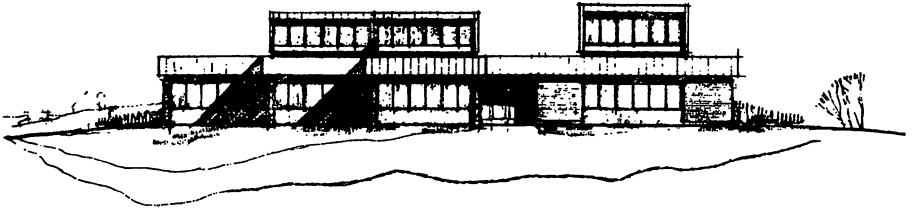


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The Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches

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by
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Editorial Notes

Our *Journal* readers might be interested to know that the work on the new addition to the Seminary has begun. As of this writing, the basement walls have been poured, new walks have been put in, and work is progressing on the enlargement of the parking lot. We expect that the steel joists will arrive sometime early in November and that, after these joists are in place, work on the second floor will proceed.

We are excited about the addition. It will make the library much larger than it now is. We have not been able to purchase as many books as we would like because we have all but run out of room. It will also give the professors offices in which to work. At present the professors must make do with offices in the classrooms, which crowds the classrooms and is not conducive to quiet study. The students also will have better places to study in the library itself where they will not be disturbed by the traffic which now goes through the library area.

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The subject of missions is high on the agenda of the church. It is a major course taught in almost every Seminary, and dozens of books on missions are written every year. Conferences are held, seminars ponder the problems of missions, ecclesiastical organizations and assemblies give their attention to the work, and new methods of missions are constantly tested on the field.

Perhaps nothing in the field of missions is so much discussed as what is called "cross-cultural missions." It's the latest technique, the current fad, the way to go to be "trendy" in missions. But is it Reformed? Is it biblical? That is another question.

Prof. Decker, professor of missions, examines closely the whole question and tests the method in the light of Scripture. Anyone interested in missions will want to follow his articles. His study appears in this issue and will be continued in subsequent articles.

*** *** *** ***

Prof. Engelsma continues his examination and evaluation of the history of the church's position on divorce and remarriage. Prof. Hanko continues his work on a discussion of various aspects of common grace.

As we continue to covet the prayers of our readers in our work, we hope that this issue too will be a blessing to you all who read it. ▲

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS

Robert D. Decker

INTRODUCTION

No one disputes the fact that the church has a mission calling. Jesus commanded His church, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt.28:19-20) This is what the church must be doing until her Lord returns. The church which is not involved in missions, i.e., in bringing the gospel to the nations, is simply disobedient to the command of her King.

How this command of Christ is to be done is a matter of much discussion and no little dispute. The question is, how can the missionary who is born and brought up in one culture, take the message of the gospel which was addressed to a people of a second culture, and communicate it to a people in a third culture?¹

It is our firm conviction that just as Scripture teaches the principles of missions so we must discover the proper methods of missions from the Word of God. Scripture tells us not only what missions is but also how the church must go about doing that work. Preaching the gospel to the nations inevitably involves the church in cross-cultural missions. The Bible tells the church how to do that. This does not mean that the Bible or some parts of it make up some kind of "missionary manual." Not at all. The Bible, as we all know, is not that kind of book. Nevertheless, what the church does through her missionaries not only can be, but *must* be based on the Bible's teaching. This is our assumption, this is our thesis.

We realize full well that this thesis is at odds with much current thinking on this subject. Most simply dismiss the thesis by saying "times have changed, what worked in Paul's day doesn't work anymore." Roland Allen, an Anglican missionary to China around the turn of the century, who was convinced that the Bible had the answer to the question of how missions is to be done, answered this objection well. When visiting a mission work

¹ John Stott, Robert Coote, editors, *Gospel and Culture*, p. x.

in East Africa in 1932, he said, "All I can say is, 'This is the way of Christ and His Apostles.' If any man answers, 'That is out of date,' or 'Times have changed.' I can only repeat 'This is the way of Christ and His Apostles,' and leave him to face that issue alone."²

Perhaps no single document has had more influence on mission thinking than the Willow Bank Report. Its authors would take strong exception to our thesis, as is obvious from the following statement: "During the missionary expansion of the early part of the 19th century, it was generally assumed that churches 'on the mission field' would be modelled on churches 'at home.' The tendency was to produce almost exact replicas. Gothic architecture, prayer book liturgies, clerical dress, musical instruments, hymns and tunes, decision-making processes, synods and committees, superintendents and archdeacons — all were exported and unimaginatively introduced into the new mission-founded churches. It should be added that these patterns were also eagerly adopted by the new Christians, determined not to be at any point behind their western friends, whose habits and ways of worship they had been attentively watching. But all this was based on the false assumptions that the Bible gave specific instructions about such matters and that the home churches' pattern of government, worship, ministry, and life were themselves exemplary."³ Our contention is that the Bible does give specific instructions as to how the church is to be organized and governed. The Bible also gives specific instructions as to how the church and her members are to worship and live. This means, therefore, that the church will look (perhaps we should say, had better look) pretty much the same in every culture and in any given period of history.

We are not saying that the church in its mission to the nations can ignore the culture of the people to whom she preaches and ministers. To do so would be to make a huge mistake. We shall have more to say to this point in subsequent essays on the subject of cross-cultural missions. But we do insist that Scripture teaches us how we are to preach the gospel to the nations, and Scripture does give specific instructions concerning the instituting of the church as she is gathered by the Son of God out of all nations.

When all the talking is over and the last article and book on missions has been written, the fact will still remain that in its missionary work the

² Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, pp. i-ii.

³ *The Willowbank Report*, Report of a Consultation on *Gospel and Culture* held at Willowbank, Somerset Bridge, Bermuda from June 6 to 13, 1978. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Wheaton, IL. Quoted in *Gospel and Culture*, pp. 433-461.

New Testament church preached, baptized, and prayed! And the Lord gave the increase! This work, carried on by the apostles, evangelists, and pastors in obedience to the command and instructions of Jesus, was complemented by the witness of the godly living of the believers. This is cross-cultural mission work according to the teachings of Scripture. If the church, therefore, is determined to be faithful to her Lord and His Word in her mission work, she will follow the pattern of the apostolic church set forth in Holy Scripture, especially in the book of Acts.

Before getting into our study it is necessary to face and answer a second common objection to our thesis. There are many who say that the church cannot follow the pattern or use the methods of the apostolic church because the moral and social conditions of the world of that day were such that they aided the spread of the gospel. The world of our time is much different, so that the methods used by the apostles will not work for contemporary mission work. It is true of course that God prepared the world for the incarnation of His only begotten Son and for the gathering of the elect out of the nations. That world, however, was not essentially different from the world of today. The "success" of the apostles is not to be attributed to the condition of the world of their day, but strictly to the sovereign grace of God in Christ. The same is true today.

The people to whom the apostles preached, especially the Gentile peoples to whom Paul and his assistants brought the gospel, were part of the Roman Empire with its Graeco-Roman civilization. When we think of this civilization we are inclined to think of Greek culture, its philosophy and language, its literature and art, all of which were preserved in the Roman world. This, however, is not the whole story. There were at least four evils which characterized the Roman world and permeated the cultural environment in which the apostles preached. These evils were: superstition, the gross immorality of the various heathen religions and life in general, the amphitheater, and slavery.⁴

The superstition manifested itself in the widespread belief in demons among the people. This was true not only of the "uneducated, poor masses, but of people of all classes and stations of life. Not only were people quite in general given to idolatry, but they were convinced that every phase of life was ruled by devils. Devils sat on thrones, hovered over cradles, and lurked in every corner. Along with this was the belief in magic and witchcraft. Human sacrifice was not uncommon. Use was made of incantations. The

⁴For a more detailed description of the cultural environment in which the apostles preached, see Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, chapter 4, pp. 27-37.

devouring of raw flesh, mangling of bodies, fastings and beatings of the breast, obscene cries at the altars, ragings and ravings were all used to appease and keep away the demons. These superstitions no doubt were the content of the books which many of the new believers in Ephesus (who prior to their conversion used "curious arts") burned (Acts 19:19). These books were worth fifty thousand pieces of silver. Every one of God's children who was brought to the faith by means of the preaching of the apostles had been born and reared in this atmosphere of superstition. This was a prominent feature of the culture of the world in which the apostles preached, and out of this darkness many were saved.

While in different forms perhaps, and while more "developed" perhaps, the same situation obtains for the missionary and the church in our day. This same superstition is to be found in the animistic religions of the peoples of Africa and other parts of the world. The same gospel of sovereign grace in Jesus Christ must be preached to these peoples. Only Christ crucified and raised and exalted has power over the devil and demons, "the angels who left their first estate" (Jude 6).

The second characteristic of the culture of the Roman world was the gross immorality which prevailed. This was most apparent in the various religions of that day. Some have argued that the mingling of the intellectual and religious elements of Hellenism and Orientalism helped to prepare the way for the gospel. From this point of view, it is said, the apostles enjoyed an advantage in their work which we lack in ours. Nothing could be farther from the truth. These ancient religions were from every point of view decidedly inimical to the Christian faith. The teachings of these religions were a contradiction of the gospel. The rites and ritual of the temples were not only indecent, they were just plain wicked. Lewd dancing and prostitution were just two of the concomitants of worship. The temples in Ephesus and Corinth, two of the more prominent cities in which the apostles preached, no more prepared the way for the gospel which Paul preached than do the temples and mosques in Singapore or India today. Can there be any doubt but that this is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Ephesians, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:17-19). From this point of view as well the apostles enjoyed no advantage in their mission work.

There is no need to go into detail concerning the brutal, horrifying shows which were presented in the amphitheater. Gladiators fought each other or wild beasts to the death before thousands of screaming, bloodthirsty

spectators ("fans"?). The attitude of the "cultured" elite toward these shows is almost shocking. People like Pliny and Cicero, we are told, considered them as "... affording splendid training for the eye, though perhaps not for the ear, in the endurance of pain and as inspiring disdain of death and love of honourable wounds." Even Marcus Aurelius was simply bored by them and complained that they were "always the same."⁵ Symmachus complained bitterly when some of the Saxons committed suicide in their cells rather than kill each other in public at the show he had prepared in honor of his son's praetorship. No one could view these spectacles without being affected.

The stage which had to compete with this powerful "entertainment" was given over to rough jokes and sensuous by-play. Nothing was too gross, too indecent, to be displayed in the Roman theater. Nudity, fornication, and blasphemy of virtually everything sacred were common on the Roman stage.

Finally there was the evil of slavery about which the New Testament has something to say. Slaves were completely subject to the will of the masters. They were at the mercy of their masters' every whim and fancy. Slaves had no rights and no protection against their masters. They were often well-educated and even served as teachers and tutors of the children of the wealthy. Even at that, most if not all of them bore the scars of their masters' lash. And, slaves made up the large majority of the population of the Roman world. This was the accepted way of life. Even at that, it's interesting to note that Scripture does not urge the abolishing of slavery, but exhorts masters to clemency and slaves to faithful obedience to their masters (Eph. 6:5-9; Phile.).

Finally, we are told that the moral environment of Asia Minor (where the apostle Paul did so much of his mission work) was even worse than that of Greece or Rome. Here people, for example, wanted nothing to do with marriage, which they viewed as an outrage on the free, unfettered life of nature.

While this is by no means an exhaustive study of the religious, social, and moral character of the culture of the Graeco-Roman world, it does indicate the cultural environment of the Mediterranean world out of which the early New Testament church was gathered. It was precisely in the context of this culture that the apostles preached Christ crucified. To this kind of men, women, and children went the gospel command to repent and believe.

The situation is no different today. The world has not changed, not

⁵Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, pp. 30-31.

essentially. The gross forms of ignorance, superstition, immorality; the entertainment of the theater, the stadium, movie house, and television are with us today.

