

# Protestant Reformed Theological Journal

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VOLUME XXXIII

November, 1999

Number 1

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## **In This Issue:**

Editor's Notes ..... 1

Forgotten Pink

Ronald Hanko ..... 2

How Many Elders?

The Presbyterian View of the Ruling Elder

Mark Shand ..... 45

Book Reviews ..... 83



ISSN: 1070-8138

# PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Published twice annually by the faculty of the Protestant-Reformed Seminary:

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The Protestant Reformed Theological Journal is published by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary twice each year, in April and November, and mailed to subscribers free of charge. Those who wish to receive the *Journal* should write the editor, at the address below. Books for review should be sent to the book review editor, also at the address of the school.

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## Editor's Notes

In his article, "The Forgotten Pink," the Rev. Ronald Hanko demonstrates that the edition of Arthur W. Pink's book *The Sovereignty of God*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust and called the "Revised Edition," omits about one half of the original edition published by Baker Book House. Included among the omitted portions of the Banner edition is the chapter on Reprobation. Does the Banner have a "hidden agenda" with these omissions? Did Pink change his views on divine sovereignty and human responsibility? Did Pink change his views on the well meant offer of the gospel, his views on the will of God, and his interpretation of such passages as II Peter 3:9? Rev. Hanko argues convincingly that Pink did not change his views on these important points. Can the Banner edition of Pink be called a "Revised Edition" when in reality it is only one half of the original? We let the reader decide. Rev. Hanko's "The Forgotten Pink" was first published in 1997 in the *British Reformed Journal*.

Mark Shand presents an excellent study of "The Presbyterian View of the Ruling Elder." He traces the positions of leading theologians in the Presbyterian tradition on the question of the office of elder. Is there only one office, viz., that of elder? According to this position both minister and ruling elder occupy the same office. Are there two distinct and separate offices, viz., that of the minister and that of the ruling elder? Or is there one office with two aspects, viz., ruling and teaching. Mr. Shand lays out the strengths and weaknesses of each of the above positions and concludes that the biblical and correct view is that there is one office with two aspects, viz., teaching and ruling.

In addition we call the reader's attention to several reviews of important books.

RDD

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# The Forgotten Pink

Rev. Ron Hanko

## Spurgeon First Forgotten

We have deliberately chosen the title of this article in reference to the book entitled *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, published by the Banner of Truth Trust and written by Mr. Iain Murray. In that excellent book Murray accuses the religious world of forgetting that Spurgeon was a Calvinist and shows what an implacable opponent of Arminianism he was.

Thus Murray speaks with disapproval of the Kelvedon edition of Spurgeon's works in which "Arminianism" was removed from some sermons. Murray says, "More seriously, 'Arminianism' has been removed from the text of some of Spurgeon's Sermons reprinted in the Kelvedon edition, though no warning of the abridgement is given to the reader" (*The Forgotten Spurgeon*, second edition, 1973, p. 52, note).<sup>1</sup>

Let us note that Murray's criticism revolves primarily around the removal of all references to Arminianism, and the fact that no notice of the removal is given to the reader. That removal is sufficient, in Murray's opinion, to make the Kelvedon edition of Spurgeon's sermons an "abridgement."

## Pink Pinked<sup>2</sup>

To our surprise we learned a number of years ago that the Banner of Truth Trust (hereafter referred to as the Banner), with which Mr. Murray has had the closest possible connections over many years, had done the same thing to Arthur Pink's important book *The Sovereignty of God*. At that time we were told that one chapter of Pink's book, a chapter entitled "The Sovereignty of God in Reprobation," had been removed in the Banner edition.

Not having a copy of the Banner edition we were unable to check the truth of what we had been told, and did not think much more of the matter. More recently, and for various reasons, we decided to investigate further, and were surprised by what we found.

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1. Cf. also Appendices #1 and #3, pp. 24 and 32.

2. "To cut with a jagged edge."

The truth is that there are three whole chapters missing from the original edition of Pink's book. The chapter entitled "The Sovereignty of God in Reprobation" is missing, but so are two others, entitled "God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility" and "Difficulties and Objections." Not only that, but four lengthy appendices (18 pages of the fourth edition as published by Baker Book House) are also missing from the Banner edition, appendices which are by no means unimportant. The titles alone will indicate to any discerning reader how important they are: "The Will of God," "The Case of Adam," "The Meaning of 'Kosmos' in John 3:16," and "1 John 2:2."

What is more, large sections of other chapters are also missing — in many cases whole paragraphs, and in others sentences and words. By our count 94 of 269 complete pages of the fourth (Baker) edition are missing and 241 of 525 paragraphs, not including missing words and sentences. More than half of the book, therefore, is missing in the Banner edition, the only edition generally available to British readers.

The notices of this are found on the title page, where the Banner edition is referred to as a "Revised Edition," and in the publisher's preface which makes reference to "certain minor revisions and abridgements" (pp. 2-3). Whether this covers what the Banner has done to Pink's book, we leave to the reader to judge, especially in light of Mr. Murray's reference to the Kelvedon edition of Spurgeon's sermons as an "abridgement."

The only other reference we know of to this "revision" of *The Sovereignty of God* is found in Murray's biography of Pink, *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, where he speaks of "the removal of some material" from the book. Again, we leave it to the reader to judge whether this constitutes "a warning ... given to the reader."

### **Justification Attempted and Aborted**

In his biography of Pink, Mr. Murray gives what we presume to be a justification of what the Banner has done to Pink's book. He says:

To aid readers in making a classification of Pink's writings we are supplying an Appendix giving the dates of all his major writings. In addition it may be of help to point to specific subjects where changes took place in his thinking.

First, with respect to Calvinistic theology, no fundamental alteration in his views took place after the publication of *The Sovereignty of God*

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in 1918. His last revision of the title was done at Morton's Gap, Kentucky, in 1929, when he wrote: "During the last ten years it has pleased God to grant us further light on certain parts of his Word, and this we have sought to use in improving our expositions of different passages. But it is with unfeigned thanksgiving that we find it unnecessary to either change or modify any doctrine..." (Foreword to the Third Edition). He had no part in Herendeen's publication of a fourth edition in 1949, although by that time there were certainly points which he would have stated differently.

In the 1929 edition, for example, he objected to the gospel being presented as an "offer": "The gospel is not an 'offer' to be bandied around by evangelistic peddlers." But he came to accept, in the words of Calvin, that "the mercy of God is offered to those who believe and to those who believe not." This is not to say that in 1929 Pink held the hyper-Calvinistic view that sinners are not to be commanded to repent and believe: as we have seen, it was his preaching on that point which prompted the trouble in Belvoir Street, Sydney in 1927-28, but thereafter he did become clearer in stating the freeness of the gospel. "The gospel," he wrote to a friend in 1949, "is as free as the air, and I Timothy 1:15 gives us full warrant to tell a murderer in the condemned cell that there is a Saviour *for him* if he will receive *him*.... The ground on which any sinner is invited and commanded to believe is neither God's election, nor Christ's substitution, but his particular need of responding to the free offer of the gospel. The gospel is that Christ died for sinners *as sinners* (not 'elect sinners') and is addressed to their responsibility."

Similarly Pink's views of human responsibility were improved after 1929. When the 1929 edition of *Sovereignty* was published he was prepared to reject all terminology attributing "free-agency" or "free-will" to sinners. By 1940, however, in his articles "The Doctrine of Man's Inability," though not basically changing his teaching, he had come to see that there is a legitimate sense in which it is necessary to insist upon both the freedom of the will and free-agency. Human responsibility is presented with an exactness much closer to Scripture in these articles and he rightly abandons an argument, based upon the would-be distinction between natural and moral inability, to which he had wrongly given emphasis in *The Sovereignty of God*.

For these reasons when the Banner of Truth Trust published the first British edition of *The Sovereignty of God* in 1961 they believed they were warranted in making a revision which included the removal of some material relating to these points. In this respect the 1961 "Revised Edition" is a more accurate presentation of Pink's mature thought and, we think, more likely to do good than the 1929 edition which is still

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published in the U.S.A. (pp. 194-196).

We quote at length to show how completely the Banner has misled the readers of *The Sovereignty of God*. Half the book is not “some material.” Nor does much of what was removed have anything to do with the points Murray raises. It is true that Pink did not write the foreword to the Fourth Edition, but it was published while he was still living, by a friend of his, and without any indication from Pink himself at that time or afterward that he was unhappy with anything in the book. Indeed, Pink himself says in his preface to the third edition (essentially the same as the fourth) that he found it “unnecessary to change or modify any doctrine.” Murray himself admits that “with respect to Calvinistic theology, no fundamental alteration in his views took place after the publication of *The Sovereignty of God* in 1918.” Yet the Banner made fundamental alterations not only to this book but to his theology as well, as we will show.

### Reasons That Reason Cannot Tell

Murray, then, justifies the Banner’s wholesale slaughter of Pink’s book by referring to two supposed changes in Pink’s theology, the first having to do with the preaching of the gospel and the second with human responsibility. As proof for the first assertion, Murray gives one quote from Calvin and one from Pink, for the second no quotes at all, but only a reference to Pink’s *Studies in the Scriptures*.

How a quote from Calvin is supposed to prove a change in Pink’s views we cannot tell, but Mr. Murray does give one quote from Pink to support his contention that Pink’s views of the gospel changed. The quote, however, proves nothing.

In the *Sovereignty of God* Pink says: “The gospel is not an ‘offer’ to be bandied around by evangelistic peddlers.” Murray quotes an unpublished letter of 1949 (this is the best and only evidence, apparently, that the Banner has to offer) that is supposed to contradict this. There Pink says: “The gospel is as free as the air, and I Timothy 1:15 gives us full warrant to tell a murderer in the condemned cell that there is a Saviour *for him* if he will receive *him*.... The ground on which any sinner is invited and commanded to believe is neither God’s election, nor Christ’s substitution, but his particular need of responding to the free offer of the gospel. That gospel is that Christ died for sinners *as sinners* (not ‘elect sinners’) and is addressed to their responsibility.”

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What is the difference between this quote and what Pink writes in *Sovereignty*? The difference exists only in the mind of Mr. Murray. We do not believe that the gospel is an “offer” to be “bandied about by evangelistic peddlers.” We have, however, no problem with the quote Murray uses to prove his point. We believe that “the gospel is as free as the air, and I Timothy 1:15 gives us full warrant to tell a murderer in the condemned cell that there is a Savior for him if he will receive him.” We would insist, too, that “the ground on which any sinner is invited and commanded to believe is neither God’s election, nor Christ’s substitution, but his particular need of responding to the free offer of the gospel. The gospel is that Christ died for sinners as sinners and is addressed to their responsibility.”

All that could possibly be proved from the quotes is that Pink’s views of the word “offer” changed. Perhaps he came to see, as we have come to see, that the problem is not with the word “offer.” The word can be used in a legitimate sense, as the Westminster Larger Catechism uses it in Question and Answer 63, to mean that God *testifies* in the gospel “that whosoever believes in him shall be saved ... excluding none that will come unto him.”

But even if there was some change in Pink’s teaching (and Murray himself admits there was “no *fundamental* alteration in his views”), Pink’s views of the gospel were never those of Murray and the Banner. Pink *never* taught that God loves everyone or desires to save everyone, or promises salvation to everyone in the gospel, as the Banner does. Pink says, for example, in *The Sermon on the Mount* (printed originally in 1938-43, not long before the Fourth Edition of *Sovereignty*):

The Gospel is a message of “good news.” To whom? To sinners. But to what sort of sinners? To the giddy and unconcerned, to those who give no thought to the claims of God and where they shall spend eternity? Certainly not. The Gospel announces no good tidings to *them*: it has no music in it to their ears. They are quite deaf to its charms, for they have no sense of need of the Saviour (p. 357).

He emphatically denies, therefore, that the gospel has good news in it for every sinner who hears the gospel.

A little further on he again rejects the Banner’s views of the gospel:



The true prophet accords God His rightful place. He is owned as the King of kings and Lord of lords, as the One who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." He is acknowledged to be the sovereign Ruler of heaven and earth, at whose disposal are all creatures and all events, for whose pleasure they are created (Rev. iv, 11), whose will is invincible and whose power is irresistible. He is declared to be God in fact as well as in name: One whose claims upon us are paramount and incontestable, One who is to be held in the utmost reverence and awe, One who is to be feared and rejoiced in with trembling (Psalm ii, 11). Such a God the false prophets neither believe in nor preach. On the contrary, *they prate about a God who wants to do this and who would like to do that, but cannot because His creatures will not permit it.* Having endowed man with a free will, he must neither be compelled nor coerced, and while *Deity is filled with amiable intentions He is unable to carry them out* (italics mine, R.H.). Man is the architect of his fortunes and the decider of his own destiny, and God a mere spectator (p. 365).

Many other such quotes could be cited from Pink's later writings. From them it is obvious that it was not Pink's views that changed, but the Banner that has changed Pink.

### Free-Willing Changes

Regarding the other matter, that is, the supposed change in Pink's views of human responsibility and free will, we also disagree with Murray. In proof of his assertions Murray gives no quotations, but does make reference in a footnote to Pink's *Studies*, 1940, pp. 158-160 (also printed in *Gleanings from the Scriptures: Man's Total Depravity*, 1969, Moody Press, pp. 238-242).

The two things Murray disagrees with in *The Sovereignty of God* are Pink's repudiation of the notion that man is a "free moral agent" and Pink's distinction between natural and moral inability. Murray says, for example, that in his later writings Pink "rightly abandons an argument, based upon the would-be distinction between natural and moral inability, to which he had wrongly given emphasis in *The Sovereignty of God*," a distinction, Murray says, that "does not clarify the real spiritual issue" (*Life*, page 196, note).

We have read and reread these pages and cannot find how they prove the point Murray is making. They do not even make reference to the distinction between natural and moral inability, and they say nothing about whether man is a free moral agent. In fact, we can find

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nothing in those pages of the *Studies* that Pink does not teach in *Sovereignty*.

That Pink does deny in *Sovereignty* that man is a free moral agent is clear. But it is also clear that Pink only means that man does not have free will *in the Arminian sense*. In denying man's free moral agency he is only contradicting the teaching that "'God Himself cannot control my moral frame or constrain my moral choice:'"

The will is not sovereign; it is a servant, because influenced and controlled by the other faculties of man's being. [The sinner is not a free agent because he is a] slave of sin — this was clearly implied in the Lord's words, "If the Son shall therefore (sic) make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Man is a rational being and as such responsible and accountable to God, but to affirm that he is [a free moral agent] is to deny that he is totally depraved — i.e., depraved in will as in everything else (the words in brackets are changed in the Banner edition to read "[The will is not free because *the man* is the] slave of sin, ... but to affirm that he is [capable of choosing that which is spiritually good] is to deny that he is totally depraved") (p. 138).

What person who believes in total depravity could possibly have any serious objection to this? Murray himself defines free agency in a note in the Banner edition of *Sovereignty* with a quote from Charles Hodge that contradicts nothing Pink says, except that Hodge uses the phrase "free moral agent" and Pink does not.

But even if Pink's repudiation of the phrase "free agency" is objectionable, we find it incredible that this is the justification for deleting so much material from Pink's book, including the whole chapter on human responsibility. In omitting the chapter, the Banner omits a total of 48 paragraphs or 21 pages (the discussion of natural and moral inability fills only 16 paragraphs, and most of what Pink says there must be judged acceptable even by Murray and the Banner)! Would not a note or a brief appendix have done far better, especially in light of the fact that this is the chapter where Pink insists on the very important point that God's sovereignty in no way destroys or impinges on man's responsibility?

### **Is Half a Book Better Than No Book?**

We would add, too, that Murray has not proved that Pink's views of reprobation changed, or his views on the operations of the Spirit, or

his views on the love of God, or his views on the will of God, or his interpretation of such passages as II Peter 3:9, yet the Banner has omitted his "views" on all these matters from *The Sovereignty of God*. Certainly that is worse than anything the Kelvedon edition did to Spurgeon.

In any case, would it not have been far more honest, if the Banner really felt that Pink's views had changed so considerably as to affect half the book, either to leave the book unpublished, or at the very least to print, perhaps as a supplement or appendix to *Sovereignty* those passages from other of Pink's writings that they believed were more correct? At least in that case the reader could have judged for himself.

We have no principle objection to an abridgment of a book if it is done to simplify and condense a book that would otherwise be beyond the capacity or patience of some readers, and if it is clear from the book itself that it is an abridged version. The abridgment of John Owen's *The Death of Death* is of that sort (the abridgment is published under the title, *Life by His Death*). But the Banner's editing of Pink was not done merely to simplify, nor is *Sovereignty* at all a difficult book to read, but one of the easiest of all Pink's writings.

What, then, should the Banner's edition of Pink be called: an abridgment? a condensation? Perhaps "Bowdlerized Version"<sup>3</sup> would be best. Whatever we call it, however, we believe the Banner should stop printing this so-called "Revised Version," admit its mistake, and refund those who are no longer satisfied to own such an impoverished edition of such an important book.

## The Forgotten Pink

But we did not entitle this article "The forgotten Pink" merely to indict the Banner. Rather, we are concerned to show that what was true of Spurgeon's Calvinism some 40 years ago — that it was forgotten or misunderstood — is also true of Pink's Calvinism today.

At the time Murray wrote *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, Calvinism was largely in disrepute both in America and in Britain. Today that is no longer true, due in large measure to the efforts of Mr. Murray and others.

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3. Bowdler was an editor of Shakespeare who removed everything objectionable from Shakespeare's works. As a result, his name has become a part of our language in the word "bowdlerize."

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Yet the Calvinism they represent and teach is not the same as that of Arthur Pink. Pink's Calvinism is a higher and stricter Calvinism than theirs.

Pink's Calvinism differs in a number of respects from the more moderate Calvinism of today. For one thing, Pink's Calvinism is logically consistent with itself, something abhorrent to the more moderate Calvinists of today who are not only willing to find, but delight in finding contradictions, apparent or otherwise, both in Scripture and in their own theology.

In the second place, Pink's Calvinism has a higher view of God, especially in that it emphasizes the self-consistency, self-sufficiency, immutability, and perfection of God. A more moderate Calvinism is willing to speak in ways that suggest that God changes and that He can and does will and work opposite things.

In the third place, Pink's Calvinism has a stronger emphasis on predestination, and is not silent about the doctrine of reprobation. The more moderate modern Calvinism tends to speak little if at all of reprobation and does not find election to be the source and fountain of every saving good. Instead it speaks of a love and grace of God that are divorced from election and from the cross.

Fourthly, Pink's Calvinism has a strong particularity to it. Not only does he insist clearly and unmistakably on particular election and particular redemption, but he carries this over into an emphasis on particular love, mercy, and grace. Even those more moderate Calvinists of today who believe in particular redemption do not want particular grace, particular love, and a particular promise of God (i.e., a promise only for the elect, though preached to all).

Having carefully taken note of the omissions in the Banner edition of *Sovereignty*, we can come to no other conclusion than that the material was removed by way of softening Pink's high Calvinism, and that in support of the watered-down version of Calvinism that the Banner itself has been promoting over the years. This watered-down version of Calvinism teaches a love of God for all men, a will of God to save all men, and a gospel offer through which God actively seeks the salvation of all men, views that Pink would have nothing of.

We believe an examination of the material removed will confirm that the difference between Pink's and the Banner's teaching on these matters is the reason for most of the changes. What follows, then, is a

selection of omitted material. This, we believe, will show more clearly than anything we can write, the kind of Calvinism Pink represented, a Calvinism with which the Banner is extremely uncomfortable. And, in quoting this material, we remind our readers that *all* of it is missing in the Banner edition of *The Sovereignty of God*.

### Reprobation "Passed By"

We begin our examination by looking at the three omitted chapters and the four omitted appendices, since these are the most serious omissions of all. This material fills 88 pages of the Baker edition of *Sovereignty*. Nor is there a *single mention* in this chapter of the two matters the Banner uses as an excuse for omitting "some material."

