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Editor's Notes

Thirty years ago, in October 1967, the first issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* appeared. The *Journal* has undergone several changes in the years which followed. For several years it was mimeographed. The first issues were circulated among ministers and other interested members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Today the *Journal* is sent to a much wider audience, which includes clergy and lay persons of many denominations located in many different countries. It is sent as well to a number of college, university, and seminary libraries throughout the world.

One thing has not changed during the past thirty years. That one thing is the purpose of the *Journal*. The purpose of publishing this *Journal*, as Prof. Herman Hanko wrote in his first editorial, is to contend earnestly for the faith in a time of great apostasy. This purpose, Prof. Hanko noted, has a positive and a negative aspect. Negatively, the founders of the *Journal* were determined to expose the many errors threatening the church; and, positively, they were determined to develop the truth of Holy Scripture for the sake of the church.

This remains the purpose of this magazine. May God give us grace to continue in this in days to come.

During its first thirty years Prof. Hanko has capably served as editor of the *Journal*. Prof. Hanko is retiring, and the undersigned has been appointed as his successor. We will miss Prof. Hanko's faithful, competent leadership as editor. We wish him God's richest blessings in his retirement years. We also hope that from time to time Prof. Hanko can continue to write articles and review books for the *Journal*.

In this issue Prof. Engelsma continues his translation of a treatise on the doctrine of the covenant, written by the late Rev. Henry Danhof. John Hooper contributes an article on the unity of the church. Undersigned continues his series on cross-cultural missions.

Robert D. Decker

Affluence: A Western Missionary Problem (1)

Robert D. Decker

The title of this installment in our series on cross-cultural missions is taken from a very significant book by Jonathan J. Bonk, who is professor of mission studies at Winnipeg Bible College and Theological Seminary.¹ We intend to give a rather detailed summary of this book. It is our conviction that any preacher or church contemplating getting involved in foreign mission work can ill afford to ignore Bonk's book.

The main point Bonk makes in the book is nicely illustrated by a former missionary's experience:

The most embarrassing moment in my missionary career occurred near the beginning, 33 years ago, when our baggage arrived in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Its arrival had been delayed for four months due to a dock workers' strike that paralyzed the port. When the long-awaited baggage finally came to the door it gave us mixed emotions.

My wife and I and our infant daughter had arrived on the field in early May. We moved into a house the national church had rented for us and we purchased everything needed in Colombo. Our furniture was made by local carpenters. The only imported items we purchased were fans, a small stove, a refrigerator, and a water filter. Besides that we had only the contents of our four suitcases.

We were getting along fine, when word came that our baggage had finally been unloaded from the ship. As soon as it was cleared by customs it was loaded onto five bullock carts for delivery to our home. How well I remember the sight of the bullocks trudging slowly up the road. The combined load consisted of no less than 18 barrels and two big crates. On the one hand we were excited, for it was like "Christmas in

¹. Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991). Hereafter we will refer to this work by the author's name.

August”.... But on the other hand there was something terribly disturbing about it. We kept saying to ourselves, “We don’t need all this stuff. Why did we buy it in the first place?”

Our neighbors turned out in force to see what the Americans were getting. As we opened the crates and barrels by the side of the house, our neighbors stared in wonderment. How rich and important this young couple must be to be able to afford five cart-loads of marvelous things!

For four months my wife and I had been building relationships and seeking to identify with the community. Our blond baby daughter provided a natural opener for conversations and a jump start for new relationships. Neighbors could see that we were not altogether different from other young parents trying to raise a child, solve everyday problems, and meet basic needs.

But then suddenly, we were discovered to be what some probably suspected we were all along—filthy rich Americans who could fill their home with every conceivable comfort and adornment. A thousand sermons could not undo the damage done that day. It would have been better for our ministry if the ship had dropped our barrels and crates in the Indian Ocean.²

We are certain that Dr. Greenway’s experience is not atypical of that of a great many missionaries in foreign fields. The affluence of Western missionaries creates a very serious problem for their work. The problem is not the fact that missionaries live extravagantly by *Western* standards. Bonk points out that most missionaries do not live extravagantly. In fact they “make do” with a whole lot less than their relatives and fellow church members in North America. By Western standards of living, missionaries “sacrifice” a great deal when they leave home and move to a Two-Thirds World country to preach the gospel.

Prof. Harry F. Wolcott having observed American missionaries in one part of Africa concluded,

“Problems related to money continue to plague and obsess many urban missionaries. They always have too much of it, and they never have enough. Their standard of living makes them seem wealthy wherever they go and results in constant conflict for them when they hold back so much of what they have for themselves. An anthropologist critical of

² Roger S. Greenway, “Eighteen Barrels and Two Big Crates,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 28, 126-127 (April, 1992).

missionaries recalled the old saw that they set out to do “good” and often end up doing “well.”³

Wolcott further observed, “On the contrary, their (missionaries, RDD) material and economic resources were seldom, if ever, adequate—and often scarce; their possessions were meager; and their spending habits with regard to food and clothing frugal to a fault.”⁴ The problem, therefore, is not that the missionaries live extravagantly.

The problem is that *relative* to the economic condition of the peoples of the Two-Thirds World there is a great disparity between the missionaries and the nationals among whom they work. The simple, disturbing fact is that Western missionaries, by comparison with the Two-Thirds World in which they work, are filthy rich. This is easily illustrated by a comparison of the Gross National Products (GNP) of Western “missionary-sending” countries like the United States and the GNP of “missionary-receiving” countries of the Two-Thirds World. The GNP of the United States in 1984 was 15,490. The GNP of Zaire was 140, India 260, Kenya 300, Nigeria 770.⁵

The relative affluence of Western missionaries is a fact. It is also true that the economic/material gulf between the Western nations and the Two-Thirds World is widening. And at this point (1991) very little has been done to correct the problem.⁶

Historical and Cultural Context of Missionary Affluence⁷

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, if not earlier, Western civilization believed in progress with the Western nations in the vanguard. Colonialism (the British and Dutch empires, for example) played a large role in this. The superior European culture/life-style was

³. Quoted by Bonk, p. 12.

⁴. Quoted by Bonk, pp. 12-13.

⁵. For several tables listing a number of these interesting, telling comparisons, see Bonk, pp. 5-10.

⁶. Bonk, p. 15.

⁷. Bonk, pp. 16-29.

imported to the inferior, uncivilized lands. The mission of the colonists was considered to be civilizing the uncivilized, "taming the wild natives." The missionaries who came to the colonies regarded themselves as emissaries of progress! Mission compounds were built employing hundreds of natives. Missionaries needed lots of equipment, tools, and food supplies sufficient for several years. All this "stuff" had to be transported, and it took hundreds of natives to do the work.

It is, as Bonk points out, no different today. Whereas one hundred years ago missionaries imported their "stuff," today they just buy it. And, missionaries need lots of "stuff." They need transportation (automobiles, planes, boats, motorcycles, e.g.). They need computers, fax machines, and other office equipment. They need air conditioners. Missionaries purchase these things at exorbitantly high prices. They think little of paying \$1.00 to \$3.00 for a gallon of gasoline.

The result of this is that, though the standard of living of the missionaries may be frugal by Western standards, it is far beyond even the wildest dreams of the nationals.

Missionaries still regard themselves as emissaries of progress. Only the terminology has changed. Now we no longer speak of progress, civilizing the uncivilized, or "taming the wild natives," but we speak of the developed countries of the West and the undeveloped countries of the Two-Thirds World. Along with preaching the gospel, the missionaries' task is to help the underdeveloped peoples reach the level of the developed countries.

The relative affluence of the Western missionaries must also be understood against the background of racism, according to Bonk. In the nineteenth century European/North American whites regarded themselves as superior to all other races, especially the blacks. A missionary delegate to the Liverpool Conference in 1860 remarked, "The Indian (India) looks upon himself as being of an inferior race; and his desire is to rise as much as possible to the level of the white man.... Civilized men should therefore go amongst them, men who will be looked up to by them ... and from whose lips they will expect words of wisdom."⁸ Wrote a Scottish missionary in 1863,

⁸. Quoted by Bonk, p. 21.

In estimating the vile, sunk, and wretched moral condition of the heathen, it matters not whether we look to China, Japan, Burma, or Hindoostan, lands in which a barbaric civilization has existed longside of the most childish superstition, or to Africa, whose Negro tribes have, since the days of their father Ham, kept sinking, from age to age, unaided, until a dreary and bloody fetishism has swallowed up all, and made them the lowest of beings that are called men. Look where we will in heathen lands, we behold the infidelity ... and piety.”⁹

The nineteenth century missionaries conceived of their task in terms of raising the backward, inferior, heathen to the level of Western civilization. Accomplishing this, they thought they would be able to “Christianize” the inferior heathen peoples and nations.

Little has changed today, except for the terminology. It is not politically correct to speak of heathen, Negroes, barbarians, etc. But, American economic growth and prosperity are possible, desirable, even necessary for the poor, undeveloped countries and peoples of the Two-Thirds World. And, the American life-style is driven by consumerism (more wealth, more and better products and services, etc.).

All this has affected the missionary enterprise. If we can raise the standard of living among the underdeveloped countries in which we work, we can pave the way for the preaching of the gospel and the planting of churches. Meanwhile the standard of living keeps rising. Missionaries continually need so much more today. A computer, for example, can do so much more than a typewriter, a plane is much faster than a train, and a four-wheel drive vehicle is better than a motorcycle, etc. This only widens the economic/material gap between the underdeveloped and the developed nations.

The Rationale for Missionary Affluence¹⁰

The question Bonk poses at this point is, “Shouldn’t missionaries be comfortable?” There are economic arguments for missionary affluence. “The cheapest mission is the mission which can keep its missionaries the longest.”¹¹ Therefore, the argument runs, missionaries

⁹. Quoted by Bonk, pp. 23-24.

¹⁰. Bonk, pp. 30-42.

¹¹. Bonk, p. 31.

must be properly housed and fed and provided with adequate medical care. These are costly necessities, but they enable the missionaries to work without distraction. Most missionaries who withdraw from the work, it is pointed out, do so on account of ill health, and they leave during the first term. The cost of preparing the missionary (education, orientation, learning a foreign language, etc., all of which can take three to six years) is lost.

Hence, the argument for affluence is: a) The cheapest missionary is a live one. b) A live one is a healthy one. c) A healthy one is a comfortable one. d) A comfortable one is a missionary whose standard of living most closely approximates that of his fellow saints at home. The conclusion? Wealth, relatively speaking, and health go together. Missionaries need comfortable homes, good furniture, good food, a decent means of transportation (preferably an automobile), vacations, good office equipment, etc., etc.

There is also what is called domestic rationale for missionary affluence. Missionaries' children (MKs, hereafter) need a proper education. Typically there are three ways to provide this proper education. If the mission is large enough, a school is set up and teachers are imported from back home. Many missionary families send the children to boarding schools.¹² The third way is to send the children back home for their education.¹³ Home schooling in rare cases may also be an option. Generally, however, it is not practiced because it takes too much time for the missionary who, after all, ought to be doing mission work.¹⁴ However the church provides for the education of the children of her missionaries, it is very costly. Only a very tiny minority of the nationals can even consider the possibility of providing what Western-

¹² For an excellent discussion of what is involved in this see, J. Herbert Kane, *Understanding Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1982), pp. 58-60.

¹³ The Christian Reformed Church provides MKs with tuition-free education at its denominational college, Calvin College.

¹⁴ While doing mission work in Jamaica for the Protestant Reformed Churches, Rev. and Mrs. Wilbur Bruinsma home schooled their children with the help of several teachers from the Christian schools in Michigan. This worked out quite well for the Bruinsmas.

ers consider an adequate education for their children. Thus, educating MKs contributes to missionary affluence. As necessary as it is, educating the MKs serves to widen the economic gulf between the missionaries and the nationals.

There is also a social rationale for missionary affluence. In 1880 a certain Dr. E. J. Southon produced a pamphlet for the London Mission Society in which he wrote,

In his travels, the missionary should always present the appearance of a gentleman. There is no necessity for discarding civilised habits because civilisation is left behind; on the contrary, it is for him to carry with him the impress of a society better than that to which he is going; hence, he should always be neat and clean in his appearance, and scrupulously careful that his garb is tidy. An untidy European will surely be criticized by the gentlemanly Arab, if not by natives.¹⁵

The point here is that just because he is Western he occupies a higher status both in his own thinking and in that of the nationals.

The close connection between the missionaries and the highly visible power and wealth of the West makes it extremely difficult for them to disassociate themselves from the status and roles assigned to the privileged. Church Missionary Society missionaries tried to do this one hundred years ago. The result was that they were regarded by the nationals as either hypocritical or failed Europeans. The missionary who attempts to “go native” today will at best be regarded with suspicion. Speaking to this point an American missionary in Peru wrote, “When we lived in Ecuador, we did ‘go native’ and the local people just thought that we were crazy.” He went on to explain,

They have a conception of ‘gringo’ and in order to gain their respect, we needed to meet their expectations, build a nice house, get a better vehicle, etc. Too close an identification with native culture diminished our standing in the community, and therefore any message we may have had for them.¹⁶

Bonk concludes, and correctly so, “Aversion to the unpleasant

¹⁵. Quoted by Bonk, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶. Quoted by Bonk, p. 38.

side effects associated with diminished standing in a community is indeed a powerful rationale for maintaining and even increasing Western missionary affluence.”¹⁷

Finally, there are strategic arguments for missionary affluence. The industrial revolution dramatically increased the wealth of the Western nations. Thus the industrial revolution enabled missionaries from the West to reach the ends of the earth. The industrial revolution also provided the means and technology to facilitate mission work. The point is that the wealth and technology greatly enhance the missionaries’ work and effectiveness in every sphere: education, literature, service and/or support, development, aid/relief, medicine, media, and more. It takes tons of money to provide hospitals and their equipment, vehicles, computers, radios, airplanes, etc. And the West has the money to provide these goods and services! The argument is, missionaries “need” all these things, along with servants, to do the Lord’s work efficiently and effectively and speedily.

Not only so, but missionary riches make a big impression on the nationals. They watch the missionaries build their houses and do their gardening and other activities and conclude that the missionaries are superior to them in knowledge, energy, and wealth. And, therefore, the missionaries, in the minds of the nationals, are worth listening to on all subjects including religion and Christianity.

Therefore missionary affluence is defended by the missionaries. This is powerfully illustrated by Bonk’s quotation of the remarks of an American missionary in Peru who said,

While committed to a Peruvian church staffed by Peruvians, we find that Peruvians will listen to a gringo and give him much more credence than one of their own. So, while we have a few Peruvian members in our mission, they are less persuasive in dealing with their own people than we, the rich, educated foreigners are!”¹⁸ ●

¹⁷. Bonk, p. 38.

¹⁸. Bonk, p. 41.

The Idea of the Covenant of Grace

by
Rev. H. Danhof
(continued)

Translated by David J. Engelsma

Translator's note: In this second section of his treatise on the covenant of grace, Henry Danhof gives a brief, but helpful account of the history of the doctrine of the covenant, especially in the Reformed tradition. I have retained, in the text, his references to sources. These references appear in parentheses. I have not translated the titles, since most, if not all, of them are available only in the Dutch language. Some who can read Dutch, however, may benefit from knowing these references. The footnotes are mine. Occasionally, I thought it necessary to give the original word or phrase. These appear in the footnotes.

In a dogma-historical sense the doctrine of the covenant dates from the time of the Reformation. It is almost exclusively a plant out of Reformed soil. As an integral part of dogmatics, it does not appear in the church fathers, the Roman Catholics, the Socinians, and the Lutherans. Nor is it found in the Anabaptists and the Baptists.¹ The real covenant-conception has been developed only in the Reformed churches.

Especially in Switzerland, the Reformers came into conflict with the Anabaptists. This external circumstance served as a goad to a deeper examination of the covenant-conception. Anabaptism did away with almost the entire Scripture, especially the Old Testament. Having no eye for our natural solidarity, it held fast to an existence of isolationism and individualism² and fled the sphere of natural life as much as possible. It wanted a congregation of the truly regenerated and an

¹. Danhof distinguishes a third, related group: “*de Doopsgezinden*.”

². Danhof has “*zandkorrel bestaan*,” literally, ‘grain of sand existence.’

immediate, perfectly holy life in the Spirit. The Anabaptist had no eye for the truth of the means of grace. Baptism is only a sign of one's own personal faith and may, therefore, be administered only to those who obviously have been regenerated. As a result, there is no place for infant baptism. The Old Testament, therefore, must be shoved far into the background in relation to the New Testament, as well as the covenant-relation in regard to the reality of being a child of God.³

With the maintenance of infant baptism, the Reformers asked concerning the connection between the Old and New Testament, as well as the significance of the means of grace. Thus, they had joined issue not only with Rome and Anabaptism, but at the same time with various movements of their time which were spiritually related to the earlier Gnosticism and the different Jewish sects. The church of the Reformation saw itself called to explain the Christian religion both in connection with and at the same time in its distinction from the religion of Israel. This it did in the doctrine of the covenant. This makes plain that the covenant-conception is no Reformed fancy or subtlety, but the most beautiful fruit of the theology of the whole Christian church.

The focus in this controversy was undoubtedly infant baptism. The Reformation had unanimously rejected Rome's doctrine that the sacraments communicate grace and righteousness and had proclaimed the Word as the chief means of grace. Exactly for this reason, however, the Reformers had to look for another ground for infant baptism, especially in the controversy with the Anabaptists. This, all of the Reformers found in their conception of the sacraments as signs and seals of God's grace. In this way, all preserved the baptism of infants. Concerning the question about the cause of God's grace in infants, however, there was sharp divergence of thought, notably between

³ That Danhof subjects Anabaptism to penetrating, severe criticism is ironic. In the conflict over common grace that would soon follow, the Christian Reformed foes of Danhof and Herman Hoeksema would charge them with the error of Anabaptism. In 1922, Jan Karel Van Baalen would publish against them the booklet, *"De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Doopersch?"* ("The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptist?") Van Baalen's answer to his question was emphatically, *"Doopersch."* Danhof and Hoeksema would respond with, *"Niet Doopersch maar Gereformeerd"* ("Not Anabaptist but Reformed").

