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# PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

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# Editor's Notes

During the first two weeks of July 2002, Rev. Ronald Cammenga, pastor of the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan, the undersigned, and their wives were in Brisbane, Australia representing the Protestant Reformed Churches at a conference sponsored by the Evangelical Reformed Church of Australia. A number of worthwhile papers were presented at this conference. In this issue we are publishing the last installment of Pastor Lau Chin Kwee's paper, *The Serious Call of the Gospel*, which paper he presented at the Conference. We also publish in full Rev. Christopher J. Connors' paper and the first installment of one of the two papers the Rev. Mark L. Shand presented at the conference. In future issues we hope to publish all of the papers presented and discussed at this very profitable, edifying conference held in that beautiful part of God's creation called "down-under." Though the reader lacks the give and take of the discussions that we enjoyed after each paper was read, we believe he/she will be blessed by these insightful studies.

Professor Dykstra gives the second installment of his series comparing the exegesis of John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas. The professor points out that these giants part ways on the place and authority of the church in exegesis. Aquinas' purpose in exegesis was to defend the dogmas of the Church (Roman Catholic), while Calvin's purpose in writing his commentaries was to stimulate as much use of the Bible by the common people as possible. In this way, Calvin sought to edify the church by his exegetical work. Prof. Dykstra concludes this installment by commenting on the method and style of the exegesis of these men.

Undersigned continues his exposition of the Epistle to Titus.

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# Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting

## An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (6)

Robert D. Decker

*Once more we remind the reader that this exposition of the Epistle to Titus was originally given in the form of "chapel talks" by the author during the weekly Wednesday morning chapel services at the seminary. The author began the exposition in the 1997-1998 school year and completed the series during the second semester of the 1999-2000 school year. The 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.*

*This installment is a bit more brief than those in preceding issues because we have at the moment quite a surplus of copy. A nice problem for an editor to have, I might add. For this reason I conclude somewhat arbitrarily with verse ten.*

### Chapter Two Verse 6

The younger men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

It may appear at first glance that Scripture has very little to say to the young men of the church. The inspired apostle has just finished rather detailed exhortations regarding the callings and responsibilities of the aged men and especially of the aged women in the church. Now, in verse six, there is just one brief exhortation to the young men. This, however, is not the case, as is evident from the Holy Spirit's use of "likewise"<sup>1</sup> (the A. V.'s translation), or "in the same manner." In other words, just as Titus must in his preaching and teaching exhort the aged men, the aged women, and the younger women, so in that same manner must he exhort the younger men. This means, therefore, that the younger men must be exhorted to be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. Their behavior, too, must be in harmony with holiness and all the rest.

But Titus, the preacher, must especially exhort the young men to be sober minded. The infinitive "to be sober minded" is the same verb the Holy Spirit used in verse four with reference to the young women. In that verse the A.V. translated that verb "to be sober."<sup>2</sup> The verb simply means: "to curb one's appetites, to be moderate, to be disciplined." One could even translate it, "to have one's senses about him." This word has a rather broad application. The idea is that the young men must be exhorted by the preacher to live soberly, i.e., moderately. They must live a disciplined life of godliness. The young men must live sanctified lives based on and as a fruit of the true doctrine of the Word of God.

### Verse 7

In this verse and verse eight the apostle inserts an exhortation to Titus concerning how he is to conduct himself as a preacher. The text reads as follows:

Concerning (A.V. has "In")<sup>3</sup> all things showing (presenting) thy-

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1. The Greek is *hoosautoos*.

2. The infinitive is *soophroonein*. Either translation is acceptable.

3. The Greek proposition is *peri*.

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self an example of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity.<sup>4</sup>

“In, or concerning, all things” means in all spheres or concerning every aspect of his life: in the church, in the home, in his recreation, in everything Titus must show himself to be or present himself to the people of God under his spiritual care an example of good works. There is more to the ministry than preaching and teaching the Word! Preaching is the main aspect of the minister’s calling, obviously! Preaching is that simply because it is the chief means of grace. It is that aspect, therefore, on which every other aspect of the minister’s work depends. But Titus must also be an example of good works to the believers!

That ministers, ruling elders, and deacons too for that matter, are to be examples of good works to the believers among whom they work is a dominant theme in Scripture. Especially is this so in the New Testament! Officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons) must be exemplary Christians. But this applies more particularly to the ministers of the Word. They must be examples, patterns, models<sup>5</sup> of good works.

Good works are, as the Heidelberg Catechism explains, the fruit of faith, works performed in obedience to God’s law, and works done to God’s glory (Q. 91). The Catechism also teaches the necessity of our doing good works. We, though delivered from our misery merely of grace through Christ, must do good works because: Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit; everyone may be assured of his faith by the fruits thereof (good works); and by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ (Q. 86, 87).

It is very important that the minister teach God’s people by his preaching of the Word, but also that he teach them by a daily walk in all good works. If the minister’s preaching is not adorned by an exemplary life, it is rendered ineffective! The minister by

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4. Some manuscripts do not have *aphtharsian*, which is “sincerity” or incorruptness.”

5. The Greek term is *tupoi*.

ungodly living loses all credibility and becomes a stumbling block and an offence to the members of the congregation. What is even worse, such a minister brings shame to the holy name of Jesus, who, after all, is the Head of the church, which is His body!

God's people must see in us who are ministers and in you students when you become ministers what is involved in serving the Lord as a husband, a father, and a faithful servant of the Lord and His precious, blood-bought people. You students and we professors with you must give ourselves over to this. And, note well, God's people are and will continue to be watching how we conduct ourselves!

The apostle continues the exhortation by getting specific. The minister must show himself a pattern of good works, "in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity...." Doctrine is the teaching or instruction of the Word of God. In the doctrine of the Word, the minister must show himself to be uncorrupt. There must be no corruptness in his doctrinal teachings. His teachings must not be liable to decay; they must be imperishable.<sup>6</sup>

This simply means his teaching must be pure, free from the corruption of error and false teaching. For us in the Reformed tradition this certainly means we must teach the truth of Holy Scripture as that truth is summed in the Reformed confessions. Still more, we must teach that truth of Scripture as summed in the Reformed confessions as that is by God's grace and mercy "taught here in this christian church!" This means we must teach that Reformed truth as it is taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches and her sister churches, the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore!

If you men are not committed fully to teaching, preaching, and maintaining that truth, do not pursue the ministry in our churches. You must be examples in doctrine of uncorruptness.

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6. The Greek term is *aphthorian*.

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## Verse 8

The apostle continues the exhortation to Titus in verse eight:

Sound speech which cannot be condemned (censured): in order that he who is opposed may be ashamed, having nothing wicked (base, evil) to say of us (or "of you.")<sup>7</sup>

In this verse, as noted above, the apostle continues the thought of verse seven. Titus is exhorted to show himself an example, a pattern of good works. In doctrine he must show uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity. Now, in verse eight, the apostle adds "sound speech." "Sound speech" must be understood in this sense, viz., the teaching of Titus, i.e., the doctrine which he preaches, must not deviate in any way from the truth of Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Let us be reminded once more that this has specific and precise meaning for us today as preachers and those who aspire to that office. We must speak and teach the truth which is: 1) revealed and preserved in the inspired, holy, and infallible Scriptures; 2) the truth of Scripture which is interpreted and summed in the Reformed confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession of Faith, Canons of Dordt 1618-'19, and the Westminster Standards); 3) the truth of Scripture summed in the confessions as that truth is taught in our churches.

Sound speech in doctrine teaches the truth about God, for God is the God of all truth! "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity in the likeness of our flesh, is the truth, for Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit poured out into the church by the exalted Christ is the Spirit of Truth. He reminds God's people of all that Jesus taught us. The Holy Spirit leads us, by means of the Word of God which He inspired, into all the truth (John 14-17, Acts 1, 2).

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7. For two reasons the reading "of you" is to be preferred. This is the translation of the A.V., and the exhortation is directed to Titus, not to the congregation.

8. The Greek word translated "sound" is *hugiees*.



That same sound speech which teaches the truth concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit also teaches the truth concerning man. Sound speech teaches the truth about man's creation, his fall into sin, his total depravity, his salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, God's gift, his calling to love God and the neighbor according to God's law. Sound speech simply teaches the entire, beautiful truth of Scripture.

That sound speech cannot be condemned or censured. There is an important point here which must not escape our attention. When our speech as ministers does not deviate from the truth of Scripture as briefly explained above, then it cannot be condemned or censured. It can be opposed, it can be criticized, and it can be rejected. That, in fact, is precisely what the unbeliever does with that sound speech. But what the unbeliever is not able to do is either condemn or censure God's truth! In fact, by his unbelieving rejection of the sound speech, he makes himself worthy of condemnation!

The speech of Titus and of every other faithful minister of the gospel will be sound and true and unable to be condemned or censured when it conveys the truth of Scripture!

The inspired apostle states the purpose in the last part of the text: "...in order that he who is opposed (the A.V. has "he that is of the contrary part") may be ashamed, having nothing wicked (base, evil)<sup>9</sup> to say of you." When Titus or any other faithful preacher speaks the truth of Scripture, he will face opponents. Always there are those, not only outside of the church, but also members of the church, who set themselves against the truth. Enemies these are of the faith! But when Titus and the faithful preachers speak the truth which cannot be condemned or censured, these opponents cannot point to a single statement and say, "That's wicked, that's base, that's evil." For them to do so would be to say that God's Word is wicked, evil, or base. That is blasphemy!

Hence, in their opposition to the sound speech of the faithful minister, the enemies of the faith bring shame and disgrace upon themselves. And, as we have said, they stand condemned on

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9. The Greek term is *phaulos*.

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account of their rejection of the truth! It's not the faithful minister, but the unbelieving opponent, who is ashamed!

Faithful ministers of the Word confess with Paul the apostle, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, the Jew first, but also the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

### Verse 9

Having finished addressing Titus concerning his own life and his calling to be a good example to the believers, the apostle now instructs him concerning the calling of servants.

Servants (slaves)<sup>10</sup> exhort to be subject (A.V. has "obedient") to their own masters ("despots"),<sup>11</sup> to be well-pleasing in everything, not speaking against (A.V. has "answering again");<sup>12</sup>

We need to understand that the text is not speaking of servants (hired by employers and paid for services or work), but of slaves. These are owned, so that they are the property of their masters. Scripture does not condemn the practice of owning slaves. That the Bible does not condemn slavery must not be viewed as a phenomenon determined by the culture of the days during which the New Testament was written. We all know that in the culture of the Roman Empire in those days, slavery was common and an accepted practice. Many in our day argue that if the New Testament were written in our day, it would surely consider slavery a grievous error and a terrible injustice. God Himself does not condemn the practice.

The Lord, however, does have plenty to say in the inspired Scriptures as to how slaves are to conduct themselves toward their masters and how masters are to treat their slaves.<sup>13</sup> In the verse before us, slaves are exhorted to be obedient to their own masters!

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10. The Greek term is *doulos*.

11. The Greek term is *despotees*.

12. The Greek verb is *anti-legoo*.

13. See, e.g., Ephesians 6:5-9 and the Epistle to Philemon.

We correctly translated “masters” as “despots” (see footnote 11). Concerning this Greek term, Thayer has this to say,

“...strictly the correlative of slave, *doulos*, and hence denoted absolute ownership and uncontrolled power; *kurios* (invariably translated “lord” in the New Testament, RDD), had a wider meaning, applicable to the various ranks and relations of life, and not suggestive either of property or of absolutism.”<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, therefore, these masters had absolute ownership and control over these slaves.

Yet Scripture exhorts the slaves to be obedient to their despots. That verb “obedient” means to arrange under, to subordinate, to put in subjection, or to yield to the despot’s orders!<sup>15</sup> This is the slave’s calling. The only exception to this rule would be if the master demanded of his slave something contrary to God’s law. In that event the slave would need to obey God rather than men. Let it be understood, however, even in this case the slave may not rebel or flee. He would have to suffer whatever unjust consequences his master might inflict on him. Joseph in Potiphar’s house is an example in this regard. Joseph’s refusal of Potiphar’s wife’s sinful advances landed him in prison!

Slaves must please their masters well “in everything,” save the one exception just noted! Pleasing the masters well is doing that which is acceptable, and what is acceptable is willing submission to the master.

Still more, what is acceptable is “not answering again.” This is a rather graphic expression, which literally means “to speak against” (see footnote 12). The idea is that the slave must not oppose himself to his master. He must not decline to obey him, refuse to have anything to do with the master, or declare himself to be against his master. The slave must not do this! Obedient submission means the slave will be well pleasing in everything and he will not oppose his master.

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14. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), p. 130.

15. The Greek verb is *upo-tassoo*.

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## Verse 10

The apostle continues his explanation of what is involved in the slaves pleasing well their masters,

Not purloining (embezzling), but showing (demonstrating, proving) all good faithfulness; in order that they may adorn the teaching (doctrine) of our Savior God in everything.”

Being in subjection to their own masters means “not purloining.” This verb means “to set apart for oneself, to withdraw covertly, to appropriate for oneself,” or, in plain words, “to embezzle.”<sup>16</sup> In order to understand this we need to remember that in those days one of the slaves often managed his master’s business affairs. Given his position as a penniless slave who was totally at the mercy of his master, he might very well be tempted to take secretly what did not belong to him. This, the apostle writes, the slave must not do.

But, and here the contrast is great, for the Holy Spirit uses the strongest of the Greek adversatives, the slave must in all his work for the master and in all his life under the authority of his master demonstrate all good fidelity, or faithfulness.<sup>17</sup> He must be honest and upright. The slave must have his master’s welfare and best interests at heart and be faithful and loyal to his master. The slave must neither say nor do anything whatsoever which might raise even the slightest suspicion that he is less than faithful. And certainly the slave must not contradict his master or appropriate for himself that which properly belongs to his master.

The purpose of these injunctions to the slaves is stated in the last clause of the text, “in order that they (the slaves) may adorn the teaching of our Savior God in everything.”<sup>18</sup> The verb means “to adorn, to decorate, to heighten the attractiveness” of the doctrine or teaching of our Savior God.

We may be brief at this point because we have treated this

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16. The Greek verb is *nosphizoo*.

17. The adversative is *alla*.

18. *Hina*, with the subjunctive *kosmoosin*.

concept earlier. The teaching or doctrine of our Savior God is the doctrine which is revealed in Holy Scripture. That is God's teaching. That which God teaches us He causes us to appropriate with understanding minds and believing hearts through the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in us.

Still more, the text emphasizes that God is our Savior. And the teaching that God through the Holy Spirit preserved in Scripture concerns Himself, the Sovereign, covenant-making, and covenant-keeping God, who has saved us from our sin and death through the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That teaching or doctrine is made attractive by God's people regardless of their station in life, whether bond or free, when they are obedient to the Lord's will. But this text is addressed to those people of God who are slaves. When they live in obedience to God's will by being pleasing to their masters, not speaking against them, not embezzling, demonstrating all good fidelity or faithfulness to their masters, the beauty and glory of God are displayed in their sanctified lives! Thus they adorn the teaching of God our Savior in all things. ●

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# **A Comparison of Exegesis: John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas (2)**

**Russell J. Dykstra**

The value of examining the exegesis of Aquinas and Calvin is found in the reality that both men are not only theological giants, they are also respected exegetes in the Roman Catholic and in the Reformed traditions respectively. Both Aquinas and Calvin were preachers who wrote numerous commentaries on Scripture. A comparative study will reveal that while many similarities exist in the exegesis of Calvin and of Aquinas, yet significant differences appear which must be attributed to the distinct impact of the Reformation. Eventually, specific specimens of exegesis from Ephesians will be examined in order to compare and contrast the exegesis of Calvin and Aquinas. However, our first article began to set forth the exegetical principles and methods of both men, so far as these principles can be known.

Since the hermeneutical rules followed by any given exegete are inseparably connected with his view of Scripture, we began by comparing Calvin's and Aquinas' writings on Scripture itself. From a formal point of view, these men have nearly identical views of Scripture, in that both receive the Bible as the Word of God. As a result, both exegetes insist that the words of Scripture are important. One evident difference between them is that while Calvin stays close to the literal text and shuns allegorizing, Aquinas allows for different senses of meaning in a text (as many as four) and is given to some allegorizing.

Another significant issue which must be addressed is the matter of exegetical freedom. This concerns, for example, the relationship between tradition and Scripture, as well as the authority of the church over exegesis. The exegete's view on these questions determines much about the final product of his exegesis.

## Scripture and Other Authorities

On the place and authority of the church in exegesis, Calvin and Aquinas part ways. Aquinas is bound by the authority of the church. This influence/authority is threefold. First, much of his lecturing was on the *glosses* of Scripture, which had come down through the ages.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, these glosses found their way into the exegesis of Aquinas.

In addition, the patristic fathers carry great weight in Aquinas' exegesis. In fact, one of his more popular works is a running commentary on the four gospels in which he merely compiles numerous quotations from the fathers.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, the church itself has the final say in the interpretation of Scripture. Although the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope was not officially established by Rome until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, a powerful and longstanding tradition held that the pope's judgment in matters of doctrine was decisive. Already in 416, Pope Innocent I wrote to the bishops in North Africa, "...you have strengthened the vigor of your religion...with true reason, for you have confirmed that reference must be made to our judgment, realizing what is due the Apostolic See...."<sup>3</sup> Although the bishops of North Africa rejected his presumption, this did not stop the next pope (Zosimus) from writing to the same bishops a year later that "...the tradition of the Fathers has attributed such great authority to the Apostolic See that no one would dare to disagree wholly with its judgments...."<sup>4</sup> By

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1. Especially two were the standard textbooks in the medieval period – the *Glossa Ordinaria*, mainly the work of Anselm of Laon, and Peter Lombard's expansion of that, called the *Magna glosatura*. Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 13ff.

2. *Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia*, ed. A. Guarienti (Turin: Marietti, 1953), 2 vols., English translation: *Catena Aurea (The Golden Chain): Commentary on the Four Gospels collected out of the Works of the Fathers* (Oxford: Parker, 1870), 6 vols.

3. Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Translated by Roy J. Deferrari from the Thirtieth Edition of Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 44.

4. Denzinger, *Catholic Dogma*, p. 47.

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the thirteenth century the pope had cemented his position as the head of the church and as the final interpreter of Scripture.

In addition, Thomas Aquinas was a part of the medieval scholastic tradition. The scholastics of the Middle Ages are difficult to characterize. Nonetheless, this can be said of them, generally, that they combined philosophy and theology and pressed both into the service of the church. Aquinas, like other theologians of his day, virtually equates theology with Scripture. In the first Question of his *Summa* "the two expressions 'sacred doctrine' and 'Sacred Scripture' are used alternatively, as equivalents."<sup>5</sup> Hence, as he expounds Scripture, he is setting forth doctrine, which doctrine must conform to the dogmas of the Church.

For all these reasons, the exegetes of Thomas Aquinas' day did not stray far from the official teaching of the church. Nor did Aquinas. Lamb puts it this way:

This does not imply that St. Thomas advocated *sola scriptura*; he could not abstract the Book from its living environment within ecclesial tradition.... The Church Fathers were the incomparable guides in this positive task of assimilating Christ and his meaning. They never could be rejected in an authentically Christian hermeneutic.<sup>6</sup>

Lamb, himself a Trappist monk, puts this in the best possible light for the modern reader. Nevertheless, if his description of Aquinas' exegesis is correct, Aquinas' exegesis was bound by the Church.

With Calvin, circumstances and attitude are entirely different. It has already been noted that Calvin maintains that the Scriptures are authoritative in all areas of life, which authority is not dependent on the church. He also rejects Rome's claim of authority over the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Calvin demands exegetical freedom in relation to other great theologians,

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5. De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I, p.27.

6. Lamb, Introduction to *Commentary on Ephesians*, pp. 19, 20.

7. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Tyler: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), p. 103.



even so great a theologian as Martin Luther. He responds in that connection to objections from a certain Francis Burkhard as follows:

There remains the other charge, that I do not everywhere subscribe to Luther's interpretations. But now, if each interpreter is not permitted in individual places in Scripture to put forward what he thinks, into what sort of slavery shall we not sink back? No, if I am not allowed anywhere to dissent from Luther's judgment, it would be absurd and ridiculous to take up the office of interpreting.<sup>8</sup>

Calvin would not be bound by the exegesis of any other man, no matter how he might respect the man as a theologian (as he assuredly did esteem Luther).