In the first place, then, the removal of the chapter on reprobation is significant. It is this doctrine more than any other that conflicts with the idea that God wills and seeks and makes a well-meant offer of salvation to all men without exception. The doctrine of reprobation, after all, is the teaching that God has eternally *willed* the damnation of some, a teaching that can hardly be reconciled with a *will* of God to save all.

Indeed, in that chapter Pink explicitly denies that God wills the salvation of all men. He speaks, for example, of the Old Testament, and points out that in those times God obviously did not will the salvation of the other nations around Israel in that He did not vouchsafe to them even the means of salvation (Baker edition, p. 83 - all references to *The Sovereignty of God* from here on are taken from this edition).

He goes on to say:

Coming down to our own day, and to those in our own country — leaving out the almost innumerable crowds of unevangelized heathen is it not evident that there are many living in lands where the Gospel is preached, lands which are full of churches, who die strangers to God and His holiness? True, the means of grace were close to their hand, but many of them knew it not. Thousands are born into homes where they are taught from infancy to regard all Christians as hypocrites and preachers as arch-humbugs. Others, are instructed from the cradle in Roman Catholicism, and are trained to regard Evangelical Christianity as deadly heresy, and the Bible as a book highly dangerous for them to read. Others, reared in "Christian Science" families, know no more of the true Gospel of Christ than do the unevangelized heathen. The great

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majority of these die in utter ignorance of the Way of Peace. Now are we not *obliged* to conclude that it was not God's will to communicate grace to *them*? Had His will been otherwise, would he not have *actually* communicated His grace to them? If, then, it was the will of God, in time, to *refuse* to them His grace, it must have been His will from all eternity, since His will is, as Himself, the same yesterday, and today and forever. Let it not be forgotten that God's *providences* are but the *manifestations* of His *decrees*: what God *does* in time is only what He *purposed* in eternity — His own will being the alone cause of all His acts and works. Therefore from His actually leaving some men in final impenitency and unbelief we assuredly gather it was His everlasting determination so to do; and consequently that He reprobated some from before the foundation of the world (pp. 83, 84).

In the same connection he writes:

Now if God had willed their salvation, would He not have vouchsafed them the means of salvation? Would He not have given them all things necessary to that end? But it is an undeniable matter of fact that He *did not*. If, then, Deity can, consistently, with His justice, mercy, and benevolence, deny to some the means of grace, and shut them up in gross darkness and unbelief (because of the sins of their forefathers, generations before), why should it be deemed incompatible with His perfections to exclude some persons, many, from grace itself, and from that eternal life which is connected with it? seeing that He is Lord and sovereign Disposer both of the end to which the means lead, and the means which lead to that end? (p. 83).

We do not think, of course, that the Banner and other moderate Calvinists all disbelieve the doctrine of reprobation, but at best it is a doctrine which is "passed by" among them, or, if mentioned, is watered down. Pink himself speaks of this. He begins the chapter with these words:

In the last chapter when treating of the Sovereignty of God the Father in Salvation, we examined seven passages which represent Him as making a choice from among the children of men, and predestinating certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son. The thoughtful reader will naturally ask, And what of those who were not "ordained to eternal life?" The answer which is usually returned to this question, even by those who profess to believe what the Scriptures teach concern-

ing God's sovereignty, is, that God *passes by* the non-elect, *leaves them alone* to go their own way, and in the end casts them into the Lake of Fire because they refused *His* way, and rejected the Saviour of His providing. But this is only a part of the truth; the other part — that which is most offensive to the carnal mind — is either ignored or denied (p. 81).

Now it may be that the Banner does not like Pink's views on reprobation, but does that justify omitting everything he taught on the subject in *Sovereignty*? What Pink teaches and what the Banner does not like, of course, is the idea that God has *willed* some to condemnation, for this can hardly be reconciled with the teaching beloved to moderate Calvinists, that God wills the salvation of all.

In the same chapter Pink deals with some of the passages favored by those who believe that God desires to save all without exception, something He actively pursues in the preaching of the gospel by well-meaningly "offering" salvation to all. He deals with such passages as Ezekiel 18:31, Acts 17:30, and I Timothy 2:4, and gives an interpretation of those passages that would not sit well with any "well-meant offer" man. We include just one sample, Pink's exegesis of Acts 17:30:

Again: if God has chosen only certain ones to salvation, why are we told that God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30)? That God commandeth "all men" to repent is but the enforcing of His righteous claims as the moral Governor of the world. How could He do less, seeing that all men everywhere have sinned against Him? Furthermore; that God commandeth all men everywhere to repent argues the universality of creature responsibility. But this Scripture does not declare that it is God's pleasure to "give repentance" (Acts 5:31) to all men everywhere (p. 103).

He also rejects the long-cherished notion that it is possible for the unregenerate to seek after God:

Second, the doctrine of Reprobation does not mean that God refuses to save those who earnestly seek salvation. The fact is that the reprobate have no longing *for* the Saviour: they see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. They will not come to Christ — why then should God force them to? He turns away *none* who *do* come — where then is the injustice of God fore-determining their just doom (pp. 100, 101)?

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It is no wonder, really, that the chapter was omitted, when so many popular notions are destroyed by it. But we are convinced it was not honest, no more so than suggesting by omission that Spurgeon was a friend of Arminianism.

### **The Difficulties Are the Banner's**

In another omitted chapter, "Difficulties and Objections," Pink makes many of the same points. So it becomes obvious why this chapter, too, was omitted by the Banner. In the chapter Pink deals again with many favorite passages of those who believe in a universal love of God and a will of God to save all men, such passages as Matthew 23:37, John 3:16, and II Peter 3:9. We offer, as a sample of Pink's views, his explanation of II Peter 3:9:

Let us now quote the verse as a whole: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Could anything be clearer? The "any" that God is not willing should perish, are the "usward" to whom God is "longsuffering," the "beloved" of the previous verses. 2 Peter 3:9 means, then, that God will not send back His Son until "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25). God will not send back Christ till that "people" whom He is now "taking out of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:14) are gathered in. God will not send back His Son until the Body of Christ is complete, and that will not be till the ones whom He has elected to be saved in this dispensation shall have been brought to Him. Thank God for His "longsuffering to us-ward." Had Christ come back twenty years ago the writer had been left behind to perish in his sins. But that *could not* be, so God graciously delayed the Second Coming. For the same reason He is still delaying His Advent. His decreed purpose is that *all* His elect will come to repentance, and repent they *shall*. The present interval of grace will not end until the last of the "other sheep" of John 10:16 are safely folded — *then* will Christ return (pp. 206-207).

In this chapter Pink also flatly rejects the idea that God loves all men (a popular Banner teaching) and the related idea that God loves the sinner, but hates his sin. Concerning a supposed universal love of God he says:

One of the most popular beliefs of the day is that God loves



everybody, and the very fact that it is so popular with all classes ought to be enough to arouse the suspicions of those who are subject to the Word of Truth. God's Love toward all His creatures is the fundamental and favorite tenet of Universalists, Unitarians, Theosophists, Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Russellites, etc. No matter how a man may live — in open defiance of Heaven, with no concern whatever for his soul's eternal interests, still less for God's glory, dying perhaps, with an oath on his lips — notwithstanding, God loves him, we are told. So widely has this dogma been proclaimed, and so comforting is it to the heart which is at enmity with God, we have little hope of convincing many of their error (p. 200).

With regard to the preaching of the gospel the following paragraph ought to be compared with the teaching of the Banner regarding the well-meant offer of the gospel, and it will be plain enough why this chapter, "Difficulties and Objections" was omitted. Pink is answering the question, "Why preach the Gospel to every creature?" He says:

Concerning the character and contents of the Gospel the utmost confusion prevails today. The Gospel is not an "offer" to be bandied about by evangelistic peddlers. The Gospel is no mere *invitation*, but a *proclamation*, a proclamation concerning *Christ*; true, whether men believe it or no. No man is asked to believe that Christ died for him in particular. The Gospel, in brief, is this: Christ died for sinners, you are a sinner, believe in Christ, and you shall be saved. In the Gospel, God simply announces the terms upon which men may be saved (namely repentance and faith) and, indiscriminately, all are commanded to fulfil them (p. 209).

It would be nice to quote the whole of Pink's discussion of what the Gospel is and why it must be preached. He has some notable things to say about the nature, power, and purpose of gospel preaching, and about the command to preach the gospel to every creature. But it is not our purpose in this article to show what Pink believed on all these matters. Those who are interested in these questions are urged to purchase and read the Baker Book House edition of *The Sovereignty of God* for themselves. They will be much enlightened.

### Irresponsible Editing

We have already dealt with the Banner's suggestion that it was

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Pink's views on human responsibility that justified the removal of so much material. That material is found primarily in the chapter "God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility." Here, too, the Banner has dealt very callously with Pink.

Even if the Banner's objections are correct and Pink's views on responsibility did change, this in no sense justifies the removal of the whole chapter. There is much material deleted that is not only above objection, but very important to the argument of the book. It is in this chapter especially that Pink shows that God's sovereignty does not destroy human responsibility. But here again the omission is easily explainable when Pink's words are compared with the teaching of moderate Calvinism as represented by the Banner.

Already at the beginning of the chapter, Pink claims that sovereignty and responsibility are not contradictory, but can be reconciled. The moderate Calvinists of today prefer to see in them an example of contradiction, antinomy, or tension.<sup>4</sup> The following quote from Pink, therefore, is an example of the kind of teaching that would have Banner-style Calvinists beating their breasts in horror:

Others have acknowledged that the Scriptures present both the sovereignty of God and responsibility of man, but affirm that in our present finite condition and with our limited knowledge it is *impossible* to reconcile the two truths, though it is the bounden duty of the believer to receive both. The present writer believes that it has been too readily *assumed* that the Scriptures themselves do not reveal the several points which show the conciliation of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. While perhaps the Word of God does not clear up all the mystery (and this is said with reserve), it *does* throw much light upon the problem, and it seems to us *more honoring* to God and His Word to prayerfully search the Scriptures for the complete solution of the difficulty (p. 144).

In this and other matters addressed in the chapter, we believe the Banner had a hidden agenda in what it deleted. This same chapter, for example, makes the following points:

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4. Another high Calvinist, Gordon Clarke, was tried for heresy in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for claiming that there was no contradiction between them. Cf. Herman Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy*, Trinity Foundation, 1995.

We shall therefore digress a little at this point to define and consider what is implied and involved in the words "No man can *come to Me*" — cf. John 5:40, "ye will not *come to Me* that ye might have life."

For the sinner to come to Christ that he might have life is for him to realize the awful danger of his situation; is for him to see that the sword of Divine justice is suspended over his head; is to awaken to the fact that there is but a step betwixt him and death, and that after death is the "judgment"; and in consequence of this discovery, is for him to be in *real earnest* to escape, and in *such earnestness* that he shall *flee* from the wrath to come, *cry* to God for mercy, and *agonize* to enter in at the "strait gate."

To come to Christ for life, is for the sinner to feel and acknowledge that he is utterly destitute of any claim upon God's favour; is to see himself as "without strength," lost and undone; is to admit that he is deserving of nothing but eternal death, thus taking side with God against himself; it is for him to cast himself into the dust before God, and humbly sue for Divine mercy.

To come to Christ for life, is for the sinner to abandon his own righteousness and be ready to be made the righteousness of God in Christ; it is to disown his own wisdom and be guided by His; it is to repudiate his own will and be ruled by His; it is to unreservedly receive the Lord Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, as his All in all.

Such, in part and in brief, is what is *implied and involved* in "Coming to Christ." But is the sinner willing to take *such* an attitude before God? No; for in the first place, he *does not realize* the danger of his situation, and in consequence is not in real earnest after his escape; instead, men are for the most part *at ease*, and apart from the operations of the Holy Spirit whenever they *are* disturbed by the alarms of conscience of the dispensations of providence, they flee to any other refuge but Christ (p. 150).

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Now let it be clearly understood that, when we speak of the sinner's *inability*, we do not mean that if men desired to come to Christ they lack the necessary power to carry out their desire. No; the fact is that the sinner's inability or absence of power is itself *due to lack of willingness* to come to Christ, and this lack of willingness is the fruit of a depraved heart (p. 151).

The idea that the sinner cannot even desire to come to Christ or realize his danger apart from the saving operations of the Spirit makes nonsense of a well-meant and loving offer of the gospel. Yet this is the

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type of moderate Calvinism the Banner has been promoting for many years. So the Banner has removed everything that contradicts or conflicts with its view from *The Sovereignty of God* without any "warning to the reader." The supposed changes in Pink's views appear to be no more than a smoke screen.

### **An Appendectomy**

The omission of the four appendices is also significant. In the first and second appendices Pink deals with the question of God's secret and revealed will and rejects the idea that there is any conflict between them. Those who believe that God in the gospel expresses a love for all and a desire to save all often try to reconcile this teaching with the doctrine of predestination by saying that there are two conflicting wills in God, a will to save all and a will to save only some. No wonder, then, that the Banner did not want these two appendices printed in its edition.

Here are some samples:

In treating of the Will of God some theologians have differentiated between His decretive will and His permissive will, insisting that there are certain things which God has positively fore-ordained, but other things which He merely suffers to exist or happen. But such a distinction is really no distinction at all, inasmuch as God only permits that which is according to His will (p. 243).

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It has been objected by Arminian theologians that the division of God's will into secret and revealed is untenable, because it makes God to have two different wills, the one opposed to the other. But this is a mistake, due to their failure to see that the secret and revealed will of God respect entirely different objects. If God should require and forbid the same thing, or if He should decree the same thing should and should not exist, then would His secret and revealed will be contradictory and purposeless (p. 244).

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That there is no conflict whatever between the secret and revealed will of God is made clear from the fact that, the former is accomplished by my use of the means laid down in the latter (p. 246).

\* \* \* \* \*

Here then is the difficulty: If God has eternally decreed that Adam *should* eat of the tree, how could he be held responsible *not* to eat of it? Formidable as the problem appears, nevertheless, it is capable of a

solution, a solution, moreover, which can be grasped even by the finite mind. The solution is to be found in the distinction between God's secret will and His revealed will. As stated in Appendix I, human responsibility is measured by our knowledge of God's *revealed* will; what God *has* told us, not what He has not told us, is the definer of our duty. So it was with Adam.

That God had decreed sin should enter this world through the disobedience of our first parents was a *secret* hid in His own breast. Of this Adam knew nothing, and *that made all the difference* so far as His responsibility was concerned. Adam was quite unacquainted with the Creator's hidden counsels. What concerned him was God's *revealed* will. *And that was plain!* God had *forbidden* him to eat of the tree and that was enough (p. 249).

In the last two appendices Pink deals with those two Scripture texts that are so often used to prove a broader scope for the love of God than for just the elect, John 3:16 and I John 2:2. Pink shows clearly that these texts do not teach anything but a love of God for the elect alone, demonstrating from Scripture that the word "world" applies only to the elect in these passages. He says for example in Appendix III, "The Meaning of 'Kosmos' in John 3:16":

That "the world" in John 3:16 refers to *the world of believers* (God's elect), in contradistinction from the "*world of the ungodly*" (2 Pet. 2:5), is established, unequivocally established, by a comparison of the other passages which speak of God's "love." "God commendeth His love *toward US*" — the saints, Rom. 5:8. "*Whom* the Lord loveth He *chasteneth*" — every son, Heb. 12:6. "We love Him, because He first loved *US*" — believers, I John 4:19. The wicked God "pities" (see Matt. 18:33). Unto the unthankful and evil God is "kind" (see Luke 6:35). The vessels of wrath He endures "with much longsuffering" (see Rom. 9:22). But "His own" God *loves!!* (p. 255).

Pink would have nothing whatsoever to do with the idea that God in some sense loves all men, but every reference to this idea has been carefully excised. An inexcusable action!

## Chapter Chopping

Many other omissions throughout the book are of the same kind. The deleted material usually contradicts the Banner teaching regarding

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a love of God for all, a desire of God to save all, and God's making a loving and "well-meant" offer of salvation to all who hear the gospel.

For example, in chapter I, "God's Sovereignty Defined," one long paragraph in which Pink explains that "God bestows His mercy on whom He pleases" and the three paragraphs in which he shows that "God is sovereign in the exercise of His love" (pp. 24-25) are completely omitted. So is a footnote in which Pink rejects as "an invention pure and simple" the distinction often made today between God's "love of complacency" and his "love of compassion" (p. 25).

Note, then, especially this paragraph:

*God is sovereign in the exercise of His love.* Ah! that is a hard saying, who then can receive it? It is written, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). When we say that God is sovereign in the exercise of His Love, we mean that He loves whom He chooses. God does not love everybody; if He did, He would love the Devil. Why does God not love the Devil? Because there is nothing in him to love; because there is nothing in him to attract the heart of God. Nor is there anything to attract God's love in any of the fallen sons of Adam, for all of them are, by nature, "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). If then there is nothing in any member of the human race to attract God's love, and if, notwithstanding, He does love some, then it necessarily follows that the cause of His love must be found in Himself, which is only another way of saying that the exercise of God's love towards the fallen sons of men is according to His own good pleasure (pp. 24-25).

The following paragraph is one of two omitted in the third chapter, "The Sovereignty of God in Administration." Why this paragraph? To read the last part of it is to see why:

Mark, too, the *sovereignty* which God displayed in His dealings with men! Moses who was slow of speech, and not Aaron his elder brother who was not slow of speech, was the one chosen to be His ambassador in demanding from Egypt's monarch the release of His oppressed people. Moses again, though greatly beloved utters one hasty word and was excluded from Canaan; whereas Elijah, passionately murmurs and suffers but a mild rebuke, and was afterwards taken to heaven without seeing death! Uzzah merely touched the ark and was instantly slain, whereas the Philistines carried it off in insulting triumph and suffered no immediate harm. Displays of grace which would have brought a doomed

Sodom to repentance, failed to move an highly privileged Capernaum. Mighty works which would have subdued Tyre and Sidon, left the upbraided cities of Galilee under the curse of a rejected Gospel. If they would have prevailed over the former, why were they not wrought there? If they proved ineffectual to deliver the latter then why perform them? What exhibitions are these of the sovereign will of the Most High! (p. 45).

In chapter 4, "The Sovereignty of God in Salvation," five lengthy paragraphs are deleted in which Pink denies that it is the present purpose of the Holy Spirit to convict *all men* of sin (p. 74). There too, most of his explanation of the parable of the marriage supper (Luke. 14:16-24, Matt. 22:2-10) and of the words "compel them to come in" is missing (one paragraph and parts of two others are deleted, and several sentences are changed, pp. 78-79).<sup>5</sup>

Listen to Pink:

But, it may be said, is not the present mission of the Holy Spirit to "convict *the world* of sin"? And we answer, It is not. The *mission* of the Spirit is threefold: to glorify Christ, to vivify the elect, to edify the saints. John 16:8-11 does not describe the "mission" of the Spirit, but sets forth the *significance* of His *presence* here in the world. It treats not of His subjective work in sinners, showing them their need of Christ, by searching their consciences and striking terror to their hearts; what we have there is entirely objective. To illustrate. Suppose I saw a man hanging on the gallows, *of what* would that "convince" me? Why, that he was a murderer. *How* would I thus be convinced? By reading the record of his trial? by hearing a confession from his own lips? No; but by the fact that he *was* hanging there. So the fact that the Holy Spirit is *here* furnishes proof of the world's guilt, of God's righteousness, and of the Devil's judgment (pp. 75-76).

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We say "compel" the sinner, for this is precisely what the Holy Spirit does, has to do.... Herein is seen His sovereignty, His omnipotency, His Divine sufficiency. The clear implication from this word "compel" is, that those whom the Holy Spirit *does* "bring in" *are not willing* of themselves *to come* (pp. 78-79).

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5. Cf. Appendix #3, p. 32.