This means, once more, the apostles enjoyed no special advantage over the missionary of today. In that kind of world and culture the apostles preached the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ. God gave them abundant fruit, "... adding to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

The church today must do precisely the same. The church needs no gimmicks with which to try to "win souls." The church must simply preach wherever God in His good pleasure sends her. This is proper missionary method. Upon this and only upon this faithful preaching of the Word will God's blessing rest. By this means His church will be gathered, a witness will be left to the nations, His Kingdom will come in Jesus Christ, and His glory will be revealed. ▲

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

David J. Engelsma

3 The Catholic Consensus

Following the lead of the Reformers themselves, the Reformed tradition has held that the marriage bond is dissolved by both adultery and desertion. As a result, the believer who has been sinned against by a fornicating or deserting marriage companion is free to remarry.¹

This doctrine of marriage on the part of the Reformers, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, represented a radical departure from the

¹ For the treatment of "The Reformed Tradition" in this series on the history of the church's marriage doctrine, see the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 27, no. 2 (April 1994): 4-20.

doctrine of the catholic church of Christ. For about 400 years after the apostolic era, the universal church taught that the marriage bond was unbreakable. There might be divorce in the sense of a full separation on the ground of the adultery of one's mate. But remarriage after divorce was forbidden. Not even the "innocent party" in a divorce was permitted to remarry.⁷ In the years that followed, the church of the East relaxed its doctrine of marriage, indeed, scandalously so. It permitted, and still permits, divorce and remarriage for many reasons. But the church of the West maintained the stand of the early church, although not without struggle.

In their doctrine of marriage, therefore, the Reformers broke with the catholic consensus that had held for a thousand years or more after the apostles.⁸ Thus the Reformers clearly violated their own canon that the Reformation return to the doctrines and practices of the early church, especially, the doctrine of Augustine.

The Doctrine of the Fathers

Very soon after the death of the last apostle was the testimony of Hermas to the nature of marriage as an unbreakable bond for life. Hermas' *The Shepherd* is dated as early as A.D. 75 and not later than the first half of the second century. There is reason to think that Hermas reflects the earliest church's understanding of the teaching on marriage and remarriage by Jesus and the apostles. In an imaginary conversation between an angel and himself, Hermas taught that remarriage after divorce was forbidden to a believer, even though the divorce was due to the adultery of one's marriage companion.

"Lord," I said, "if a man has wife who believes in the Lord and he catches her

²This is the doctrine of marriage that is taught and practiced by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, largely through the influence of Reformed theologian and churchman Herman Hoeksema. For the position of Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches, see David J. Engelsma, "The Development of Herman Hoeksema," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 27, no. 1 (November 1993):4-12. This was the first article in the present series on the history of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

³I speak of the time of the consensus as approximately a thousand years in view of the fact that in the 12th century the doctrine of marriage as a sacrament that was later confessed by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent began to take definite shape. See Jack Dominian, *Christian Marriage* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), p. 32.

in adultery, does the man sin if he continues to live with her?" "As long as the man is unaware," he said, "he does not sin. But if he discovers her sin and the woman does not repent, but rather persists in her adultery, the man shares the guilt of her sin and participates in her adultery, if he continues to live with her." "What, then," I said, "will the man do, Lord, if the woman persists in this passion?" "He must dismiss her," he said, "and the man must live by himself. But if, after dismissing her, he should marry another woman, he himself commits adultery."⁴

Writing at the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria explained that

Scripture recommends marriage and does not allow release from the union; this is evident from the precept: You shall not put away your wife, except because of fornication. It is regarded as adultery if either of the separated partners marries, while the other is alive.⁵

Oscar D. Watkins pointed out that in his *Stromata* Clement made clear that when he prohibited remarriage he had in view "the case of the innocent husband who has put away an adulterous wife." Watkins concluded that "in the opinion of S. Clement, the apostles understood our Lord, as he himself understood Him, to bar all remarriage."⁶

The comment by Origen is telling. He is explaining Matthew 19. Noting that some rulers of the church have permitted a man to marry a woman whose husband was yet living, Origen adds, "thus doing contrary to the Scripture (and) to what was enacted and written from the beginning." Even though he is interpreting Matthew 19:9 with its now controversial exception clause, Origen finds no justification for the remarriage in the exception clause. Instead, he suggests that the remarriage was a concession by the rulers of the church to hardness of heart, as was the case with Moses' permission of divorce under the old covenant.⁷

⁴Cited in *Marriage in the Early Church*, tr. and ed. David G. Hunter (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 29.

⁵Cited in *Marriage in the Early Church*, p. 49.

⁶Oscar D. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony: A Treatise on the Divine Laws of Marriage* (London: Rivington, Percival and Co., 1895), p. 203. Cf. Willy Rordorf, "Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 20 (1969): 204: "Remarriage during the lifetime of a previous marriage partner always remains excluded as we see from ... Clement of Alexandria."

⁷See Watkins, *Matrimony*, pp. 212-214. Origen is referring to Jesus' condemnation of the unbelieving Jews in Matthew 19:8. Origen wrote early in the third century:

For church father Tertullian, it was an established fact that Scripture forbids remarriage after divorce, including the remarriage of the “innocent party.”

... the fact that (he) who shall have dismissed his wife, except on the ground of adultery, makes her commit adultery; and (he) who shall have married a (woman) dismissed by her husband, of course commits adultery. A divorced woman cannot even marry legitimately; and if she commit any such act without the name of marriage, does it not fall under the category of adultery, in that adultery is crime in the way of marriage? Such is God’s verdict, within straiter limits than men’s, that universally, whether through marriage or promiscuously, the admission of a second man (to intercourse) is pronounced adultery by Him.

The reason for this verdict, said Tertullian, is the nature of marriage as an indissoluble bond by the act of God:

For let us see what marriage is in the eye of God; and thus we shall learn what adultery equally is. Marriage is (this): when God joins “two into one flesh”; or else, finding (them already) joined in the same flesh, has given His seal to the conjunction. Adultery is (this): when, the two having been — in whatsoever way — *disjoined*, other — nay, rather alien — flesh is mingled (with either): flesh concerning which it cannot be affirmed, “This is flesh out of my flesh, and this bone out of my bones.” For this, once for all done and pronounced, as from the beginning, so now too, cannot apply to “other” flesh.⁸

It is true that Tertullian erroneously extended the binding of marriage beyond death so that a widow was forbidden to marry again. Nevertheless, this was an illegitimate application of Tertullian’s basic understanding of Scripture’s doctrine of marriage as an unbreakable bond.⁹

Watkins summed up Tertullian’s doctrine this way:

He understands our Lord to permit the husband to put away for *adulterium*; he implies in addressing Marcion that the husband is bound to put away a wife living in adultery, since he would otherwise partake of her sin; he

⁸ Tertullian, “On Monogamy,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885; American repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 66. Tertullian wrote “On Monogamy” about A.D. 217.

⁹ Earlier, prior to the writing of “On Monogamy,” Tertullian had recognized Scripture’s permitting of a widow to marry again, e.g., I Corinthians 7:39. By A.D. 217, Tertullian had been influenced adversely by Montanism. See David G. Hunter, “Introduction,” in *Marriage in the Early Church*, pp. 10, 11).

admits that the wife is at liberty to put away her husband for the same cause; he understands by *adulterium* post-nuptial adultery, “a crime incident to the marriage state”; he is positive that there is no remarriage possible for either of the separated parties, and he assumes that such impossibility of remarriage is recognised without question by all Christians alike.¹⁰

Augustine wrote two treatises on marriage, *The Good of Marriage* (*De bono coniugali*) in A.D. 401 and *Adulterous Marriages* (*De incompetentibus nuptiis*) in A.D. 419. In *The Good of Marriage*, Augustine set forth marriage as a lifelong, unbreakable bond:

The marriage of male and female is something good. This union divine Scripture so commands that it is not permitted a woman who has been dismissed by her husband to marry again, as long as her husband lives, nor is it permitted a man who has been dismissed by his wife to marry again, unless she who left has died.¹¹

Recognizing the right of the husband to divorce an adulterous wife according to Matthew 5:32, Augustine asked whether “it is accordingly permitted, after she has been put away, to marry another.” Augustine denied that this is permitted:

The Apostle says (in I Cor. 7:10, 11 — DJE) that according to the command of the Lord a wife is not to depart from her husband, but, if she departs, she ought to remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. She surely ought not to withdraw and remain unmarried except in the case of an adulterous husband, lest, by withdrawing from him who is not an adulterer, she causes him to commit adultery.... But I do not see how a man can have freedom to marry another if he leaves an adulteress, since a woman does not have freedom to marry another if she leaves an adulterer.¹²

Since only death dissolves the bond of marriage, all remarriage after divorce is adultery when the original marriage companion is yet living:

Once, however, marriage is entered upon in the City (that is, Church) of our God, where also from the first union of the two human beings marriage bears a kind of sacred bond, it can be dissolved in no way except by the death of

¹⁰ Watkins, *Matrimony*, p. 212.

¹¹ Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, tr. Charles T. Wilcox, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 27 (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955, repr. 1969), p. 12.

¹² Augustine, *Good of Marriage*, p. 18.

one of the parties.... If they do unite (with others — DJE), they commit adultery with the ones with whom they join themselves, for they remain married people.¹³

The main issue in *Adulterous Marriages* was the question whether the “innocent party” may remarry. Earlier, in his commentary on Matthew 19:9, Augustine had explained the exception clause, “except it be for fornication,” as giving a ground only for divorce, understood in the sense of a separation of the married persons. Augustine had denied that the words, “except it be for fornication,” permit the “innocent party” to remarry.

But in reference to what He says, “Whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery,” it may be asked whether she also who is married commits adultery in the same way as he does who marries her. For she also is commanded to remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; but this in the case of her departing from her husband.... It is much less easy to discover how, when a man and woman have intercourse one with another with equal consent, one of them should be an adulterer, and the other not. To this is to be added the consideration, that if he commits adultery by marrying her who is divorced from her husband (although she does not put away, but is put away), she causes him to commit adultery, which nevertheless the Lord forbids. And hence we infer that, whether she has been put away, or has put away her husband, it is necessary for her to remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband.¹⁴

A certain Pollentius challenged this interpretation, arguing that the “innocent party” is permitted to remarry. *Adulterous Marriages* was Augustine’s response.

¹³ Augustine, *Good of Marriage*, p. 31.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, tr. William Findlay, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1979), pp. 20, 21. Augustine’s argument here is the one that is devastating to the interpretation of Matthew 19:9 that views the text as permitting the remarriage of the “innocent party.” The woman in the second part of the text is an “innocent party.” But Jesus forbids her to remarry: “whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” The man who marries the “innocent party” commits adultery. But in the nature of the case, he cannot commit adultery by himself. At the very least, says our church father, the woman, the “innocent party,” causes the man who marries her to commit adultery, and this also is forbidden. Cf. Augustine’s commentary on Matthew 5:31, 32 in his *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 17.

In light of the teaching of the other gospels on remarriage and in light of the apostle's teaching in I Corinthians 7:10, 11, Augustine insisted that Matthew 19:9 may not be understood as approving the remarriage of the "innocent party."

It cannot be correctly affirmed either that the husband who puts away his wife because of immorality and marries another does not commit adultery. For there is adultery, also, on the part of those who marry others after the repudiation of their former wives because of immorality.... We do not ... acquit of the crime (of adultery — DJE) the one who marries a woman who has been put away on account of immorality, and we also have not the slightest doubt that each of them is an adulterer.¹⁵

The remarriage of the "innocent party," as well as that of a "guilty party," is adultery:

We likewise declare him to be an adulterer who puts away his wife without the cause of immorality and marries another; yet we do not therein defend from the taint of this sin the man who puts away his wife because of immorality and marries another. For, while the one offense is greater than the other, we yet recognize both men to be adulterers.¹⁶

Therefore, when we read in the Gospel according to Matthew: "Whoever puts away his wife except for immorality," or, to use the better reading of the Greek: "Without the cause of immorality and marries another commits adultery," we should not immediately think that that man does not commit adultery who puts away his wife because of immorality and marries another. We should suspend judgment until we consult the accounts of the other Evangelists who have written this down for us. All that pertains to this question is not expressed in the Gospel of Matthew, but the portion contained therein is expressed in such a way that from it may be inferred the whole, that both Mark and Luke have preferred to state, in explanation, as it were, so that the sense might be understood in full. Therefore, not doubting that what Matthew says is true: "Whoever puts away his wife without the cause of immorality and marries another commits adultery," as soon as we inquire if that man alone commits adultery by taking another wife who has put away his previous spouse without the cause of immorality, or whether everyone who marries another after the repudiation of the first commits adultery, so that even the one who dismisses an unfaithful spouse is included — as soon as we place these questions, shall not our answer come

¹⁵ Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, tr. Charles T. Huegelmeier, in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 27, pp. 71, 72.