Calvin exercises freedom also in the use of the patristic fathers. Parker describes the role of these fathers in Calvin's commentaries as being that of a partnership, not one of domination. Calvin carries on a "dialogue with the immediate and more distant past," but is free to state his own conclusions.<sup>9</sup>

David Steinmetz captures accurately the relationship of Calvin to the patristic fathers. On the one hand,

Calvin does not use the Fathers in the way a medieval commentator used his ancient authorities. The Fathers are not cited by Calvin in his exegesis...because he agrees with them and needs their authority to strengthen his argument. Nor does he cite them because their teaching is binding on him and forecloses in advance the range of his exegetical options.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, Calvin speaks of the value "of the ancients who have, by their piety, learning, holiness, and also by their age, gained so much authority that we ought to despise nothing of what they have adduced."<sup>11</sup> Steinmetz insists that Calvin uses these

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8. Quoted by Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 199.

9. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, pp. 198, 202.

10. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, p. 136.

11. Calvin's letter to Simon Grynaes, the dedicatory epistle to his commentary on Romans.

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fathers to stimulate his reflections on the text, particularly with ideas not found in more contemporary commentators, but he adds, "Nevertheless, they do not have the last word. Paul does."<sup>12</sup>

One would expect that Calvin would be less influenced by philosophy than Aquinas, and this is the case. Although neither of the men would call upon a philosopher as the final authority, Aquinas believes that "sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason," even if only for "extrinsic and probable arguments."<sup>13</sup>

Although Calvin does not call upon philosophers as supporting authorities, he does use them for purposes of illustration. He notes that "the truth is vindicated in opposition to every doubt, when, unsupported by foreign aid, it has its sole sufficiency in itself." He contrasts the writings of Demosthenes, Cicero, Plato, Aristotle, "or any other of that class" with Scripture. The former will, he admits, cause one to "feel wonderfully allured, pleased, moved, enchanted." But Scripture will "pierce your heart" because it contains "a truth divine, a something which makes it immeasurably superior."<sup>14</sup>

### **The Purpose of Exegesis**

One additional element of exegesis must be discussed before turning to the respective exegetical methods and styles, that is, the goal and purpose for expounding Scripture. No doubt, an exegete's purpose will affect the actual commentary produced. Aquinas writes far less than Calvin on the topic of exegesis itself, and does not, so far as we could determine, express his views on this matter. Perhaps his answer would be simply that it is the Word of God and ought to be explained for the benefit of man, for he does maintain that "Sacred Scripture is divinely ordered to this: that through it, the truth necessary for salvation may be made known to us."<sup>15</sup> Yet

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12. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, p. 136.

13. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 8.

14. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, 8, 1.

15. *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 7.6.1, ed. R. Spiazzi (Turin: Marietti, 1956), p. 146.

it will be evident that Aquinas uses the exposition of Scripture to defend the dogmas of the Church.

On the other hand, Calvin is much more explicit on this score. It is evident that he set his mind to produce as many commentaries as he could in his lifetime, having in mind already this desire in 1539 when he wrote in his Epistle to the Reader attached to the *Institutes*, "if I shall hereafter publish any commentaries on Scripture."<sup>16</sup> In addition, in his dedication of the commentaries on the catholic epistles, written to King Edward of England in 1551, Calvin makes this significant comment, "I, indeed, have in an especial manner resolved to devote myself to this work [of writing commentaries], as long as I live, whenever time and opportunity shall be afforded me."<sup>17</sup>

Many have proposed explanations for Calvin's energetic writing of commentaries, but the simplest and most logical is that of W. De Greef: "Early on it appeared that Calvin wished to stimulate as much use of the Bible by the common people as possible."<sup>18</sup> This follows from Calvin's firm conviction of *sola Scriptura* for doctrine, for walk, for faith, and for the regulation of the church.

Thus Calvin's motive for writing commentaries was, first of all, to benefit the church. In the above mentioned dedication to King Edward, Calvin writes that "the Church to which I belong shall thus receive the fruit of this labour...of writing [commentaries]."<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, and closely related to the above, commenting on Scripture is for the edification of the church.<sup>20</sup> Exegesis is never an end in itself.

Thirdly, Calvin desires to set the Scriptures free from the perversions of the Church of Rome. Writing to King Edward, Calvin blames the troubles and errors of Rome on her departure

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16. Quoted in Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 10.

17. *Calvin's commentaries*. Vol. 22, p. xx.

18. de Greef, *Writings of Calvin*, p. 90.

19. *Calvin's commentaries*. Vol. 22, p. xx.

20. Kraus, "Exegetical Principles," p. 11.

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from Scripture. He reassures the faithful "that nothing is more firm or certain than the teaching of Scripture." Yet, since the true meaning of Scripture is deformed by the "Sophists" and obscured by the "rabble of the Pope," he adds that "it behoves us to be more intent on the restoration of its brightness."<sup>21</sup>

Finally, in all his exegesis Calvin's goal is to find "Christ in it. Anyone who deviates from this may labor and study all his life, but he will not come to a knowledge of the truth."<sup>22</sup>

### Method and Style

Having examined the exegetical principles underlying the exegesis of Calvin and of Aquinas, as well as some of the implications involved, we must yet observe the techniques of these exegetes, that is to say, the manner in which they worked with Scripture and the style of their commentaries.

First, as to the use of the language, in his exegesis Calvin deals with philology, grammar, and figures of rhetoric. François Wendel is convinced that this rather scientific method is the fruit of Calvin's humanism.<sup>23</sup> No doubt it is true that Calvin's humanist training prepared him well for his life's calling, and that he presses into the service of exegesis also what is of use from that training. It should also be noted, however, that these same activities are perfectly in harmony with his high view of Scripture, and the emphasis on the literal meaning.

Calvin pays particular attention to the *words* of Scripture. Before beginning to comment, he engages in textual criticism to obtain the correct reading of the Greek or Hebrew text, and then translates the passage into Latin. Calvin seeks the particular meaning of the individual word. "For help in philology Calvin will go to Bude chiefly, to Erasmus and Bucer certainly, perhaps also to Melancthon."<sup>24</sup>

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21. *Calvin's commentaries*. Vol. 22, pp. xix-xx.

22. Kraus, "Exegetical Principles," p. 17.

23. Wendel, François. *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, translated by Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), pp. 31ff.

24. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 194.

In the end, however, the context is the final court of appeal. Parker asserts that the context is "all-important" for determining the meaning of the words.

Individual words or clauses are not allowed any eccentricity; they are controlled by the context. Conversely, the meaning of the context is understood by the interrelationship of the meanings of the individual parts. Hence these parts are to be interpreted only in relationship to the other parts.<sup>25</sup>

Calvin learned the importance of this from experience. Arguing against the Anabaptist position, he observes that "there are many passages of Scripture whose meaning depends on their peculiar position."<sup>26</sup>

Concerning the use of language, it must be pointed out that Aquinas is at a distinct disadvantage in comparison with Calvin, for Aquinas did not have a working knowledge of either the Hebrew or the Greek. In his exegesis, therefore, he is dependent on the Latin, and the Latin Bible he uses is the Vulgate. Lamb notes that Aquinas did have concordances and dictionaries at his disposal.<sup>27</sup> O'Meara asserts that Aquinas' "theology of the biblical text pays attention to how different writings explored the same word and the same theme, and experts see here signs of his employment of a concordance."<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, Farrar is obviously less than impressed with Aquinas' linguistic skills. He complains that

a large part of his method consists in the ingenious juxtaposition of passages of which the verbal similarity depends only upon the Vulgate. From these imaginary identities of expression, by a method which seems to have survived from the days of Hillel, he deduces systems extremely ingenious but utterly without foundation.<sup>29</sup>

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25. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, p. 193.

26. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 16, 23. See also III, 17, 14.

27. Lamb, Introduction to *Commentary on Ephesians*, pp. 20, 21.

28. O'Meara, *Theologian*, p. 69.

29. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 271.

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Aquinas and Calvin share in this distinction, that both repudiate complicated and verbose commentary on Scripture. O'Meara points out a report of an early biographer of Aquinas that "students flocked to his classroom" already in Aquinas' early lecturing days. "The reason for this success was the terse, clear, and engagingly intelligible style of his lectures."<sup>30</sup> Aquinas' commentaries have the same distinguishing characteristics, namely, they are terse and clear.

This is also a consuming passion of Calvin. It is well documented that Calvin not only loved brevity, but that he strove consciously and deliberately for clarity and brevity in his commentaries.<sup>31</sup> In the dedicatory letter to his commentary on Romans, his first, Calvin unveils the style he determines to use in all his commentaries. Though he recognizes the value of the style of other men, such as Melancthon and Bucer, Calvin rejects their style for himself. He will not (as Bucer) make the commentary long and difficult, lest it be of no value for the ordinary reader. Nor will he include long discussions of theological topics in his commentaries (as did Melancthon), for he fears that the reader may well become bored, and that the various verses will not all be treated. Treatment of topics is reserved for his *Institutes*, he announces already in the Epistle to the Reader in his 1939 Edition.<sup>32</sup> In his commentaries, Calvin strives for a running commentary on all the verses of a given chapter and book. But above all, Calvin insists that a commentary must be *brief* and *clear*!

In harmony with that intent, Calvin makes sparing use of quotations from other commentaries. He exercises extreme self-discipline in his commentaries. Farrar, though no friend of Calvin

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30. O'Meara, *Theologian*, p. 19, quoting Peter Calo, *Fontes vitae S. Thomas Aquinatis auctore Petro Calo*, ed. D. Prummer (Toulouse, 1912), p. 30.

31. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries*, pp. 10ff.; Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, p. 137; and especially Richard Gamble's excellent study, "*Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic*," in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 47 (1985), 1-17.

32. The pertinent part of the Epistle to the Reader is quoted in Parker, *Calvin the Expositor*, pp. 182, 183.

or his doctrine, is nonetheless full of admiration for the style and clarity of his commentaries. He writes,

Nothing can furnish a greater contrast to many helpless commentaries, with their congeries of vacillating variorum annotations heaped together in aimless multiplicity, than the terse and decisive notes of the great Genevan theologian. He was a foe to all vagueness, prolixity, and digression.<sup>33</sup>

Farrar adds that Calvin “never drags his weary reader through a bewildering mass of opinions, of which some are absurd, the majority impossible, and of which all but one must be wrong.”<sup>34</sup>

The actual writing style of Calvin in his commentaries is aided greatly by his humanist training. Wendel insists that it is exactly Calvin’s humanist training that

distinguishes him among all the reformers. In all his works he remains respectful to well-conducted reasoning, to chaste style and good taste. We know that Calvin was one of the best Latinists of the sixteenth century; and when he wrote French, too, his language was of a range and elegance comparable to Pascal’s or Bossuet’s. In refinement of taste he comes very near to Erasmus.<sup>35</sup>

The style of Aquinas, on the other hand, is decidedly different. Aquinas belongs to the Middle Ages; his theology is part of the scholastic era. In fact, C. Spicq considers the “commentaries of St. Thomas on St. John, and especially on St. Paul, [to be] the maturest fruit and the most perfect realization of medieval scholastic exegesis.”<sup>36</sup> His commentaries definitely evidence this —

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33. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 344.

34. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 344.

35. Wendel, *Calvin: Origin and Development*, p. 35.

36. C. Spicq, “Saint Thomas exegète,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. 15-A Col. 695, quoted in Lamb, *Introduction to Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 18.

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they are dialectic, and "the chief ingredient of this approach to the Bible is the omnipresent divisions and subdivisions."<sup>37</sup>

The commentaries of Aquinas do not often receive the high praise that Calvin's do. O. Pesch observes,

The biblical commentaries of Thomas are quite often rather tiresome to read. The text is divided in minute detail, and this sometimes results in a stark analysis which pursues the grammatical and logical connections. Often this is expanded by the exposition of various possible interpretations among which Aquinas does not always decide. Sometimes the commentary becomes a mini-question or an article (as in the ST).<sup>38</sup>

Farrar, highly critical of all scholastic exegesis, maintains that:

Even Thomas of Aquino, with all his nobleness and greatness, profound as a thinker, incomparable as a theologian, is least successful in the interpretation of Scripture. Imbued with the fatal dream of the fourfold sense of Scripture, he is meagre in the explanation of the literal sense, but diffuse in speculative discussions and dialectic developments.<sup>39</sup>

According to Farrar, "neither Greek, nor Arab, nor Jewish learning produced any adequate effect on the exegesis of the Schoolmen. Even in the hands of St. Thomas it is dependent, traditional, unprogressive."<sup>40</sup> This assessment is a serious indictment of Aquinas' exegesis. One expects that Aquinas' exegesis will not be nearly as progressive as that, say, of Calvin, due to the difference in the age and the history that transpired between Aquinas and Calvin. At the same time, one would expect a theologian of Aquinas' genius to advance the understanding of

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37. Lamb, *Introduction to Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 26.

38. O. Pesch, "Um den Plan der Summa Theologiae des hl. Thomas von Aquin," in *Thomas von Aquin*, ed. K. Bernath (Darmstadt, 1978), p. 88, quoted in O'Meara, *Theologian*, p. 70.

39. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 269-270.

40. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, p. 270.



Scripture in his exegesis. And it can be noted that in many other aspects of his work, Aquinas was not afraid to be independent, innovative, and progressive.<sup>41</sup>

Having completed a brief evaluation of the views of Calvin and Aquinas on Scripture and exegesis, we can turn next to a comparison of two passages from their respective commentaries on Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

... to be continued ●

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41. O'Meara claims that, because Aquinas "drew the method of Aristotle into theology, Aquinas was seen in the turbulent world of Paris as an innovator, as an avid, even risky, explorer of new ideas, and as an original creator of syntheses for being and faith." *Theologian*, p. 30.

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# **The Serious Call of the Gospel — Is the Well-Meant Offer One?**

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## **Chapter III**

### ***Is the Well-Meant Offer of Salvation a Serious Call?***

**Lau Chin Kwee**

#### **A. The nature of an offer.**

As it is evident that there has been a change in the use of the term “offer” in the development of theology, or should we say a failure to make sharp distinction of the various usages of this term, it is necessary here to consider how this term is commonly understood and used today, before considering the legitimacy of its usage for the serious call of the gospel.

##### **1. The constituent elements of a well-meant offer.**

We are using the “well-meant offer” to indicate the present day usage of this term “offer.” The well-meant offer has the following essential elements:

###### **a. The availability of the thing offered.**

Now if a man come to us and offer us something either for sale or for an exchange for something else which we might have, our natural understanding would be that he has the thing for us should we decide to accept his offer. So if God offers salvation to anyone on the basis of that man’s fulfilling a certain condition, then He must have that salvation ready for that man should the man decide to accept that offer and fulfill that condition.

- b. The willingness of the owner to part with it.

An offer also suggests that the owner is willing to part with what he offers to another should that condition be fulfilled. If ever there is a fall-through in this transaction, it would not be because the owner was not willing, but because the one to whom he made the offer, for some reason, is either unwilling or unable to fulfill the condition of the offer. In other words, the owner is all ready to close the deal, but the ball is now fully in the court of the one offered.

- c. The favor shown by the owner to those receiving the offer.

When something good is offered to one person rather than to others, it is only natural to consider that some favor is shown, here, to those offered over against others who are not offered. It is evident that the "gospel offer" is not shown to all men that ever live. Is it fair to these neglected ones if salvation is a matter of the offer?

- d. The desire of the owner that those receiving the offer may accept it.

Since this is a well-meant offer, the owner must have the desire that the transaction be closed. If an offer is not closed, it is only because the owner has no power over the free-will of the one offered.

- e. An option given to one receiving the offer.

An offer is not something which carries with it an obligation to accept. In other words, rejecting an offer is not a morally wrong act in itself. One has the option to accept or not to accept.

- f. Condition of prerequisite implied in the well-meant offer.

In a well-meant offer, the realization of the things offered is conditioned upon the acceptance of the offer and the fulfillment of the condition stipulated in the offer. This condition is a condition of prerequisite. If the acceptance of an offer is absent, there is no carrying out of what is offered. An unconditional undertaking is not called an offer, but an unconditional promise.

**2. The well-meant offer is a kind of call** in the sense that it is a communication of thoughts that expects a response from its recipients.

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That there is a call in the gospel proclamation, no one should doubt. It would be a fatal error if all the church could do is simply set forth the truth without the call to believe and submit to it. This would be a church without discipline of its own members, and thus a false church. And when the gospel is brought to those who have never heard it before, should there not also be a call? A call is important.

The well-meant offer is also a type of calling. One need only go to an open market to understand what is the call of a sale-offer. One is sometimes, literally, called into a business talk with another. Then one feels the pressure to respond in some way — “yes” or “no.” The well-meant offer of the gospel and of salvation is a kind of call. Just because it is a call, and the Bible also reveals that the gospel proclamation includes a call, does not mean that the well-meant offer is a legitimate call as prescribed in Scripture.

## **B. Wherein the well-meant offer is not a serious call of the gospel.**

We must now compare the well-meant offer with what we’ve already written about the true call of the gospel, to see if the former is indeed a serious call of the gospel.

**1. The call of God must be sincere,** but in the well-meant offer there is no sincerity.

Now, we are not talking here about the insincerity of Christian believers who preach the gospel using the well-meant offer method. It is possible to do a thing wrongly and ignorantly and yet with sincerity. We are talking about the sincerity of God, if He should issue the well-meant offer of salvation to all.

a. Grace (God’s unmerited favor) is said to be shown to all who hear the gospel, yet the merit of repentance and faith is required for salvation.

Some may object that by the grace shown in the hearing of the gospel they do not mean the saving grace of God, but the common grace of God, which is non-saving. This distinction is the invention of men not found in Scripture, and it confuses God’s people, so that the unmerited character of grace is removed. There is no

comfort of grace if there is a grace of God that does not save. It is by grace that we are saved.

When repentance and faith are demanded as prerequisites for salvation, they become something outside of the pale of salvation and must be met by a man first before God's salvation will start operating in his life. What is demanded becomes meritorious for salvation.

There are those who argue that this faith and repentance are the gifts of God and are part of the salvation benefits that God has purchased for His elect people, as the Canons of Dordt teach. Therefore, they are not the merit attained by those who are saved, but they are earned by Christ Himself on the cross. Indeed, the Canons of Dordt teach that repentance and faith are gifts of God's grace purchased at the cross and flow from the election of God. It is exactly for that reason that the Canons deny that they are conditions as prerequisites for election and salvation.

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended: but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to that of the apostle: "He hath chosen us (not because we were, but) that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).<sup>1</sup>

The will of God to save is never conditioned upon what men would do. God is the sovereign Lord who saves whom He wills by the means which He has appointed. Ours is to seek His mercy and discover His grace, never to put Him in subjection to our will and fancy.

b. God has no intention to save all to whom the gospel comes, as the well-meant offer suggests.

Now, we are not saying that the serious call of the gospel does not call all to whom the gospel comes, to seek salvation in Christ

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1. Canons, Head 1, Article 9.

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by way of their repentance and faith. That has always been man's obligation to do since the Fall in Eden. The gospel makes clear to everyone his calling as a fallen creature. But the well-meant offer speaks of God's intention to save all, provided they all believe. God promised to save all who believe, but He does not offer to save all who would believe. The former exalt God as sovereign, while the latter subject God's will to man's will.

Heppe clearly shows that it is the Reformed faith not to make the outward calling in such a fashion that there is a possibility of the "counsel of God being perhaps rendered futile by man," which evidently the well-meant offer does upon close examination.

Moreover outward Church calling is not imparted to the non-elect in such a wise that God wished to present them with faith, should they refrain from resisting the activity of the H. Spirit. Otherwise the possibility would arise of a counsel of God being perhaps rendered futile by man. Besides it is to be noted that man can only resist the H. Spirit. —HEIDEGGER (XXI, 10): "Nor does God altogether call particular reprobate in such wise that he has decreed and wills to give them faith and repentance just like the elect, provided only they do not resist the H. Spirit's call, as is the leptologia (frivolity) of some. There are no decrees of God which men or any creature can frustrate. They are altogether effectual and have a most definite outcome. If He has decreed to give to some faith and repentance, He bestows them in time through the Word and the H. Spirit. In that case all men of themselves and by their nature resist the H. Spirit: Rom. 8, 7 (the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be).<sup>2</sup>

Since salvation is the work of God alone, an offer of salvation is an offer of what God Himself would do. If God sincerely offers to save someone, why would he at the same time want to harden his heart? A. C. DeJong wrote that this change in God's attitude is not towards all men, but only towards those who have persistently rejected the offer. In fact, God even withdraws

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2. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 513.

His offer and makes His Word to them become “the instrument of his wrath” hardening their hearts in its process. Thus the well-meant-offer men make the attitude of God change according to man’s fancy.

