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EDITOR'S NOTES

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra concludes his fascinating study of the late medieval theologian Thomas Bradwardine by outlining Bradwardine's polemic against Pelagianism on the errors of "meritorious good works" and Rome's "sacrament" of penance. Dykstra points out that while Bradwardine was strong on the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and double predestination, he manifested a serious weakness in his doctrine of sin. That weakness, Dykstra contends, "...begins with his failure to recognize the serious consequences of original sin." This led to Bradwardine's failure to see the great contrast between "the horrible depths of sin [and] the greatness of grace." Dykstra concludes his study by pointing out that the rejection of Bradwardine by the churchmen indicates that there was no room in the church of his day for the truth of sovereign, double predestination. Positively, God was preparing the way, however, through Bradwardine's work, for the reformation of his church.

The Rev. Lau Chin Kwee, a graduate of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, contributes the first part of an in-depth study of the Serious Call of the Gospel. In this two-part series Pastor Lau exposes convincingly the errors of the notion of "the well-meant offer of the gospel."

Prof. David J. Engelsma writes an extensive review of Peter A. Lillback's book, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*. Engelsma calls the book, "an unconvincing treatment of a worthwhile subject: the doctrine of the covenant in John Calvin."

Undersigned continues his exegetical study of *The Epistle to Titus*.

We also offer a number of book reviews.

Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting

An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (4)

Robert D. Decker

The reader is reminded that this exposition of the epistle to Titus was first given in the form of "chapel talks" by the author at the weekly Wednesday morning chapel services at the seminary. The author began the exposition in the 1997-1998 school year and completed the series the second semester of the 1999 - 2000 school year. This exposition is being published in the *Journal* with the hope that it will prove helpful to a wider audience of the people of God in their study of this brief letter in the sacred Scriptures. So that both those able to work with the Greek language and those unable to do so may benefit from this study, all references to the Greek will be placed in footnotes. The translation of the Greek text is the author's. We present this exposition pretty much as it was spoken in the chapel services, application and all. Perhaps this will help the reader gain some insight into what goes on in the seminary.

Chapter One

Verse 10

In the preceding verses the inspired apostle has greeted his legitimate, spiritual son, Titus, the minister he has left to shepherd the church in Crete (vv. 1 - 4). The apostle exhorted Titus to "set in order the things that are lacking, and ordain elders in every city" (v. 5). In the next section the apostle lays out the gifts/qualifications a man needs in order to serve in the office of elder in the church (vv. 5 - 9).

With verse 10 the apostle begins the concluding section of chapter one of this letter to Titus. Verse ten reads as follows:

For there are many, even¹ unruly, vain talkers, and deceivers chiefly² they out of the circumcision.

Though this be a new section, it is linked to the preceding by the conjunction *gar*, which means “for.” Hence the apostle states the reason for the preceding. Titus must set in order the things which are lacking by ordaining gifted/qualified elders for the church. These elders must be “holding fast the reliable word” which Paul taught them, so as to be able by the sound doctrine of that reliable word both to exhort, encourage the faithful, and refute the gainsayers. This is the elders’ calling because there are many unruly, vain talkers and deceivers in the churches.

These the apostle describes as “unruly.”³ The term means ones who cannot be subject to control. The idea is that these are men who cannot be subjected to the control of the truth of God’s Word. Because they are uncontrollable, they are disobedient to the Word of God. Furthermore, they are “vain talkers.”⁴ A “vain talker” is an idle talker, one who speaks empty, senseless things. Vain is this kind of talker because his speech is empty, of no substance. There is nothing of positive value in what he has to say. His talk is empty because it lacks biblical content. Lacking biblical content, his talking contains nothing which would instruct, guide, correct, or edify the people of God. These evil men are marked by a third characteristic, viz., they are “deceivers.”⁵ This word means, literally, a mind-deceiver or a seducer. This is what these men do! They seduce, deceive God’s people, and they do this especially by lying. They present the lie as if it were the truth.

There is a relationship among the characteristics of these evil men in the churches. Because they cannot be subjected to the

1. If *kai* is retained, as some manuscripts do. Whether retained or omitted the meaning of the text is not affected.

2. *malista* is the Greek term. The AV translates it “specially.” It could also be translated, “most of all” or “above all.”

3. The Greek is *anupotaktoi*.

4. *mataiologoi*.

5. *phrevapatai*.

Word of God, their talk, their speech, lacks the edifying substance of God's Word. They, therefore, by their unruly behavior and empty speech deceive God's people.

What is more, these evil men are "chiefly the ones of or out of the circumcision." In other words, most of these evil men in the churches were Jewish "converts." Not all of them, but most were of the "circumcision party or faction" in the churches. These, because they were Jews, thought probably that they ought to be looked up to. This same expression is used elsewhere in several New Testament passages to refer to Jewish members of the church.⁶ These evil men insisted that Gentile members of the churches had to be circumcised and had to observe other Jewish rites and rules as well.

Concerning these evil men, there are several truths we ought to note:

1. There were many, not a few, but many of these plaguing the churches with their deception. William Hendriksen writes, "...they existed in alarming numbers in the church."⁷

2. These are always to be found in the church. Holy Scripture warns of this often and in many ways. This same apostle warned another of his spiritual sons, the young preacher Timothy, of this very fact.⁸ The inspired apostle Peter warns us that just as there were false prophets in the Old Testament church, so there will be false teachers in the New Testament church. These will privily bring in damnable heresies and many will follow their pernicious ways.⁹ We must as preachers and as those who aspire to that sacred office be aware of this truth! These evil men are always present in and must be opposed by the church.

3. These men are deliberately evil. They are consciously out to destroy the church. They are not sincere, godly men who

6. *peri-tomee*, see, e.g., Galatians 2:12; Acts 10:45; Acts 11:2. Further, Acts 2:11 speaks of Jews from Crete as among those who heard Peter's Pentecost sermon.

7. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Titus*, p. 350.

8. See II Timothy 3 and 4.

9. See II Peter 2.

happen to hold unwittingly to some minor errors. No, these men know the truth and deliberately reject and deny it. What is more, they attempt to convince others to believe and follow their heretical teachings. We must make no mistake about this. Their talk is empty because it is devoid of the truth of the gospel. They are devoid of the gospel because they in their disobedience refuse to subject themselves to the Word of God. They are out to seduce the people of God.

4. We need to do battle against them and expose them and refute their erroneous teachings. If they remain impenitent, we need to put them out of the church by way of the exercise of church discipline. The only weapon we have to accomplish this is the sound doctrines of the Word of God.

An indispensable aspect of our preaching, therefore, must be that it be *antithetical*, sharply and distinctively antithetical. We must not hesitate to refute the false teachers, the disobedient, vain talkers and deceivers. If we fail in this we shall be held accountable by God and His Christ for allowing the church to be led away and corrupted by these evil men.

Hence, be positive in your preaching. Comfort, encourage, instruct God's people by means of the preaching of the Word. But do not shrink from being negative in the right sense of that word. The right sense of "negative" is that we refute the false teachings of the evil deceivers who never cease to trouble God's church.

Verses 11, 12

(11) Whose mouths must be stopped ("whom it is necessary to silence by stopping the mouth" is the literal translation), who overthrow (the AV translates this "subvert") whole houses, teaching things which they ought not in favor of (or "for the pleasure of")¹⁰ base gain (the AV translates the phrase, "for filthy lucre's sake").

(12) One of them, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, wicked beasts (wild, ferocious, savage),¹¹ idle or lazy bellies.

10. The Greek is *charin*.

11. Thayer's translation of *kaka theeria*. See James Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 290 and 320.

In these verses the apostle continues his description of the unruly, vain-talking deceivers whose false teachings Titus and all faithful ministers of the Word must refute by means of teaching the sound doctrine of the reliable Word of God. Do not fail to note that the Holy Spirit, who inspired this Word of God, does not hesitate to use very sharp, strong language. One who would be a faithful preacher in today's church must do no less!

The mouths of these deceivers must be stopped. The Greek puts it a little stronger, "Whom it is necessary to silence by stopping the mouths...." The mouths of these deceivers must be stopped. It is necessary that they be silenced. This, you understand, is divine necessity! The teaching of these deceivers must be clearly, sharply refuted, shown to be false by means of the bishops' teaching the sound doctrine of the Word of God.

Should these deceivers continue to teach their heresies, they must be silenced by the application of Christian discipline, even to the point of "the extreme remedy," excommunication from the church and kingdom of heaven. It is necessary!

The reason these must be silenced is the terrible consequences their false teaching has on God's church. It is not just a few, one or two, members of the church who are led astray by the vain talk of these deceivers. They subvert or overthrow whole houses! John Calvin, commenting on this clause, is certainly correct when he writes:

If the faith of one individual were in danger of being overturned (for we are speaking of the perdition of a single soul redeemed by the blood of Christ) the pastor should immediately gird himself for the combat; how much less tolerable is it to see whole houses overturned?¹²

These deceivers subvert whole houses by "teaching things which they ought not." Their teachings contradict the truth of the Word of God. What is more, they are dishonest in their presenta-

12. John Calvin (Pringle translation), *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 299.

tion of their false teachings. II Peter 2:1 - 3 and Jude 4 warn us that these deceivers “privily bring in their damnable heresies” and “creep into the church unawares.”

Hence, as preachers and those who aspire to that holy office of Christ, we must take great care that we teach the truth of Scripture. And we must constantly be on our guard, so that we are able to discern even the slightest departure from the truth of God’s Word.

The apostle also exposes the evil motive of these deceivers. They teach things which they ought not, “in favor of” or “for the pleasure of base gain.”¹³ The deceivers do not teach because they want the church to be edified and grow in the knowledge of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They emphatically do not desire the church to grow in the grace of her Lord.

The deceivers teach their damnable heresies for base gain! Their desire is to get rich, wealthy in earthly things. They love money and what it can buy? Money cannot buy the grace of salvation in Jesus Christ. It can only buy earthly things. Motivated by covetousness and with “feigned words (they) make merchandise” of God’s people (II Pet. 2:3). Along with this love of money, the deceivers want the “base gain” of the praise of men. Power and prestige are their aim.

Interestingly enough, the Holy Spirit uses one of their own prophets to condemn them: “The Cretans are always liars” (v. 12). That, at bottom, is what all of their teaching is: lies. This is why they ought not teach these things. The reference is to heresy, false doctrine, the lie in all of its many and various forms as it stands in flat contradiction of the truth of the Word of God.

Let it not escape us, if this be what the Holy Spirit calls heresy, this is what we must call it too. And we must exert ourselves to expose these gainsaying deceivers. They are all about us, and they threaten our churches and their members too. Let no one, no matter how vehemently men may criticize us, let no one deter us from this important aspect of the work of the ministry.

13. The AV translates *aischrou kerdous charin* “for filthy lucre’s sake.”

Two striking metaphors are used by the Holy Spirit in verse 12 to describe these deceivers. They are “evil beasts.” Literally, they are fierce, ferocious, wild, wicked beasts, beasts of prey. That’s an apt figure of speech because in the spiritual sense the deceivers devour God’s people! They are also “slow bellies.” Idle, lazy bellies are what the deceivers are! The apostle uses a similar expression in Philippians 3:19, where he describes the ones whom we must not emulate as those “whose god is their belly.”¹⁴ These deceivers are lazy gluttons who satiate themselves with the things earthly, the world’s lust, pleasures, and treasures.

Verses 13, 14

(13) This witness is true, for which cause¹⁵ rebuke (admonish) them sharply (abruptly, curtly) in order that they may be sound (healthy, well) in the faith.

(14) Not giving heed to (applying oneself to) Jewish fables (myths, falsehoods) and commandments of men, turning themselves away from the truth.¹⁶

“This witness is true,” writes the apostle, i.e., the witness of the prophet of the Cretans mentioned in verse 12, who said, “the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.” This witness is true. The Cretans were notorious liars, evil, ferocious, wild beasts, and lazy gluttons.

Because this is true, Titus and the bishops must rebuke them, admonish them sharply, abruptly, curtly. Titus must do this. He must sharply admonish the Jewish, unruly, vain talkers! He must sharply admonish them to stop their vain talking and deception. Also today the bishops must sharply rebuke the vain talkers and deceivers. They must stop their lying!

The purpose of this sharp admonition is, “that they may be sound (in the sense of healthy, well) in the faith.” Their vain speech and their deceiving of the people of God indicate that, at

14. In Philippians 3 the apostle uses *koilia*, a synonym of *gasteeer*. The idea, however, is the same.

15. *Di’ een aitian*.

16. *Apostrephomenoon*, present, middle, participle of *apostrephoo*.

best, they are very weak, at worst, sick unto death as regards the faith. Faith here must be understood in the objective sense, as the body of truth or doctrine taught in the Word of God. That truth is the very opposite of the vain, futile, empty talk of the false teachers. If the latter will be sound, healthy in the faith, they will need to repent of their vain talking and deceiving of God's people and they will teach the truth.

That this is the correct sense of the passage is evident from what the apostle writes in verse 14. These deceivers were turning themselves away from the truth. There is only one truth, viz., the truth revealed in God's Word! They were turning themselves away from that truth precisely by giving heed or applying themselves to Jewish fables and commandments of men. Jewish fables are literally myths, falsehoods, lies. The "commandments of men" are just that. They are commandments not given by God, but by men! No doubt the reference is to their phariseeistic interpretations of the Word and especially the law of God.

In other words, the apostle is warning Titus concerning the same falsehoods, myths which Jesus so sharply condemned in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17 - 48). What our Lord called "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," the apostle calls, "Jewish fables and commandments of men." Repeatedly in the Matthew passage, Jesus exposes the error of these Jewish myths and commandments of men with the formula "Ye have heard that it hath been said ... but I say unto you," and then Jesus would explain the true meaning of God's commandments. Not only did Jesus expose these myths and commandments of men in Matthew 5, but it may correctly be said that His entire ministry was a polemic against the Jewish fables and commandments of men about which the apostle is here warning Titus.

This passage teaches that in order that these Jewish, vain, unruly talkers may be sound in the faith, Titus must admonish them sharply from the Word of God. These unruly, vain talkers will be sound in the faith only when they cease turning away from the truth of God's Word and only when they cease applying themselves to Jewish myths and falsehoods. Only when this happens will the church be edified and preserved in the faith and truth of God's Word.

Let us who are called of God to minister to the contemporary church be warned. This is an ever present danger in the church. We must be alert to this and not hesitate to rebuke sharply the vain, unruly talkers in order that they may be sound in the faith and in order that the church may be preserved and blessed. Again, if the vain talkers persist in their deceitful ways by refusing to heed the sharp admonitions of the faithful preachers, they must be put out of the church by means of the application of Christian discipline.

Verses 15, 16

(15) All things are pure to the ones who are pure, but to the ones defiled (polluted, stained, contaminated) and unbelieving nothing is pure, but both the mind and conscience of them have been defiled.

(16) They profess to know God, but by their works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient,¹⁷ and regarding every good work reprobate.

These verses form the conclusion of this last section of chapter one. These Jewish vain talkers, who teach false doctrines for shameful gain (AV, "filthy lucre's sake"), whose mouths must be stopped, and who must be rebuked sharply, really deny the freedom with which Christ has made us free.¹⁸ The interpretations and applications of the typical commandments of God, by these "Judaizers," regarding what may or may not be eaten because it is clean or unclean, and especially their interpretations of the ceremonial laws, are in fact a denial of what James calls "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25).

"To the pure all things are pure," writes the apostle. The "all things" are simply everything that God created to be received by us with thanksgiving, including "meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the

17. *Bdeluktos* is translated "abominable" by the AV. I prefer "detestable." *Apeitheis* means disobedient in the sense of it being impossible to convince the deceivers of their error and sin and, therefore, of the truth of God's Word.

18. These same types threatened the churches in Galatia, cf. Galatians 5:1 - 12.

truth" (see I Tim. 4:1 - 4). Every creature of God is good because it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer (I Tim. 4:5). The Jewish vain talkers taught that some foods were unclean and, therefore, impure and not to be eaten. Scripture here maintains that the impurity is not in God's creatures, but in the heart of a man. Jesus taught the same. It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man. It is what comes from a man's heart and thus that goes out of a man that defiles him. Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and all the rest (cf. Matt. 15:1 - 20). Hence the creature of God is good and pure; it does not make a person unclean.

"The ones pure" are those whose sins have been forgiven in the blood of Jesus, those who have been raised up to newness of life by the resurrection of Jesus. The pure are the regenerated, justified, sanctified believers who are continually being cleansed by the Spirit and Word of Jesus Christ. To these pure saints, all that God has created, also "meats," is pure. He receives it from God with thanksgiving. And he uses it in the service of God.