Luther and Calvin, especially after the controversy with the Anabaptists. Luther and his followers really fell back into the sacramentalism of Rome. According to Luther, the sacrament must also work that which the Word works, although not without that Word. Therefore, the ecclesiastical administration of baptism again had regeneration as the effect, and baptism again was absolutely necessary. With this teaching, the door of the authentic Lutheran system was closed to the development of the real covenant-conception.

Calvin, on the other hand, maintained the existence of the church from the beginning and the essential oneness of the testaments, in opposition to the Anabaptists (*Institutes*, 2.10,11). In connection with this, he maintained the essential oneness of Israel and the Christian church. According to Calvin, there is in reality only one testament, although as regards administration one must distinguish between shadow and fulfillment. In a twofold administration, the Messiah is really one, and faith is one, as well as the way of salvation. The continuity of the congregation finds its origin in the fact that grace continuously works in the line of generations. Against Rome and Luther, Calvin put the covenant of God behind Word and sacraments. That covenant is also the ground of infant baptism. Thus, Calvin's view of the covenant, which does not govern his system, but comes up merely in an appendix, received the form of a doctrine of the testaments. Many, both before and after the Synod of Dordt, have followed him in this. The real covenant-idea then is less developed. Probably it is also because of Calvin's example that the doctrine of the covenant receives such scanty treatment in the Belgic Confession and in the Canons of Dordt.

The covenant-conception is much more prominent in the Zurich theologians. Dr. G. Vos calls the Zurichers the predecessors of the federal theologians in the narrower sense, inasmuch as the covenant became for them the governing idea for the practice of the Christian life (*De Verbondsleer in de Geref. Theologie*). According to Vos, the well-known authors of our Catechism, Olevianus and Ursinus, stood in the closest relationship to the Zurich theologians. This has certainly influenced the composition of the Heidelberg Catechism. Although the Catechism does not devote much attention to the concept of the covenant formally, still in a practical way that idea (of the covenant) definitely permeates the Catechism.

We find the covenant-conception more beautifully developed in

our "Form for the Administration of Baptism." According to this Reformed liturgical form, believers with their children, although conceived and born in sin and, therefore, children of wrath, have an eternal covenant of grace with God. Wherefore, they must then also be baptized. Therefore, they also have fellowship with the triune God, are called to a new obedience, may fight and overcome sin, the devil, and his entire kingdom, and extol and praise the God of the covenant forever.

Indeed, these are precious thoughts!

What they mean for us concerning the real covenant-idea depends on our own understanding of the concept "covenant." Is the covenant, which is referred to here, essential, or merely incidental? Do we have an eternal covenant of grace with God, or does grace come to us by means of the covenant? The expression, "whereas in all covenants, there are contained two parts," appears to allude to the latter. In this case, we would have to say with Maccovius that the covenant between God and man is not a real covenant, but an arrangement similar to other covenants: a treaty in which God promises something to man, e.g., life, and in turn requires something from him as a condition, e.g., obedience (*Godgel. Ondersch.*, chap. XII). After the fall, God then has repeated that same covenant (that He supposedly established with Adam), in order to teach us our duty, admonish us to obedience, etc. In this case, although in my struggle against Satan and sin I may rejoice, "God has confirmed a covenant with me in the spiritual strife! The triune God is at my side!" I still do not have a real covenant with God.

But such is indeed the case if I say, with Dr. B. Wielenga, that this covenant is no appearance, but adorable reality; no pale imitation of a human covenant, but the real and original covenant that is rooted in God's eternal decree⁴; the highest reality and truth, which is the perfect

⁴ Danhof is here denying that the biblical covenant of grace owes its origin to, is fashioned after, and is to be understood in light of earthly covenants among men. The importance of this denial cannot be emphasized too strongly. It is widespread today to assume that the covenant revealed in Scripture, especially between Jehovah and Old Testament Israel, originates in and must be explained according to various ancient, near-eastern treaties and covenants. The Presbyterian theologian, Meredith G. Kline, has been influential in introducing this notion into conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

pattern for all human activity (*Ons Doopsformulier*, p. 64). On that view, the baptism formula says to me that, according to its essence, the covenant is friendship between God and man. In this case, the believer bears in baptism the sign and banner of King Jesus. He fights on behalf of the cause of the Son of God. In the arena of this life, he is of God's party. He is such, above all, because he is God's friend. The choice between these two opinions depends, in my view, on the meaning which we ourselves attach to the term "covenant" in our baptism formula.

The Westminster Confession of Faith goes further into the covenant-idea as such. Chapter VII, 1-4 reads:

The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe. This covenant

In his *By Oath Consigned* (Eerdmans, 1968), Kline has written: "Now since in certain notable instances, particularly but not exclusively in the Mosaic covenants, it pleased the Lord of Israel to describe his covenant relationship to his people according to the pattern of these vassal treaties, no other conclusion is warranted than that 'covenant' in these instances denoted *at the formal level* the same kind of relationship as did the vassal covenants on which they were modelled" (p. 21). See also *Treaty of the Great King*, with its discussion of "suzerainty treaties" (Eerdmans, 1963). Danhof repudiates the notion, root and branch. Apart from its derivation of the holiest things of the people of God from idolatrous, profane nations, it puts us on the wrong track in understanding the nature of the covenant of God with His people. Not old records of treaties among or within ungodly nations, but divine revelation in Holy Scripture must make known to us what the covenant of grace essentially is. The life of Jehovah with Israel, and of Israel with Jehovah, is not patterned after the life of the nations, but after the life of God.

of grace is frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ, the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it therein bequeathed.

Concerning the real idea of the covenant, obviously two thoughts are here intertwined. The first sentence describes the covenant as means of fellowship between God and man. The covenant-idea is then identical with the idea of religion itself. The following sentences really present the covenant as means to the highest blessedness and salvation of men. The covenant of works serves for the reception of something that man in Paradise did not yet possess, at least, not yet unchangeably; the covenant of grace is a means for the redemption and salvation of men. In the latter case, the covenant is something incidental, something that conceivably might not have been. It is a kind of conditional promise.

Also the Westminster Shorter Catechism gives this representation. To the 12th question, the answer is given:

When God had created man, He entered into a covenant with him upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.

To the 20th question, treating of the covenant of grace, there is the answer:

God, having out of mere good pleasure, from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

Here too the covenant is understood as means to the highest blessedness of men and to the realizing of election.

The Irish Articles of Religion (1615) likewise speak of the covenant of works as a conditional promise of God. The Walcheren Articles (1693) use the covenants for an explanation of our depravity in Adam and of our redemption in Christ.

According to Dr. A. Kuyper, the covenant is essentially an alliance between God and man against every actual and possible hostile power (*Dict. Dogm., Loc. de foedere*). The making of a covenant,

according to him, is an act of friendship (*Gem. Gratie*, I, 287). Whether now the essential idea of the covenant must be sought in the friendship out of which the alliance arises, or in the alliance in which the friendship takes form against the mutual enemy, is less obvious.

According to this historical survey, the idea of the covenant has been understood as:

a. a means to men's highest blessedness, redemption, and salvation;

b. the essence of religion;

c. an alliance arising from friendship.

We adduce yet a few quotations demonstrating each of these conceptions.

A. Hellenbroek gives this answer to the question, what the covenant of grace is: "The covenant of grace is that way along which God through Christ becomes the possession⁵ of the sinner, and he becomes the possession of God (*Voorb. der Godd. Waarheden*, p. 44)

T. Bos gives a similar definition (*Genadeverbond en Bondzegelen*).

M. J. Bosma expresses himself concerning the covenant thus:

What was the covenant of works?

A covenant is an agreement. The covenant of works was an agreement between God and Adam, wherein God promised eternal life to Adam and all his posterity upon condition of perfect obedience to the probationary command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God threatening that Adam would die in case he broke this command. The elements of this covenant, therefore, were:

1. a condition expressed: perfect obedience;

2. a promise implied: eternal life;

3. a penalty threatened: death.

What is the covenant of grace?

It is the gracious agreement between God and his people, whereby God promises them complete salvation in the way of faith, and they accept in faith (*Exposition of Reformed Doctrine*, pp. 91, 111).

These quotations express a view of the covenant as not really a covenant at all⁶; as a means to men's highest blessedness, redemption,

⁵. *het eigendom*.

⁶. *oneigenlijk*.

and salvation; and as a conditional promise.

In the Westminster Confession, as well as in men such as Vos, Bavinck (*Geref. Dogm.*, II, pp. 611-614), Kuyper, B. Wielenga, and others, we find the conception that the covenant is the essence of religion. Kuyper is representative: "The covenant-idea is not something that is added to religion, but it is identical with religion. It is the idea of religion itself" (*Dict. Dogm.*, *Loc. de foedere*, p. 69).

Vos says, "Friendship is the essence of the covenant-relation" (*Compendium van de Systematische Theologie*). One finds similar expressions in almost all well-known Reformed writers. H. Hoeksema recently spoke in the same vein in his articles in the *Banner* of April 10 and 17. Also according to him, the covenant is essentially friendship.⁷

How has it come about that there are these three views of the covenant in the Reformed tradition? In my opinion, this has happened in the following way. After the break with Rome, especially Anabaptism occasioned the search for a biblical ground for infant baptism. This led to clearer insight into the connection of the generations of men. All men share in Adam's guilt. In the same manner, although in a more limited

⁷ Hoeksema is the one Christian Reformed colleague mentioned by Danhof in this history of the doctrine of the covenant. As Danhof indicates, in 1919 (when Danhof gave the address on the covenant) both he and Hoeksema had rejected the view of the covenant that had become standard in the Christian Reformed Church and were developing the conception of the covenant as a bond of fellowship. Which of them might have been "father" to this conception is an intriguing question. Hoeksema himself related that upon graduating from Calvin Seminary in 1915 he was certain that the doctrine of the covenant taught by Prof. William Heyns—the covenant as conditional contract—was erroneous, but was uncertain what the truth of the covenant might be. Within a few years of the publication of Danhof's treatise on the covenant, Danhof and Hoeksema were battling together in the Christian Reformed Church for the truth of particular grace. Shortly thereafter, virtually simultaneously, both were cast out of the Christian Reformed Church for their united opposition to the doctrine of common grace which the Christian Reformed Church adopted as official church dogma in 1924. The subsequent sad separation between the two was described in my introduction to this translation of Danhof's work on the covenant (*Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 29, no. 2, April, 1996: 51-61).

sphere, there is also communion in the righteousness and life of Christ. The tendency was to view Adam and Christ more as our representatives than as covenant friends⁸ of God. The term "covenant-head" was applied to both. In our relationship to the head of the covenant was seen the real covenant-relation. Thus, one could explain the common depravity of the children of men, as well as the continuity of the working of the grace of God in the line of generations. One also had a ground for infant baptism.

However, that thinking almost inevitably had to result in confusing the covenant of works with the probationary command. Generally, the covenant of works was considered to be a conditional promise of life. However, seeing that Adam already possessed life and, therefore, did not have to obtain it for himself or for his descendants, the promise of God was made to refer to the unchangeable life of eternal glory. The covenant must serve for the obtaining of salvation in the highest degree. The promise, condition, and threat remain. To the question, why Adam would in fact be guilty, if he did not desire that higher life for himself, the answer was that such was Adam's obligation toward God. Because God willed that Adam should be partaker of the unchangeable life of salvation in the highest degree, Adam must, for God's sake, desire it for himself and his descendants. "Covenant" is figurative, a manner of speaking, no reality. It serves merely to indicate the obligation that men have toward God.

However, that left the special and very frequent use of that term unexplained. Therefore, others sought something real in the term and concept "covenant." It is impossible for man to enjoy God in His infinite exaltation. The worship of God is possible only if God condescends to man and raises him up to Himself. That explains the creation of man after the image of God. Religion is fellowship with God, and the covenant is the essence of true religion.

This also really implies that the real covenant-relation is not our relationship to Adam or Christ. Rather, the covenant-relation is identical with the relationship in which, through Adam or Christ, we stand to God. The covenant points to our fellowship with God. It is, therefore, not first of all the question, what the head of the covenant,

⁸. *bondgenooten*.

Adam or Christ, does for those who are included in him, but what he is and does in his relation to God. Rightly understood, it may be said that he does not have to earn life for us. Rather, he has to realize the covenant of God. He is the servant and covenant friend of God. He must serve God, but unconstrained, according to his own free choice, as a friend. God's servant is God's child, and the child resembles his father; they are friends. Religion is fellowship, covenant-fellowship, friendship. ●

(to be continued)

Biblical Church Unity

John Hooper

Notes

John Hooper lives near the city of Plymouth on the south coast of England. He was brought up in Arminianism, but over the years the Lord led him to embrace the doctrines of the Reformed faith. This involved a rethinking of ecclesiology, particularly a change in view from Independentism to an understanding of Scripture's teaching on the unity of the church.

The article was not written with the intention of it being published in the Journal, but the editor thought it an important contribution from one who knows both sides of the question and has firsthand experience of Independentism.

One must, as he reads the article, remember that it is not written as an abstract essay on the church. It is written within the context of the ecclesiastical situation in England, where Independentism is, for the church, a way of life. It is written out of the conviction that Independentism is wrong and that the hope for the church in England lies in part in abandoning this dead-end street in order to seek earnestly the unity of Christ's church. While it will have particular meaning to our readers in the United Kingdom, it will be of value also in this country, where more and more people, disillusioned with the apostasy in their own denominations, are opting for the dangerous position of Independentism.

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Herman Hanko

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
for brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious ointment upon the head,
that ran down the beard, even Aaron's beard:
that went down to the skirts of his garments;
As the dew of Hermon,
and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion:
for there the LORD commanded the blessing,
even life for evermore.*

Psalm 133

Introduction

The expression “church unity” is viewed by many evangelical and Reformed people today with understandable suspicion. Being a term which is almost exclusively associated with the ecumenical movement, it conjures up pictures of main-line denominations striving to bury their theological differences and merging to form ever larger ‘church’ organizations. One can see as the ultimate end of this movement reunion of the nominal Protestant churches with Rome and the formation of a one-world church having the pope at its head. Certainly all talk of church unity in this sense is off the agenda for Christians and churches who seek to be governed by the Word of God.

There is a danger, however, that in our eagerness to condemn the false we also overlook the true. It may be that we even condemn the true with the false. As a reaction against ecumenism the tendency very often is for evangelical churches to adopt a position of independence, eschewing formal ties with other churches of like mind.

In addition to those churches which have been historically independent, the last thirty or so years have seen many ministers and churches in the UK withdrawing from the main denominations over doctrinal issues and maintaining an independent existence. For some this has involved paying a high material price. One can sympathize with their reluctance to become embroiled again in denominational issues. Their fears of theological compromise, which is so much a part of main-line denominational life, are perfectly understandable. But the question arises, do the results of this surge in independency really commend it as a God-honoring alternative? And more to the point, is it biblical?

It is sad, yet true to say, that as the thinking Christian takes a step back to survey the evangelical/Reformed church scene in Britain today, all he sees is confusion. He sees a hotchpotch of churches, each loudly claiming loyalty to the Scriptures, yet each going its own way and doing its own thing. Surely the time has come to ask whether this situation brings glory to God. Is this what Paul really means by decency and order? Is this the situation that prevailed in the days of the early church as, led by the Holy Spirit, the apostles established churches throughout Asia Minor and Europe?

It seems to me that while we have been quick to condemn the false unity of the ecumenical movement, and rightly so, we have been strangely silent in promoting the true unity revealed in the Scriptures.

This study is an attempt to break that silence and to present what I am increasingly convinced is the biblical teaching on the unity of the church, particularly as it is expressed in her life and government. May it encourage the thoughtful reader to search the Scriptures for himself and prayerfully consider the issues with a view to applying them to our own needy times.

1. The Principle of Biblical Church Unity

In essence the church is a perfect unity. The Bible teaches us that this is true despite all the apparent evidence to the contrary. Whatever we may see around us and experience in our own lives of divisions and strife amongst Christians and churches, it remains ever true that the church of Jesus Christ is one. She is made up of the elect children of God, each foreknown and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, from every nation, tribe, and tongue, of every generation, gathered together into one. In His electing work God did not choose for Himself a disordered rag-bag of individuals, He chose a church, a single, structured, living organism to be understood spiritually as one united whole, in Christ.

Scripture uses many vivid figures of speech to illustrate this truth and bring it home to us clearly. The church is described as one flock of many sheep, a house, a temple of many stones fitly framed together (see John 10:16; I Pet. 2; Eph. 2:11-22; Eph. 4:15,16). Above all, she is the glorious body of Christ, one entire, perfect body comprised of many members, each having his proper place and rule in the body, together constituting one organic whole: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ..." (I Cor. 12:12ff.; see also Rom. 12:4,5; I Cor. 10:17; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:4; Eph. 5:30).

The subject of our study, then, is nothing short of the unity of Christ, and His is a perfect, unblemished unity that cannot be divided (I Cor. 1:13).

Be of one mind

This being the case, we must emphasize, as does Scripture itself, that the unity of Christ's body is a unity that must be visibly expressed on earth. Again and again the Holy Spirit, through the apostolic writers, exhorts the people of God to unity.