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In chapter 7, "God's Sovereignty and the Human Will," there are more significant omissions:

But some one may reply, Did not Joshua say to Israel, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve"? Yes, he did; but why not complete his sentence? — "*whether* the gods that your fathers served which were on the other side of the flood, *or* the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell" (Josh. 24:15)! But why attempt to pit scripture *against* scripture? The Word of God never contradicts itself, and the Word expressly declares, "There is *none that seeketh* after God" (Rom. 3:11) (p. 127).

No seeking after God, no desire for God on the part of the unregenerate! That, too, a moderate Calvinist does not like. Nor does he like the idea that the will is moved to obey God only by "the victorious efficacy of God's grace," as the following quote shows:

It is only as we see the real nature of freedom and mark that the will is subject to the motives brought to bear upon it, that we are able to discern there is no conflict between two statements of Holy Writ which concern our blessed Lord. In Matt. 4:1 we read, "Then was Jesus *led up* of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil"; but in Mark 1:12, 13 we are told, "And immediately the Spirit *driveth* Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan." It is utterly impossible to harmonize these two statement by the Arminian conception of the will. But really there is no difficulty. That Christ was "driven," implies it was a by a forcible motive or powerful impulse, such as was not to be resisted or refused; that He was "led" denotes His freedom in going. Putting the two together we learn, that He was *driven, with a voluntary condescension thereto*. So, there is the liberty of man's will and the victorious efficacy of God's grace united together: a sinner may be "drawn" and yet "come" to Christ — the "drawing" presenting to him the irresistible motive, the "coming" signifying the response of his will — as Christ was "driven" and "led" by the Spirit into the wilderness (pp. 132-133).

### **Blue-Penciled Pink**

Many of the other omissions and changes follow the same pattern. They, too, weaken Pink's sharp emphasis on the particularity of God's love and grace. In the chapter "The Sovereignty of God in Salvation,"



there is a sentence which reads, "If Christ was 'made a curse' for all of Adam's race then none are now 'under condemnation.'" This is changed by the Banner to read, "If Christ was 'made a curse' for all of Adam's race then none will finally be condemned" (p. 62). Two pages later, part of another paragraph is deleted because it also makes reference to the fact that the some who do not believe *are now already* under condemnation (p.64). This teaching that some men are *now already* under condemnation does not reconcile with the Banner teaching that God wants and seeks to save all.

Many omissions and changes, however, seem merely to be by way of softening Pink's strong and sharp emphasis on the subject of the book, the sovereignty of God, and his equally sharp condemnation of error. Examples of the Banner's attempt to soften Pink's sharp emphasis are numerous. A few follow.

In the chapter on God's sovereignty in salvation, page 70, the words "This passage need not detain us long" have been substituted for a sentence in which Pink rejects the doctrine of universal atonement with the words, "A false doctrine has been erected on a false translation." In another chapter, "God's Sovereignty and Prayer," Pink sharply condemns the idea that prayer "shapes God's policy" as blasphemous (p. 168). In the Banner edition this has been changed to say that the idea is in defiance of the teaching of Scripture. Likewise, on page 139 most of a paragraph which condemns the Romanist and Arminian teachings concerning free will is also omitted. To give just one more example, in the chapter "The Value of This Doctrine," the Banner edition reads "not all are made partakers of that grace" where Pink actually wrote "multitudes will be tormented forever and ever" (p. 216). And so throughout the book.

## Conclusion

Pink's Calvinism is the sharp, sure, logically consistent Calvinism that makes so many Calvinists today uncomfortable, a high Calvinism that emphasizes the glory of God above all else and does not remake God in the image of man. This kind of Calvinism is not only forgotten and neglected today, but misrepresented as hyper-Calvinism and fatalism and openly ridiculed by those who claim to be Calvinism's friends.

That it should be so is not surprising. As Pink himself wrote nearly 70 years ago:

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We are well aware that what we have written is in open opposition to much of the teaching that is current both in religious literature and in the representative pulpits of the land. What is surprising is that men (who have a reputation for integrity) should go to such lengths in trying to find support for their teachings that they would so shamefully misrepresent another as though he was a friend of that half-baked Calvinism they hold, when in fact he is no friend but a sworn enemy (p. 18).

Let the Banner take note!

We do not agree with everything Pink wrote in *The Sovereignty of God* or elsewhere, but we abhor the way this most valuable of all his writings has been presented to the public by the Banner. The Pink we meet in the Banner edition of *Sovereignty* is not Pink at all but some entirely different color.

## APPENDIX #1

### *The Forgotten Spurgeon*

In the second edition (1973) of *The Forgotten Spurgeon* there is only a brief note on page 52 concerning the Kelvedon edition of Spurgeon's sermons. This note only states:

More seriously, "Arminianism" has even been removed from the text of some of Spurgeon's sermons printed in the Kelvedon edition, though no warning of the abridgement is given to the reader. Compare, for example, the sermon preached on 18 October, 1857 which is No. 159 in the *New Park Street Pulpit*, Volume 3 and which appears in Volume 13 (Sermons of Comfort and Assurance), page 222 of the Kelvedon edition published by Marshall, Morgan & Scott.

This footnote leaves the impression that only a single word was removed from the Kelvedon edition of Spurgeon's sermons. In fact, that edition removed large sections of the sermons, carefully excising all references to the sovereignty of grace versus Arminianism.

In the first edition of *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (1966) Murray himself showed this. That first edition included an appendix which compared part of one of Spurgeon's sermons as printed in the *New Park*

*Street Pulpit* (Sermon No. 159) with the Kelvedon text of the same sermon to show how it had been butchered.

In the introductory part of that Appendix, Murray says concerning the Kelvedon version of the sermon:

There is also no indication given as to the nature of the editing which was considered necessary. It is only by comparison with the original that one discovers that "the editing" consists almost entirely of abridgements which in places are considerable, and as the following pages appear to show, their omissions may not be without theological significance (p. 207).

These words were originally published in two issues of *The Banner of Truth* magazine in 1962, the very next year after the Banner had done exactly the same thing to Pink's *Sovereignty of God*! Indeed, Murray might well have been describing what the Banner had done to Pink. It is really no wonder, therefore, that Murray omitted these words and the appendix which included them in the second edition of *The Forgotten Spurgeon*.

## APPENDIX #2

### *A Response from the Banner*

In the August-September 1997 issue of *The Banner of Truth* magazine the Banner published a response to this article as it first appeared in the January - March issue of the *British Reformed Journal*. This response is by Iain Murray and carries the title "A.W. Pink's *Sovereignty of God* — Revised or Unrevised?"

That it is a response is also clear from several things: (1) the date of Murray's article; and (2) the fact that eight copies of the issue of the *British Reformed Journal* in which our article appeared were sent to the Banner office at their request; and (3) reference to "one critic" in connection with a brief quotation from this article.

Nevertheless, it would not have been evident to most readers of the *Banner* that Murray was responding to our article. In the quotation Murray does not even give a reference, though every other citation in his article is carefully referenced.

One of the British Reformed Fellowship committee members (the

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organization that publishes the *British Reformed Journal*) wrote to the *Banner* about this matter. He said:

It seems clear that the Revd. Iain Murray's article: *A.W. PINK'S SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD — REVISED OR UNREVISED?* in Issue 407-8 of *The Banner of Truth* August-September 1997 is directed in the main to the Revd. Ronald Hanko's article "The Forgotten Pink" in Issue No. 17 of the *British Reformed Journal* — March 1997.

There need be no quarrel about such a response. The issues of the Offer of the Gospel and the Love of God are amongst the most complex with which we who are Reformed have to deal. Having written a *Life of Pink* Mr. Murray is probably as well placed as any both to debate the issues and to discuss any changes in Pink's views. Historically theological knowledge has often been advanced by just such discussion and if the *Odium theologicum* which has often characterized theological dissensions in the past can be avoided that is all to the good.

But it is no help to your readers if they are left without any reference to Mr. Hanko's article. It might reasonably have been expected at the outset; but not only is it omitted there, but of Mr. Murray's 32 footnotes — 31 being carefully referenced — the only omission occurs on p. 15 footnote 4, where Mr. Hanko is being directly quoted.

It would be invidious to speculate on the reason. May I perhaps hope that the publication of this letter will provide the lacuna?

Murray's only response (dated 19 August 1997) was as follows:

My reason for not referring to Ronald Hanko's article by name is precisely because of the point which you refer to in your letter, *Odium theologicum*. I do not care at all for the manner in which Mr. Henko (sic) conducts controversy, and to be truthful I am sorry indeed that you should be supporting the British Reformed Fellowship. The Protestant Reformed Church thrives on controversy and we have no intention of becoming engaged with it.

It is not our purpose, however, to make an issue of this. We leave further judgment of that to those who have followed the controversy. Our purpose is to examine briefly Murray's continued attempts to justify what the *Banner* has done to Pink's book.

In his article Murray acknowledges publicly, for the first time in the 36 years since the publication of the *Banner* edition of Pink's book,

that their editing involved more than “minor revisions and abridgements.” Nevertheless he still continues to try and justify the dishonesty and deception that were involved in the Banner’s editing and publishing of it.

For the most part Murray attempts to justify himself and the Banner by insisting again that Pink’s views on many matters changed over the years and that, therefore, Pink himself would have made the same changes as the Banner or approved them if he had republished the book later in life:

There is the strongest possible presumption that Pink would not have allowed *The Sovereignty of God* to stand unaltered had he been re-issuing the book thirty years later (p. 16).

Whether even this justifies the omission of half the book with only a reference to “minor revisions and abridgements” we also leave the reader to judge.

There are, however, several very telling admissions in Murray’s article. For one thing he as much as admits that the omission of the chapter on reprobation was simply due to the fact that the Banner does not like the Reformed doctrine of reprobation which Pink firmly held and never repudiated.

He describes Pink’s view of reprobation thus (p. 7), quoting from Pink himself: “‘if there were some of Adam’s descendants to whom He purposed not to give faith, it must be because He ordained that *they* should be damned;” and thus: “the non-elect are ‘fitted to destruction’ by God — ‘objectively *by his eternal decree.*”” He is correct. That was Pink’s view of reprobation. It is also Scripture’s (I Pet. 2:8, Jude, 4, Rom. 9:22; cf. also Acts 13:48, John 10:26, II Pet. 2:12) and the Reformed creeds’.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says that God, as well as passing by, “ordained them (the rest of mankind) to dishonor and wrath for their sin” (III, 7) and quotes Romans 9:22 as proof. The Canons of Dordt say: “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it *proceeds from God’s eternal decree*” (I, 6).

The Banner does not want the Reformed doctrine of reprobation because of their devotion to the well-meant offer of the gospel and the notion that God loves all men and expresses that love by expressing in

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the gospel His desire for the salvation of all without exception. As we have pointed out elsewhere:

The teaching that God in the gospel intends and desires the salvation of all who hear is, on the face of it, not compatible with the teaching that God has eternally intended and willed the damnation of some. Now, we believe that the theology of the well-meant offer is also in conflict with such doctrines as the simplicity and immutability of God, total depravity, particular redemption, and unconditional election. But it contradicts none of these other doctrines so plainly as it does the doctrine of reprobation. Reprobation means exactly and explicitly the opposite of the well-meant offer.

If you ask: "What should the preacher say concerning God's intention with respect to those who go lost?" the answer of those who teach the well-meant offer is: "God sincerely seeks their salvation through the preaching of the Gospel." The doctrine of reprobation says: "God has eternally and unconditionally determined them to damnation." It ought to be evident that the two cannot possibly be reconciled ("The Well-meant Offer and Reprobation," *British Reformed Journal*, October — November 1997, p. 7).

Murray suggests that Pink's view does not do justice to the fact that "the condemnation of those finally lost will not be without regard to their guilt" (p. 6). Yet he admits on the other hand that Pink does include the qualification "God has not created sinful creatures in order to destroy them ... the responsibility and criminality are man's." In fact, Pink spends several pages in the chapter on reprobation insisting on man's responsibility and guilt, and two sections of a further chapter dealing with the same issue,<sup>6</sup> but that chapter also has been omitted by the Banner.

Thus Murray is reduced to pleading that Pink's "exposition lacks the clarity which is essential precisely at this point," and *that* becomes

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6. The chapter referred to is Chapter 8, "God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility." The two sections are: "III. How is it possible for God to DECREE that men SHOULD commit certain sins, hold them RESPONSIBLE in the committal of them, and adjudge them GUILTY because they committed them?" and "IV. How can the sinner be held responsible to receive Christ, and be damned for rejecting Him, when God FOREORDAINED him TO condemnation?"

the justification for removing the entire chapter. By the same token, that gives us right to republish Murray's essay with all its lack of clarity edited out or changed (as we judge it), though in that case there would probably be little left besides the title and the name of the author.

Further, Murray charges Pink with "leaving out of view" "God's holy justice in all his dealings with men." He says, "this consideration Pink ignores" (p. 7). If it is left out of view, that is the case only because the Banner has omitted the chapters on reprobation and responsibility. Several times in the chapter on reprobation Pink makes a point of establishing God's justice in connection with reprobation. He says, for example, in his fine exposition of Romans 9:

Finally, it is worthy of careful consideration to note how the *vindication* of God in His dealings with Pharaoh has been fully attested. Most remarkable it is to discover that we have Pharaoh's *own testimony* in favor of God and against himself! In Exodus 9:15 and 16 we learn how God had told Pharaoh for what purpose He had raised him up, and in verse 27 of the same chapter we are told that Pharaoh said, "I have sinned this time: *the Lord is righteous*, and I and my people are wicked." Mark that this was said by Pharaoh *after* he knew that God had raised him up in order to "cut him off," *after* his severe judgments had been sent upon him, *after* he had hardened his own heart. By this time Pharaoh was fairly ripened for judgment, and fully prepared to decide whether God had injured him, or whether he had sought to injure God; and he fully acknowledged that he had "sinned" and that God was "righteous" (p. 89).

The second damaging admission by Mr. Murray is made in the footnote on page 15 of his article. He says:

One critic of the Banner's revised edition of *Sovereignty* claims that the revisers disagreed with Pink's belief in the sovereignty of divine love and edited him accordingly. But there is no disagreement over whether the saving love of God is sovereign and effective. The question is whether there is any love for any apart from the elect. Pink's 1921 statements that asserted that there is no such love were omitted by the revisers and this was, in my belief, the only omission which occurred in editing which could not be justified from his later writings. But no view contrary to Pink's was introduced into the revision, and to allege, as the critic to which we have referred has alleged, "that it was not Pink's views that changed, but the Banner that has changed Pink," is absurd.

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This is blatant dishonesty. First, we never claimed that the issue was simply “the sovereignty of divine love” and whether “the saving love of God is sovereign and effective.” We insisted that the issue was that of *particular* love, i.e., whether there is love of God for all men, the kind of love the Banner insists is expressed in the preaching of the gospel. This should be abundantly clear from our article.

Second, Mr. Murray’s statement that nothing contrary to Pink’s views was introduced is nothing more than a smoke screen. Does the fact that an editor introduces nothing contrary to the author’s views *really* justify the complete removal of his views on a certain subject and that without any notice given to the reader? Surely even Mr. Murray himself does not believe that!

Third, the charge that the Banner changed Pink is *not* absurd. If we remove from Mr. Murray’s collected writings every reference to a universal (though non-saving) love of God, he will be the first to charge us with changing his teaching, and that with perfect justice.

Indeed, the whole article is a hodge-podge of insinuations, half-truths, and evasions. Let us note a few more.

First, Murray suggests that the last Pink had to do with *Sovereignty* was in 1921 when the second edition was published. This is not true. In 1929, *eight years later*, Pink wrote a “Foreword” to the third edition (really only a reprint as Murray points out). Pink himself says there:

It is with unfeigned thanksgiving that we find it unnecessary to either change or modify any doctrine contained in the former editions. Yea, as time goes by, we realise (by Divine grace) with ever-increasing force, the truth, the importance, and the value of the Sovereignty of God as it pertains to every branch of our lives (p. 9).

This is significant in that the lengthy quotation that Murray uses to prove a supposed change in Pink’s views on human responsibility, a change that to his mind justifies the omission of so much material from *Sovereignty*, is a quote that *predates* what Pink says in the 1929 “Foreword to the Third Edition.” Murray’s quote is from Pink’s *Studies in the Scriptures*, 1927, pp. 260-261.

Second, Murray implies in the article that it was only later that Pink came into contact with hyper-Calvinism and that this was a major factor in his supposed change of views. This, too, is false. There are a number of references in *Sovereignty* to hyper-Calvinism that make it



clear that Pink not only knew of it, but rejected it. Already in *Sovereignty* he asserts plainly over against the error of hyper-Calvinism that it is the duty of every sinner to repent and believe and search the Scriptures ( pp. 158, 159 — part of the chapter on human responsibility omitted by the Banner). He asserts this already in the 1921 edition of *Sovereignty* in spite of Murray's misleading statements: that "by 1936 he speaks very fully and pointedly of the error of hyper-Calvinism and especially its denial of the truth that 'it is the bounden duty of all who hear the Gospel to savingly trust in Christ'" (p. 12); and that "an unrevised edition was calculated in places to enforce the very Hyper-Calvinism which he came to regard as a serious danger" (p. 18).

Third, both in his biography of Pink and in his article Murray makes much of Pink's distinction between natural and moral inability and suggests that this is a major theme in *Sovereignty* and therefore a justification for leaving out half of the book. The fact is that Pink mentions the matter only a few times (we counted *six*). Now it so happens that we agree with Mr. Murray on this point and think Pink is wrong, but we cannot see that a few references warrant what the Banner has done.

Murray also suggests that Pink's views on the "offer" of the gospel changed (we have already discussed whether or not they did). The fact is that there is *one* reference from *Sovereignty* in which Pink explicitly rejects the "offer" of the gospel and he only says there that it is "not an offer to be bandied about by evangelistic peddlers." For the rest he is only rejecting the *theology* of the well-meant offer — some kind of love of God for all and a desire on God's part to save all.

Remember now that, according to Murray, the supposed changes in Pink's thinking on these two matters is justification for the kind of "editing" that the Banner has done to Pink's book. Mr. Murray will recognize, we think, that we would not be writing if the Banner had omitted *a few paragraphs or references* from *Sovereignty*. They have in fact omitted almost half the book.

It is, therefore, pure supposition on the part of Murray to say that Pink would himself have made a number of changes in *Sovereignty* if he were to rewrite it today. The evidence points in the other direction. In a 1943 letter to Robert C. Harbach (later a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches) Pink speaks of his earlier works. The only book he does not recommend is *The Antichrist*. He says:

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Most of my earlier works are out of print, but a few may still be had from the B.T.D. Swengel (Union Co.), Pa. I would not recommend my book on "The Antichrist" which was written twenty years ago (about the same time as *Sovereignty*) (*Letters to a Young Pastor*, Grandville, MI, 1993, p. 6).

No suggestion that he was at all so unhappy with *Sovereignty* as Murray seems to think.

We are not saying that Murray and the Banner do not have a perfect right to their views on the love and will of God and the gospel. They are free to disagree with us on these matters, as they surely will do. Nor are we denying them the right to promote their views. We are only protesting the dishonesty that is involved in editing a book that does not agree with their views on these issues in order to bring it in line with their teaching.

If Pink's views as expressed in *Sovereignty* are so out of line with Reformed theology and with his own later views, as understood by Murray and the Banner, that *half of the book* had to be removed, then the book would better have been left unpublished. We believe, in fact, that the Banner ought to cease publishing it in its present form.

### APPENDIX #3

#### *The Banner Edition of Pink's Sovereignty*

We include here a section from chapter 4 of *The Sovereignty of God* comparing the original version with the edited Banner version by way of demonstrating what the Banner has done to Pink. This is the fifth chapter in the Banner edition, though the chapters are not numbered in that edition. The part shown is from section 3, "The Sovereignty of God the Holy Spirit in Salvation" (pages 73-79 in the Baker edition). Words in brackets are added or changed in the Banner edition.