But to "the ones defiled (polluted, stained, contaminated) and unbelieving," nothing is pure. These defiled and unbelieving are one class of people. They are defiled exactly because they are unbelievers. They have rejected Christ. They refuse to believe in Jesus and, therefore, they are polluted, they are yet in their sins. They defile God's good creatures. To them nothing is pure!

Nothing is pure to these unbelievers because even their mind and conscience is defiled. Their mind is their thinking, that which determines their willing and acting. The minds of these unbelievers are polluted, defiled, stained. Their conscience, that which Hendriksen calls "their moral selves" is defiled too.¹⁹ "Conscience" literally means "to know with," i.e., "joint-knowledge."²⁰ The believer, according to his conscience, knows with God what is true and what is false; what is good and what is evil; what is pure and what is impure. The vain talking Jewish unbelievers concerning whom the apostle warns Titus, the preacher, refuse to know

19. Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

20. See Thayer, *op. cit.*, on *sun eideesis*, p. 602.

with God what is right and wrong. Their consciences are seared with a hot iron and, therefore, polluted with sin. To them nothing is pure.

These vain talkers, according to verse 16, profess to know God. They talk as if they, more than all others in the church, know God. With their rules and regulations; with their forbidding to marry and their abstaining from meats; with their interpretations of the law, they profess to know God. But their profession, their talk, is vain. It's futile and empty.

It is that because by their works they deny God. Their so-called observance of the law is really a denial of God and His Word and law. By so doing, and now the apostle uses very sharp, strong language, these vain talkers are abominable, i.e., detestable. God detests them. They are disobedient in the sense of it being impossible to convince them of their error and, thus, persuade them of the truth.

This is underscored by the last clause of the text, "and regarding or pertaining to every good work reprobate." A good work is:²¹

1. Performed out of faith, it is a fruit of faith. These vain talkers are unbelieving, they have no faith.

2. Performed according to the law of God. The vain talkers, to borrow Jesus' language in describing the Pharisees, teach for doctrine the commandments of men (Matt. 15:9). The vain talkers give heed to Jewish myths.

3. Performed to the glory of God. The vain talkers subvert whole houses and deceive God's people for shameful gain.

Indeed, they are reprobate regarding every good work. They are totally depraved, unable to do any good at all. Titus must, therefore, rebuke them sharply. We too, as bishops in God's church, must preach, teach sound doctrine. We must do this antithetically. Sharply we must warn the people of God against the vain talking deceivers. We must do this in order to edify God's people. ●

21. See the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 91.

Thomas Bradwardine: Forgotten Medieval Augustinian (3)

Russell J. Dykstra

Salvation by Grace

In harmony with the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and sovereign predestination, Bradwardine insists that salvation is of grace. By that he means both that salvation is a gracious, that is, unmerited gift, and that salvation is worked by the power of God's grace. In the preface to *The Cause of God* he complains, "How many, today, O Lord, with Pelagius, oppose Thy freely given grace... and believe that only by their free will can they gain their salvation."¹

A key issue that he faces in this connection is the matter of merit. The doctrine of merit was deeply ingrained in the church in Bradwardine's day. It was a significant part of Pelagius' theology in the fourth century. Pelagius insisted that natural, fallen man is able to do good. He maintained that there are three aspects to a good work of man – the ability, the will, and the act itself. He taught that God graciously made man with the ability to do good (part of God's grace given at creation), and that man – also after the fall – has the will and the power to do good works. The only additional grace needed is an external grace given through the good influence of the example of Christ and by the preaching of the law. Thus man can do good and in fact merited saving grace by so doing.

Even though Augustine had effectively rejected Pelagianism, the Semi-Pelagianism that arose after Augustine still maintained

1. Bradwardine, *Cause*, Preface, p. 1, quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 28.

that fallen man, being sick but not dead, has the power to do good. That teaching had taken over in the church, with the result that it was commonly assumed that fallen man has a free will, and can do good that will merit with God. "Do what is in you" the theologians urged (*Facera quod in se est*), that is to say, without grace, do whatever good you can, and God will reward you. This notion "was as strong in the early fourteenth century as in any other period of high and late medieval theology."²

In addition, the scholastics had made distinctions in the merit that man supposedly could obtain. According to many medieval theologians, *merit of condignity* was a merit earned by man which is rewarded on the basis of justice, that is, God judges that a deed truly earned merit, and gives to the doer a reward commensurate with the work performed. *Merit of congruity*, on the other hand, was not a merit based strictly on justice, but a merit that God conferred graciously. It was this latter merit that was supposedly conferred when the sinner, apart from grace, would "do what is in him." Hook notes that the fourteenth century theologians imagined that they had avoided the errors of Pelagianism by denying the merit of condignity, and affirming only that of congruity.³

Over against this, Bradwardine insists that man cannot do good apart from the grace of God. By God's grace, Bradwardine means not grace as Pelagius taught, namely, an external influence, but rather a grace working in the man. Yet even with that position Bradwardine remained a man of his times, and was not able to eliminate all traces of merit from his theology as Luther and the Reformers would do some 200 years later.

By the fourteenth century, the scholastics' systematizing of the doctrine of grace had resulted in many fine distinctions, and Bradwardine used the accepted terminology.⁴ He speaks of cre-

2. Courtenay, William. *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth Century England*, pp. 295-296.

3. Hook, *Bishops of Canterbury*, p. 89.

4. For discussions of the various distinctions of grace, see Leff, *Pelagians*, Appendix II, pp. 267-268; Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 129-133. For the best treatment of Bradwardine's position on grace, see Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 135-144.

ated grace and uncreated grace. Uncreated grace is in God's being, and is His favor towards men. Bradwardine insists that uncreated grace is the cause for God electing those whom He did. Created grace, on the other hand, is a power that God works in man.

Concerning this "created grace," Bradwardine holds that it consists of two parts, a preparatory grace (*gratia gratis data*) and a saving grace (*gratia gratum faciens*). The created grace is necessary for a man to do any work that God will reward. Hence it follows that no man can do a work that will merit grace. If he does a good work, he already has grace operating in him. In this connection, Bradwardine rejects also the good that unbelievers supposedly do by cultivating a good habit. Without grace, such "good" can only be considered evil.

In addition, Bradwardine is clear that the saving grace of God is indeed saving. It (*gratia gratum faciens*) is even irresistible grace.

However, Bradwardine also teaches that this created grace, as preparatory grace, is not limited to the elect. In this Bradwardine is not unlike Augustine, who had the faulty notion that baptism conferred grace to everyone baptized, a teaching that would produce much corrupt fruit in the medieval church's theology and practice.

Concerning the doctrine of justification, Bradwardine teaches "justification by grace alone without preceding works."⁵ This flows out of predestination, in the way of grace, not because there is cause in man. God determines the works they will do, gives them the grace to perform the works, and then rewards them in heaven. This is language that sounds like the cry of the Reformation of Luther almost 200 years later. However, Oberman notes the significant difference between Bradwardine and Luther in this connection, namely, that Bradwardine did not add "*sola fidei*" (by faith alone). Bradwardine teaches that man is justified by grace without *preceding work*. It is commendable that he sees faith as the root of good works, which are the result of God's grace. But he

5. Bradwardine, "*iustificatio sola gratia sine operibus praecedentibus*," quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 179.

does also view good works as necessary for the completion of justification and remission.⁶

Yet it should be noted that although Bradwardine thus allows for the merit of condignity, he does not view it as an accomplishment of man. Forgiveness of sins, which also implies remission of punishment, is not because of merit, but out of grace.⁷ Bradwardine says explicitly, "We must conclude with St. Augustine, then, that our merits are God's gifts, and when he rewards them, He crowns them not us."⁸

The Sacrament of Penance

Even as Pelagius and his followers were difficult to pin down, so errors of the "Modern Pelagians" of Bradwardine's day had to be ferreted out and refuted. Their craftiness was especially evident in connection with the doctrine of penance. Key to this is the notion of attrition. Medieval theologians used the term attrition to describe a sorrow for sin that is not caused by love for God but fear of punishment. Many theologians taught that attrition was the first step of true penance, leading to contrition, confession, and satisfaction in the sacrament of penance.

Interestingly, Bradwardine addresses those who despaired of forgiveness either because of the gravity or the multitude of their sins. Bradwardine emphasizes the possibility and reality of the forgiveness of sins. His argument is that man's sins are finite, but the mercy and grace of God are infinite. Thus he reassures the penitent believer that the one who truly repents and confesses his sins may be (to a high degree) assured of forgiveness and his own salvation.⁹

6. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 182.

7. *Estergo remissio ... poenae ex gratia, non ex merito de condigno*. Bradwardine, *Cause*, Book I, Chap. 39, p. 341, quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 155.

8. *Causa*, p. 324, quoted by Leff, *Pelagians*, p. 70. The Latin is given in the footnote: *Cum, inquit Augustine, Deus coronat merita nostra nihil aliud coronat quam munera sua*.

9. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 162-3, citing Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 1. 21.

Bradwardine faces the question of the relation between man's repentance and God's grace. The Pelagians are of the opinion that man first repents, thereby meriting grace and justification. Over against this, Bradwardine defends the position that God first infuses grace into the sinner, which brings the sinner to repentance.

Bradwardine rejects the notion that attrition is true repentance. If it exists, it does not merit grace, but is a "pre-effect" of grace, most likely caused by the preaching.¹⁰ In addition, even true repentance is not satisfaction or a condition by which one obtains forgiveness. If it were, God's forgiveness would not be merciful, but only an act of rigid justice.¹¹

At the same time, Bradwardine insists that God demands a perfect contrition. This over against the Pelagians, who thought that even a tepid repentance merits remission of guilt and punishment, both eternal and temporal.¹² Bradwardine also maintains that God brings about the repentance.

Concerning the act of repentance, Bradwardine teaches that the whole act is God's work. It begins with an infusion of God's grace. Oberman explains, "Where light comes, darkness disappears; infused grace extinguishes sin" immediately.¹³ The result is a contrite heart. Next comes oral confession. However, Bradwardine does not hold that oral confession is essential for remission. Bradwardine views confession as simply naturally following from the grace of contrition. He illustrates this with the story of the healing of the ten lepers. "One goes to the priest just as the ten

10. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 165, 174, citing Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 43. 380.

11. *Non est hoc opus misericordiae sed iustitiae et rigoris*. Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 1. 23, quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 163.

12. Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 43. 380, quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 165.

13. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 167, citing Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 43. 402.

lepers were sent to the priests by Jesus, namely, *in order to show the healing and not in order to obtain it.*"¹⁴

Bradwardine maintains that sins are not remitted through *absolution* by the priest, "but only God" takes away sin.¹⁵ In fact, according to Bradwardine, God has already performed the work by infusing grace.

However, Bradwardine leaves room for works as a part of satisfaction. He does this by distinguishing between the remission of the *guilt of sin* and removal of the *punishment of sin*. First of all, through repentance "*guilt* is completely taken away; but according to the sin committed the *punishment* remains to be completed."¹⁶ God's infused grace produces these works and God accepts them and grants merit.¹⁷ Yet Bradwardine holds that good works do not obtain remission, but good works inevitably follow true repentance. He writes, "A contrite heart is a sign that sins are dismissed, just as exterior satisfaction [good works] is a sign of a contrite heart."¹⁸ It is important to keep in mind that the whole of this work, "infusion of grace, justification and forgiveness, is founded on God's predestination" before any previous merits.¹⁹

It is disappointing then that in the end Bradwardine defends the Church's doctrine of penance and works of penance as satisfaction of the temporal punishment for sin. He even allows that temporal "punishments can be remitted for present and future by indulgences which are drawn from the superfluous wealth of good works of the Church"²⁰ and that absolution by the priest is necessary. Oberman explains this conclusion – apparently a contradiction with his teaching on penance – as the influence of the spirit of

14. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 168.

15. Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 43. 404, quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 168.

16. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 165.

17. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 169.

18. Bradwardine, *Cause*, I. 43. 414, quoted in Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 171, my translation.

19. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 170.

20. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 174.

the age, namely, that having set forth a number of positions, the theologian would often bow to the teaching of the Church.²¹

Bradwardine's Doctrine of Sin

It is incontrovertible that Bradwardine strove to maintain the doctrines championed by Augustine against the Pelagians. And, though the emphasis in Bradwardine's theology was necessarily different from Augustine's due to development of the lie and the various approaches of the "Modern Pelagians," to a large degree Bradwardine was a faithful disciple of Augustine. This is not true, however, in one crucial doctrine, namely, sin. In this area Bradwardine had a serious weakness.

Bradwardine's weakness begins with his failure to recognize the serious consequences of original sin. With Augustine, he sees all that exists as being good, in that it was created by God and has form and existence. Evil is the privation of the good. Sin is, then, not in the act itself, but in the motive. For proof of this, Bradwardine argues that, for example, homicide is not a sin as such, for then it would be wrong to execute a murderer. But this leads Bradwardine to conclude that a violation of God's law done in ignorance is not sin because the motives were not evil. That, Augustine did not say. In fact, Augustine insisted that sins of ignorance are a working out of the horrible depravity of man because of Adam's fall.

Bradwardine does not give evidence that he has a grasp of the horrible effect of Adam's fall. He speaks of the result of the fall usually in terms of the punishment that God put on man. That is correct, as such, but it is wholly inadequate. Oberman notes that the difference between Bradwardine and Augustine is that Bradwardine does not have a view of sin as a profound debt and a turning away from God. Oberman adds, "It is obvious that where Bradwardine emphasizes too little the seriousness of sin, this must also have consequences for the understanding of God's overwhelming love in His grace."²²

21. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 176-177.

22. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 124.

This weakness is evidenced in that Bradwardine does not contrast the horrible depths of sin with the greatness of grace. He rather finds the great contrast between *grace* and *merit*. No doubt this emphasis is due largely to the contest he faces with the "Modern Pelagians" holding forth the ability of man to merit God's grace. Yet it is also plain that Bradwardine had not experienced the intense spiritual struggle (over sin) of an Augustine, or of a Luther. Therein too may lie one of the reasons that Bradwardine's monumental defense of the truth of sovereign predestination had so little lasting effect. *The Cause of God* is a brilliant and scholarly treatise to which the learned of his day reacted. In contrast with that, Luther's works address the common believer.

Bradwardine's Influence and Significance

Determining the influence of Bradwardine and his thorough refutation of Pelagianism is difficult and puzzling. On the one hand, the work was apparently widely disseminated and discussed. Courtenay notes that Bradwardine's work "was being cited in Paris within a year or two of its completion in 1344."²³ He adds that

Bradwardine's thesis quickly became a cause *celebre* at Oxford and, later, at Paris. Few theologians did not take up the challenge and attempt to protect the freedom of man from what looked to them like a thoroughgoing, predestinarian, even predetermined view of the divine plan. It made Bradwardine a household name among the educated, inside and outside the university, and put forward a particular interpretation of Augustine that had its own long and interesting history.²⁴

That, in fact, seems to have been the most notable effect – a negative reaction to the doctrines Bradwardine propounded. The church of that day was, at best, Semi-Pelagian, and Bradwardine's theology did not find wide acceptance. Most seemed to ignore it. A number of theologians reacted against it, though most of them

23. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, p. 347.

24. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, p. 322.

did not identify Thomas Bradwardine's theology as the object of their attack. Oberman demonstrates conclusively that Bradwardine's contemporary and fellow Mertonian, Thomas Buckingham, attacked the theology of *The Cause of God* in his *Questiones*. The subtitle reads:

*Questions treated by Thomas Buckingham, late Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral, showing that there is a Catholic middle course between the errors of Pelagius, Cicero and Scotus and that eternal predestination, preordination and prevolution are consistent with freedom of will and human merit.*²⁵

At certain points Buckingham even takes the words of Bradwardine from *The Cause of God* but adds the word "*non*" to take the opposite position from Bradwardine.²⁶ A contemporary (Thomas of Cracow) claims that Buckingham taught for a time in Paris and there "made a name for himself as a critic of Bradwardine."²⁷

John Baconthorpe (d. 1348), in his *Commentary on the Sententiae*, did attempt to set forth Bradwardine's meaning, and in a sense therefore defended Bradwardine. The trouble was that he did not capture the true meaning of Bradwardine, nor was he uncritical of his theology.²⁸

Another contemporary reaction to Bradwardine is found in John Rodington, particularly in his *Quodlibet de Conscientia*. Bradwardine's influence is seen in that Rodington does hold to predestination, but in effect denies the sovereignty of God and allows that man can merit eternal life without grace. It is especially in the area of merit and man's will that Rodington was reacting against Bradwardine's theology.²⁹

The controversy did not die out immediately. Uthred of Bolden (d. 1397), a member of the Benedictine Order, writes of the

25. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 190.

26. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 192-193.

27. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 189.

28. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 194-195.

29. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 196-198.

fact that the friars and monks were disputing over such topics as predestination and free will, which discussions became so heated that the Bishop of Canterbury imposed silence on the men in 1368.³⁰

W. A. Pantin notes another interesting fact from fourteenth century England. Manuals for parish priests included the *Regimen Animarum*. In this manual, the second section deals with the instruction that the parish priest ought to give to his people. In the chapter on the virtue of faith is inserted the whole of St. Anselm's treatise on God's foreknowledge and free will. Pantin wonders if this might "be an echo of the controversies that were being raised about this time by Bradwardine and Buckingham, and does it represent the intellectual preoccupation of the schools rather than the practical needs of the average parish? But possibly the fourteenth-century layman was worried by such questions." In support of this, Pantin points to Chaucer's reference to Bradwardine on predestination and free will in *The Canterbury Tales*.³¹

Another interesting question is the relationship between Bradwardine and a contemporary, Gregory of Rimini. Gregory was born in the 1280s at Rimini. He later lectured in the University of Paris. He too was an avowed Augustinian, maintaining double predestination from eternity not based on any merit of man. With Bradwardine, he rejects the existence of merits of condignity.

He apparently knew Bradwardine's work because he did criticize it twice in his commentary on the *Sententiae*, and that at points where Bradwardine was in fact weak, especially on the importance of the Fall and the character of sin.³² Both men combated Pelagianism, but Oberman concludes that they did so independently of each other.

Thus it seems that Bradwardine's *The Cause of God* produced a sharp reaction, but realized no significant or lasting effect on the church or her doctrine. Two reasons may be adduced for this fact.

30. Pantin, W. A. *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), pp. 168-169.

31. Pantin, *The English Church*, p. 205.

32. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, pp. 213-214.

The first is that Bradwardine was a scholar, primarily a man of the universities. Courtenay writes that "it may be one of the distinguishing features of a Hus or a Martin Luther that they carried the seriousness of the academic debate in the classroom into the streets." On the other hand, "Bradwardine's tenacious and provocative *Summa de causa Dei* circulated within university circles in England and on the continent."³³ In that same connection, Alistair McGrath points out that Bradwardine, unlike Gregori of Rimini, was not a member of a religious order, which order might have promoted Bradwardine's views. In addition, he notes that the Hundred Years War would isolate Oxford and give the advantage to Paris as a center of theological study.³⁴ Perhaps those were factors. One could point out the obvious fact that Bradwardine died in his prime, thus snuffing out any possible influence he might have had as Archbishop of Canterbury.

However, the material reason why Bradwardine's efforts effected no change must be traced to the doctrine he propounded. Recall the state of the church in the fourteenth century. The church was corrupt in doctrine and practice. The sacerdotal system and the hierarchy were stifling. The doctrinal support for both was the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of merit. In turn, the doctrine of merit was based on the free will of men and the notion that man has a necessary part in his salvation. These doctrines were well established in the church, and are doctrines always pleasing to man. Man wants to be able to point to something he has contributed to his salvation. Bradwardine's teaching demolished all bases for man to boast. For that reason, the theology of Bradwardine would never be accepted. William Cunningham notes that Bradwardine

deplores bitterly the general prevalence of Pelagian error over the church, and earnestly appeals to the pope to interpose to check it, addressing him in these words: "Rise, Peter, why art thou sleep-

33. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, (fn. 38) p. 38.

34. McGrath, Alistair E. *Iustitia Dei: a history of the Christian doctrine of justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 142-143.

ing?" But Peter did not find it convenient to hear him, and continued to sleep; and, in consequence, the Pelagian heresy, in its grossest and most injurious forms, prevailed generally over the whole church in the beginning of the sixteenth century.³⁵

Even so, it is worth exploring the possibility that God used Bradwardine in a different way, namely, to assist others later in history when God determined to reform His church. The first instance of such possible influence is on John Wyclif. Wyclif (c.1329-1384) was a theologian and scholar of Oxford, in Merton College, as Bradwardine had been. Many church historians point to the influence of Bradwardine on this later pre-reformer. Toplady is representative, writing that Bradwardine "was in some sense, Dr. Wicliff's spiritual father: for it was the perusal of Bradwardine's writing, which next to the Holy Scriptures, opened the proto-reformer's eyes to discover the genuine doctrine of faith and justification."³⁶

Oberman is more cautious. While noting that Wyclif himself reveals that he had a high regard for Bradwardine when he refers

35 Cunningham, William. *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979) vol. 1, pp. 467-477.

36 Toplady, *Works*, p. 106. Lewis Sergent, in his work, *John Wyclif: Last of the Schoolmen and first of the English Reformers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1892), p. 69, writes that Bradwardine's "teaching commended itself not a little to the men of his day, and Wyclif was deeply imbued with it." He goes so far as to say that "There is clearly a sense in which Bradwardine was a forerunner of the Calvinists, or rather of the early English predestinarians." K. B. McFarlane, *John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953) maintains that the two precursors to whom Wyclif "was most indebted [were] Bradwardine and FitzRalph" (p. 12). He avers that "Wyclif was indebted to the 'Profound Doctor' Thomas Bradwardine for his predestinarianism, ... though ... he gave his borrowings a characteristic twist of his own" (p. 30). Later he says that Wyclif "was an uncompromising predestinarian. He derived his grisly creed from Thomas Bradwardine ... and—with important differences—from their common master, Augustine" (p. 92).

to Bradwardine as one of "two pre-eminent doctors of our order,"³⁷ Oberman warns that the question of "influence" is a most difficult one, well nigh impossible to substantiate unless the individual personally describes the influence in his writings. Thus, while almost all agree that Wyclif was influenced by Bradwardine, opinions differ as to the extent and nature.

One major problem in identifying possible influence of one man on a later is the fact that a theologian's writings are greatly affected by the issues of the day. Oberman notes what while Wyclif was only one generation younger than Bradwardine, "in that very period new problems were raised and new developments took place, which were of such great significance for the history of Christian thought, that in reality the distance between Bradwardine and Wiclif is considerably greater than that between Wiclif and the Reformation."³⁸ The issues of Wyclif's day involved the doctrines of the church, Scripture, and the Lord's Supper, of which little or nothing is found in Bradwardine's *The Cause of God*.

While that is admittedly true, it is also a fact that Wyclif's doctrine of the church was greatly determined by the doctrine of predestination, which in turn led him to differ with the hierarchical view of the church maintained by medieval theologians. This is a crucial point, because Wyclif, and later Hus, would define the church in terms of the elect members rather than the magisterium – the clergy. The doctrine of sovereign predestination is the foundation of that position. In addition, Wyclif shared the profound reverence for the Scriptures possessed by Bradwardine. No doubt also, Wyclif's high regard for Augustine was fostered by Bradwardine. All this would lead one to conclude that God did use Bradwardine to teach Wyclif.

Oberman's skepticism on the question of Bradwardine's influence on the Reformation is justified. Still, he notes the similarities in that, for example, Bradwardine, Wyclif, and Luther

37. *De Domino donino*, (ed. R. L. Poole, 1890), I, p. 115, quoted by Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 198. The other doctor referred to is Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh.

38. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 202.

all maintained the sovereignty of God. They held to the view that all things that happen, happen of necessity. They all emphasized predestination. And he adds adroitly, "insofar as Bradwardine's theology meant a return to a Boston, he undoubtedly took part, together with Wiclif, in defining the climate of thought at the end of the Middle Ages and in this more general way prepared for the reformation."³⁹

There remains one additional, fascinating aspect of Bradwardine's possible influence to discuss, and that is his influence in connection with the battles against Arminianism in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, and thus indirectly on the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19).

That Bradwardine had a following in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England is evident from the fact that his monumental work was republished at that time. In fact, Bradwardine had supporters in some very high places. The printing of Bradwardine's *The Cause of God* was made possible by George Abbot, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1562-1633). Abbot was "deeply committed to the propagation of his understanding of the predestinarian views of Augustine, Bradwardine, and Calvin. He rightly feared that that position was losing acceptance among some of the members of the more learned classes."⁴⁰

In those days, the relationship between the Dutch and the English was close. Abbot was well aware of the rise of the Arminian threat in the Netherlands and had early set out to undercut it. In 1611, he persuaded King James to oppose the appointment of the "undogmatic and tolerant Conradus Vorstius [to]... the professorship at Leiden as the successor to the recently deceased Arminius."⁴¹ His efforts were successful.

Abbot had been appointed to help with the translation of the KJV (1604-1611). He was on the subcommittee to translate the

39. Oberman, *Archbishop Bradwardine*, p. 203, 204.

40. Tanis, James. "Abraham van der Heyden: A Seventeenth-Century Bradwardinian" in *Augustine, the Harvest, and Theology*, Kenneth Hagen (ed.), (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p 340.

41. Tanis, *Van der Heyden*, p. 340.

Gospels, Acts, and Revelation. Sir Henry Savile was a fellow member on this subcommittee, and a skilled mathematician who had already done some printing. Abbot urged Savile to prepare a critical edition of Bradwardine's works. The volume was ready for publication in 1618 (even dedicated to King James), in time to be of assistance for the work at the Synod of Dordt. In addition, Abbot sent his chaplain to represent him in the Netherlands.

Bradwardine was well known to the Calvinists and the English opponents of Calvinism. At least one such opponent called Bradwardine an "enemy of God."⁴²

Sad to say, Archbishop Abbot lost the battle against Arminianism in England. The tide was clearly against the doctrines of sovereign grace. By 1622, Abbot, disturbed about the debates and discussions taking place, joined with King James in a terse publication intended to quell the so-called Arminian controversy. It reads as follows:

That no preacher of what title soever, under the degree of a Bishop or Deane at the least, do from henceforth presume to preach in any populous auditorie, the deepe point of predestination, election, reprobation; of the universalitie, efficacie, resistabilities, or irresistabilitie of God's grace, but leave those theames to be handled by the learned men, and that moderately, and modestly, by way of use and application, rather than by way of positive doctrine, as beeing itter of the schooles and universities, than for simple auditories.⁴³

Though Archbishop Abbot held to the fight until his death in 1633, it was clearly a losing battle.

Still, at least one English church historian believes that Bradwardine's theology "is substantially expressed in Articles 12, 13, and 17 of the Reformed Church of England."⁴⁴ Toplady uses

42. Tyacke, Nicholas. *The Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 56-57.

43. Tanis, *Van der Heyden*, p. 342.

44. Ella, George M. "The Reformation Candle that is Never Extinguished, Part 2" *New Focus*, vol. 5, # 1, June/July 2000, p. 11.

Bradwardine extensively in his long defense of the proposition that the Church of England historically stood in the line of the Calvinistic reformation.

What possible influence Bradwardine's 900-page work may have had on the formulations of the Synod of Dordrecht cannot be known. However, the case of Abraham van der Heyden makes it obvious that there was influence on some Reformed men in the Netherlands.

Abraham van der Heyden was a preacher in the Netherlands who took up the defense of the doctrines of grace after the Synod of Dordt by criticizing the catechism of the Remonstrants (published 1640) constructed by Johannes Uytenbogaerd. Van der Heyden was answered by Simon Episcopius, a former professor of van der Heyden at the University of Leiden. Van der Heyden then replied in greater length. He consciously relied on Bradwardine in his works. Both Uytenbogaerd and Episcopius ridiculed van der Heyden's use of Bradwardine, a "popish bishop of Canterbury who lived 250 years ago." Such scorn did not result in van der Heyden's distancing himself from Bradwardine in the defense of the doctrines of Dordt. On the contrary, van der Heyden unashamedly titled his second work, *De causa Dei*.

It is plain that Bradwardine's *The Cause of God* enabled van der Heyden to trace the line of the truth back to Augustine. "With the exception of references to Episcopius, whose work van der Heyden was specifically answering, references to Augustine outnumber even those to Calvin, the next most frequently cited authority, by four or five times."⁴⁵

Any serious evaluation of Bradwardine's significance affirms that predestination is a central element in his theology, if not the cornerstone. Not since Gottschalk of the ninth century, and Augustine before him, had any theologian maintained this "hard doctrine" so faithfully or emphatically. Gottschalk died a martyr for the sake of this truth; Bradwardine did not. Several factors (in God's providence) account for Bradwardine's escape from condemnation. The first is the papal schism that greatly weakened the

45. Tanis, *Van der Heyden*, p. 342.

power of the papacy in Bradwardine's day. The second factor is that Bradwardine was in England, where the power of the Romish church was often mitigated by English nationalism. In addition, Bradwardine was held in high regard among the universities in Europe and in the churches in England. That King Edward would choose Bradwardine to be his personal chaplain and secretary demonstrates Bradwardine's high standing.

These seemingly ineffectual stands for the truth of sovereign grace by Gottschalk and Bradwardine lead one to ponder the purposes of God. Not that anyone may sinfully question God's wisdom or ways in all his dealings with men. Yet there is a legitimate investigation into God's purposes, insofar as they can be determined by the study of history. It is obvious that God had similar purposes in Gottschalk and in Bradwardine. Both men were but briefly lit candles for the truth that Augustine developed. Both men had opposition, and ultimately the message of both was squelched.

From a negative point of view, God revealed clearly that the church after Augustine did not want the truth of sovereign, double predestination. With Gottschalk, it was declared with a vengeance. If anyone thought that the martyrdom of Gottschalk was not conclusive, that perhaps the schoolmen returned to the essence of Augustine, the rejection of Bradwardine by the universities and churchmen indicates otherwise. There was no room for that truth in the context of works-righteousness firmly maintained by the church of that day.

From a positive point of view, as has been noted, God was preparing the way for the reformation of His church. And yet only a part of the way. In many respects the reformers would have to go much farther than Bradwardine.

Nonetheless, God upholds His truth. It is a comfort to the Reformed man and the church today to know that God maintained the truth also of sovereign predestination even in the darkest times of the high Middle Ages. The lesson of Bradwardine is clear. It should not surprise anyone in the twenty-first century that the church world at large spurns the doctrine of sovereign predestination. Unbelief hates that truth especially, because predestination

maintains that God is sovereign. Thus the church must take comfort in the historical reminder that God will maintain His truth to the end. ●

The Serious Call of the Gospel — Is the Well-Meant Offer One? (Part 1)

Lau Chin Kwee

Introduction

In the midst of rampant Arminian offers of and invitations to salvation, the Reformed community would do well to reconsider the usefulness and legitimacy of “The Well-meant Offer of Salvation” as a serious call of the gospel.

Where should we turn for a united Reformed front on this matter? In the history of dogma, we learn that the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) was the last ecumenical assembly where delegates were drawn from all over the then known Reformed world. If ever there was a united, official, and carefully formulated Reformed refutation of the Arminian errors, it must be the Canons, the product of this synod for that very purpose. But the Canons are much neglected these days, even by those who purportedly promote the Five Points of Calvinism (the popular name for the Canons). One wonders if it is not due to the shying away from the Canons, that Reformed people are drifting apart from one another in the matter of Reformed soteriology. The Canons shall not be neglected in our attempt to determine what is truly the serious call of the gospel and whether the well-meant offer may be classified as one.

In this paper we are not particularly concerned about the legitimacy and possibility of the work of evangelism in the light of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Dr. R. C. Sproul, in his book *Chosen By God*, saw the implication of the doctrine of predestination on the task of evangelism. He asked, What does predestination do to the task of evangelism? His answer essen-

tially is that it does not affect evangelism at all, as evangelism is a matter of the church obeying the command of Christ, her Head, and considering it a privilege on her part to be involved.¹ We agree with him and here in this paper we would ask how the doctrine of grace affects *the form of gospel presentation* to the lost.

That there are serious errors in presenting the gospel as a “well-meant offer” can be discerned in the following words of the late Dr. John H. Gerstner:

I had the incomparable privilege of being a student of Professors Murray and Stonehouse. With tears in my heart, I nevertheless confidently assert that they erred profoundly in *The Free Offer of the Gospel* and died before they seem to have realized their error which, because of their justifiedly high reputations for Reformed excellence generally, still does incalculable damage to the cause of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel.²

Chapter I

What Is the Call of the Gospel?

Before His ascension, Christ commanded His church to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations. None should doubt the importance of the accuracy of the message which we must bring and of the knowledge of its effect in this world. Heppie tells us of the three important ingredients of the gospel:

This word is of three kinds: (1) witness or proclamation, that God in Christ has given the world new salvation and life; (2) the command that those who hear this proclamation believe it with remorseful and penitent hearts; and (3) the promise that those who

1. R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.), pp. 208-212.

2. David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-calvinism & The Call of The Gospel* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1994), pp. viii-ix.

believe this proclamation with upright hearts really attain to the salvation prepared in Christ.³

A. What is the gospel?

1. It is the good news of salvation through the Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.

The bad news of the Fall.

The Fall of man into sin in the Garden of Eden is bad news for mankind, notwithstanding the fact that God did turn that evil around even for the good of His people. Before the Fall, God saw that everything that He had created was "very good" (Gen 1:31). Every change was good news, but not the good news of salvation, as there was no Fall as yet to make salvation necessary. So the gospel presupposes the Fall — the "bad news" in the history of mankind.