¹⁶ Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 72.

from Mark: Why do you ask whether this man be an adulterer, and that one not? "Whoever puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery" (Mark 10:11 — DJE). Will not Luke also say to us: Why do you doubt that the man who puts away his wife because of immorality and marries another commits adultery? "Everyone who puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery" (Luke 16:18 — DJE). Therefore, since it is not proper for us to maintain that the Evangelists, in writing on one topic, disagree in meaning and sense, although they may use different words, it follows that we are to understand Matthew as having desired to indicate the whole by the part, but, nevertheless, as having held the same opinion as the other Evangelists. As a result, neither the particular man who puts away his wife because of immorality and marries another commits adultery, nor does the particular man who puts away his wife without the cause of immorality commit adultery; on the contrary, everyone who puts away his wife and marries another is most certainly guilty of adultery.¹⁷

Oscar Watkins summarized Augustine's view of Matthew 19:9 correctly:

He (Augustine) is not blind to difficulties of interpretation; but the conclusion is invariably the same. He knows the passage S. Matthew xix.9 in the difficult form in which we have it in the received text. He rejects the marriage of the innocent husband, which some deduce from the text, on the ground of its logical incompatibility with the rest of the teaching.¹⁸

In an age that was as antagonistic towards the doctrine that marriage is an indissoluble bond for life as is our own, Augustine the pastor did not hesitate to preach this doctrine of marriage to his congregation.

You must not have wives whose former husbands are living; nor may you, women, have husbands whose former wives are living. Such marriages are adulterous, not by the law of the courts, but by the law of Heaven. Nor may a woman who by divorce has withdrawn from her husband become your wife while her husband lives. Only because of fornication may one dismiss an adulterous wife; but in her lifetime you may not marry another. Neither to you, O women, is it granted to find husbands in those men whose wives have quitted them by divorce: such are adulteries, not marriages.¹⁹

With reference to the period from A.D. 100 to A.D. 314, Watkins wrote that "there is no instance during this period of any writer referring

¹⁷ Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, pp. 75, 76.

¹⁸ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 335.

¹⁹ Augustine, *Sermon 392*, cited in Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 332.

to S. Matthew xix.9, as to an authority authorizing remarriage after divorce, or as to a difficult passage requiring to be explained away.”²⁰

Regarding the period from A.D. 314 to A.D. 527, similarly, “the verse S. Matthew xix.9 is not cited by any writer as supporting the right of remarriage after divorce for adultery.”²¹

There was no appeal in the early church to Matthew 19:9 in support of the remarriage of divorced persons. With the rare exception, neither was there any appeal to I Corinthians 7:15, the other favorite text of those who advocate remarriage. In sharp criticism of the notion that in I Corinthians 7:15 Paul teaches “that a Christian partner deserted by a heathen may be married to someone else,” C. Caverno has written:

That neither Paul nor anyone else ever put such construction upon his language is evidenced by the fact that there is no record in history of a single case where it was attempted for 400 years after Paul was in his grave, and the Roman Empire had for a century been Christian. Then we wait 400 years more before we find the suggestion repeated. That no use was ever made of such construction of Paul in the whole era of the adjustment of Christianity with heathenism is good evidence that it was never there to begin with. So we shall pass Paul as having in no respect modified the doctrine of divorce laid down by Christ in Mt 19.²²

The simple fact is that with virtually one voice the early church rejected all remarriage after divorce, including the remarriage of the “innocent party.” It did so because it held the marriage of Christians to be an indissoluble bond, broken only by death. This doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage prevailed in the church of the West during the Middle Ages.

Oscar D. Watkins concluded his thorough study of the history of the doctrine of the early and medieval church on marriage with this summary:

The first three centuries afford no single instance of a writer who approves remarriage after divorce in any case during the lifetime of the separated partner, while there are repeated and most decided assertions of the principle that such marriages are unlawful.... In the period from Constantine to Justinian, the Churches of the West are more decided in their prohibition

²⁰ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 226.

²¹ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 346.

²² C. Caverno, “Divorce in NT,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 865, 866.

of remarriage than the Churches of the East. In the West the Council of Arles and the African Code, with S. Ambrose, S. Jerome, and S. Augustine, decline to admit remarriage after a divorce for adultery even in the case of the unoffending husband.... Speaking generally, this period from Constantine to Justinian shews the Western Churches maintaining the entire indissolubility of Christian marriage, while the Churches of the East give an uncertain sound. From the time of Justinian the Churches of the East concede, without difficulty, the right of remarriage after divorce to the innocent husband, though not to the guilty wife. Remarriage is also allowed after divorce for many other causes assigned. In the West, from the time of Justinian, the Churches of Italy appear to have maintained the indissolubility of Christian marriage, while beyond the Alps there are traces of a long and difficult struggle with the license of the secular laws and the lax customs of the peoples. From the time of Gratian, however, the indissolubility of Christian marriage was universally acknowledged in the West. As regards the Churches of the British Isles, there was, before the Norman Conquest, some diversity of view, but from the Norman Conquest onwards the indissolubility of Christian marriage has been accepted.²³

In the course of their own, briefer examination of the doctrine of marriage in the early church, William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham note that

the author of the most comprehensive study ever written on this subject contends that in the first five centuries all Greek writers and all Latin writers except one agree that remarriage following divorce for any reason is adulterous. The marriage bond was seen to unite both parties until the death of one of them. When a marriage partner was guilty of unchastity, usually understood to mean adultery, the other was expected to separate but did not have the right to remarry. Even in the case of I Corinthians 7:15, the so-called Pauline privilege which later Catholics held to permit a believer deserted by an unbeliever to remarry, the early church Fathers said that the deserted Christian had *no* right to remarry.²⁴

²³ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, pp. 435, 436. The only exceptions to the prohibition against the remarriage of the "innocent party" in the period from A.D. 314-527 were the layman Lactantius and an unknown writer designated as Ambrosiaster. Both of these writers taught that the "innocent" husband might remarry after divorce. Ambrosiaster expressly denied this liberty to an "innocent" wife. See Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, pp. 296, 297, 342.

²⁴ William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1985), p. 22. The author to whom they refer is H. Crouzel. His untranslated work on divorce and remarriage in the early church is *L'église primitive face au divorce du premier au quatrième siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1971). In his recent work, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles & Pastoral Practice*, Andrew Cornes agrees

Church Councils

The early church expressed its doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in official decisions of her councils and synods.

The Council of Elvira (about A.D. 305) ruled that

a woman baptized, who has forsaken an adulterous husband also baptized, and is marrying another, must be forbidden to marry him; and if she so marry she must not receive the communion till after the husband whom she has left be dead, unless extremity of sickness compel the indulgence.²⁵

The Council of Arles (A.D. 314) took a decision forbidding young men who had divorced their wives for adultery to marry others:

As to those who detect their wives in adultery, and the same are baptized young men, and (so) are forbidden to marry, it is decreed that so far as may be counsel be given them that, while their wives are living, although adulteresses, they do not marry others.²⁶

In A.D. 407, the 11th Synod of Carthage, representing the churches in Africa, resolved that

according to the evangelical and apostolical discipline neither a man put away by his wife, nor a woman put away by her husband, be united to any other, but that they so abide or be reconciled to one another. If, however, they contemptuously disregard this, they are to be brought to penance.²⁷

with the analysis of Watkins, Heth, Wenham, and Crouzel: "The Fathers are almost unanimous in understanding Christ's exception in the same way. They often write about divorce and remarriage, and concentrate more on the issue of remarriage than that of divorce. When they speak of divorce, they frequently mention the Matthean exception. When, however, they speak of remarriage, they never mention any exception (Ambrosiaster is the only clear exception up to the end of the fifth century). Their normal practice is simply to prohibit remarriage absolutely (as in Mark and Luke) but significantly they often do this in a context of quoting Jesus' divorce sayings in their Matthean form or in the course of a commentary on Matthew's gospel. Where they do raise the specific question of whether remarriage may be legitimate in the case of divorce for adultery, they prohibit it." See Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles & Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 306, 307.

²⁵ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, pp. 216, 217.

²⁶ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 294.

²⁷ Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 336.

Features of the Early Church's Marriage-Doctrine

Certain features of the doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the early church should be noted. One important feature is that the fathers derived their doctrine of marriage from the biblical texts, especially Christ's words in the gospels and Paul's teaching in Romans 7:2, 3 and in I Corinthians 7. They taught that divorce is limited to the one ground of adultery and that all remarriage is forbidden during the lifetime of the original marriage companions, not because of an abstract theory of an unbreakable bond, but because they understood the Bible to teach this.

Well aware of the exception clause in Matthew 19:9, the fathers rejected the interpretation that views it as permitting the remarriage of the "innocent party." Rather, they held that the exception clause qualifies only the prohibition against divorce. That is, the early fathers explained Matthew 19:9 as allowing divorce on the ground of adultery, while forbidding the remarriage after divorce of both the "guilty party" and the "innocent party." Augustine acknowledged that the text is "difficult to comprehend."²⁸ Nevertheless, the exception clause does not teach that the man who remarries after putting away his wife on account of her fornication is clear of the sin of adultery.²⁹

One reason why Augustine explained Matthew 19:9 as he did was the light shed on the text by the corresponding, and clearer, passages, Mark 10:2-12 and Luke 16:18: "have not the other Evangelists treated the same matter so comprehensively that (the truth of the matter) can be understood?"³⁰

I Corinthians 7:10, 11 also helped to convince Augustine that the exception clause in Matthew 19:9 did not allow the remarriage of the "innocent party." I Corinthians 7:10, 11 only repeats for the Corinthian congregation the doctrine on divorce and remarriage that the Lord Jesus Himself taught during His earthly ministry, that is, the doctrine found in Matthew 5 and 19, Mark 10, and Luke 16. Paul points this out when he says, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord." The permission granted to a wife to depart from her husband, therefore, must be based on the adultery of her husband, since this is the only ground for divorce that the Lord ever mentioned. The woman in view in I Corinthians 7:10, 11 is the "innocent party." But Paul, repeating the instruction of the Lord, forbids her to remarry: "let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband."

²⁸Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, pp. 72, 73.

²⁹Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 72.

³⁰Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 73.

This, said Augustine correctly, is inspired commentary on the “difficult” exception clause of Matthew 19:9: the exception clause does not allow the “innocent party” to remarry.³¹

The Lord Himself, the Sovereign in the “City of God,” forbade all remarriage after divorce. Every remarriage after divorce is, by His judgment, an “adulterous marriage.”

The biblical basis for the prohibition of all remarriage after divorce while an original wife or husband is yet living accords with the nature of marriage as an unbreakable bond. This profound conception of marriage, Augustine and the entire early church got, not from a misconception of the Vulgate’s translation of Ephesians 5:32, but from the plain teaching of the Bible in Romans 7:2, 3 and in I Corinthians 7:39. The Vulgate rendered the Greek “*musteeron*” (“This,” namely, marriage, “is a great *mystery*”) in Ephesians 5:32 as “*sacramentum*.” But Augustine did not deduce an unbreakable bond from this suggestive Latin translation of the Greek word, “mystery.” In fact, in his main works on marriage the great African says almost nothing about Ephesians 5:32. He did not find the unbreakable bond in an implication of “*sacramentum*” but in the express statements of Romans 7:2, 3 and I Corinthians 7:39.