We have included this section for several reasons. First, it presents an unusual view of Genesis 1:1, 2, a view that most evangelicals today would reject. However, even that does not in our opinion warrant the omission of the large portions of the chapter that have been left out in the Banner edition. Second, it shows very clearly the Banner's reasons for omitting so much material, especially in the omissions of Pink's explanation of John 16:8-11 and Luke 14:16-24.

## THE ORIGINAL PINK

That the work of the Holy Spirit *precedes* our believing is unequivocally established by 2 Thess. 2:13 — “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” What then is the “sanctification of the Spirit”? We answer, *the new birth*. In Scripture “sanctification” *always* means “separation,” separation from something and unto something or someone. Let us now amplify our assertion that the “sanctification of the Spirit” corresponds to the new birth and points to the positional effect of it.

Here is a servant of God who preaches the Gospel to a congregation in which are an hundred unsaved people. He brings before them the teaching of Scripture concerning their ruined and lost condition; he speaks of God, His character and righteous demands; he tells of Christ meeting God’s demands, and dying the Just for the unjust, and declares that through “this Man” is now preached the forgiveness of sins; he closes by urging the lost to believe what God has said in His Word and receive His Son as their own personal Saviour. The meeting is over; the congregation disperses; ninety-nine of the unsaved have refused to come to Christ that they

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

might have life, and go out into the night having no hope and without God in the world. But the hundredth heard the Word of life; the Seed sown fell into ground which had been prepared by God; he believed the Good News, and goes home rejoicing that his name is written in heaven. He has been "born again," and just as a newly-born babe in the natural world begins life by clinging instinctively, in its helplessness to its mother, so this new-born soul has clung to Christ. Just as we read, "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia *"that she attended unto the thing which were spoken of Paul"* (Acts 16:14), so in the case supposed above, the Holy Spirit quickened that one before he believed the Gospel message. Here then is the "sanctification of the spirit:" this one soul who has been born again has, by virtue of his new birth, been *separated* from the other ninety-nine. Those born again are, by the Spirit, *set apart* from those who are *dead* in trespasses and sins.

A beautiful type of the operations of the Holy Spirit *antecedent* to the sinner's "belief of the truth," is found in the first chapter of Genesis. We read in verse 2, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The original Hebrew here might

## THE REVISED PINK

might have life, and go out into the night having no hope and without God in the world. But the hundredth heard the Word of life; the Seed sown fell into ground which had been prepared by God; he believed the Good News, and goes home rejoicing that his name is written in heaven. He has been "born again," and just as a newly-born babe in the natural world begins life by clinging instinctively, in its helplessness to its mother, so this new-born soul has clung to Christ. Just as we read, "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia *"that she attended unto the thing which were spoken of Paul"* (Acts 16:14), so in the case supposed above, the Holy Spirit quickened that one before he believed the Gospel message. Here then is the "sanctification of the spirit:" this one soul who has been born again has, by virtue of his new birth, been *separated* from the other ninety-nine. Those born again are, by the Spirit, *set apart* from those who are *dead* in trespasses and sins.

### THE ORIGINAL PINK

be literally rendered thus: "And the earth *had become* a desolate ruin, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." In "the *beginning*" the earth was not created in the condition described in verse 2. Between the first two verses of Genesis 1 some awful catastrophe had occurred — possibly the fall of Satan — and, as a consequence, the earth had been blasted and blighted, and had become a "desolate ruin," lying beneath a pall of "darkness." Such also is the history of man. Today, man is not in the condition in which he left the hands of his Creator: an awful catastrophe has happened, and now man is a "desolate ruin" and in total "darkness" concerning spiritual things. Next we read in Genesis 1 how God refashioned the ruined earth and created new beings to inhabit it. First we read, "*And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*" Next we are told, "*And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.*" The order is the same in the new creation: there is first the action of the Spirit, and then the Word of God giving light. *Before* the Word found entrance into the scene of desolation and darkness, bringing with it the light, the Spirit of God "moved." So it is in the new creation. "The entrance of Thy words giveth light" (Ps. 119:130), but

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

*before* it can enter the darkened human heart the Spirit of God must operate upon it.

To return to 2 Thess. 2:13: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." The *order* of thought here is most important and instructive. First, God's eternal choice; second, the sanctification of the Spirit; third, belief of the truth. Precisely the same order is found in I Pet. 1:2 — "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We take it that the "obedience" here is the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5), which appropriates the virtues of the sprinkled blood of the Lord Jesus. So then *before* the "obedience" (of faith, cf. Heb. 5:9), there is the work of the Spirit setting us apart, and behind that is the election of God the Father. The ones "sanctified of the Spirit" then, are they whom "God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13), those who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Pet. 1:2).

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

But, it may be said, is not the present mission of the Holy Spirit to "convict *the world* of sin"? And we answer. It is not. The *mission* of the Spirit is threefold; to glorify Christ, to vivify the elect, to edify the saints. John 16:8-11 does not describe the "mission" of the Spirit, but sets forth the *significance* of His *presence* here in the world. It treats not of His subjective work in sinners, showing them their need of Christ, by searching their consciences and striking terror to their hearts; what we have there is entirely objective. To illustrate. Suppose I saw a man hanging on the gallows, *of what* would that "convince" me? Why, that he was a murderer. *How* would I thus be convinced? By reading the record of his trial? by hearing a confession from his own lips? No; but by the fact that he *was* hanging there. So the fact that the Holy Spirit is *here* furnishes proof of the world's guilt, of God's righteousness, and of the Devil's judgment.

The Holy Spirit ought not to be here at all. That is a startling statement, but we make it deliberately. *Christ* is the One who *ought* to be here. He was sent here by the Father, but the world did not want Him, would not have Him, hated Him, and cast Him out. And the presence of the Spirit here instead

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

*evidences its guilt.* The coming of the Spirit was a proof to demonstration of the resurrection, ascension, and glory of the Lord Jesus. His presence on earth reverses the world's verdict, showing that God has set aside the blasphemous judgment in the palace of Israel's high priest and in the hall of the Roman governor. The "reproof" of the Spirit abides, and abides altogether irrespective of the world's reception or rejection of His testimony.

Had our Lord been referring here to the gracious work which the Spirit would perform in those who should be brought to feel their need of Him, He had said that the Spirit would convict men of their *un*-righteousness, their lack of righteousness. But this is not the thought here at all. The descent of the Spirit from heaven establishes *God's* righteousness, Christ's righteousness. The proof of that is, Christ has gone *to the Father*. Had Christ been an Imposter, as the religious world insisted when they cast Him out, the Father had not received Him. The fact that the Father *did* exalt Him to His own right hand, demonstrates, that He was innocent of the charges laid against Him; and the proof that the Father *has* received Him, is the presence now of the Holy Spirit on earth, for Christ has *sent* Him from the Father (John 16:7)! The world



## THE ORIGINAL PINK

was unrighteous in casting Him out, the Father righteous in glorifying Him; and this is what the Spirit's presence here establishes.

"Of judgment, because the Prince of this world is judged" (v. 11). This is the logical and inevitable climax. The world is brought in guilty for their rejection of, for their refusal to receive, Christ. Its condemnation is exhibited by the Father's exaltation of the spurned One. Therefore nothing awaits the world, and its Prince, but judgment. The "judgment" of Satan is already established by The Spirit's presence here, for Christ, through death, set at nought him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil (Heb. 2:14). When God's time comes for the Spirit to depart from the earth, then His sentence will be *executed*, both on the world and its Prince. In the light of this unspeakably solemn passage we need not be surprised to find Christ saying, "The Spirit of truth, whom the world *cannot* receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." No, the world wants Him not; He condemns the world.

"And when He is come, He will reprove (or better, "convict" — bring in guilty) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

me no more; Of judgment because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Three things, then, the presence of the Holy Spirit on earth demonstrates to the world: first, its sin, because the world refused to believe on Christ; second, God's righteousness in exalting to His own right hand the One cast out, and now no more seen by the world; third, judgment, because Satan the world's prince is already judged, though execution of his judgment is yet future. Thus the Holy Spirit's presence here *displays* things as they really are.

The Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operations and His mission is confined to God's elect: they are the ones He "comforts," "seals," guides into all truth, shews things to come, etc. The work of the Spirit is *necessary* in order to the complete accomplishment of the Father's eternal purpose. Speaking hypothetically, but reverently, be it said, that if God had done nothing more than given Christ to die for sinners, not a single sinner would ever have been saved. In order for any sinner to see his *need* of a Saviour and be willing to *receive* the Saviour he needs, the work of the Holy Spirit upon and within him were imperatively required. Had God done nothing more than given Christ to die for sinners and then sent forth His

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

servants to proclaim salvation through Christ, leaving sinners entirely to themselves to accept or reject as *they* pleased, then *every* sinner would have *rejected*, because at heart every man hates God and is at enmity with Him. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit was needed to bring the sinner to Christ, to overcome his innate opposition, and compel him to accept the provision God has made. We say "compel" the sinner, for this is precisely what the Holy Spirit does, has to do, and this leads us to consider at some length, though as briefly as possible, the parable of the "Marriage Supper."

In Luke 14:16 we read, "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many." By comparing carefully what follows here with Matt. 22:2-10 several important distinctions will be observed. We take it that these passages are two independent accounts of the same parable, differing in detail according to the distinctive purpose and design of the Holy Spirit in each Gospel. Matthew's account — in harmony with the Spirit's presentation there of Christ as the Son of David, the King of the Jews — says, "A certain *king* made a marriage for his son." Luke's account — where the Spirit presents Christ

## THE REVISED PINK

servants to proclaim salvation through Christ, leaving sinners entirely to themselves to accept or reject as *they* pleased, then *every* sinner would have *rejected*, because at heart every man hates God and is at enmity with Him. Therefore the work of the Holy Spirit was needed to bring the sinner to Christ, to overcome his innate opposition, and [bring] him to accept the provision God has made.

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## THE ORIGINAL PINK

as the Son of Man — says, “A certain *man* made a great supper and bade many.” Matt. 22:3 says, “And sent forth His *servants*;” Luke 14:17 says, “And sent His *servant*.” Now what we wish particularly to call attention to is, that all through Matthew’s account it is “servants,” whereas in Luke it is always “servant.” The class of readers for whom we are writing are those that believe unreservedly, in the *verbal* inspiration of the Scriptures, and such will readily acknowledge that there must be some reason for this change from the plural number in Matthew to the singular one in Luke. We believe the reason is a weighty one and that attention to this variation reveals an important truth. We believe that the servants in Matthew, speaking generally, are *all* who go forth preaching the Gospel, but that the “Servant” in Luke 14 is the Holy Spirit Himself. This is not incongruous, or derogatory to the Holy Spirit, for God the Son, in the days of His earthly ministry, was the Servant of Jehovah (Isa. 42:1). It will be observed that in Matt. 22 the “servants” are sent forth to do three things: first, to “*call*” to the wedding (v. 3); second, to “*tell*” those which are bidden ... all things are ready; come unto the marriage (v.

## THE ORIGINAL PINK

4); third, to "*bid* to the marriage" (v. 9); and these three are the things which those who minister the Gospel today are now doing. In Luke 14 the Servant is also sent forth to do three things: first, He is "to *say* to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready" (v. 17); second, He is to "*bring in* the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" (v. 21); third, He is to "*compel* them to come in" (v. 25), and the last two of these the Holy Spirit *alone* can do!

In the above scripture we see that "*the Servant*," the Holy Spirit, *compels* certain ones to come into the "supper" and herein is seen His sovereignty, His omnipotency, His divine sufficiency. The clear implication from this word "compel" is, that those whom the Holy Spirit *does* "bring in" *are not willing* of themselves *to come*. This is exactly what we have sought to show in previous paragraphs. By nature, God's elect are children of wrath *even as others* (Eph. 2:3), and as such their hearts are at enmity with God. But this "enmity" of theirs is overcome by the Spirit and He "compels" *them* to come in.

Is it not clear then that the reason why *others* are left outside is not only because they are *unwilling* to go in, but also because

## THE REVISED PINK

By nature, God's elect are children of wrath *even as others* (Eph. 2:3), and as such their hearts are at enmity with God. But this "enmity" of theirs is overcome by the Spirit and [it is in consequence of His regenerating work that they believe on Christ.] Is it not clear then that the reason why *others* are left outside [the kingdom of God], is not only because they are *unwilling* to go in, but also because

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### THE ORIGINAL PINK

the Holy Spirit does not "compel" *them* to come in? Is it not manifest that the Holy Spirit is *sovereign* in the exercise of His power, that as the wind "bloweth *where it pleaseth*," so the Holy Spirit *operates where He pleases*?

And now to sum up. We have sought to show the perfect consistency of God's ways: that each Person in the Godhead acts in sympathy and harmony with the Others. God the Father elected certain ones to salvation, God the Son died for the elect, and God the Spirit quickens the elect. Well may we sing,

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,

Praise Him all creatures here below,

Praise Him above ye heavenly host,

*Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

### THE REVISED PINK

the Holy Spirit [has not so dealt with them]? Is it not manifest that the Holy Spirit is *sovereign* in the exercise of His power, that as the wind "bloweth *where it pleaseth*," so the Holy Spirit *operates where He pleases*?

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# How Many Elders?

## The Presbyterian View of the Ruling Elder

Mark Shand

### Introduction

Historically, Presbyterian church polity has distinguished between pastors or ministers<sup>1</sup> and ruling elders. In drawing this distinction, it has not been the intention to deny that pastors or ministers are elders, nor to suggest that they have no function, so far as rule in the church is concerned. Rather, the purpose has been to emphasize the distinction between those who preach and expound the Word of God and those whose primary function is to exercise rule or oversight in the church.

While this distinction has been made and continues to find a place in Presbyterian ecclesiology, nonetheless, the use of such terms and the underlying basis for the distinction have not been free from controversy. Indeed, controversy regarding such issues stretches back to the Westminster Assembly and has continued with greater and lesser intensity to the present day.<sup>2</sup> The controversy has tended to focus upon the scriptural basis for the distinction between ministers and ruling elders.

The sensitivity of the issue is highlighted by the careful wording which was employed by the Westminster Assembly in describing the office of those who were to exercise rule within the church and who today are referred to commonly as ruling elders. It is noticeable that

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1. Those who undertake the work of pastors or ministers have also been styled teaching elders, though that is not a term which has been universally accepted.

2. For example, T. F. Torrance maintains that Presbyterians have accepted the use of the term "elder" to refer to those who rule in the church, knowing that if the searchlight of the New Testament were focused upon this issue, "there is no evidence that can stand up to objective criticism for the title 'elder' used in our way." *The Eldership in the Reformed Church* (Hansel Press, Edinburgh, 1984), p. 8.

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when the Assembly came to the description of that office, it balked at employing the title ruling elder or even elder, but opted for the description, "other church governors." The *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* formulated by the Westminster Assembly reads:

The offices which Christ hath appointed for the edification of his church, and the perfecting of the saints, are, some extraordinary, as apostles, evangelists, and prophets, which are ceased. Others ordinary and perpetual, as pastors, teachers, and *other church governors*, and deacons. [Emphasis MLS]

The apparent hesitancy of the Westminster Assembly to describe those who held that office as elders becomes even more apparent when consideration is given to the description of the work associated with that office. Under the heading "Other Church-Governors," the following appears:

As there were in the Jewish church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in his church, hath furnished some in his church, beside the ministers of the word, with gifts for government, and with commission to execute the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the minister in the government of the church. *Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.* [Emphasis MLS]

The Assembly clearly recognized that those who filled this office were referred to commonly as elders in the Reformed tradition, but they declined to make use of that designation.

Not only does the use of the term "church governors" and the apparent reluctance on the part of the Assembly to employ the common Reformed title of "elders" suggest that this was a matter in respect of which there was some tension, but the source of the tension begins to emerge when consideration is given to the proof texts which the Assembly appended to the *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* in support of the office of church governor. One may have expected that passages such as 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Timothy 5:17, and Titus 1:5-9 may have been cited, but the proof texts are confined to Romans 12:7, 8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. While it is true that these texts provide arguably



adequate proof for the office of church governor, the absence of the Timothy and Titus passages provides an indication of the tensions present in the Assembly concerning the office of the ruling elder.

Indeed, this matter was one of the most contentious issues which the Assembly faced. Some members of the Assembly maintained that church governors occupied the same office as ministers of the Word, namely, the office of elder. This office, they contended, encompassed two aspects: a call to rule in the church and a call to labor in the Word and doctrine. As is evident from the Assembly's final pronouncement on the subject, this view was not shared by all. We will return to a more detailed consideration of the proceedings at the Assembly in due course because they play an important role in the controversy which has simmered since that time.

## Chapter 1

# The Issues

Following the Westminster Assembly, the issue remained dormant for many years. However, it resurfaced again in the nineteenth century in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. It arose in this way. Samuel Miller, who was Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Government at Princeton Theological Seminary, became concerned about the demise of the ruling elder<sup>3</sup> within his denomination and the tendency for those who occupied that office not to take their responsibilities seriously. Furthermore, he was concerned that those who held the office of minister failed to give proper recognition to the office of the ruling elder in the life of the church. As a consequence, he preached initially on the subject and then published a work on the eldership. This work was first published in 1821, but was

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3. For ease of reference, the title "ruling elder" will be treated as being synonymous with that of "church governor." The designation "church governors" had been almost abandoned in Presbyterian circles by the nineteenth century.

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expanded and revised subsequently and published in 1831 under the title, *The Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church*. At the time that he published this work, Miller knew that it contained views which did not enjoy the unanimous approval of all his colleagues. It proved to be the catalyst for an ongoing debate within the Presbyterian church which was to last for the next thirty years.

In his work, Miller did not deviate from the threefold classification of ordinary church officers recognized by the Westminster Assembly, namely those of pastor/minister, ruling elder/church governor, and deacon. He gave the office of ruling elder a clear and unambiguous place within church polity.

In every Church completely organized, that is, furnished with all the officers which Christ has instituted, and which are necessary for carrying into full effect the laws of the kingdom, there ought to be three classes of officers, viz.: at least one *Teaching Elder, Bishop, or Pastor* — a bench of *Ruling Elders* — and *Deacons*. The *first* to “minister in the Word and Doctrine,” and to dispense the Sacraments; — the *second* to assist in the inspection and government of the Church; — and the *third* to “serve tables;” that is, to take care of the poor, and sometimes to manage whatever relates to the temporal support of the gospel and its ministers.<sup>4</sup>

In that respect, his work was unexceptional. However, what did attract attention was Miller’s justification of the office of ruling elder upon the passages from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. When dealing with the qualifications of the ruling elder, Miller relies on the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In referring to these passages, he makes the observation that it is evident that these passages appear to be “equally applicable to *Teaching and Ruling*.”<sup>5</sup>

Although this was certainly not Miller’s intention, the publication of his book triggered a reaction within the Presbyterian church whereby the office of ruling elder and the scriptural basis for it came under

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4. Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, Dallas, Texas, 1987), p. 28.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

intense scrutiny. Substantial disagreement surfaced within the church which led to a proliferation of articles on the subject. Furthermore, the debate on this issue arose peripherally with other matters of church polity which surfaced within the denomination. For example, it found its way into discussions on what constituted a proper quorum for Presbyteries, the appropriateness of church boards, and the manner of ordination of ministers and elders.

Traditionally Presbyterianism viewed teaching and ruling elders as distinct offices. However, this view was questioned by some leading southern Presbyterians such as James Thornwell, Robert Dabney, and Robert Breckinridge. They preferred to emphasize that the Scriptures spoke of only one office of elder, though they acknowledged that it encompassed two differing aspects, namely, the preaching of the Word and the exercise of rule or oversight. In their view, the two aspects came to manifestation in the teaching elder and the ruling elder respectively. It may be thought that such views do not differ radically, at least in practice, from the position espoused by Miller, and in many respects that is true. However, as we shall see, other implications flowed from the treatment of the office of elder in this way.

