyond the level of the popular fluff paperbacks which are cranked out today. Further, they need to be reminded of the pastoral needs of their people. It is not enough to teach them doctrine — important as this is today. These ministers of the Word must help their people to see that these truths are living truths and that to be saved is to have a living relationship with Jesus Christ. To this end the theology and the history laid out in this volume will help.

Dr. Beeke has provided a first-rate study, and therefore a great service to the church at large, to the churches called by the name Reformed, and to the sons of the Reformation. ♦

The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination from 1551-1555, by Philip C. Holtrop. 2 vols. Lewistown, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993. Pp. xxviii + 1033. \$199.90 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Calvin College professor Philip C. Holtrop gives us a thorough historical and theological study of the controversy between John Calvin and Jerome Bolsec over predestination.

The issue was Calvin's teaching of God's eternal, double predestination, election and reprobation. Bolsec rejected predestination as an eternal decree. Although he raised his objection specifically against reprobation, Bolsec likewise opposed election as an eternal decree. Election for Bolsec was an act of God in time. According to Bolsec, God gives grace to all humans so that all are able to believe in Christ. To those who avail themselves of this universal, or common, grace by believing in Christ, God gives special grace which results in their election. Those who harden themselves against the overtures of God in His common grace are rejected by God. This temporal rejection is reprobation (vol. 1, pp. 72-74).

Calvin and the ministers of Geneva condemned Bolsec's doctrine as the denial that faith depends upon election and as the affirmation of free will. Thus Bolsec denied the Reformation's gospel of salvation by sovereign grace. Calvin saw Bolsec's basic error to be that "he boasts that grace is offered equally to all, and that its efficacy depends on the free choice of each" (vol. 2, p. 602).

Holtrop lays out the doctrinal issues in the controversy in volume 1, pp. 47-164, and throughout volume 2.

A valuable feature of the work is its inclusion of the correspondence between Bolsec and the ministers of Geneva and of the advice submitted by the Reformed theologians in other

parts of Switzerland, notably Bullinger.

Volume 2 is a detailed account of the proceedings at Bolsec's lengthy trial before the Genevan magistrates on charges of heresy and disturbance. The outcome of the trial was that the magistrates condemned the heretic and banished him from Geneva for life.

The author does not adopt the role of objective historian in this study. Holtrop commits himself to a defense of Bolsec and to the exposure of an "ugly" side of Calvin. He carries his defense of Bolsec to such an extreme that he excuses the slanderous "biography" of Calvin that Bolsec later wrote in order to destroy the Reformer and his work.

Holtrop insists that Calvin's opposition to Bolsec was mainly political and personal. Calvin was determined to maintain his rule in Geneva in troublous times. In the spirit of William Bouwsma's *John Calvin, A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, Holtrop accounts for Calvin's resistance to Bolsec's public attack on predestination by appeal to Calvin's "neurotic tendencies." This judgment is purely subjective. In this way, every defense of the faith can be discredited. Why should not Calvin and the Genevan ministers be taken seriously in their confession that they regarded eternal election as "the foundation of the faith" and, therefore, in their claim that they opposed Bolsec for attacking the foundation?

Regardless of Calvin's psy-

chology and alleged hidden agenda, the one important question about the Bolsec controversy is this: Is Calvin's doctrine of predestination true, indeed *the truth*?

Holtrop denies that it is. He sides with Bolsec doctrinally. Not only is there no eternal decree of reprobation, but also biblical election is an act of God in time, an act that is "wrapped up" with the sinner's activity of believing. Holtrop does not make clear whether election *follows upon* the sinner's believing or is inexplicably *simultaneous with* the sinner's believing. In either case, election is not an eternal decree that ordains unto faith and upon which faith depends.

Holtrop's refrain in this connection that biblical election is "in Christ" does nothing to prove that election is in time. Certainly election is "in Christ." This is taught in Ephesians 1:4: "According as he hath chosen us in him...." But this election in Christ was decreed "before the foundation of the world," that is, in eternity. God chose His people in Christ in eternity. The issue is not whether election is in eternity or in Christ, but whether election in Christ is an eternal decree or a temporal act.

Nor is Holtrop's analysis correct when he presents the conflict between Calvin and Bolsec as a somewhat abstract difference of conception concerning the relation of eternity and time. Calvin was concerned to confess the salvation of the sinner as the gracious act of God that has its

source and foundation, not in the faith of the sinner but in the sovereign, free decree of election. This does not make God a tyrant, but rather reveals Him as glorious in His grace.