It was good that man was created "in our image, after our likeness" according to God's own Word. Without the understanding of this original goodness in the human race, there would be no proper understanding of the Fall of man. The concept of the Fall implies a standing position from which the Fall took place. This standing position is obviously the original rectitude of man. Without this original righteousness, holiness, and true knowledge of man, there would be no Fall to talk about.

The story of the Fall in Genesis 3 is the Bible's bad news of what happened to our first parents. The Belgic Confession confesses,

But being in honor he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life which he had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having

3. Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, Ruskin House, Museum Street, 1950), p. 515.

corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death.⁴

It is obvious that the bad news is very bad. Death has come upon this creation, with man in the forefront to experience both corporal and spiritual death. Death is not a natural phenomenon, but the judgment and curse of God upon man and this creation because of the Fall. Man by nature does not like this truth about himself, as it is truly humbling to his sinful pride. By all means he would rather think of himself otherwise than in terms of the Fall. Yet, he must explain the obvious imperfection of man. Hence, he came up with the theory of evolution.

All theories of evolution are the devil's wiles to rob man of any idea of the Fall in man. In evolution, the lower forms of life evolve to more complex and better forms of life, culminating in the nature of man. Therefore, any weaknesses and failures (and sinfulness) in man is attributed to parts of the evolutionary process. There is, therefore, no Fall at all, but only the process of evolution to a better being. This is the lie of the devil.

Without the bad news of the Fall there is not good news of redemption.

The good news of redemption.

Redemption speaks of a price paid to bring man back to fellowship with God again. That indeed is good news to man, for there is nothing more glorious to him than to be in communion with His God, in whose image he was first created. But ...

They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.⁵

Good news can never arise from man himself. Adam and Eve tried

4. Belgic Confession, Article 14.

5. Psalm 49:6-9.

to bring good news with their “fig leaves” to cover up the shame of their sins. Later their firstborn, Cain tried with his fruits and other produce of the ground, but to no avail. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. God alone can bring the good news to man, as He alone can create that good news. The protevangel (“mother-promise”) is found here:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.⁶

These were words of curse upon the devil pronounced by God in the presence of our fallen parents. As such it was also a promise to them that God will fight for them the fierce battle against the devil and defeat him. This victory (according to this prophecy) will come through the “seed” of the woman, who should bruise the head of the devil and destroy him. In the course of the battle, the heel of the woman’s seed would be bruised. This is the prophecy concerning of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

From the protevangel to the first advent of Christ, there were many more prophecies through the types and shadows of the Old Testament, giving greater details concerning the coming of the Messiah. All these were and still are good news of His work of redemption. They are the gospel, still relevant today when carefully and faithfully preached.

Now in the New Testament era, we know that this promised Messiah is none other than the Second Person of the Godhead, who became flesh and dwelt among men in order to save a people whom His Father had given Him to represent legally and spiritually. For them He had paid the penalty of all their sins on the cross of Calvary and fulfilled all righteousness according to the Law of God. His resurrection from the dead was because of their justification. So the good news of Jesus Christ is that He did it all to save a people that is represented by the church today.

6. Genesis 3:15.

The good news of conversion.

The good news (or gospel) goes beyond announcing what God the Father had planned to do, and God the Son had executed in His work of redemption, into what God the Holy Spirit is presently doing in applying this salvation to mankind.

The good news is that out of all the sons and daughters of Adam, dead and totally helpless in trespasses and sins, God the Holy Spirit would raise to spiritual life a people whom God had chosen in His love to save and for whom Christ had died and rose again. All that is necessary for their salvation is found in the redemptive work of Christ. The Holy Spirit applies these benefits to the chosen of God in time, so that they come to the conscious knowledge of their salvation, and thus live the remaining days of their lives in joy and thankfulness under the lordship of Christ. The good news is incomplete without this promise of the Holy Spirit's work. The Westminster Larger Catechism is clear on this:

Q 59: Who are made partakers of redemption through Christ?

A 59: Redemption is certainly applied, and effectually communicated, to all those for whom Christ hath purchased it; who are in time by the Holy Ghost enabled to believe in Christ according to the gospel.

Notice that the enabling work of the Holy Ghost is something "according to the gospel," and that it is very particular in its effectual communication of redemption. The first sign of life as the Holy Spirit regenerates is conversion. It is good news that God should promise conversion among the children of man.

2. The gospel is the authoritative announcement of this good news.

This good news must be published throughout the whole world.

This good news of the gracious work of the triune God must be published throughout the whole world. That this is the purpose of God was already hinted at in the time of the Old Testament, and also during the earthly ministry of the Lord.

Though not in a big way like the time of the New Testament, there was already indication that God did gather His children from nations other than the Jewish nation. Before there was the Jewish

nation, we read of Melchisedek, the priest of the most high God and king of Salem, to whom even father Abraham gave tithe. Then we read of the conversion of Ruth of Moab, Rahab of Jericho, and the inhabitants of Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah. During the time of Moses we also read of initiatory rites for non-Jews to join the Passover:

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.⁷

In the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, He went to bear witness of the truth to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). He also ministered to the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:25-30). The clearest indication of this purpose of God was in the great commission given to His church at the time of His ascension (Matt. 28:29ff.). The Book of the Acts of the Apostles records such activities of the church. All the New Testament books were the result of these activities.

Our Canons, in the Second Head and Article 5, state:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

The importance of the authoritative announcement of this news.

The gospel must be published with the authority from heaven above. In giving the great commission, Jesus gave the following preamble: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). ἐξουσία is used here to refer to "authority." The one with authority in heaven and earth had commissioned this

7. Exodus 12:48.

world-evangelism program. Peter's message to Cornelius, a Gentile, is a point in hand:

The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead.⁸

When we hear of important news which would affect our very lives, we immediately and naturally want to know how authentic that news is. The gospel is no trivial news, as it involves our eternity. God never treated its announcement in this world lightly, but with great care has ensured that it is authoritatively announced in this world.

The apostle Paul spoke of this authoritative preaching of the gospel in Romans 10:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!⁹

The word for "preach" in our text is κηρυσσω which speaks the

8. Acts 10:36-42.

9. Romans 10:13-15.

official activity of a monarch's herald. Such a herald goes in the name and authority of the king. The king shall not hold the herald guiltless if he should meddle with the message which He wants His citizens to receive with all clarity, confidence, and authority. It is not an overstatement to say that the unity, health, and strength of the nation or people depend on how reliable the heralds are, and how well the citizens receive their words. Where there is no authority there can be no trust, and where there is no trust there can be no good news of salvation.

3. The church alone is called to do that.

It was the church which the Lord Jesus commissioned to preach the gospel to all nations. This is obvious from the fact that the apostles themselves, who received that commission, were not able to live long enough to carry it out to completion. Only the church which continues to this day, to the end of time, is able to do that.

The apostle Paul called the church the "pillar and ground of truth," as he understood the church to be the place where the truth of God's Word is set forth and defended in its preaching and living. Without a faithful community, the Word of God cannot be set forth in a living way in this world. The church is not a regular gathering of people of the same interest to encourage one another in that interest. It is a society of people which may be properly called a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). The church has its own life and peculiar character, which can grow and develop as she serves her Lord in this world.

The Lord calls and sends preachers through the church. Besides the apostles, no one receives direct commission from the Lord. This order must be respected to maintain authority in the preaching today. The self-proclaimed preachers today do not have the authority from Christ, and they are bringing confusion to Christianity with their messages unauthenticated and non-illustrated in any community of God's people. They must be clearly denounced by faithful churches for the sake and interest of the authority of the Word.

The officebearers, whom the Lord does give to the church,

should be faithful to uphold the gospel in her preaching, discipline, and encouragement. In this way the gospel will go to the ends of the world for the gathering of the chosen ones of God out of every nation, tongue, and tribe.

B. Wherein lies the call of the gospel?

1. The nature of a call.

A call is a communication of thoughts which demands a direct response.

Not all communications of thoughts constitute a call. Often we communicate just for the sake of passing information. At other times thoughts are communicated just for sheer delight. But when a communication demands a direct response, then such communication is a call.

A call consists of the following three essential elements: the identity of the caller (directly or implied) made known to the called, the identity of the called directly or implied in the call, a set of instructions (however simple) given and expected to be followed.

The different types of calls and their respective implications.

There are many different types of calls, depending on the who and what of the above three essential elements that constitute the call. For example, you can have a call of duty in cases where the caller and called stand in a permanent relationship of supervision. You can also have the call of filial piety, a business call, a social call, et cetera.

Our interest here in this paper is only on the call of the gospel as it is controverted with regards to the call as a well-meant offer. It must be noted here that we are not talking about the internal effectual call, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby only the elect are called to regeneration and spiritual life. Here we are interested in the external, general call, whereby all men are called "promiscuously" (to use the term used in the Canons) to God and His fellowship. Heppie made this sharp distinction thus:

This calling is imparted only to the elect; God not only has His word proclaimed to them through man (*vocatio externa*), but also introduces it by the H. Spirit into their hearts and there sets up living communion with Christ (*vocatio interna*). - HEIDEGGER (XXI,

8): "Calling is of those elect and redeemed through Christ. These alone are so called that they are also attracted and created new and begotten. They alone are those for whom God not only strikes their ears by His word preached through men, but also attacks their hearts, opening them, writing His law in them, changing them and inflaming them to love him."¹⁰

2. What is the call in relation to the gospel?

It is the present, authoritative call of the coming Judge, in saving the world, before the final day of judgment.

Jesus is the coming Judge as appointed by God. There will be a day of final judgment in which this present world shall come to an end and all men, both great and small, shall stand before him to be judged according to their works and the grace of God (Rev. 20:11-15).

But before that great and glorious day, Jesus is also the Savior of the world. He, therefore, at present issues the call of the gospel for the purpose of saving this world. At Mars' hill, to the men of Athens, the apostle Paul reveals as much in his preaching:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.¹¹

The essential elements in this call.

The essential elements in the call of the gospel are set forth in Paul's description of his own ministry:

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²

10. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 512.

11. Acts 17:30-31.

12. Acts 20:20, 21.

It is a call to repentance of sins.

This sets forth the proper relationship between God who calls and men who receive the call. It is a relationship of the Creator and creatures who were created rational and moral. As such, when man falls into sin, the demand to repent is legitimate. It is therefore a call to the proper duty of man. Here it must be emphasized that actual sins must be dealt with to bring about genuine conversion.

This is what Heppe called "the *vocatio universalis* and *naturalis*," in contrast with "*vocatio specialis, supernaturalis* and *evangelica*."¹³ The latter is a call addressing the chosen of God, while the former, men in general.

It is a call to faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; no man can come to fellowship with God except by Him (John 14:6). Coming to Christ is a proper duty of fallen man, whether or not he has a personal interest in Him. Arminius challenged the propriety of calling all men after the Fall to faith in Christ. He wrote:

I say and affirm, asseverate, profess and teach that Adam before his fall had not power to believe in Christ because there was no need of faith in Christ; and therefore that God could not have demanded this faith from him after his fall (to wit, by this right) because Adam had criminally lost that power to believe ("Apology or Defence ... Against Certain Theological Articles," 19 in *The Writings of James Arminius* [1956], 1:333).¹⁴

Turretin answered Arminius' question very well that, indeed, Adam had that power to believe in Christ even before the Fall, should God have been pleased then to reveal the coming Fall and redemption plan in Christ to him.¹⁵ The Fall made not only Adam

13. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 510.

14. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, (P&R Publishing, P. O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817), p. 571.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 571-573.

but all his posterity unable to obey God's commandment as well as to believe in Christ. This inability is no reason for the gospel call not to include calling men to their bounden duty. This controversy in Arminius' day also demonstrates that the serious call of the gospel is a matter of the command anchored upon original rectitude of man and not a matter of the offer.

In this connection, it is improper, in the external, general call, to call all men to believe that Christ died for all men, head for head. The simple reason why this may not be done is that God would not require people to believe in something which is not true. It is simply not true that Christ died for all men head for head. If that be true, then all men would be saved, given the substitutionary nature of Christ's Atonement.

Cunningham says:

This revelation (that the gospel be preached to every creature — LCK) does not warrant us in telling them that Christ died for all and each of the human race— a mode of preaching the gospel never adopted by our Lord and His apostles.¹⁶

Turretin rightly says:

Christ is not revealed in the Gospel as having died for me in particular; but only as having died in general for those who believe and repent. Hence I reason from that faith and repentance which I find actually to exist in my heart, that Christ has, indeed, died for me in particular. I know that he died for all who fly to him; hence I can and should infer that he died for me. That the faith commanded in the Gospel is not a direct and immediate belief that Christ died for me, appears from this consideration: that when it is enjoined either by Christ or his apostles, no mention is made of its being applied to this or that man, in particular. It is set forth only in a general relation to duty, or to blessings promised to those who believe; as in Matt.xvi.16. Peter, in his celebrated declaration of faith, professes no more than this: that he believes Jesus to be the

16. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology, A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church Since the Apostolic Age*, vol. II, (Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), p.345.

Christ, the Son of the living God. Jahn vi. 69: "We believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Paul demands no more of those who believe unto salvation, than "to confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and to believe with the heart that God raised him from the dead."—Rom.x.9. Thus, when the saints are commanded to believe in the Son of God, they are bound indeed to believe that Christ is the true Messiah, and to fly to him as the only author of salvation, to those who, through faith and repentance, betake themselves to him; and these acts must take place before they are bound to believe that Christ died for them.¹⁷

John Murray said the same thing concerning faith:

The faith of which we are now speaking is not the belief that we have been saved but trust in Christ in order that we may be saved. And it is of paramount concern to know that Christ is presented to all without distinction to the end that they may entrust themselves to him for salvation. The gospel offer is not restricted to the elect or even to those for whom Christ died. And the warrant of faith is not the conviction that we are elect or that we are among those for whom, strictly speaking, Christ died but the fact that Christ, in the glory of his person, in the perfection of his finished work, and in the efficacy of his exalted activity as King and Saviour, is presented to us in the full, free, and unrestricted overture of the gospel. It is not as persons convinced of our election nor as persons convinced that we are the special objects of God's love that we commit ourselves to him but as lost sinners. We entrust ourselves to him not because we believe we have been saved but as lost sinners in order that we may be saved.¹⁸

While it is improper to call all men to believe that Christ died for all of them, it is certainly proper to call all men to believe that salvation of mankind is totally the work of God through Christ

17. Francis Turretin, *The Atonement of Christ* (Michigan: Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), pp.179 –181.

18. John Murray, *Redemption — Accomplished and Applied* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids 3, Michigan, 1955), pp. 134, 135. It is interesting to note that Murray used both the terms "gospel offer" and "presented" here.

alone, and He saves whom He will. Everyone is under obligation to believe that, whether or not he or she has an interest in Christ. Having an obligation does not mean that one has the ability to do so. In fact, none has the ability to do that without the grace of God. Faith here is the gift of God. This faith necessarily manifested in this way at this stage of its development will blossom into a confession that Christ died for one personally in time.

This call has no objective indication of God's grace and desire to save all to whom the call comes.

Jesus said that many are called but few are chosen (Matt. 20:16). It is only the few chosen ones who are effectually called by the Holy Spirit in their hearts to salvation (Rom. 8:30). The many who are called are called by the general call of the gospel.

In the general call of the gospel, men are called to seek salvation from God. This is their proper duty to do as creatures created by God after His image and likeness and who had grievously fallen into sin and miseries. This call is not without the setting forth of the gospel as we have earlier described in this paper — a gospel of salvation by the triune God according to His own sovereign, particular grace.

As to whether God would save everyone who hears this gospel call, there is no indication. However, there is the particular, unconditional promise of the gospel, whereby God promised to save all those who truly repent and trust in His Son Jesus Christ, which must accompany the preaching of the gospel as well. This promise is peculiarly designed for those who have shown signs of God's grace in their lives. ●

... to be concluded.

Review Article:

The Recent Bondage of John Calvin: A Critique of Peter A. Lillback's *The Binding of God*

David J. Engelsma

The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology, by Peter A. Lillback. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. Pp. 331. \$24.99 (paper).

This is an unconvincing treatment of a worthwhile subject: the doctrine of the covenant in John Calvin. It is a disturbing book: Calvin is made to teach the doctrine of justification by faith and works.

This much can be said favorably. Lillback demonstrates that Calvin was a covenant theologian in the sense that the covenant was "an integral feature of Calvin's theology" (p. 137). Also, as the title indicates, Lillback discovers that Calvin viewed the covenant as a bond. It is remarkable that of late Presbyterian and Reformed theologians are describing the covenant between God and His people in terms of fellowship, a bond, and a relationship of love. Little is heard of the covenant as contract, or agreement, or arrangement of promise and demand, which used to be the prevailing position. But the theologians do not explain why they

have moved away from the notion of the covenant as contract to the conception of the covenant as bond of fellowship.