Others disbelieve, they reject the call to salvation. God passes them by with the saving operations of his insuperable grace. But God continues to call them back to salvation. Sometimes this offer is withdrawn, and God’s word becomes the instrument of his wrath and he hardens the impenitent sinner. This hardening action is the present actualization of the final judgment. Preaching, gospel preaching, is such a serious matter that it forms a prelude of the end. The present hardening activities of God constitute the eschatological prelude of the end. They are to be viewed as anticipatory events of the Messianic judgment. Rather than disproving the existence of a well-meant offer of salvation the “hardening” passages prove precisely the opposite. God so seriously and genuinely wills that his call to salvation be heeded that he hardens those who reject his offer. It is the Lord’s redemptive earnestness which occasions these eschatological preludes of the Messianic judgment.<sup>3</sup>

c. God is said to desire the salvation of all who hear the gospel, yet He gives the necessary faith only to some and not to all. Can God be sincere about His desire?

This controversy is not about whether the gospel should be preached to all men and that all should be called to repentance and faith and that the promise of the gospel should be made known to all. All agree to the above, but debate is over the will and desire of God in the call of the gospel. Tom Wells, having studied the controversy, said:

Those who have not studied the matter will be surprised that relatively few texts speak to the subject directly. The reason is this: the question is not about whether God calls all men to faith and repentance when the gospel is preached. The question is rather:

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3. A. C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, p. 12.

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does God *in any sense* will or desire the salvation of the non-elect who hear the gospel?<sup>4</sup>

Repentance and faith are so integrally connected with salvation that the desire for the latter cannot be conceived of without the desire for the former. If God desires to save a person, He will also give him repentance and faith. Repentance and faith are part of salvation and not conditions of salvation.

Evangelical repentance is the gift of free grace; faith is the gift of God. What is God's, as a gift to bestow, cannot be man's duty to perform as a condition of salvation. Those who are invited to look to Christ, to come to Him for salvation, are very minutely described: they are the weary and heavy laden with sin, the penitent, the hungry and thirsty soul, etc., these are the characters invited to come and believe in Christ, and not all men (Matt. 11:28; Isa. 55:1; Mark 2:17).<sup>5</sup>

To those who still insist that the idea of the well-meant offer is all right so long as we maintain that repentance and faith are the gifts of God, William Cunningham has this to say:

Evangelical Arminians profess to ascribe to the agency of the Spirit the production of faith and regeneration in men individually; and seem to exclude, as Calvinists do, the co-operation of man in the exercise of his natural powers in the origin or commencement of the great spiritual change which is indispensable to salvation. But whatever they may hold, or think they hold, upon this point, they cannot consistently—without renouncing their Arminianism, and admitting the peculiar principles of Calvinism—make the agency of the Spirit the real, determining, efficacious cause of the introduction of spiritual life into the soul; and must ascribe, in some way or other,—palpably or obscurely,—some co-operation to man himself, even in the commencement of this work. And if the commencement of the work be God's, in such a sense that His

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4. Tom Wells, *Notes On The Free Offer Controversy*, p. 6.

5. Christopher Ness, *An Antidote Against Arminianism* (Huntington, West Virginia: Publishers of Baptist Literature, 1982), pp.72, 73.



agency is the determining and certainly efficacious cause of its being effected in every instance, then this necessarily implies the exercise of His sovereignty in the matter in a much higher and more definite sense than any in which Arminians can ever ascribe it to Him. It is not disputed that, whatever God does in time, He decreed or resolved to do from eternity; and, *therefore*, men, in consistency, must either deny that God does this,—that the agency of His Spirit is the cause of the implantation of spiritual life,—of the commencement of the process which leads to the production of faith and regeneration *in any other sense* than as a mere partial concurring cause co-operating with man,—or else they must admit all the peculiar doctrines of Calvinism in regard to grace and predestination.”<sup>6</sup>

Making repentance and faith the gifts of God is no guarantee that one is soundly Reformed. One is still an Arminian if he advocates co-operation between God and man for the commencement of the spiritual life in one sense or another. And that is what the well-meant offer suggests.

**2. God’s call comes from on high**, but in the well-meant offer there is no authority.

As observed above, the gospel call is the creative call of God in the new creation. Converts are said to be new creations of God in Scripture (2 Cor. 5:17). Then they are also called those who are born again (John 3:3, 5). Salvation is compared in Scripture with nothing less than the great wonder of creation! What power brings such things into being? He commanded and they were so. He called everything into being out of nothing. There is power and authority in the call of God. “...God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17).

The well-meant offer as a gospel call lacks the power and character to call into being what is not. Hear what Christopher Ness wrote:

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6. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, vol. II, p. 512.

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If fallen man must be drawn to goodness, then hath he no free-will to good.... That moral persuasion will not bring a soul to Christ; that man cannot come himself, but must be drawn, is proved from John 6:44: "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." Drawing is a bringing of anything out of its course and channel by an influence from without, and not from an innate power or principle from within. In Sol. Song 1:4, it is not said lead, but "draw;" in drawing there is less will and more power than in leading; and though God draws us strongly, yet He doth it sweetly. As we are drawn, we have not a free-will to good, else man fell in his understanding only, not in his will; yet are we volunteers (Psa. 110:3), a willing people; not that Christ finds us so, but makes us so "in the day of His power," and when He speaks to us with a strong hand (Isa. 8:11). We are naturally haters of God, and at enmity with Him (Rom. 1:30; 8:7), but the Spirit gives a new power to the soul, and then acts and influences that power to good; so draws God-haters to love Him. This is more than a bare persuasion to a stone to be *warm*, for God takes away the "heart of stone," and gives a "heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). God the Spirit gives the inclination to come, and the very power of coming to Christ; and Christ finds nothing that is good in us (Rom. 7:18).<sup>7</sup>

R. C. Sproul spoke of a debate he once had at an Arminian seminary on the issue of predestination. At one juncture he pointed out the fact that the Greek word, ἐλκυσῆ, as found in John 6:44, has the idea of "drag," suggesting that the Father compels men to come to Christ. The opponent then quoted its usage by a Greek poet, where water was said to be "drawn" from the well, suggesting that it is ridiculous to say that water was dragged from the well. Sproul then responded that it was more ridiculous to suggest that the water in the well was "wooed" to come forth, as the Arminians would like to suggest that the gospel call does just that — to bring faith out of a person.<sup>8</sup> The serious call of the gospel has power to draw, which the well-meant offer lacks.

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7. Christopher Ness, *An Antidote Against Arminianism*, p. 93, 94.

8. R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, pp. 70, 71.

## Chapter IV

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, may I begin by quoting Dr. John Gerstner again, who wrote that the well-meant offer of salvation, as supported and promoted by Murray and Stonehouse and the churches they represent, “does incalculable damage to the cause of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel.”

So what can we do now?

### **A. Preach the gospel zealously and issue the serious call faithfully.**

The darkness of the false gospel is best dispelled by the light of the true. Churches must be well versed in the doctrines of grace and be unashamed to promote them by all means, especially in the preaching at worship services. Believers should stop worrying about offending people when they are exalting their God in what they testify.

Preaching must always come with the call to repentance of sins and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. It does not matter whether the hearers are within or outside of the covenant. This call is natural and universal. In this way, as Christ is also pointed out, there is proclaimed the particular promise of God of His grace towards those who believe.

As the way of the cross is not without trials and temptation, we must guard against discouragement and unfaithfulness in the course of our labor. We must also learn how to encourage one another in the cause of Christ.

### **B. Expose the evil tendency of the well-meant offer.**

The well-meant offer is man-centered in approach, in that it seeks to get man to make a decision — to accept the offer. As such there is a tendency to water down the content of the gospel or to sweeten it and make it more acceptable to the hearers. It is God’s truth that saves. It kills and makes alive. The truth about man must be told. The truth about the end of the world and the coming of Christ in judgment must be proclaimed courageously.

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God's people must be warned against the serious error of maintaining that God has two irreconcilable, conflicting wills. The advocates of the well-meant offer rush in where even the Arminians fear to tread. The Arminians were at pain to point in one of their Opinions that "... we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person."<sup>9</sup> Today the supporters of the well-meant offer, with false piety and humility, claim that their minds are too puny to understand the conflicting mind of God, thus in effect making God "a double person." Suggesting two conflicting wills in God would ultimately rob God's people of their assurance of salvation.

Finally, about their belief in antinomy and its result in the careless handling of God's Word, we should listen to Robert Reymond:

... the proffered definition of "paradox" (or antinomy) as two truths which are both unmistakably taught in the Word of God but which also cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason is itself inherently problematical, for the one who so defines the term is suggesting by implication that either he knows by means of an omniscience that is not normally in human possession that no one is capable of reconciling the truths in question or he has somehow universally polled everyone who has ever lived, is living now, and will live in the future and has discovered that not one has been able, is able, or will be able to reconcile the truths. But it goes without saying that neither of these conditions is or can be true. Therefore, the very assertion that there are paradoxes, so defined, in Scripture is seriously flawed by the terms of the definition itself. There is no way to know if such a phenomenon is present in Scripture. Merely because any number of scholars have failed to reconcile to their satisfaction two given truths of Scripture is no proof that the truths cannot be harmonized. And if just one scholar claims to have reconciled the truths to his or her own satisfaction, this *ipso facto* renders the definition both gratuitous and suspect.<sup>10</sup>

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9. Peter Y. DeJong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches...*, p. 227.

10. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville; USA), p. 105.

**C. Point out the good effect of the serious gospel call upon christian life and worship.**

The serious gospel call addresses the conscience of fallen man, which is how the Law brings one to Christ. When our Lord was on earth He spoke as one with authority, unlike the Pharisees and Scribes. Today in that pervasive well-meant offer the preaching is robbed of its essential authority. God's people need to be assured by the commands of God, not an offer.

When our salvation is fully in the hands of God, would we not be humble before Him and find our complete trust and reliance upon Him? To whom shall we go? He has the words of life. The serious call of the gospel promotes the healthy sense of complete and utter reliance upon God alone for salvation.

Knowing that the immutable God saves in the way of our repentance of sins and faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, helps us to be more focused in our lives. We must deal with sins in our lives. And dealing with sins we must come humbly to the cross. Knowing our infinite debt we seek to live our thankful life.

Having a constant sense of God's greatness and of our total dependence upon Him sets for us the proper atmosphere for true worship. The proper serious gospel call calls us to the true and joyful worship of the God of our salvation. Amen.

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# The Place of the Mystical Union in Reformed Soteriology<sup>1</sup>

Christopher J. Connors

Our subject is the mystical union and its place in Reformed soteriology.

When I told the youth group in my congregation of this topic, one wag said: “What’s that about, Pastor, spooks and meditation and stuff?” We had a chuckle about that, but I decided, on the spot, to begin this paper by clarifying what I do *not* mean by the term “mystical union.” This term, like so many of our Christian terms, has been hijacked by the “New Age” of spiritual enlightenment,

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1. Our subject concerns Reformed soteriology. Soteriology is the locus of theology dealing with the knowledge of God as revealed in His works of salvation in Jesus Christ, by way of the covenant of grace; thus, it is knowledge of God’s way of salvation.

We specify Reformed soteriology in order to highlight our concern for the distinctively biblical, confessional, and antithetical understanding of God’s way of salvation by grace alone over against all forms of self-salvation. For our soteriology to be truly Reformed, it should manifest three clear characteristics. First, it must be in complete harmony with the five great *solas* of the Reformation: it must rise from Scripture alone and demonstrate that salvation is by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, and to God’s glory alone. Secondly, it must be faithful to the doctrines of grace as summarized in the five points of Calvinism. It will show that salvation has its origin in unconditional election, is grounded in the limited and effectual atonement of Christ for the elect, is applied in time by the Holy Spirit through irresistible grace, and infallibly preserves believers by grace, through faith, unto salvation. Thirdly, it must be covenantal — unfolding the truth that God saves sinners by way of “the covenant of grace made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as his seed” (Larger Catechism 31).

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in which science, Pseudo-Christian spirituality, Eastern mysticism, and occult spiritism are converging to form a “new spirituality” for the post-modern world — and the mystical union is a major theme. For example, a recent *Reader's Digest*<sup>2</sup> article informs us that hi-tech brain scans conducted on Tibetan Buddhists meditating and Franciscan nuns engaged in deep, contemplative prayer have “captured snapshots of the brain nearing a state of mystical transcendence.... Catholic mystics, we are told, referred to this state as ‘mystical union’ with God. A Buddhist would call it ‘inter-connectedness.’ ...a sense of limitless awareness melting into infinite space.”<sup>3</sup> Paul Harrison, a “Scientific Pantheist,”<sup>4</sup> in a recent article titled *Mystical Union and Meditation*, says: “Mystics in all religions attempt to overcome separation and achieve unity with the source of being — God, Allah, the Tao, Brahma, emptiness. ... Scientific pantheism agrees with the mystics of all ages and traditions that it is possible to achieve re-union. But it seeks a re-union with the Real, not with the imaginary. ... If we empty our mind of all thought and allow ourselves to enter into the motion of things, and the motion to enter into us, we can literally swim in the ocean of existence and burn with its fire.”<sup>5</sup>

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2. *Readers Digest*. February 2002.

3. Man, it seems, is “hotwired” for mystical union with ... (who knows what – but something big and spiritual!). The writer, having discovered that Science may have found “genetic proof” for god, decides with the mystic: “My silence is my salvation. And that, I’ve decided, is my new master plan: to forget about being informed, or interested, or rational. To just shut up and listen for a while.”

4. Scientific Pantheism is the belief that the universe and nature are divine. On its Web Site it claims: “It fuses religion and science, and concern for humans with concern for nature. It provides the most realistic concept of life after death, and the most solid basis for environmental ethics. It is a religion that requires no faith other than common sense, no revelation other than open eyes and a mind open to evidence, no guru other than your own self.”

5. Paul Harrison. *Mystical Union and Meditation*, (<http://members.aol.com/Heraklit1/union.htm>). It is tragic to see post-modernism groping blindly, yet in determined unbelief, for a god of their own



No wonder that young man thought his pastor had lost the plot! Well, let me say, our subject has nothing to do with such notions — except in that it exposes them as counterfeit. In such an age the Reformed churches must assert, maintain, and defend the truths of Scripture concerning the living and true God, and man's relation to Him. Also we must declare that any notion of direct access to God, or immediacy of union between the soul and God, is utterly false. "No man hath seen God at any time (John 1:18)," and that there is no access to the Father but through faith in Jesus Christ, who is "the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Only through faith in the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son presented to us in the gospel can we know and have communion with God.<sup>6</sup> The "spirituality" of the kingdom of Satan brings "connectedness" all right, but not with the true God.

But let us turn positively to our subject.

I suspect that the doctrine of the mystical union has, in times past, received much more attention from our Reformed forebears than it does today.

John Calvin certainly placed great emphasis upon it in his *Institutes*. In fact, he built his Soteriology around it. Calvin's first proposition in book three, which concerns *The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ*, is: *The Holy Spirit as the bond that unites us to Christ*.<sup>7</sup> His first paragraph reads:

We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he has to become ours and to dwell within us. ...we possess nothing until we grow into one body with him.<sup>7</sup>

Heinrich Heppe, describing the view of the sixteenth century

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imaginings. And it is frightening, to know that it is the prince of darkness that beckons men on.

6. Geoffrey Bromiley. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 1979, p. 368.

7. John Calvin. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1961), vol. 1, p. 537.

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continental Reformers, could say: “At the root of the whole doctrine of appropriation of salvation lies the doctrine of union to Christ.”<sup>8</sup> And John Murray, in the Presbyterian tradition, writes: “... if we did not take account of it, not only our presentation of the application of redemption but our view of the Christian life would be gravely distorted. Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. ... Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation....”<sup>9</sup>

I submit to you that there is no truth more vital, central, and basic, not only to our understanding of God’s way of salvation but also to preaching the gospel and true Christian experience, than this doctrine.

With these things prefaced, we will proceed to describe the mystical union, then to show its place in the scheme of salvation and its relation to the benefits of redemption, and in conclusion to demonstrate some implications for our preaching.

## **I. The Mystical Union: a definition and description**

The mystical union between Christ and believers is one of three mystical unions that are the chief mysteries in the biblical, revealed, Christian religion. The other two are the union of the Trinity of persons in one God-head, and the union of the divine and human natures in one person, Jesus Christ, God and Man.

The Westminster Larger Catechism #26 describes the mystical union in this way:

The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God’s grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.

This excellent description, I fear, leaves one important element implied, namely, the intensely *personal nature* of the union. “Union with Christ,” Heppe points out, “is a real, wholesale,

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8. Heinrich Heppe. *Reformed Dogmatic* (London: Wakeman Great Reprints), p. 511.

9. John Murray. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), p. 161.

spiritual and indissoluble union of the person of the elect with the divine-human person of the Redeemer....”<sup>10</sup>

Herman Witsius, in his delightful way, describes this union as “... that mystical and most delightful marriage of the elect soul with Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

### The Nature of This Union

It is a *spiritual* union. The spirituality of this union is unique. It is not some vague sentimentality, nor is it the Christian brand of “New-age” spirituality. This is a distinctly *Christian* spirituality. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is the personal bond who forms this union. It is a spiritual union between Christ and the believer formed by God the Holy Spirit, *as the Spirit of Christ* (Rom. 8:9, 10; 1 Cor. 12:13). The source and bond of this spiritual union is the Spirit of the Head, who dwells and works in the members.<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:9-10 shows that Christ dwells in and with us if His Spirit dwells in us, and He dwells in us *by* His Spirit. Richard Sibbes explains why this union is the special province of the Holy Spirit — as the Spirit of Christ:

In those special works wrought in his Church and on his children, all things come from the Holy Ghost, not simply as the third person, but as ‘the Spirit of Christ’ — that is, first sanctifying and filling the human nature of Christ, and then sanctifying and filling us. Christ could not give the Holy Ghost immediately to us, as we are at enmity with God and separated from him through our sins. He must first take the Spirit to himself and, having by his death and sufferings reconciled us to his Father and purchased the Spirit for us, he may now give his Spirit *to* us....

First he receives the Spirit himself, and the same Spirit that filled and sanctified his human nature also sanctifies his church, which he ‘loves even as himself.’ As he loves his own human nature,

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10. Heppe. *Op. cit.*, p. 511.

11. Herman Witsius. *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Escondido: The Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), p. 344.

12. A.A. Hodge. *Outlines of Theology* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), p. 483.

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which the Holy Ghost sanctified, so he loves his own mystical body, his church, which is mystically united to him, and he sanctifies it by the same Spirit. Christ, as head of his church, dispenses the Spirit to us.<sup>13</sup>

It is a *real* union. The distance between Christ in heaven and believers on earth presents no obstacle to the reality of a spiritual union. Christ is in heaven and we are upon earth, but the Spirit of Christ being omnipresent is able to be the connecting link between us.<sup>14</sup> Through the Spirit not merely a figurative but a real union is effected, so that there is one living principle in the head and the members. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17). Astounding as it is, the same Spirit lives in our exalted Redeemer and in His people on earth; and hence, although separated from Him and from one another, they are but one.<sup>15</sup>

It is a *personal* union. The union between Christ and believers is such that their persons are united to His person. This union is not an impersonal and theoretical relatedness, it is a relationship in which there is mutual knowledge, love, communication, and communion in all things. And since Christ cannot be separated from His Father and His Spirit, this union at the same time brings us into communion of the undivided Trinity.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, union with Christ marries the church with Christ and realizes God's purpose to establish His everlasting covenant of love and friendship with the people He loves, so that they may say in very truth, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Song. 6:3).

Obviously, such a personal union has two sides. The Spirit is the bond of union on Christ's side, and faith, produced by the Spirit of faith, is the bond on our side; and when that union is

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13. Richard Sibbes. *Glorious Freedom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), pp. 11, 12.

14. Arthur Pink. *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 90.

15. John Dick. *Lectures On Theology* (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1850), pp. 167 – 169.

16. Witsius. *Op. cit.* p. 345. "That truly our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

effected, the soul, being grafted into Christ, is like a fruitful branch of the vine bringing forth fruit.<sup>17</sup> The personal nature of this union lays the ground and imperative for experimental religion and close dealing with the heart of men in the preaching of the Word of Christ. For the communion of this union must take place “through the Word.”

It is mysterious, or *mystical*. The apostle Paul describes the union between Christ and His church as “a great mystery.” It belies scrutiny and definition, for it is, in the true sense of the word, a mystery.<sup>18</sup> This union, being a work of the Holy Spirit, “is supernatural, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable....”<sup>19</sup>

The Scriptures employ many figures and relationships to reveal something of the mysterious intimacy and efficacy of this union. These range from a comparison to the relation existing between stones and a chief corner stone (1Pet. 2:4, 5), a vine and its branches, a head and the members in the human body, Adam and his posterity, the one flesh relation of husband and wife, right up to a comparison with the relation between the three persons of the blessed Trinity (John 14:23; 17:21-23).<sup>20</sup> Of course, analogy does not mean identity — we are no more incorporated into the Godhead than we become branches, rocks, or members of a

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17. George Smeaton. *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), p. 227.