To defend Bolsec by pointing to his willingness to ascribe the "initiative" in salvation to God does not avail. For, according to Bolsec, God makes this "initiative" toward all humans. God's grace is universal and ineffectual. The ultimate explanation then why some are saved by universal grace must be the will of the sinner himself. This glorifies man.

Heinrich Bullinger comes off as a weak reed in the controversy. He refused to support Calvin when support was needed. The reason obviously was that given by Holtrop: Bullinger disagreed with Calvin, especially on reprobation, and was sympathetic to Bolsec's views. It is to Calvin's undying credit that he was willing to stand for the truth of eternal predestination, if necessary alone. Others recognized the doctrinal weakness at Zurich. Shortly after the Bolsec controversy had concluded, Peter Martyr Vermigli went to Zurich to labor. His colleague Zanchi wrote Calvin that "divine providence" called Vermigli to Zurich in order to "unlearn many in that church of that utterly pestilential doctrine of free will, which is opposed to predestination and consequently to God's grace" (vol. 1, pp. 350, 351).

In the face of a strong senti-

ment in scholarly circles and despite his own early suspicions that Beza, Dordt, and Westminster radically changed Calvin's theology, Holtrop acknowledges that Beza, Dordt, and Westminster were true to Calvin's own theology. Beza only systematized and further developed Calvin's predestinarian theology. "Reformed scholasticism rooted in Calvin, and was consolidated in Geneva largely through the efforts of Theodore Beza" (vol. 2, p. 830). Holtrop, however, opposes this "scholastic" theology, both in Calvin himself and in the succeeding tradition, including Dordt (see vol. 2, pp. 867-876).

Of special interest to the Protestant Reformed Churches in America is Holtrop's frank admission that the Bolsec controversy was replayed in the common grace controversy in the Christian Reformed Church in the early 1900s. The theology of Jerome Bolsec reappeared in the Christian Reformed doctrine of a common grace of God in the "well-meant offer of the gospel." The Protestant Reformed doctrine of particular grace in the preaching continues the tradition of Calvin, Beza, Dordt, and Westminster.

If anyone ever started his research with a bias toward Calvin, it was I. But now I recognize that some predestinarian communities — like the Protestant Reformed Church, which split from the Christian Reformed in 1924 — have more basis in Calvin than I had previously envisioned. That does not make their thinking more

palatable to mine — but it does qualify my fidelity to John Calvin (vol. 1, p. 10).

With reference to the distinction between "common grace" and "special grace," Holtrop writes:

This distinction was given official status in the Dutch-American wing of Reformed theology at the Christian Reformed synod of 1924. While the "common grace" majority there were not "Bolsecians" — at least not consciously — we cannot deny that main motives in the Bolsec controversy were playing in the Christian Reformed community, and that the minority in 1924 — headed by Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof — sounded remarkably like the Genevan pastors in 1551. Hoeksema and Danhof were expelled from the CRC and began the Protestant Reformed Church (vol 2, p. 474).

A few pages later, Holtrop expands on his assertion that Bolsec's doctrine of universal grace is found in the Christian Reformed teaching of common grace in the preaching of the gospel:

Again — perhaps more than in any other denomination — the issues of the universality or particularity of God's love and grace are hotly debated in the Christian Reformed Church, even after the decisions of 1924.... Already in 1928 H. Kuiper wrote a thesis entitled *Calvin on Common Grace*; C. Van Til wrote his *Com-*

mon Grace in 1947; A. C. DeJong wrote a thesis (under Berkouwer) on *The Well-meant Gospel Offer* (1954).... In 1962-63, H. Dekker of Calvin Theological Seminary wrote a series of explosive articles in the *RJ* under the general heading "God So Loved — All Men!" ... Others chimed in — notably H. Stob ... and A. C. DeJong.... Opposing views were expressed in the *Torch and Trumpet* — a right-wing Reformed scholastic journal ... as well as in the equally scholastic Protestant Reformed *Standard Bearer*. These issues were never resolved — any more than they were in the Bolsec controversy.... In all these documents, there were astounding parallels to the Bolsec conflict — but again, the name of Jerome was never mentioned. The writings of Daane, Boer, and Punt represent the latest phase of this debate (vol. 2, p. 482).