Regardless that one shies away from describing the rich, living covenant relation between God and His people as a contract, his doctrine of the covenant may still be that of a cold, business-like bargain between God and men. According to Lillback, such was the theology of John Calvin. Lillback is determined to show that for Calvin the covenant is a conditional, breakable relation between God and every Israelite in the Old Testament and between God and every member of the visible, instituted church in the New Testament. God makes His covenant with all alike. But the covenant is conditional. Whether it continues with a person, whether it will bestow its blessings upon this person, and whether it will bring the person to heavenly life and glory depend squarely upon certain works that the person himself must do. These works are faith and obedience. If the person with whom the covenant is made fails to fulfill the condition, the covenant with him is broken, and he perishes.

Calvin taught a "bilateral, mutual, conditional, and breakable covenant" (p. 175). In the theology of Calvin, "the covenant is mutual, conditional and potentially breakable" (p. 264).

If this was, in fact, Calvin's doctrine, he overthrew in his covenant theology everything that he taught in his doctrine of salvation. Calvin's soteriology was the gospel of God's efficacious deliverance of totally depraved sinners by grace alone. Grace is particular, in Calvin's thought, inasmuch as it has its source in and is infallibly directed by election. And this election, accompanied by an equally eternal and sovereign reprobation, is unconditional.

A doctrine of a general, conditional, breakable covenant overthrows the gospel of salvation by particular, unconditional, irresistible grace since the covenant concerns grace and the salvation that grace gives. The very name of the covenant is "covenant of grace." Even such an ardent advocate of a conditional, breakable covenant as Peter Lillback acknowledges that the covenant is grace—saving grace—to those with whom the covenant is made; that the blessings bestowed by the covenant are the blessings of righteousness, holi-

ness, and eternal life; and that the realization of the covenant with a person means his salvation in time and eternity.

Why does Lillback not face the problem of the contradiction between Calvin's theology of gracious salvation grounded in and flowing from the decree of election and Calvin's alleged covenant doctrine of salvation by God's promise and by the sinner's own works? Why does Lillback not explain how a conditional covenant does not imply conditional salvation as defended by Rome, Erasmus, and Pighius, but condemned by Calvin?

Lillback toys with the problem on the rare occasion. Having quoted Calvin on baptism, Lillback makes an important admission: "The mutual covenant promises divine benefits on the one hand, and human obedience on the other." Whether this statement is intended as a description of Calvin's own thinking or of Lillback's own view makes no difference. The statement is true. It is the teaching of Jeremiah 31:33: "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

That the covenant promise includes both divine benefits and human obedience is decisive against the doctrine of a conditional covenant. The doctrine of a conditional covenant makes man's godly activity, works, and obedience a condition that man must fulfill in order for the covenant to be established, maintained, or perfected. But Jeremiah 31:33 makes a man's godly activity, works, and obedience part of the divine promise. A man's obedience to the law, that is, love for God and the neighbor, is God's gift to him by promise. Obedience to God is not a condition upon which the covenant depends, but a benefit of the covenant. Godliness of life and deed is not a work of the sinner alongside the work of God contributing to the establishment, maintenance, or perfection of the covenant, but itself the grace and salvation of the covenant. The covenant is a covenant of grace, not a covenant of grace and works. And since obedience is promised to all those with whom God makes His covenant, the covenant promise is obviously particular, not general. God did not promise obedience to every Israelite in the Old Testament. He does not promise obedience to

every member of the visible, instituted church, or to every child of believing parents.

With his statement "the mutual covenant promises divine benefits on the one hand, and human obedience on the other," Lillback is headed in the right direction. Also his next line is sound: "Men cannot keep their part of the covenant due to sin." Then he hedges: "God's covenant of *grace*, however, enables man to meet the condition through the redemptive benefits bestowed" (emphasis his). According to Lillback, God's covenant, bestowing "redemptive benefits" upon all with whom it is made, merely "*enables* man to meet the condition" (p. 247; emphasis added). Whether a particular person with whom God has established His covenant makes good use of this enabling and thus is saved depends on the man himself, not on the promising and covenant-making God.

How this doctrine of the covenant differs one whit from the Roman Catholic and Arminian teaching of a universal, saving, but resistible grace that depends for its efficacy on the will of man, Lillback does not tell us.

In Lillback's presentation of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, the contradiction in Calvin's theology goes deeper still. Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is itself contradictory. Lillback's thesis is that Calvin taught a conditional, breakable covenant with elect and reprobate alike. But time and again, Lillback quotes Calvin as teaching an unconditional, unbreakable covenant with Christ and the elect only.

On the very next page after Lillback has assured us that Calvin held a "bilateral, mutual, conditional, and breakable covenant," he quotes Calvin as teaching plainly that the covenant is unbreakable by virtue of God's making it "with us" in Christ.

Let us then set forth the covenant that he once established as eternal and never perishing. Its fulfillment, by which it is finally confirmed and ratified, is Christ. Who, then, dares to separate the Jews from Christ, since with them we hear, was made the covenant of the gospel, the sole foundation of which is Christ? . . . This is the new covenant that God in Christ has made with us, that he will remember our sins no more (p. 176).

A few pages later, Lillback analyzes Calvin's doctrine of the covenant as teaching that "an indissoluble bond exists between Christ and the elect" (p. 180).

In the chapter, "Covenant, Predestination, and Hypocrisy in Calvin's Theology," Lillback makes an extraordinarily significant quotation from Calvin's commentary on Jeremiah 22:29, 30: "We are taught that God is ever so consistent with himself, that his covenant, which he has made with Christ and with all his members, never fails" (p. 213). The quotation shows that Calvin held that the covenant is made with Christ as the head of the covenant and, therefore, with "his members," that is, the elect; that the covenant "never fails," that is, cannot be broken, in the sense of nullified, by those with whom it is made; and that this firm and lasting character of the covenant is due to God's being "consistent with himself," that is, His being the faithful, unchangeable God.

Lillback himself is forced to acknowledge that Calvin taught an unconditional, unbreakable covenant "*from God's vantage point*": "The covenant from God's vantage point is absolutely unconditional. God's absolute goodness means that He cannot deny His promises to His people." "Yet, in another sense," Lillback quickly adds, "that is from man's vantage point, the covenant is conditional" (p. 169).

When, a few pages later, Lillback comes to summarize Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, he describes it, exclusively, as a "bilateral, mutual, conditional, and breakable covenant" (p. 175). Man's "vantage point" has evidently won out. There is not even a word about "God's vantage point." This is not surprising. When theologians play with the contradiction, "God saves men, but men also save themselves," the false gospel of man's saving himself always drives out the gospel of salvation by grace alone.

Contributing to Lillback's analysis of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is Lillback's confusion of "mutual" with "conditional." Because Calvin taught that the covenant is "mutual," Lillback concludes that for Calvin the covenant is conditional. When Calvin taught that the covenant is mutual, he meant that the covenant makes demands upon God's covenant people. In the covenant, they are called to love, fear, serve, and obey God. Their

fulfilling this calling is their part in the covenant. It is necessary. God's people are to love God, even as God loves His covenant people.

But mutuality is not the same as conditionality. The love of Israel/church for their God is due to His gracious covenant with them. They obey the ten commandments because He is Jehovah their God, who has brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Their love is love in the covenant. Their love is gratitude for the mercies of the covenant. And their love is love that the covenant love of God for them works in them. He writes His law upon their hearts as He has promised.

In a conditional covenant, the love of the people merits the covenant, or obtains the covenant, or keeps the covenant in force. The covenant with all its weight of blessing and salvation depends upon the love of the people. The covenant does not depend only upon the love of God in Jesus Christ. In a conditional covenant, the covenant depends upon the people's love because in some decisive respect their love for God has its origin in themselves. And their love for God is motivated by a proud, or terrified, desire to earn the covenant, or obtain the covenant, or keep the covenant in force.

Lillback's thesis that Calvin taught a conditional covenant cannot be established by a number of selected quotations from Calvin's writings, mostly his commentaries—quotations that can at least be matched by an equal number of quotations that teach the very opposite. The whole, massive theology of Calvin of God's salvation of elect sinners by sovereign grace and of God's establishment of His covenant in Christ as its head and foundation is against the theory of a conditional covenant. Calvin taught that the covenant is mutual. He did not teach that it is conditional.

What explains Lillback's reading of Calvin? And why is Lillback so obviously pleased with the notion of a general, bilateral, conditional, and breakable covenant that he thinks to find in Calvin? A general, bilateral, conditional, and breakable covenant, operating by a general, conditional, and impotent promise, is in flat contradiction of the teaching of the Westminster Standards. As a Presbyterian theologian, Dr. Lillback is bound by the doctrine of the Westminster Standards.

The Westminster Larger Catechism declares that “the covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed” (Q. and A. 31). In harmony with this teaching that God made the covenant of grace with Christ as the head of the covenant and therefore with the elect only, the Westminster Confession of Faith restricts the promise of the covenant to the elect. With explicit reference to the promise of the covenant of grace, by which the covenant is realized with the elect sinner personally and its salvation enjoyed, the Confession speaks of God “promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe” (West. Conf., 7.3).

The Westminster Standards teach a particular, unilateral, unconditional, and sure covenant of grace with Christ as the head of the covenant and with the elect as His members. God establishes, maintains, and perfects this covenant by a particular, unconditional, and efficacious promise. This is the teaching of the Westminster Standards inasmuch as the Westminster Assembly was determined to confess salvation by sovereign, particular grace as a system of doctrine. The covenant concerns the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, nothing less. A general, bilateral, conditional, and breakable covenant is a covenant that depends upon man. But if the covenant depends upon man, so also does its salvation depend upon man.

Lillback is determined to find a conditional covenant in Calvin because Lillback is afraid of election. He sees election as a threat to the covenant and its life. He wants to keep election at bay like some dangerous beast. Election must not be allowed to determine the covenant: with whom God establishes the covenant; how the covenant is established and maintained; who receive its blessings; the godly life of the covenant people.

Calvin’s use of the covenant was not hampered (*sic*) because of his belief in the doctrines of sovereign election and reprobation. Even in his discussion of these ideas, he was able to give the covenant significance for time and space. The hypocrite is not told that he is non-elect, rather he is reminded of his duty to obey the covenant upon which his hope of participation in the covenantal blessings is

contingent. Further, Calvin did not let the pressures of his theological system cause him to identify the covenant and election. This would have seemingly closed the door on many intricate questions. Yet, Calvin believed the Scriptures required the distinction between the covenant and secret election. The result is a covenant that exists in this world, and not one that only corresponds to secret election. Calvin thus achieved a meeting of the decree and the flow of the history of salvation in his doctrine of the covenant (pp. 229, 230).

For Lillback to project his fear of predestination upon Calvin is foolishness on the face of it. As the world knows, Calvin did not share Lillback's fear of God's election. This exposes Lillback's entire project.

Apart from Calvin's doctrine of the covenant, Lillback and the others who are contending today for a conditional covenant that is "unhampered" by God's election must answer this question: Who or what then does determine and control the covenant? If it is not the will of God that determines the establishment and maintenance of the covenant, the members of the covenant, the blessings and salvation bestowed by the covenant, and the faith and obedience of the covenant people, whose will does determine these things? And when this controlling will is discovered, will we say that the covenant is now "hampered" by this will? Or will we say that, since the covenant is determined by another will than the will of God, the covenant is liberated?

It is of extraordinary significance that Lillback acknowledges that the doctrine of a conditional covenant implies the doctrine of justification by faith and works. The works in this case are the works produced by faith. Lillback contends that Calvin taught a doctrine of justification by faith and works as an aspect of his doctrine of a conditional covenant.

John Calvin taught the heresy of justification by faith and works!

In a brief historical study of the reformers' doctrine of the covenant, Lillback contrasts Luther's doctrine of justification with that of the Reformed. Luther cut off every reference to the law and works of the law in the matter of justification. But, asserts

Lillback, "the Reformed hermeneutic discussed works in the context of justification because the covenant had two parts" (p. 125). This is ominous.

Lillback returns to the alleged difference between Luther and the Reformed over the place of good works. In a section of the book headed "Calvin's Disagreement with Luther Regarding God's Acceptance of the Believer's Good Works" (pp. 185-193), Lillback grievously misrepresents Luther as teaching "the Christian to be ignorant of the law" (p. 186). The truth is that Luther taught Christians to be ignorant of the law *in the matter of their justification*. By no means did Luther deny the necessity of good works of obedience to the law in the matter of sanctification. Even worse than the misrepresentation of Luther is Lillback's as yet somewhat obscure suggestion that Calvin taught a justification that included the believer's own good works.

Luther's understanding of justification by faith alone had no room for inherent righteousness, while Calvin's view required it as an inseparable but subordinate righteousness.... Calvin is insistent that works have a proper place in the discussion of justification by faith alone.... The law had no place in Luther's discussion of justification. But in Calvin's mind, the believer's obedience was an "inseparable accident" to the justification doctrine (pp. 192, 193).

In this way, Lillback carefully lays the groundwork for an unambiguous, if cautious, declaration that Calvin taught justification by faith and faith's works. The declaration is important enough to warrant the long quotation.

What is particularly important to remember at this point is that Calvin's development of the idea of the acceptance of men's works by God was expressed in terms of the covenant. The works were not seen as meritorious, but rather, God has promised to reward works with spiritual gifts, and this promise of the law is realized by the gracious gifts of the covenant. God in covenant has liberally forgiven the sin in men's works, and actually enabled those works by His Spirit. This idea he readily admits is the common doctrine of the Schoolmen, except they developed their idea of the covenant

of acceptance in terms of merit, instead of justification righteousness and its subordinate righteousness of the Holy Spirit. Here one sees Calvin as the historical bridge between the medieval Schoolmen's covenant doctrine and that of the later Calvinistic federal theologians. Calvin simply excises the medieval doctrine of merit from the covenant of acceptance and replaces it with the Reformation's justification by faith alone. Consequently, Calvin occupies a middle ground between the Schoolmen and Luther on the issue of the acceptance of good works in relationship to justification. Luther and Calvin are in full agreement against the scholastics regarding the issue of the unique instrumentality of faith and the non-meritorious character of all of human standing before God. On the other hand, Calvin, in agreement with the Schoolmen and contrary to Luther, accepts the fact that God can by covenant receive the works of man. Calvin's doctrine of the acceptance of men's works by God is therefore an intermediate position between Luther and the medieval tradition.

The declaration that Calvin taught a doctrine of justification by faith and works is false. Calvin damned this doctrine as heartily as did Luther. Calvin fully agreed with Luther that justification is by faith alone, apart from any work or righteousness of the justified sinner himself. Always the one who is justified appears as the "ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). Calvin regarded the truth of justification by faith alone as the "cornerstone of the gospel." The doctrine that Lillback attributes to Calvin is exactly the teaching that Calvin exposed as the heresy of Roman Catholicism.

But a great part of mankind imagine that righteousness is composed of faith and works. Let us also, to begin with, show that faith righteousness so differs from works righteousness that when one is established the other has to be overthrown.... Farewell, then, to the dream of those who think up a righteousness flowing together out of faith and works. The Sophists [Roman Catholic theologians — DJE], who make game and sport in their corrupting of Scripture and their empty caviling, think they have a subtle evasion. For they explain "works" as meaning those which men not yet reborn do only according to the letter by the effort of their own free will, apart from Christ's grace. But they deny that these refer to spiritual works. For, according to them, man is justified by both faith and

works provided they are not his own works but the gifts of Christ and the fruits of regeneration. For they say that Paul so spoke for no other reason than to convince the Jews, who were relying upon their own strength, that they were foolish to arrogate righteousness to themselves, since the Spirit of Christ alone bestows it upon us not through any effort arising from our own nature. Still they do not observe that in the contrast between the righteousness of the law and of the gospel, which Paul elsewhere introduces, all works are excluded, whatever title may grace them [Gal. 3:11-12].... Moreover, we shall see afterward, in its proper place, that the benefits of Christ—sanctification and righteousness—are different. From this it follows that not even spiritual works come into account when the power of justifying is ascribed to faith (*Institutes*, 3.11.13, 14; McNeill, Battles edition).

There is no doctrine of justification that is “an intermediate position between Luther and the medieval tradition.” There are two positions on justification, and two only. Either one is justified by faith alone with Christ’s righteousness, which righteousness consists of the obedience of Christ in His earthly ministry of living and dying in the stead of His elect church, or one vainly attempts to be justified by faith and works with a righteousness that is a mongrel-mix of the obedience of Christ and one’s own obedience.

Calvin never taught justification by faith and works. But Lillback likes to find this doctrine in Calvin. The reason is that Lillback, though he is a Presbyterian and a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, himself holds this heretical doctrine. And he holds it as part-and-parcel of his doctrine of a conditional, breakable covenant, which we shall henceforth call a “covenant of grace and works” to distinguish it from the covenant of grace.