Their views brought them into sharp conflict with men from Princeton such as Charles Hodge and Thomas Smyth, who rejected the idea of one office of elder with two differing aspects. They maintained that the offices of minister and ruling elder were separate and distinct. They contended that none of the New Testament references to elders (πρεσβυτεροι) were applicable to ruling elders; in their view, all such references concerned the office of the ministry alone. Smyth highlights the issues when writing on the issue of church boards:

It is not intended in the present discussion to raise the question of the scriptural warrant of ruling elders in the church of Christ, nor any quarrel about the propriety of the designation — ruling elders — in the *general* meaning of both terms — as happily descriptive of their official dignity and office as the representatives of the Christian people, and assessors with the Christian ministry in the government of the church. But as names are things, and principles precede and prepare for practical results, it is, we think, of great importance *to have it clearly understood that the name of ruling elder is applicable only in the general*, and not in the official sense affixed to it in the New Testament and by the early church, and indeed by the church universally until long after the

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Reformation; and that the true basis and authority of these official representatives of the people are to be found in other terms contained in the only recognized constitutional code of doctrine, order and officers of the church of God.<sup>6</sup> [Emphasis MLS]

This was the contentious issue. Were ruling elders, truly the elders (πρεσβυτεροι) of the New Testament?

The long running debate was carried on in publications controlled by Thornwell and Hodge. The issue found its way regularly into the General Assembly of the church. The debate was at times acrimonious. For example, Hodge described Thornwell's views as "an utter impracticality" which was "utterly unscriptural" and devoid of any claim to a heritage in American Presbyterianism.<sup>7</sup> He opined further that Thornwell's views amounted to "hyper-hyper-hyper-High Church Presbyterianism."<sup>8</sup> Thornwell retorted that Hodge's principles were "no, no. No, Presbyterianism, no, no, No, Churchism."<sup>9</sup> The differing views resulted in frequent verbal skirmishes.

It should be recognized that neither side denied that the office of ruling elder was scriptural. Furthermore, although Hodge denied that ruling elders were the elders (πρεσβυτεροι) of the New Testament, it would appear that he held a high view of the office.

The power which this view [i.e., Hodge's view] of their office attributes to the eldership, is not only great, but controlling. In the primary Church court, the session, they are always the majority; and in all other courts they are, as a general rule, as numerous as the ministers. Nothing can be done without their concurrence. They admit and exclude from the church, in opposition to the ministers, in opposition to the pastors.<sup>10</sup>

However, Thornwell questioned Hodge's commitment to the office of the ruling elder. He stated:

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6. Thomas Smyth, "Theories of the Eldership" *The Princeton Review* (April, 1860), pp. 185, 186.

7. James H. Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, Vol. 4, (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974), p. 229.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

... [Hodge's] persistent representation of the clergy as an estate in the Church, separate and distinct from the people, and his degradation of the office of Ruling elder to a lower order than that of the Minister of the Word, are thoroughly Prelatic. To this extent, therefore, he is no Presbyterian.<sup>11</sup>

The scriptural basis upon which the office of ruling elder could be justified was at the heart of the protracted and at times heated debate. This was not simply an academic question, because some very practical issues, so far as the life of the church was concerned, flowed out of it. For example, when Acts 15:6 declares that at the Council of Jerusalem "the apostles and elders (πρεσβυτεροι) came together to consider of this matter," was this a reference only to the apostles and teaching elders or did this embrace the ruling elders also?

This very issue came to the fore in the General Assembly of 1843 when the Assembly dealt with an overture concerning what constituted a quorum for Presbyteries. The Form of Government (Chapter x. 7) stated, "Any three ministers, and as many elders as may be present belonging to the Presbytery, being met at the time and place appointed, shall be a quorum competent to proceed to business." Acting on this overture, the Assembly adopted a resolution stating, "that any three ministers of a Presbytery being regularly convened, are a quorum competent to the transaction of all business, agreeably to the provision contained in the Form of Government, chap. x. sec. 7."<sup>12</sup> Breckinridge was vehemently opposed to the adoption of this overture. From a cursory consideration of the overture, one may wonder at the degree of his opposition. However, mature reflection reveals that the overture touches the very heart of Presbyterian polity, namely, who are the office bearers required to constitute a bona fide Presbytery, and as such who are competent to conduct ecclesiastical business. The unstated question is, May this be confined to teaching elders alone?

Breckinridge maintained that both teaching and ruling elders must be present in order to constitute a legitimate quorum. Clearly this had been denied by the Assembly of 1843, which had determined that the

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

12. Samuel Baird, ed. *A Collection of Acts and Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), p. 43.

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Church Order, did not require necessarily the presence of ruling elders. The interpretation given to the Church Order was that if competent ruling elders were present, they were entitled to participate in the decisions, but their presence was not required absolutely. Breckinridge viewed that decision to be a fundamental denial of the principles of Presbyterian church government. In particular, he saw it as an attack on the parity of elders and a step toward clerical domination and hierarchy.<sup>13</sup>

The difference of views bubbled to the surface again in 1860 when the subject of church boards came under discussion at the General Assembly. The issue of church boards concerned whether it was legitimate for the church to utilize church boards or committees to transact its business or whether by utilizing such boards the church was abrogating its responsibilities and devolving to these boards authority which should be exercised by the church through its ecclesiastical assemblies. Hodge and Smyth supported the use of boards, whereas Thornwell, Breckinridge, and Dabney were opposed to their use.

In April 1860, as a precursor to the forthcoming Assembly and a full scale debate between Hodge and Thornwell on Presbyterianism, Smyth wrote a series of articles on the subject of the eldership. Subtlety was not his strong point. He writes:

The tendency of the human mind is to extremes. Man, by his fall, lost that perfection of wisdom, which would ever have preserved him in the middle path, safe from the dangers of latitudinarianism on the one hand and ultraism on the other. As it is, we find the human mind like the pendulum, perpetually verging from one extreme to the other. This tendency is manifested in a very striking manner when the attention has been directed with absorbing interest to some great perversion of the truth.<sup>14</sup>

Although, Thornwell is not mentioned by name, he and his colleagues are clearly in view. Smyth continues:

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13. Interestingly, Hodge acknowledged only "the parity of the *clergy*." Cf. Charles Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), p. 119.

14. Thornwell, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 581.

The truth of God as it is contained in the doctrines of His Word, and the purity of these ordinances which have been established in His Church, have been both assailed, and both triumphantly defended. And as the power, with which such opposing views were advocated, has been great, and is still threatening us with a renewed assault, so has it called forth a fiercer and more determined resistance.<sup>15</sup>

This was something akin to getting in the first shot!

Hodge also put pen to paper and produced an article entitled "Presbyterianism." He reiterates his previously stated views that there are two radically different theories on the eldership. He describes those views in the following way:

According to the one, the ruling elder is a layman; according to the other he is a clergyman. According to the former, he belongs to a different order from the minister, holds a different office, has a different vocation and ordination. He is not a bishop, pastor, or teacher, but officially a ruler. According to the latter the reverse is true. The ruling elder belongs to the same order with the minister. He is a bishop, pastor, teacher, and ruler.... They therefore have the same office, and differ only as to their functions, as a professor differs from a pastor, or a missionary from a settled minister.<sup>16</sup>

In his assessment of the office of ruling elder, Hodge is careful not to denigrate the office. He goes on to say:

It is to be noticed that the point of difference between these two theories is not the importance of the office of ruling elder, nor its divine warrant. According to both views, the office is *jure divino*. The Spirit who calls one man to be a minister calls another to be an elder. The one office is as truly from Christ as the other. Nor do the theories differ as to the parity of elders and ministers in our church courts. Both enter those courts with the same credentials, and have the same right to sit, deliberate and determine. The vote of the one avails as much as that of the other. On all these points the theories agree.<sup>17</sup>

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15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 626.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 626, 627.

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Having noted the points of agreement, Hodge then proceeds to identify those points at which he considers the views to diverge. He says:

The point of difference between them which is radical, affecting the whole character of our system, relates to the nature of the office of the ruling elder. Is he a clergyman, a bishop or is he a layman? Does he hold the same office with the minister or a different one? According to the new theory the offices are identified. Everything said of presbyters in the New Testament, this theory applies equally to elders and ministers of the word.... This new doctrine makes all elders, bishops, pastors, teachers, and rulers. It applies all directions as to the qualifications and duties, as to election and ordination of presbyters, as much to the ruling elders as to the minister of the word. It therefore destroys all official distinction between the two of them.<sup>18</sup>

It is in this article that Hodge also notes the difference between himself and Miller, though he downplays the significance of their disagreement. Referring to the view of Thornwell, he states:

It need hardly be said that our fathers, and especially the late Dr. Miller, did not hold any such doctrine as this.... We do not differ from Dr. Miller as to the nature of the office of the ruling elder. The only point of difference between him and us relates to the method of establishing the divine warrant for the office. He laid stress on one argument, we on another. That is all.<sup>19</sup>

It is appropriate to note at this juncture that the description that Hodge provides of Thornwell's views leaves something to be desired. The impression given is that Thornwell was advocating that the office of ruling elder was identical in all respects with that of the minister. However, that was not the case. Thornwell maintained that they held

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 627.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 628. While Hodge is correct when he states that the difference between himself and Dr. Miller concerned the scriptural proof for the office of ruling elder, it is difficult to describe that difference as being insignificant because, as we have noted, Miller relied on passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, whereas Hodge denied that those passages had anything to do with the office of ruling elder. Yet those texts lay at the center of the dispute.



the same office, but he drew a clear distinction between the work which was to be performed by teaching and ruling elders. He makes this distinction clear when he comments on the preaching of the Word.

The considerations which have been presented we deem sufficient to show, that our standards and the Scriptures concur in teaching that the Ruling Elder is truly and properly a Presbyter; and therefore has a right to participate in all acts in which any other Presbyter can bear a part. *It does not follow, however, that because he is a scriptural Pastor and Bishop he is therefore a Minister of the word and a steward of the mysteries of God.* Preaching is a very different department of labour from ruling; and though all Preachers whether Apostles, Evangelists or Pastors, in the technical sense of our Standards, are rulers according to the appointment of God, *yet the converse of the proposition is by no means true* — that all rulers, whether elders, Bishops, *aut alio quocunque nomine vocentur*, are Preachers. We affirm, without hesitation, that all Ministers of the Word, lawfully called and ordained, are Presbyters, but we are very far from affirming that all Presbyters, lawfully called and ordained are Ministers of the Word.<sup>20</sup> [Emphasis MLS]

Thornwell did not respond to the articles by Smyth and Hodge due to ill health. However, into his shoes stepped another southern Presbyterian in the person of Robert Dabney. He adopted a theological position similar to that of Thornwell. Not surprisingly, he acclaimed the views of Miller.

The view of the ruling elder's office, which, we were happy to believe was becoming prevalent in our denomination, is substantially the one advocated by the venerable Dr. Samuel Miller, a man whose justness of thought and soundness in deduction the church will yet learn to value more highly than it has been the fashion to do. This theory teaches that the office of ruling elder is emphatically of divine institution in the church. It is the same, so far as the powers of inspection and government go, with that of the preacher. Wherein the preacher is *πρεσβυτερος* and *ἐπισκοπος* he holds the same office in substance as the ruling elder. The difference is that he has the additional function of acting as God's public ambassador in the word and the sacraments.<sup>21</sup>

20. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

21. Cf. Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1967), p. 126.

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Matters settled down for a short while after this barrage of papers and the death of Thornwell in 1862, but the matter was far from over. The writing debate was reignited in 1866 when Peter Campbell, the Principal of the University of Aberdeen, published *The Theory of the Ruling Eldership*. He shared the views of Hodge and Smyth and argued forcefully that the designation “elders,” although often applied to those who exercised government in the church, could not be justified from the use of that term in the New Testament.

We cannot, therefore, but consider it a subject of great regret that the valuable institution of lay councillors or rulers, as existing in the Reformed Churches, should have been exposed to attack and brought into discredit— nay, more, should have been, as we shall show, impeded in its working in some of these Churches themselves — by its connection with a specious theory, which, although resting on no formal ecclesiastical sanction, and long since abandoned as untenable by the most learned friends of the institution, is still produced from time to time in popular controversial works — the theory, namely, which classifies the lay rulers of Presbyterian churches with the presbyters or elders, technically and properly so called, of the New Testament church.<sup>22</sup>

Like Hodge and Smyth, he did not dispute the existence of the office of ruling elder, but maintained that a sufficient and indisputable warrant for the office was to be found in passages such as Romans 12:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. However, passages such as 1 Timothy 5:17 and those in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he asserted were only applicable to teaching elders. He drew support from the manner in which the subject had been treated by the Westminster Assembly.

He contented that the theory which classed the lay rulers or councillors of the church with the Presbyters was untenable. He argued that nowhere else did the Scriptures indicate such a marked difference within the office of elder. He queried:

“Surely it is reasonable to suppose that some notice of such a difference would have been given in the passages of Scripture which relate expressly to the institution and duties of the presbyterate, and

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22. Mark R. Brown ed. *Order in the Offices: Essays Defining the Roles of Church Officers* (Classic Presbyterian Government Resources, Virginia, 1993), pp. 81, 82.

equally reasonable to infer, from the want of any allusion to it, that no such difference was contemplated or sanctioned."<sup>23</sup>

He noted that neither in those passages of Scripture which refer to the ordination of presbyters "in every church" and "in every city," nor in those passages which set forth expressly the qualifications and functions of elders did one find "the most distant intimation given, we do not say of a difference so wide as that in question, in the position and duties of members of the presbyterate, but of any difference whatsoever."<sup>24</sup> He goes on to say:

Scripture gives no hint of a deliberate and formal division of presbyters into two classes, designed to be permanently distinct in function or in dignity — the one authorised to teach publicly and to dispense the sacraments, the other invested with no right or authority, in these respects, beyond the other members of the flock.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, he pointed to the view within the Presbyterian tradition, of the equality of the term presbyter (πρεσβυτερος) with that of bishop (ἐπίσκοπος). He argued that it must follow that the lay rulers of the church, if presbyters, must also be bishops. That being the case, he opined that it logically followed that lay rulers must also be pastors and so must feed the flock. In support of this, he directed his readers' attention to the elders at Ephesus, who were exhorted by Paul to feed the flock.<sup>26</sup> His argument proceeded that if that be true, then lay rulers must do the work of pastors, to nourish with the Word and doctrine those that have been committed to their care. This he categorized as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Although seeking to provide a solution to the debate, Thomas Witherow's article published in 1873 entitled "The New Testament Elder" served to muddy the waters further and to push the issue to the extremities. His views regarding the relationship between the teaching and ruling elder were radical and were not in accord with the views of the Westminster Assembly.

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. Acts 20:28

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In 1856, while opposing the concept of lay elders, he wrote:

It is however, only candid to say that such grotesque notions of ecclesiastical order, as these terms betray, have received countenance from the disparity that in the course of time has arisen between the elders who teach and the elders who rule. This disparity is not the result of any ecclesiastical enactment, but was at the beginning, and still is, the effect mainly of a difference of gifts. The most gifted of the elders was in the beginning set to preach, and what at first was only a difference of gifts has grown in the progress of time to wear the appearance of a difference of rank.<sup>27</sup>

*Teaching and ruling*, as we have already stated, are different departments of the same office: and, *while there can be no doubt that those appointed to the office have, in the abstract, a right to fill both departments*, yet, in practice, it is found more convenient and beneficial for the people that each elder give most of his attention to that department whose duties he is best qualified to discharge.<sup>28</sup> [Emphasis MLS]

The radical nature of his views becomes even more evident when cast against the background of how the office of elder is to function. For Witherow, all elders were entitled to exercise every aspect of the office including ruling, teaching, preaching, and the administration of the sacraments. Any distinction arose not by virtue of the office, but as a result of an elder's personal recognition of his gifts. As is evident from the following statement, this had significant implications for aspects of the office:

*All elders, being bishops, have an equal right, according to the Scriptures, to preach, baptise, administer the Lord's Supper and ordain*, but these duties it is arranged to devolve on one of the elders, called by distinction the minister, who is specially trained to his work, and is by general consent, admitted to possess most gifts and attainments, and who, in consequence, is the best qualified to make these ordinances edifying to the Church;<sup>29</sup> [Emphasis MLS]

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27. Thomas Witherow, *The Apostolic Church: Which is it?* (Morrison & Gibb Limited, London & Edinburgh, 1954), pp. 74, 75.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.

With that background, it is not difficult to understand where he was coming from in 1873 when he wrote, "there has been a failure on all sides alike to reproduce the apostolic elder, and to put all members of the presbytery on that footing of official equality on which they stood in the New Testament age." He rejected the views of Thornwell, as well as those of Hodge.

He rejected the approach of Thornwell and those who supported him on essentially three grounds.

1. There is only one passage in the New Testament that even seems "to indicate any distinction between teaching and ruling elders." Referring to 1 Timothy 5:17, he stated, "that if such a distinction really existed, it is strange that it crops up in no part of the New Testament except this solitary passage."

2. Again referring to 1 Timothy 5:17, he maintained that "there is nothing in the language used to indicate that an elder had no right to take part in any other department of the work if he pleased." In Witherow's opinion, the words "rather seem to imply that if an elder wrought in both departments of the work, and did well in both, he was specially deserving of double honour."

3. "To limit one class of elders to government, and to deny their right to give public instruction, is inconsistent with the qualification, 'apt to teach.' "

As regards Hodge and Smyth, Witherow's chief line of opposition lay in the fact that if passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 were considered to refer only to ministers, then where in the Scriptures did one find clear and unambiguous approval for the office of ruling elder? In furtherance of this argument, Witherow warned:

The introduction into the church constitution of an official who can plead no warrant for his office from the Scripture, opens a wide door for the creation of other offices, as expediency may suggest or human wisdom may determine.

He acknowledged that changed circumstances in the church from the time of the apostles may necessitate change in the manner in which the office functioned. Nonetheless, as a principle, he contended that there was no difference between the offices. He drew this conclusion:

So a member of the eldership ought not to have his tongue tied by

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legislation. It should be left to his own good sense when to speak and when to be silent. Even if he were sometimes to speak weakly and out of season, greater calamities might happen.<sup>30</sup>

## Chapter 2

# The Competing Views

As is evident from the views of Hodge, Thornwell, and Witherow there have been essentially three views of the eldership propounded within the Presbyterian tradition.<sup>31</sup>

1. *A two office view* in which the minister is distinguished from lay ruling officers. As we have noted, proponents of this view such as

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30. Thomas Witherow, "The New Testament Elder" *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 1873 (J. Nisbet, Edinburgh, 1873), p. 227.

31. Cf. Iain Murray, "The Problem of the Eldership and its Wider Implications" *Banner of Truth* August-September 1996, Number 395-6, p. 38; John Macpherson, *Presbyterianism* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1949), pp. 47-49. One of the problems associated with the debate is the difference in terminology which is utilized to categorise the differing views. The difficulties can be demonstrated amply by comparing those employed by Leonard J. Coppes "Three New Testament Offices" (Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 203, 204), with those adopted by Iain Murray. Murray identifies three principal views in similar terms to those identified in this paper. Coppes also identifies three views, however, they do not coincide in all respects with those employed by Murray. Coppes refers to three positions which he styles as "the three office position," "the two office position" and "the two and one half office view" respectively. He defines his views as follows:

The three office view sees three ordinary offices in the New Testament: teaching elder, ruling elder, and deacon. The two kinds of elder are both viewed as elders; i.e., both classes of elder rule over the Church and hence sit on the ruling body.

For the two office position there are but the elder and the deacon. All elders are the same in function. The functions are to be equally shared.