It is indicative of the sorry state of the Reformed churches today that Holtrop is undoubtedly right when he observes that, although Calvin and Beza's theology of predestination won out in the Bolsec controversy,

most Reformed thinking on predestination today is more in line with the positions of ... Bolsec, at that time. Except for pockets in the Reformed world, Genevan decretalism has not survived in the twentieth century (vol. 2, p. 671).

Very worthwhile translations

of writings of both Calvin and Beza on predestination are included in these volumes. Holtrop has translated them into English for the first time. He promises the future publication of his voluminous translation of Beza's important works on predestination. For this we wait eagerly. ♦

A Path Through the Sea: One Woman's Journey from Depression to Wholeness, by Lillian V. Grissen. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993. Pp. xix, 223. \$14.99. (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This book is the personal story of Lillian Grissen's struggle with depression. In the Foreword, Mary Vander Vennen writes,

Lillian is careful to point out that her story is not intended as a prescription for others, not even as a generalized description of depression. Treatment has changed since the time of which Lillian is writing, though the factors in cause and recovery remain similar. But it is one woman's authentic and courageous account of a profound struggle with her life and her God.

Writes Grissen:

Depression is an illness with many faces; it is complicated. To the sufferer, clinical depression is emotional, physical, and/or spiritual bankruptcy, with no Chapter

11 that allows beginning again. Much has changed during my journey over the last four decades, but clinical depression has not: it is still bankruptcy, intensely personal and excruciatingly painful. It is a lonely, private hell. People have easy answers:

Snap out of it.

Trust in the Lord.

Get right with the Lord.

Take a vacation.

Forget about it; stop thinking about yourself.

It's just an excuse.

She's just lazy, that's all.

It's all in your head; it can't hurt you.

But easy answers are false. Countless writers have tried to answer questions about depression. Countless self-help books are testimony to the desire of millions to cure themselves. No single theory covers all the diagnostic possibilities. Some writers are experts, and others are not. I'm not an expert; I'm simply an example. (pp. 9-10)

I am another example, having struggled with depression myself for nearly twenty years. Though the "core of her problem" differs from mine, her struggles and symptoms were similar. Lillian writes of her profound, anguished struggle with her perfectionism, her obsessive-compulsive behavior, her false guilt, her inferior feelings. She writes movingly of the terrible anxiety she experienced and the questions which plagued her night and day for five years. Has God forgotten to be kind? Is His mercy clean gone forever? If

God loves me, why doesn't He heal me? What have I done wrong? I want desperately to serve the Lord as a missionary, as a good wife and mother of my four children, why doesn't God give me the strength to do this?

Lillian also writes of the help she received, while hospitalized at Pine Rest, from her gifted, Christian psychiatrist, the late Dr. Gelmer Van Noord, from her pastor, Rev. Henry DeMots, and from her husband, Ray.

I realize full well that many well-meaning Reformed Christians (including some of my students over the years) will disagree with what I am about to say, but I believe depression is an illness. Yes, it is one of the bitter fruits of the fall of Adam into sin and of our own depravity and sins and weaknesses. But depression is a sickness with physical, spiritual, emotional, and genetic dimensions. With the help of Christian psychiatrists, medicines, and other treatments, and understanding pastors and elders and fellow Christians, there is healing for depressed Christians.

Lillian's story is one illustration of the truth of this position.

Those whose calling it is to minister to depressed parishioners will benefit greatly from this account. So will those suffering from depression or who have relatives or close friends who suffer from depression.

Lillian Grissen, mother of four children and grandmother of thirteen, taught school for twenty years. She served as editor of *Christian*

Educator's Journal from 1976 to 1982. She also served as an associate editor of *The Banner* for six years.



Book Notice

Augustine Today, Richard John Neuhaus, General Editor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993) v-ix, 158 pp., \$12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The Center on Religion and Society in New York City sponsors various conferences at which theologians discuss subjects of current interest. The papers delivered at the Conference along with summaries of the discussions are printed in books under the general title "Encounter Series." This book is the fruit of a conference held in 1991 on August-

However, if one expects to find discussions on some of the as-

pects of Augustine's theology which especially influenced Reformation, he will be disappointed. I refer especially to Augustine's writings against the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians. No mention is made of them.

Rather, the book discusses such concepts in Augustine as cupidity, charity, sexuality, justice, love, and peace.

The theologians in this conference were generally liberal thinkers, and their liberal positions come out in the book.

The advantage of the book is that it provides some interesting glimpses into various aspects of Augustine's thinking which are not often discussed. ▲

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