Lillback’s theology of a covenant of grace and works accompanied by a doctrine of justification by faith and faith’s works is not an isolated phenomenon in the Reformed churches. It is part of a widespread movement now surfacing in reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The movement is advanced by prominent Reformed and Presbyterian theologians. The movement intends to introduce justification by faith and works on the wings of a doctrine of a conditional, breakable

covenant of grace and works, or it intends to establish the doctrine of a conditional, breakable covenant of grace and works even though this means the introduction of the doctrine of justification by faith and works. Whatever the primary intention, whether a conditional covenant or justification by faith and works, the movement promotes both of these doctrines as related teachings.

The Binding of God is the latest in a fine series, "Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought." This reviewer has reviewed most of the books in this series in this journal. The reviews have been glowing. This book is an exception. The scholarship is flawed. The doctrine is heretical. Nevertheless, it is an important work because it makes two things plain: that a conditional covenant of grace and works implies justification by faith and works, and what is going on today at the highest levels of reputedly conservative Presbyterianism. ●

Book Reviews

Come Out From Among Them: 'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings of John Calvin, by John Calvin. Tr. Seth Skolnitsky. Dallas, Texas: Protestant Heritage Press, 2001. 317pp. \$29.95 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

For this book, we have been waiting.

The "Nicodemites" were Protestants in France during the Reformation who participated in Roman Catholic worship, not because they believed Roman Catholic doctrine or regarded Roman Catholic worship as pure, but because of various pressures on them to conform. These pressures included the threat of persecution, their own desire to maintain their social standing in the community, and the influence of Roman Catholic family members and friends. The Nicodemites deliberately dissembled. Outwardly they performed all the rites of Roman Catholic worship, including the celebration of the Mass. Inwardly, they said, they re-

jected Roman Catholic worship as false and worshiped God according to the Reformed faith.

Since they justified this behavior by an appeal to Nicodemus, who came to Jesus secretly at night while retaining his position on the Sanhedrin, Calvin called these people "Nicodemites." Later, he would call them "pseudo-Nicodemites."

Come Out From Among Them contains most of Calvin's writings against the Nicodemite error, including "A Letter to Some Friends," "A Short Treatise Setting Forth What the Faithful Man Must Do When He is Among Papists and He Knows the Truth of the Gospel," "Answer of John Calvin to the Nicodemite Gentlemen Concerning Their Complaint That He is Too Severe," "Four Sermons from John Calvin Treating Matters Which Are Very Useful for Our Times with a Brief Exposition of Psalm 87," and "A Response to a Certain Dutchman Who, Under Pretence of Making Christians Really

Spiritual, Suffers Them to Defile Their Bodies in All Sorts of Idolatries.” Most of these, if not all of them, are now translated into English for the first time.

One important work by Calvin against the Nicodemite error—the earliest—is not included. No doubt this is because it appears in English translation in Calvin’s *Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, tr. Henry Beveridge, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851). The English title is “On Shunning the Unlawful Rites of the Ungodly, and Preserving the Purity of the Christian Religion.” Calvin wrote this in 1537. In this treatise Calvin established the line he would take, and marshaled the texts he would use, throughout the entire body of his anti-Nicodemite writings.

It is not without significance that Calvin’s controversy with the Nicodemites spanned his entire ministry. He wrote the first of his treatises (we would call them pamphlets) at the very beginning of his ministry in 1537. He wrote the last of them at the end of his ministry in 1562. This was the treatise entitled “A Response to a Certain Dutchman.” Obviously, the

Nicodemite error persisted. Obviously also, Calvin viewed this error as grievous, one that demanded his unrelenting attention.

The Nicodemite error is with us today. This makes the publication of these treatises extraordinarily worthwhile. Professing Reformed believers remain in countries or areas where worship in a true Reformed church is impossible, excusing themselves by appeal to the hardships of moving. Or men and women who confess the Reformed faith worship in churches that are not Reformed, because this is convenient. Or those who claim to know and love the Reformed faith stay in churches that depart from the faith, corrupt the Word and Sacraments, and pollute the worship, because of family or social pressures. All of these are modern Nicodemites.

The Calvin scholars, some of whom are themselves Nicodemites, will no doubt welcome the book as a valuable contribution to the academic study of Calvin’s mind in English. Our interest is more spiritual and practical. To Reformed believers in foreign lands who cannot publicly worship God in

a true Reformed church because such a church is lacking, Calvin now says in plain English, "Emigrate to another country, regardless of the cost!" To Reformed Christians who remain in apostatizing churches because of the influence of their wife, or children, or parents, or grandparents, or because leaving for the true church will mean ridicule and the loss of friends, Calvin now says in plain English, "Leave that church and its God-dishonoring worship for a church that worships God rightly."

To participate in corrupt worship, regardless that one inwardly dissents, is forbidden:

I answer that part of the yoke of Jesus Christ is to confess his name, and to declare that we desire to purely worship God alone. I say that faith is not buried in the heart, but produces fruits outwardly. From this it is clear that those who dissemble in order to please idolaters, signifying that they are of their band, have neither faith nor zeal to obey God. Rather they are like lost beasts, taking cheer in a wicked and perverse license (p. 283).

The believer must be mem-

ber of a true, instituted congregation, where the gospel is purely preached, the truth is confessed, and God is worshiped as He requires in His Word. The fundamental trouble with the Nicodemites is that they do not appreciate

what a treasure it is to have freedom, not only to serve God purely and to make public confession of one's faith, but also to be in a well ordered and governed church, where the word of God is preached, and where the sacraments are properly administered, since these are the means by which God's children may be confirmed in the faith and are stirred up to live and die in his obedience.

Calvin added: "Now, it seemed to me that this point was very needful in our day, because there are many fanciful Christians who mock those who take pains to get to foreign and far off countries in order to enjoy such freedom" (pp. 130, 131).

So much is it the duty of every believer to be an active member of a true church that "they are without excuse, who are in a far-off land and are kept by the world from every means of relocating to a country where

the gospel is preached" (p. 212). Indeed, "for the sake of God's worship we ought to forget everything, to the point of renouncing our own lives" (p. 293).

Some of the Nicodemites repented and moved to Geneva and other places where Reformed worship was possible. Others reacted by criticizing Calvin for his rigor and his alleged lack of sympathy for their plight. One Nicodemite charged Calvin with teaching that "one cannot get to paradise except by way of Geneva." The equivalent in our day is the angry accusation that "you people think that you are the only ones going to heaven."

Many will find the book offensive. All hardened Nicodemites will stumble at it. So also will the delicate "brothers of charity." In his zeal for the glory of God in right worship and in his holy anger against

our readiness to put our own convenience and ease before God's honor, Calvin is ironic and severe. He grants that contemporary Nicodemites resemble the original in one respect: both bury Jesus. In his "Response to a Certain Dutchman" who defended Nicodemism, among the names that Calvin calls the wicked Dutchman are "oaf," "crackpot," "blunderer," "wretch," "dog," "wild animal," "beast," "baboon," "clod," "joker," "dimwit," "blockhead," and "bulldog."

This book is long overdue and sorely needed. It is divine encouragement (for Calvin derives his instruction and admonition from Holy Scripture) to those who take seriously membership in a true church and participation in the right public worship of God. ■

Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines, by John Calvin. Tr. and ed. Benjamin Wirt Farley. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982. 336 pp. \$29.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

At its beginning, the sixteenth century Reformation of the church was threatened from two quarters: the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptists. The worth of this translation of two of John Calvin's outstand-

ing refutations of Anabaptist doctrines and practices is two-fold. The book exposes the errors of Anabaptist teachings in the light of the Reformation's understanding of the gospel. These errors still plague the church today. Most notable is the Anabaptist denial that the infants of believers belong to the church and must therefore be baptized.

A second benefit of the book is its reminder to Reformed people who have become tolerant of the false doctrines of Anabaptism that the Reformers, particularly Calvin, regarded Anabaptism as grievous heresy. With regard to the more radical Anabaptists, who called themselves the "Spirituals," but whom Calvin called "Liber-tines," Calvin wrote:

Since I can only edify the church of God by fighting against those who machinate to destroy it, I would be cheating myself if, to the best of my ability, I were to discredit the pope and his accomplices, but should pardon those who are by far the more serious enemies of God and the greatest spoilers of His truth (p. 204).

The book consists of two of Calvin's treatises condemning Anabaptist teachings. The first is his "Brief Instruction for Arming All the Good Faithful against the Errors of the Common Sect of the Anabaptists," published by Calvin in 1544. Calvin directed this polemical work against the more moderate Anabaptists. The bulk of the work is Calvin's refutation of the seven articles of the important Anabaptist confession of faith, *The Schleitheim Confession*. This confession, authored mainly by Michael Sattler, was written in 1527. It treats of seven doctrines: baptism, the ban (Anabaptist discipline), the sword (the magistracy), the oath, the breaking of bread, separation from abominations, and shepherds in the congregation. Calvin concentrated on the first four teachings. He commented on the last three only briefly.

"The Brief Instruction" ends with Calvin's criticism of the Anabaptist beliefs concerning the incarnation of Christ and the state of souls after death. The peculiar view of the Anabaptists regarding Christ's incarnation was that the Son of God did not take to Himself a real human body from Mary.

"They do not hold that Jesus Christ was true man, but rather, with respect to His body, make Him into a phantom" (p. 106). This denial of Jesus' full humanity, charged Calvin, identified Anabaptism as "Antichrist" (p. 118).

With regard to the Anabaptist error of soul-sleep, Calvin demonstrated from Scripture that "souls have a proper essence" and that immediately upon the death of believers their souls consciously enjoy Christ. Calvin wrote that it is "the height of stupidity to tuck souls indolently in bed, as the Anabaptists do, making them sleep until the day of the resurrection" (p. 133). It is interesting, especially in light of recent ill-considered and intemperate criticism of Herman Hoeksema's questioning of the phrase "immortality of the soul," to note that Calvin recognized the inaccuracy of the phrase.

When we say that souls are immortal, we do not mean thereby, in any way, to slight God, whom Saint Paul says "is alone immortal" (I Tim. 6:16). Rather we consider it a blasphemy to attribute immortality to the soul, as if it subsisted by its own power. Nevertheless it is appropri-

ate for us to consider what particular quality and nature God has given to souls: which is to subsist by His hand in order to enjoy immortal blessedness or malediction (p. 151).

The first article of the Anabaptist *Schleitheim Confession* assailed infant baptism as popish. Calvin's defense of infant baptism is lucid and compelling. The Reformer showed that the issue is the unity of God's covenant in connection with the essential oneness of Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism. Every rejection of infant baptism necessarily implies the denial of the unity of the old and new covenants. Denial of the unity of the covenants is dispensationalism. And this is grievous heresy.

As for infant baptism's being an invention of the pope, Calvin retorted that "the whole church held to infant baptism long before one ever knew about the papacy or had ever heard of the pope" (p. 45).

Astutely, Calvin remarked that, since in the Old Testament God was the God of the Jews and their children, rejection of infant baptism means that God

is less gracious to New Testament believers than He was to the Jews. But "whoever wants to make the grace of God less toward us and our children than it was toward the Jewish people inflicts a great injustice on Jesus Christ and blasphemes Him" (p. 51).

The fact is, Calvin asserted, "children ... belong to the church before they depart their mother's womb" (p. 48).

The second of the two treatises that make up the book is Calvin's "Against the Fantastic and Furious Sect of the Libertines Who are Called 'Spirituals.'" This was published in Geneva in 1545. In this work, Calvin took on the more radical elements of the "left wing of the Reformation." These most radical of the radicals taught a form of pantheism. Since God—the universal Spirit—is all, all actions of humans are determined, so that there is no difference between good and evil. Therefore, in refuting this branch of the Anabaptists, Calvin had to distinguish between biblical providence and determinism. These Anabaptists were antinomians, or "libertines." According to them, sin, the devil, and the wicked world are

not reality, but merely bad thoughts. This doctrine is much the same as the teaching of the cult of Christian Science.

The "Libertines" taught that the fellowship of believers must be expressed by a community of goods, which extends to husbands and wives. This teaching gave Calvin occasion to explain what having all in common in the early church of Acts really was.

The pantheism of the "Libertines" led them to deny the resurrection of the body. For them, the resurrection is past inasmuch as spiritually they had already been taken up to God. At death, their soul would become God. Calvin, in response, affirmed the resurrection of the body in the day of Christ's coming. For Calvin, this is "our highest hope." It is "imperative that the understanding of believers should be entirely pinned on this day and that their hearts should cling to it" (p. 295).

Basic to the entire gnostic philosophy of the "Libertines" was an allegorical interpretation of Scripture. They despised the "simple sense" of the Bible. They defended their allegorical interpretation of Scripture by an appeal to Paul's statement in

II Corinthians 3:6 that “the letter kills” (p. 222). In contrast, Calvin described his own, and the Reformation’s, hermeneutic. This is the principle of the natural sense of Scripture with Jesus Christ as its central content. Calvin insisted on the

simple sense from which nothing else should be drawn out, unless we ought to learn not to divide the Word of God so as to cut it off from Jesus Christ who is its soul ... and by whom alone it has the power to become beneficial to us (p. 223).

Against the claim of the “Libertines” to be honoring the Spirit by their fanciful, allegorical interpretation, Calvin warned that the interpreter of the Bible must not separate the Spirit from the Word. Such is the importance and timeliness of the subject that what Calvin said on the relation of Word and Spirit, especially as regards interpreting Scripture, deserves to be quoted at length:

[Christ] did not promise the Spirit for the purpose of forsaking Scripture, so that we might be led by Him and stroll amid the clouds, but in order to gain its true mean-

ing and thus be satisfied. In Jesus Christ’s own words: “When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will enable you to understand the things which you have heard from Me” (John 14:26). [Hence] we see that He does not promise His apostles a spirit that will create new doctrines for them; rather the Spirit only confirms them in the gospel which was preached to them.

Furthermore, after His resurrection, when He opened the understanding of His two disciples (Luke 24:27, 32), it was not in order to inspire them with strange subjects not found in Scripture but in order to help them understand Scripture itself.

In fact, to whom has been given the greatest abundance of the Spirit if not to the apostles? Nevertheless, the Spirit did not cause them to lay aside Scripture or create in them mistrust for it. But on the contrary we see that the Scripture became the focus of their entire study and obedience. And we hold to the same obedience.

As for Saint Paul in particular, never once did he want to lay aside Scripture, for he found its authority so good that he recommends it to us in order to persuade us to

know and to hunger to know only what it contains. For he says, "It is useful for our instruction, exhortation, repentance, and for making us perfect in every good work" (II Tim. 3:16), saying that it is the foundation on which our consolation and patience should rest if we would be firm in hope.

As for the word "Spirit," it appears from what he calls his "ministerial preaching of the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:8) that Spirit and Scripture are one and the same. For after admonishing the Thessalonians not to "quench the Spirit," he adds that they should "not despise the prophets" (I Thess. 5:19f.). By this he means that we choke out the light of God's Spirit if we cut ourselves off from His Word. That is, provided it is [properly] preached to us. For preaching and Scripture are the true instruments of God's Spirit.

Therefore, let us consider anyone a devil who wants to lead us astray from it, whether directly or indirectly, and let us flee from them as we would a poison. Let us hold, I say, to the pure and plain Word of God, where He has clearly revealed His will to us. And let us pray that by His Holy

Spirit He will want to implant it in our hearts, which is His true office. Let us say to Him with David: "Lord, open my eyes that I may behold the marvels of Thy law" (Ps. 119:18) (pp. 224, 225).

Like all the Reformers, Calvin held allegorical interpretation in contempt: "For there is about as much substance to allegories as there is to bottles of water that babies drink with a straw" (p. 223).

It is not the least of the lessons that Reformed ministers could learn from this book, that a faithful minister must condemn doctrinal errors. He must do so pointedly, sharply, and at some length. He must even do so by referring to the false teachers and, by implication, churches that spread these errors *byname*. Calvin was aware that some would object to his vehement polemics. Therefore, he began the second treatise with an explanation and defense of controversial writing.

Whenever any wicked and pernicious sect begins to multiply, and especially grow, the task of those whom our Lord has constituted for the edification of His church

is to oppose and to repulse that sect vigorously, before it is strengthened (*sic*) and further taints and corrupts.

In fact, inasmuch as the church is provided with pastors, it is not enough for them to serve and administer the good pasture of Jesus Christ's flock, unless they also keep on the lookout for wolves and thieves, in order to cry out against them and to chase them away from the flock whenever they come too close.

However, strictly speaking, heretics are not only like thieves or wolves, but are much worse. For since they corrupt the holy Word of God, they are like poison, murdering poor souls under the pretext of grazing them and providing them with good pasture.