18. Murray. *Op.cit.*, p. 166. Murray explains: “It is a union of intensely spiritual character consonant with the nature and work of the Holy Spirit so that in a real way surpassing our power of analysis Christ dwells in his people and his people dwell in him.”

19. Canons of Dort, 3rd and 4th Heads, Article 12.

20. 1 John 4:12-16. We ought not to sell this comparison short. The Spirit, who is the personal bond of love and communion between the Father and the Son within the covenant life of the triune God, is also sent forth from the Father and the Son to form a personal, spiritual bond between the believer and God in and through Christ. This is a real, though creaturely, fellowship in the covenantal life of God. This indwelling of the covenant God by His Spirit becomes the ground and necessity for believers to love one another.

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physical body.<sup>21</sup> Rather, these figures teach us that, of all possible creaturely relations, union with the Son of God become flesh is far and away the highest. This is a union in which the inmost soul of the redeemed is reserved for Christ's inhabitation by the Spirit, who thus becomes the life of their life, the soul of their soul, in a sense to which any other union makes no approximation.<sup>22 23</sup>

## **II. The place of Union to Christ in our Reformed Soteriology**

Here we are concerned with how the mystical union fits into God's plan of salvation.

We begin with a brief overview of our confessions.

The mystical union does not come in for direct treatment in the Three Forms of Unity. It is clearly implied, however, in the beautiful treatment of the Lord's Supper in the Heidelberg Catechism 76:

What is it then to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ? It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal; but also, besides that, to become more and more

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21. Dick. *Op. cit.*, p. 169. Though united, there does not result any unity of essence or of person, for it is not effected immediately, but through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and consequently there is no confusion of nature or persons. Christ is not incarnate in believers, nor are they deified in Him.

22. Smeaton. *Op. cit.*, p. 277.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 228. George Smeaton describes the intimacy of this union: "Such is the Spirit's efficacy, that there is not one thought, feeling, or emotion pervading the human bosom of the man 'Christ Jesus amid the glories of the upper sanctuary, but may be said to be renewed and reproduced in the experience of his people, — perfectly in the bliss above, incipiently in their present dwelling place below. So real is the union through the Spirit, and so deep the sympathy reciprocally exercised between the ever-living Head in heaven on the one hand, every want, necessity, and sorrow under which His people groan vibrates to Him like the touching of a chord, of which He is instantly aware; while, on the other hand, an injury offered to His cause awakens in them such a sense of oneness and of conscious identification with His interests and honour, that it constrains them to say: 'Rivers of water run down my eyes, because they keep not thy law' (Psalm 119:136). By the Spirit our person is united to His whole Person."

united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding “flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone”; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.

In his treatment of this catechism Herman Hoeksema gave a beautiful description of the place and significance of the mystical union:

From Him [Christ] we receive all the spiritual blessings of salvation. And in order to receive them we must be united with Christ, incorporated into Him, become one plant with Him. ... We must ... be literally joined with Christ, united with Him: we must be in Him, even as He must be in us, in order that He may become our righteousness, holiness, and eternal life, and we may draw out of Him all the blessings of grace.<sup>24</sup>

In the Westminster Standards, and the Larger Catechism in particular, we find a direct and rather detailed treatment of this doctrine. In fact, the Catechism is built around this doctrine. In order to demonstrate this, we will briefly trace this doctrine through the Larger Catechism.

We are introduced to this truth first in its federal and representative aspects.<sup>25</sup>

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24. Herman Hoeksema. *The Triple Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: RFP), pp. 588, 592.

25. Abraham Kuyper. *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 336. Kuyper makes a five-stage mystical union.

1) In the decree of God.

2) In the incarnation — “where He carries all believers in the loins of His grace like Adam carried all men in the loins of his flesh.”

3) When we appear in our regeneration. “Until then the mystical union was hid in the decree and in the Mediator, but in and by regeneration the person appears with whom the Lord Jesus will establish it.” NOTE: “However, not regeneration first and then something new, but in the very moment of completed regeneration that union becomes an internally accomplished fact.”

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We are led to the fountain of salvation, namely, God's sovereign decree of predestination and unconditional election, *in Christ* (L.C. 13).

"God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of His mere love, for the praise of His glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory; and *in Christ* hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means thereof...." <sup>26</sup>

Those who will be saved were not even contemplated by the Father in His electing love apart from union with Christ — for they were chosen *in Christ* unto union *with Christ*. In the words of Romans 8:29, we are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Then we are taught that salvation "in Christ" is by way of covenant. God, "of His mere love and mercy delivers His elect out of the estate of sin and misery into an estate of salvation by the second covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace" (L.C. 30). "The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect" (L.C. 31). The elect are given to Christ as the covenant Head and united with Him as His mystical body (which body the Catechism distinguishes as the "invisible church," which is "the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head" (L.C. 64). This mystical body is viewed as being "in Him" and "with Him" by representation in all His work of redemption.

Thus the Catechism treats the "federal and representative" aspect of union with Christ. It then proceeds to what can be termed the "spiritual and vital" aspect.<sup>27</sup> The mystical union is treated

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4) In the first conscious exercise of faith. "The first sigh of the soul, in its first exercise of faith, is the result of the wonderful union of the soul with its Surety."

5) Death — "Union with Him does not attain its fullest unfolding until every lack be supplied and we see him as he is; in blissful vision we shall be like him, for then he shall give us all he has."

26. See also the Westminster Confession, III, 5.

27. A. A. Hodge. *Op. cit.*, p. 482.



now in the context of the Holy Spirit's *effectual application* of redemption and all the benefits of the covenant of grace (L.C. 58).

First, union with Christ is brought to the fore and emphasized as *the special benefit* applied to and enjoyed by the invisible church (L.C. 65). "What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ? The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory." Salvation — from grace to glory — is comprehended in union with Christ.

It is emphasized that we do not become *actual* partakers of Christ until redemption is effectually applied,<sup>28</sup> "which is done in effectual calling" (L.C. 66). As Calvin said: "...we possess nothing until we grow into one body with him." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:10). Effectual calling is the means. It is viewed as the Spirit's work that is specifically designed to form this union. Thus, it is defined, in part, as: "...the work of God's almighty power and grace whereby ... He doth, in His accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by His word and Spirit..." (L.C. 67).

When this union is realized, the Catechism turns to its blessed fruits, namely, *communion* with Christ in *grace* and *glory*. From this point on, the Larger Catechism unfolds this communion through to "the perfect and full communion the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory." Communion with Christ in *grace* is shown to include: "partaking of the virtue of His mediation, in this justification, adoption, sanctification, and

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28. This truth is a working principle of the Reformed soteriology of Westminster. Emphasis is placed upon two truths: 1) the absolute certainty and efficacy of the application of redemption to all God's elect, and 2) the necessity of that application, in time, by the Spirit, to the person, before any of the benefits can be said to have been bestowed or actualized. E.g., care is taken to demonstrate how that even the forensic benefits of justification and adoption (being acts of God concerning the legal state and not works of God changing our spiritual condition) are not realized and actually bestowed "until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them." WCF, XI, 4.

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whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with Him" (L.C. 69). Communion with Christ in *glory* is developed in three aspects, and shown to include communion in this life, immediately after death, and as perfected "at the resurrection and day of judgment" (L.C. 82, 86, 90).

Thus, our Reformed faith does not view union to Christ as one step in our salvation. Rather, it *is* salvation. Salvation is unfolded *as* union with Christ. Our heavenly Father embraces His children in the arms of Christ and brings them to Himself in grace and glory. It is hard to imagine a more significant place for this doctrine in our Reformed soteriology.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Relation to the Benefits of Redemption**

Union issues in communion. We now focus attention specifically upon *communion* between Christ and believers within the mystical union.

Here our working principle is that salvation, in its totality, must be received out of Christ's fullness, as a thing already prepared and brought to an existence for us in Christ, and treasured up in Him.<sup>30</sup> This means that every individual benefit, as a constituent part of that salvation, must flow to us through communion with Christ.<sup>31 32</sup> "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of

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29. "Union with Christ has its source in the election of God the Father before the foundation of the world, and it has its fruition in the glorification of the sons of God." John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1961, p. 164.

30. Walter Marshal. *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (Edinburgh: James Taylor, 1887), p. 43.

31. Wilhelmus à Brakel. *Our Reasonable Service* (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), vol. 2, p. 91. à Brakel makes the important point that: "First, believers have and exercise communion with His Person. A temporal believer concerns himself only with the benefits and has not interest in Christ himself. Believers, however, have communion with the Person of Jesus Christ, but many neither meditate upon nor closely heed their exercises concerning Christ himself. They err in this, which is detrimental to the strength of their faith and impedes their growth."

32. Smeaton. *Op. cit.*, p. 228.

God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

Obviously, we cannot touch upon all the benefits. We limit ourselves to regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification.

We begin with regeneration, because it is the very "first work" of the Spirit in the application of redemption.<sup>33</sup>

**Regeneration** (in its narrow sense) is an immediate, instantaneous work of the Spirit below the consciousness, upon the heart and spiritual nature. It underlies effectual calling, for nothing but irresistible grace can quicken the dead and bring them to Christ in faith.<sup>33</sup> It is specially intended to form spiritual union with Christ for the application of redemption, and for the inhabitation of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2).<sup>34</sup> At the moment of

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33. Marshal. *Op. cit.*, p. 80. Christ takes us into fellowship with Himself by nothing less than the creative power of irresistible grace (Eph. 2:5,10), making us new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Herman Hoeksema. *Triple Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: RFPA, 1976.) vol. 2. Hoeksema emphasizes, on behalf of sovereign grace, that it is utterly absurd and impossible for this union to be formed and realized by fallen man. "Salvation," he declares, "is not of man, nor of the will of man. Nor does our union with Christ depend on man's consent: 'No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him' John 6:44. And again, 'Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my father' (John 6:65). According to the Heidelberg Catechism, we are united with Christ's sacred body by the Holy Ghost who dwells both in Christ and in us. The Father draws with cords of love to Christ, and that, too, through Christ Himself, who is exalted and draws all unto Him. And when we are so drawn and so united with Christ, and He by His Spirit lives in us, we respond, we hunger and thirst, we long and pray, we come and embrace Him, we eat the bread of life and are satisfied, we drink the water of life and thirst nevermore, we draw from him who is the fullness of all the blessings of salvation even grace for grace."

34. Smeaton. *Op. cit.*, p. 227. The last Adam is a quickening Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). "That life is in the Son, who, by the Spirit, apprehends the whole man in all his faculties; and the renewing process will be completed even on his body on the resurrection day."

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regeneration the effectual and permanent workings of the indwelling Spirit commence, Christ is applied, the mystical union is formed, the life of Christ is communicated and a new spiritual *principle*<sup>35</sup> of faith is implanted in the soul. Thus the foundation is laid for the *exercise* of saving faith.<sup>36</sup> From that foundation, the indwelling Spirit, now working upon our hearts by and with the gospel, effectually calls forth the exercise of faith unto Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> Through the gospel He draws us to receive Him, believe in Him, trust in Him, live in Him, love Him, hope in Him, and rejoice in Him;<sup>38</sup> and turning from all others, to cleave unto Him alone for justification, sanctification, and glorification. Thus, we are brought to the personal exercise of faith and to a firm and conscious hold on Christ, to "a serious full recumbency and rolling of the soul upon Christ in the promise of the gospel, as an all-sufficient Saviour, able to deliver and save to the utmost them that come to God by him...."<sup>39</sup> And this is accomplished in such a way that none of the glory of this great work belongs to faith, but only to Christ and His Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

As an aside here, it may be profitable briefly to apply this distinction between the *principle* of faith and the *exercise* of faith to covenant children who may be regenerated in early infancy. Let me quote again from Walter Marshal:

We may note, to the glory of the grace of God, that this union is fully accomplished by Christ giving the Spirit of faith to us, even

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35. Otherwise variously termed by Reformed men, the grace, spirit, faculty, or habitus, of faith in distinction from the exercise of faith. This is faith as the gift of grace in distinction from our exercise of that grace in the conscious activity of believing.

36. A.A. Hodge. *Op.cit.*, p. 484.

37. Or, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, #30, "The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling."

38. àBrakel. *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

39. J.I. Packer. *Introduction to Owen's Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.

40. Marshal. *Op. cit.*, p. 80.

before we act that faith in the reception of Him; because by this grace or Spirit of faith, the soul is inclined and disposed to an active receiving of Christ. And, no doubt, Christ is thus united to many infants, who have the Spirit of faith, and yet cannot act faith because they are not come to the use of their understandings; but those of riper years, that are joined passively to Christ by the Spirit of faith, will also join themselves with Him actively, by the act of faith; and until they act this faith, they cannot know or enjoy their union with Christ, and the comfort of it, or make use of it, in acting any other duties of holiness acceptably in this life.<sup>41</sup>

### Justification:

Upon being united to Christ as federal, or representative Head, we are made partakers of His justifying righteousness.<sup>42</sup> John Owen hit the spot, when he wrote:

God hath appointed that there shall be an immediate foundation of the imputation of the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ unto us; whereon we may be said to have done and suffered in him what he did and suffered in our stead, by that grant, donation, and imputation of it unto us; or that we may be interested in it, that it may be made ours.... And this [foundation] is our *actual coalescency into one mystical person* with him by faith. ...Our actual interest in the satisfaction of Christ depends on our actual insertion into his mystical body by faith, according to the appointment of God.<sup>43</sup>

### Adoption:

As with justification, union with Christ forms the immediate foundation for the blessing of adoption. John Murray well says:

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41. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

42. James Buchanan. *Justification* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), p. 400.

43. John Owen. *Works* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), vol. 5, p. 218. See also the WCF, XI, 4, "God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: *nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ to them.*"

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We cannot think of adoption apart from union with Christ. Election in Christ before the foundation of the world is election unto adoption of sons. Hence union with Christ and adoption are complementary aspects of this amazing grace. Union with Christ reaches its zenith in adoption and adoption has its orbit in union with Christ. The people of God are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

### **Sanctification:**

Union with Christ is the source of all sanctifying grace. Everything necessary to furnish us for the immediate practice of holiness is comprehended in the fullness of Christ and treasured up for us in Him — and is to be obtained richly by union and fellowship with Christ.<sup>44</sup> The “new man” has life and grace only by virtue of his communion with Christ in grace. If we are to be sanctified, it must be by every grace and virtue being first wrought out and completed in Christ for us, and then imparted to us by His Spirit through the Word. Our sanctification must take place in fellowship with Christ in the transforming, assimilating power of His life, making us like Him; every grace of Jesus Christ reproducing itself in us: “Of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).<sup>45</sup> The reception of Christ’s fullness, which is commenced at regeneration, is carried on throughout the whole course of our life, and will most certainly be completed in glory: “when we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

### **Glorification:**

“God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph.2:6). “Our life is hid with Christ in God” (Col.3:4), so that as joint heirs together with Christ we shall also be glorified with Him (Rom. 8:17). In Christ there is no disjunction between grace and glory. Grace is glory in the

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44. Marshal. *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

45. A.A. Hodge. *Op. cit.*, p. 485.

bud, glory is grace in the blossom. Thus union with Christ in grace and glory enables us to confess:

At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on His right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with Him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and forever freed from all sin and misery: filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment (L.C. 90).

### **III. The Implications of this Doctrine to the Preaching**

Preaching, of course, has many important subordinate ends, which are all important in their place,<sup>46</sup> but all these serve a higher end. All must work toward the realization of the mystical union. Preaching must lead the soul to Christ alone as the object of faith, the source of life and blessing, the yea and amen of every promise. Our great God has no higher end for the preaching than the glory of His name in the salvation of His church in and through Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup> And this end must be realized through union with Christ.

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46. E.g., teaching sound doctrine, defending the flock against error, instruction, warning, comfort, encouragement, etc., etc.

47. This is true in missions and evangelism. God is pleased to call His people effectually unto Christ through the preaching of the gospel. Preaching, though not the only means, is certainly the chief means unto this end. Preaching, therefore, is designed by God to realize the union of His elect with Christ (1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:16). There can be no doubt that God ordains the preaching to this end (Rom. 10:13, 14). Christ commands His church to "go forth into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), for by means of preaching God "makes known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), "that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and

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The preacher, therefore, must set his sights carefully. He must aim at this target, marshalling all his gifts and talents, and consciously adapting all his labors so that they best serve this end. Significantly, our *Directory for the Public Worship of God* speaks directly to this very point. Under *The Preaching of the Word*, it reads: "...he [the minister] need not always prosecute every doctrine which lies in his text, so is he wisely to make choice of such uses, as, by his residence and conversing with his flock, he finds most needful and seasonable; and, amongst these, such as may most draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness and comfort." Reformed preaching, preaching that is faithful to the whole counsel of God, should consciously aim at drawing souls to Christ. It should adapt itself to that end.

Preaching which aims at this mark that God sets ought, therefore, to manifest at least the following characteristics:

First, *an antithetical faithfulness to the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ*. This is most necessary, because the truth reveals and falsehood hides Christ. Every error, corruption, compromise, or distortion of the true gospel can only disfigure and obfuscate the person and work of Christ. But in the truth the living Christ is present, appears, and can be known as He really is. Further, every deviation from the pure gospel tends to lead the hearer away from Christ and God's way of salvation in Christ alone. Therefore, the preacher who aims to draw his hearers to Christ, will not tweak the truth to please the hearer. He will be

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with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). It is true also in the pastoral ministry from week to week. In order that His people might be continually called unto Himself for communion in grace and glory, Christ gives pastors and teachers to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." That through the faithful preaching of Christ, "we might all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 12,16), that we might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1:9), and that "every man may be presented perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28).



vitality concerned about the truthfulness and faithfulness of his message.

Secondly, it must be genuinely *Christ-centered*. Preaching that aims at union and communion with Christ must lift Christ up in the midst, in the grace and glory of His person, natures, offices, work, promises, fullness, faithfulness, beauty, and all sufficiency to the needs of poor sinners — so that Christ Himself might draw the hearts of His people unto Himself with cords of love and grace. The preacher must so preach that he can say to his congregation: “Before your eyes Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you” (Gal.3:1). Preaching ought not be content to impart information *about* Christ and *about* the gospel and *about* God’s grace and *about* the call, etc. Rather, the preaching must actually *preach* Christ, and bring His words to call, encourage, and compel the hearer to come unto Him as the only way of salvation. In this way Christ will be truly present in our preaching, and the Good Shepherd’s voice will be heard in the midst: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt.11:28). Has he not said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27)?

Such preaching must gather up the whole counsel of God while saying with Paul, “I am determined not to know anything among you, save Christ, and him crucified” (1Cor.2:2). No sermon ought to leave the hearer wondering what relation the message had to Christ. This holds true no matter what the text or subject treated — whether it be the law, the Christian home, marriage, creation, the duty of rulers, church government, comfort in death, marriage, mortification of sin, labor, love, faith, hope, or whatever it may be. Every area of life, and every particle of truth, grace, and strength we need for it, is to be had from Christ alone; and the preaching must demonstrate this. Under the preaching of the gospel the flock must “learn Christ” as those who “have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21). At every point, and at every turn, the preaching is to lead to Christ in whom and by whom we must live by faith.

Thirdly, by its very nature, this preaching will have a profoundly experimental dimension to it. It will teach and unfold what might be called robust Reformed spirituality. That is a

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spirituality grounded upon the objective reality of union with Christ, and which satisfies the mind with truth, warms the affections, and moves the will to new obedience. It is religion that, at its very heart, says: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1Pet. 1:8-9). Such preaching will be able to draw forth the new life of faith in a gospel manner at every turn. For it will be engaged in leading the heirs of God deeper into the strength, joy, and comfort that belong to them in communion with Christ in grace and glory.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

In John Murray's words: "Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation." May we be encouraged to make, not the doctrine only but the reality of union with Christ, the one great aim of our ministry — and our Christian life. For this is an end that rises above man to the glory of God's covenant. This doctrine brings us to the Father, in and through God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit.

Soli Deo Gloria! ●

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48. Many more implications must be left unstated. I hope someone more able may be inclined to develop the implications of this doctrine in other areas such as missions, evangelistic preaching, the nurture of covenant children, experiential preaching, and the ministry of comfort in pastoral labor, the communion of the saints, and even Reformed ecumenism.