Assuredly, “a woman is bound, as long as her husband is alive” (I Cor. 7:39 — DJE), that is, to speak more plainly, as long as he is physically alive. The husband, being subject to the same law, is likewise bound as long as his wife is physically alive. Wherefore, if he wishes to dismiss an adulteress, he is not to marry another, lest he himself commit what he reproaches in her. And so with the wife. If she puts away her adulterous husband, she is not to join herself to another husband. She is bound as long as her husband lives. She is not freed from the law of her husband, unless he be dead, so that she will not be guilty of adultery if she has been with another man.³²

Augustine faced the objection that the “innocent party” may remarry inasmuch as an adulterous wife or husband is to be considered as dead: “if a man or woman commits adultery, he or she is considered dead.”³³

With characteristic wisdom, Augustine analyzed this justification for remarriage as “absurd.” What it means is that husbands and wives can free themselves from their marriages in order lawfully to marry another simply by committing adultery. The procedure, and argument, runs as follows. Adultery, like death, dissolves the bond. All who are not bound in marriage

³¹Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, pp. 64-70; *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 20, 21.

³²Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 106; cf. pp. 102-106, 118, 119, 128.

³³Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, pp. 102-106.

are free to marry. Therefore, adulterers are free to marry by virtue of their adultery.

Therefore, ... do not say that an adulterous spouse, whether husband or wife, should be considered dead.... The accepted teaching is: "the woman is bound as long as her husband is alive," that is to say, as long as he has not yet departed from the body. "For the married woman is bound by the Law, as long as her husband is alive," that is to say, with body intact. "If he dies," that is, if he departs from the body, "she is released from the Law which binds her to her husband. Therefore, while her husband is alive, she will be called an adulteress, if she be with another man; but if her husband dies, she is set free from the law (of her husband) so that she is not an adulteress, if she has been with another man" (Rom. 7:2, 3 — DJE).... The woman begins to be the wife of no later husband, unless she has ceased to be the wife of her former one. But, she will cease to be the wife of the former one, if he should die, and not if he should commit fornication. As a consequence, a spouse is lawfully put away because of fornication, but the bond of chastity remains. For this reason, whoever marries a woman who has been put away, even for the reason of fornication, incurs the guilt of adultery.³⁴

To the practical argument for remarriage, that few can live continually, as they must who are divorced because of their husband or wife's unfaithfulness, Augustine responded:

We ought not to pervert or alter the Gospel of Christ on their account.... Take notice of how many cases will arise, when we must permit adultery to be committed, if we acknowledge the complaints of these men. What are we to do if the wife is gripped by some chronic, incurable disease which prevents her having relations with her husband? Again, suppose they are separated by captivity or some other calamity, so that the husband knows his wife is still alive, whose favors are denied him. Do you think that the mutterings of the incontinent are to be allowed and that adultery is to be countenanced?³⁵

Augustine refused to destroy the law of Christ in order to make life easier for oppressed saints. Instead, he offered pastoral encouragement:

The burden of self-restraint must not terrify them. It will be lighter if it is Christ's and it will be Christ's if that faith is present which obtains from the Lawgiver the grace to do what He has ordained.³⁶

³⁴Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 105.

³⁵Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 112.

³⁶Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages*, p. 129.

The early church faced and rejected all of the arguments, pleas, charges, evasions, and absurdities that are used today to fill the churches with “adulterous marriages.” She resolutely maintained the rigorous doctrine of marriage laid down by Jesus Christ and His apostles. She did this in a culture — the world of darkness of that day — that was as opposed to her doctrine as is the society in which we live. Divorce was available on request. Remarriage followed as a matter of course. In the midst of such laxity, the early church bound her members to a narrow way in the matter of marriage. And she prospered and grew.

Today, an apostate evangelical church corrupts Scripture and relaxes her stand on marriage in order to accommodate the lawless culture. Spineless evangelicals plead for removing what restraints on divorce and remarriage remain, so that men and women are not required by the church to be “unhappy” for the short while of earthly life and so that the church may “grow.”³⁷

A practical motivation for the early church’s prohibition of remarriage was her desire to keep the way open for repentance and reconciliation. This appeared already in *Hermas*. Having been instructed by the angel that, although a husband must dismiss an adulterous wife, he may not remarry, *Hermas* asks: “And if, Lord, the woman repents after she has been dismissed

³⁷See Craig S. Keener, “... and Marries Another: Divorce and Remarriage in the Teaching of the New Testament (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991). Keener’s avowed purpose is the refutation of that interpretation of the New Testament texts that forbids remarriage to the “innocent party.” Along the way, he approves remarriages “even for guilty parties” (p. 49). “We may allow some exceptions not addressed by Matthew or Paul,” that is, remarriages after divorce “for reasons other than these two exceptions (adultery and abandonment)” (p. 105). What motivates the evangelical to throw open the doors as widely as possible to remarriage is, first, the suffering that otherwise results for some professing Christians (chapter 1) and, second, the obstacle that is otherwise placed in the way of church growth (“how long will conservative churches be able to continue evangelizing the multitudes in our society who are divorced ...?”, p. 110). Jesus’ doctrine in the gospels and Paul’s doctrine in I Corinthians 7 must be explained away. This is done by interpreting the passages “in their proper cultural context” (p. viii). As a result, Jesus’ teaching on divorce must be “qualified when applied to daily living in our culture” (p. 21). In addition, interpretation of the passages is to be governed by the present cultural conditions, specifically, the presence of divorce for all kinds of reasons in modern society (pp. 104-110). As a result, the restriction of remarriage by Jesus and Paul on the most liberal reading of the texts must give way to wholesale acceptance of remarriage. This is evangelicalism today! It is the church conformed to the world, salt that has lost its savor, a candle under a bushel.

and wishes to return to her husband, shall he not take her back?" The reply is:

"Yes," he said, "if the man does not take her back, he sins and brings great sin upon himself, for it is necessary to welcome back the sinner who has repented.... Therefore, for the sake of repentance the man must not marry. This course of action applies to the woman as well as to the man.... That is why you were instructed to live alone, whether you are male or female, so that repentance might be possible in these cases."³⁸

Augustine taught the same: forbidding remarriage enables the "innocent party" to take back a penitent wife or husband.

If she repents of her gross sin and returns to conjugal chastity and breaks off all adulterous unions and purposes, I cannot conceive of even the adulterer himself thinking of her as a violator of fidelity.³⁹

Marriage a "Sacrament"?

Contemporary Protestantism ignores this clear, powerful, virtually unanimous testimony of the early church to the sanctity and permanence of marriage. It does so by dismissing it as the error of regarding marriage as a sacrament. The early church's doctrine of an indissoluble bond, then, was not the "catholic" consensus, but the "Roman Catholic" consensus.

This is an unhistorical judgment in that the early church was not Roman Catholic and in that all of the early fathers were not already corrupted with Trent's dogma of the sacramental nature of marriage. In addition, this judgment misconceives Augustine's reference to marriage as "*sacramentum*."

Augustine spoke of the marriage of believers as a "sacrament." According to Augustine, it is this "sacramental" nature of marriage that constitutes the lifelong, unbreakable bond. And it is the unbreakable bond that forbids, indeed makes impossible, such a separation of the two as would permit remarriage.

To such a degree is that nuptial pact which has been entered upon a kind of sacrament that it is not nullified by separation....⁴⁰

³⁸Hermas, *The Shepherd*, p. 30. Hermas adds that "only one repentance (is allowed)."

³⁹Augustine, *Good of Marriage*, p. 14; cf. Watkins, *Holy Matrimony*, p. 335.

⁴⁰Augustine, *Good of Marriage*, p. 18.

Once, however, marriage is entered upon in the City (the church — DJE) of our God, where also from the first union of the two human beings marriage bears a kind of sacred bond (*quoddam sacramentum*, 'a kind of sacramental quality' — DJE), it can be dissolved in no way except by the death of one of the parties.⁴¹

The sacrament of marriage in our time has been reduced and confined to one man and one woman, so that it is not lawful to ordain a minister of the Church unless he is the husband of one wife.⁴²

By "sacrament," however, Augustine did not mean what later Roman Catholic theology intended by "sacrament."⁴³ He did not come to the texts on marriage in the gospels and in I Corinthians 7 with an *a priori* theory of the sacramental nature of marriage that he had developed from a study of "*sacramentum*" in Ephesians 5:32. On the contrary, whatever Augustine meant by the "sacramental" nature of marriage he derived from Jesus' teaching on marriage in the gospels and from the apostle's doctrine of marriage in Romans 7:2, 3 and I Corinthians 7:39.

For Augustine, the "sacrament" of marriage was this, that, when two Christians married, God by a mysterious work bound them so intimately to each other that they became one flesh for life. Simply put, marriage is a "sacrament" as an indissoluble bond.

That Augustine's use of "sacrament" for marriage differed fundamentally from the later, Roman Catholic doctrine is readily acknowledged by competent Roman Catholic scholars. Jack Dominian, who specializes in the theology of marriage, writes that Augustine "nowhere explicitly states that marriage carries with it a special gift of grace and, in view of the fullness with which he treats this subject, it does not seem rash to conclude that this momentous truth really escaped him." Dominian calls this omission on Augustine's part "particularly regretful."⁴⁴

⁴¹Augustine, *Good of Marriage*, p. 31.

⁴²Augustine, *Good of Marriage*, p. 35.

⁴³For Rome's doctrine of the "sacrament of matrimony," see "The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent," 24th Session, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), pp. 193-198. It is basic to Rome's doctrine that marriage is a sacrament instituted by Christ, like Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and that marriage confers grace. It should be remembered that the popular version of the Bible in Augustine's day called marriage "*sacramentum*" in Ephesians 5:32. Augustine's referring to marriage as "sacrament," therefore, may very well mean no more than does our referring to marriage as "mystery."

⁴⁴Dominian, *Christian Marriage*, p. 29.

The translator of Augustine's *The Good of Marriage* in the series, *The Fathers of the Church*, quotes G. Vasquez as denying that Augustine ever "called marriage a sacrament in our sense of the term." Augustine called marriage a "sacrament" inasmuch as it is an "indissoluble bond" that "figure(s) ... the union of Jesus Christ with His Church." He did not use the term "*sacramentum*" for marriage "in its technical sense of 'a sacrament.'"⁴⁵

Protestants are not able lightly to brush aside the testimony of the early church, particularly the doctrine of Augustine, by saying, "Augustine taught that marriage is a sacrament." Of course Augustine taught that marriage is a sacrament. Everyone who used the Vulgate taught that marriage is a sacrament. The question is not whether Augustine taught that marriage is a sacrament. But the question is this: was the early church, including Augustine, right in understanding Matthew 5, Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 16, Romans 7, and I Corinthians 7, as well as Genesis 2:18-25, as teaching that marriage is an unbreakable bond?

The issue for the early church was not a theory of sacrament. Nor was it the prevailing culture, or the ease of the life of church members. But the issue was the doctrine of Christ in the biblical texts.

Would God that this were the issue for evangelical and Reformed churches at the end of the 20th century.



⁴⁵Charles T. Wilcox, "Introduction," in *Good of Marriage*, pp. 4, 5.

Another Look

At Common Grace (6)

Restraint of Sin: Its Meaning

Herman Hanko

Introduction

We have written a number of articles dealing with that aspect of common grace which teaches that God is favorably inclined to all men, which favorable inclination includes the bestowal of blessings, such as rain, sunshine, health, prosperity, etc.

The doctrine of common grace is by no means exhausted by this idea. The proponents of common grace teach that common grace includes also the restraint of sin by the work of the Holy Spirit, which restraint of sin results in the unregenerate man being made capable of doing some limited good works.

It is to this idea of common grace that we turn in this and in succeeding articles.

We must understand at the outset that, on the one hand, a restraint of sin in the hearts of the unregenerate is related to God's blessing upon elect and reprobate alike; and, on the other hand, the restraint of sin in the lives of the unregenerate is a view which carries with it various other implications, some of which we will mention a bit later.

We shall, in the course of this study, take a look at all these things.

The Teaching

It is best to learn what is meant by the restraint of sin by referring to and quoting from others who hold to this doctrine.