News had evidently reached Paul that there were divisions at Corinth: "...it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren,... that there are contentions among you." He condemns this open warfare as carnality. They were still babes in Christ, or at least behaving as babes. He continues, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:11,10). Again, as he takes leave of them in his second letter, Paul reminds them of their calling: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (II Cor. 13:11).

In writing to the Philippians, Paul tells them of the joy they bring to his soul, but it is a joy that is as yet incomplete. He admonishes them, in order that his joy might attain its full measure, "that ye be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. 2:2).

Thus Paul was at pains to promote unity and to encourage the saints to be of one mind and to live at peace with one another. The local church was not to be a place of discord and dissent but of peace, brotherly love, and unity. Believers were to be "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10). "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33). Peace is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and ought to pervade all His gathered churches. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body" (Col. 3:15).

But our subject is not primarily the unity of the local church. We will take that as understood. What we need to grasp is that the calls for unity which the apostle made, while certainly addressed to specific historic local churches, were also intended for a far wider hearing. The unity the Lord requires is a unity that reaches far beyond the walls of the church local.

It is this aspect of truth, so commonly abused, neglected, ignored, or denied, that we want to examine here.

The Scope of the Command

The epistles, and hence their exhortations to unity, were not always addressed to individual local congregations. When Peter wrote,

“be ye all of one mind” (I Pet. 3:8), it was not to one local church in one town but to all the scattered saints of Asia Minor, an area covering many thousands of square miles (I Pet. 1:1). When Paul wrote “be of one mind,” it was to “the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia” (II Cor. 13:11; 1:1), Achaia being a province of Greece covering the whole of the southern half of the country. One other church which most certainly would have been included in this salutation, as well as that at Corinth, was the one at Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1). The churches in that part of the world were not just to be united internally but also with each other.

Similarly the Galatian letter had a regional application. Galatia covered a large central area of what is now Turkey and was blessed with a number of local churches. This explains why Paul addressed his letter to “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:1; note the plural). Again, when he writes to the Corinthian believers about collecting alms he says, “as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” (I Cor 16:1).

The Colossian letter too was written for more than one congregation. We know that in the neighbourhood of Colossae both Philemon and Nymphas had churches meeting in their homes (cf. Phile. 2 and Col. 4:9; 4:15). This letter was to be taken to the nearby city of Laodicea and there “read also in the church of the Laodiceans.” In return, the Colossians were to “likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col. 5:16).

We may broaden the scope still further because, in writing his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul was addressing “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:2). His Ephesian letter too is addressed generally to “the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1).

We can draw from these Scriptures the conclusion that unity was to be present not only *within* the churches of the New Testament, but also *amongst* them. All that everywhere called upon the name of Jesus Christ at that time were to speak the same thing and be of one mind, without strife or division. It was a responsibility placed upon the people of God generally, wherever they were to be found.

But there is a still broader application. Those exhortations to unity were not given to churches of just one age and generation but to the entire body of Christ of all time. They are for every generation. The letters of Paul and the other apostles have been bound together by the Holy Spirit into one inspired sacred volume. Together with the writings of the prophets (cf. Eph. 2:20), they have been sent to all the churches

of every succeeding generation, to the four corners of the earth. They are not bound by time or space. The appeals for unity, therefore, are directed at us too!

Yes, we in our day have a responsibility to the Head of the church to ensure that there are no divisions and schisms within His body but that all are of the same mind, united with a unity that extends beyond the walls of our own local church to embrace all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. That is a heavy responsibility, but to ignore it is most certainly to live in disobedience to our common Lord.

Perhaps at this point someone raises the objection that it is not being realistic to expect all believers to dwell together in unity. It is impossible to fulfill. It is difficult enough to achieve unity in one local church, and a small one at that, let alone among a number of churches. And as for all churches being united together, that is pure fantasy.

To a certain extent, that is quite true. We all see things differently. We are brought up in different family traditions. We come from varying cultural backgrounds, and we all differ as individuals. These things are bound to be reflected in the churches. But the apostles' exhortations are not meant to be realistic: they are idealistic. They establish a principle. They are what God says and are made from His perspective. They do not make allowances for the fact that churches are made up of people who are still sinners and still prone to pride, disputing, strife, jealousy, and so on. They set out the ultimate standard, even though it can never be met on earth. They show us the perfect way in which we should strive to walk. They show us the goal which we are to desire with all our heart and work for with all our strength.

That is how it is with all of God's commands. They present us with our moral obligations. The fact that we are not able to live out a principle does not invalidate that principle or release us from its obligation. We cannot live a single hour without sinning, but still God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Likewise He still says, "Be ye all of one mind." It is a command based upon the incontrovertible principle that the church of Jesus Christ is one. The only reason that it is not one and cannot be one in this world is the sinful, proud independence of us, her members.

Only in the sinless perfection of heaven will our desires be fulfilled and the ideal become glorious reality. Only when we are free from sin shall we be perfectly united and love one another as we should.

Only then will the body of Christ know perfect unity within herself and with her Head, and what is true now in principle will be true also in experience.

But even so, we may, we should, experience something of that heavenly unity here upon earth. We have been born again. God has not only given us His commands but He has also given us His Spirit. This means that, despite our fallen nature, with the command comes also the ability to obey. By the Spirit of God we are able to know in some small measure, as a foretaste of heaven, the unity of His church. Hence it is called "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). It is a unity that is produced and imparted by the Holy Spirit of Christ. He brings forth from our hearts and lives the fruits of love, joy, peace, etc., so that even Jews and Gentiles are brought together in the bond of peace. It is for this unity that we are to strive.

Unity in Operation

The unity of the Spirit is not merely an abstract idea that cannot be experienced. It is a principle that manifests itself in practical, tangible ways. The reader of the book of Acts and the letters of the apostles ought not fail to notice this. The very fact that the epistles were not always addressed to individual congregations but in some cases to regional groups of churches is itself evidence of unity at work.

When the inevitable divisions arose amongst churches, such as those in Achaia, they were dealt with promptly. Churches were separated geographically by many miles of land and sea, but they did not sit in splendid isolation. Even though they had their own cultural distinctives, and certainly their distinctive problems, they were together. Spiritually they were one.

The New Testament provides us with three compelling examples of this unity at work.

1. Relief of the poor

An unmistakable feature of early church life was a commendable liberality in distributing material help to the poor. This was a duty enjoined on them, and on us, by the apostles. Paul drew on the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself to enforce the point: "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to

remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35; see also I Cor. 16:1-4).

The early church took up their responsibility with spontaneous enthusiasm and sacrifice. The needy believers in Jerusalem and the pilgrims who had journeyed from afar at Pentecost found that their every need was met. "All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44, 45).

This passage is often misrepresented as teaching that the believers sold and pooled all their possessions in order to live in some kind of commune arrangement, but there is nothing to indicate that that was the case. The selling and sharing was a continual activity. At no time did the believers reach the point at which they had sold everything they owned. Acts 2 simply tells us that they were selling their possessions and sharing the proceeds with those whom they knew to be in need, as those needs arose. They most certainly kept their houses, because we read that they were "breaking bread from house to house" (v. 46).

This generosity of spirit was not confined to immediate neighborhoods. Almsgiving extended to meeting the needs of those at a distance. In Acts 11 we find the disciples at Antioch sending relief, every man according to his ability, "unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea" (vv. 29, 30).

Paul encouraged the believers in Corinth, and by implication throughout Achaia, to give generously in supplying the needs of the saints in Macedonia so that "your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality" (II Cor. 8:14).

The Macedonian believers themselves were noted for their own liberality, despite afflictions and "deep poverty" (II Cor. 8:2,4). Macedonia covered an area roughly equivalent to the northern half of modern Greece, and we know of at least three churches within its borders: at Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea. The Thessalonian church is especially commended by Paul for their love of the brethren "in all Macedonia." He urges them, "but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (I Thess. 4:9-10).

The churches of Macedonia apparently collected their alms, pooled them, and entrusted them to the apostle Paul, asking him to distribute them on his travels. Paul described this happy task as taking

upon himself "the fellowship of the ministering of the saints" (II Cor. 8:4).

On another occasion Paul went to Jerusalem solely with that intention: "But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:25,26). All the Greek churches were involved together in helping the saints at Jerusalem.

In order that he remain above reproach, Paul entrusted the gifts collected in Macedonia to three men, and it is instructive to note, in no fewer than three verses, how these men are described: "And we have sent with [Titus] the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; And not that only, but who was chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace" (II Cor.8:18-19). These men were "the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ" (v. 23). The Corinthians were to receive them with affection, proving to them "and before the churches," i.e., those churches who had sent them, that the apostle's testimony concerning their love had been true (v. 24).

The point is that these three men were not sent by just one independent church, nor yet by three churches acting independently of each other, but by "the churches" working together. There was evidently a procedure in place whereby the churches could cooperate in choosing and commissioning the right men. It has to be said that in these days of fierce independency such an operation could never be undertaken.

Clearly the early church took "the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1) very seriously. It involved much time and labor, so much so that the apostles found it was distracting them from their primary task of prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2, 4). For this reason they commanded the church to choose seven men "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" of caring for the widows (Acts 6:3). Seven such men were duly chosen and appointed to the work, and therein we have the origin of the office of deacon in the churches of Christ.

The office of deacon, like the office of elder, is a continuing office. His work is a continuing work. The poor are always with us, and their needs today are to be met by the dispensing of alms just as they were in the churches' earliest times. That is the deacons' work, together

with the visitation of the sick and widows, bringing relief in the form of material help and words of consolation and cheer from the Scriptures. Today the office of deacon has degenerated into little more than that of a caretaker who maintains the material fabric of church buildings. Does it ever occur to the modern deacon that his earliest counterparts did not have any church buildings to maintain? What did they do? They cared for the material needs of the church. That is a crucial distinction but one that is lost today.

The current neglect of the deacons' true work is a serious matter, and that for three reasons. In the first place, the ingathering and distribution of alms is the very purpose for which the office of deacon was created. It is the deacons' *raison d'être*. Not to carry it out is to disobey the church's Head. In the second place, the consequences for both the material and spiritual well-being of the poor in our churches are dire. The priestly mercies of Christ are being denied them. In the third place, and this is the salient point, the churches are deprived of one of the most important and certainly the most expressive and tangible signs of their unity. Within the body of Christ there are materially prosperous churches and there are materially deprived churches. When we have the example of the early churches to follow and the means, in the office of deacon, to fulfill it, what grounds do we have to neglect the poor just because they are not in our own local church? It is the calling of prosperous churches to collect alms and, through the deacons, to dispense them to those in need wherever that need may arise.

But there are further examples in the New Testament of unity at work.

2. Labouring together in the gospel

Our second example can be found sprinkled liberally throughout the epistles. They are the expressions of endearment used by the writers towards their fellow believers. There was a deep bond of love and affection between them, no matter how far apart they happened to be geographically. Paul begins his letter to Philemon in this way, writing from Rome to Colossae: "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier". The same short letter ends: "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in

Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers" (Phile. 1, 2, 23, 24).

The salutations with which Paul closes his Roman, Colossian, and first Corinthian letters give the same clear demonstration of the spiritual unity which bound the saints and churches together. It was a unity which expressed itself in love and mutual support among fellow laborers in the work of the gospel. They were all in it together.

Paul often used the term "fellow" to describe his partners in the gospel. Titus was his "fellowhelper" (II Cor. 8:23); Timothy, as well as those others quoted above from Philemon's letter, was Paul's "fellowlabourer" (I Thess. 3:2); Epaphroditus and Archippus were his "fellowsoldiers" (Phil. 2:25; Phile.2); Epaphras and Tychicus were "fellowservants" (Col. 1:7; 4:7) and in Colossians 4 Paul lists several "fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God." The work of the gospel was one work, and they were all fellows together in that work. They were not working independently of each other.

This is wholly appropriate for an organism. Churches and their members are to live, think, and work together as one, one body, the body of Christ, with one heart and one soul. They are to encourage one another, love one another, care for one another, and strive together in the work of the gospel as fellow laborers.

The reality and intensity of unity amongst the New Testament churches is clearly evident as through Paul's letters they sent their united salutations around the world. Hence we read in the letter to Corinth, "The churches of Asia salute you" (I Cor. 16:19), and in Paul's letter to Rome a general greeting from all the churches together: "The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). Can one seriously imagine such greetings being sent today even from the churches of one English county to those of another? In independency the lines of such communications are broken.

Sometimes, however, questions arose in the churches. Invariably these questions concerned not just one church, nor even a number of churches, but all of them. Our third example of unity in operation is concerned with how the churches dealt with that kind of problem.

3. The Jerusalem council

When difficulties arose at Antioch over the place of circumcision in the new dispensation, it was clear that the issue at stake was not just

a local one. It affected all the churches and therefore needed to be dealt with at a broader level than the local congregation. Thus we read in Acts 15 that the Antioch brethren “determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about the question” (see Acts 15:1ff.). True, these were apostolic days and therefore very different from our own, but the point is that in seeking apostolic authority the church at Antioch did not act alone. The brethren met with the elders at Jerusalem, and a church council was convened. They “assembled with one accord” and all the problems were openly discussed.

At the close of their deliberations emissaries and letters were sent to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia to convey to the churches in those places the authoritative conclusion of the council. As Paul and Silas traveled “they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4).

We will return to these events later, but suffice to say now that here was established a pattern for the churches to continue throughout the post-apostolic era. There would be no apostles then because the canon of Scripture would be complete. When matters of common concern arose, the elders of the churches were to meet together before the Word of God, which would be their sole authority in all matters of faith and practice. Led by the Spirit of God into the truth, the churches would then continue in one mind, speaking with one voice.

2. The Basis of Biblical Church Unity

What was it, then, that held those early churches together? What was the basis of their unity? What was the glue? Well, of course, it almost goes without saying that theirs was not the artificial unity of our modern-day ecumenists who are held together by compromise. Neither was it that perfect unity for which the Lord prayed in John 17, “that they may be one as we are one.” For that we must wait until we reach glory. No, what united the churches of those days was the truth: “Therefore love the truth and peace” says the Scripture (Zech. 8:19), and therein lies the heart of the matter.

It is not a case of either/or but both/and—truth and peace. True peace and biblical unity cannot be bought at the expense of truth.

We have already established that the unity of the church is no less

than the unity of Christ, in whom there is no division. What the ecumenists forget, though, is that Christ also declared Himself to be “the truth” (John. 14:6). In Him there is no falsehood or deviation, for He is the pure and absolute Truth. Therefore, just as the church is in Christ united, so she is also in Christ pure and undefiled. This means in practice that as the church militant, the church in the world, seeks to express the unity of the body, she can do so only by keeping herself in the truth.

Common Belief in the Truth

The teaching which the Lord Jesus Christ imparted to His disciples throughout His ministry was truth in all its pristine glory, untainted by even the suspicion of error. His words to Pilate are the Scriptures’ own confirmation of that, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth” (John. 18:37).

That truth Christ had received from His Father in heaven: “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me,” He says (John 7:16). “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (see John 8:28-32; 12:49, 50; 14:10, 24; 15:15).

This divine truth, this pure doctrine from heaven, the disciples learned at the feet of their Master. He imparted it to them as only He could, without error, and in it they were all united. On the day of Pentecost they were “together,” they were “with one accord” (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 44, 46). Such was the visible unity of the Lord’s disciples.

This same truth the apostles then took with them and preached wherever the Spirit of God sent them. Paul, the apostle born out of due time, assured the Corinthian believers that what he had preached to them he had been taught by no less a teacher than the Lord Himself: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” (I Cor. 11:23).

Similarly, to the Galatians he wrote, “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11, 12).

Each apostle received from the Lord the same body of doctrine and preached the same gospel wherever he was sent. Whether in Athens, Rome, or Jerusalem the same Christ was presented, the same message

of salvation declared, and the same doctrines expounded, without contradiction, just as the apostles themselves had been taught by the Savior.

What did Timothy hear from the lips of Paul? He heard “the form of sound words,” to which he was to hold fast (II Tim. 1:13) and in turn preach to others. He too preached exactly the same message. Paul sent Timothy to Corinth so that his “son in the faith” could remind the believers there “of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church” (I Cor. 4:17).

Notice what Paul says: “as I teach everywhere in every church.” He did not attempt to adapt the content of his message to his various hearers: “And so ordain I in all churches” (I Cor. 7:17). “As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” (I Cor. 16:1). “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (I Cor. 14:33; see also I Thess. 2:14).

From all of this it follows that the entire early church, that first generation of new dispensation believers, was grounded in the truth, even as though they had heard it from the lips of the incarnate Truth Himself. In fact Paul explicitly tells the Ephesians that they had heard Christ. Of course, they had not seen Him in the flesh nor heard Him speak; but, nevertheless, through the voice of the apostle they had heard Him. They had been taught by Him “as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:20-21). This was because Paul had preached to them the word of truth (Eph. 2:13), which is the word of Christ (Col. 3:16).

The apostles were able to do this because in the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost came He who would “bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). Even though the Lord was no longer with them in body, His Spirit was present, guiding them into all truth: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me” (John 16:13, 14).

Here then is the bond, the glue, that held those early believers together. They were united in the same system of truth, the faith once delivered unto them by the Lord’s apostles, that apostles’ doctrine in which they were steadfastly to continue (Acts 2:42; Jude 3). That was the bond. The basis of their unity was truth. It is the truth, both then and now, which binds the Lord’s people together such that they are all of one

mind. That is the essence of biblical church unity: it is to share a common belief in the eternal, unchangeable truth.