# In the Space of Six Days (1)

**Mark L. Shand**

Extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules; and history records that whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed if not annihilated: scotched, if not slain.<sup>1</sup>

These are the arrogant assertions of Thomas Huxley, the close associate of Charles Darwin and an ardent proponent of his evolutionary theory. The battle between creation and so-called science is still being fought. However, orthodox Christianity, as manifested by the Reformed faith, has not been vanquished by the so-called scientific discoveries proffered by Darwin or his successors. Nonetheless, it would be naive to suggest that the Reformed faith has emerged unscathed from its ongoing battle with so-called science.<sup>2</sup> Deep inroads have been made into the Reformed faith. Sadly, the majority of the damage that has been sustained by the church has been self inflicted.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day, many advocates of the Reformed faith have sought to reconcile the claims of so-called science with the scriptural account of

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1. Thomas H. Huxley, "Review of *The Origin of the Species*, by Charles Darwin," *Westminster Review*, *Darwinia*, 52, as quoted in Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), p. 263.

2. So-called science is to be distinguished from that which is genuine science. Genuine science is that science which views the creation only in and through the light of the Word of God.

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creation. In their attempt to do so, one issue which has generated considerable discussion is whether the first two chapters of Genesis teach not only *that* God created the world, but also *how* He created the world. That discussion has spawned other questions, namely, “Did God create all things within the space of six natural days?” or “Are the references to ‘days’ in Genesis 1 & 2 to be interpreted figuratively?”

These issues are being actively debated within Presbyterian circles in North America.<sup>3</sup> At the center of that debate stands Chapter 4:1 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which reads:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, *in the space of six days*; and all very good. [Emphasis MS]

The question that is taxing Presbyterian theologians is: What does the *Westminster Confession* mean when it refers to “in the space of six days”? Is that phrase to be taken literally, or can it be interpreted to allow for the possibility of longer periods of time, perhaps even billions of years? Now one may think that the answer to that question is obvious from a simple reading of the Confession. The conclusion that the Confession is referring to a period of six natural days is inescapable, if the phrase is to be permitted to have its natural meaning. However, the matter is not quite so transparent — at least that is the view of the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary.

Noting with apparent dismay that “in recent years it has been claimed that, in expounding the biblical teaching on creation, to hold anything other than that God created the world in six days, each of 24 hours duration, is (a) to depart from theological orthodoxy and (b) to interpret Scripture in the light of secular science in general and evolutionistic philosophy in particular,” the

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3. This issue has not been confined to Presbyterian circles, but has also engaged the attention of the Reformed church world.

faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary released a statement in March 1999 in which they sought to establish that their views accorded with "historic Reformed teaching on this subject."<sup>4</sup> Their efforts were a dismal failure.

In support of their position, the faculty declared:

Committed, as the Seminary is, to the inerrancy of Scripture and standing in the Augustinian and Reformed theological tradition, the precise chronological duration of the six days of creation has never been regarded by the Seminary's Board or Faculty as a matter on which *the Scriptures themselves* speak with decisive clarity.<sup>5</sup>

Tragically, the faculty's statement as regards the position of the seminary is true, but that is to its everlasting shame. In any event, the vital question is not whether the current teaching of the seminary accords with what has previously been taught, but whether the seminary's teaching accords with the Reformed tradition as it is found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and, more importantly, with Scripture itself.

In their statement, the faculty acknowledges that "The Reformers, it is true, seem to have generally interpreted the days as 'ordinary' days of 24 hours in duration."<sup>6</sup> However, they hasten to add, "Yet this position, consciously distanced, as we will see, from Augustine's and Anselm's view of instantaneous creation, never seems to have been regarded as a test of orthodoxy in the reformed churches."<sup>7</sup>

In order to fortify their position the faculty makes reference to John Colet and to what they describe as "a striking illustration of the way in which biblical scholars wrestled with this issue."<sup>8</sup> Colet, it is claimed, "held to a position approximating to a day-age

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4. "Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation: A Brief Statement," dated 1 March 1999, p. 1.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

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or even framework interpretation of the days of Genesis.”<sup>9</sup> The faculty notes:

Interestingly, he held that Genesis 1 was written in “the manner of a popular poet” [*more poetae alicuius popularis*]. In the Augustinian tradition, Colet views the precise meaning of the days of Genesis 1 as so difficult to untangle that he writes (tongue in cheek): “nothing could be more like night than these Mosaic days.” In addition, he argued that the function of Genesis 1 is precisely not scientific but intended to portray the mystery of creation to the children of Israel in the days of Moses.<sup>10</sup>

But who was John Colet? Colet was an English clergyman who died in 1519, two years after Luther nailed his theses to the door at Wittenburg. The *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* offers this description of him:

Colet shared the Renaissance humanist concern for reforming the clergy and church institutions, and also for furthering enlightened education. He attacked many clerical abuses and though he did not advocate doctrinal reform, the suspicion of heresy was never far from him. Yet he was listened to by a wide circle; among the contemporaries whose thinking he influenced were Erasmus and Sir Thomas More.<sup>11</sup>

Given the subject matter under discussion, one may have thought it would have been more germane if the faculty had made reference to the views of a Reformer, or to the views of one of the Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly who advocated a position approximating to the day-age or framework interpretation of the days of Genesis. The faculty’s failure to do so is presumably not from lack of desire, but rather from an inability to identify a suitable example.

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9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), p. 239.

Turning their attention to the phrase “in the space of six days,” the faculty notes:

Some insist that its inclusion is manifestly intended to exclude anything but the six 24-hour day view. Others maintain that at this point the Standards are simply paraphrasing the language of Scripture and do not address the question of the length of the days.<sup>12</sup>

Neither view meets with the complete approval of the faculty, though the latter view is nearer to the truth in their judgment. They acknowledge that “the paraphrase view is doubtful because if the Standards had intended simply to utilize biblical language, ‘in six days’ would have sufficed and been a more natural choice.”<sup>13</sup>

What then is the import of the phrase? The faculty contends that the phrase was designed to affirm that the work of creation involved duration, the intent being to exclude the view that creation was instantaneous. In support of that contention, they point to John Calvin’s commentary on Genesis 1:5 in which he repudiates explicitly the idea of instantaneous creation.

What is the faculty’s conclusion?

In view of such examples it seems fair to maintain that the phrase in question in the Standards functions to oppose the error, longstanding at that time, of instantaneous creation. Though the framers of the Standards for the most part held personally to the 24-hour day view, that view, to the exclusion of all others, is *not* the point of their confessional affirmation. That affirmation, as particularly the inclusion of “the space of” shows, intends not somehow to *limit* but rather, over against the instantaneous creation view, to *emphasize* the duration of the creation days. Even though Calvin, Ames, and the authors of the Westminster Standards, with few exceptions, if any, undoubtedly understood the days to be ordinary days, there is no ground for supposing that they intended to exclude any and all other views, in particular the view that the days may be longer. Such views are outside their purview; their

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12. *A Brief Statement*, p. 2.

13. *Ibid.*

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concern, in fact, moves in the opposite direction, against the instantaneous view that denies any length.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, the Confession, which appeared to oppose views which entailed an old age of the earth, now not only does not oppose such views, but in fact supports them! Where is this all leading? The faculty makes that plain when they continue:

This point bears emphasizing within the context of the current debate about the days of Genesis. To establish that the Standards mandate the six 24 hour days view requires more than demonstrating that the Divines, perhaps even to a man, held that the days were ordinary days. To demonstrate that of itself establishes nothing. What needs also to be shown, *which we believe cannot be shown*, is that *they intended to exclude the views that the days are longer in some respect or that they represent a literary framework*.<sup>15</sup> [Emphasis MS]

The onus is now cast onto those who seek to maintain the literal view of Genesis 1 & 2 to show that the Confession intended to exclude the view that the days were of long duration and that the whole account was part of a literary device employed by Moses. How convenient when it is remembered that Westminster's faculty includes longstanding and ardent proponents of the literary framework theory. Meredith Kline, who occupies the chair of Professor of Old Testament, first advocated a literary framework view of Genesis 1 in 1958.<sup>16</sup>

What is the faculty's conclusion?

Within churches subscribing to the Standards today, therefore, the phrase in question does not foreclose discussion of the nature and length of the Genesis days and related issues, but leaves those open questions to be settled, if possible, by what Scripture teaches.<sup>17</sup>

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14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Meredith Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 20, 1958, pp. 146-157.

17. *A Brief Statement*, p. 2.



It is evident that what governs the thinking of the faculty is not a proper exegesis of Genesis 1, nor the views of the Reformers, nor those of the Westminster divines. Rather, their thinking is dictated by the current scientific views that they seek to harmonize with Genesis 1 by resorting to long period theories or literary framework theories. This is the blight that has smitten the church since the early nineteenth century.

Westminster Theological Seminary claims to stand "in the Augustinian and Reformed theological tradition." However, as will be demonstrated, the faculty's statement lacks theological integrity. As Kenneth Gentry notes with respect to the current debate within the Presbyterian Church of America:

Six-day Creationists are concerned that [the] Confession is being handled in a disingenuous way when attempts are made to re-interpret its objective, unambiguous statements. If in the final analysis six-day creation is erroneous, we are convinced that we would have more integrity as a church before the world if we simply revised our Confession by deleting the offending phrase, rather than altering its clear and forthright meaning.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of this issue within Reformed and Presbyterian churches cannot be overestimated. Kline unintentionally makes this plain in his most recent contribution to the debate over the days of Genesis 1 & 2 when he writes:

In this article I have advocated an interpretation of biblical cosmogony according to which Scripture is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, *does not discountenance the theory of the evolutionary origin of man*. But while I regard *the widespread insistence on a young earth to be a deplorable disservice to the cause of biblical truth*, I at the same time deem commitment to the authority of scriptural teaching to involve the acceptance of Adam as an historical individual, the covenantal head and ancestral fount of the rest of mankind, and the

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18. Kenneth L. Gentry, "In the Space of Six Pages: On Breaking the Confession with the Rod of Irons," *Chalcedon Report*, April 2000, p. 21.

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recognition that it was the one and the same divine act that constituted him the first man, Adam the son of God (Luke 3:38), that also imparted to him life (Gen. 2:7).<sup>19</sup> [Emphasis MS]

As Kline indicates, the acceptance of evolutionary views is clearly on his agenda. While that in itself should occasion dismay, the implications for the rejection of a literal view of the days of Genesis 1 & 2 are even more spiritually catastrophic, going as they do to the very heart of the Christian faith.

### **Genesis 1 & 2: Pre-1800**

Many of the early church fathers held to a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 & 2.<sup>20</sup> Herman Bavinck summarizes the views of the early church as follows:

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19. Meredith Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, vol. 48, March 1996, pp. 15, footnote 47.

20. In this chapter we will canvass the views of some early church fathers, Reformers, members of the Westminster Assembly, and other leading theologians prior to the proliferation of so-called scientific discoveries in the early nineteenth century, with respect to their interpretation of "days" in Genesis 1. This survey is not intended to be exhaustive, but it is designed to note that many held not only to six twenty-four hour days, but also to the relatively recent origin of the earth. For more detailed analyses, confer Jack P. Lewis, "The Days of Creation: An Historical Survey of Interpretation," *The Journal of the Theological Society*, vol. 32, no. 4, December, 1989, pp. 433-455; Louis Lavellee, "Augustine on the Creation Days," *The Journal of the Theological Society*, vol. 32, no. 4, December, 1989, pp. 457-464; David W. Hall, "The Evolution of Mythology: Classic Creation Survives As the Fittest Among Its Critics and Revisers," *Did God Create in Six Days?* Joseph A. Pipa & David W. Hall, eds. (Southern Presbyterian Press, Taylors SC, 1999), pp. 267-305; Robert W. Letham, "In the Space of Six Days: The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 61, 1999, pp. 149-174; David W. Hall, Mark A. Herzer, and Wesley A. Baker, "History Answering Present Objections: Exegesis of the Days of Creation a Century Before and After Westminster, 1540-1740," <http://capo.org/1540-1740.html>;

In this respect one can clearly discern two distinct schools of thought. The one rejects the temporal character of the six days, for the most part ascribes visionary significance to them, sees the entire world as being created simultaneously at a single stroke, and frequently arrives at a variety of allegorical interpretations. It was already presented by Philo and, later, in the Christian church by Clement, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, Erigena, Abelard, Cajetan, Canus, Gonzales, and others, as well as by Moses Maimonides. The other school adheres to the literal sense of the creation narrative, including that of the six days. It was followed by Tertullian, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Ephraem, John of Damascus. Later on it achieved almost exclusive dominance in Scholasticism, in Roman Catholic as well as Protestant theology, although the alternative exegesis of Augustine was consistently discussed with respect and never branded heretical.<sup>21</sup>

In the third century, Hippolytus (c. 170-236) the Presbyter of Rome taught that the world was less than six thousand years old. He wrote:

For as the times are noted from the foundation of the world, and reckoned from Adam, they set clearly before us the matter with which our inquiry deals. For the first appearance of our Lord in the flesh took place in Bethlehem, under Augustus, in the year 5500; and He suffered in the thirty-third year. And 6,000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day "on which God rested from all His works." For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they "shall reign with Christ," when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for "a day with the Lord is

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David W. Hall, "The Westminster View of Creation Days: A Choice Between Non-Ambiguity or Historical Revisionism," <http://capo.org/creation.html>; Wesley Brice, "The Doctrine of Creation in the History of the Church," *The Days of Creation* (Special Committee Report of the Reformed Church in the United States: Adopted by the 253rd Synod of the RCUS. May 17-20, 1999), pp. 7-15.

21. Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 106.

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as a thousand years." Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled. And they are not yet fulfilled, as John says: "five are fallen; one is," that is, the sixth; "the other is not yet come."<sup>22</sup>

Irenaeus (c. 115-202), while expounding his recapitulation doctrine, according to which Christ undid that which Adam had done, makes reference to Genesis 1:5 and 3:4, arguing that Adam and Eve died on the same day that they ate of the forbidden fruit. He identifies that day as being the one on which man was created. He is aware of others who identified a thousand year period with one day, but considers that, even if that were the case, if Adam died within a period of one thousand years, then the word of God with respect to Adam is true.

Thus, then, in the day that they did eat, in the same did they die, and became death's debtors, since it was one day of the creation. For it is said, "There was made in the evening, and there was made in the morning, one day." Now in this same day that they did eat, in that also did they die. But according to the cycle and progress of the days, after which one is termed first, another second, and another third, if anybody seeks diligently to learn upon what day out of the seven it was that Adam died, he will find it by examining the dispensation of the Lord.... And there are some, again, who relegate the death of Adam to the thousandth year; for since "a day of the Lord is as a thousand years," he did not overstep the thousand years, but died within them, thus bearing out the sentence of his sin. Whether, therefore, with respect to disobedience, which is death; whether [we consider] that, on account of that, they were delivered over to death, and made debtors to it; whether with respect to [the fact that on] one and the same day on which they ate they also died (for it is one day of the creation); whether [we regard this point], that, with respect to this cycle of days, they died on the day in which they did also eat, that is, the day of the preparation, which is termed "the pure supper," that is, the sixth day of the feast, which the Lord also exhibited when He suffered on that day; or whether [we

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22. Hippolytus, *On Daniel*, 2:4.

reflect] that he (Adam) did not overstep the thousand years, but died within their limit, — it follows that, in regard to all these significations, God is indeed true.<sup>23</sup>

The views of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-220) are not entirely clear. He appears to teach a literal view of the days of Genesis when he writes, “For the creation of the world was concluded in six days. For the motion of the sun from solstice to solstice is completed in six months — in the course of which, at one time the leaves fall, and at another plants bud and seeds come to maturity.”<sup>24</sup> However, there are other references in the writings of Clement which indicate that he did not view the days of creation as literal days.<sup>25</sup>

Origen (c. 185-254) touched upon the subject of the days of creation in his discourse with Celsus. Celsus had written:

Silly as that may be, sillier still is the way the world is supposed to have come about. They allot certain days to creation, before days existed. For when heaven had not been made, or the earth fixed or the sun set in the heavens, how could days exist? Isn't it absurd to think that the greatest God pieced out his work like a bricklayer, saying, “Today I shall do this, tomorrow that,” and so on, so that he did this on the third day, that on the fourth, and something else on the fifth and sixth days! We are thus not surprised to find, that like a common workman, this God wears himself down and so needs a holiday after six days.

In his response, Origen declines to enter into a detailed discussion of “the manner in which different kinds of days were allotted to both sorts.” He insists that he had treated this subject before in his discussions with Celsus. Nonetheless, Origen emphasizes that Celsus was in error and motivated by a “secret desire to cast discredit upon the Mosaic account of creation.”<sup>26</sup> Despite

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23. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.28.3

24. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, 6:16.

25. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

26. Origen, *Against Celsus*, 1:20.

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these assertions, the position of Origen remains somewhat obscure.

By way of marked contrast with Origen, the fourth century church father Basil (c. 330-379) was a strong proponent of the literal interpretation of Scripture. With a none too veiled reference to Origen, he wrote:

I know the laws of allegory, though less by myself than from the works of others. There are those truly who do not admit the common sense of the Scriptures, for whom water is not water, but some other nature, who see in a plant, a fish, what their fancy wishes, who change the nature of reptiles and of wild beasts to suit their allegories, like the interpreters of dreams who explain visions in sleep to make them serve their own ends. For me grass is grass; plant, fish, wild beast, domestic animal, I take all in the literal sense.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, it is not surprising to discover that Basil approached Genesis in a literal way, concluding that Scripture was referring to a natural twenty-four hour day.

Thus were created the evening and the morning. Scripture means the space of a day and a night, and afterwards no more says day and night, but calls them both under the name of the more important: a custom which you will find throughout Scripture. Everywhere the measure of time is counted by days, without mention of nights.... If it therefore says "one day," it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day — we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less, circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there.<sup>28</sup>

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27. Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1989), 8:101.

28. Basil, *Homily*, II.

Ambrose of Milan (c. 339-397) was one of the first theologians to develop a mature view of creation. He asserted:

The beginning of the day rests on God's word: "Be light made, and light was made." The end of day is the evening. Now, the succeeding day follows after the termination of night. The thought of God is clear. First He called light "day" and next He called darkness "night." In notable fashion has Scripture spoken of a "day," not the "first day." Because a second, then a third day, and finally the remaining days were to follow, a "first day" could have been mentioned, following in this way the natural order. But Scripture established a law that twenty-four hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of day only, as if one were to say the length of one day is twenty-four hours in extent.<sup>29</sup>

Augustine is often appealed to in support of a non-literal approach to Genesis 1 & 2. It is true that Augustine did contend for a non-literal interpretation of the days of Genesis.<sup>30</sup> However, his purpose in doing so differs radically from those who call on him to support a view of creation over a long period of time. Augustine found it difficult to conceive of a reason why a sovereign God needed six days to create the world when He could have made all things in a moment of time. It was this matter that led to his adoption of instantaneous creation. Concerning the meaning of the days in Genesis 1, he wrote:

Thus, in all the days of creation there is one day, and it is not to be taken in the sense of our day, which we reckon by the course of the sun; but it must have another meaning, applicable to the three days mentioned before the creation of the heavenly bodies. This special meaning of "day" must not be maintained just for the first three days, with the understanding that after the third day we take the word "day" in its ordinary sense. But we must keep the same meaning even to the sixth and seventh days. Hence, "day" and "night," which God divided, must be interpreted quite differently from the familiar "day" and "night," which God decreed the lights

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29. Ambrose, *Hexameron*, pp. 42, 43.

30. Cf. Lavellee, *op. cit.*, p. 460; Letham, *op. cit.*, pp. 154, 155.

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that he created in the firmament should divide.... For it was by the latter act that he created our day, creating the sun whose presence makes the day. But that other day which he originally made had already repeated itself three times when, at its fourth occurrence, these lights of the firmament were created.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas Aquinas offers this useful summary of Augustine's views:

I answer that, On this question Augustine differs from other expositors. His opinion is that all the days that are called seven, are one day represented in a sevenfold aspect (Gen. ad lit. iv, 22; De Civ. Dei xi, 9; Ad Orosium xxvi); while others consider there were seven distinct days, not one only. Now, these two opinions, taken as explaining the literal text of Genesis, are certainly widely different. For Augustine understands by the word "day," the knowledge in the mind of the angels, and hence, according to him, the first day denotes their knowledge of the first of the Divine works, the second day their knowledge of the second work, and similarly with the rest. Thus, then, each work is said to have been wrought in some one of these days, inasmuch as God wrought nothing in the universe without impressing the knowledge thereof on the angelic mind; which can know many things at the same time, especially in the Word, in Whom all angelic knowledge is perfected and terminated. So the distinction of days denotes the natural order of the things known, and not a succession in the knowledge acquired, or in the things produced. Moreover, angelic knowledge is appropriately called "day," since light, the cause of day, is to be found in spiritual things, as Augustine observes (Gen. ad lit. iv, 28). In the opinion of the others, however, the days signify a succession both in time, and in the things produced.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most notable work on the days of creation in the Middle Ages came from the pen of the Venerable Bede (c. 673-

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31. Philip Schaff, ed. *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First series (1887; reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrikson Publishers, 1995), vol. 34, p. 314.

32. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Book 1, Question 74, Article 2.



735). Bede repudiated the allegorical approach of Augustine and gave the literal meaning to days in Genesis 1.<sup>33</sup>

The question of instantaneous creation and creation in six days continued to be discussed and debated throughout the Middle Ages. Hugh of St. Victor, in an attempt at compromise, suggested that while God had created all things together, afterward He distinguished them in form over a period of six days. This view met with limited enthusiasm.

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) discussed the subject of creation at length. However, his views on the days of creation are not always clear. Nonetheless, he is often cited as supporting a literal view of the days of Genesis 1.

The period of the Reformation, with its historical, grammatical approach to the interpretation of Scripture, saw a solidification of the thinking of the church. This was particularly evident in the writings of Luther and Calvin. Luther, in his commentary on Genesis writes:

Hilary and Augustine, almost the two greatest lights of the church, hold that the world was created instantaneously and all at the same time, not successively in the course of six days. Moreover, Augustine resorts to extraordinary trifling in his treatment of the six days, which he makes out to be mystical days of knowledge among the angels, not natural ones.... Nor does it serve any useful purpose to make Moses at the outset so mystical and allegorical. His purpose is to teach us, not about allegorical creatures and an allegorical world but about real creatures and a visible world apprehended by the senses. Therefore, as the proverb has it, he calls "a spade a spade," i.e., he employs the terms "day" and "evening" without allegory, just as we customarily do. The evangelist Matthew, in his last chapter, preserves this method of expression when he writes that Christ rose on the evening of the Sabbath which began to dawn into the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1).... Therefore, so far as this opinion of Augustine is concerned, we assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegori-

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33. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 448.

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cally or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, Calvin accepted the sequence given in Genesis. He contended that the days of Genesis 1 were six successive days. He also made it clear that the days of creation were natural days. In rejecting instantaneous creation, Calvin advocated a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:

Here the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment. For it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction. Let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men. We slightly pass over the infinite glory of God, which here shines forth; whence arises this but from our excessive dullness in considering his greatness? In the meantime, the vanity of our minds carries us away elsewhere. For the correction of this fault, God applied the most suitable remedy when he distributed the creation of the world into successive portions, that he might fix our attention, and compel us, as if he had laid his hand upon us, to pause and to reflect.<sup>35</sup>

William Perkins (1558-1602) maintained that Moses recorded precisely the time that elapsed from creation to his own day, although he noted that chronologers were not all of one mind on that subject. After citing a range of authors who speculated that between 3,900 and 4,000 years had passed from creation to the birth of Christ, he goes on to say "...some might ask in what space of time did God make the world?" While acknowledging that God

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34. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1958), pp. 4, 5.

35. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 78.

could have made all things in a moment of time, Perkins states "...but he begane and finished the whole worke in sixe distinct daies." After listing the six days of Genesis 1 and the contents described in the chapter, he concludes "...in six distinct spaces of time, the Lord did make all things."<sup>36</sup>

Interestingly, none of the major Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century specifically addresses the question of the days of creation.<sup>37</sup> The *French Confession* (1559) focuses on creation as a work of the Trinity, while the *Scots Confession* (1560) points to God's sovereignty in creation. The *Belgic Confession* (1561) states that God created *ex nihilo* all creatures "as it seemed good to him, giving to every creature its being shape, form, and several offices to serve its creator." The *Second Helvetic Confession* (1562), like the *French Confession*, points to creation as a work of the Trinity, but does not make reference to the days of creation. Finally, the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (1563, 1571) do not deal with creation at all.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) takes up the matter indirectly in relation to the fourth commandment. In Question 92, the Catechism quotes the entire text of Exodus 20:8-11, which specifically bases the observance of one day in seven upon the pattern that God established when He created the world. Unless the word "day" means a period of twenty-four hours in both instances, the comparison becomes meaningless. Question 103, which distinguishes a "day of rest" from "all the days of my life," also supports the view that the days of Genesis 1 were periods of twenty-four hours.

Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), the chief author of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, raised similar arguments in his commentary on the Catechism. He argued, "The reason which is here given [for

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36. William Perkins, *The Works of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612), vol. 1, pp. 143, 144.

37. The sections pertaining to creation in the *French Confession*, the *Belgic Confession*, the *Second Helvetic Confession*, and the *Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms* are set out in Appendix A.

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keeping the fourth commandment] is drawn from the example of God's resting on the seventh day from the work of creation which he had accomplished in six days."<sup>38</sup> Further, "that by the example of himself resting on the seventh day, he might exhort men, as by a most effectual and constraining argument, to imitate him, and so abstain, on the seventh day, from the labors to which they were accustomed during the other six days of the week."<sup>39</sup> Commenting on Question 26, Ursinus observes that "God created the world, not suddenly, nor in a moment of time, but in six days."<sup>40</sup>

The first explicit confessional reference came with the *Irish Articles of Religion*, compiled by James Ussher in 1615. Article 18 read, "In the beginning of time, when no creature had any being, God, by his word alone, in the space of six days, created all things, and afterwards, by his providence, doth continue, propagate, and order them according to his will."

The literal view of the six days of creation also appears in the *Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible* which were ordered by the Synod of Dort (1618-19). The annotation to Genesis 1:5 reads: "The meaning of these words [day/night] is that night and day had made up one natural day together, which with the Hebrews began with the evening and ended with the approach of the next evening, comprehending twenty-four hours."<sup>41</sup>

As already noted, the Westminster Assembly (1643) concluded that it pleased God "to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein ... in the space of six days." As expected, this same view appears in the writings of those who attended the Assembly. The following is a small selection from the writings of the Westminster divines.

John Lightfoot wrote:

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38. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1852), p. 558.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

41. Quoted in Brice, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

That the world was made at equinox, all grant, — but differ at which, whether about the eleventh of March, or twelfth of September; to me in September, without all doubt. All things were created in their ripeness and maturity; apples ripe, and ready to eat, as is too sadly plain in Adam and Eve's eating the forbidden fruit.... So that look at the first day of the creation, God made heaven and earth in a moment. The heaven, as soon as created, moved, and the wheel of time began to go; and thus, for twelve hours, there was universal darkness. This is called the "evening," meaning night. Then God said, "Let there be light," and light arose in the east, and, in twelve hours more, was carried over the hemisphere; and this is called, 'morning,' or 'day.' And the evening and morning made the first natural day; twelve hours, darkness, — and twelve, light.<sup>42</sup>

Commenting on Exodus 20:11, Lightfoot wrote:

But let us consider of the second thing, as it tends to the end of this command, the setting forth the reason of the institution of the sabbath; that he created all things 'in six days.' And what needed he take six days, that could have done all in a moment? He had as little need to take time for his work, as he had of the world, he being Lord of all. What reason can we give? But that he, by his own proceeding and acting would set the clock of time, and measure out days, and a week, by which all time is measured, — by his own standard, evening and morning, to make a natural day, i.e., day and night; and seven natural days to make a week; six days of labour, the seventh for rest.... So that look at the first day of the creation, God made heaven and earth in a moment. The heaven, as soon as created, moved, and the wheel of time began to go; and thus, for twelve hours, there was universal darkness. This is called the "evening," meaning night. Then God said, "Let there be light," and light arose in the east, and, in twelve hours more, was carried over the hemisphere; and this is called, "morning," or "day." And the evening and morning made the first natural day; twelve hours, darkness, — and twelve, light.<sup>43</sup>

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42. John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, D.D.* (rpr. J. R. Pitman, ed., London, 1825), vol. 2, p. 333.

43. Quoted in Hall, *The Westminster View*, p. 13.

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John White, who was an assessor for the Assembly, wrote a lengthy *Commentary on the First Three Chapters of Genesis*. He states, "Here, where it [yom] is distinguished from the Night, it is taken for a Civil day, that is, that part of 24 houres which is Light; but in the latter end of the verse, it signifies a Natural day, consisting of 24 houres, and includes the night too."<sup>44</sup>

In that same commentary, he wrote, "By the Evening, we must here understand the whole night, or space between the shutting in of the light, and the dawning of the next day. . . . In the same manner runs the computation of Times, among the Hebrews to this day."<sup>45</sup>

The commentary on the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* by Thomas Vincent, which was published in 1674, is also significant. This catechism was published while many of the Westminster divines were still living. The level of appreciation for this work is indicated by its endorsement by three of the divines: Joseph Caryl, Edmund Calamy, and Thomas Case. Vincent wrote:

Q. 4. In what time did God create all things? A. God created all things in the space of six days. He could have created all things together in a moment; but he took six days' time to work in, and rested on the seventh day, that we might the better apprehend the order of the creation, and that we might imitate him in working but six days of the week, and in resting on the seventh.<sup>46</sup> [Emphasis MS]

This statement is followed by a series of questions regarding each of the six days of creation. Vincent gives no indication that he, or any of the Westminster divines who endorsed his commentary, envisioned that the days of Genesis 1 were anything other than normal days.

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44. John White, *Commentary on the First Three Chapters of Genesis* (London, 1656), p. 32.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture* (1674, rpr. Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980), p. 8.

Following the Westminster Assembly, the literal view of days in Genesis 1 was maintained by leading Reformed theologians. Francis Turretin (c. 1623-1687), referring to Augustine's views of an instantaneous creation, offers these comments, which indicate his acceptance of a taking of the six days of creation as literal days without provision being made for intervening long periods of time.

But there are the following objections to this opinion: (1) the simple and historical Mosaic narration, which mentions six days and ascribes a particular work to each day; (2) the earth is said to have been without form and void and darkness rested upon the face of the deep (which could not have been said if all things had been created in one moment); (3) in the fourth commandment (recommending the sanctification of the seventh day), God is said to have been engaged in creation six days and to have rested on the seventh (so that by this example the people might be induced to rest on the seventh day). This reason would have no weight, if God had created all things in a single moment. (4) No reason can be given for the order followed by Moses in his narration, if all things were not made successively.<sup>47</sup>

Writing slightly later than Turretin, the Scottish divine Thomas Boston (1676-1732) echoes similar views:

Our next business is to shew in what space of time the world was created. It was not done in a moment [as Augustine], but in the space of six days, as is clear from the narrative of Moses. It was as easy for God to have done it in one moment as in six days. But this method he took, that we might have that wisdom, goodness, and power that appeared in the work, distinctly before our eyes, and be stirred up to a particular and distinct consideration of these works, for commemoration of which a seventh day [24 hours] is appointed a sabbath of rest.<sup>48</sup>

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47. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (P & R Publishing, New Jersey, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 444, 445.

48. Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (repr. Wheaton, Illinois: Richard Owen Roberts, Publisher, 1980), p. 173.

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With the coming of the nineteenth century, the position adopted by Luther, Calvin, and the Westminster assembly suddenly started to be challenged. Questions started to emerge as to whether the earth had in fact been created in six literal days. The source of those queries did not emanate initially from the theologians, but from geologists.

John Dick (1764-1833), in his *Lectures on Theology*, provides an insight into the nature of the challenge to the literal interpretation of Genesis 1.

God created the heavens and the earth about four thousand years before the Christian era. The materials were produced out of nothing in an instant; but it is related, that six days were employed in arranging them in their present form. Some are of the opinion that these were not natural days, but periods of an indefinite length; *because they think that the world must have been created at an earlier date than Moses has assigned to it, and ages were necessary to give rise to those appearances which are observed in its structure.* But, besides that this opinion is objectionable on the ground that it puts a meaning upon the word day, although it is distinctly defined by the evening and the morning, which it bears no where else in simple narrative, it remains to be proved that there is any necessity for such interpretation.... If we cannot answer particularly all the objections of geologists, neither can they satisfactorily shew that the appearances, upon which they found their theories, were not caused by that event [referring to the flood], and by the state in which the earth existed before it was brought into its present form. We may, therefore, understand the words of Moses literally, when he says, that in six days God created the heavens and the earth. As he could have perfected them at once, we cannot conceive any reason why he proceeded by degrees, but that he might exhibit his power and his wisdom more distinctly to us, who should afterwards be informed of the process; and that he might confirm, by his own example, the command to work on six days, and rest on the seventh.<sup>49</sup> [Emphasis MS]

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49. John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: F. W. Greenough, 1839), vol. 1, p. 384.



Initially, the challenge to the literal interpretation of Genesis 1 came from geology, but as the century progressed the challenge diversified and biologists also became trenchant critics.

Louis Berkhof sums up the position well:

The prevailing view has always been that the days of Genesis 1 are to be understood as literal days. Some of the early Church Fathers did not regard them as real indicators of the time in which the work of creation was completed, but rather as literary forms in which the writer of Genesis cast the narrative of creation, in order to picture the work of creation — which was really completed in a moment of time — in an orderly fashion for human intelligence. It was only after the comparatively new sciences of geology and palaeontology came forward with their theories of the enormous age of the earth, that theologians began to show an inclination to identify the days of creation with the long geological ages.<sup>50</sup>

... to be continued ●

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50. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), pp. 153, 154.

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# Book Reviews

***The Old Religion in a New World, The History of North American Christianity***, by Mark A. Noll. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. xii+340pp. (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Mark Noll knows religion in North America as well as any student of religion. This is obvious from this book as well as from other books he has written, two of the best of which are *The History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* and *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

Prof. Noll has two purposes in mind with this book: the first is to trace the various religions in this country to their European roots, or, if a religion is indigenous, to explain its rise in our continent; and the second is to discuss various crucial issues which were faced in the course of the history of Christianity in the American continent.

The description of this history of religion is not from the viewpoint of the church of Jesus

Christ, but, more objectively, from the viewpoint of religion in general. There is, therefore, not a great deal of evaluation and critical analysis, for Noll's emphasis is on the history itself. Noll includes a very interesting chapter on the development of the idea of the separation of church and state, by anyone's estimation an important issue in the history of this country. One should read this chapter to understand what is going on today in the court's definition of the First Amendment. (As I write this, the news has just broken that a federal judge in California has ruled that the public recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag is unconstitutional because of the inclusion of the words "under God.")

A great deal of space is given in the book to a discussion of revivals and Methodism, especially the revivals of Whitefield, Finney, Moody and Sankey, and Billy Sunday. In close connection with this subject, much attention is paid to the Charismatic Movement.

There can be no doubt about it that both have shaped religion generally in this country and influenced the church.

Noll points out that the Seventh Day Adventist movement arose out of a layman who predicted Christ's return in 1843 and deceived thousands. Thus Seventh Day Adventist churches had all the earmarks of being sectarian. Those who still find delight in predicting that which God has chosen not to reveal face the danger of joining the many sects which flourish in this land.

Other subjects treated at some length are black Christianity, Roman Catholicism, the development of the social gospel from the time of Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of social Christianity, the temperance movement, and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Speaking of Protestant fragmentation, Noll writes,

First was the fragmentation of the evangelical Protestant phalanx. The unleashing of ordinary individuals, who for Christian and democratic reasons were urged to think and act for themselves, produced

tremendous expansionary energy in the churches, but it also fueled an ecclesiastical centrifuge. To empower ordinary people meant that some of the people so empowered might act in ways not conforming to inherited standards of faith and practice. Spokesmen for evangelical Protestantism urged people to take control of their lives in their own hands. But when individuals like William Miller (probably the reference is to the founders of the "Millerites," who believed in the return of Christ in 1843) and Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism) did so, traditional Protestant leaders were far from pleased. The secret of the power behind the evangelical surge during the first generation of the new nation's history was also the secret behind the fragmentation of evangelicalism in the generation after 1830 (p. 100).

The book is a must for an overall view of the history of religion in America; the book is of no help to one seeking to trace the history of the church of Christ. ■

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***Telling the Old, Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching***, by David L. Larsen. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995. x - 320pp. \$13.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

David L. Larsen defends the truth of the infallible inspiration of the Bible. The Bible is, "God's true message to lost humanity" (p. 29). Larsen rejects neo-orthodoxy and its subjectivity. He also rejects liberalism's "flight from historicity and supernatural revelation" (p. 29).

While advocating turning afresh to Scripture's immense trove of narrative and story, Larsen correctly criticizes Fred Craddock for going too far when he writes, "It is very important that the structure of the message be a narrative. A narrative, by its structure, provides order and meaning, and therefore I cannot stress too heavily the indispensability of narrative shape and sequence. Change the shape, for instance into a logical syllogism and ... the function of the message as narrative is now lost. The movement from chaos to order, from origin to destiny is broken, and in its place are some

ideas, well argued" (p. 30). Larsen cautions preachers against abandoning any of the scriptural genres (narrative, didactic, poetic, etc.).

In the second chapter Larsen makes a convincing, solid case for the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible. Because the Bible is inspired it is true and authoritative and must, therefore, be approached with reverent belief and obedience. Larsen reminds us that the question we must put to Scripture is not, "Is it True?" but, "What does it mean?" (p. 36).

In this same context Larsen distinguishes three types of narrative: "1) historical narrative; 2) parabolic narrative (with no historical representation); and 3) poetic narrative, such as the Song of Miriam in Exodus 15 or the Song of Deborah in Judges 5, in which we have an historical sub-stratum with poetic and imaginative elements of language" (p. 38).

Larsen offers the following definition of narrative, "... a story tells about something that happened, starting with a point of tension and finally leading up to the satisfactory or unsatisfactory resolution of that

tension" (p. 38). He claims that the bulk of both Old and New Testaments is narrative in this definition (p. 38).

Larsen stresses, and we appreciate the emphasis, that the opening of God's Word and the preaching of God's truth call for a submissive and humble spirit and prayer (pp. 38-39). This is to be followed by the preacher's giving careful consideration, "... to the characteristics of the particular genre if the passage is to be preached accurately and clearly" (p. 39). The author concludes this section with a statement every preacher ought to take to heart,

If we can steer clear of the current literary boom's dethronement of the Bible's author and His intention, as well as its concomitant insistence on the status of texts as unstable entities, and open ourselves to the stories of the Bible, we shall have found wealth untold for the aspiring communicator (pp. 42, 43).

Larsen next proceeds to distinguish and describe five kinds of Old Testament Narrative: Epical, Historical, Biographical Cycles, Topical, and

Prophetic Narrative (pp. 43-47). This section will be helpful to aspiring preachers. Concerning the New Testament and the unity and interdependence of the Old and New Testaments Larsen writes, "The christological nature of all Christian discourse is not argued here but follows from our agreement with Luther that Scripture is the garment of Christ. The Bible is the cradle of Christ" (p. 47). In his discussion of the narratives of the Gospel accounts and the book of Acts, Larsen insists on the historicity of these events. This he does over against what Larsen correctly calls "the devastating wreckage left in the wake of redaction criticism" (p. 48). Indeed, not only throughout this section, but throughout the entire book, Larsen displays his high regard for the inspired, infallible, authoritative Holy Scriptures with Jesus Christ lying at its heart!

The third chapter is a must read. After establishing the truth that all sermons are built on "sound and careful exegesis," Larsen discusses the three components of expounding the biblical narrative, viz., 1) Reading the story. In this section Larsen rightly insists that Scripture

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must be read with the expression the passage calls for. This he calls "oral interpretation"; 2) Telling the story; and 3) Preaching the story. Preaching the story involves spiritual, exegetical, theological, and homiletical preparation.

In chapter four Larsen contends that "how we handle the Bible hinges largely on what we believe the Bible is" (p. 74). Again, he is sharply critical of higher criticism and asserts yet again that the Bible is inspired and authoritative. We must determine what the text of Scripture meant and means!

Chapter five contains Larsen's well taken warning against ministerial sloth. The brief paragraphs on "Emphasize the Unity" and "Respect the Complexity" are especially helpful (pp. 95, 96).

In his discussion of the crafting of the narrative sermon in chapter six, Larsen offers a searing indictment of contemporary preaching. He insists that preaching must be good, solid, exegetical exposition of at least thirty minutes (pp. 109, 110)! We would agree heartily. The rest of the chapter contains practical suggestions on how to craft a sermon on a narrative

text. Some of these are excellent, some are not. Let the discerning, Reformed preacher implement the former and ignore the latter. Larsen, to his credit and to our profit, does insist that the conclusion "needs careful preparation and honing" (p. 122). How true! An otherwise good, edifying sermon can be easily spoiled by a poor conclusion. Preachers need to take to heart Larsen's exhortation, "let it fly in the conclusion" (p. 122).

The delivery of the sermon is the subject of chapter seven. Delivery involves: 1) Emotion. If the preacher is going to preach with deep feeling, he himself must have that deep feeling in his own heart. 2) Conviction. Here the author warns that sermons must not be read from the pulpit. 3) Unc- tion. In preaching we are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Hence we must be much in prayer.