Louis Berkhof

Louis Berkhof gives a very concise and thorough definition of the whole idea of common grace not only, but also of this aspect which we now treat. He writes in a summary of common grace, that common grace includes:

... those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby [God], without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted.¹

Berkhof is somewhat hesitant to say that common grace is rooted in the cross as its judicial basis, but speaks nevertheless of benefits from the cross which come upon all men.²

When Berkhof is speaking of the means by which sin is restrained, he mentions general revelation, government, public opinion, and divine punishments and rewards, although he does not mean to deny, by these outward restraints, the inner working of the Spirit. Both operate.³

¹Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953) 436.

²*Ibid.*, 437, 438.

³*Ibid.*, 440, 441.

The following elements in the restraint of sin can be found in Berkhof's position: 1) Sin is restrained by means of the temporal operations of the Holy Spirit; although other means may also be employed such as government, public opinion, divine punishments and rewards, etc. 2) These operations of the Holy Spirit take place without renewing the heart of man, i.e., without actually accomplishing the work of regeneration and salvation. The man so restrained remains unconverted and eventually perishes, if no saving work follows. 3) This restraint of sin is specifically connected with revelation, something of such importance that we shall have to look at this more closely in a different connection. 4) While Berkhof hesitates to claim that the atonement of Christ forms the judicial basis for common grace, the restraint of sin is nevertheless connected to Christ's work on the cross and is a blessing which flows from it.

James Daane

James Daane, in discussing common grace, emphatically speaks in general of gracious operations of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. He writes:

The traditional manner in which Reformed theology accounted for this difference between absolute and total depravity was by reference to a general, gracious operation of the Holy Spirit upon unregenerate human hearts.⁴

This matter of gracious operations of the Holy Spirit *in the heart* is, for Daane, crucial. In order to support his contention that this is the traditional manner in which Reformed theologians defended common grace, he refers to Abraham Kuyper and quotes from him:

“Thus common grace is an operation of divine mercy, which reveals itself everywhere where human hearts are found to beat and which spreads its blessings upon these human hearts.”⁵

Daane sums up the matter by saying: “Thus it is evident that 1924⁶ teaches in harmony with traditional Reformed thought that there is a restraint of sin in the life of the unregenerate....”

⁴Daane, James, *A Theology of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954) 88.

⁵*Ibid.*, 89. The quotation is from Abraham Kuyper's *Gemeene Gratie*, I, 251.

⁶The reference is to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church which in 1924 adopted three distinct points concerning the doctrine of common grace.

Daane's emphasis that this restraint of sin takes place within the hearts of men is important, for no one, so far as I know, denies that a restraint of sin actually exists in the world. Whether it takes place by an inward work of the Spirit or by outward constraints is the question at issue.

A. A. Hodge

A. A. Hodge treats common grace in connection with the internal call and writes:

"Common grace" is the restraining and persuading influences of the Holy Spirit acting only through the truth revealed in the gospel, or through the natural light of reason and of conscience, heightening the natural moral effect of such truth upon the understanding, conscience and heart. It involves no change of heart, but simply an enhancement of the natural powers of the truth, a restraint of evil passions, and an increase of the natural emotions in view of sin, duty, and self-interest.⁷

Although Hodge does not say so in so many words, it is clear that he also considers this restraint of sin to be an inward work of the Spirit. He speaks of the Spirit working through conscience and having an effect upon heart and conscience. He speaks of the effect being a restraint of evil passions and an increase of the natural emotions — all of which can take place only by internal influences.

Charles Hodge

Charles Hodge, though almost reluctant to speak of common grace, nevertheless also defines it in terms of a restraint of sin. He writes:

The Bible therefore teaches that the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, of holiness, and of life in all its forms, is present with every human mind, enforcing truth, restraining from evil, exciting to good, and imparting wisdom or strength, when, where, and in what measure seemeth to Him good.... This is what in theology is called common grace.⁸

This same idea appears also when he says in connection with Acts 7:51:

⁷Hodge, A. A., *Outline of Theology* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1878) 449, 450.

⁸Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946) 667.

[God is] everywhere present with the minds of men, as the Spirit of truth and goodness, operating on them according to the laws of their free moral agency, inclining them to good and restraining them from evil.⁹

In connection with his discussion of Romans 1:25, Hodge claims that the very fact that God gives the wicked *no* implies some prior restraint; and he refers this to the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

From these quotations it is clear that Hodge maintains concerning this aspect of common grace: 1) that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of all men without distinction, and not only in the hearts of the elect. 2) That this work of the Holy Spirit is especially upon the minds of men. 3) That the fruit of this work of the Spirit is a restraint of sin and a consequent enabling of the sinner to do good. 4) And, strangely enough, Hodge ascribes this work of the Spirit to the Spirit as the "Spirit of Truth," whom Christ specifically promises only to the church.¹¹

Henry J. Kuiper

Henry J. Kuiper makes some extremely interesting and important observations about this aspect of common grace.¹²

Kuiper makes the interesting point that "if you accept the first [point], you have in principle accepted the others."¹³ His argument, undoubtedly correct, is that if one accepts God's gracious attitude of favor towards all men, one must accept also the idea that this attitude of favor towards all men and grace which He confers on all men *must* include an inward restraint of sin in the hearts of all men by the Holy Spirit. In other words, this conferring

⁹ Ibid., 668.

¹⁰ Ibid., 669.

¹¹ See the references to the Spirit of Truth in John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 13, 14.

¹² Kuiper, H. J., *Sermons Delivered in Broadway Christian Reformed Church* (no publisher given, 1925). It is important to remember that H. J. Kuiper preached these sermons to defend the statements concerning common grace which had been adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. In those statements, three in number, the first one spoke of an attitude of favor which God shows to all His creatures and to all men, the latter of which is especially evident in the free offer of the gospel. The second statement spoke of the inward restraint of sin in the hearts of all men by the Holy Spirit. The third statement spoke of the good which the unregenerate are capable of doing because of the work of the Spirit. Against the background of these statements Kuiper makes his remarks. Hence, he states in the preface: "Our real purpose was to explain and defend the three points."

¹³ Ibid., 14.

of grace on all men *cannot* simply be an *outward* display of good gifts such as in rain and in sunshine; but it *must* be also an *internal* work of God in man's heart.

Undoubtedly the necessity of this internal work of God lies in the nature of grace. Grace is an attitude of favor, of love, of compassion, or mercy. God's *attitude* of love and mercy is not shown if it is limited to outward gifts; it must include the sinner's *conscious experience* and *knowledge* of God's favor. This is true, if we stop to think about it, also of relationships between men mutually.¹⁴

There is another point here which needs to be made, although it is somewhat beside the point of our discussion.

The point has to do with the relation between the free and general offer of the gospel and the internal operation of the Spirit by which sin is restrained and man is enabled to do good. It is undoubtedly this relation too that Kuiper had in mind when he insisted that to accept point one was to commit oneself also to point 2. Point 1 taught not only a general attitude of favor on God's part towards all men, but it stated also that this attitude of favor was especially evident in the general offer of the gospel.

Although it is impossible to tell whether Synod had such ideas in mind, the fact nevertheless remains that if one connects the well-meant offer of the gospel with an inward operation of the Spirit in the hearts of all which restrains sin, then it follows that this work of the Spirit is preparatory to the preaching of the gospel. That is, the work of the Spirit restraining sin and producing good prepares all men for the gospel in such a way that they are in a moral and ethical condition to accept or reject the overtures of the gospel. And, of course, the decision to accept or reject is theirs to make. God intends the salvation of all and expresses this intention in the gospel itself. God does all that He can to make men aware of this desire on His part. God even gives His Spirit to all men so that their sin may be restrained and they enabled to do some good, though not saving good. God, having now done all He is capable of doing, leaves the final decision with man himself who, through the work of the Spirit, is made capable of making such a choice.

Whether this idea was, in fact, in the minds of the authors of the statement concerning common grace at the Synod of 1924 is impossible to say. What is clear is that this notion has become generally accepted by those who hold to common grace and the free offer of the gospel.

¹⁴ Whether Kuiper himself was completely aware of these implications, I do not know. His sermons do not include such a line of argumentation. But his statement is emphatic: Acceptance of an attitude of favor towards all necessarily implies an internal work of grace.

But anyone with any Reformed sensitivity will readily see that this notion is Arminianism at its worst.

However all this may be, Kuiper also very clearly distinguishes between inward restraint of sin and outward restraint of sin.¹⁵ After examining the question, Kuiper comes to the conclusion that Scripture teaches both. He admits that the Reformed confessions actually teach only an outward restraint (although an inward restraint, so Kuiper claims, is implied), but Scripture itself is clear.¹⁶

The Scriptural proof which Kuiper offers is interesting.

He appeals first of all to the "repentance" of the Ninevites under the preaching of Jonah as an example of inward restraint. His argument is that Nineveh's repentance was not true repentance, but an outward remorse rooted in terror of destruction. Because Jonah himself speaks of God's grace in this connection, we have here, so says Kuiper, an example of common grace, which common grace is an inward restraint of sin by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Further proof is found in Psalm 81:11, 12. Here the line of proof is much like that of Hodge in connection with his comments on Rom. 1:24. Kuiper argues that because God gave Israel over, an inward restraint of sin is implied, for one cannot give another over who has not previously been restrained.

William Masselink

William Masselink gives his own insights into this matter of the restraint of sin when he specifically connects common grace with general revelation.¹⁸ Although general revelation and common grace differ, according to Masselink, in origin, purpose, and how we acquire knowledge of them, they are related.¹⁹ Masselink writes:

They are related, however, because in common grace God uses the truths of general revelation to restrain sin. The two results of general revelation

¹⁵This is important for, on the one hand, not all defenders of the idea of the restraint of sin make such careful distinctions; and, on the other hand, while the Bible clearly teaches an outward restraint, it is quite another question whether it teaches an inward restraint by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶Ibid., 21, 22.

¹⁷Ibid., 23-25.

¹⁸Masselink, William, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953).

¹⁹Ibid., 69.

are: God-consciousness and moral consciousness. By means of these two results, through God's common grace, sin is curbed in the natural man.²⁰

Masselink claims that Reformed theology all but went into eclipse for 200 years after the Reformation because "the great fact of the Christian's relation to the world was neglected." But Kuyper and Hodge were the ones who revived Reformed theology once again.²¹

Donald McCleod

In referring especially to Kuyper, Masselink speaks of a negative element in the restraint of sin which restrains "the devastating effects of sin," and a positive element which is "the constant operation of the Holy Spirit upon all mankind by which civil righteousness is promoted."²²

McCleod also includes restraint of sin in his discussion of common grace.²³ He seems, however, to speak mostly of external restraints, for in mentioning the instruments of this element of common grace he speaks of God's general revelation, the presence of the church which restrains sin and postpones judgment, ordinances of law and government which create a good climate, influence of public opinion, God's judgments which remove wickedness, and the external call of the gospel.²⁴

John Murray

Because of John Murray's prominence as an orthodox and biblical theologian whose influence has been widespread and great, we refer to his views in some detail.

Those of our readers who have followed this series of articles will recall that our earlier references to John Murray made clear that, while some theologians who held to common grace were reluctant to root common grace in the cross of Jesus Christ, Murray does not hesitate to do this. He speaks forcibly about benefits of the atonement to the non-elect,²⁵ of the non-elect enjoying "many benefits that accrue *from* the atonement," although, Murray insists, the non-elect do "not partake of the *atonement*."²⁶ Among these "benefits" are also those internal influences of the Holy Spirit.

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Ibid., 187.

²² Ibid., 188.

²³ McCleod, Donald, *Behold Your God* (Edinburgh: Christian Focus Publications, 1990).

²⁴ Ibid., 118-123.

²⁵ Murray, John, *Collected Writings*, Vol. I (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976) 68.

²⁶ Ibid., 69.