Doctrinal Succession

What we must realize is that that same body of truth which united the churches of Galatia and Achaia with those of Jerusalem and Ephesus, every succeeding generation of the Lord's people have had in their possession. It was not unique to the days of the apostles. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write it down for us, so that we have it now in our own hands without alteration, no more and no less. Therefore the unity which they experienced in their day is no less accessible to us.

The church today has no excuse for disunity merely because she has come such a long way in time from the golden age of the apostles. We have the same faith, the same apostles' doctrine, the same word of truth as the early church possessed. This is the true apostolic succession—not a succession of office or authority but a succession of doctrine, of truth down the ages. Never has the church been without it: "I have given them thy word," said Christ, "thy word is truth" (John 17:14, 17).

The church in our day has received the truth as a glorious heritage. From generation to generation that heritage, like the athlete's baton, has been handed down until we are entrusted with it for safe keeping in these closing years of the twentieth century.

The consequence of this succession is that we enjoy a blessed organic unity with the saints of former days. It must be said that this is not sufficiently appreciated by us, if at all. If we are united with the saints of past generations in a common belief in the truth, being guided by the same Spirit of truth, that is a great blessing, and we can live, or should live, in the consciousness of it. We should live in conscious fellowship with the church of the past. No individual believer, no local church or denomination of churches can sit in historical isolation, any more than it can in geographical isolation, because all are members together of the same body.

Maybe one of the reasons why this consciousness has been lost is the church's ignorance of her history, but I believe there is another even more important reason. We live today in an age of unashamed individualism. The 'rights' and desires of the individual are considered paramount. He is independent. He is responsible only to and for

himself. He sets his own goals and ethical standards in isolation from all that has gone before, and even to the disregard of others around him. He goes his own way and seeks his own ends for his own personal fulfillment.

Independence is the spirit of the age. Wives seek independence from their husbands. Husbands want independence from their wives. Parents want to be independent from their interfering children, and when the children grow up they want to be independent from their aged, burdensome parents. The results of this in society are clear to see as abortion, child abuse, neglect of the elderly, and other social evils abound.

Needless to say, such individualism has no place in the church of Jesus Christ. Each member of the body, each living stone in the building occupies a position in relation to all the others irrespective of time and place. We hold the truth in relation both to those who have gone before and to those who will come after us.

This is a principle brought out clearly in Paul's letters to Timothy. Paul writes that he had received the gospel, the "glorious gospel" he calls it, as a sacred trust (I Tim. 1:11). It was committed to him for safe keeping. He in turn passed it on to Timothy with the command that he was to hold on to it: "hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" (II Tim. 1:13, 14).

Likewise Timothy was to pass on the baton of truth to the generation after him: "And the thing that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men." And what were those faithful men to do in their turn but "to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2).

In a similar vein, Paul writes to the brethren at Thessalonica, this time using the term "tradition" to emphasize the continuity of truth: "stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15).

That which our fathers have taught us we in turn are to pass on to our children, for they are the church of their generation. We have a responsibility to them, "shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.... That the generation to come might know them, even the

children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps. 78:4-7). In this way each child of God, from Adam to the last elect soul, is related to and united with every other.

We are to "hold the traditions." We are to hold fast to the apostles' doctrine which has been passed down to us, the Word of God, for that is the bond which unites us, just as it united the churches of two thousand years ago. It unites the churches both among themselves and with the church of past and future generations.

There is a continuity of doctrine, originating in heaven, woven into the very fabric of church history as an unbroken thread. Ever present, it unites the whole church until the gathering of the elect is complete, for the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself a church agreeing in true faith.

Truth Divides?

The objection is often made, however, that rather than uniting, truth divides, doctrine divides. There is certainly a sense in which that is true. Truth does divide—it divides from the lie. The churches of the New Testament were not only to unite in the truth but also to shun those who were in error: "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). He who preaches "another gospel," "let him be accursed" (see Gal. 1:6-9).

To the Thessalonians Paul issues a strong and what may appear to us a most unloving command, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us" (II Thess. 3:6). This is what marks out true unity from the false unity of the ecumenical movement. When the truth is rejected, the lie must be withstood and shunned.

The cause of disunity is always error, never truth. In Philippians 3:2 Paul writes, "beware of the concision." He is warning the church of certain Judaizers, "evil workers" he calls them, who were insisting that the rite of circumcision should still be performed, even on Christian converts. They were putting value on the outward rite, while denying

the inner reality of heart circumcision (see Rom. 2:28,29). By a clever play on words the Holy Spirit underlines the very point we are making here. By their erroneous insistence on the cutting of the flesh (circumcision), they were guilty of the mutilation (concision) of the body of Christ. They were making a cut in the church, causing a tear and division, rending the church apart (cf. Rom. 16:17,18).

The approach of the liberal and the ecumenist is to say that the church is in search of the truth and that different parts of the body find it in different expressions. They then go on to argue that each such 'expression of truth' is equally legitimate and therefore must be respected by all. That road leads only to the blind alley of relativism, where there is no truth and no error, where everyone has the right to believe what he wants to believe.

No, the church is not in search of the truth, she has the truth. She is the custodian of the truth. She has the Word of God and she has the Spirit of truth as her Interpreter.

The church has indeed come a long way in time from the age of the apostles. Two thousand years is plenty of time to account for the multitude of heresies, lies, and half-truths which plague the churches today. A tendency to depart from the truth was evident very early in church history, so much so that it surprised even the apostle Paul (see Gal. 1:6). It was present even within the apostolic band (see Gal. 2:11), and subsequent history is littered with departures from the faith, prompting what is the only biblical response from those who remain faithful: separation for the re-forming of the church anew. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (II Cor. 6:17). That is the biblical pattern, of which the sixteenth century Reformation is such a shining example.

Yes, truth divides from those who oppose it, but it unites in a most beautiful way, crossing geographical and historical barriers, all who love it and who walk in its ways. In the church of Jesus Christ no one holds the truth in isolation.

3. The Expression of Biblical Church Unity

To summarize thus far, we have sought to establish that the basis for church unity is belief in the truth. We have noticed that this was the bond holding together the churches of the New Testament. They were

united in a common belief in the truth of God as it had been delivered to them by the apostles.

We have noticed also that the truth is no less than Christ Himself, for He said, "I am ... the truth" (John 14:6). To believe in the truth is no less than to believe in Christ. That is faith. We can say, therefore, that the bond uniting believers and churches is "the faith." "There is one body,... one faith" (Eph. 4:4-6). Objectively, "the faith" is that body of truth contained in the Scriptures, it is that "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3); subjectively it is that which unites us to Christ. Understood in both senses, faith is God's precious gift to us by His grace. We believe "according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:19; see also Col. 1:29 and Eph. 2:8-9).

The question we consider now is how this gift of God expresses itself. Does faith stay silent? Does faith not speak? Scripture provides us with the emphatic answer that, yes, faith does speak. It must and it will speak.

Confession of Faith

Faith cannot remain silent: "I believed, therefore have I spoken" confessed the psalmist (Ps. 116:10). Faith has a voice which even all the enmity and persecutions of the world cannot put to silence: "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (II Cor. 4:13).

It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). The mouth provides the evidence by which we know the spiritual state of the heart, whether it is good or corrupt. If a man has evil treasure in his heart he will bring forth evil things from his mouth, but "a good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things" (Matt. 12:35).

Where there is faith, a heart indwelt by the Spirit of truth, there will be a mouth speaking wisdom, making known the faithfulness of God to all generations (Ps. 49:3; 89:1). Where the Lord God is sanctified in the heart there will be a tongue ever ready to give an answer to every man that asks a reason of the hope that is in him (I Pet. 3:15).

This speech of faith Scripture calls the *confession* of faith. The believer confesses his faith before men. That truth which we believe we also confess. The Bible constantly maintains a vital link between the

heart and the mouth, between faith and the confession of faith. It goes even so far as to identify that confession with salvation itself, for where there is confession of Christ, there must of necessity be faith in the heart. The two cannot be divorced: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Credo

It is possible to distinguish three levels at which this confession of faith is made.

1. First of all, as should be clear from the Scriptures we have already referred to, confession is made at a personal level. We all as individual believers confess our faith before men. We testify of the truth that is in us, of that which we believe.

Scripture has given us the confession of Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16); of Martha, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27); and of the Ethiopian eunuch, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

But confession does not end there. It is not confined to the individual. Even Peter's confession can be understood as being the united confession of the disciples, Peter so often acting as their spokesman.

This brings us to the second level at which confession is made: the local church.

2. A gathered company of the Lord's people, being of one mind, confess together "we believe." It was Paul's prayer for the church at Rome that they might "with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6). In this manner each church becomes a light set upon a hill, a beacon shining out into this dark, sin-benighted world. With every member speaking the same thing, she is like a trumpet giving out a sure and certain sound, telling forth the truth of her God.

Now there are some Christians for whom the whole idea of a church creed or confession of faith is anathema. "No creed but Christ" is their catchy motto. Since this attitude stems from a fundamental

misunderstanding of the nature and character of a creed, we will digress slightly to explain this in greater detail.

For a biblical description of a creed we need look no further than to Luke 1:1. A creed is “a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us.” It is important that we recognize a creed as having two aspects, both of which can be identified in this text.

Firstly, it is a declaration. That is clearly understood. A creed is an objective statement declaring what a church believes to be true concerning God. It forms an answer to the question “What is truth?” It is easy for us to say that we believe the truth, but it is also very glib. It does not say anything. There is not a church on the face of the earth, however apostate it has become, which will not say it believes the truth. The important thing is to state what we understand the truth to be, what we understand the Bible to say. That is what a creed or confession of faith does. It thereby serves as a standard by which a local church is identified and around which its members unite in opposition to error and the world.

But if we leave our definition of creed there, I believe we will have missed the most important aspect, indeed the whole point of what is meant by “confession of faith.” A creed is something far more than just an objective standard. There is a prominent subjective element. This is evident from the expression “most surely believed,” as found in Luke 1:1. A creed ought not to be considered merely as a collection of doctrinal statements to which believers give their mental assent. That may well satisfy an enquirer as to a church’s orthodoxy, but in itself it is not enough. Ephesus was strictly orthodox, yet there was something of the utmost importance that was lacking: her first love (see Rev. 2:1-7). She had lost her zeal for the Lord and His truth.

Confession of faith is not a cold, clinical assent to a set of doctrines. There is something far deeper and more spiritual involved. Real confession arises from the heart. It is living and vibrant. It is not just an intellectual activity but is a matter of the heart and of the soul. It carries conviction and warmth as the living testimony of the church. In her corporate confession of faith a church is affirming with all her heart, mind and soul, “WE BELIEVE....”

A creed is not like a political manifesto which someone draws up and calls on others to endorse. A creed is the voice of a church’s united faith. It is not something brought in from outside, but it originates in the

hearts of the members themselves—hearts indwelt by the Holy Spirit of truth. It has been well said that “the true use of a creed is not to set forth what men must believe, but to record what men do believe” (W.H.P. Faunce).

Confession is the work of the Spirit. That document of objective doctrinal statements which many so decry is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, a work of faith, a spontaneous outpouring from the heart. It is the common confession of a company of the Lord’s people gathered together by Christ into a local church. It is therefore to be maintained, outworked, and cherished by that church as a most precious gift from her heavenly Father. When a church is thus united in the faith, giving expression to her unity by common confession, that is truly wonderful and cause for thanksgiving to God.

But we must go further because, wonderful though that may be, it still does not give full expression to the unity of Christ’s body. There is a broader unity, as we have seen, and that too is to be outworked in the life of the churches.

3. When a number of churches, perhaps scattered over large distances as were those of the apostolic age, confess together the same confession, speak the same thing, being united together in the truth also with the church of past generations, that is more wonderful still. That is a more complete reflection of the unity of the body of Christ on earth. That is the unity of the Spirit. In other words, it is biblical church unity.

Paul besought the church at Corinth, together with “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” to “all speak the same thing” (I Cor. 1:2,10). The idea of confession therefore extends beyond the local situation. Churches and saints covering large geographical areas who are united in the truth are required to make common confession of that truth. It is their calling to speak the same thing and not to contradict one another, causing confusion and misunderstanding and thereby bringing dishonor to the name of the Lord.

Clearly enunciating what they believe the truth of the Word of God to be, churches are called to unite in common confession of their faith. They are to identify with that confession, defend it against the attacks and slanders of the world, oppose on its basis all errors and heresies, and give all the glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is true that occasionally during the twentieth century this

responsibility has been recognized to a degree. Some churches have sincerely sought to express a broader unity by the forging of stronger ties between themselves. Invariably, however, these attempts have been on the basis of wholly inadequate "statements of faith." Even a recent attempt to revive Presbyterian church government in England has given the appearance of being little more than an accommodation of independency under a broad "presbyterian" umbrella.

The point of Presbyterian and Reformed church government is not that it can accommodate variety. No, the point and the beauty of Presbyterian and Reformed church government is that it unites churches of a common confession. This means in practice that a believer can travel from one side of the world to another and find a uniformity in church doctrine and practice. Wherever he may be he will find a spiritual home from home. He will find churches of one mind speaking the same things.

It is not without significance that the creedal standards of the continental Reformed churches (the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht) are together called "the three forms of unity."

The Historic Creeds

Again the importance of the historic aspect to all of this needs emphasizing. Since biblical church unity embraces the saints of every generation, we need to express that historic unity by joining in common confession with our fathers.

The creeds and confessions which our fathers have handed down to us are not just interesting historical documents of no practical use or relevance, though that seems to be the prevailing view today. The fact that they are largely forgotten, ignored, or even disparaged in our day says a great deal about the spiritual condition of the churches and their leaders. It is a sign of the times in which we live that men will not endure sound doctrine, and the creeds are full of sound doctrine. On the one hand the ecumenical spirit of compromise has displaced all zeal for dogmatic theology. On the other hand a mystic subjectivism, seen in its most advanced form in the charismatic movement, but present in principle in many more orthodox circles, has undermined the churches' hold on the Scriptures as the truth, the final and complete revelation of God to His people. These twin scourges leave no place for the creeds.

But even among those who acknowledge the historic creeds and confessions as being of some value, it must be said that they are given only lip-service. By ministers they are considered as little more than useful doctrinal handbooks and reference tools to help in sermon preparation. Perhaps on the occasion of an anniversary they are taken off the shelf and dusted, so to speak, but to the congregation they mean little and remain unread.

No one would deny that the confessions are useful aids to Bible study, but to say that this is their only rule today is to miss their real significance. They have long ceased to be what they should be: a living confession rising from the hearts of the Lord's people united down through history such that they affirm with one voice, "we most surely believe."

It has to be said that, in their understanding of the meaning and significance of the creeds, the vast majority of churches today, and we are talking now about conservative evangelical churches, have missed the point by a mile. They have failed to see them for what they really are. The creeds are not textbooks. They are living confessions of living faith. Combine this failure with an ignorance of and indifference to the church's historic unity, and the loss of visible unity becomes inevitable, since it is through the creeds that it is expressed.

Many if not all of the creeds and confessions were formulated in the heat of intense theological controversy. They were the church's response to heresy, born out of a love and concern for the truth and a need to define and defend it. The saints raised up their creeds as mighty bulwarks against the enemies of truth. It was the heresy of Arianism that gave rise to the Nicene Creed in AD 325. The other trinitarian creeds, the Athanasian and the Chalcedonian, again were written in response to errors concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it was the Reformation that produced the fullest expressions of revealed theology. From that work of God, by which He delivered His church from the evil darkness of medieval popery, came such clear and systematic declarations of Christian doctrine as remain unsurpassed to this day among uninspired writings.

This progress of history represents giant steps forward in the church's understanding of the truth. But we must ask, how did the church arrive at such clearer understanding of truth? Was it not by the Holy Spirit Himself: "when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will

guide you into all truth" (John 16:13)? The creeds are the product of the Holy Spirit living and working in the hearts and minds of God's people, causing them, often under severe physical hardship, to see the truth with a clarity and declare it with a sharpness hitherto not known or heard. The calling of the church today is to take hold of that truth into which her fathers were guided and confess it with them.

Does the faith of the children differ from the faith of their fathers? God forbid if that should be so! Has truth changed? It is not for each generation to discover the truth for itself, as the liberal and the modernist would have us to believe, but to receive it with thanksgiving from the hands of those who have gone before, and confess it before men.

This does not rule out the development of truth and continuing reformation down the ages. As the Spirit builds on what has gone before, the church grows in her knowledge and understanding of the truth, but the truth itself does not change, even as Christ does not change. He is "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8).

By subscribing to the great definitions of truth from former days the church maintains the vital link with the church of her fathers. She stands with them and expresses her organic unity with them, and thereby the church of the present experiences conscious fellowship with the church of the past.

Doctrinal independence from the church of the past is the hallmark of sectarianism. Sects, by their very nature, reject and despise the creeds and confessions. They thrive in a climate of theological individualism. They epitomize the idea of all men believing that which is right in their own eyes and then drawing other men after them. In contrast, churches that "hold the traditions" will with gladness in their hearts join their fathers in common confession of the truth which they all as one believe.

If church unity is to be biblical, therefore, the churches must be confessional churches.

Finally, before we move on, there is a further objection to the confessions which we must consider briefly. Against those churches who take their confessional standards seriously the charge is sometimes made that they give them an authority equal to that of Holy Scripture. There are two comments to be made in reply. In the first place, it is doubtful whether the charge is ever actually true, but, in the second

place, even if it were a valid charge, the objection is misdirected, since the fault lies not with the confession, but with the individual, church, or denomination giving it the undue authority.

The authority of a creed is a derived authority and is therefore always subordinate to that of Scripture.