In the eighth chapter Larsen discusses preaching the parables. In his sharp criticism of higher criticism, which, he rightly says, "empties the parables of their meaning," he uses strong language: "incredible atrocities" and "hermeneu-

tical mayhem!" Larsen warns against allegorizing the parables, an error into which preachers can easily fall. He instructs us to seek the theme of the parable and preach that.

In chapter nine Larsen discusses miracles. He "inclines" toward Everett F. Harrison's definition: "A miracle is an event in the external world wrought by the immediate power of God to accredit a message or messenger" (p. 160). Nowhere, we are convinced, will anyone find a better discussion of miracles/wonders than that of Herman Hoeksema in his *Reformed Dogmatics* (pp. 236-244). Hoeksema writes, "In general we would circumscribe a wonder as that act of God whereby He raises the whole of His creation, fallen in sin and under the curse, into the glory of His eternal kingdom and everlasting covenant" (p. 243).

In yet another denunciation of higher criticism which denies miracles, Larsen writes, "If miracles are ontologically impossible, then so is the supernatural Christ impossible. All has been lost" (pp. 166-167).

In general this is a good chapter. It contains a number of helpful suggestions especially

for seminarians and preachers who are at the beginning of their careers.

Larsen has a fine section in the tenth chapter asserting the truth that Christ must be preached from both testaments. The first paragraph of this chapter indicates the truth of this assertion:

The center and core of Christian proclamation are the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is dedicated to the exaltation of Christ as the fulfillment of the promises of God (John 15:26; 16:13-15; 2 Cor. 1:20). Christ is to be seen throughout the Old Testament (Luke 24:27), and no Christian proclaimer could preach any Old Testament passage just as a Jewish rabbi would preach it. The fact is that Jesus Christ has come; the promise that was first articulated in Genesis 3:15 and that permeates the entire older testament has come to glorious fulfillment in Christ. We do not impose Christ on any passage, but He is the ultimate frame of reference in the Father's plan and purpose (Eph. 1:9-10; Col. 3:11).

The chapter contains many

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helpful suggestions for Advent, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter. Larsen, in his list of published series of sermons on Christ's suffering, omits one of the finest, viz., Herman Hoeksema's *When I Survey*. This book is available from Reformed Free Publishing Association, 4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Grandville, MI 49418. I highly recommend it.

The author maintains, and rightly so, that preaching on Bible characters must be theocentric and christocentric (chapter 11). Preachers must not lapse into anthropocentric or moralistic preaching. To avoid this danger, sermons on Bible characters must be anchored in solid exegesis! The point ought to be taken to heart by preachers.

Chapter twelve emphasizes the necessity of the Reformed pastor not neglecting in his preaching and teaching the apocalyptic, prophetic passages of Scripture in a way that Larsen did not intend. Larsen is committed to the error of premillennialism. He is correct when he points out that the Bible holds out a wonderful and blessed hope for the believer. Christ is coming again! But Christ is not coming again in the pre-mil sense. God's people need in-

struction and encouragement as regards the Lord's return. They also need to be warned against erroneous views of Christ's return.

Chapter thirteen is a good chapter on preaching the difficult passages of the Bible. Larsen upholds biblical inspiration and inerrancy. He treats in this chapter Rahab's lie, David's adultery, and similar passages. The author reminds us, in chapter fourteen, that our preaching must not be predictable or cluttered with doctrinal clichés. He offers some good suggestions on how to achieve this and at the same time keep our sermons anchored firmly in the text.

We quite agree with Larsen's thesis developed in chapter fifteen. He states, "Our thesis here is that the Bible is powerfully relevant. We do not need to make the text relevant; rather, our task is to share and show its extraordinary relevance" (p. 257).

The concluding chapter is excellent. Here Larsen argues that preaching is more than, "...study, skills, and style ... (p. 271). Preaching is spiritual warfare! In this great work preachers must never hedge. They must preach what the text



says and not avoid what the people may not like to hear! Prayer and spiritual living on the part of the preacher are necessary parts of preparing to preach the Word faithfully.

Whether one is still in seminary or just beginning his ministry or has been preaching for twenty years or more, he ought to read this book. ■

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***Cutting-Edge Bioethics: A Christian Exploration of Technologies and Trends***, by John F. Kilner, C. Christopher Hook, Diann B. Uustal, editors. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. xii-201pp. \$22.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

In many ways this is a frightening book. It is not recommended reading for the hours immediately preceding sleep, for it could result in nightmares and bad dreams. This is not because of the book itself, which is written from a broadly Christian perspective, but it is because of the vivid descriptions of what scientists and medical technicians are doing in the realm of genetics and other sciences relating to human life.

There is a text in Scripture, in connection with the confusion of tongues at Babel (Gen. 11:6), in which God gives as His reason for confusing the speech of those who assembled

to build the tower of Babel: "This they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." Apparently the Lord confused the one language which men spoke so that the human race was divided into nations each speaking its own language. The Lord did this to restrain the full out-breaking of sin in the human race, for if sin manifested itself in all its horror, the gathering of the church would have been impossible. Babel was a premature attempt to establish the Antichristian kingdom. It was too early. The Lord prevented it from happening.

But we live near the end of the ages, and it seems as if the Lord, as He melds the nations of the earth into one kingdom (through the use of one universally understood language), is taking away the restraints of Babel, and now "nothing will be restrained" from evil men. And what man proposes to do is

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blood-chilling and absolutely frightening, but all under the guise of the betterment of the human race. The underlying assumption is the theory of evolution. The boast of man is that he now is able, by means of the science of genetics especially, to control directly the evolutionary process, so that, not only is the process speeded up, but man controls the direction the process will take. His goal is a "superman." This book describes and defines what has been done, what is on the verge of being done, and what seems possible to do in the near future.

The first section of the book deals with new technologies and trends in science (physics and biology) and medicine. A brief mention of some of the more chilling advances will describe this section sufficiently for our purposes.

The human genome has now been mapped, and what each part of this amazingly complex creation of God does in the development of the human person from embryo to adult is being studied and discovered. Genetic manipulation can result in the controlling of gene-related diseases and thus improve and enhance the quality of life. It

can also be used to alter man's physical-psychical make-up in significant and disturbing ways. Much experimentation along these lines is already in progress. The chapter warns against some of the dangers and notes that one of the dangers, not always recognized, is the threat which such development poses in the area of employment and of life and health insurance.

Another chapter deals with nanotransplantations, or the transplanting of organs, tissues, fluids, and cells from animals to humans. It is quite amazing to what uses the doctrine of common grace is put, for here we find common grace used in defense of the Christian's right to use medical advances for his own profit.

That (holding technology to the criteria of promoting the restraint of evil and reinforcement of good) will certainly mean exploring the common ground we share with all human beings made in the image of their heavenly father, whether they realize it or not. All are subject to the common grace of God, which does not leave anyone without some kind of moral sense. As Christians we can appeal to and build on that common

ground, which must surely relate to human flourishing and the avoiding of human harm (p. 28).

Nevertheless, the author gives us a much needed warning.

In the desire to help the progress and development of medical science and to save human life, we need to realize that moral questions must be addressed. Just because we have the technology to do something, does not mean that there is some kind of imperative that we must use that technology. Just because we can do something, does not mean that we ought to do it. We need to look carefully at the technology itself, the motives for its use and development, the nature of what is involved in using that technology, and the likely consequences which may follow its use. Only then can we properly allow the practice of technology.

Medicine exists in order to help preserve the life and well-being of human beings. At times it seems that modern medicine is determined to preserve life by all means and at all costs. This drive should cause us to reflect on

what we really mean by sanctity of life and whether we are in danger of inappropriately trying to resist death.

Transgenics is becoming increasingly common and a great deal of experimentation is being done. The word refers to a procedure in which genetic material of one species is planted in another species, say of a mouse into a cat, or of a monkey into a human. The ostensible reason for such transplantation is the control of disease (approved by the author of this chapter), but many other experiments for many other purposes are being done. It does not take much imagination to envision what could very well be the end of such experimentation.

An important chapter on artificial intelligence and personhood defines the work that is presently being done in the area of melding human beings with computers. This chapter describes what is further defined in a chapter on Cybernetics and Nanotechnology. The way for this form of experimentation is opened by the discovery that individual living molecules can be used to make very small machines. An example is found in the recent discovery

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that molecules can be used in electronic chips to perform the same functions as these chips in computers of every sort. But because molecules are much smaller, and, apparently, much more efficient, the machines made from them are capable of many uses. They can be inserted into the human body, either put into the bloodstream to travel through the body, or implanted in some part of the body such as the brain or the lungs. They can be used to detect disease or infection, to cure diseased cells, to repair injuries, to take pictures of various parts of the body for diagnostic purposes, or, most frightening of all, to create better human beings with superior gifts, higher intelligence, greater strength, etc., etc.

Much has been written in this field, and those who find such development of technology useful speak openly of the fact that man and machines can eventually be merged into one unit, one superior entity, one superman, a machine-man. The author, C. Christopher Hook, makes some interesting observations concerning these developments. He does not hesitate to point out that man's goal is

indeed to become God. The believer is reminded of the lie of Satan in Paradise. And one cannot help but wonder whether God will permit Satan to work in the world in such a way that this lie seemingly becomes a reality in startling ways which we have never anticipated.

The author points out too that wicked man is intent on pursuing the goals of becoming a superman because man wants to deny or hide himself and thus escape the responsibility of guilt for his sin. And then, in a crushing application of this, the author says that something similar is being done already by people who live an imaginary life on the Internet in sex chat rooms and pornographic sites, as well as those who are deeply into what is called virtual reality. One can do things that are very wicked by setting oneself outside one's self, so to speak, and engaging in imaginary experiences and evil discussions anonymously and thus live an illusionary life. This, the author is convinced, is so dangerous that the way is already being prepared by such practices for the more horrible developments that are just around the corner.

The second section of the

book deals with "Growing Cultural Challenges." In this section are some very important chapters. One chapter, on "Multiculturalism," deals with the wrongness of tolerance, which will, in the author's opinion, eventually destroy all Christian ethics. Another chapter, "Reliance on Technology: Stem Cell Research and Beyond," is so important that it is worth the price of the book. Daryl Sas has a section on the appeal of technology and points out that the following elements in the explosion of technology make it appealing even to Christians.

1) It promises to free us from pain and suffering and protect us from consequences of our sins (herpes, HIV) "whether or not they are God's judgments" (p. 83). 2) Technology promises to allow us "to be fully human, at least by humanism's definition of humanness: with total freedom and independence" (p. 83). The Internet will give us any information we desire to have, whether good or bad, so that children's development will not be stifled; physician-aided suicide will help us escape pain and terminal disease; death with dignity will obliterate the finality of death,

etc. 3) Technology promises happiness, but without God. If God does not give us children, technology will enable us to do what God does not do. If our child is born with genes that will make the child develop into a young man of only 5' 5" tall and happiness is to be found in superiority on the basketball court, the problem can be corrected by the insertion of other genes. If studying becomes such hard work that the pleasure is out of it, new genes can give superior intelligence. If happiness is to be found in musical accomplishments, such abilities in music can be provided through genetic manipulation. All of this makes one wonder what is going to happen when each set of parents wants its child to excel — to be taller than others; to be a better mathematician than anyone else; to be the greatest concert pianist on earth....

The author argues that technology holds the promise of replacing God:

Technology, then, can provide a way to replace God. Technology is given attributes of God. Technology is seen as uniquely capable, almost holy; powerful, almost

omnipotent; leader, almost lord. Has technology, in the eyes of some, already replaced God? If we want to know who someone's god is, we should look at whom they worship and praise, who demands the most of their time and energy, whom they trust for deliverance and what they call paradise. We often hear people in secular settings praising technology, and looking to it for truth, as well as assuming it will save them from their problems and bring them into utopia. Are these the "offerings" demanded by this new god?

Two sets of promises compete for our trust: those of God and those of technology.

There are warnings to Christians in these two chapters, which God's people do well to heed. Sometimes even believers, with the excuse that God provides these medical advances and we are to make use of them as gifts of God, step beyond the bounds of what is morally and ethically permissible in an effort to undo what God has done. Even believers can have an unnatural and altogether wrong fear of death. Even believers sometimes argue that if science can do something, it must be

good. Even believers can easily go too far to flee God's chastisement in order to escape what our Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper so poignantly admonishes us to do: "Take up our cross daily."

The third section of the book has to do with "The Changing Face of Health Care." In this section too some interesting issues are discussed. Two of them I found particularly intriguing. The first was "Money Matters in Health Care," in which the author points out that the high cost of new technology and the scarce medical resources raise many profound ethical issues. To mention but one: if a believer's rather aged father was in need of a heart transplant and was in line to receive it, but a young boy of 15 also needed a heart, though he was farther down the list, should a believer insist on having the transplant performed on the aged father?

The second intriguing chapter was one on preventing AIDS and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases). The ethical issue here is more clear-cut. It involves the question of whether the discovery of effective treatment of these diseases is sometimes used as an excuse to engage in the sins which bring them on.

The final section deals with the future and what we may reasonably expect to take place. The book discusses these from the viewpoint of the ethical issues which will necessarily arise in connection with these developments.

A book such as this is most welcome and ought to be read by God's people who have to face many serious ethical questions in their own lives and calling in connection with their own health and the health of their loved ones. Nevertheless, I have one major objection to the perspectives of the authors. On the whole they all seem to have too optimistic an opinion of mankind in general and of the future of mankind in particular. The authors, for the most part, have a whole lot more confidence in scientists and public opinion than I have. Although they would undoubtedly grant that there are evil men around who will carry technology to wicked ends, they are confident that people as a whole and those on the cutting edge of technology are sufficiently to be trusted that they will refrain from permitting science to carry us into extremes which are obviously evil

and putting new discoveries to evil ends.

I do not share that optimism. Total depravity without any common grace tells us that to be optimistic is to hide our heads in the sand. The Lord tells us that one of the signs of His coming is the increase in lawlessness. The world does not get better and better, but worse and worse. Evil abounds and wickedness increases. Man hates God and is determined to push God out of His own world. Man is confident that he stands on the brink of success in this endeavor. The kingdom of Antichrist will, when medical technology reaches its zenith, when cloning is an everyday occurrence, when machine-men replace men, when there is some escape from every disease, when man thinks he has succeeded, apart from God and the cross of Christ, in achieving the perfect kingdom — from an ethical point of view, the kingdom of the beast will be far, far more horrible than anything anyone of us could have imagined. I do not know, nor would I care to speculate, how far God will permit man to go in his crazed pursuit of escape from sin's judgments. It seems as if God will

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permit man to do things that forty years ago we would have said were impossible. But God will demonstrate, beyond any doubt, that the heart of man is wicked above all things and desperately evil, and that, given the bit between his teeth, man will be restrained in nothing.

There is something of relief for the child of God in all this. I suspect, and can even hope, that because of the righteous confession of the saints, persecution will increase to the point that medical assistance will more and more be denied one who serves the Lord Christ. The door of access to medical treatment will be slammed in his face. One author, speaking of advances in the field of unifying men and machines so that men become machines, ponders the question of how a simple person who has only his God-given mind is going to survive in confrontation with superior intellects and giants of mental

abilities. He suggests that a man's God-given mind will be declared a "non-mind," because it is not acceptable by the standards of modern psychiatry. The asylum is the only place for such a "person," for such a one has lost his personhood. It will be a blessing to have medical technology as it is being developed denied us, for we shall not be tempted by the allurements it promises to forsake the way of righteousness. It is, after all, not true that just because something in the field of science *can* be done, it *may* be done. And, for the believer, the definition of a disciple of Christ still holds: Deny one's self, take up one's cross, and follow the Lord. And at the end, though death comes (even, by worldly standards and in the light of modern technology, prematurely), what is so bad about dying and going home to heaven? That is the end of our pilgrim's sojourn in a world that is increasingly mad. ■



***My Dear Erasmus: The Forgotten Reformer***, by David Bentley-Taylor. Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002. 217pp. No price given (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

This book is a sympathetic biography of Desiderius Erasmus, the contemporary of Luther and the supreme Humanist of the sixteenth century. The interesting part of the biography is that the author has written the biography by letting the letters of Erasmus do the speaking. While some additional material is interspersed by way of explanation and to carry the thread of the story, and while occasionally a letter written to Erasmus is quoted, the book consists in large measure of what Erasmus himself said to others in his astoundingly large correspondence. The University of Toronto Press is publishing the complete works of Erasmus in 86 large volumes, many of which contain his correspondence with "kings and popes, cardinals, bishops and theologians, professors and headmasters, philosophers, humanists and doctors, businessmen, bankers and lawyers."

Erasmus was a Humanist, a genuine Renaissance man, a

lover of the classical literature of Greece and Rome. The author, in the title to the book, calls him a "reformer." That is a mistake. That he was important goes without saying. That his contributions to learning in his day were helpful to the Reformation is a fact. But that he himself was a reformer cannot be maintained. Erasmus was an enemy of the Reformation.

He was probably the most learned man of his day and his influence on classical studies was enormous. He had a profound impact on learning in all the schools, including the universities, and he was hailed from one end of Europe to the other as the greatest scholar of all time. His writings were best sellers, and in a day when one earned little by writing, he could support himself from the sale of his books.

Erasmus' commitment to classical literature is evident from his own writings. While he, by his own admission, loved the classics, his favorite was Cicero. He considered Cicero (a Roman essayist) to be the greatest of all the Latins. He loved him for his moral teachings and called him a saint. He came close to ascribing deity to this pagan and described him as

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a forerunner of Christianity (p. 112).

But Erasmus was also a student of the church fathers. Perhaps the church father he loved most dearly was Jerome, the contemporary of Augustine and the father of the Latin Vulgate. In fact, a large part of Erasmus' life was spent in editing and correcting Jerome's works. Let Erasmus himself speak.

[I deplore the fact that] the slippers of the saints and their drivel-stained napkins we put to our lips, scraps of their tunics we place in bejewelled reliquaries (references to the Romish worship of relics), while their most powerful relics, the books in which we have the best part of them still living and breathing, we abandon to be gnawed by bugs and cockroaches. It is impossible to find any writer of our faith to compare with [Jerome], expert in so many languages, completely at home in sacred and profane literature, so perfect in every department of knowledge. Who had the whole of Scripture by heart as he had, drinking it in, pondering upon it? Who breathes the spirit of Christ more vividly? Who

ever followed him more exactly in his way of life? A man who possesses Jerome acquires a well-stocked library, a river of gold. After the writings of the evangelists and apostle, there is nothing more deserving of Christian attention....

His task to edit and correct Jerome's writings was a mammoth task. He wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury:

Everything so damaged, mutilated and muddled, that if Jerome himself came to life again he would neither recognize his own work nor understand it. Let me just say one thing, which is bold but true. I believe that the writing of his books cost Jerome less effort than I spent in the restoring of them, and their birth meant fewer nightly vigils for him than their rebirth did for me.

This preference for Jerome is interesting and may shed some light on his later repudiation of the Reformation. Jerome, who did most of his work in the Eastern Church, near or in Jerusalem itself, disagreed fundamentally with the theology of Augustine, especially with respect

to the question of the absolute sovereignty of the grace of God in the work of salvation. Jerome even wrote Augustine to express his disagreement in the hopes that Augustine would modify his position. The freedom of the will was a generally accepted doctrine in the Eastern Church prior to Augustine, and Jerome was by no means free from that error. Augustine's insistence on the absolute sovereignty of the grace of God destroyed the doctrine of the freedom of the will. It is not surprising, therefore, that this same question was the one profound issue in the dispute between Erasmus and Luther.

Nevertheless, Erasmus, though unintentionally, served the cause of the Reformation. This service to the Reformation consisted chiefly in his work on the Greek New Testament. He was the very first to produce a Greek New Testament, which was based on the best manuscripts available at that time. It was of inestimable value in the preparation of accurate translations of the Bible in every country in Europe. We may note in passing that the work on the Hebrew Bible was done by Reuchlin, a grand-uncle of

Melanchthon, a friend of Erasmus, and also a Humanist, whose work in the Hebrew Old Testament served well the cause of accurate Bible translations in the language of the people.

Erasmus also wrote paraphrases of many New Testament books. But paraphrases are not Scripture; in fact, they are really short commentaries, for they must necessarily reflect the author's theological bias. A striking example of Erasmus' own commitment to Romish theology is found in his paraphrase of Romans 5:1, 2:

Since sins alone produce enmity between God and men, now that we who were sinful have been made righteous, we have made our peace with God the Father not through the Mosaic Law nor by the merit of our deeds, but by our faith. And this has come about through the only Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who by washing away our sins with his blood and death, and reconciling God who was previously hostile to us because of our sins, has opened an approach for us so that through the intervention of faith we might be led to this grace of the gospel (quoted from the book, p. 81).