Referring to A. A. and C. Hodge's definition of common grace as "the influence of the Spirit of God on the minds of men," Murray finds this deficient and pleads for a broader and more inclusive definition which embraces any gift or favor "of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God."²⁷

The various elements of common grace include restraint "upon the expressions and consequences of human depravity and of unholy passion."²⁸ This restraint is, in turn, broken down into: 1) Restraint of sin which is "restraint upon the workings of human depravity" by which God "prevents the unholy affections and principles of men from manifesting all the potentialities inherent in them."²⁹ 2) Restraint upon the divine wrath so that judgment is postponed and God's attributes of forbearance and longsuffering are revealed to the non-elect. 3) Restraint upon evil by means of which God sends "correcting and preserving influences so that the ravages of sin might not be allowed to work out the full measure of their destructive power."³⁰

Murray never states explicitly that these restraints upon the wicked are caused by the internal operation of the Spirit in the hearts of the non-elect. Indeed, when he speaks of the agency of restraint, he mentions specifically civil government and points out that the purpose of civil government, as defined in I Peter 2:14, is at least in part achieved.³¹ But he seems to imply such internal workings when he speaks of a restraint which "prevents the unholy affections ... of men from manifesting all the potentialities inherent in them."

While many others speak of the fact that common grace serves special grace, Murray not only makes a special point of this, but goes on to make a very strange assertion in this connection. He writes that the salvation of the church is "not the only purpose being fulfilled in history and not ... the one purpose to which all others may be subordinate."³²

This is strange, to say the least. While Murray does not enter into this idea at all, questions arise which seem to be unanswerable to a Reformed

²⁷ Ibid., Vol. II, 96.

²⁸ Ibid., 98.

²⁹ Ibid., 98. For proof Murray cites Genesis 3:22, 23; 4:15. With respect to Cain, Murray speaks of "a halo of sanctity" which "was placed around his life" (99). Further proof is found in Gen 20:6, but the assumption here is that Abimelech was an unbeliever, something difficult, if not impossible, to prove (100).

³⁰ Ibid., 101.

³¹ Ibid., 111.

³² Ibid., 113.

man. What other purpose is there in history but the one purpose of the salvation of the church? Does God have multiple purposes in His counsel — if, indeed, Murray believes that history is the temporal realization of God's counsel? Does God glorify Himself (the one great purpose for which God does all things) in other ways than the salvation of an elect people in Christ? If so, does God have other purposes in His works apart from Christ? What a strange statement of Murray this is.

But whatever Murray may have meant, it is clear that Murray too held firmly to a restraint of sin as a part of common grace.

Slightly different is the view of Sietsma on the restraint of sin. Sietsma is not ready to find the origin or judicial basis for the blessings which the wicked received in the cross of Jesus Christ. He prefers to explain the lingering elements of good in man in terms of remnants which man preserves after the fall and which are remnants of the office in which man was created.³³ He writes:

Of course, Satan did not succeed in destroying man completely. Man is not a devil, full of conscious and deliberate hate for God. We believe, according to what we designate "common grace," that there are active in the world and in man many energies or powers of the Word and Spirit of God which prevent the transformation of all that God once created good into its very opposite. The Lord sees to it that the thoughts of the human mind, the affections of the human heart, and the works of the human hand still manifest His glory and the rich qualities of His creation. There remains a rich form of human life, even where there is no regeneration of the heart and even where the grace of salvation has not been bestowed.³⁴

Abraham Kuyper

Perhaps no one is more responsible for developing this aspect of common grace than Dr. Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper did not, of course, hold to the free and general offer of the gospel, and, in fact, sharply repudiated it. But later in life, after Kuyper had resigned from the active ministry in order to devote himself to politics, he developed his own theory of common grace. His views on common grace are to be found especially in his three-

³³ Strangely, and in seeming contradiction to what he writes, Sietsma does speak of original goodness preserved in man as being related to Christ (p. 34); but he never explains what that relationship is.

³⁴ Sietsma, K., *The Idea of the Office*, tr. by Henry VanderGoot (Winnipeg: Paideia Press, 1985) 27.

volume work, *Gemeene Gratie*,³⁵ and in his Stone Lectures published in book form under the title *Calvinism*.

After speaking of the magistrate as “an instrument of ‘common grace,’”³⁶ Kuyper broadens his definition and speaks of common grace as that which arrests sin. It does “not kill the core of sin, nor does it save unto life eternal, but it arrests the complete effectuation of sin.”

God by His “common grace” restrains the operation of sin in man, partly by breaking its power, partly by taming his evil spirit, and partly by domesticating his nation or his family.³⁷

Henry VanTil

Henry VanTil, though disagreeing with Kuyper in some respects, gives an excellent summary of Kuyper’s position as outlined in his *Gemeene Gratie*. He writes:

Creation would have returned to the void unless God in his common grace intervened to sustain it; thus the creative will is now achieved through common grace. Common grace does not merely have a restraining or negative influence but it is also positive and progressive in motivating cultural activity. Culture is a gift of common grace since through it the original powers deposited in nature were brought to fruition. The very antithesis between light and darkness is possible only on the basis of common grace.³⁸

The Christian Reformed Church

Finally, we quote the “second point” of the doctrinal decisions of the Christian Reformed Church taken in June of 1924 by the Synod of these

³⁵ Kuyper deliberately called his view of common grace *Gemeene Gratie* to distinguish it from the more common term, *Algemeene Genade*. Though it is impossible to distinguish between the two terms in an English translation, Kuyper chose the former so that his view would not be confused with the general offer of the gospel.

³⁶ Kuyper, Abraham, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943) 82.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 123, 124.

³⁸ VanTil, Henry, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959) 229. The reader will notice that Kuyper also speaks of a positive “good” resulting from this restraint of sin. This positive good is taught by all who hold to common grace. This is understandable. The restraint of sin results in “good.” This latter aspect of the question, however, we hope to treat separately.

churches and declared by that Synod to be the teaching of Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

Relative to the second point, which is concerned with the restraint of sin in the life of the individual man and in the community, the Synod declares that there is such a restraint of sin according to Scripture and the Confession. This is evident from the citations from Scripture and from the Netherlands Confession, Arts. 13 & 36, which teach that God by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin, by which human life in society remains possible; while it is also evident from the quotations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that from ancient times our Reformed fathers were of the same opinion.³⁹

With that quotation we bring our discussion of this idea to a close. It is possible to quote many more writers who have expressed themselves on this view, but a sufficient number have been quoted to give us a correct view of what defenders of common grace mean by the restraint of sin.

Some Related Matters

Although a detailed discussion of this matter of the restraint of sin will have to wait for later articles in *The Journal*, we conclude this introductory article with a few observations and general remarks.

General Favor and Restraint of Sin

Although we have discussed the aspect of common grace which teaches God's attitude of love and favor upon all men separately from our present discussion of the restraint of sin, one must not get the impression that these are two unrelated matters. All proponents of common grace connect the two ideas.

We have talked about this matter earlier in this article, but must discuss it a bit more.

That they belong together is evident on the surface from the fact that both are *grace*. They are not saving grace, but grace shown to all men. God's attitude of favor and His gracious restraint of sin are both grace, common to all.

The relation between these two is clear. Not only are the gifts of rain and sunshine evidences of God's attitude of love and favor upon all men, but also his gracious restraint of sin is evidence of His attitude of love and favor.

³⁹ Quoted from Hoeksema, Herman, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America* (Grand Rapids, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1947) 354.

After all, the inward restraint of sin by the Holy Spirit is *grace*. And grace is favor, by definition. So the relation is this: God shows His love and favor to all men in many different ways. Two of them are the good gifts He gives and the work of the Spirit in restraining sin.

But this connection between the two does not exhaust the ideas which proponents of common grace have in mind. Although they are not always as clear as one could wish on these questions, certain ideas nevertheless emerge.

The best way to get at this matter is to proceed from the question: What is considered, by the defenders of common grace, to be the relation between common grace and saving grace? More than one defender of common grace speak of this.

Herman Bavinck writes in connection with his discussion of general and special revelation:

Grace is the content of both revelations, common in the first, general in the second, but in such a way that the one is indispensable for the other.

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.⁴⁰

In a similar fashion, but more explicitly, John Murray discusses this point:

Apprehension of the truth of the gospel that is prior to faith and repentance, and therefore prior to the regeneration of which faith and repentance are the immediate effects in our consciousness, cannot strictly belong to the saving operations of the Spirit. They are preparatory to these saving operations and in the gracious design of God place the person concerned in the psychological condition that is the prerequisite of the intelligent exercise of faith and repentance. In other words, they place in his mind the apperceptive content that makes the gospel meaningful to his consciousness. But since they are not the saving acts of faith and repentance they must belong to a different category from that of saving grace and therefore to the category of no-saving or common grace.

We may thus say that in the operations of common grace we have what we may call the vestibule of faith.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Bavinck, Herman, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956) 38.

⁴¹ Murray, Op. cit., Vol. II, 115.

Thus, the whole idea of common grace is connected to the free offer of the gospel. David Silversides, e.g., says of common grace:

God enjoins his ministers to present a genuine and benevolent invitation to sinners to come to Christ expressive of his love and favour to them.⁴²

It is evident, therefore, that the connection between God's gracious attitude of favor towards the wicked and the restraint of sin include the following.

First of all, both are manifestations of God's grace shown to all men in common. Perhaps it would not even be an exaggeration to say that the idea is that God's restraint of sin is an *evidence* of His attitude of favor, just as rain and sunshine demonstrate this favor. That is, God expresses and shows His love and benevolence for all men by restraining sin in their evil hearts.

Secondly, among the evidences of God's favor is the free and gracious offer of the gospel.⁴³

Thirdly, the relation between common grace and special grace is two-fold. On the one hand, common grace, evident in the free offer of the gospel, speaks of God's love and favor towards all because it expresses *objectively* God's earnest desire and will to save all. But, on the other hand, because the *subjective* restraint of sin by an operation of the Holy Spirit within the heart is also grace, it is a preparatory grace which puts the sinner in a position to receive the gospel. It is, to use Murray's words, the "vestibule of faith."

So the conclusion of the matter is that, although common grace is not in itself saving grace, it is nevertheless indispensable for the saving operations of the Spirit. ▲

⁴²Silversides, David, *Paper on the Two Natures of Christ* (Unpublished Paper) 35.

⁴³That the free offer of the gospel is an evidence of God's gracious favor to all is evident from the first point of common grace adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, which speaks of the fact that this general offer is proof of God's favorable attitude towards humanity in general.

Book Reviews

On the New Frontiers of Genetics and Religion, by J. Robert Nelson. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Publishers, 1994. Pp. xii-212, \$12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

The discovery of the incredibly complex DNA molecule and the present work in "mapping" its approximately two billion combinations of the elements that go to make up our genetic structure have opened a Pandora's box of problems and dangers. From these arise serious ethical questions which the church must face as science continues its explorations.

Not only have scientists discovered the marvelous world of genes, but they have also discovered ways to alter the genetic structure of living organisms by taking away defective genes or substituting genes from other living creatures for genes present in, e.g., man. As these techniques are applied to humans, the possibilities are endless.

Because, e.g., some serious and debilitating diseases are genetically transmitted, it is now possible to isolate the gene causing the sickness, remove the gene from potential parents, and thus prevent future generations from receiving the defective genes and passing them on to their offspring.

It is also possible, by means of genetic substitution, to "improve" an embryo physically, and some are thinking that it is possible to improve a human embryo psychologically. Some examples include: memory enhancement; improvement of the immune system; softening and curbing of overly-aggressive tendencies; making it possible for a person to work with only half his present amount of sleep without curtailing his abilities to concentrate.

Genetic engineering, as it is called, brings to the agenda of scientists, theologians, and ethicists many questions involving pre-natal testing for genetic diseases; the legitimacy of abortions for fetuses with sicknesses; the donation of fetal organs; the financing of expensive tests, procedures, and treatments; in vitro fertilization as ways to prevent fetal abnormalities, etc.

The author of this book, himself well-versed in both genetics and theology, has provided an important study. His book is written so as to be clearly understood by those who are not experts in these fields. He reports on the latest advances in the field of genetics. He introduces the enormous number of problems which arise from genetic technology. He gives answers to ethical questions from different theologians and dif-

ferent religious traditions (he has, e.g., a lengthy section in which leading theologians from Jewish, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Islamic, Lutheran, Calvinistic, and Hindu traditions comment on various ethical questions), and he presents important decisions on these matters by various ecclesiastical groups.