The danger today, in these times of doctrinal laxity, lies not so much in giving the confessions too much authority as not enough. Once a church or denomination becomes embarrassed by its stated confession and quietly leaves it to gather dust on the shelf, or allows diversity of opinion on matters which are judged to be unconcerned with the substance of the faith, then the enemy is at the door, if not already rampaging through the house. The churches no longer speak with one voice, and divisions, with all the disruption and pain they incur, inevitably follow.

4. The Keeping of Biblical Church Unity

When the Bible speaks of our calling with regard to church unity, it never speaks of creating unity or of becoming united. This is because unity already exists as a principle intrinsic to the body of Christ. The idea of Christ's church being divided and having to "come together" is quite foreign to Scripture. Our calling is rather to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called ... endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 1:1; 4:1-6).

The calling of churches is not to manufacture the unity of the Spirit but to keep it, to maintain it.

But that does not mean being passive. Keeping the unity of the Spirit involves effort. The natural inclination of our hearts is toward error, self-seeking, and pride. It is so easy to let the truth slip, to wander from the central path and thus break the bond of unity. For this reason unity has to be worked at. The Philippians were to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). So must we in our day strive together with one mind, earnestly contending for the faith once delivered (Jude 3). There is work involved. There are battles to be fought: battles against the flesh, the devil, and the encroachment of worldly thought into the church.

Notice the verbs Paul uses: “endeavour” (Eph. 4:1), “strive” (Phil. 1:27), and “earnestly contend” (Jude 3). These expressions indicate activity and convey to us the difficulty of the task, the toil, the sweat and tears, the spiritual graft entailed. It is not something that comes naturally to us or without effort. It calls for labor and it calls for grace and humility. We can be so independent by nature, deceiving ourselves that we can go it alone; but there is no place for independence in the body of Christ. We are all related one to another as members of the same body and called to strive together for the cause of the unity of that body.

What, then, is the nature of the work we are called to do? What is involved? In other words, how is the church to keep the unity of the Spirit? The apostle Paul explains in this way:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:11-16).

This passage explains to us the principal means by which the church maintains the unity of the body: it is by the preaching of the Word, the work of the ministry.

Earlier we traced an unbroken line of truth from heaven, through the apostles, to the Word of God in our own hands. The Scripture is the truth. The Word of God is our standard and our sole authority in all matters of faith and life. It is therefore, first of all, the responsibility of every child of God to know where that line of truth lies. Then he is to “keep in line.” He does this of course by reading and studying the Scriptures for himself.

That is important, but in itself it is not enough. Our subject is the unity of the church, the unity of a body, that living organic entity which

is the body of Christ. The manifestation of that body in the world is to be found in local churches. This means that the child of God has a solemn responsibility to seek out a local church and to join himself to it.

Church Membership

The importance of church membership cannot be overstated. Christ gathers His people into local, organized, instituted congregations in the midst of whom He dwells. Private worship in the secret place, family worship, and listening to tape-recorded sermons all have their appropriate place in the believer's life. They are all, to varying degrees, beneficial to his spiritual well-being, but none of them may be considered a substitute for church membership and attendance at the means of grace, chief of which is the preaching of the Word. None of them may be considered a substitute for the corporate worship of God and the experience of the communion of saints, confessing together the one faith. This is because in church membership a principle is at work.

The world has a saying that "no man is an island." This idea surely finds its highest expression in the church of Jesus Christ. Christians are not independent: they are inter-related and inter-dependent as members together of the one body of Christ. When a believer joins a local church he is giving expression to his membership of that body, i.e., that he is a Christian. A believer who remains outside of the local church is a paradox. He is saying, in effect, "I am a member of the body of Christ but not a member." Such a one will find no support for his position in Scripture.

The seriousness of this case becomes clear when we consider the position of someone who leaves the local church. In withdrawing from the local manifestation of Christ's body he is sending a signal to all around him that he is not a member of the body, i.e., not a believer. Indeed, that is the principle underlying the final step in church discipline, excommunication. A member who refuses to repent shows all the signs that he does not belong to Christ's body, hence he may no longer continue as a member of its local manifestation.

No Christian has the right or authority voluntarily to withdraw and absent himself from the local church and maintain an independent existence. He is duty bound as a member of the body to join himself to the local church. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love

and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:24,25).

This means in practice that a believer will search out and join the purest manifestation of the church that he can find in his neighborhood, a local church which keeps herself united on the line of truth, one in mind and confession. It is only as a member of a local church that a Christian can even begin to experience and appreciate the unity of the body of Christ. This is because only in the local church will he find preaching.

Unity is the work of the Spirit, as through faithful preaching by God-appointed pastors and teachers He works to perfect the saints, to edify the body of Christ till all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man. Put simply, the unity of the church is maintained through the ministry of the Word. It is in the preaching that Christ speaks by His Spirit and continues His earthly ministry, bringing to His people the eternal word of truth which has been handed down to them.

That divine truth which Christ received from His Father, which He imparted to His disciples and which they in turn preached to Gentile and Jew in the early years of the New Testament church, is taught and heard today where the Holy Spirit is at work. And just as that truth united then, so it unites now. Just as it is the Spirit who guides us into all truth and by whom we confess that truth, so it is by the Spirit that unity is maintained in the church. The Holy Spirit is the unifying force, maintaining the purity of the gospel, ensuring that what is preached is no more and no less than "the form of sound words" given to the apostles and that the confession of the church today is at one with her confession down through the ages as she gives voice to the truth that is in her.

Little wonder that what we are dealing with is called "the unity of the Spirit." There is nothing of man in it. Not even the minister of a church can create or enforce unity amongst his flock. Unity is not forced upon believers against their stubborn, independent wills but is worked in them by the gracious, powerful ministrations of the Holy Spirit. He works in the churches to maintain and bring to expression the glorious unity of the body of Christ.

To be disunited, to be tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine, says Paul, is to be like children, immature. That is invariably the situation one finds where there is failure or incompetence

in the pulpit. That was the situation at Corinth. Unity, on the other hand, fostered by a regular faithful pulpit ministry, indicates maturity, the saints having “grown up” into Him.

Now, quite obviously, it is no easy task for some of the Lord’s people to find such a faithful local church: large tracts of the United Kingdom are spiritual wastelands. But still the believer is not discharged of his responsibility. This may mean that he will have to travel several miles to find a church. If that is not possible he may have to join a church which falls short in some measure. In this case it is his duty to seek the reformation of the church, using all the means at his disposal within the rules of government of that church. If reformation proves impossible, then it may be practicable for a number of like-minded believers to come together and work for the establishment of a separate church.

If none of these things proves feasible, then the lonely believer may well consider whether he should be living in such a spiritually barren place.

Biblical Ecumenism

As much as it is the calling of the individual believer to belong to a local church, so also it is the calling of local churches to manifest the broader unity of Christ’s body. It is at this point that we introduce the question of institutional church unity, and there is surely an irony in that this is probably the most contentious aspect of our subject. Where there exists amongst churches a unity of both faith and confession, that spiritual, organic unity should be reflected in an institutional unity. The church as an institution is called to express her oneness. This is the logical and biblical consequence of all that we have said before.

We have already seen that the exhortations to unity found in the epistles reach out far beyond the confines of any one local congregation. We have noticed too the practical unity demonstrated by those early churches. They clearly understood that their life and responsibilities did not end with the official worship services of the Lord’s Day but continued through each day of the week to become manifest in practical ways, touching the lives of fellow believers in faraway churches. While the churches were clearly autonomous [self-governing], they were not independent.

At the beginning of our study we noted that the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23). A body is a living, united organism. It is structured and organized. In the same way the church in the world must have structure and organization (Rom. 12:4,5). This means that her life is to be outworked through local churches in such a way that there exists amongst them a unity of mind and purpose, as we find in the New Testament—churches bound together by the truth for the work of the gospel. On viewing the church scene, one should hope to see decency and order, not a confused ecclesiastical hotchpotch.

There are several important areas of church life which are of common interest and concern. For many churches, particularly small ones, it is not possible to perform these alone. The training of men for the ministry, ministerial support, and the sending and support of missionaries are three such areas. The usual solution to this problem is to resort to independent training colleges, ministerial aid societies, and missionary societies, despite a complete lack of biblical warrant for such para-church organizations. All of these responsibilities have been given by Christ to His church, therefore it is churches that must fulfill them as their common concern. And that means working together in federation, following the example of II Corinthians 8.

Here we come to the heart of the controversy: denominationalism. Independency has the ascendancy at the present time because churches have rejected the denomination. But what is a denomination? Ideally it is a number of churches which, being of one mind and one voice, federate together to experience that same unity so manifestly enjoyed by the churches of the New Testament. They are churches that know and love the communion and fellowship that only a common faith and confession can give. They are churches that know the unity of the Spirit, living in peace and striving together for the faith of the gospel. They are churches that have begun on earth to reflect the perfect unity of the body of Christ which they shall know in heaven.

To dispel some of the misconceptions that often arise regarding denominationalism, it must be stressed at the outset that a denomination is comprised of churches; she herself is not the church. It is the local congregation which is the church, and she must jealously guard her autonomy, recognizing no authority over her but the authority of Christ. Many of the fears and prejudices directed toward church federation stem from painful experience in denominations that have thought they

were a church and have exercised more power and authority than was rightly theirs.

The New Testament knows of only two “churches”: the universal church of all ages, comprised of all the elect; and the church local. Christ has given the ministry, the keys of His kingdom, the sacraments and the authority to exercise discipline, to churches, not to denominations. This defines the limits of denominational activity. It is just as wrong for a local church to relinquish her Christ-given responsibilities to a denominational synod as it is to a para-church society. The ordination and calling of a minister, for instance, rests with the local church. His credentials are held by that church, and only that church, not a denominational court, can depose him from office.

I do not believe that the word “church” may be used to describe a denomination. It is proper to speak of a denomination of churches, but to speak of, for example, the Methodist Church or the Lutheran Church, or the Church of Wherever is to abuse the word, giving it a meaning which the Spirit of God has not authorized.

Even if the Westminster Assembly, in its *Form of Church Government*, was right that the churches of Jerusalem and Ephesus were each made up of several congregations—which is by no means proven—that does not mean that a nationwide or even regional denomination of churches may be called “one church.” Jerusalem and Ephesus were not large geographical regions like England, Scotland, or the U.S.A. Even if they did constitute more than one congregation, then at most we may call them city churches, i.e., several congregations under one city-wide government; but when Paul wrote to the Galatians, covering a much larger geographical area, he addressed “the churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2). Likewise he refers to “the churches of Asia” (I Cor. 16:19), “the churches of Macedonia” (II Cor. 8:1), and “the churches of Judaea” (Gal. 1:22), all in the plural.

Historically denominations have arisen largely as a necessary consequence of the church’s divisions. It could be objected that we read nothing of denominations in Scripture, and that is quite true. It was to be a thousand years before a major division took place in the church. But we do read many commands to separate from error and apostasy, and separation by its nature causes a division.

An interesting passage in this regard is to be found in I Corinthians 11:18,19: “For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear

that there be divisions [Greek: schisms] among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies [Greek: sects] among you, that they which be approved may be made manifest among you." Paul is saying here that it is to be expected that divisions should occur in the church. They cannot be avoided, such being the present fallen state of human nature. Divisions are caused not by those who follow after truth, order, and peace but by the enemies of truth, order, and peace; and, painful as they are, they must take place so that "they which be approved may be made manifest." Here already we have a foretaste of what was to come.

For many centuries after Pentecost there was only one institutional church. Not until the year 1054, with the separation of the Eastern churches from the Western, did this situation change. Five hundred years later saw another major division with the Protestant Reformation, heralding the beginning of the fragmentation of the church institute into the bewildering multitude of denominations we find today. Of course, this does not mean that the church as an organism has been torn asunder. Such is the spiritual nature of her unity that we can always confess by faith, in the language of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe an holy, catholic church."

It follows that where two denominations have arisen along different historical routes, but are united in the faith, those denominations should do all in their power to establish an institutional unity, so that all the churches might go forward together in the work of the gospel.

Institutional unity must be on the basis of truth. In stark contrast to this, what may be called biblical ecumenism, lies the false ecumenism of the ecumenical movement. This movement is an attempt to put the clock back and heal all the historical divisions, creating a single vast worldwide church institution. But whatever success it may be deemed to have by its supporters, the final product of all its efforts can only be a grotesque monstrosity, a caricature of the true church. Why is this? Because in its folly it has forsaken truth. It is the church of the Anti-christ.

The only conceivable way in which the churches and denominations of today can return to the true unity of apostolic days is by retracing two thousand years of history. That means taking the path of confession and repentance before God for the errors and heresies that caused the divisions in the first place, and a return to His blessed truth as it is in Jesus Christ. That they will never do.

The all-consuming drive for institutional unity at any price that we see across the world in the ecumenical movement exposes the grave danger of seeking unity for its own sake. When the search for institutional unity is elevated above love and jealousy for the truth, it becomes an unbiblical distraction that will lead the churches ever deeper into apostasy and will ultimately destroy them. There can be no true, God-glorifying unity without the truth. This is why the emphasis in Scripture is not on unity but always on truth. Truth begets unity. Love for the truth is first; unity follows. Unity is the servant of truth, not its master.

But however much institutional unity has been corrupted over the generations, or however bitter our experiences of it may have been, we may not shun it. Indeed we must promote it. We must not let experience cloud our judgment or determine our church practice for us, but we must go back to the Scriptures. We have a biblical example to follow in the council of churches which met at Jerusalem and whose proceedings are recorded for us in Acts 15. This chapter provides us with the clearest guidance on not only the true nature and form of institutional unity but principally its purpose in preserving the churches' unity in the truth.

An Abiding Principle

The beauty of confessional unity, unity in the truth such as that experienced in apostolic times, is that the people of God enjoy a unity of doctrine and a unity of worship. Occasionally, however, unforeseen problems arise. Doctrinal controversies erupt on subjects which are not adequately covered by the churches' creeds, if at all. Examples may include marriage, divorce, and remarriage; headship; and the sign-gifts of the Spirit.

One such problem that arose in the days of the apostles concerned the place of circumcision in New Testament churches. The teaching that some believing Pharisees were putting about, that circumcision was still to be enforced, threatened to destroy the unity of the churches. It caused "much disputing" (Acts 15:2,7).

What must be remembered is that, while unity is based upon the truth of God's Word, this was a lie. This was heresy. Here was something threatening to drive a wedge right down the center of the churches and re-open the age-old distinction between Jew and Gentile,

the distinction which Christ had forever abolished “in his flesh” (Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:28).

The point is that this was an issue affecting far more Christians than those in Jerusalem. If this error took hold, it would travel like wildfire wherever the gospel spread. How was it to be dealt with?

The way in which it was tackled provides us with an example for our own day. We do not need to be reminded that heresies and strange doctrines still spring up and have the potential to wreak havoc among the churches. And some do wreak havoc. Teachers of false doctrine never confine themselves to their own little sect and neighborhood. Oh that they would! They go about pandering to malcontents, those with ears itching for something new, and spread their heresies wherever they can gain a hearing.

Neither is heresy something which comes into the churches only from without. It comes from within too: “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30).

What was at stake at Jerusalem was not just the orthodoxy of the Jerusalem church but the united faith and confession of all the churches. The truth on which their unity was based was under threat, hence they all had to be involved in dealing with the problem. They were all represented at the council and they all recognised its binding authority. Thereby the truth was upheld and unity was maintained.

It is the application of this abiding principle, inherent in Reformed and Presbyterian church government, that is sadly missing amongst evangelical churches today, contributing much to the ecclesiastical muddle we are in.

Maybe someone objects that the Jerusalem council took place in the times of the apostles and of apostolic authority which we do not have now. Quite so, but we do have the complete canon of Scripture. When the elders and brethren met to discuss at Jerusalem they met with the apostles. Today they will meet with the Word of God. They will meet to search the Scriptures, prayerfully seeking to be guided into all truth by the Spirit. Then, when they have arrived at a knowledge of the truth, they will convey it to the churches as settled and binding “decrees” to be received, as at Antioch, with joy (Acts 15:30-31). That is the New Testament pattern. That is the pattern for us today.

But while the churches are to beware the Scylla of independency

on the one hand, they must also beware the Charybdis of hierarchy on the other.

Hierarchy

The example of the Jerusalem council was followed many centuries later by what have become known as the ecumenical or general councils, such as those at Nicea (AD 325), Constantinople (AD 381), and Chalcedon (AD 451). In addition to these general councils were others called by churches in particular districts to deal with problems specific to their own areas. Among these were the Ante-Nicean Councils held at Antioch (AD 269) and Rome (AD 313). Both of these were convened to consider the emergence of heresies, namely the proto-Socialism of one Paul of Samosata, and Donatism respectively.

However, by this time in church history episcopacy had become well established. Bishops had taken to themselves more power than they possessed by right, and a hierarchical structure was beginning to take shape. The seeds of the papacy had been sown.

This leaven of hierarchy is nowhere to be found in the Word of God. It is rightly shunned and feared by all for whom Scripture is the sole authority in matters of faith and practice. There was no hierarchy in Acts 15. The only authority submitted to there was the authority of Christ as it came to the churches through the apostles by the Holy Ghost. And it was because the decisions of that council were thus stamped with divine authority that they were binding on the churches represented, i.e., all the constituted churches of that time.

In seeking to restore this practice today, a number of churches that are bound together in common faith and confession as we have described will also together humbly submit to the Word of God. When their “elders and brethren” meet in an official capacity, representing the churches, to search the Scriptures concerning a doctrine or practice common to them all, then their conclusions will carry the authority of Christ and be binding on all those churches. That will be true even if for some reason a local church is not represented in person (see Acts 16:4).

But there will be no hierarchy. The authority of a synod (or presbytery, or council, or general assembly, whatever name the churches choose to give it) is the authority of Christ in the Scriptures, and the elders present represent churches who unitedly submit to that authority.