The two and one half view is an effort to retain a practical distinction between the teacher and the ruler, while maintaining a theological and exegetical identification of the two. To hold this position, all elders may

Hodge and Smyth maintained that the references to elders (πρεσβυτεροι) or bishops (ἐπισκοποι) in the New Testament applied only to ministers and not to ruling elders.<sup>32</sup>

This view contends that the New Testament requires that all those who are designated elders must be preachers of the Word. Accordingly, the office of elder does not include those who only rule in the affairs of the church. The term ruling elders according to this view is strictly speaking a misnomer. No one, they say, should be designated an elder or presbyter who is not called to preach. Consequently, they reject the idea that passages such as view 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 refer to ruling elders.

The view also recognizes that there are those who are called to govern or rule in the church. However, the scriptural basis for such an office is said to be found in texts which speak generally of rule or government, such as Romans 12:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.

2. *A one office, two aspects view*, which contends that the New Testament office of elder is one office, but that it contains within it two aspects: rule or oversight and the preaching of the Word.<sup>33</sup> According to this view, all elders participate and contribute to the rule, government, and oversight of the church. However, there are those elders who not only rule, but also labor in the Word and doctrine, in other words,

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engage in all the activities of the eldership. They may all conduct worship (including the preaching) and administer the sacraments — i.e., all are the same theologically. Practically, however, since it is desirable to have only the best teaching coming from the pulpit, the one (or ones) who teaches ought to be trained and examined before he assumes the position of the regular teacher of the congregation.

Clearly, Coppes' "two office" position, which one may have thought would correspond with the view of Witherow, does not do so. Instead, he calls that view a two and one half office view. Obviously, care is needed in identifying what is meant by the various terms which are employed.

32. This position is often referred to as "the three office view," referring to the offices of teaching elder, ruling elder, and deacon. The description "two office view" will be employed in this paper.

33. This position is sometimes referred to as "the two office view" referring to the offices of elder and deacon. However, the description "one office, two aspects view" will be utilized in this paper.

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who preach. These officers receive the titles "minister," "pastor," or "teaching elder," while those who only rule are styled ruling elders.

This view draws a clear distinction between the two aspects of the office, so that those who are called only to rule do not preach the Word, though they are required to be apt to teach. The distinction between the elder who rules and the elder who not only rules, but also preaches is not founded on pragmatic grounds, but is said to be based upon divine institution. Under this view, there is a parity of authority or rule amongst the eldership, but not a parity of function.

The proponents of this view which as we have observed included Thornwell, Dabney, and Breckinridge maintained that the reference to elders in the New Testament applied to all elders, both ruling and teaching. Hence, they regarded the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as being applicable to all elders.

3. *A one office view* which also asserts that there is only one office of elder found in the New Testament. However, it differs from the one office, two aspects view in that it makes no distinction between teaching and ruling elders. All elders are viewed as having the same functions. Admittedly, some elders elect not to undertake the exposition of the Word and public preaching, but this is by choice on the part of the individual elder and not by design or compulsion. It contends that such a choice is made by some elders because they recognize that other elders have superior gifts as regards preaching. This was Witherow's view.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to note that the first two views have received considerable support within Presbyterian circles. The latter view appears never to have been adopted formally by any Presbyterian church. Both the one office, two aspects view and the two office view acknowledge that there is scriptural warrant for distinct church officers whose principal and indeed sole function is to rule.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, both views recognize that there are church officers whose primary calling is to teach and preach, but who also exercise rule within the church.

It is interesting to observe that the debate over the office of ruling elder appears to have been confined to the Presbyterian tradition. Those

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34. This does not mean that they are not to be "apt to teach" as required by 1 Timothy 3:2, but rather that they are to rule by means of their teaching.



of the continental Reformed tradition do not appear to have been disturbed by the issue. If one were to identify the line within which the continental Reformed tradition were to fall, it would be the one office, two aspects view. For example, Johannes Heidegger writes:

From pastors or teaching elders are to be distinguished non-teaching but ruling elders. Their institution is divine, because if by Christ's precept one or two more prudent men may be summoned to confute a sinning brother, Mt. 18.16, rulers may also be appointed by the Church and when appointed according to Christ's precept may be called, approached by the Church and may maintain discipline *communi ἐλελεγγει*. — Above all St. Paul says eloquently that "presbyters who do well are given double honour, particularly those who labour in preaching and doctrine" 1 Tim. 5.17. Therefore, some labour in preaching and doctrine, others do not.<sup>35</sup>

This same position is reflected by Herman Hoeksema who writes, "It is evident from Scripture that the office of the ministry of the Word arose out of that of elder. Evidently some elders devoted themselves more particularly to the work of the Ministry of the Word of God."<sup>36</sup> He then proceeds to cite 1 Timothy 5:17 in support of that proposition.

Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster, who are from that same tradition, when examining the development of the office of the ruling elder in Scripture state:

The Church now receives inspired instruction concerning the office of the elder. In both his First Letter to Timothy (3:2-7) and in his letter to Titus (1:5-9) Paul spells out the tasks and qualifications for eldership, while in his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:28-31) he establishes their authority and responsibilities — a pattern upon which this book is based.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Heinrich Heppe. *Reformed Dogmatics* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), p. 681.

36. Herman Hoeksema. *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985), p. 628.

37. Gerard Berghoef & Lester De Koster, *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders* Christian's Library Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979), p. 226.

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Having summarized the various views, we now turn our attention to the question as to which view can be said to stand in the mainstream of Presbyterian thought. The proponents of at least the one office, two aspects view and the two office view claim that they represent the historic Presbyterian position. For example, Iain Murray, a supporter of the two office view, asserts that "Presbyterianism, traditionally, had seen elders and ministers as two distinct and separate classes."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, he contends that the two office view is supported by the Westminster Divines.<sup>39</sup> He highlights his views, when, in response to his own question of how the work of those who govern in the church is to be justified if the New Testament title of elder does not strictly belong to them, he refers to the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* and quotes the section concerning "church governors" which we noted earlier.

Murray concludes:

My personal opinion is that the one office, two classes, theory of eldership has often found acceptance among us because we assumed it was the position biblically established by the Westminster Assembly. The truth is that the assumption is wrong.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, Leonard Coppes asserts that the two office view is:

... the one that has been held nearly unanimously throughout the history of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.... The Westminster Standards clearly present this view.... The Form of Presbyterian Church Government approved by the Westminster Assembly also makes it quite clear that the framers of these documents distinguished the teaching elder or minister from the ruling elder. First, it distinguished the extraordinary or temporary offices from the ordinary or perpetual officers. It specifically lists ministers, elders, and deacons as the ordinary and perpetual officers of the Church. Furthermore, it clearly speaks of the minister of the Word as one office (which may be further divided into Pastor and teacher) distinct from that of ruling elder."<sup>41</sup>

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38. Iain Murray, "Ruling Elders — A Sketch of a Controversy" Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

39. Murray, "The Problem of the 'Eldership' and its Wider Implications," pp. 39, 40.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

41. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

However, others differ in their assessment as to the true historic position. John Macpherson, although not an advocate of the two office view, writes:

The old Presbyterian theory maintained by Calvin, Gillespie, and others, rests largely upon that interpretation of 1 Tim. v. 17 which regards that passage as referring to a distinction of offices formally recognised in Apostolic times. It is generally admitted that so great a conclusion cannot safely be built upon a single passage, seeing that no trace can be found elsewhere in the New Testament of rulers and teachers recognised as distinct orders of church officers. We find no restriction placed upon ruling elders. They were not appointed as rulers to the exclusion of the exercise of their teaching gifts, but to the exercise of them in their office if they possessed them.<sup>42</sup> [Emphasis MLS]

Even in more recent times, Sherman Isibell has asserted:

The older position, represented, for example by Gillespie's *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* (1641), is that there is a biblical distinction between the rule committed to all Presbyters, and certain executive functions carried out on behalf of the Presbytery. The imposition of hands is an executive function, and such executive functions like the administration of the sacraments, the preaching of God's word to his people and the pronouncement of admonition and censures on behalf of church courts, belong exclusively to the minister of the word, for he is a messenger and herald between God and the people.<sup>43</sup>

Well, is it possible to identify an historic Presbyterian position? It is possible, and that view, notwithstanding the apparent leanings of the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* to the two office view, accords with the one office, two aspects view.

In 1560, John Knox and others were requested by the Church of Scotland to compile the *First Book of Discipline*. There, the subject of church officers was addressed in the following terms:

Men of best knowledge in God's word, and cleanest life, men faithful,

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42. Macpherson, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

43. Sherman Isibell, "Book Reviews" *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine* Vol. X, No 1, p. 38.

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and of most honest conversation that can be found in the kirk, must be nominate to be put in election, and their names must be publicly read to the whole kirk by the minister; giving them advertisement, that from amongst them must be chosen elders and deacons.... *The elders being elected, must be admonished of their office, which is to assist the ministers in all public affairs of the kirk; viz. in determining and judging causes, in giving admonition to the licentious liver, in having respect to the manners and conversation of all men within their charge.* [Emphasis MLS]

It would appear that the *First Book of Discipline* leans towards either the two office view or the one office, two aspect view, given the apparent distinction between the minister and the elders.

In 1578, the Church of Scotland adopted Andrew Melville's *Second Book of Discipline*.<sup>44</sup> In chapter 6 which deals with the office of ruling elder we read:

The word elder, in the Scripture, sometimes is the name of age, sometimes of office. When it is the name of any office, sometimes it is taken largely, comprehending as well the Pastors and doctors, as them who are called seniors or elders. In this our division, we call these elders whom the apostles call presidents or governors. Their office as it is ordinary, so it is perpetual, and always necessary in the kirk of God. The eldership is a spiritual function as is the ministry.... *It is not necessary that all elders be also teachers of the word, albeit the chief ought to be such; and so are worthy of double honour.* What manner of persons they ought to be, we refer to the express word, and namely, to the canons written by the apostle Paul. Their office is, as well severally as conjunctly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to their charge, both publicly and privately, that no corruption of religion or manners enter therein. As the Pastors and doctors should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word, so the elders should be careful in seeking after the fruit of the same in the people.... Their principal office is, to hold assemblies with the Pastors and doctors, who are also of their number, for establishing of good order, and execution of discipline; unto the which assemblies all persons are subject that remain within their bounds. [Emphasis MLS]

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44. The *Second Book of Discipline* was approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1578. From that time onwards, it became the authorized standard of the Church of Scotland in respect of government and discipline.

The *Second Book of Discipline* appears to indicate that the offices of ruling and teaching elder represent differing functions of the same office. It also suggests a parity of order and authority, yet a distinction of function. That same idea is found in Chapter 7, which deals with "Elderships, Assemblies, and Discipline." There we read, "Elderships and Assemblies are commonly constituted of Pastors, Doctors, and such as we commonly call Elders, that labour not in the Word and doctrine."

Clearly, an argument could be mounted to assert that the *Second Book of Discipline* supports the one office, two aspects view.

Turning to the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government*. As noted earlier, the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* has been appealed to particularly by the proponents of the two office view. The reason for this was the decision by the Assembly not to utilize the term "elder," coupled with the absence of the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as proof texts for the office of church governor.

While those features appear to be conclusive that the Assembly had the two office view in mind, it would be a mistake to jump too quickly to that conclusion.

The discussion of this matter in the Assembly commenced with consideration of a proposition suggested by one of the Assembly's committees, namely "that besides those presbyters which rule well and labor in the word and doctrine, there be other presbyters, who especially apply themselves to ruling, though they do not labor in the word and doctrine."<sup>45</sup> It should be remembered that the Assembly consisted of delegates who held radically different views on church government. The Assembly contained Erastians, Episcopalians, Independents, and Presbyterians. Not surprisingly, the subject of church government proved to be the most controversial issue debated in the Assembly.

The debate took the form of a discussion of the texts which had been offered by way of proof for the proposition. The first to be considered was 1 Timothy 5:17. Differing views were expressed as to the meaning of this text. The debate on this and related texts continued for over a week, until it was agreed that the matter be referred to a committee which was given the mandate to draw up a statement

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45. William M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, Canada, 1991), p. 164.

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reflecting those matters in which the parties were *agreed*, "with the view of arriving at some fair accommodation."<sup>46</sup>

The report submitted by the committee contained three propositions, which met with the approval of virtually all concerned:

1. Christ hath instituted a government and governors ecclesiastical in the church.

2. Christ hath furnished some in the church with gifts for government, and with commission to exercise the same, when called thereto.

3. It is agreeable to and warranted by the word of God, that some others beside the ministers of the word or church governors should join with the ministers in the government of the church. Rom. xii. 7, 8, and I Cor. xii. 28.<sup>47</sup>

After further debate, all three propositions were carried. However, what was achieved was, without doubt, a compromise. Alexander Mitchell offers these observations:

My opinion is that the utmost that the Assembly at this stage of its proceedings could be got to formulate was, that the office of elder was scripturally warrantable, not that it had been expressly instituted as an office that was to be perpetual and universal obligation in the church like the ministry.<sup>48</sup>

He continues:

The texts adduced in proof of this proposition from the New Testament were Romans xii. 7, and I st Corinthians xii. 28. But neither proof text was held by many of them to amount to a positive and distinct divine institution of this office. The text, which was appealed to throughout by the more zealous defenders of the divine institution of the office, was I st Timothy v. 17, and had they got that inserted among the proof texts they would have gained their case beyond dispute. On the other hand, I do not

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46. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

48. Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1897), p.194.

regard the common Presbyterian interpretation of that text as having been positively rejected by the Assembly at this date....<sup>49</sup>

The compromise was reached, not because the Presbyterians did not hold a majority in the Assembly, but rather to accommodate "many influential and highly respected ministers in the Assembly."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, it is inaccurate to assert that the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* reflects fully the historic Presbyterian position. It only does so to a certain extent. The writings of the Scottish Commissioners to the Assembly make it plain that they favored the one office, two aspects view. For example, George Gillespie, writes:

... the apostles left only two sacred orders to be perpetual in the Church, the order of deacons and the order of elders.... Now, elders are of three sorts: 1. Preaching elders, or Pastors; 2. Teaching elders or doctors; 3. Ruling elders. All these are elders, because they have voice in Presbyteries, and all assemblies of the Church, and the government of the Church is incumbent to them all....<sup>51</sup>

## Chapter 3

# Analysis of the Views

In seeking to analyze the various views, it is evident that there are some difficulties which need to be confronted.

In the case of the one office, two aspects view, its critics maintain that "its most serious weakness lies in its ability to offer only one proof text to support a division of function."<sup>52</sup> The text in question is 1 Timothy 5:17, which the King James version translates, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who

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49. *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 196.

50. John de Witt, *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* (J. H. Kok N. V. Kampen, 1969), p. 85.

51. George Gillespie, *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* Vol 1, Chap. 2, p. 11.

52. Murray, "The Problem of the 'Eldership' and its Wider Implications" p. 41.

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labour in the word and doctrine." Literally the text reads, "Let the presbyters the having presided well ones be judged worthy of double honour, especially the labouring with wearisome effort in word and teaching ones."

Exegetes have found it difficult to settle on the meaning of this text. Certainly Witherow found it a confusing text. In 1856, in support of the eldership being divided into the office of ruling elder and teaching elder, he asserted, perhaps too boldly from his perspective, "Any unprejudiced person may see from 1 Timothy 5:17, that the office of the eldership divided itself into two great departments of duty in primitive times, even as at the present."<sup>53</sup> However, in 1873, when he wrote again on the same subject, his view of the text had undergone a significant metamorphosis. Things had now become clearer to him.

To us it seems clear that the whole theory rests on a misconception of the force of the passage, 1 Timothy 5:17, and therefore cannot be any real justification for the difference that actually exists between the ruling elder and the minister.<sup>54</sup>

The interpretation of this verse has varied widely, with interpretations at times seeming to be determined by the view that the author takes on the office of the ruling elder.

Some have contended that the emphasis is to be laid on the word "labouring." According to this view, all elders are required to teach, and in that regard reliance is placed upon the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9 and particularly the requirement that an elder be "apt to teach"; while those worthy of special honor were those who had distinguished themselves by laborious application to their duty to proclaim the Word of God.<sup>55</sup>

It is a feature of this interpretation that the qualification of being "apt to teach" is equated to being apt to preach. However, that does not necessarily follow. John Brown, commenting on 1 Timothy 3:2 and in particular the requirement that a bishop be "apt to teach," says:

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53. Witherow, *The Apostolic Church* p. 68.

54. Thomas Witherow, *The New Testament Elder* (British and Foreign Evangelical Review, J Nisbet: Edinburgh, 1873), p. 216.

55. Macpherson, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 41.



All that is asserted in it appears simply to be this, that an elder, or bishop, should be fitted to teach, according to the station which he holds in the church. The preaching elder should be qualified to preach publicly, according to the nature of his function; and the ruling elder should be qualified to teach, and admonish, and counsel privately, according to the particular nature of his office. But because an elder, or bishop should be apt to teach, according to the particular nature of his office, can it fairly be inferred that none are to be elders but those who are qualified to be preachers of the gospel? If it is still contended, that all elders of the church of Ephesus are commanded by Paul (Acts xx. 28) to feed the church, they must all have been ministers of the word, because it is the province of the minister, and not of the ruling elder, to feed the church.<sup>56</sup>

Others have suggested that the better view is that within the church at Ephesus there were a number of elders, some of whom had the gift of teaching more eminently than others. Here the emphasis is not laid upon the laboring, but upon the distinction implied between those who ruled only and those who also taught. John Murray adopts that approach:

‘Word and doctrine’ may properly be construed as preaching and teaching. Though it is necessary for all elders to hold fast the faithful word, so as to be able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute gainsayers, though all must be competent to teach, yet not all labour in preaching and teaching. On the other hand, there are those who do ... those labouring in word and doctrine are classified as elders who, in addition to ruling, devote themselves to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and, are thus in a special way accounted worthy of the compensation which their labour warrants.<sup>57</sup>

Speaking of this text, Thornwell wrote:

From this passage it would also appear to have been the custom of the apostolic church to select the preachers from the class of elders. Instead

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56. John Brown, *Vindication of the Presbyterian Form of Church Government as Professed in the Standards of the Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh: H Inglis, 1805), pp. 186, 187.

57. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1977), Vol. 2, p. 360.

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of making an additional order in the Church, the Apostles, it would seem, in the permanent arrangement of its constitution, required those who were to labor in the Word and in doctrine to be also strictly and properly Presbyters.<sup>58</sup>

This was also essentially the view that found favor with John Calvin. Calvin wrote:

We may learn from this, that there were at that time two kinds of elders; for all were not ordained to teach. The words plainly mean, that there were some who "ruled well" and honourably, but who did not hold the office of teachers. And, indeed, there were chosen from among the people men of worth and of good character, who, united with the Pastors in a common council and authority, administered the discipline of the Church, and were a kind of censors for the correction of morals.<sup>59</sup>

Not surprisingly, Thomas Smyth approached the text in a different way. He suggested that προεστωτες, translated "rule" in the King James version, denoted not ruling elders, but the president, moderator, or superintendent of the presbytery, who was preeminently the pastor or preacher of the church. Therefore, he concluded that 1 Timothy 5:17 did not refer to two kinds of elders, but to the peculiar duties to which elders were assigned in the apostolic and primitive churches. In particular, he relied upon the presbyter who was set over the local church, and who, in addition to that task, in a self denying and laborious manner performed the work of an evangelist in the surrounding country. The one who not only presided over the Presbytery, but who also fulfilled the function of the evangelist, was the one who was worthy of double honor.<sup>60</sup>

Peter Campbell also dealt at length with the meaning of this text. His explanation of 1 Timothy 5:17 proceeds along these lines. He suggests that all who were qualified and ordained to be placed in charge

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58. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

59. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan), pp. 138, 139.

60. Thomas Smyth, *Complete Works of Rev. Thomas Smyth* ed. J. W. Flinn, (Columbia, S.C: R. L. Bryan, 1912), Vol. 4, p. 54.

of the early churches were not alike endowed with gifts for public instruction and exhortation. Indeed, he concedes that there may have been some who did not preach at all. However, this he contends was a provisional state of things, which it was not intended should continue. Rather the intent was that preparation must be made in order that the presbyters were to be the stated and constant instructors of the flock and in respect of whom there was to be no formal distinction; all must be διδακτικός, "apt to teach." He highlights the fact that the Scriptures make clear that all presbyters must be those who are apt to teach. From that he argues that all elders must be preachers of the Word.