While the author makes no attempt to answer the many problems which arise out of these advances in genetic technology, he does reveal his own theological perspective. It is soon apparent that the author is himself strongly in favor of advances in these fields and is optimistic about the future of the human race because of genetic engineering. His optimism arises out of his conviction that Scripture's promises of salvation refer to a bright future here in the world as gradually the world's problems are overcome. Genetic engineering will contribute in bringing this about.

When confronted with the problem of sin, he points us to what Paul had to say about sin which prevents him from doing good (Rom. 7), and he suggests that Paul's problems may very well have been genetic.

This in itself is a fascinating question. The author, quite naturally, supports his contention with appeals to the fact that drunkenness, tendencies towards stealing, towards violent and aggressive behavior, or towards homosexuality are due to genetic defects — all of which are

then correctable through genetic engineering. The Reformed believer does not necessarily disagree. We do not know how original pollution is transmitted, although we must insist that original pollution which results in total depravity is surely a matter of the soul as well as of the body. But, however that may be for the moment, Reformed believers surely believe in the corruption of the nature. But this total corruption of our natures — tendencies towards every kind of sin under heaven, including drunkenness and immorality — is our fault and responsibility. The Heidelberg Catechism reminds us that the forgiveness of sins includes God's gracious forgiveness of our sinful natures against which we have to strive all our life long (L.D. XXI, 55). Sin is indeed in the nature, in the genes, if you will. But this does not excuse us; it only makes our responsibility the greater. And Scripture is very clear that deliverance from such depraved natures comes, not through genetic engineering, which is the fond hope of today's scientists, but only through the blood of Jesus Christ and faith in Him.

Nevertheless, in keeping with modern liberal theology, especially as it touches upon these questions of genetic manipulation, the author is seemingly not averse to calling man what many theologians today call him: "Co-creator with God." The boldness and pride of sinful man, who thinks he now possesses the skills to save man, is also the fulfill-

ment of the devil's lie: "Ye shall be as God...."

The author's main purpose in writing this book is to urge pastors to acquaint themselves with what is going on in this field so that they may be able to engage in the counseling of their parishioners concerning problems which advances in genetics are bound to create for God's people. These questions are serious and important ethical questions. God's people are going to be confronted with them. Pastors must know what is going on to be able to help them.

This book will serve as a helpful beginning to an understanding of these problems. ♦

Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel, by David J. Engelsma, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, revised edition 1994; 216 pp., \$10.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Chris Coleborn.]

This book by Prof. Engelsma basically deals with the vital question, "Does the fact that the gospel of Christ Jesus is to be preached to all mankind mean that God desires and intends the salvation of all who hear that preaching, even the reprobate?" Those who hold to the well-meant offer of the gospel answer in the affirmative. Prof. Engelsma clearly says "No" to the question, with good reasons given from Scripture and

the confessed historic Reformed faith. He also makes it clear that those who deny this notion are not hyper-Calvinists, rather true Calvinists — consistent biblical Christians.

We are well aware that, to many, the relevance and importance of this question is really only academic, with no real application to vital Christianity, the welfare of the church, and to the great work of evangelism. We are also aware that others believe that to deny the notion that God intends and desires the salvation of reprobates when the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to all, is to deny the gospel itself and the very reason for preaching it, and not to have a love for the salvation of souls. This of course is the most serious accusation to be made against a Christian and a preacher of Christ's church.

Here, in this revised edition of Prof. Engelsma's book, we may find plain reasons why the denial of the above question is very important and practical not only for the honor of Christ Jesus' Person and work, but also for the welfare of the church and the true preaching of the gospel to all mankind. The author shows that any professing Reformed believer worthy of the name, and zealous for "the faith," will have a critical problem with the notion that in the earnest, urgent preaching of the gospel and call to all men and women without distinction to come to the Savior by repentance and faith, of necessity implies that God intends

and desires the salvation, not only of the elect, but also of the reprobate!

This important question has been debated for some time in professing Reformed circles. In fact, it seems to me that the debate is becoming more general and earnest in our day. This is good, for in my opinion the question has been left without proper consideration for too long by those who profess to love the doctrines of grace, and who truly believe that the Reformed faith most accurately expresses the teachings of the Word of God.

It has not been easy to find a book that faithfully, and yet in a popular way, sets out the matter for not only the Reformed preacher, but the Reformed believer. Here is such a book!

The author clearly denies that the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ to all mankind is an evidence of a desire in God for all who hear to be saved — the reprobate included. He also shows that this does not of necessity also mean the denial of “the indiscriminate, lively, urgent preaching of the gospel. It entails no hesitation to call everyone in the preacher’s audience to repentance and faith. It originates in no determination to weaken the responsibility of man before the face of the sovereign God” (p. 7).

It is correctly pointed out that the well-meant offer is in fact a cause of great peril to the faith that Calvinists profess to love. It is an essential compromise of the doctrines of Calvinism. Prof. Engelsma writes: “By

adopting the theory of the well-meant offer of the gospel, these churches begin saying ‘yes and no’ to the great Calvinistic doctrines of grace: ‘Yes, God loved and chose only some men, but, no, He also loves and desires to save everybody’; ‘Yes, God’s grace in the preaching is irresistible, but, no, God’s grace for some in the preaching fails to save them’; ‘Yes, Christ of the cross is only for the elect, but, no, He is also for the reprobate.’ This is the theology of the offer (well-meant offer, CFC). This is not the way to safeguard lively preaching. It is the way to surrender the Reformed faith. It is the way to lose the gospel of grace itself” (p. 13, 14).

The author draws out a most important lesson, I believe, from the controversy in England in the 1600s and 1700s, when the Arminianism of John and Charles Wesley was so strong, and caused some Calvinists, in reaction to it, particularly to the well-meant construction of the preaching of the gospel to all, to fall into hyper-Calvinism. The real issue in the debate on the matter of the call of the gospel is that which Reformed theology speaks of as the external call of the gospel. The matter of the external and internal call is helpfully illustrated by reference to Matthew 22 (p. 109).

This book plainly refutes the accusation made against those who deny that there is a universal love in God for all mankind, and a desire for their salvation, particularly in the preaching of the gospel, of being

hyper-Calvinists. Hyper-Calvinists deny that God calls everyone who hears the preaching of the gospel to repent of their sins and believe on Christ Jesus. Prof. Engelsma emphatically writes, "... the teaching that denies the call of the gospel to all who hear the preaching is not Reformed, biblical doctrine. It is indeed true that God calls only the predestinated, or elect, with the effectual, saving call. Them and them only, He calls by drawing them efficaciously to Himself by a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts even as He says 'Come!' in the preaching of the gospel. This is the teaching of Romans 8:30: 'Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called....' But there is also a sense, according to the Scriptures, in which He calls those who are not elect in the preaching of the gospel. Matthew 22:14 teaches this: 'For many are called, but few are chosen.' More people than the elect are called by God.... That the call to repent is not restricted to the regenerated, or 'the sensible sinner,' but goes out to everyone who hears the preaching is taught in Acts 17:30: '(God) now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.' This was the practice of the apostles" (pp. 19, 20).

Another accusation brought against those who deny that the preaching of the gospel is grace to all — even the reprobate, is that a man cannot be a true, sincere, and earnest preacher of the gospel to sinners, if he does not believe Christ has a desire that all who hear the preach-

ing be saved. The answer is given in this book; we must distinguish between the serious call of the gospel, and the well-meant offer of the gospel. Condemnation of the well-meant offer is not rejection of the serious call of the gospel to all who hear it. Having heard the preaching within the Protestant Reformed Churches, and indeed, within my own, I can testify that there can be a heartfelt, sincere, and serious call to sinners to repent and believe and so be saved, without holding to the well-meant offer notion. It is as the author writes: "... it is nothing but a caricature to portray (those) who deny the (well-meant) offer as men who, by virtue of their rejection of the (well-meant) offer, lack the fervent ardour of the apostle Paul to gain and save many (I Cor. 9:19ff.), as men who are unable or unwilling to beseech others to be reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:20)" (p. 40).

The real issue is this, writes Prof. Engelsma: "... does God love and have a gracious attitude towards everyone who hears the preaching, and does He in the preaching desire to save everyone?" This is why we must ask the question of those who profess a love of the Reformed faith, but who at the same time hold to the well-meant offer, "What grace does the reprobate receive in the preaching?" It is striking that much of the calumny of those who hold to the well-meant offer against those that oppose it, is that of the Arminians. It very much involves the doctrine of reprobation. This awful truth is that

God has eternally decreed "out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure" that certain, definite members of the human race will not be saved by Him but that they shall perish in their unbelief and other sins. Reprobation is God's eternal decree that the destiny of certain men shall be everlasting death, whether one views it as God's passing those men by with the grace of election or as the determination to damn (Canons of Dordt, I/15). "If reprobation is the decree not to give a man faith, it is patently false to say that unbelief is the cause of reprobation (Rom. 9:18-23)" (p. 58).

We accept of course that those who profess to love the Reformed faith, and at the same time hold to the well-meant offer, can see that there is a contradiction in their position. The way they seek to resolve their dilemma is to resort to what they call "the mystery." "The recourse of some to 'the mystery' to solve the problem of the contradiction between the (well-meant) free offer and the Reformed doctrine of reprobation is both desperate and erroneous. Such like to speak of the paradox of God's two wills: His will to save and His will not to save the same man. For God to love and to hate the same man, to desire to save and to reprobate the same man, to be gracious in the preaching of the gospel towards and to harden the same man is sheer contradiction. The reality of the twofold will of God is quite different. It has to do with the

fact that God at the same time decrees that a man shall not be saved [the will of God's decree] and commands that man to repent and believe [the will of God's precept]. The serious, external call of the gospel does justice to both of these aspects of God's will, but the (well-meant) offer of the gospel places a contradiction in God" (p. 60). See also pages 113ff.

We fully agree with Engelsma that, "The Reformed doctrine of reprobation and the theology of the well-meant offer are diametrical opposites. To affirm the offer is to deny reprobation. But a denial of reprobation is necessarily also a denial of election. If reprobation is made a conditional decree, the decree to condemn whoever rejects the offer, election becomes a conditional decree also, the decree to save whoever accepts the offer.... The attack on election is out in the open today in the Reformed sphere. When a Reformed theologian of vast erudition can write a 330-page book on election without ever once saying that God elected certain, particular men in distinction from others, as G.C. Berkouwer did in *Divine Election*, the cat is out of the bag" (p. 58, 59).

Prof. Engelsma also correctly points out, we believe, the link between the theology and practice of the well-meant offer, and an abandonment or compromise of the Reformed faith. He writes, "Evidence abounds in Reformed churches today that predestination and the offer are incompatible and the embrace of

the (well-meant) offer results in repudiation of the theology of predestination. Official decisions are made by Reformed churches in the Netherlands rejecting the double predestination of the Canons of Dordt as 'scholasticism' and 'determinism.' Synods of Reformed churches in the United States approve the boldest teaching of universal atonement and the sharpest attack on the doctrine of an eternal decree of sovereign reprobation.... The prevailing message in Reformed pulpits, catechism classes, seminaries, and mission fields is that of a love of God for all, of a death of Christ for all, and of the ardent desire of God to save all. This explains why Reformed churches can cooperate in evangelism with the most notorious free will preachers and organizations. Of reprobation, nothing is heard. Of an election that constitutes one eternal decree with reprobation, nothing is heard. And this means that nothing is heard of Reformed, biblical election. But if nothing is heard of biblical election, silence falls over the doctrines of grace.

"Indeed, it is not the rule that Reformed and Presbyterian theologians defend the universalism of the offer by appeal to those texts of Scripture that Pelagius used against Augustine, that Erasmus used against Luther, that Pighius and Bolsec used against Calvin, and that the Arminians used against the Synod of Dordt: Ezekiel 33:11; John 3:16; I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9b" (pp. 119, 120).

"We warn the advocates" writes the author, "of the (well-meant) offer that, so far is it from being true that the denial of the offer destroys gospel-preaching, the (well-meant) offer-doctrine itself corrupts biblical preaching. The teaching of the well-meant offer creates preaching that assures all and sundry of the love of God for them in the cross of Jesus. It creates preaching that then must proclaim faith not as God's free gift to whomever He wills but as the condition which the sinner must fulfill in order to make God's love effective. It creates preaching that soon adopts the most atrocious free will abominations on the mission field and in the congregations: the altar-call and all its accessories. It creates preaching that silences basic biblical truths, truths that Jesus Himself loudly preached in His own evangelism: 'Ye must be born again'; 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me'; 'No man can come to me, except the Father ... draw him'; 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.' In the end, the (well-meant) offer silences preaching altogether, for more effective methods of winning all to Christ are discovered" (p. 125).