A hierarchy is like a pyramid. The local churches form the base of

the pyramid, while above them are numerous tiers of ever increasing authority until eventually one reaches the top to find the highest authority of all. This is the way in which the Roman Catholic system is structured, with the Pope at the top as its head. Quite clearly, in this kind of arrangement the local church has very little say in its government. The local church is lost under a vast weight of external authority; it has long ceased to be autonomous.

Neither can Presbyterianism, as it has been historically applied, always escape the charge of hierarchy. To all accounts, this very issue caused "much disputing" at the Westminster Assembly, which is not surprising since it was comprised of both Presbyterians and Independents. Yet, the outcome was a structure of tiered assemblies: congregational, classical, provincial, and national, each being in "subordination" to the higher.

Needless to say, the Scriptural pattern is not of a pyramid. In Scripture the local church is always central. The Jerusalem council, and any other such assembly, can be likened to a circle formed around the church, a circle made up of all the other churches represented. It does not represent a higher authority, for there is none but Christ. Rather, it represents a broader unity. Each local church may thus see itself as at the center, yet also represented on the concentric circles around it in the churches' broader (larger) assemblies.

The remit and authority of these assemblies are limited in sphere to those matters which are of the churches' common concern. For instance, it is not for a council or synod to exercise discipline or oversee the appointment or dismissal of ministers. Such matters are for the local church alone.

Perhaps if this distinction had been made clear at Westminster during 1644, the debates would have been less protracted, the outcome more biblical, and the ensuing course of British church history far different, following a more God-glorifying, peaceful, and united line.

Now it may be that on occasion a church will find itself in disagreement with the outcome of one of the broader assemblies. It is appropriate therefore that there should be mechanisms for appeal and opportunity for the reconsideration of the Scriptures. However, if a church continues at odds with its sister-churches, then unity has been broken and *ipso facto* the church has separated itself from them and can play no further part in denominational life.

Obviously a church's withdrawing itself from fellowship in this way is a serious matter and one not to be taken lightly. It must be a measure of last resort, taken only when all attempts at reconciliation have failed. When it occurs, it is an occasion for much pain and sadness on the part of all concerned, but also for ongoing prayer that unity might be restored.

Institutional unity is no guarantor of truth; but, then, neither is independency. However, biblical institutional unity embodies the principle that "in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14; also 15:22 and 24:6), whereas the earlier part of that verse gives a grave warning to those of an independent spirit: "Where no counsel is, the people fall." In Acts 15 God has given His people a clear example of this principle at work, an example that in its day established churches in the faith and increased their number daily (Acts 16:5). Our calling is to follow that example, in obedience and gratitude to the Lord, both for the good of the churches and for our own spiritual well-being as individual members.

Conclusion

We live in days of small things. Evangelical churches in the UK, churches which separate themselves from the charismatic and ecumenical movements, are relatively few, usually small, and widely scattered. In such circumstances isolation can often become an unavoidable way of life. We grow used to being alone.

Moreover, such churches are invariably independent in their government. A formal, institutional expression of unity is viewed with anything from suspicion to outright horror. Isolation can become almost a virtue.

The consequences of this are clear to see in the diversity or, it should be said, disorder and confusion that characterize the churches of our day. While each church claims to identify with biblical Christianity and to possess the truth, each is also manifestly different from the other in both doctrine and practice. Where present, fellowship is informal and intermittent rather than official and ongoing.

Hopefully the reader understands by now that this situation is far different from the one which the apostles knew. While local church autonomy is a vital principle that must be jealously protected, it is not the whole story. It does not present the complete picture as we see it in

the New Testament. Those early years of the New Testament church provide authoritative testimony to the desirability and propriety of visible unity on a much broader scale.

According to Scripture there is no virtue in being isolated. There is no virtue in being alone and separated from one's brethren. Psalm 133 begins, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). To dwell in unity is good; that is, it is commendable and beneficial, something to be desired and actively sought.

Unity is pleasant. It is precious, like the sweet-smelling ointment used in the anointing of the High Priest. Just as the perfume from that holy oil was a delight to all who smelled it, so is unity to those who dwell in it. And not only to them, but to God also, for central to this unity is His presence and blessing as He dwells with His people in covenant fellowship. As He blessed Mount Hermon and Zion with life-giving dew, so will God bless those who dwell in unity. He will command the blessing, "even life for evermore" in His house, the everlasting temple which is His church.

The psalmist describes those who dwell together. This is no casual acquaintance or loose association that he is talking about. This is "dwelling." This is permanent co-habitation, living under one roof, in one house. And this "dwelling" is both good and pleasant. It is not something to be condemned and shunned but valued and cherished as precious and a thing of great beauty. God Himself has said so! Yet so many of us are strangers to that beauty.

This begs the question, Why? Why are we strangers to that beauty? If it is true that unity is both good and desirable, why is it so little in evidence?

There is no simple answer to this question. Part of the answer may lie in ignorance, but perhaps it lies chiefly in unbelief. The problem is that we do not believe that there can be any goodness and beauty in a formal church unity. Rather than keeping our eye fixed on what God has said in His Word, we look away and form our own judgment from the ugly caricature which is the ecumenical movement. We see the growing apostasy of the large denominations and the relentless advance of world ecumenism and retreat into what we perceive to be the safety of independency.

Institutional unity does not work, we say. It is a recipe for

problems and eventual disaster. It means local churches must sacrifice their autonomy, inevitably become involved in doctrinal compromise and tainted with the deviations of others with whom they are associated, and thus lose their purity. What is more, there are bound to be dissensions and disputes. Why, then, become involved in the first place? Independence is the better way. Independency is the safer way: it works.

All this is sheer unbelief. It is a denial of the power of grace. As I have tried to emphasize throughout, believers and churches are not united by man but by the power of divine grace. Christ by His Spirit works unity in the hearts and minds of His people to create a church of unparalleled beauty. Envy, jealousy, strife, resentment, etc., all those sinful traits that cause divisions between men are naturally present in the heart of every believer and in every church, but as the Spirit of Christ works in our hearts and churches He causes us to love Him, to love His truth, and to love our fellow saints, agreeing in true faith. He makes us gracious and longsuffering toward one another, so that as new creatures in Christ we are made willing and able to dwell together in unity. Do we believe that?

Unity is all of God, and therein lie our hope and confidence, for “except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Ps. 127:1). Let us by faith look to Him to do His work in His churches, that He may make us of one mind in the truth, speaking with one voice and submitting together to the authority of Christ our Savior and Head. To do less would be unbelief.

What I have attempted to do in this study is to set out the relevant biblical principles as I understand them and as clearly as I know how. From a practical, human point of view the situation looks dire and the future bleak as churches draw yet further apart with the passage of time. If there is to be any attempt to restore biblical church unity today it must be by way of a return to the truth and a common confession with our fathers of the historic Christian faith. That means a return to the church’s historic creeds and confessions. And it means a return to biblical (Reformed/Presbyterian) church government.

Only by taking these bold steps of faith can we hope to see, experience, and enjoy again that dwelling together in unity of which the Scriptures speak so alluringly but which is so rarely known today. ●

Book Reviews

The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary, by Herman Ridderbos (translated by John Vriend). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. xiii-721. \$42.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

Herman Ridderbos, now retired, taught New Testament for many years at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in Kampen (GKN). Throughout his long career he wrote many books, among which are the excellent commentary on Matthew in the *Korte Verklaring Der Heilige Schrift* series and *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*.

As the book's title indicates, Ridderbos purposed to write a theological commentary on the Fourth Gospel. His purpose was to make clear from the exposition of this Gospel what its *message* is. What particular truth does John contribute to the doctrine of Holy Scripture? Does Ridderbos succeed in this? We think so, but with some reservations.

Because his purpose in writing this commentary was as stated above, and because he wanted to

write for as wide an audience as possible, Ridderbos does not offer a treatment of all the "preliminary questions that have been raised with regard to the origin of the Fourth Gospel, such as

- * whether it was originally a single composition,

- * the issue of the independence (or otherwise) of the sources and the way they were handled by the Evangelist,

- * this Gospel's relationship to the Synoptic Gospels,

- * whether we have the material in the Gospel in the original form and order (which is doubted by many scholars),

- * the "phases" in the history of the Gospel's origination,

and the like. "Opinions," says Ridderbos, "on all these questions are widely divergent and come to us in a body of literature almost impossible to survey, consisting as it does in a vast multitude of separate studies and monograph" (pp. xiii-xiv).

The question, maintains Ridderbos, on which the Gospel focuses is, "Who is Jesus?" "The Evangelist," writes Ridderbos, "views the real miracle of the coming and work of Jesus, the Christ,

as the incarnation of the Word or, as he states in a no less pivotal pronouncement, as the *descent* of the Son of man (3:14)" (p. 13). "Hence, the author continues, "to have 'beheld' the revelation of that glory in the flesh and to witness to him who thus dwelled among us forms the foundation and content of the Fourth Gospel" (p. 13). "Accordingly, this glory is nowhere depicted more visibly and audibly than in John, as is evident particularly from the emphasis placed there on the irrefutability and reality of Jesus' miracles (9:18-34; 11:38-42; 20:27; also 2:9; 4:15ff.)" (pp. 13-14).

The language used by the author in the introduction does not sound as if Ridderbos believes the doctrine of plenary, verbal, infallible inspiration, even though he concludes the introduction with this statement, "The point at issue is always what Jesus said and did in his self-disclosure on earth, but it is transmitted in its lasting validity with the independence of an apostle who was authorized to speak by Jesus and endowed with the promise of the Spirit" (p. 16). The reader will have to decide this question for himself.

There is much to be said for this work. It is scholarly. The author interacts with the scholars and commentators in extensive

notes on nearly every page. He obviously knows "what's out there" on the Gospel of John. The book is enhanced by detailed, extensive name, subject, and Scripture text indices.

At the same time, there are very serious weaknesses in this work. The author denies the doctrine of predestination. Commenting on John 10:25-26 he writes, "here again ... commentators often refer to 'Johannine predestinationism.' Undoubtedly the reference here is to the deepest grounds of faith and unbelief. 'My sheep,' after all, are those whom 'the Father has given me' (cf. vs. 29; 6:37ff., etc.). The text speaks of a predetermined situation, but it is rooted not in a divine decree but in 'belonging to' and living out of a spiritual field of dynamics other than that in which Jesus' sheep are.... It is not the case, however, and here lies the permanent meaning of this confrontation, that the situation is closed from God's side, as if Jesus has been sent by the Father merely to note that fact and to proclaim it as immutable" (p. 369). That the author denies predestination is evident as well from his comments on chapter 12:39-40, "Unbelief is not thereby blamed on God in a predestinarian sense, but is rather described as a punishment from God: he abandons un-

believing people to themselves, thus confirming them in their evil, blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts, as a result of which whatever God gives them to see and hear can no longer lead to salvation, that is, to repentance and healing" (pp. 444-445).

This reviewer cannot determine from Ridderbos' comments on chapter 20 whether he believes that Jesus arose from the dead.

Finally, in conclusion, my colleague, the Rev. Herman Hanko, who taught New Testament at the Protestant Reformed Seminary for over thirty years and who has read much of Ridderbos' writings and who has written an extensive review of Ridderbos' book, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, commented to me recently, "Herman Ridderbos has changed. The contemporary Ridderbos is not the Ridderbos of *Korte Verklaring*." *Korte Verklaring Der Heilige Schrift* is a series of commentaries on all the books of the Bible written by Dutch professors and ministers in the 1930's. H. R. Ridderbos contributed a two-volume commentary on Matthew in this fine series. ■

Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning, 1812-1868* and *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony,

1869-1929, by David B. Calhoun. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, 1996. Pp. xxvi-495 and Pp. xxi-560. Vol. 1 \$35.99, Vol. 2 \$29.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

Here is a detailed history of what was for over a century a bastion of Reformed/Presbyterian orthodoxy. The first volume contains excellent chapters on Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and Charles Hodge. Likewise, volume two contains excellent chapters on Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and J. Gresham Machen. Calhoun also treats in detail the "mighty battle," as he calls it, between the conservatives and the modernists in the Presbyterian Church, a battle which commenced around the turn of the century. This mighty battle finally resulted in the establishing of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia by Machen and several of his colleagues in 1929. Interestingly enough, though they were staunch supporters of Machen, Geerhardus Vos, Caspar Wistar Hodge, and William Park Armstrong chose not to join Machen at Westminster. Said Machen in the main address given at the formal opening of Westminster on September 25, 1929, "Westminster Seminary

would endeavor to hold the same principles that old Princeton maintained.... We believe, first, that the Christian religion, as it is set forth in the Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church, is true; we believe, second, that the Christian religion welcomes and is capable of scholarly defense; and we believe, third, that the Christian religion should be proclaimed without fear or favor, and in clear opposition to whatever opposes it, whether within or without the church, as the only way of salvation for lost mankind" (vol. 2, p. 396).

These two volumes, in the opinion of this reviewer, make clear three main points concerning Princeton Seminary. One is that really up until the 1920s the seminary held fast to Reformed orthodoxy, especially over against the higher critics in Hermeneutics. At the turn of the century, through the outstanding work of men like John D. Davis, Robert Dick Wilson, and Geerhardus Vos, Princeton was still resisting higher criticism, while virtually all of the other prestigious seminaries in America (Yale Divinity, Union Seminary, e.g.) had yielded to the critics. Great emphasis was placed on careful and faithful exegesis of Sacred Scripture using the original Hebrew and Greek languages.

Princeton theology was derived from Scripture.

Second, the Princeton faculty was graced by several outstanding theologians. Some of these "big names" are of course A. A. Alexander, Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen. These were men strongly committed to the Reformed faith. Warfield told his students that, "A 'Christianity' which can dispense with the immediately supernatural, to which the pre-existence and the proper deity of Christ are unknown, which discards the expiatory work of Christ, and which looks for no resurrection of the body, may readily enough do without the fact of the resurrection of Christ. But when it comes to that, may we not also do very well without such a 'Christianity'? What has it to offer to the sin-stricken human soul?" (vol. 2, p. 249).

Third, however, there was some very "strange fire on Princeton's altars." A. A. Hodge claimed that, "The difference between the best of either class (Arminianism and Calvinism, RDD) is one of emphasis rather than of essential principle. Each is the complement of the other. Each is necessary to restrain, correct, and supply the one-sided strain of the other. They together give ori-

gin to the blended strain from which issues the perfect music which utters the perfect truth." (vol. 2, p. 73). If Hodge were right, the Westminster Standards and the Canons of Dordrecht are hopelessly one-sided! D.L. Moody and Ira Sankey were cordially received by the seminary as well (cf. pp. 24-26, vol. 2). In addition to these Arminian influences, several of the faculty, notably Warfield and Machen, were weak at best in their evaluation of evolutionism (cf. pp. 256-257 and 360 of vol. 2).

All in all this is a fine account of Princeton seminary. It's written in a pleasant, readable style as well. Those who wish to learn from the past would do well to read these two volumes on Princeton. ■

Law & Gospel in the Theology of Andrew Fuller, by George M. Ella. The Cairn, Hill Top, Eggleston, Co. Durham, England: Go Publications, 1996. 235 pp. \$14.50 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

The importance of the English Baptist preacher Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) for Calvinism today is his teaching regarding the call of the gospel. In controversy with other English Baptists, particularly John Gill, Fuller taught

"duty-faith." He charged that Gill was a "hyper-Calvinist" in that Gill denied that the gospel calls, or commands, the unconverted to repent of their sins and to believe in Jesus Christ. In contrast to Gill, Fuller taught that the gospel confronts every man, unconverted as well as converted, with the duty to believe on Jesus Christ. The main work of Fuller on the subject was *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1785).

Fuller and the conflict of his time over "hyper-Calvinism" come up today, especially in the British Isles, in the controversy over the question whether the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation to all who hear. Those in the British Isles who are vigorously advocating universal, ineffectual grace in the gospel, particularly those connected with the *Banner of Truth* magazine, appeal to Fuller as a champion. They accuse all those who confess particular grace in the preaching of the gospel of "hyper-Calvinism." With this book on the theology of Andrew Fuller, Dr. George Ella obviously intends to shed light on the current "hyper-Calvinist" controversy. This is a worthy purpose.

Unfortunately, the book is so poorly written that it proves to be of dubious worth for the purpose. There are many, serious

misspellings, e.g., "Luis Berkof" for "Louis Berkhof" (p. 87; cf. p. 223); "Edward's" for "Edwards" (p. 168); "Nettle's" for "Nettles" (p. 166); "proceed" for "precede" (p. 122); "tracts" for "tracks" (p. 54, unless a pun is intended: "To stop Huntington in his tracts," etc.).

There are innumerable grammatical errors, e.g., "it is the subjective believing of the sinner which makes the atonement, working backwards, effective" (p. 89: does the atonement work backwards?); "it was no more an atonement for Cain as it was for Abel, for Paul or for Judas" (p. 91: was Christ's death an atonement for Judas?); "due to the fall man is not imputed with Adam's sin" (p. 94: is man imputed along with Adam's sin? if so, to whom?); "who would deny that Christ did not fulfil the spirit of the Law?" (p. 117: I for one would certainly deny that Christ did not fulfil the spirit of the law); "due to none essentials taking the place of essentials," etc. (p. 157: should be "non-essentials"); "Maria de Fleury, a vowed opponent of the Calvinist path" (p. 169: evidently "avowed" is intended; the error is repeated on p. 170).