He dismisses out of hand any suggestion that some elders may meet the scriptural requirement of being apt to teach, in that they are to be able to instruct and exhort privately.

To meet this plain injunction with the assertion that those elders who are appointed to rule, and not to teach, who are selected without the slightest reference to capacity for teaching, are nevertheless διδακτικοί, in the sense of being qualified to exhort privately, is an evasion which it is painful even to notice.<sup>61</sup>

Consequently, he argues that if lay rulers are indeed elders but do not preach, they ought not to be, because they do not meet the scriptural criterion of being apt to teach.

He contends that in 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul was not seeking to establish a permanent office of elder in which some ruled, but did not preach. Rather, he asserts that the exact opposite was the case. Campbell opines that Paul's purpose was to bring about a different state of things. This he sought to achieve by securing double honor to those elders who labored in the Word and doctrine, thereby seeking to hasten the time when all elders would take up their responsibilities and be engaged in teaching. He cites in support of his view Campegius Vitringa, who writes:

St. Paul, therefore, does not in this place refuse to any presbyters the right of teaching. He merely supposes that some do not teach. He wishes, however, that all should teach; nay, he stimulates and exhorts

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61. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

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all to do so, when he declares those who teach to be worthy of double honour.<sup>62</sup>

Iain Murray contends that the text can be translated, "All elders who do well as leaders are worthy of double honour, especially those who are painstaking in preaching who toil unweariedly in the word and teaching." He suggests that translated in this way, the distinction is not between elders who only rule and others who preach, but rather that it "simply urges special commendation and support for those who are outstanding in their efforts in the preacher's calling."<sup>63</sup> That being the case, he asserts, that the text gives no leave to some elders not to preach at all.

Murray goes on to suggest that the case for 1 Timothy 5:17 not referring to two classes of elders is strengthened by what appears in chapter 3 of the same epistle. He points out that there is no hint at all in the third chapter that Paul envisages two classes of elder. On the contrary, says Murray, aptness to teach is set out as a qualification for the office. The inference, he maintains, is that men who do not possess that ability are not to be made elders.

There are a number of weaknesses evident in Murray's analysis, and some of them are reflected in the views of Smyth and Campbell.

Murray's initial contention that the text could refer to a distinction between those who are outstanding in their efforts in the preacher's calling is at least arguable, though certainly not unassailable.

The following observations, while directed to Murray's treatment of 1 Timothy 5:17, are also germane to the reason why the one office and two office views should be rejected.

1. The fact that 1 Timothy 3 makes no reference to a division of functions between elders does not lend any support to the view which Murray advocates for 1 Timothy 5:17. In 1 Timothy 3, the apostle sets out the qualifications for those who desire oversight in the church. Literally the text reads, "If anyone aspires to oversight (ἐπισκοπῆς), he desires a good work." Consequently, it is not surprising that in what follows the apostle sets out what is required of those who are to have oversight in the church. This is made clear by verse 2, which com-

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62. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

mences, "Therefore, it behoves the overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) to be without reproach...."

2. In that same vein, it is a mistake to equate the idea of being apt to teach with the office of the ministry to the exclusion of the office of the ruling elder. It seems to be thought that those who rule in the church do not need the ability to teach. If, as we have noted, the passage in 1 Timothy 3 concerns those who aspire to oversight in the congregation, then when the apostle states that they must be apt to teach it is obviously a requirement which applies to those who are to exercise oversight in the church. The requirement pertains to oversight. It is not a requirement that is peculiar to the ministry of the Word. Murray is absolutely correct when he says that every elder must have an ability to teach, but that is not because he must preach the Word. Rather, it is required for oversight in the church. It is the means by which elders exercise oversight: they do not exercise oversight by coercive power, but by being able to exhort and to teach the members of the congregation.

3. There is a third and extremely significant point that needs to be drawn out of the passage in 1 Timothy 3. Why does Paul write about these things to Timothy? We are told the reason in 1 Timothy 3:14, 15. He says that he writes these things, "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." As that same passage indicates, Paul is writing because his return to Ephesus has been delayed. Therefore, he writes to Timothy who is a young pastor to provide him with information necessary to enable the church in Ephesus to function in accordance with the will of God.

In chapters 2 and 3 of 1 Timothy, Paul instructs Timothy concerning aspects of the church institute: public prayer, the role of women in the public worship of God, and then he moves naturally on to address the qualifications of those who are to be overseers and deacons in the church. Now what is extraordinary is this. It is conceded by all, that the office of ruling elder, or whatever title one desires to append to that office, is by divine institution. All acknowledge that it is an important office within the church. Why then would Paul, who is writing to Timothy in order to instruct him as to how he is to behave himself in the church of God, only instruct him about bishops or overseers? If Hodge and Murray are correct, Paul instructs Timothy only about the ministers

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of the Word. But the context is dealing with those who are to exercise oversight and rule, functions with which ruling elders ought to be concerned.

Furthermore, why would he take the time to instruct him on the qualifications for the office of deacon, but neglect to instruct him on the office of the ruling elder? This is incongruous. It defies explanation and indeed, if the interpretation placed upon the text by Murray and Hodge is correct, one might think that Paul was negligent in his instruction of Timothy. On their view of this text, he neglects to instruct him concerning the office whose principal function is to exercise rule in the congregation. None of this makes any sense.

However, what does fit with the context is the view expounded by Thornwell and Dabney, namely, that in this passage Paul is dealing in a generic way with the office of elder, and so his comments are applicable to all those who rule in the church, both the teaching and ruling elders.

Similar observations can be made as regards the passage in Titus 1. There Paul is also writing to Titus, a young minister whom he has left in Crete for the purpose, that he "should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders (πρεσβυτερους) in every city."<sup>64</sup> Paul commences in verse 6 to set down the qualifications for those who are to occupy the office of elder. However, notice that in verse 7 of the same chapter, he switches from πρεσβυτερος to ἐπισκοπος. Evidently, πρεσβυτερος and ἐπισκοπος refer to the same office, though they accentuate a different aspect of that office; ἐπισκοπος referring to the function of the office, namely oversight, while πρεσβυτερος refers to age and hence the dignity of the office.

As with the passage in 1 Timothy 3, the aspect of rule or oversight is on the foreground. However, if Hodge and Murray are correct, then Paul, while seeking to assist Titus to set things in order in these new congregations, informs him about the qualifications of the minister, but neglects to tell him about those who are to exercise rule with him in the congregation. Such a view of the passage is untenable.

The only sensible conclusion that can be reached is that both the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 refer to both ruling and teaching

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64. Titus 1:5

elders. If that be the case, then Hodge's contention that all references to elders in the New Testament are to ministers, is destroyed. In addition, this weakens severely Murray's argument that 1 Timothy 5:17 does not refer to both the teaching and ruling elder. In light of the above, much of the support which Murray used to deny that 1 Timothy 5:17 relates to both ruling elders and teaching elders is removed.

If 1 Timothy 3 refers to both the teaching and ruling elder, the normal rules of interpretation would demand that when Paul again refers to elders in 1 Timothy 5:17, he should be taken to be referring to both ruling and teaching elders, unless the context dictates otherwise. The context gives no indication that the elders referred to in 1 Timothy 5:17 differ in any way from those referred to in 1 Timothy 3.

One other observation is worthy of our attention. There was a plurality of elders ordained in every church. This is significant in the context of the eldership debate. If there had been a plurality of elders appointed only in some of the more populous cities, where there were probably several congregations, one could well understand why it would have been necessary to have more than a single preacher. However, it is not only in such congregations that a plurality of elders were appointed. It was done in every church, some of which were relatively small and financially weak. It is difficult to reconcile this with the two office view that all elders in the apostolic church were preachers of the Word.

Both the direction and the practice were to ordain elders, that is, more than one, in every church, small as well as great. Therefore, there is a strong presumption that it was intended to conform to the synagogue model. And, if that be the case, then all the elders were not required for the purpose of public instruction. Rather some were rulers, who, as in the synagogue, formed a bench of elders for the government of the church.<sup>65</sup>

Another potential problem with the two office view is that it destroys parity between the teaching elder and the ruling elder. Under that view, there are two distinct offices, each carrying with it differing responsibilities. The existence of two distinct offices does not suggest parity.

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65. Miller, *op. cit.*, p 53.

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It is also relevant to note the comments of William Heyns regarding the views of Hodge as they touch upon another weakness in his approach to this issue. Referring to the distinction made by Charles Hodge between ministers and elders that the former belong to the "clergy" but that the latter are "laymen," Heyns asserts that ministers cannot represent the people, but the elders, being laymen, belong to the people and can represent them. This, however, is virtually a denial of the general priesthood of the believers, and is in accordance with the Roman Catholic doctrine of two separate classes in the church: the superior class of the "clerici" and the inferior class of the "laici," the people. In this sense, the terms "clergy" and "laymen" are entirely out of harmony with the Reformed doctrine of the church.<sup>66</sup>

In conclusion it should also be noted that the one office view is open to significant criticism. Firstly, it has no scriptural warrant. Furthermore, it denies effectively that there is a specific call to the gospel ministry, which is contrary to the teachings of Scripture.<sup>67</sup> The idea that men are invested with office, but have no responsibility to discharge the functions of their office, is anathema to the Scriptures. When men are called to an office, it is not sufficient for them to fulfill only one part of that office and to lay other aspects of it aside.

## Chapter 4

# Conclusion

All of the divergent views on the office of the ruling elder have one thing in common, and that is that they acknowledge that the Scriptures require the appointment of those who are to rule and exercise oversight in the congregation. However, plotting a clear course through the various views is not easy. To suggest that these issues are unimportant

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66. William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons: The Nature and the Duties of the Offices According to the Principles of Reformed Church Polity* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1928), pp. 15, 16.

67. 1 Corinthians 9:16-17; Acts 26:15-20; Romans 10:15; Colossians 4:17.



or irrelevant underestimates the complexity and importance of the matter. Men of considerable talent have found the exercise a challenge. William Cunningham was well versed in Presbyterian church polity, but even he found this issue intellectually challenging. He corresponded with Hodge over the scriptural basis for the ruling elder and in doing so made this acknowledgment:

I have never been able to make up my mind fully as to the precise grounds on which the office and functions of the ruling elder ought to be maintained and defended. For some time before I went to America I had come to lean pretty strongly to the view that all ecclesiastical office-bearers were presbyters, and that there were sufficiently clear indications in Scripture that there were two distinct classes of those presbyters, viz. ministers and ruling elders; though not insensible to the difficulty attaching to this theory from the consideration that it fairly implies that whenever presbyters or bishops are spoken of in Scripture ruling elders are also included. I have been a good deal shaken in my attachment to this theory by the views I have heard from you, but I have not yet been able to abandon it entirely.<sup>68</sup>

Notwithstanding the difficulty highlighted by Cunningham, the view which accords best with the Scriptures and with the confessional standards is the one office, two aspect view. In many respects this could be considered a two office view, though not on the basis maintained by Hodge and Smyth.

It is not surprising that the one office view has never enjoyed any significant support, due to its lack of clarity and certainty as regards the functioning of the church. God is not a God of disorder, which is where the one office view leads.

The weaknesses of the two office view as propounded by Hodge were significant. Despite his assertion to the contrary, Hodge's reference to ruling elders as lay elders and indeed some of the decisions taken by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States during his lifetime, provide evidence that the two office view contains within it seeds which lead to the diminution, if not the destruction, of the office of the ruling elder.

In light of the debates over the ruling elder, all churches which

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68. *Life of Charles Hodge* (T. Nelson: London, 1881), p. 425.

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hold to the Reformed and Presbyterian views of church government should learn to value the office of the ruling elder. It provides stability to church government and affords the believer the opportunity to participate in the government of the church.

It would be a significant mistake to think that these issues have passed into oblivion. Such is not the case. There are many in the professing church world who would be happy to see the demise of the ruling elder. This is evidenced by the experiences encountered by Mark Brown in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He writes:

To recognise distinctions in calling and functions between the pastor and other elders was seen by them as evidence of clericalism, hierarchy, and arrogance. For example, the dissident elders were offended when I would encourage young men to consider a call to the ministry. To them this was a put down. They felt I was falsely assuming ministerial prerogatives to myself. They wanted a rotating pulpit, the right to baptise and administer communion on the basis of their calling as elders.<sup>69</sup>

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69. Iain Murray, "The Problem of the 'Eldership' and its Wider Implications" *The Banner of Truth*, Number 395-396, August-September 1996, p. 38.

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## Book Reviews

*Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. David Willis and Michael Welker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. Xvi + 533 pages. \$40 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The book intends to point out how Reformed theology can and should develop to meet the challenges of, and remain relevant in, the new millennium. The authors would contend that the development that they have in mind should try to remain "true" to the roots of Reformed theology in the Reformation, especially Calvin. In fact, the book demonstrates the extent and depth to which confessional Reformed theology is being corrupted by the prominent Reformed theologians in the main-line Reformed and Presbyterian churches of the World Council of Churches. Among these theolo-

gians and in these churches, Reformed theology has no future.

Thirty-one Reformed theologians from around the world contribute articles on various tasks, topics, and traditions of the Reformed faith. In their hands, the development of Reformed theology is guided by the thinking of the world; open to the influence of pagan religions; directed toward ecumenicity; and concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the redemption of social structures and the salvation of the physically needy.

Myanmar theologian Edmund Za Bik urges Reformed theology to accept insights from other religions, especially Asian religions.

In this postmodern period of ours, characterized as it is by pluralism, relativism, and cultural interpenetration, it will be

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in the interest of churches around the world for Reformed theology to increasingly incorporate into its system not only insights that come through the cultural lens of Western intellectual mentality but also valuable insights from Asian religions as well. Truth, and for that matter the kingdom, is not exclusively restricted to the Christian churches, but is also found where people of different faiths are promoting its values. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are also promoting the common values of justice, morality, peace, and freedom, with a view to build a more humane and just society. All seek to liberate humans from egoism, selfishness, and self-centeredness and to turn them to their neighbors in loving service and to the Absolute as their common end (p. 85).

South American theologian Beatriz Melano is a vintage liberation theologian. Reformed theology for Melano is practical solidarity with all those "living in inhuman conditions." The implication is that unbelief concerning the very existence of God is of no moment. All that matters is that one helps the oppressed. Melano interprets Galatians 3:28 as teaching that within the church "there are neither men nor women, neither exploiters nor exploited,

neither Christians nor atheists" (p. 159).

Leanne Van Dyk, professor of theology at the Reformed Church of America's Western Seminary in Holland, Michigan, defends John McLeod Campbell's heretical doctrine of the atonement. Christ's death was not substitutionary satisfaction of the justice of God. Rather, it was Jesus' adequate confession of sin. Campbell's rejection of penal substitution "is a significant and promising alternative to traditional satisfaction accounts" (p. 225). Van Dyk proposes the Scottish theologian's theory "as a uniquely valuable contribution to ongoing Reformed theological exposition of the atonement" (p. 226). Toward the future of Reformed theology with regard to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God!

Van Dyk's article highlights the passionate commitment of Reformed theologians of this sort to feminism and the absurdity to which the commitment leads. Van Dyk feels herself compelled to apologize for the nineteenth century heretic's disregard of twentieth century canons concerning gender inclusive language.

The reader will notice not only the peculiarities of Campbell's style but also his exclusive use of masculine images and pro-

nouns with respect to God and to human persons. I have let these stand as is and trust the reader will be able to profit from Campbell's thoughts in spite of language now perceived to be jarring and insensitive (p. 226).

Cutting the heart out of the gospel is approved; saying "his" when referring to God or to people generally—in the nineteenth century—calls for an embarrassed apology. Van Dyk is determined to redress the wrong of centuries of masculine pronouns by the use of feminine pronouns. This leads her to compose the sentence, "The believer finds her authentic redeemed identity in the life of sonship" (p. 236). In this mad sentence is a delightful justice.

Louisville Presbyterian Seminary professor Amy Plantinga Pauw thinks it "entirely appropriate for contemporary Reformed theologians to recast doctrines with the aid of a variety of intellectual approaches current in their own day, such as analytic philosophy, feminist thought, or narrative approaches to Scripture" (p. 459).

Throughout, the writers strike out, often sharply, even bitterly, against historic, creedal Reformed theology, which they know well.

Brian Gerrish dislikes

Calvin's "rhetoric of disgust at the human condition," that is, the Reformed doctrine of total depravity (p. 14). John de Gruchy is enthusiastic about Karl Barth's restatement of the doctrine of election as universal grace. de Gruchy is decidedly unenthusiastic about "those who remain tenaciously faithful to its traditional formulation," for example, in book three of Calvin's *Institutes*; the Canons of Dordt; and the Westminster Confession of Faith (p. 117). David Willis charges historic Reformed theology with threatening the centrality of the good news.

There were long periods ... when Reformed theology was in danger of being controlled by a preoccupation with a divine decree considered in general, or by a preoccupation with the symmetry of double predestination, or by a preoccupation with the woes rather than the blessings as motivation for ethics, or by a preoccupation with the fallenness of human nature rather than the goodness of human nature as created and restored (p. 182).

The theology proposed by this volume is not Reformed theology. It is heresy. The proposing of this theology is not development. It is apostasy.

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There is the occasional historical study that is profitable. John Leith's essay, "Calvin's Theological Realism and the Lasting Influence of His Theology," though brief, is solid.

The main value of the book for the Reformed minister and professor of theology, however, is its stark presentation of the enemy within the gates. In our maintenance and genuine development of Reformed theology, this is what we are up against. ■

***Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God***, by John W. Cooper. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. 301 pp. \$19.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is the book for the Reformed Christian, layman as well as minister, who wants to understand the movement for gender-inclusive language for God in the churches. Calvin Seminary professor John Cooper has made a thorough, biblical examination of the movement. A piece of careful, penetrating, first-rate scholarship, it is written in a popular style.

Cooper defines gender-inclusive language this way: "speaking of God as equally masculine and feminine, or as ungendered, or as

both ungendered and equally masculine and feminine" (p. 27). Basic to this powerful movement in the churches is gender-egalitarianism. The notion that there must be perfect equality in all respects between men and women is thrust back upon the being of God. God must be imagined as at least equally female and male.

The gender-inclusivists cannot charge the book with unfairness. It considers all their arguments with scrupulous carefulness. Judging every argument by Scripture, the book demonstrates that gender-inclusivism is unbiblical. Without exception, biblical revelation makes God known as masculine, although without sexuality.

Cooper goes further. He exposes inclusive language as resulting in a different religion than that of Christian orthodoxy. Specifically, he proves that inclusive language "alters" orthodoxy regarding the Creator-creature distinction; the Trinity; the Deity of Jesus; and the atonement.

His conclusion is strong condemnation:

We charge that inclusive language for God is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of deviating from the doctrine and piety of biblical Christianity. Although there are elements of truth in its



evidence and arguments, we have found no conceivable way to justify fully gender-inclusive language for God that is compatible with Holy Scripture and the historic Christian faith (p. 263).

The subtle tactics of the proponents of inclusive language to introduce their new and different religion into conservative churches are pointed out. These tactics include the incessant use of the name "God" in writing and worship, rather than to say "He" or "His" or "Him."

Cooper informs the reader that inclusive language and its gender-egalitarianism are being sung into the churches, as is invariably the case with heresies, especially by means of the songs of hymnwriter Brian Wren.

Cooper's exposure of the radical evil of the movement makes his fatal concession to it disconcerting. In the end, he allows that "it can be permissible occasionally to say 'God is our mother,' provided that it is properly intended and done in appropriate circumstances" (p. 275; cf. also p. 277).