It is a most helpful book for Reformed preachers who desire to preach the "whole counsel of God" — the full gospel. The book is not simply negative, condemning the

errors of both hyper-Calvinism and compromised Calvinism as seen in the doctrine of the well-meant offer but there is also the positive setting forth of how a truly consistent Reformed preacher would proclaim the gospel to all. (Chapter 3: "The Reformed Doctrine of the Call of the Gospel.")

On the matter of preaching, a most valid scriptural point is made. It is this, "The reason why God has the gospel preached both throughout the world in missions and in the established churches is that the elect may be saved to the praise of His grace"; "The Scriptures teach that divine election — not a universal love of God or a desire that all be saved — is the basis and motivation of missions, indeed of all preaching. This is Jesus' teaching in John 10. The good Shepherd causes His voice to be heard in the world. How Jesus emphasizes the importance of His voice in this chapter. His voice is simply the preached gospel in all ages. His voice, that is, the gospel saves. It leads the sheep out (v. 3). It causes the sheep to follow Him (v. 4). It safeguards them from the strangers, thieves, and robbers who are bent on the sheep's destruction (v. 5, 8). It brings the sheep into the fold (v. 16). It is the means by which Jesus gives His sheep eternal life (v. 28), preserving them from perishing.... But one thing is abundantly plain: the reason for the voice of the Shepherd is 'my sheep,' that is, the gathering and preservation of those men and women whom the Father

eternally gave to Jesus in His decree of election (v. 29). Jesus does not send out His voice because God loves all men and desires all men to be saved. In the human race, among all nations (v. 16), there are some who are sheep, in distinction from others who are not sheep (v. 26). This is due to predestination. The Shepherd comes for the sheep, to give His life for them (v. 11) and to call them (v. 3)" (pp. 72, 73).

There are some most helpful summaries and descriptions, such as, "By the well-meant offer is meant the conception, or doctrine, of the preaching of the blessed gospel that holds that God sends the gospel to all who hear out of an attitude of grace to them all and with the desire to save them all. The well-meant offer consists at the very least of these two notions: God is gracious in the preaching to all hearers, and God has a will, or sincere desire, for the salvation of every man who hears the gospel" (pp. 98, 99). Also, "That God is serious in the external call to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect, does not mean, or even imply, that He wishes all to be saved but rather means that He commands all to believe on Christ and that this command is in dead earnest. Coming to God by believing in Jesus is the solemn obligation of every man who hears the gospel. This pleases God. All those called to the marriage in Matthew 22 ought to have come.... Unbelief displeases God.... Think only of Jehovah's dealings with Pharaoh in Exodus 4-14, as explained by

Paul in Romans 9:17-23" (pp. 108, 109).

As a Reformed preacher from a British Reformed background, I was pleased to see the author being acquainted with the Westminster Confessional Standards as well as the Continental Reformed Symbols. For example, Prof. Engelsma writes, "It is a curious thing that professing Calvinists, zealous for the well-meant offer, hold up the phrase in the Westminster Confession, 7.3, 'freely offereth' as though it were the very essence of Westminster's doctrine of the calling, indeed the only thing that Westminster has to say on the calling, while ignoring not only all that Westminster teaches elsewhere on the effectual call but also that which Westminster says about the particular promise in this very article" (pp. 109, 110).

The matter of "common grace," a universal love of God, non-saving benefits and love won by Christ for the reprobate, and historical material relative to the subject are also dealt with in the book.

There is a most challenging introduction to the book by the well-known and respected Presbyterian theologian, Dr. John H. Gerstner, strongly supporting Prof. David Engelsma on this question.

I trust that this edition is not the last, and that there will in the future be a further edition. If that is the case, it seems to me that this important contribution to the debate on the Reformed preaching of the gospel, and the welfare of the Re-

formed cause generally, could perhaps be further enhanced in the following ways.

First, there could be further scriptural exegesis and elaboration on various aspects of the question. One aspect could be the important matter of the "call," and the distinctions of an external and the internal call, could be treated more at length, as it is most helpfully done, looking at the Savior's parable in Matthew 22, in *The Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, April, 1990, Volume XXIII, No. 2 — the article, "Is Denial of the 'Well-Meant Offer' Hyper-Calvinism?" I think many would also be helped if there could be a similar treatment of such questions as, Does God have a "delight" in salvation, and what does it mean? Can a Reformed preacher "entreat" and "plead" with sinners to repent and believe, as well as to declare the Lord's command for them to do so? (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:20, 21.) Does God "entreat" or "plead" in any sense at all?

Second, a general subject index as well as the scriptural index would be helpful.

Third, while it is understandable that the book is orientated to those of a Continental Reformed background, perhaps it could be borne in mind that many readers will be from a British/American Reformed (Presbyterian) background, and that certain changes, deletions, additions made in that light would be helpful — for example, the fine historical sections,

particularly towards the end of the book, deal mainly with Continental divines and churches. There is also much helpful information available in support of the author's position from a British Reformed perspective — particularly Scottish. We would suggest such articles, for example, as that admission by the renowned Scottish historical theologian James Walker found in *Theology & Theologians of Scotland, 1560-1750*, Knox Press, Edinburgh, pages 83ff. There is also Thomas Halburton's *Digression* in his *Natural Religion*, James Durham's *Commentary on Revelation, Chapter V*, page 325ff., John Knox's *Works*, ed. D. Laing, Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1848, pages 51, 314, 403. Also there is a most excellent treatise by Knox on the question of whether God wills the salvation of all men in his article, "An Answer to a Great Number of Blasphemous Cavillations Written by an Anabaptist, and Adversary to God's Eternal Predestination."

Fourth, clarify that while not all Presbyterians favor the well-meant offer, the Protestant Reformed Churches are not alone in their stand on this matter. There are those in the Presbyterian world such as Dr. John H. Gerstner, the late Dr. G. Clark, even the Christian Reconstructionist Dr. G. North, and denominations such as my own — the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, and organizations such as the Trinity Foundation that would support the faithful stand of the author and the Protestant Reformed Churches

on this question.

Fifth, while it is appreciated, as the author points out, that the use of the word "offer" has and does cause theological confusion and resultant errors in the theory and practice of preaching and evangelism, and though we can understand the suggestion that we speak of the "call" of the gospel rather than the "offer" of the gospel (cf. p. 48), the term "offer" is confessional. Rather than abandon its use, let us rescue its use. To that end, it would be helpful and clearer, if the book had always said "free-offer" where that was meant, rather than simply "offer." (E.g. pp. 33, 40, 60, 69, 119 etc.) An important distinction has been made between the two terms. Let us keep them!

Those coming from both a historic British as well as Continental Reformed background, would be troubled with some expressions used about the "Covenant of Works" (p. 135), and eternal justification (p. 15). One may not agree with all the doctrine and practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches, but in our day and age none can deny that they are a bastion of defense and propagation generally of what all true Reformed men and women would call the faith of our fathers — holy faith.

While the author quite rightly points out the unfair caricature made of those who reject the well-meant offer, it could be that some sincere men who do hold to it, but are open to be shown, like Apollos, "a more

that will still appreciate
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perfect way,” may feel they are caricatured with some of the description found on pages 86, 87. Perhaps the valid point being made behind the description would be more effective if it were expressed differently? (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

The larger print of this edition is an improvement over the first edition; but, more importantly, this reprinting adds considerably more information to the first edition. Apart from the “Introduction” being help-

fully reworked, most of the chapters have been expanded, and the most significant difference from the first edition is the addition of a new chapter, “Is Denial of the Well-Meant Offer Hyper-Calvinism?” This makes the purchase of this reprint vital for all who would love and seek to preserve the God-glorifying faith of our Reformed fathers. We trust to hear more from Prof. David Engelsma on this and related subjects. ■

Book Notices

The Dead Sea Scrolls Today by James C. VanderKam. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. & SPCK in England, 1994. Pp. xiii-210, \$12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

In 1947 several very old manuscripts were discovered by some Arab shepherds in a cave in the desert to the north and west of the Dead Sea. Since that time some 800 manuscripts or pieces of manuscripts in 11 different caves have been found. Some contain parts of Scripture, others contain documents of an early settlement in this area of what is now Jordan and which has become known as the Qumran settlement. Here a

group, probably Essenes, lived sporadically from about 150 B.C. till A.D. 68.

This book is the story of the scrolls. It is a fascinating story. The book is interesting and well-written, with all the latest information about the scrolls, which have been the object of intense study for over 40 years by international groups of scholars.

The book gives an overview of the contents of the scrolls, a history of the Qumran settlement, and a comparison of the Bible scrolls with the Old and New Testaments. It is interesting that the scrolls have proved the accuracy of the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible (on which is based our own King James Version)

even though the scrolls from Qumran are 1,000 years older than the Masoretic text — startling proof of God's gracious and providential care of the text of Scripture.

Because the scrolls and manuscripts have so much to do with Scripture, two lengthy chapters are devoted to the whole subject of textual criticism and the light thrown on this subject by the scrolls. The material on the Old Testament will be especially interesting to Hebrew students.

Anyone who has attempted to keep up a bit on these "Dead Sea Scrolls" will know that recently fierce controversy has swirled around them, controversy which has even caught the attention of the media. The book takes the time to discuss, explain, and evaluate the controversy.

The best book I have read on the subject. If you are at all interested in these scrolls, read the book.



Backgrounds of Early Christianity, by Everett Ferguson. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993. Pp. xx-611, \$29.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Dr. Ferguson has completely revised a 1987 publication of this book and has added a great deal more material. The original publication was found so useful that many colleges and Seminaries have chosen it as a text in New Testament studies. It will continue to serve that purpose.

The church has always believed that the grammatical-historical method of the interpretation of Scripture is the correct one. The historical method presupposes that the Scriptures, which were written during a specific period of history, reflect the historical situation of that period. Knowledge of the historical and cultural background of the period will enable one to understand Scripture more fully. This book is an aid in understanding the social, political, and religious background of the inter-testamentary period and the one hundred years during which the events of the New Testament took place and during which the New Testament Scriptures were written.

A smattering of the subjects treated will give the reader some idea of its contents: the Persian, Greek, and Roman kingdoms; the Roman military, illustrations of which are found in Scripture; Roman citizenship (so crucial in the life and ministry of Paul); religions of the period; philosophies of Hellenism and the Roman Empire; a very lengthy and helpful treatment of Judaism with all that it implied.

While, perhaps, every subject treated in the book can also be found treated in a good Bible Dictionary, this book is much more detailed. It can be used by ministers and students who study the New Testament, but it is written so that all God's people can read and profit from it.



Christendom and Christianity in the Middle Ages, by Adriaan H. Bredero; tr. by Reinder Bruinsma. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994. Pp. xiii-402, \$29.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko]

Adriaan Bredero, himself a Roman Catholic, and emeritus professor of the Free University in Amsterdam, has brought together into one book a number of articles and other writings on Christianity during the Middle Ages.

Bredero defines Christendom, a key term in Medieval thought, as "the countries, people, and matters which stood under the influence of Christ." In his treatment of this subject he concentrates on medieval monasticism in general, and the Cluny Order and Bernard of Clairvaux in particular, the latter

two of which are his areas of expertise.

This does not mean that other subjects are not treated. He deals with "The Truce of God" movement, the veneration of saints and the idea of sainthood, the beginnings of the Franciscan Order, Peter Abelard's life and basic theology, and a very interesting (to me) chapter on Medieval theology in the Lowlands.

The book is interestingly written and the translation is very readable. While extremely detailed, it is helpful and instructive in an understanding of some aspects of medieval thought.

The book can be used profitably by students of church history, but will prove to be a gold mine of information to anyone interested in one of the most fascinating periods of the history of the Christian church. ♦

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