Worse still, the book is theologically confused and confusing. Ella criticizes Fuller because "his doctrine of election is not grounded

in the atonement." Ella asserts that "unconditional election (is) based on particular atonement" (pp. 89, 90). But election is not grounded in or based on the atonement. Rather, limited atonement is based on election. Election is grounded in the sovereign freedom of the decreeing God. The confusion is more than such inexact, careless statements. Purporting to be a critical analysis of Fuller's theology, the book lacks order, system, definition, succinct summary, and pointed criticism in light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. One gets the impression that, having done the necessary reading, the author dashed off his thoughts pretty much as they came to him, and the publisher then put the first draft between covers.

This is regrettable. Dr. Ella is doing valuable work on certain English Calvinists and on the controversy over "hyper-Calvinism" in the 17th and 18th centuries. Go Publications is already a significant publisher in England, determined to defend and promote Calvinism. The work demands better workmanship.

All of this could be forgiven for the sake of the historical research and the doctrinal subject. But the final flaw is unpardonable: Ella will not address *the* issue in

the controversy of the 18th and 19th centuries that he is covering. He will not address this issue *head-on, clearly, and thoroughly*. He will not address this issue *in its bearing on the current debate*. This issue is whether God in the gospel seriously, earnestly calls, or commands, every hearer, unconverted as well as converted, to repent of his sins (with heartfelt sorrow toward God) and to believe in Jesus Christ (with true faith).

In an earlier exchange with Dr. Ella in the *Standard Bearer*, I put this issue to him as a pointed question, asking for a "yes" or "no" answer (*SB*, Aug. 1, 1996, p. 443). No such answer has been forthcoming.

For all its weaknesses, the book demonstrates that Andrew Fuller was heretical on the atonement. He denied substitutionary satisfaction. His doctrine of the cross was an amalgam of Abelard's moral influence theory and Grotius' governmental theory. Fuller extended the atonement to all: in an important sense Christ died for all. Fuller proposed this heresy as necessary for evangelism and missions. Only if Christ died for all can the gospel be preached to all, especially in its command to all to believe on Christ. But if Christ died for all, His death cannot have been the

actual payment to divine justice of the debt of sins in the place of others. Such was Fuller's thinking. Ella nails this down, giving the citations from Fuller, pointedly criticizing the heresy, and stating the orthodox doctrine against Fuller's error.

Ella does not similarly treat the issue of the external call of the gospel. This was *the* issue in Fuller's day: "duty-faith." This is *the* issue today: "well-meant offer"? no command to the unconverted whatever? a command to all, but grace to the elect only? Again and again, throughout the book, Ella touches on the issue. He keeps coming back to it. It is fundamental, and Ella knows it. But every time he either presents the issue incorrectly, or contents himself with criticizing Fuller's position, or quickly backs away without a penetrating, thorough examination. Never does he state his conviction as to the truth of the gospel-call (see pp. 13, 14; 33-38; 72; 141, 142; 148; 189-192).

Almost to the very end of the book, the reader who has toiled thus far for the sake of an answer to these questions is asking, "What exactly was Fuller's error regarding the gospel-call? What precisely was the view of Fuller's opponents, particularly John Gill? And what, according to Dr. Ella, is

the truth of the matter in light of the contemporary controversy?"

Just as the reader despairs of an answer, Ella makes everything plain. Oddly, he does so, in a kind of aside, in a lengthy quotation from William Huntington. Huntington, also an English Baptist preacher, opposed Fuller on the doctrine of the call of the gospel. Specifically, he opposed Fuller's "duty-faith." In the quotation, Huntington obviously speaks for Ella. Huntington's doctrine was that the gospel does *not* command the unconverted to repent and believe. It is *not* the duty of the unconverted who hear the gospel to believe on Christ presented therein. The reason is that the unconverted do not have the (spiritual) ability, the grace, the Holy Spirit, to repent and believe. The only command that God, the church, and the preacher give to the unconverted is the *demand of the law*.

This extorting evangelical obedience to the faith from infidels shut up in unbelief, is a doctrine that cannot meet with the approbation, nor be attended with the impression, of the Holy Ghost; for he is the Spirit of faith, and produces faith: but, by this doctrine the unconverted are set to perform what none but the Spirit of God can effect.

A man receives grace for the obedience of faith; but that which is produced by the Spirit's energy, is here made the carnal man's duty. Man is made the agent, where the Spirit is the efficient; and, can it be expected that the Spirit will attend with his seal a doctrine that brings no honour to him? He will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to the unconverted. This doctrine will never add one soul to the household of faith (pp. 197-199).

It is not my concern here to criticize this view of the preaching of the gospel, or to respond to the arguments raised on its behalf. I only want to establish that an able, sympathetic scholar of these men and their theology concludes that John Gill, William Huntington, and their school deny that God in the gospel commands all who hear, unconverted as well as converted, to repent and believe. If this call, or command, is an integral part of the preaching of the gospel (as I believe it is), these men deny that the gospel is to be preached to the unconverted, at least insofar as its call is concerned. That which is to be preached to the unconverted is the law.

Law & Gospel, therefore, does serve in the end to clarify the vital issue of the call of the gospel

as this issue is raised in Calvinistic circles in our day. On the one hand, there is the view that God in the gospel calls all alike in grace, desiring to save them all. This, evidently, was the view of Andrew Fuller. One important element of his view was the notion that fallen man naturally has a certain ability to obey the command: "he could, if he would." This is a denial of total depravity. This view is always accompanied by, or invariably leads to, the doctrine of universal atonement. The doctrine of universal atonement involves the rejection of the cross as satisfaction and, at last, the loss of the entire Reformed system of sovereign grace.

On the other hand, there is the view that God in the gospel outwardly calls only the elect, regenerated, converted sinner. There is no command of the gospel to the unconverted sinner. This is the denial of the external call of the gospel. This was the view of John Gill, William Huntington, and other English Baptists. This is a real "hyper-Calvinism." "Hyper-Calvinism" is the error of denying the external call of the gospel and, thus, the responsibility of the totally depraved sinner.

Against both these false teachings stands the historic, confessional Reformed faith. God in

the gospel commands every hearer without exception to repent and believe. This command comes to all, even though all lack all ability to obey the command. Fallen humans have the duty to do what they are unable to do. Responsibility is not determined by, nor does it imply, ability. God's purpose with the external call to all who hear is twofold. It is the twofold purpose of eternal predestination, election and reprobation. He wills, in righteousness, to show the wickedness of, render inexcusable, and harden the reprobate. He wills, in grace, to draw the elect to Himself, giving them the repentance and faith He calls for, by the work of the Spirit in their hearts. This is the Reformed tradition (see H. Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Baker, repr. 1978, pp. 512, 513). This is the official stand of the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt, especially in II/5-7 and III, IV/9-11. ■

The Theology of John Calvin, by Karl Barth. Tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. Xxiv + 424 pages. \$25 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

In 1922, Karl Barth lectured in Gottingen on John Calvin. First published in 1922 as *Die Theologie Calvins*, these lectures are now

published in English for the first time.

The first section of the work is a twofold introduction to Calvin. It relates the Reformation to the Middle Ages and compares Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. Barth's relating of the Reformation to the Middle Ages includes a profound analysis of medieval mysticism and of Luther's stance with regard to it. The comparison of the three Reformers shows that Zwingli was, to use an anachronism, a theorist and practitioner of "dominion theology." Luther detested Zwingli, insomuch, according to Barth, that he would not allow Zwingli even a little corner of heaven. Neither did Calvin share Zwingli's spirit.

The second section of the book is an uneven, but always compelling account of Calvin's life and doctrine through the Reformer's stay in Strassburg, 1538-1541. (A professor of theology is painfully amused by the fact that Prof. Barth, having intended to cover the whole of Calvin's life and theology, was barely able to finish the first part of the projected course. Basically, he completed the prolegomena.) This section includes a penetrating analysis of Calvin's *Psychopannychia* (*Soul Sleep*) and of the original, 1536 edition of the *Institutes*.

I would not recommend the

book to a beginner or to one who is unlearned and uncertain concerning Calvin and his theology. The danger is too great. But one who knows Calvin and whose belief of Reformed theology is tested and firm will find the book helpful in understanding Calvin. He will also find it provocative. Karl Barth on John Calvin, with the no-holds-barred style of Barth and of the classroom, is a Reformed theologian's delight.

Already in 1922, Barth knew Calvin. He knew Calvin, not only by diligent study (and Barth always did his homework), but also by having tasted the good gifts and powers of Calvin's world. Barth is not an avowed enemy of Calvin, as are a Bolsec and a Holtrop. He certainly does not trivialize Calvin, as does the psychologizing Bouwsma, whose work on Calvin is, for this reason, beneath serious consideration.

Barth recognizes that "the first feature of Calvin's concept of God is the thought of his divine sovereignty" (p. 119). He knows why Calvin needed

to work out consistently and to champion relentlessly the doctrine of double predestination, that sharpest of all the formulations of the concept of the vertical. He rightly perceived—and if we understand this we

have already grasped the main point of his theology—that everything would be lost for Reformed theology if at this point, too, it let itself be robbed by just one jot of its well-considered definitions of the paradox of grace. The nervous tension with which he stressed and underlined this is undoubtedly an indication that here was the threatened point of this theology (p. 78).

Rightly, Barth observes that Calvin's doctrine of predestination did not prevent him "from taking our human responsibility in bitter earnest." It is, in fact, a major theme in Barth's examination of Calvin that Reformed Protestantism, following Calvin, has a unique ethical concern: "ethical concern for the glorifying of God on earth." Barth speaks of "the ethical fervor of Reformed Protestantism" (pp. 388-393). Barth is sharply critical of contemporary Reformed theology for its rejection of predestination:

Modern Reformed theology, which for sentimental reasons thinks it may or must throw the concept of predestination overboard, has burdened and punished itself, as we see in Switzerland and America, precisely with what Calvin wanted to avoid by means of his sharp

insertion of the concept. It has burdened and punished itself with great moral leveling, with a highly industrious and astonishingly visible churchiness that knows little, however, of the fear and trembling at the grace of God (Phil. 2:12) that is the basis and meaning of the real nature and life of the church (p. 179).

This, apparently, is an account of Calvin and his theology that is highly sympathetic.

Even Calvin's angry severity with his enemies is appreciated, if it is not approved.

Calvin was not giving way to passion when even in his Bible commentaries he at once spoke of dogs and swine if he saw the sanctuary of truth violated. It was instead his calm and well-considered view that those who did such things did not deserve to be called human. On one occasion ... he solemnly protested that it was not out of personal hatred that he dealt with his opponents as he did. Even allowing for every possibility of self-deception, why should we not just as well believe him as not believe him? But he thought—and this is connected with the unity he saw between being a child of God and a servant of God—that he might and should be angry on

the basis of God's own anger.... Almost always the battles were for that which was for him highest, for the totality. When it was a matter of the glory of God and his truth, he would rather be enraged than not, lest the dishonor staining the divine majesty should fall back on his own head. That was what he said in his fight against Castellio. Referring again to his anger later, he said that it was as if he could do no other, as if he were caught up by a whirlwind (p. 124).

But Barth's empathy makes him, in reality, a more dangerous enemy of Calvin than an openly hostile Holtrop or a superficial Bouwsma. One tends to lower his guard with Barth. Then, Barth makes his deadly thrust. In his zeal against the foes of the truth, Calvin was, in fact, "demonic" (p. 124). It were kinder to judge him with Bouwsma as psychologically disordered. Barth tasted Calvin's theology; he did not embrace it.

Worth considering is Barth's careful critique of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity in connection with the conflict with P. Caroli. Barth sees a real weakness in Calvin's doctrine in that Calvin stressed "the unity rather than the distinctions in God" (p. 327). Barth speaks of the "strangely unemphatic and 'loveless' position that

the doctrine of the Trinity occupies in the *Institutes* and the catechism" (p. 312). Foreshadowed in this criticism are both the prominence of the Trinity in Barth's own dogmatics and the emphasis upon the "distinctions." This is not to say that Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is sounder than Calvin's.

Memorable insights and lines, by both Calvin and Barth, are found throughout the book. Barth refers to "student sermons in which the aim, as we know, is often to say all that is to be said" (p. 142). Calvin is quoted as asserting that "the first principle of Roman Catholic theology is that there is no God and the second that Christianity is a swindle, from which two all the rest follow" (p. 401). ■

Biblical Authority and Conservative Perspectives, edited by Douglas Moo. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. Pp. 240. \$11.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Some books come like a refreshing breeze on an almost unbearably hot day. This is one of them. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find anywhere a strong defense of the absolute inerrancy

of Holy Scripture. One wearies of the erosion of this doctrine by evangelicals from all parts of the world. But here is a book which stands strongly for the traditional doctrines of inerrancy and is not afraid to condemn contrary views with sharp and uncompromising language.

The book is actually a compilation of articles on the doctrine of the authority of Scripture which appeared in past issues of the *Trinity Journal*, a Journal published by the faculty of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. The short "Preface" makes clear the purpose of the book:

Many doctrines are vital to the Christian faith: Christology and soteriology, for instance, immediately come to mind. But no doctrine is more foundational than biblical authority. The Bible is our source for all doctrine. Believe the wrong thing about the Bible, and all other doctrines are, at least potentially, threatened. Evangelicals have long been known for their adherence to the full authority of the Bible. We at *Trinity Journal*, reflecting a core belief of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, use the term *inerrancy* to describe this full authority of the Bible. By it we mean that the original writings

of all the biblical books are without error in anything that they teach. We think this belief about the Bible is solidly based in the Bible itself and in Christian tradition and that it is vital to protect all other doctrines.

But scholars, even from within the evangelical movement, have challenged this view of the Bible....

These new views, which claim that inerrancy is limited to the "gospel" in Scripture while errors abound in scientific, historical, and chronological matters, are claimed to be the historical position of the church: "A number of 'revisionist' Christian historians were arguing that the view of the Bible that we are calling 'inerrancy' was a relatively recent idea and that it had not been held by most theologians in church history" (Quoted from the "Preface," p. 5).

The book is an answer to that claim of the "revisionists." It is solid proof that the revisionists are dead wrong and that absolute inerrancy is indeed the historic position of the church.

The first chapter, written by John Woodbridge, sets about this task in a masterly and convincing way. It uses a book (*The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*) of Jack

Rogers from Fuller Theological Seminary and Donald McKim, a United Presbyterian minister, as an example of the revisionists.

In a carefully documented defense of the historic position of the church, Woodbridge finds that the early church fathers beginning with Clement of Rome (c. AD 100) all taught an absolute infallibility of Scripture. The same was true of the Reformers and of those who represent the main lines of thought in Europe and America since the Reformation.

This position, Woodbridge argues, was not called into question until the advent of higher criticism. And, although Rogers and McKim claim that Karl Barth and Gerrit Berkouwer recovered Reformed thought in their denials of absolute inerrancy, the fact is that their position was a major surrender of historic Reformed thought.

The criticism of Rogers and McKim is merciless.

It taxes the imagination to think that St. Augustine, Calvin, or Luther, whose authority Rogers and McKim repeatedly invoke, would have ever characterized Holy Scripture in this sharply dichotomized fashion. Rogers and McKim's claim upon these past Christians is indeed tenuous (p. 63).

And then:

Because they so desperately wanted to plead a certain case, they generally sacrificed their claims to evenhanded scholarship by discounting out-of-hand contrary evidence, by neglecting worlds of technical scholarship bearing on their broad subject, by fixing too uncritically upon a neo-orthodox historiography, and by relying too heavily upon secondary literature rather than examining primary sources for themselves. As a result, their volume lacks that quality of reliability which gives good historical surveys their endurance. For this reason and others, professional historians will probably tend to bypass their study in years to come....

Regrettably, the words of one of Dorothy Sayers's characters capture the dynamics of Rogers and McKim's apologetic efforts: "There's nothing you can't prove if your outlook is only sufficiently limited" (p. 64).

This position outlined so clearly in Chapter 1 is bolstered by the rest of the book. Chapter 3 is an interesting discussion of a short correspondence between Erasmus and John Eck on the question of inspiration. The humanist Erasmus (against whom Luther wrote his

Bondage of the Will) had reservations on the question; John Eck (whom Luther debated at the Leipzig Disputation) did not. Erasmus had influence on Spinoza and Richard Simon, both of whom are usually considered the founders of higher criticism.

Chapter 4 is an analysis of the writings of S. T. Coleridge (Pantheist, Unitarian, Rationalist, though one time an orthodox thinker) who had such wide influence on subsequent thinkers and was one of the earliest to argue for limited infallibility. Strikingly, one of those influenced by Coleridge was F. A. J. Hort, whose text of the New Testament is widely received as the best, and on the basis of which text the NIV was prepared.

Chapter 5 is alone worth the price of the book. It is a sharp and stirring defense of Luther's absolute commitment to an infallible Word of God against all who argue to the contrary in our day.

In Chapter 7 Carl F. H. Henry takes on Charles H. Kraft's theories on cross-cultural missions and not only demolishes that position, but shows what it does to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. Charles H. Kraft is professor of anthropology and African studies in the Fuller school of World Missions.

The only caveat I have (and

one is reluctant to mention a disagreement when one is thankful for the book) is that Dr. J.P. Moreland, in a chapter entitled "The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy" attempts to make a rational case for inerrancy. One ought not to do that. The Bible makes its own case, and that is sufficient. There is an old saying which disputes the need for rational proof for matters of faith. It goes something like this: The wicked won't accept it and the righteous don't need it. The point is that belief in an inerrant Scripture is a matter of faith in the testimony of Scripture itself. Faith is not rational proof. Faith is the opposite of unbelief. And faith is the gift of God.