That this was coming was earlier indicated by Cooper's restrained criticism. In an otherwise fine chapter showing that gender-inclusive language is destructive

of the "Christian piety" of the first three commandments of God's law, Cooper mildly declares that "rejecting God as revealed in Scripture and worshipping a deity that has been reimagined and renamed certainly *have the potential* for transgressing these commandments" (p. 221, emphasis added). He continues: "I do not claim that endorsing gender-inclusivism for God automatically involves impiety or false religion. I claim that these spiritual dangers accompany inclusivism" (p. 222).

This restraint may reflect an idea about scholarship. Or it may indicate a notion about Christian love. In either case, by this restraint the blood-bought church of Christ is exposed to grievous heresy.

Cooper's argument from the female imagery in Isaiah 66:13 for his permission occasionally to call God mother does not hold. It is not true that Isaiah 66:13 likens God to a mother. Rather, it likens *a certain act* of God to the *act* of a mother. There is a difference. I may carry my grandchildren on my back like a horse. This does not make me like a horse. It certainly does not warrant anyone's naming me a horse occasionally, as well as a man. I would take it ill of someone who did this, including a grandchild.

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Similar is Cooper's admittedly grudging tolerance of referring to the Holy Spirit as "she":

perhaps it is best to conclude that *it is permissible as a standard practice in English either to use he or to avoid using pronouns for the Holy Spirit*. Given the maternal imagery of the Spirit in the Bible, *she* as an occasional secondary, figurative reference cannot be completely ruled out (p. 273).

This seems to be related to Cooper's strange questioning of the personality and masculinity of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament revelation (pp. 72ff., 272).

An issue that the inclusive language movement presses upon Reformed churches and their theologians is the masculinity of God. Is this merely anthropomorphism in Scripture, or is God essentially masculine? It is a virtue of the book that Cooper goes into this rarely explored matter of God's gender. Without being dogmatic, Cooper takes the position that the representation of God as masculine is anthropomorphism. "God is beyond gender" (p. 187).

But if the divine being is not essentially masculine, how can God be essentially Father and Son? Does not God's Fatherhood and Sonship reveal Him as original

and real masculinity of which masculinity among us is only the pale created reflection? ■

***Marriage and Divorce in the Thought of Martin Bucer***, by H. J. Selderhuis. Tr. John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma. Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 1999. 406 pp. \$45 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The fine study of the teaching of Martin Bucer on marriage and divorce by Dutch Reformed theologian H. J. Selderhuis will be of interest to all students of the Reformation. The Reformer Martin Bucer of Strasbourg, although generally overlooked in accounts of the Reformation, played a significant role in the sixteenth century Reformation of the church. A force in his own right, he influenced John Calvin in a number of important areas, including predestination and church polity. Part 2 of this four-part book is a biography of Bucer.

The importance of the book is its presentation and analysis of Bucer's doctrine of marriage. The laxity of Bucer's view of marriage was well-known already to his contemporaries. Not only did Bucer permit the remarriage of the

"guilty party" in a divorce, something that the other Reformers opposed, but he also permitted divorce and remarriage for virtually any reason whatever. Essentially, for Bucer, a valid ground for divorce was the loss of love in a marriage.

Selderhuis discovers the theological roots of this licentious doctrine of marriage. They are fascinating. They must also be deeply troubling to members of Reformed churches at the end of the twentieth century who see marriages, indeed the institution of marriage itself, being destroyed by Bucerian principles.

For one thing, Bucer employed his passionately-held conviction that "no one should live for himself but for the neighbor" to dissolve marriages. The principle is good. The application by Bucer was perverse. Should sex become impossible because of a wife's difficult pregnancy and childbirth, the lusty husband has the right to divorce her and marry another. The principle of living for the neighbor is applied to the poor wife, who is compelled to agree that her husband may leave her for another.

Thus it sometimes happens with a wife that in case of childbirth or from some other cause she incurs such injuries that it is no longer possible to have sex with

her. In such a situation as well, the Word of God holds true that it is better to marry than to burn, so that the authorities should allow the man in question to marry another woman in order thus to prevent immorality (p. 300).

In close connection with this, Bucer adopted the "hermeneutical-theological a priori that it could never be God's intent that the interpretation of his Word would be harmful to anybody" (p. 148). Regardless what Scripture plainly says, if its teaching results in earthly unhappiness, e.g., lifelong marriage to an unsatisfying wife, the teaching of Scripture may be set aside, and the very opposite may be practiced. Bucer applied this principle when he approved, and attended, the bigamous marriage of Philip of Hesse.

Against this lax doctrine of marriage stand the biblical texts, especially the clear prohibitions of divorce and remarriage in the New Testament. A unique exegesis is needed to change them into their opposite. Selderhuis confirms what other recent writers on the Reformers' doctrine of marriage have been saying: the source of Bucer and the other Reformers' novel interpretation of the biblical texts was the Renaissance humanist, Erasmus.

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Investigation of the sources of Bucer's theology has clearly brought to light the profound influence of Erasmus. Since this influence also applies to our subject it is important for us first to examine how the well-known humanist thought about marriage and divorce, especially because Bucer expressly appeals to his views (pp. 36, 37; cf. p. 316).

But Erasmus' theory of interpretation of the texts on marriage and divorce, Selderhuis observes, was that which today is described as viewing the texts as culturally conditioned (p. 41).

In addition, Erasmus imposed upon the hard texts a criterion external to Scripture itself. That criterion was "fairness." It amounted to Erasmus' own notion of the "well-being of humanity" (pp. 41, 42). Thus, Erasmus' extra-biblical standard of interpretation tied in nicely with Bucer's hermeneutical *a priori*: the Word of God must never cause earthly suffering to anyone. Scripture no longer interpreted Scripture. Human happiness interpreted Scripture. Human happiness as determined by Erasmus and Bucer interpreted Scripture.

Yet a fourth theological root of Bucer's permissive doctrine of marriage was his conception of marriage as a conditional contract.

Of great importance for his (Bucer's) views on marriage and divorce in this connection is his premise that in the case of marriage we are dealing with a covenant in which two parties voluntarily enter into a relationship. In this context Bucer refers to the idea of a "covenant" or "treaty" as this is known in ordinary public life; and for that reason he also frequently uses the word "contract" when the reference is to a marriage relationship.... The idea of viewing marriage as a treaty or contract is not new as such. Also in the Roman and canonical legal tradition this idea expressly recurs.... The contractual aspect of marriage concerns a relation of mutual obligations, obligations that flow from the community that the partners have entered and that pertain, for example, to the participation of each in the suffering and troubles of the other. It is a matter of natural equity (fairness) that where two people have entered a covenant they obligate themselves to do certain things for each other. But if one partner refuses to honor his (her) obligations, the other can consider himself (herself) released from his (her) obligations. Breach of contract, therefore, results in divorce. After all, when a hired man fails to do his work, his boss will also terminate the relationship (p. 184).

Again:

Especially of influence in Bucer's definition of marriage is the role played by aspects of Roman law, by which marriage in part acquires the nature of a contractual agreement. This agreement can be canceled if one of the contractors no longer wants to or, as in these cases, is no longer able to fulfill its obligations (p. 303).

The view of marriage as a conditional contract, however, conflicts with the Bible's comparison of marriage with the union of Jesus Christ and the church, especially in Ephesians 5:22ff. The covenant of Christ with His church is an unbreakable bond, not a conditional and, therefore, voidable contract.

The biblical doctrine of marriage as the earthly symbol of the covenant of grace is far too prominent and Bucer was far too biblical a theologian to permit this to have escaped Bucer's notice. And when this fundamental truth about marriage came up in Bucer's teaching on marriage, Bucer spoke of the *indissolubility* of marriage. Selderhuis remarks on this in a striking passage:

Characteristic for Bucer is his description of marriage in a covenant terminology that has in

large part been derived from Scripture. He continually refers to the relationship between husband and wife in the way Ephesians 5 describes it. *When, based on this Bible passage, Bucer speaks of the indissolubility of marriage, his words are at odds with his emphasis on the contractual aspect of marriage* (pp. 184, 185; emphasis added).

Weakening Bucer's doctrine of marriage still further was his notion that he had to apply the biblical teaching to a society broader than the church. Bucer conceived the kingdom of Christ as an earthly, political entity. In it were large numbers of unregenerated unbelievers, who certainly would not be open to the more rigorous features of the biblical teaching on marriage and divorce. Bucer deliberately crafted his doctrine of marriage to accommodate cities and nations in which, although the government was at least nominally Reformed, many citizens were ungodly.

The civil government must, for the sake of his own well-being and that of society, give the non-Christian the opportunity to opt for a life that is minimally sinful and still self-centered. Characteristic for Bucer's theology of marriage is

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that he struggles to give shape to the rule of Christ and to use the Bible as his code of laws and at the same time allow room—in the administration of those laws—for the anthropological fact that humans are controlled by self-seeking and passion. In light of his conviction that the whole Bible is normative for the whole of society he had to create room in Scripture by which God's law can also become applicable to unbelievers.

This is also the reason, says Selderhuis

why Bucer in his writings so rarely appeals to the sacrifice and love of Christ in order, by means of such an appeal, to straighten out broken marriages. He is aware that such an appeal will not accomplish anything in the case of those who do not themselves know the love of God (p. 355).

The result was a lawless doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage that scandalized even Bucer's fellow Reformers.

Selderhuis concludes with the judgment that Bucer's doctrine of marriage had little influence on the practice of marriage in his day. No doubt, this is correct. But this judgment does not do jus-

tice to the significance of Martin Bucer's appalling view of marriage.

This significance is, first, that Bucer's permissive doctrine accurately drew out the implications of the new interpretation of especially the New Testament texts on marriage to which all the Reformers, following Erasmus, committed themselves. This was the interpretation that viewed marriage as a breakable contract, rather than an unbreakable bond.

Second, although the other Reformers shrank back from implementing these implications in their day, at the present time Bucer's doctrine of marriage reigns in most evangelical and Reformed churches. Marriage is a mere contract between the human parties. It is breakable when the conditions are not met by one or the other. And the main condition is the happiness of the parties as determined by themselves. Certainly, it is widely assumed in evangelical and Reformed churches, the Word would never require hardship and sacrifice.

What English merchant John Burcher wrote about Bucer to Heinrich Bullinger holds for most evangelical and Reformed churches today: "In the matter of marriage Bucer is worse than permissive. One time, around the

table, I heard him debate this issue when he stated that divorce should be granted on any ground, no matter how trivial." ■

*Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, by Jan Rohls. Tr. John Hoffmeyer. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. xxiii + 311 pp. \$35 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

To read *Reformed Confessions* is to receive a sound, thorough education in the theology of Reformed orthodoxy. Following the order of the six loci of dogmatics (although strangely there is no treatment of eschatology), Jan Rohls sets forth the teaching of the Reformed creeds on all the leading doctrines of Scripture. The book is a comparative study of the creeds. The purpose is not to comment on the creedal teaching, but simply to present it. Although the creeds are in basic agreement, the occasional difference is noted.

The author concentrates on the confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, beginning with the creedal statements of Zwingli and concluding with the Helvetic Consensus Formula.

The last section of the book considers the history of confes-

sions in the Reformed churches after 1675. This includes an analysis of the Barmen Declaration of 1934. In this section, Rohls notes that the authority of the confessions came under attack from two quarters, pietism and the Enlightenment.

Encrusted orthodoxy was opposed both by Pietism, influenced by Dutch precisianism and English Puritanism, and by the Enlightenment, which was making its way from Western Europe.... The Enlightenment and Pietism agreed in emphasizing the priority of scripture over the confessional writings and symbolic books. There was a corresponding opposition to the Orthodox "papacy of the confessions".... In the new view, a confession could no longer be a *rule of faith*, but only the articulation of a specific *type of doctrine* (pp. 265, 266).

Rohls' exposition is sound. With only the rare lapse, he does justice to the confessions and, thus, to Reformed orthodoxy. In addition, he unfailingly hones in on the exact issue. In treating of "reconciliation and substitution," Rohls points out that Christ reconciled us to God, and not God to us (pp. 90, 91). In the section on "justification and faith," he is at pains to

demonstrate that the creeds condemn viewing faith as another work of the sinner: "It is impossible to regard faith as that on the basis of which we are justified" (p. 126). Faith is the gift of God to the elect sinner (pp. 128, 129).

Posing the problem that "the particularity of election seems to call into question the universality of grace," Rohls observes, correctly, that

the universalistic statements of the Bible are understood (by the Reformed confessions—DJE) in such a way that the expressions "world," "all," and "many" apply exclusively to God's church in the sense of the communion of those who have been elected from eternity (pp. 162, 163).

Not only does Rohls invariably strike to the heart of the creedal statements of Reformed doctrine, but he also has the gift of expressing that heart in a memorable way. Regarding the doctrine of the person and natures of Jesus Christ, "Christology is about the fact that God is human, and specifically that God is human without ceasing to be God" (p. 108).

A rare lapse is his treatment of reprobation. It is Rohls' understanding of the creeds that unlike election (for which he reserves the

term "predestination") "reprobation can in no way be considered a positive act of God's will, so that election and rejection also cannot be understood as two parallel acts of the divine will" (p. 153). Rohls supposes that reprobation in the creeds is "exclusively ... a passing over or overlooking of some sinners in the act of election, which is the sole positive act of the divine will" (p. 154).

But the Canons of Dordt speak of one eternal decree of election and reprobation according to which God gives faith to some and withholds faith from others (I/6). Further, the Canons teach that God has "*decreed* to leave (others) in the common misery" (I/15). The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches one decree by which some "are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death" (3.3). In 3.7 Westminster views reprobation as the divine counsel that not only "passes by" but also "ordains" some humans to dishonor and wrath.

This reviewer protests vehemently against the profaning of language that results from politically correct deference to feminism. As theologians increasingly cower before the feminists, we will have to read books that defile the English language. But how can



one not be disgusted with such a sentence as this? "In the words of the Westminster Confession, God has the divine life 'in Godself' ... and 'from Godself'" (p. 46). In fact, these are *not* the words of the Westminster Confession. The Holy Spirit, God *Himself*, who guided the divines at Westminster into the knowledge of the truth, also protected them from such barbarisms.

This aside, the book must be part of the library of all, whether friend or foe, who would know the Reformed faith from its creeds. ■

*Original Sin: Illuminating the Riddle*, by Henri Blocher. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. 158 pp. \$18 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

No one who read the author's treatment of Genesis 3 in the earlier book, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), will be surprised at the message of this follow-up work. The message of *Original Sin* is rejection of the Reformed doctrine that Adam's disobedience in Paradise is imputed to all humans by virtue of Adam's repre-

sentative headship. Accordingly, the book denies that depravity of nature, with which all humans are born, is punishment for the transgression of Adam, for which transgression all are responsible before God.

The book denies the doctrine of original sin.

It does so carefully, even cautiously, and, therefore, subtly. The author is "steeped in the Reformed tradition" and shows a certain respect for it. He likes to remain as close to the doctrine that he rejects as possible. He acknowledges that a sinful condition follows Adam's sin, both in Adam and in us all. The sinful condition of the race is due to the race's relationship to Adam. But the relationship is not that of representation by a federal (that is, covenant) head. Rather, it is the "organic solidarity of the race." The sinful condition of the race, therefore, "is not a penalty, or strictly the result of transference, but simply an existential, spiritual *fact* for human beings since Adam." The condition is "voluntary," a "disposition of the will" (pp. 128, 129).

The basis of the rejection of the Reformed doctrine of original sin is an erroneous interpretation of Romans 5:12-21. Blocher explains the passage as teaching that "the role of Adam and of his sin in

Romans 5 is to make possible the imputation, the judicial treatment, of human sins" (p. 77; emphasis Blocher's). Adam's sin makes possible the imputation of the sins of others; it is not itself imputed to others. Somehow, the disobedience of Adam opened up the way for God to condemn every human for his own personal sins. Blocher's interpretation of Romans 5 avoids "the unattested and difficult thesis of the imputation of an alien sin" (p. 80).

Conclusive against this interpretation of Romans 5:12-21 are the clear statements by the Holy Spirit (not a "rabbinic" Paul) in verses 18, 19 that the offense of the one man effected the condemnation of all and that the disobedience of one man constituted the many, sinners.

The implications of Blocher's doctrinal innovation are significant. He himself calls attention to one: breaking down the radical difference between the Augustinian and the Pelagian doctrines of original sin (p. 123).

The other implication is inescapable by virtue of the inspired structure of Romans 5:12-21. This structure consists of the parallel, "as by Adam, so by Christ." If Adam's disobedience merely allows God to condemn the race for their own misdeeds, then Christ's

obedience merely allows God to justify humans on the basis of their own right deeds. The interpretation of Romans 5 that manages to avoid "the unattested and difficult thesis of the imputation of an alien sin" must also avoid the equally difficult thesis of the imputation of an alien righteousness.

This is the teaching of Pelagian works-righteousness. It is the denial of the gospel.

What rendered this rejection of original sin certain was Blocher's earlier denial (in his *In the Beginning*) of the historicity of Genesis 3—a denial repeated in this book (cf. pp. 41, 50, 51). Denial of the historicity of the opening chapters of the Bible (they are a unit) results in the loss of the gospel of Jesus Christ: no Adam, no Christ; no federal headship of Adam, no federal headship of Christ; no imputation of Adam's guilt, no imputation of Christ's righteousness; no original sin, no justification; no tree of the knowledge of good and evil, no cross.

There is in this book a clear, sharp warning to those churches which, though traditionally Reformed and conservative, are now opening themselves to doubt concerning the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis. Blocher would be considered, and probably considers himself, an evan-

gelical, even conservative, Reformed scholar.

The first chapters of Genesis are not a myth. They are history. The myth is that a church can let go the historicity of the opening chapters of Genesis without losing the gospel. ■

*The Company of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era*, by David L. Larsen. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998. Pp. 1-894. No price given (hard cover). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

In many ways this welcome addition to the field of the history of preaching is an improvement over what has been the standard work for a number of years, *The History of Preaching* (volumes I and II by Edwin Dargan and volume III by Ralph G. Turnbull). The latter, while more detailed than Larsen's work, makes for very difficult reading because of its dry, tedious style. There are helpful indices and there is a bibliography given with each of the preachers on which the author writes. Future editions ought to contain an index of the preachers covered.

There are a host of Funda-

mentalist/Evangelical preachers covered. There is a lengthy section dealing with preachers in the Plymouth Brethren tradition. A fair number of the "great ones" among the Presbyterians are treated. Among the latter are: J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), Mark A. Matthews (1867-1940), Clarence E. McCartney (1879-1957), Andrew Blackwood (1882-1966), and Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895-1960). But only three preachers in the Dutch/American Calvinist tradition are covered: Klaas Schilder (1890-1952), Samuel Zwemer (1867-1938), and David James Burrell (1844-1926). Of these three it could be argued that Schilder was a better theologian/professor than preacher. Zwemer was a missionary for the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and Burrell spent the first half of his ministry in the Presbyterian Church in the USA and the last half at the Marble Collegiate Church (RCA) in New York City. In Volume III of Dargan's *A History of Preaching* Ralph Turnbull writes on Zwemer and Henry Bast (RCA), Samuel Volbeda and Peter Eldersveld (both of these were preachers in the Christian Reformed Church in North America), and Herman Hoeksema (a preacher in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America).

It is the opinion of this reviewer that the Dutch Calvinist tradition with its emphasis on exegetically based sermons and the thematic method of constructing sermons, makes at least two very worthwhile contributions to the art of preaching. There is room for a good, solid study of preachers in the Dutch Calvinist tradition both in the Netherlands and in North America from the beginning of the seventeenth century through the twentieth. The names of really great preachers in this tradition and time-frame are many. Perhaps the multi-volume study currently underway (volumes 1 and 2 have

appeared), *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, by Hughes Oliphant Old (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) will dig much more deeply into the Dutch tradition than does Larsen.

Aside from the critical comments, this is, nevertheless, a good book from which preachers and laymen alike can benefit.

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