Furthermore, inasmuch as Satan never ceases to plot by every means the dissipation of that holy unity which we have in our Lord Jesus by [means of] His Word, it is absolutely necessary, for the preservation of the church, that this very same Word should serve and be used as a sword and shield in order to resist such machinations.

Now insofar as it has pleased our Lord, by His infinite goodness, without consideration for what I was, to add

me to the number of those He has commissioned, not only to publish His truth to the world, but also to maintain it against all adversaries, I must engage myself in this charge according to the ability He has given me (pp. 188, 189).

Those who suppose that love means that the minister never mentions the name of the theologian or church that teaches false doctrine do well to heed Calvin's explanation of his practice of the opposite.

There are two reasons that prompt me to name these wretches, who otherwise are unworthy of anyone giving them a single word of recognition, so much so that the paper would be soiled by their names. First of all, many who have no idea what the word "Libertine" means recognize the name of Quintin. Second, it is expedient that such dangerous beasts should be marked so that everyone might recognize them for fear of being hurt by them through lack of information.

Furthermore, I know quite well that I will not please everyone by publishing their names in this way. But what should I do when I see four scamps who are already the

cause of the ruin of four thousand men and of whom at least three are still seeking constantly to overthrow God's truth, who scatter the poor church, who deceive all whom they trap in their nets, who sow damnable blasphemies, and, what is still worse, put everyone into a horrendous confusion? Am I to keep silent or conceal it?

What cruelty on my part it would be if, in order to spare them or to please everybody, I should allow them to destroy and ravage everyone without warning that we should be on guard against them? If I were to know of brigands who had seized a road, ought I not reveal them for fear that poor travelers might fall into their hands? Should I hide poisoners who have conspired to murder an entire people?

Now there is no brigandage as evil, nor poison as pernicious to the world, as this accursed doctrine which tends to scatter and destroy not only Christianity but also all human propriety—not even among the Turks and pagans has such ever been!

But if I were to remain silent, then I would deserve being thought of as a murderer, since I should be consenting to evil. [Hence]

should I not sound a word, seeing that they abuse the name of Jesus Christ in order to introduce under His shadow an abomination greater than any the world has known, and by means of which He is subjected to such disgrace that He is considered worse than a devil from hell? In remaining silent, I should be less faithful than a dog that doesn't care if its master is attacked, or at least does not bark.

Therefore I am compelled to cry out with a loud voice ... (pp. 203, 204).

Calvin mentioned names, for example, Quintin.

He added adjectives, for example, "the *swine* Quintin," which, it should be noted, was not a deplorable weakness of Calvin, or the sad characteristic of that age, but simply biblical (see II Pet. 2:22).

Evidently, *Treatises against the Anabaptists* is a recent reissuing of a book originally published in 1982, although nowhere does the date of the reprint occur.

As will be apparent from the lengthy citations, it is the judgment of this reviewer that the book is nearly required reading for Reformed ministers. ■

Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics, Roy B. Zuck, General Editor. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996. Pp. 320. (No price) (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

The more I read current books on Hermeneutics (the principles of biblical interpretation), the more I become convinced that the distinction between the divine author and the human authors of Scripture is fatal for all biblical interpretation. This book has confirmed that judgment.

The 22 chapters in this book are written by 21 different men who span the evangelical spectrum. The authors run from such well-known men as Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., I. Howard Marshall, Moisés Silva, Milton S. Terry (the author of an excellent textbook on biblical Hermeneutics, but long deceased), Norman Geisler, Roger Nicole, and Charles Kraft to such relatively unknown men as J. Robertson McQuilken, Darrell L. Bock, G. B. Caird, and Robert H. Stein.

The differences in authorship of the chapters reveal deep-seated differences in viewpoint.

Some chapters are excellent and ought to be read by every minister of the gospel; some are so obviously rooted in higher critical thinking that they are not worth reading. The thoughts of some authors flatly contradict the ideas of other authors. One has to do a lot of picking and choosing. I sometimes fear that the vast differences in viewpoint, all between the covers of one book, simply testify to the fact that none of the authors considers the differences among evangelicals to be important and significant. The toleration of many viewpoints on all manner of subjects, including the character of God's holy Word, is the order of the day.

Some evidences of the differences ought to be shown.

Looking at the strong points of the book, first of all, one finds many ideas and warnings which a serious student of Scripture ought to take to himself. In a chapter authored by three evangelicals and titled, "Preunderstandings and the Interpreter," much emphasis is placed on the role of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture. "First, we recognize '*the spiritual factor*.' The full purpose of the Bible is realized only

by the work of the Holy Spirit 'who illuminates the mind and witnesses to the veracity of the divine verities'" (p. 77).

The same chapter emphasizes Scripture's clarity, a Reformation principle which implies the ability of all God's people to understand the sacred record (pp. 78, 79).

In a chapter entitled "Using and Abusing Language," Moisés Silva warns against misusing word studies in etymology, synonyms, etc., but carries the warning too far when he relegates many distinctions in Scripture to mere rhetorical devices. Verbal inspiration means that the Holy Spirit used every word with a purpose.

Several chapters warn against making the understanding of Scripture difficult by a multitude of distinctions, exercises in literary analysis, interpreting in the light of non-canonical literature (such as the Jewish Mishnah), and imposing complicated literary frameworks on the text. But other chapters (see, for example, pp. 8 & 9) pile distinction on distinction and exercise on exercise as being essential to explain the sacred text.

Norman Geisler has an

excellent chapter entitled "The Relation of Purpose and Meaning in Interpreting Scripture." He warns against making purpose determine meaning, rather than meaning determine purpose. He points out, correctly, that the former leads to a non-literal interpretation of Scripture, as, e.g., in the interpretation of Genesis 1. Those who determine in advance that the purpose of Genesis 1 is doxological then proceed to deny its literal meaning. He points out that the same thing has been done with texts condemning homosexuality, and Bultmann's demythologizing was the end result of making meaning dependent on purpose. It is a chapter every student of Scripture ought to read.

Walter J. Kaiser, Jr. pleads in a chapter with the title, "The Single Intent of Scripture," for the position that Scripture has only one meaning. That meaning is the obvious one, the one obvious from the words and thoughts. It is, says Kaiser, the "surface" meaning, the "prosaic" meaning; and it is the correct one. Looking for other meanings, he warns, reduces exegesis to a shambles. The very fact that a warning like this

is necessary speaks volumes about the state of Hermeneutics in evangelical circles.

Roger Nicole has a generally good chapter on the use in the New Testament of Old Testament quotations. The Holy Spirit, says Nicole, may use his own Old Testament Scriptures in any way He wishes when writing the New Testament.

But Darrell L. Bock, in his chapter, "Evangelicals and the Use of the Old Testament in the New," makes the prophecies of the Old Testament which are fulfilled in the New so complicated that any child of God in the pew would be totally unable to make use of these prophecies.

As an aside, how well I remember the days of my childhood when young children from Catechism class would give their annual Christmas program and quote Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in Christ in an appropriate and biblically correct way. It's a good thing they did not have to read the treatment of these things in this book.

Several chapters, with Charles Kraft leading the way, deal with the problem of making Scripture relevant to our day.

This is an extremely perplexing problem, apparently. Kraft writes:

Largely through the input of the grammatico-historical method, evangelical scholars have begun to pay more and more attention to the interrelationships between the ways in which things are stated in Scripture and the ways in which things were stated in the wider cultural context in which the people and events recorded in Scripture participated. When it comes to the analysis of such cultural contexts, however, it is likely that contemporary disciplines such as anthropology and linguistics, dedicated as they are to a primary focus on these issues, may be able to provide us with sharper tools for analysis than the disciplines of history and philology have provided. On this assumption, I am attempting to develop an approach that may be labeled *culturolinguistic* (or, better, *ethnolinguistic*) as a contemporary evangelical modification and amplification of the grammatico-historical method. This method depends greatly on the pioneering insights of Bible translation theorists such as Eugene Nida (whose views

of dynamic equivalence dominated in the preparation of the NIV, HH) and John Beekman.

This is completely destructive of biblical hermeneutics. In fact, it makes any study of the Bible an exercise in futility and denies that Scripture is the infallible record of the revelation of God in Christ. Kraft proceeds from the assumption that no full communication is possible even between people from the same culture (p. 248). The Bible, from a vastly different culture, can communicate anything only in a very approximate way. We get, I guess, a sort of vague notion of what the Bible is saying. We can never be sure we understand what it teaches. Everything is to be interpreted in the context of the culture in which it was written, and that culture is forever beyond our understanding.

If this were indeed true, I wouldn't spend any more time with Scripture than I do with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. But this is what happens when we open the door to a "human element" in Scripture. I challenge anyone to point to a single text in all Scripture where the origin of Scripture is explained in terms

of the men whom God used to write it. The classic texts in II Timothy 3:16, 17 and II Peter 1:21 make no mention of a human element, and, as a matter of fact, Peter specifically denies it: "prophecy came not in old time by the will of man." What right do so-called evangelicals have to introduce into Scripture that which Scripture itself denies is there? This is an inexcusable, God-denying caricature of His holy Word which leads thousands on the path to destruction. Must such views be tolerated? I would be furious if anyone did this to my letters to my wife, or hers to me. But Scripture is from God! Do these scholars have no sense of God's righteous indignation against those who deliberately mutilate His Word and pull it out of the hands of God's people to whom God gave it?

The book is marred by poor editing. Mistakes are frequently present. For a few see pages 86, 160, 166, 177. ■

Guilt, Grace and Gratitude, Lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism by George W. Bethune. First published by Sheldon & Company, New York, 1864. Reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust, 3 Murray Field Road, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. Two Volumes. Hardcover. \$49.99. [Reviewed by Arie den Hartog.]

I have owned a much older edition of these two volumes for a number of years. They were given to me by a fellow minister of the Word. I have read these volumes through several times in connection with preparation of Heidelberg Catechism sermons. The work of Bethune is outstanding. Ever since I saw a Banner of Truth advertisement indicating that the Truth Trust was in the process of republishing these volumes, I have been eagerly awaiting their appearance. My old edition is disintegrating, held together by book tape, with many pages falling out. Ever since I began to read in them I have wondered why no one has ever reprinted them.

Anyone who preaches on the Heidelberg Catechism regularly will greatly benefit from reading these volumes. Those

who are not preachers and know the preciousness of the Heidelberg Catechism will deeply appreciate the works of George Bethune. Ministers who preach through the Heidelberg Catechism over and over again, as do ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches, are always looking for good commentaries on the catechism. The commentary by Bethune definitely ranks among the best I have ever read.

Bethune's lectures are full of deep and rich and new thoughts on the Heidelberg Catechism. Bethune is often quoted by the followers of the Puritans.

Faithful preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism in the Reformed churches has done a great deal to help with systematic doctrinal preaching in the churches. Such preaching is one of the greatest strengths of truly Reformed churches. Doctrinal preaching must, however, be done from a living, personal, spiritual and experiential perspective. The excellence of the Heidelberg Catechism is exactly this perspective, reflected especially in its opening question and answer concerning the only comfort of the Christian in life and death. It is a tragedy when a preacher presents the Heidel-

berg Catechism in a cold and abstract way. George Bethune's lectures will be a great aid to the preacher to follow the perspective of the Heidelberg Catechism itself and preach through all the great doctrines of the Christian religion from a living, spiritual perspective.

Perhaps the best way to stir up the interest of those who have not read these excellent volumes is simply to quote from a few sections of them. I have found myself on numerous occasions in sermons quoting from George Bethune's lectures.

We are to love God intelligently. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." God has endowed us with understanding and reason, that we may know Him and perceive the arguments which He addresses through our minds to our affections. The faculty of will or choice which He grants us, cannot be exercised rightly unless intelligently. We are not to love even the Lord our God without motive, or an appreciation of His claims upon our love. We are therefore to employ our minds, above all else, in the study and contemplation of these claims that we may by the very force

of logic, cheerfully, yet, as it were, of moral necessity, fix our hearts supremely upon Him to whom of right they belong. We must diligently read His Word, in which He reveals Himself for our learning; we must observe His works, in which He demonstrates Himself to our senses; we must investigate His doctrines, meditate on His attributes, apply His laws to our consciences, trust in His promises, set His threatenings between us and what He has forbidden, while we practice His commands, that through experience we may be continually acquiring greater proof of their wise goodness; and especially must we seek by earnest, humble prayer the sanctifying grace of His illuminating Spirit, that in close, personal, habitual communion with God, we may grow more like Him as we know more of Him. Thus consecrating all our faculties to His praise, we shall love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our minds. (From Lecture II on The Knowledge of our Misery, pages 39 and 40.)

If, then, infants were admitted as members of the church under the old dispensation, how can it be denied that they are not to be admit-

ted under the new? If it were right in the one, it must be right in the other case because the fundamental constitution of both is the same: justification by faith. Where we ask, is there any proof in all the New Testament writings that the right of the believers to church membership is taken away? Where is there a single text to show that the Christian believer may not dedicate his child as the Jewish believer was privileged to do? On the contrary we find four instances of entire households being baptized: that of Cornelius, that of Lydia, that of the jailor, and that of Stephanas. If it be objected to this, that we do not know whether there were any but adults capable of personal faith in these households, we answer that one could scarcely take four families at random without finding some infants among them; and besides the promise in the case of the jailor was to him as the head of his house.... (From Lecture XXXIV on Baptism: The Subjects, pages 255 and 256.)

We behold Him crucified before our eyes, and know that we derive our life and joy of life from the offering of His body and the shedding of His blood. We feel that we

are one with Him and one with each member of His church which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all: and, looking forward to the blessed day when He who was crucified and rose from the dead, shall come again to receive His people where He is in glory, we anticipate the blessed, consummate joy of sitting down with the church of all ages at the marriage supper of the Lamb in the supper sanctuary, amidst holy perceptions of the eternal Sabbath. (From Lecture XXXVI on The Lord's Supper, pages 296 and 297.)

As the "old man" and the "new man" are, so long as our Christian life is in the mortal body of sin, struggling for mastery and the old man, our worse self, must be resolutely "mortified," we must feel the anguish and agonies of a death, and execution, or, as the Scripture more emphatically calls it, a crucifixion of our natural tendencies and desires. Therefore hate, a very strong passion, is sent to our aid that we may set ourselves on our wickedness with the ardor of a combatant, who minds not his own sufferings in his determination to inflict death on his foe. But hate is not enough to

bear us victoriously through. There is a stronger passion yet,—the power most prevalent and impelling in God or man, love, which sheds through the faculties and affections of the human soul a delicious ardor absorbing the whole nature to one purpose, and concentrating all its forces on one enterprise. Faith is strong, hope is stronger, but love is the strongest in all operations of the Christian life. It is the superlative of the three degrees of heavenly grace, the acme of the climax by which we ascend to God. Hence, in this most difficult work of our conversion, love alone is equal by divine grace to its accomplishment, and has the largest share in the process. God, from whom comes the divine life which assimilates us to Himself, is love; and love to God is so identified with the new life, that we cannot distinguish it from the life itself.... It is the perception, the persuasion, the apprehension, the bringing home to Himself of the love of God in Christ, which transforms the believer by an all-pervading energy, thrilling, subduing, exciting all of his senses into a willing, happy, obedient creature of Christ's will. (From Lecture XLI on The

Nature of True Conversion, pages 387 and 388.)

Every well-kept Sabbath is thus a fresh return of man to God for instruction and strength to discharge his duty; and also a repeated anticipation of his rendering an account at the great day of the manner in which he has discharged his duty. All the binding force that religion has over morals, is thus concentrated and made immediately applicable in a right use of the Sabbath. Not to remember the Sabbath, is not to remember God; and to forget God, is to forget the obligation of virtue. In this high sense has the Sabbath been made for man. As his happiness is inseparable from virtue, and virtue inseparable from religion, the Sabbath, on which both are specially cultivated, is a confirmation and security of man's highest good. Hence (we may observe in passing) experience has proved that where the Sabbath has been best kept, sound notions of morality, and the practice of virtue, personal and social, have most prevailed, because there the fear and love of God are the paramount motives of man's conduct. He only who remembers the Sabbath day to keep it holy, will remem-

ber to keep himself holy; for the Sabbath is not only a means of moral strength, but also a test of moral sincerity. (Lecture XLVII on The Purpose of the Sabbath, pages 489 and 490.)

My only regret about the lectures of George Bethune is that his commentary ends with Lord's Day 38 of the Heidel-

berg Catechism. We thank the Banner of Truth for republishing these excellent volumes. Having them in hard cover is worth the money. These are the kind of books you want to be sturdy enough to be read several times over the years, especially by preachers who love to preach on the Heidelberg Catechism. ■

Christ Preeminent: A Commentary on Colossians. Alden A. Gannett. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998. 109 pages. (paper). [Reviewed by Russell J. Dykstra.]