Nevertheless, the caveat is a small one. It is perfectly legitimate, and this may be Moreland's ultimate purpose, to demonstrate that belief in absolute infallibility is not irrational or supra-rational, but perfectly consistent with rational thought when rational thought is purified and enlightened by faith. ■

The Second Epistle To The Corinthians, by Paul Barnett. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997. Pp.xxx+662. \$45.00 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

It was several decades ago that a new set of commentaries appeared on the market called "The New International Commentary on the New Testament." Although the quality of the volumes differed somewhat because each was authored by a different person, they were excellent commentaries and helpful in interpreting Scripture. Now, an entirely new set of commentaries is being published to take the place of the old set. In a way that is too bad. The two or three volumes of the new set which I have looked at are not as good as the old volumes.

The same is true of this volume on II Corinthians. The old volume, written 35 years ago by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, was better than this one by Paul Barnett. The justification for an entirely new volume is, according to the editor: "The proliferation of Pauline studies, including works on 2 Corinthians, has meant that [Hughes'] volume, too, needed to be replaced so as to bring the busy pastor and student up to date on the interpretation and theology of this very important Pauline letter" (p. ix). Generally speaking, what the editor wrote means that the author has drifted a bit farther away from interpreting Scripture as God's infallibly inspired Word to His church, and has begun to pay

more attention to literary-historical criticism.

In fact, the book devotes a great deal of time and space to the literary aspects of this epistle. I have no objection as such to a commentator pointing out various literary characteristics of a particular Bible book (as, e.g., whether a given passage is poetry or prose), but I do object to what often seems to me to be forced literary constructions foisted on a passage without much justification for them. And I vehemently object to such a preoccupation with literary constructions that the meaning of the Holy Spirit is lost.

The result of such emphasis on literary analysis in the book is that there is little development of concepts (many of which are crucially important, as e.g., the concept "reconciliation" in Chapter 5), there is almost no practical application of the Word of God to the life of the saints, and there is little instruction in sound biblical doctrine.

I was also disappointed in some of the exegesis.

In chapter 2:14-17, where Paul stresses so strongly the absolute sovereignty of God in the preaching of the gospel both in them that are saved and in them that perish, this note of sovereignty was missing entirely, and God's

purpose through the gospel was made dependent upon man's response to it.

In 5:1 the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" was made to refer to the resurrection body, something totally impossible in the light of Paul's clear emphasis on the fact that we have this house not made with hands at the moment that our earthly house is dissolved and we die.

In 5:19, in his treatment of reconciliation, the author admits that reconciliation includes the forgiveness of sin; but he nevertheless writes, quoting another: " 'Reconciliation in the New Testament sense is not something which we accomplish when we lay aside our enmity to God; it is something which God accomplished when in the death of Christ he put away everything that on his side meant estrangement....' However, the imperative in verse 20 indicates that human response is required for it to be subjectively effective" (pp. 307, 308). That can only mean that (and the author stresses this very strongly in other passages) the sins of every man in the world are objectively forgiven. But for that forgiveness to be subjectively effective, man must respond positively to the gospel overtures. How it is possible for God to

throw into hell a man whose sins He has objectively forgiven remains a mystery.

Nevertheless, there are good things about this commentary, and I would be remiss if I failed to mention them.

The introduction to the volume is excellent and places the epistle of Paul in its historical setting. The author contends that there was one hasty visit to Corinth which is not mentioned in the book of Acts; and he maintains that there was at least one and perhaps two additional letters which Paul wrote. The commentary is well-written and the material presented in an interesting and understandable fashion for the most part. The Greek and technical material are relegated to the footnotes, which makes it possible for those not acquainted with Greek to read it. II Corinthians is a difficult book to read and understand. This commentary will go a long way to help you sort through the many obscure and hard-to-understand passages. ■

Book Notices

Sermons on Galatians, by John Calvin (translated by Kathy Childress). Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997. Pp. xii-671. \$46.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

These sermons on the epistle to the Galatians were first preached by Calvin in the French language between November 14, 1557 and May 8, 1558. They were taken down by a professional scribe in shorthand, then transcribed and presented by him to the deacons of the church in Geneva who in turn published them February 1, 1563. Eleven years later Arthur Golding translated them into English. The present volume is an entirely new translation of the original French edition.

The translation reads easily. The sermons are vintage Calvin containing recurring themes such as: human depravity, justification by faith alone, holiness, the sovereignty of God, and the errors of Rome.

The book is worth the price. It can be used as a commentary by both preachers and lay persons. It would also make for excellent devotional reading. Get it and devour it.

The book is enhanced by a detailed subject index. ■

The Way Everlasting: A Study in Psalm 139, by E.J. Young. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997. Pp. 1-117. \$750 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This book was first published in 1965. It is a fine piece of work and will be of benefit to a wide range of readers. Ministers will discover insights that will enhance their preaching on the Psalm. God's people will find the book to be an excellent tool to help them in their personal devotions.

One will find in the book good, solid exposition of this portion of sacred Scripture. At the same time, it is written in a clear and concise style.

The late Dr. Young taught Old Testament for many years at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

Highly recommended. ■

Historical Commentary on Galatians, By William M. Ramsay (Ed. By Mark Wilson). Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. Pp. 366. Price not given (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Kregel Publications has been involved in the reprinting of many valuable books which have been

long out of print. This is one such volume, for the author lived from 1851-1939, and this work has been very difficult to find. Mark Wilson, from Regent University in Virginia Beach, has done the editing of this reprint.

The book is not a commentary in the usual sense of that word, nor is it intended to be such. The purpose is rather to provide the historical and cultural background of the epistle of Paul to the Galatians, and to mine the book itself for such passages as will assist in understanding more fully the history of the region. After a lengthy introduction, the author treats briefly various parts of the epistle which are of historical and cultural interest. The last half of the book is not a commentary at all, but a historical section which describes the history, culture, and geography of Asia Minor, especially the central part in which were to be found the Galatian cities where churches had been organized.

The author spends a great deal of time in different parts of the book defending his thesis that the epistle was written to those churches which were organized on Paul's first missionary journey; and not, as some maintain, to churches in the northern part of Asia Minor. I appreciated his careful argumen-

tation and I agree with his conclusion, but he seems to me to spend an inordinate amount of time on the question which is, after all, of limited importance. One must remember the primary purpose of the book.

Some aspects of the book are evidence of the inroads of higher criticism into the thinking of 19th century Bible scholars. The author, e.g., is not impressed with Paul's argument in 3:16 where Paul argues that the "seed" of Abraham is Christ because Scripture uses the singular "seed" and not the plural "seeds" (p. 121). Nor does the author seem to understand the problem in the Galatian churches, the Judaizing threat of salvation by works, and the powerful refutation of all Arminian heresy which the book contains.

Ramsay's book is quite technical, with a considerable amount of Greek and much technical argumentation. But it contains extremely interesting information on particular words and expressions used in the book, especially as far as word usage in New Testament times is concerned. The background material is so extensive and so valuable that every minister who preaches on the epistle to the Galatians ought to read the book; and, in fact, it has so much very useful information on the

Mediterranean world that it is almost must reading for an understanding of the book of Acts. Ramsay was a scholar of great ability. ■

Near Unto God, by Abraham Kuyper. Daily meditations adapted for contemporary Christians by James C. Schaap. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997. Pp. 235. \$14.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Many years ago I had read an older translation of Abraham Kuyper's powerful book, *Nabij God te Zijn (To Be Near To God)*. The translation was prepared by John Hendrik deVries, published by Eerdmans in 1961, and revealed in its chapters a side of Kuyper which few people knew—Kuyper the mystic. The book did not include all of the meditations found in Kuyper's original work, and I looked forward to this new translation.

I was disappointed. Admittedly, the book is not intended to be a translation, but an adaptation for "contemporary Christians." But in it all, Kuyper himself was lost. I wanted to read Kuyper, and instead I was forced to read Schaap. I wanted the biblical mystical side of Kuyper; I got Schaap's reflections on some aspects of the Chris-

tian life. I wanted to reach Kuyper through some of his writings which are not very well known; instead I found Dordt College's professor of literature.

The book is so modern as to speak of things unknown to Kuyper: "nuclear mushrooms" (pp. 44, 45), helicopters (p. 56), Mother Theresa (p. 176), computers (p. 180), etc. To make it truly contemporary, the author felt compelled to use slang, something Kuyper with his elegant Dutch would never have done.

But, worst of all, the contemporizing of Kuyper resulted in heresies which would have made Kuyper's hair stand on end. He refers to God as "mother-God" (p. 45), and changes Kuyper's strongly Reformed statement "Then for such a one Christ becomes Savior" to the Arminian notion: "We're fully persuaded of the efficacy of Christ's death, so we seal the bargain by accepting him into our lives as our personal Savior" (p. 186).

I checked in a number of places in Kuyper's original work and was forced to the conclusion that any resemblance between Schaap's books and Kuyper's book is rather coincidental.

I do not object to Schaap writing a series of meditations. Indeed, some are extremely well-

written and very interesting. I do not object to following the general format of Kuyper and the broad ideas of Kuyper in these meditations. I do not object to abbreviating the meditations so that we have only about 1/3 of what Kuyper wrote in each chapter. But I do object to making Kuyper the author of a book which is written by Schaap. ■

Boyd's Handbook of Practical Apologetics, by Robert T. Boyd. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. Pp. 251. No price, (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

The subtitle of this book is "Scientific Facts, Fulfilled Prophecies, and Archaeological Discoveries That Confirm the Bible." That subtitle accurately portrays the contents of this very interesting book.

Using the word "Apologetics" in its technical sense of "defense of the truth," the author proceeds from a deeply held conviction that the sacred Scriptures are infallibly inspired to show that all attacks against Scripture have failed to discredit it and that, if looked at properly, the Scriptures are confirmed by the data of creation, history, and archaeological discoveries.

The errors of evolutionism

are pointed out, and the truth of a creation as a work of God in six days of twenty-four hours is maintained. The author demonstrates too how Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled. This is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that our own Confession of Faith speaks of the fact that the Scriptures "carry the evidence in themselves" that "they are from God. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling" (Art. 5). In a rather lengthy section on archaeology, the author gives one hundred discoveries which verify the Old and New Testaments. And the book is made more interesting by a large number of photographs.

The book contains some weaknesses of which the Reformed believer ought to be aware.

It contains a defective view of prophecy, in that it views prophecy only as prediction. While it is certainly true that much of prophecy was predictive, prophecy was far more than merely to predict what would happen in the future. It was the Word of God to His people which centered in the revelation of God's purpose to accomplish full and complete salvation in Jesus Christ; and, as such, prophecy was God's interpretation of how this great work of God affected all the history of the

church and all the nations of the world in their relation to the church.

The book tries to make some of the miracles plausible by showing that they are entirely possible within the realm of natural phenomena. For example, in connection with the miracle of the whale swallowing Jonah, the author is at pains, not only to show that whales can swallow humans, but also to give instances of whales that actually did swallow humans. I do not really care if all this is true or not. The whale swallowed Jonah whether scientifically possible or whether scientifically impossible. As Spurgeon once said: If the Bible said that Jonah swallowed the whale, I would believe it.

Some exegesis in the book is rather allegorical. For example, the bronze in the shields which Rehoboam made when Shishak took away Solomon's shields of gold is interpreted to refer to the sin of hypocrisy.

The believer must remember that what Scripture says does not depend for its veracity on anything found in all God's world; it depends only upon the simple fact that God said that it is so. Hence we believe it. For the rest, we expect that all creation will indeed testify of the truth of creation; that all prophecy will surely be ful-

filled; that all discoveries in archaeological digs will support Scripture. But, if in the minds of some, evidence which appears to be contrary to Scripture should be found, we do not care one whit. Scripture stands. Nothing can contradict it.

If this is our approach to the matters treated by this book, the contents can make for extremely fascinating reading. ■

The Making of the NIV, Kenneth Barker. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991. Pp. 175. No price (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

The blurb on the back cover of this book describes why it was published:

This helpful guide answers some important questions: Why was a new translation considered necessary? How was the work carried out? What kinds of problems and challenges did the translators face? What is the explanation behind some of the NIV renderings? "Presented here," notes the editor, "are some of the whys and hows in the making of the NIV—a look behind the scenes by an English stylist and 13 of the original translators."

While many different subjects are treated in the book, two things become clear. The first is that the principle of dynamic equivalence was followed in the translation (see pages 17, 18, 125, 126). The idea of dynamic equivalence is that the thought or sense of an original Hebrew or Greek sentence (or clause) is given in an English sentence (or clause) which supposedly expresses the same idea. The argument for making use of dynamic equivalence is accuracy: "The NIV has been very cautious when it has departed from a "literal" rendering, but its willingness to be less literal has markedly enhanced its overall accuracy" (p. 134).

Apart from the question of what this principle of translation does to the truth of *verbal* inspiration, the simple fact of the matter is that the principle can only be put into practice by means of interpreting the original. If one is to give the sense of the original, one must interpret the original to know what the sense is. The business of translators is not to interpret, but to translate.

I am aware of the fact, as argued in the book, that all translation necessarily involves interpretation. I am also aware of the fact that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to put Hebrew and

Greek (and any other language) into good English in any kind of "literal" way. But this does not alter the fact that translators are to be translators and not interpreters as much as they possibly can. And when the literal translation is abandoned for a "dynamic" equivalent, the translators go beyond their rightful business of translating and present us with a paraphrase.

The second point which is troubling is the cavalier dismissal of the King James Version and of the Majority Text on which it is based.

I am not interested in getting into that debate in this review; but the authors of this book show no regard for the excellent and convincing scholarship of the defenders of the Majority Text when they offhandedly say that the Majority Text cannot be used for purposes of translation because of its many departures from the *Autographa*, or original manuscripts. And Edwin Palmer simply and without argument claims that the King James Version adds to God's Word.

Both are simply lies and do not have the backing of a significant number of Bible students. But it is the cavalier way in which such statements are made that undermines the credibility of the entire book.

The claim is made in the

book that so much attention to style was paid by the translators that the style of the NIV is excellent. I have made extensive use of the NIV to learn as much about it as possible. I have used it at family devotions when all my children were still home. Although I considered the style to be what I can only call "blah," the children themselves finally asked to go back to the King James—which I gladly did. ■

Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology, by R. C. Sproul. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977. Pp. 230. \$16.99 (hard cover). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

I heartily recommend this book to our *Journal* readers as a brief, concise, and clearly written statement of the doctrines which constitute the heart of Reformed theology. In a way, I think I would want our readers to begin with Part II of the book and study that part thoroughly. Then the reader can proceed to Part I. The reason is that, in my judgment, Part II of the book is its real strength.

Let me explain the divisions of the book.

Part I is entitled "Foundations of Reformed Theology" and deals with the subjects: Centered on God, Based on God's Word,

Committed to Faith Alone, Devoted to the Prophet, Priest and King, Nicknamed Covenant Theology. Part II treats in five chapters the five points of Calvinism, or as Sproul calls them, the five petals of the tulip. Part II is excellent. Part I, somewhat less so.

Let me start with Part II.

Sproul's treatment of total depravity is biblical and to the point. While he admits that the unregenerate are able to do things that are in outward conformity to the law of God, he insists, contrary to the theory of common grace, that these "good" deeds are not good in God's sight. His discussion of the question of the freedom of the will is excellent and in the tradition of all sound Reformation truth, beginning with Luther.

In his treatment of unconditional election, Sproul does not hesitate to enter into the question of reprobation. While he takes the *infra* position in reprobation (i.e., that reprobation is a "passing by" of some), he does not want a conditional reprobation and insists that God decrees to permit sin (pp. 172, 173).

Sproul claims that Calvin taught a permissive will of God with regard to sin, something that could, I think, be challenged on the basis of Calvin's two brochures included in the book published

under the title, "Calvin's Calvinism."

Interestingly, after describing various interpretations of II Peter 3:9, Sproul accepts that interpretation which makes the verse refer to the elect in the clause "not willing that any should perish"; and he interprets God's will as referring to the will of God's decree (pp. 172, 173).

In his discussion of limited atonement and irresistible grace, Sproul teaches both doctrines forcibly and consistently, sharply condemns every form of Arminianism and Pelagianism, and has no room for a well-meant offer in the call of the gospel.

Sproul offers a nice explanation of the Westminster Confession, 18.3 on the question of whether assurance belongs to the essence of faith. He claims that the idea of the creed is that faith is not a condition to salvation, and that one may be saved even though he temporarily loses the assurance of faith.

Although the author explains Hebrews 6:4-6 as a warning to believers (because of the word *renew* found in the text), he holds strongly to the doctrine of the preservation of the saints.

Part II is edifying and instructive.

Part I has also many good

points in it. The book contains an excellent statement on the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture and on the doctrine of God. Sproul's treatment of justification by faith is a vigorous defense of the Reformation truth over against Roman Catholic theology, and ought to put to shame evangelicals who have compromised this truth in their statement of agreement with Roman Catholic theologians. But Sproul's treatment of the sovereignty of God left me a bit empty. At best it was vague; at worst it was improperly stated. I am, e.g., wary of a statement like this: "Any limit here is not a limit imposed on God by us, but a limit God sovereignly imposes on himself." I think I know what Sproul means by that, but it is vague; and the trouble is that it is the language which Arminians use to explain how a sovereign God makes room for the free will of man. God curbs his own sovereignty so that man's free will is decisive.

In the doctrine of the covenant, the last chapter of Part I, Sproul defends Meredith Kline's view of the covenant, i.e., that the covenant is patterned after ancient treaties used among the nations. This view has always struck me as a concession to higher critical approaches to the Old Testament; but it also interprets the covenant

in terms of a treaty or pact, and lacks the power of Scripture's presentation of the covenant as a bond of fellowship.

Nevertheless, one may be thankful for a book of this caliber,

especially because it is written by a widely recognized evangelical theologian in a climate of soft evangelicalism when crucial doctrines are at stake. Buy the book and enjoy it. ■

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