The title of this brief commentary on Colossians is most appealing to the Reformed believer – *Christ Preeminent*. The Reformed faith emphatically maintains that Christ is preeminent – the center of the counsel of God, the express image of the Father, the God-appointed Mediator of the covenant, and the Savior of His people. *Christ Preeminent* is also an appropriate title for a commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians. In fact,

the very term preeminence is ascribed to Christ in Colossians 1:18 – “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” Colossians sets forth that very truth in a glorious way, particularly in 1:15-20.

That passage not only reveals that Christ is very God, the Creator, the Head of the church, and the Savior, but sets forth the truth that Christ is the center of the counsel of God. Colossians 1 provides probably the clearest and strongest testimony that the decrees of God ought to be understood in a supralapsarian order. That is to

say, that God (logically) decreed that Christ should be the Mediator of the covenant, before (that is, logically before) God decreed the fall of man into sin, or the creation of the world. By *logically before* we mean that the decree of Christ is a higher goal than the subsequent decrees, and that those same decrees serve the decree of Christ.

A more complete description of the supralapsarian view of the decrees of God could be presented as follows:

1. God decreed to glorify Himself as the triune, covenant God.

2. God decreed to do so especially in and through Christ, the Mediator of the covenant.

3. God decreed predestination, which includes election, namely, choosing specific people unto salvation in Christ, and reprobation, namely, rejecting the rest, who would in turn serve the decree of election.

4. To fulfill the decree of predestination, God decreed a race of men, and the fall into sin.

5. To serve the race and the working out of predestination, God decreed to create a world and decreed all of history and providence with it.

The infralapsarian view presents God's decrees in the reverse order. It too maintains that the purpose of all is to give glory to God. To that end God decreed as follows:

1. God decreed to create a world and a race of men.

2. God decreed the fall into sin.

3. God decreed predestination, namely, He chose some members of the race unto salvation (election), and determined to pass by the rest (reprobation).

4. God decreed to send Christ to save the elect.

An examination of the two positions reveals that the supralapsarian view presents the decrees in a logical order, with each particular decree serving the one preceding it, culminating in the decree that God glorifies Himself. The infralapsarian position, on the other hand, gives the decrees in the order in which they are carried out in time. The names themselves come from the position of the decree of Christ in relation to the decree of the fall (the lapse). Hence supra-lapsarian means "above or prior to the fall" and infralapsarian means "below or subsequent to the fall."

It must be understood that

there is room for both positions in the Reformed faith. Both describe the decrees of God in eternity. Hence, both positions maintain sovereign, double, unconditional predestination in eternity, a predestination not in any way based on man or his works. Historical proof for that is that the Canons of Dordrecht are infralapsarian, but several delegates to the Synod of Dordrecht were supralapsarian and their position was not condemned by the synod.

Colossians 1 gives powerful support to the supralapsarian view of God's decrees. For instance, Colossians 1:16 teaches that not only were all things in heaven and earth created *by* Christ, all things were also created *for* Him. The word translated *for* is the Greek word *εἰς*, which in many instances in Scripture has the meaning of "with a view to." That all things were created with a view to Christ supports the view that the decree of creation and providence serve the decree of Christ.

In addition, Colossians 1:20 teaches that God through Christ reconciles all things in heaven and earth to Himself. Christ is presented as the goal of God's plans, the one in whom

heaven and earth will one day be made one (as stated explicitly in Ephesians 1:9-10).

In these and other ways, Colossians exalts Christ and assigns Him the God-ordained preeminence.* The title of the book by Dr. Alden A. Gannett is, therefore, most appropriate.

The book, however, is most disappointing. In plain words, it does not present the glorious truth that the title implies that the book will give. In the Preface, Dr. Gannett indicates his purpose for writing the book. It "is not primarily to provide another technical and scholarly work on this timely epistle. Rather, my aim is to set forth a practical word by expounding the theme of the epistle—the preeminence of Christ in our daily walk."

Dr. Gannett's presentation of the theme of Colossians gives an indication where he is going, and where, in my judgment, he went wrong. No doubt Co-

* For those interested in a more thorough exposition of Colossians 1 and of the preeminence of Christ, I recommend Herman Hoeksema's *Chapel Talks on Colossians*, available from the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

lossians, like most of the New Testament epistles, contains much instruction about the Christian's walk – instruction based on the doctrinal material of the epistle. It is doubtful, however, that the main point of Colossians is preeminence of Christ in the walk of the Christian. That shifts the emphasis radically from the place of Christ in the counsel and works of God, to the place Christ has in the life of the believer. The danger is then that the emphasis is on the Christian making sure that he has (makes?) Christ preeminent in his own life.

Sadly, that is exactly the approach Dr. Gannett takes. The first page of chapter one declares that "God wants, through the Book of Colossians, to bring us back to the centrality of our Lord Jesus Christ—who He is, what He did for us on the cross, and how He *wants to* live in and through us. In two words, Christ preeminent." (My emphasis, RJD.)

When the commentary reaches the very verse that speaks of the preeminence of Christ (p. 37), there is but a short paragraph of explanation, and then this telling question: "As far as you know, in the pres-

ence of God, is Jesus Christ first in your life?" Even more obvious is the first of two questions with which the book ends (pp. 104-105) – "Is Christ first in your life? ... Will you now humble yourself, bow the knee, and crown Christ *Lord*?"

That pathetic question indicates the reason why Dr. Gannett cannot give Christ the proper preeminence that Colossians does, namely, that his theology is Arminian. He gives numerous prayers that he urges upon the reader, adding the assurance that if the individual will pray these prayers, in his words, "God will save you" (p. 44; similarly, see pp. 40, 89, 105, for examples). He is blatant in asserting to the unconverted, "Christ died for you," citing, of course, John 3:16 (p. 47). He avers that Christ "longs to be your life, my friend" (p. 88).

With that theology, Dr. Gannett can only present a Christ who is glorious in what He wants to do and be for man, but who can do nothing until man allows it. In such a system, who has the preeminence? Man does. Man holds the reigns of power, and must be willing to "crown Christ Lord"(!).

Dr. Gannett's eschatology also effectively rules out the possibility that he would ascribe to Christ the preeminence given Him by God. Dr. Gannett is a premillennial dispensationalist, awaiting the Rapture (cf. pp. 17, 37, and 40). Admittedly, he does not speak of his view of eschatology often in this book. Nonetheless, the premillennial dispensationalist believes that in the end of the earthly kingdom of a thousand years, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, so that God will be all in all. Christ will no longer be King. Christ will no longer have the preeminence.

This work is misnamed in another way when it is subtitled "A Commentary on Colossians." It is a commentary only in the sense that the comments are loosely connected with and somewhat based on Colossians. This book does not give clear or insightful exposi-

tion of the text of Scripture. The concepts in the passages are not even defined, as a rule, and the explanation of the text is skimpy at best. I would describe this more as an anecdotal walk through Colossians. The work is short on explanation, long on stories more or less connected with the various passages of Scripture. It is evidently intended to impress upon the reader the importance of making Christ first in his life.

Reformed pastors should take note that this is the kind of material found in Christian bookstores. While the title might be attractive and give the appearance of being Reformed, it is misleading, and it will not build up the members of their flocks in the Reformed faith. Even more seriously, this book robs Christ of the true God-given preeminence even while it claims to be setting forth the same. ■

Saving Grace, by John Cheeseman. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. 136pp. + viii. Paper, \$7.99. [Reviewed by Russell J. Dykstra.]

This work is a revision of *The Grace of God in the Gospel*, published in 1972. The book arose out of the fact that the author was disturbed "by certain man-centred emphases

which had invaded the thinking and practice of evangelical Christians, undermining the biblical gospel of the grace of God" (p. vii). John Cheeseman is quick to point out that he believes "both in the absolute sovereignty of God *and* in the clear scriptural commands to preach the gospel" (p. viii). Thus the work is somewhat polemical, intending to set forth the truth of sovereign grace, pointing out some of the ways in which the doctrines of grace are being compromised. At the same time, he will maintain emphatically the calling to do evangelism.

This book has many good and commendable aspects, and for the most part, it was a delight to read. The author sets forth the sovereignty of God, and particularly in the salvation of man. Consider his description of the gospel. It is

a proclamation of divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment.... The gospel tells of the glorious triumph of God's life-giving, free and saving grace over the will of man.... This grace is that free and unmerited favour of God to sinners, by which God the Father loved us and had mercy upon us; by which the

Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to die for our sins; and by which the Holy Spirit called us and drew us out of darkness into God's marvelous light (pp. 7-8).

Again he writes,

The gospel we find in the Bible is concerned with God. It seeks to glorify Him, and Him alone (pp. 8-9).

Cheeseman is emphatic about the sovereignty of God. God is the "sovereign Creator of all things" (p. 9). He affirms that God "'works all things according to the counsel of His will' (Eph. 1:11), not out of necessity, but freely for His own glory" and "to that perfect will, all things, and all men are subject" (p. 9). Also the sins of men are subject to that will and to the providence of God, though that "in no way lessens man's responsibility for his sin" (p. 10).

As to the state of natural man, Cheeseman insists that man is "totally fallen" as a result of Adam's fall (p. 21). "Every man, woman and child born into this world, with the exception of our Lord, is a slave to sin ... and dead in sin,... [and] sins in all things" (p. 23). Not only

that, but man has a corrupt nature (p. 24).

Cheeseman rejects the notion that fallen man has a free will. He writes that "man's will, like every other part of him, is depraved, and *in bondage to sin*" (p. 25). Thus man's will "is 'free' only to sin" (p. 25). He recommends Luther's *Bondage of the Will* on the question (p. 52).

The salvation of man, therefore, is not a cooperative effort between God and man; it is rather God's work. Every Reformed believer will appreciate this emphasis in this book. Cheeseman writes (p. 32):

It is evident, then, that, far from the Lord Jesus Christ waiting patiently and impotently at the door of our life for us to make up our minds to let him in, if left to our 'free-will' we would be forever lost and no-one would be saved. Yet God, in His mercy *delivers, saves*, sinners from that death, by drawing them to Himself. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, a work of *irresistible grace*, an *effectual call*, by which a man embraces the salvation Christ has won for him and by which he is truly born again of the

Spirit of God. 'No one can come to Me' (because of his hardness of heart, and sinful unwillingness) 'unless the Father who sent Me draws him' (John 6:44).

Later this exclamation point is added to the above – "The doctrines of irresistible grace and of God's unconditional election destroy free will" (p. 41).

The work points out that God demands repentance and faith in Christ, but "repentance and faith are gifts of God and they *follow*, but do not precede, the new birth" (p. 35).

The next crucial doctrine of concern is the atonement of Christ on the cross, or to be more specific, for whom did Christ die? About this, too, Cheeseman affirms the biblical (and thus Reformed) position. He writes, "I hold that the atonement described in Scripture is *particular* – the Lord Jesus Christ died specifically for the elect, as their representative and substitute, to secure their salvation." He adds, "Christ died for His church, and not for the sins of each and every individual" (p. 72).

Cheeseman does not waver in this crucial point. The

atonement did not merely make salvation possible for men, it effectually redeemed and saved those chosen by God. He answers the various charges raised against this, and explains the texts that are usually brought up (e.g., John 3:16, I John 2:1-2, etc.). He maintains that it is wrong to preach "Christ died for you" (p. 84). The atonement is particular, and even personal, so that the believer (and only the believer) can say with Paul, "The Son of God ... loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20) (p. 85).

Consistent with this, the author maintains that those who are saved are unchangeably saved – they cannot be lost.

The books criticisms of the "modern gospel" are accurate and devastating (Chapter 6 – Another Gospel). He summarizes (p. 98):

Jesus is presented as a loving but impotent figure, standing and knocking outside the door of our lives. There is only one door-handle, on the inside, where the sinner alone can control it. The feeling excited is pity: "He has done so much for you; will you not now open the door to Him and allow Him to bless you

with His salvation?" This leads the hearer to feel that he has done God a favor by agreeing to believe!

The true gospel is most humbling to man, and the unity of believers is that they see their own unworthiness and rejoice in the saving work of God. This salvation also motivates the believer to declare the good news of salvation. Evangelism, true evangelism, is the result. The author affirms the need to preach the gospel promiscuously. Not only so, but the gospel is to be preached with confidence, for God is sovereign, and His word does not return void (pp. 117-118)!

This is refreshing! Few books today affirm the truths of sovereign grace so forcefully and unapologetically.

While all that is true, the book has several flaws in its doctrine. These flaws are so serious that they may well corrupt the main teaching of the book. One serious error is the author's contention that God has two kinds of love. On the one hand, God is "loving and kind" to all (p. 11). This is the love that God has as Creator, and according to which He provides for the needs of all men (p. 58). In this sense

the love of God is “universal” (p. 58). On the other hand, there is a “deeper,” saving love (p. 11). This love of God as Redeemer is particular, for the elect (p. 58).

In harmony with this “universal” love, the book (briefly) alludes to a “common grace,” which is defined as “the work of the Holy Spirit in restraining men from sin and in leading them to do good, which extends to all men” (p. 28). It is “not the same as saving grace” (p. 29). Not only that, but it is maintained that “the good which results is in spite of the sinner’s corrupt nature” and is “not acceptable to God” because the good deeds “are without the only motives with which God is pleased – love to God and humble faith in Christ (Heb. 11:6)” (p. 29).

It is most unfortunate that the author does not consistently maintain sovereign, particular love and grace, but allows for a common love and grace to all men. It is appreciated that he does not promote two wills in God, that God supposedly loves and wills to save all, and yet loves some men more than others and does save the “some.” Yet his allowance for a com-

mon grace and love is not consistent with the rest of his, to say nothing of the Bible’s, teaching on sovereign grace and particular love. The question must be faced: If God loves all, why does He not save all? And, Can there truly be two kinds of love and two kinds of grace in God? In addition, what is the basis for the “common grace”? God has favor on His elect exactly because of the cross of Christ. If God has favor on all men, upon what is that based? The conclusion of nearly every supporter of common grace is that this grace is one of the benefits of the cross that flow to all men. In some sense of the word, therefore, Christ died for all men. However, that leads inevitably to the swamp of Arminianism. I would contend that it is impossible to maintain sovereign, particular love and grace on the one hand, and a common and universal love, on the other hand. History has demonstrated that fact repeatedly. The church will not be able to keep it straight – the universal love of the Creator for all His creatures is still love.

The author does not escape the contamination of Arminianism. He maintains that there is a “free offer to all of

salvation" (p.52) It is, in fact, "God's universal offer of salvation" (p. 82). Sometimes it appears that he might be using the term "free offer" in the sense of a "presentation of Christ, with the call to repent and believe in Christ." With that every Reformed believer would agree, though one might take issue with the appropriateness of the term "free offer," due to the use of the term by Arminians. Yet, what the author intends is not sufficiently clear. Ironically, although Cheeseman rejects the possibility of contradictions in theology (p. 60) and affirms without embarrassment the need to be logical (p. 62), when he arrives at this apparent contradiction, he resorts to the worn-out device of "mystery." He writes: "It is indeed a mystery which we cannot understand that God sincerely offers the gospel of salvation freely to all, while He has purposed to save only those whom He has chosen. Yet we are to believe both, for Scripture teaches both" (p. 54).

One of the problems manifested in the book is a lack of clarity at certain points. This is true in the use of the words "will" or "willing" or even "desire." When these are applied to God

and the matter of salvation, it is not always clear what the author means. It could refer to the will of God's command, namely, that He commands all men to repent and believe and turn to Him. Or it could refer to the will of God's decree – that He has willed that all men repent and believe, and therefore strives to attain that goal. I think that the author meant "will" in the sense of command, but the author could clear this up by being more explicit.

Secondly, there is a lack of clarity concerning the relationship between faith and salvation. Due to this lack of clarity, someone could argue that the author maintains that faith comes first, and then one is (i.e., gets) saved by using his faith. That would leave room for works in man's salvation, which the author otherwise clearly rejects. An example of this lack of clarity is found in the statement: "Faith is the holding out to God of empty hands in order to receive the white robes of salvation with which God has promised to clothe all who believe in His Son" (pp. 36-37). This statement could be rightly understood, I suppose, as referring to the appropriation of the blessings of salvation by faith. How-

ever, throughout the book there is no reference to faith as a bond that connects the elect sinner to Christ. Had that been made plain, there would be no confusion. Faith that connects the elect sinner to Christ is the work of God that becomes the “life-line” through which all the blessings of salvation flow to the believer. Faith becomes active in the believer, obviously, but only after one has been saved. The difference is between faith

as a part of salvation, on the one hand, and faith as a condition (i.e., as pre-requisite) unto salvation, on the other hand.

In many ways, therefore, the book offers much enjoyable reading. It rejects the Arminian gospel so prevalent today and promotes the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of sovereign grace. One could only wish that sovereign, particular grace was consistently maintained. ■

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