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In spite of the fact that Erasmus was a dedicated son of the Romish Church, he was also the Church's sharpest critic. While his book, "Enchiridion: Manual of the Christian Soldier" was a more positive setting forth of the need for genuine piety in the service of God, his "Praise of Folly" was a wildly popular critique of the church. He criticized, mocked, and ridiculed the church's rituals, sins, practices, ceremonies and outward religion. His sharp satirical criticism of the church led many within the Romish Church to think that Erasmus was a "closet-Lutheran." The author points out that he was increasingly vilified because he was thought to be working with and even writing for Luther. Erasmus hated this and even feared the enmity of his fellow scholars and of the church (120).

But in his heart of hearts, Erasmus was a despiser of the truth of sovereign grace. Some contend that it was Erasmus' irenic nature and his consequent love of peace that prevented him from joining Luther in his battle against Rome. But, while this may have been a minor element, it was by no means important. He may also have been a moral coward who, as he himself ad-

mitted, feared persecution, which fear prevented him from casting his lot with Luther. But the chief reason was that he did not want Luther's doctrine. Early in the Reformation, May 1519 to be exact, Erasmus wrote Luther and advised him to use peaceable means and not clamor and racket to bring about reform. He even informed Luther that he had not read Luther's works (pp. 108, 109); nor did he have any intention of reading them. There is no record that he ever read one book or pamphlet which Luther wrote. When various public gestures did not placate his critics nor bring to a halt the harassment of various Romish clerics, Erasmus made his final break.

The author claims that in 1520 Erasmus was confused. He wanted reform in the church. He wanted the aid of Luther to accomplish that reform. But he feared his critics. The author claims, and perhaps rightly so, that this fear of his critics was a determining factor in the publication of the book which brought about the final break. The book was "A Discussion of Freedom of the Will." Luther's own magnificent "Bondage of the Will" is the biblical response to Erasmus and the public ac-

knowledge on Luther's part that the break was final and beyond repair.

Although the author does not comment on the theological significance of this, it is well that we who are the heirs of the Reformation understand that God providentially guided events in such a way that this one question of the freedom or bondage of the will should be the crucial issue of the break between the Reformation and the humanistic Renaissance. That that should be the fundamental issue ought not to surprise us, for it is the fundamental issue between Rome and the Reformation, between Rome's Pelagianism and the Reformation's insistence on the sovereignty and particularity of grace. And thus this one issue which separated Erasmus from Luther, and the Renaissance from the Reformation, is the great issue that has always divided the church of Christ from an apostatizing church and truth from error. Paul fought Erasmus' error in his battle against Judaizers, for the issue was justification by faith alone vs. justification by faith and works. Athanasius fought the same battle against Arius, for

the doctrine of the divinity of our Lord is the reason why salvation, to be found only in Christ, is the exclusive work of God. Augustine made the issue his own when he took up the sword of Scripture against the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians. It was the battle between the Reformation (all the reformers) and Rome. It was the battle at Dordt, at the Afscheiding, in the Doleantie, and in 1924 at the time of the inception of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The author points out that towards the end of Erasmus' life he became increasingly cranky. He could not tolerate criticism and lunged fiercely and repeatedly at friends and enemies alike who spoke critically of anything he said. And there were plenty of critics, for (as so frequently happens with one who compromises), his friends did not trust him and his enemies repudiated him. He died a lonely man.

The book is an excellent addition to one's library. ■

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***The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, volume 4: The Age of the Reformation***, by Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002. xi-556pp. \$45.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

Forty-five dollars for a paperback may seem steep, especially for students, but this volume is worth the price. Seminarians, professors of theology, ministers, and lay members of the church ought to read this book. Old writes in a nice, readable, understandable style. Anyone who cares about the proper worship of the church and the preaching of the Word as the central element in the worship of the church will come away from this book encouraged to carry on in the Reformed tradition of worship.

Following the brief Introduction titled "the Reformation of Preaching," Old, in chapter one, analyzes the preaching of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Oecolampadius (and several of the preachers in Strasbourg, among them Martin Bucer), Johann Brenz, John Calvin, and

the English preachers Hugh Latimer and John Hooper.

Old points out, and correctly so, that the Reformation not only preached reform, but was a reform of preaching. Whereas preaching was incidental to worship in the Medieval Church (Rome), the reformers taught that preaching is essential to the proper worship of God. The two giants of the Reformation responsible for this new and distinct school of preaching were Luther and Calvin.

Not surprisingly, the sections on Luther and Calvin are excellent. Old points out that Luther's theology of preaching flows out of his high regard for Scripture as the "ultimate authority in the Church..." (p. 38). For Luther this meant: "Quite naturally, then, preaching is fundamentally an interpretation and application of Holy Scripture. Preaching is a matter of reading the Bible, explaining its meaning for the life of the congregation, and urging God's people to live by God's Word. ...preaching as an act of worship has a definite centrality in the well-ordered service of worship" (pp. 38, 39). The essence of the content of the preaching of the Word for Luther

was, salvation is not by our works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone, God's gift.

Calvin, according to Old, was an expository preacher who preached in the *lectio continua* style (explaining the Scriptures phrase by phrase, clause by clause, going thus through entire books of the Bible, RDD). Old has a nice, well-documented analysis of Calvin's sermons on the Beatitudes. He paraphrases large sections and quotes from these sermons so as to give the reader a good sense of Calvin's preaching style. These sermons indicate that Calvin, in addition to his exegetical skills, was a very effective orator. Calvin made effective use of his extensive vocabulary and also made effective use of variety of sentence structure.

Geneva during Calvin's time there did observe the evangelical "feast days": Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Calvin's sermons during Holy Week demonstrate "the pastoral thrust of Calvin's preaching" (p. 124). With Luther, Calvin regarded preaching as the heart of worship. For Calvin, Christ is really present in the reading and preaching of the Word. Worship, therefore,

is a covenantal relationship between God and his people (pp. 132, 133)!

The chapters that follow contain analyses of: the Counter-Reformation, the Puritans, Anglican Preaching, Protestant Orthodoxy in Germany, France, and the Netherlands, and the Age of Louis XIV. All of these are instructive and well worth reading.

Of particular interest to those of us in the Dutch Calvinist tradition is Old's analysis of Dutch preaching in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most, if not all of us, would agree with Old that Dutch preaching and worship were not elaborate, but were characterized by solid exposition and simplicity of liturgy. Most of us would disagree with Old's conclusion that Voetius (scholastic) and Cocceius (covenantal, experimental) represent the two main streams of Dutch preaching emerging in the age of the Reformation.

Old laments the fact that much of Dutch preaching is inaccessible. Writes he, "The Netherlands was a good place to preach.... The Dutch have always loved solid preaching. What a pity it is locked away in leather bound volumes only

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Dutchmen can read. Thus is Dutch preaching rather inaccessible..." (pp. 449, 450). Perhaps the Dutch Translation Society (the Board of which is located in Western Michigan, Grand Rapids, Holland area) can do something about this?

The book is well-documented. Each chapter contains an excellent bibliography. The book is also enhanced by a detailed, excellent index.

Orthodox, Reformed Protestantism is indebted to Old for this fine work. We are pleased to learn that Old has completed most of the rest of the remaining three volumes of this seven-volume series on, "The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church" (cf. Preface, xi). We look forward to reading them, DV. ■

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***With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship***, by D. J. Hart and John R. Muether. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 2002. 203pp. \$12.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

The fact that a Protestant Reformed believer will not agree with every detail in this book does in no way detract from the book's valuable contribution to the whole subject of distinctively Reformed worship. This is a good book, which ought to be read by every believer who wishes to engage in worship that is pleasing to God because it is worship that is in harmony with God's will as revealed in the inspired, infallible Scriptures.

Not only in the sphere of what may be called "broadly evangelical churches," but also among Presbyterian and Reformed denominations the contemporary church is plagued by "worship wars." We hear of contemporary worship, seeker-sensitive worship services. There is a wide variety of worship styles among the churches. There's even blended worship, which is an attempt to combine the new worship styles with the old, traditional worship. How did we get to this point, the authors ask? We are where we are because of a couple of false assumptions. One is that traditional worship is too somber and sober, too unemotional. We need to experience the joy of salvation in our worship. An-



other false assumption is that we need to attract the unconverted. Our worship must not make them feel uncomfortable.

The authors contend we need to get back to the basics of Reformed worship. We must begin with theology because good theology must produce good worship. Defective theology yields inferior and inappropriate forms of worship. This is why the Westminster divines began with a Directory of the Public Worship of God!

Good theology is biblical theology, and biblical theology begins, continues, and ends with the sovereignty of God. Our worship, if it be biblical, will of necessity be theocentric. Proper worship will be in harmony with the sound doctrines of God's Word, e.g., man's total depravity, God's sovereign, and particular grace. Never will our worship be separated from the sound doctrine of God's Word. It's in this context that the authors make a point that ought to give the Reformed believer who leans in the direction of "seeker-sensitive worship" pause,

Ironically, however, there is a sense in which what we propose in this study is profoundly seeker-sensitive. We

do not mean that we hope to please any browsers who might step into our sanctuaries on Sunday morning. Rather the seeker we intend to please is the one whom Scripture describes as the seeker of acceptable worship. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus says that those who worship God in spirit and truth are the kind of worshiper "the Father seeks" (John 4:23). This is the seeker-sensitivity that the Bible requires and that Reformed worship has traditionally pursued. (p. 21)

The authors correctly point out that the church is *ecclesia*, i.e., called out. The church, as church, is called out of the world, separated from the world by God. Also and especially in her worship the church is separate from the world and in the fellowship of God. The world out of which the church is called into God's fellowship is the world of unbelief and sin. As called out, the church is to be holy, and, therefore, the church is against the world, antithetical to the world!

This truth has three implications for the church's worship: 1) The wisdom and ways of the gospel will appear foolish

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to those who are enemies of God. 2) The contrast between the church and the world will be most obvious when the church is at worship. 3) True worship will be odd and even weird to the watching world (33, 34).

For this reason, the authors contend,

...the church must be unapologetic in her worship and must not cater to those bound to ridicule her ways as foolish (p. 34). ...Christians cannot expect unbelievers to be comfortable in services of worship that are alien to the ways of the world. "User friendly" or "seeker-sensitive" worship is not an option for the people of God. In fact, worship that demonstrates the separateness of the church is what Machen called 'merciful unkindness' because it testifies to the world of the hope that is within us. If the world mocks us, so be it. True worship is for the church, not for the world (p. 35).

The worship of the church is inseparably related to the purpose of the church. The purpose of the church is not: 1) to right the wrongs of society (nineteenth century liberalism's "social gospel"); 2) to grow in numbers by means of

up tempo music, choruses, dramatic skits, liturgical dance, etc. (the "Church Growth" movement); 3) merely to win converts. The purpose of the church is to nurture disciples of Christ. Hence worship involves preaching and sacraments. And the church must believe that God will indeed save "them that believe" by these means!

Further, the church is saved in order to worship God in the way of glorifying Him and enjoying Him. This is evident, the authors assert, from the marks of the church: pure preaching, proper observance of the sacraments, and exercise of discipline (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). These marks constitute proper worship. Also the third ... inasmuch as preaching is the chief key of the kingdom of heaven (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 84).

In the fourth chapter of the book the authors bemoan the fact that American Protestants no longer observe the Sabbath. This chapter is a must read. We too must "take heed lest we fall" regarding God's holy day. It is fulfilled in Christ. The Sabbath is the Lord's Day and is to be devoted to spiritual rest: the

public worship of God, morning and evening!

In their defense of the "regulative principle," the authors affirm that this principle is taught in the Westminster Standards, in the Heidelberg Catechism, and in the Belgic Confession. Calvin, too, held this principle. Hence, the regulative principle is not a Puritan invention. The authors present a fine defense of the regulative principle against its critics (cf. pp. 81-84).

The book stresses that worship is for the praise of God by His people. This praise of God takes place by the means of grace: preaching, sacraments, and prayer. By these means God enables His people to worship Him and receive in their worship His blessings as they grow in sanctification. All of this takes place corporately in the communion of the saints in the church and never apart from the church (cf. pp. 131-144).

In the tenth chapter the authors make a distinction between the "elements, circumstances, and forms" of worship. The elements which are commanded by God and from which we may not subtract or to which we may not add are: reading and

preaching the Word, sacraments, prayer, song, and collection. How often we sing is circumstance determined by the session/consistory. What we sing, psalms or hymns, is a form.

While in their discussion of "Song in Worship" (chapter 11) there is sharp, biblical criticism of "contemporary music," as well as a bemoaning of the loss of Psalm-singing and an advocating of frequent Psalm singing, the authors come short of advocating exclusive psalmody and of prohibiting choirs and special music.

There is an error on page 110, where the reference "Ephesians 4:12" ought to be Ephesians 4:11, 12. The authors, however, are to be commended for their careful working with Scripture and the Presbyterian and Reformed confessions. The book is well documented and its value is enhanced by a General Index, a Scripture Index, and an Index of the confessions.

Again, this is a good book. This reviewer has added it to the Select Bibliography of his class in Homiletics/Liturgics, and it will be required reading for his students in that class. ■

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***What Love Is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God***, by Dave Hunt. Sisters, OR: Loyal Publishing, 2002. 436pp. \$15.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

To the long list of human hammers who have shattered themselves on the anvil of the gospel of God's sovereign grace, add Dave Hunt. *What Love Is This?* is not so much an attempted refutation of "Calvinism" as it is a deliberate resurrection of all the misrepresentations and slanders with which the enemies of the gospel of grace through the ages have thought to destroy it. The book is a 400-page elaboration of the "calumnies" of "the doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination and the points annexed to it" briefly outlined in the "Conclusion" of the Canons of Dordt. Upon Dave Hunt now falls the warning of the Synod of Dordt: "the synod warns calumniators themselves to consider the terrible judgment of God which awaits them for bearing false witness against the confessions of so many churches, for distressing the consciences of the weak, and for laboring to render suspected the society of the truly faithful."

Hunt repudiates and blasphemes all five of the leading doctrines that make up the gospel of salvation by grace alone as confessed by the Synod of Dordt, the doctrines popularly remembered in "TULIP."

He persistently misrepresents the Reformed faith. According to Hunt, the Reformed faith teaches, "God created [people] totally depraved, caused [people] to sin, then withheld the grace [they] needed for salvation." The result is that people cannot be justly held accountable (p. 287). Mr. Hunt does not notice that his response to the Reformed faith is precisely that which the apostle says will always be the response to the gospel of sovereign grace by the enemy of the gospel. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19).

With the shrewdness that the enemies of grace have always shown in their public attacks upon the gospel, Hunt makes the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation the main issue. If one believes Hunt, the central message of Calvinism is that "God [is] pleased to damn billions" (p. 403).

No Reformed theologian will take Hunt's book seriously

as an argument against Reformed Christianity. Hunt denies that Romans 9 refers to salvation and damnation (pp. 261 ff.), that Exodus 33:19 proclaims the particularity of divine grace (p. 312), and that Acts 13:48 teaches election as the source of faith (p. 210; Hunt changes the word "ordained" to "disposed").

When Hunt denies that he is defending Arminianism, he is disingenuous. As his hatred for Calvinism is unmistakably that of historical Arminianism, so the doctrines he maintains against Calvinism are exactly those held by that form of Pelagianism. Hunt defends election conditioned by God's foreknowledge of those who would believe; the natural ability of every sinner to believe when presented with the gospel; Christ's death as payment for the sins of every human, but effectual for actual redemption only upon the condition of faith; and grace dependent upon the sinner's own acceptance of the offered grace by his alleged free will and therefore resistible.

Although Hunt differs from traditional Arminianism by confessing "eternal security," his doctrine is not the Reformed and biblical truth of persever-

ance. For Hunt, one who believes with the cheap decision for Christ of his Arminian theology is guaranteed heaven even though afterwards he lives a completely wicked life without performing even one good work (p. 412). This antinomism of modern Arminianism is more than interesting. It is the tacit acknowledgment by the Arminians that the salvation offered by their theology is not the salvation of Jesus Christ by His Spirit. Jesus Christ does not save only from the punishment of sin; He saves from sin.

Hunt is a knowledgeable Arminian. He knows the issues between Arminianism and the Reformed faith and states them clearly. The issue is the universality or particularity of the love of God: "The issue is whether God loves all without partiality and desires all to be saved. Unquestionably, Calvinism denies such love" (p. 301). The issue is the resistibility or sovereignty of grace: "Here we must agree with Arminius, who said, 'Grace is not an omnipotent act of God, which cannot be resisted by the free-will of men'" (p. 291). The issue is the freedom or the bondage of the will: "Nor is there any reason ... why

man ... could not also choose between good and evil, God and Satan, and genuinely open his heart to Christ without first being regenerated"; "no one ... is made willing against his will but must have been willing to be made willing"; "there is only one biblical explanation for God taking some to heaven and sending others to hell: Scripture declares that salvation is a genuine offer, that men may *choose* either to receive or to reject Christ, and that God in His omniscient foreknowledge knows how each person will respond" (pp. 131, 183, 266).

Contrary to the impression Hunt works hard to leave with the reader, the main difference between Hunt's Arminian theology and Calvinism is not Calvinism's doctrine of the perishing of many. The main difference is their doctrine of salvation. Hunt's gospel is a command to sinners to save themselves by willing in the day of their power; Calvinism's gospel is the promise that God will save unwilling sinners according to His gracious will, making them willing in the day of His power. Hunt's gospel has a helpless God depending upon the will of the sinner; Calvinism

has helpless men and women depending upon the will of God. The vaunted love of God of Hunt's gospel saves not one sinner—it merely makes possible that sinners save themselves; the love of God of Calvinism saves—actually *saves*—a multitude that no man can number. Hunt's gospel has all the saved in Hunt's (mythical) heaven shouting, "Hallelu—MAN"; Calvinism's gospel has the redeemed, in God's heaven, confessing and singing, "Salvation is of the Lord; Hallelu—JAH."

Hunt is plainly and utterly refuted, though he refuses to be silenced, by one Word of God: "So then it [salvation] is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). "*Not of him that willeth*"—this is the anvil that shatters all proud free-will hammers.

Despite its wretched content, the book will be of some interest to the readers of this journal. First, it clearly, and even violently, displays the lie of salvation by the free will of the sinner as an enemy of the gospel of grace. Arminianism is a false gospel.

Second, Hunt repeatedly cites a number of Protestant Reformed men as representatives

of the gospel of grace that he opposes.

Third, Hunt bases his opposition to the gospel of grace on the texts that are commonly appealed to in Calvinistic circles in support of the well-meant offer against the Protestant Reformed confession of particular grace in the preaching of the gospel: Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11; Matthew 23:37; John 3:16; I Timothy 2:4, and others. The interpretation given these texts by Calvinistic defenders of the well-meant offer is grist for the mill of Dave Hunt and outright Arminianism.

Fourth, one of Hunt's most devastating arguments against Calvinism is the concessions that some of the leading Calvinist theologians themselves make to Arminian universalism and free will in their defense of the well-meant offer of the gospel. Correctly, Hunt identifies a loving desire of God for the salvation of all without exception as a hallmark of the Arminian theology he opposes to Calvinism. Hunt finds this desire of God in I Timothy 2:4: "who will have all men to be saved." Hunt then notes that John Piper, reputedly a defender of Calvinism, both concedes Arminianism's funda-

mental tenet and is guilty of sheer contradiction in his handling of this significant passage.

In trying to handle this passage Piper contradicts himself. He confesses that Paul is saying that "God does not delight in the perishing of the impenitent and that he has compassion on all people." Admitting that this sounds like "double talk," he sets out to show that there are "'two wills' in God . . . that God decrees one state of affairs while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass."

About this teaching of two wills, Hunt judges, rightly: "This *is* double talk" (p. 273).

Hunt does not let Piper and his two wills of God off the hook with this condemnation. He comes back to Piper's doctrine a few pages later. Piper has written that he "affirm(s) with John 3:16 and I Timothy 2:4 that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin." Hunt calls this idea, namely, "that God has *two wills* which contradict one an-

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other, yet are not in conflict," "an ingenious but unbiblical and irrational solution." In fact, writes Hunt, this idea of two wills is an "unblushing contradiction." Hunt exposes the folly of this popular attempt by professing Calvinists to hold both the well-meant offer and Calvinist particularism:

Let us get this straight: Piper's God desires the salvation of all men; in His sovereign imposition of Irresistible Grace he *could* save all, but doesn't because it is His "secret will" not to do so. Here we have the clearest contradiction possible. How can the Calvinist escape? Ah, Piper has found an ingenious way to affirm that God loves and really desires to save even those whom He has predestined to damnation from eternity past: God has *two wills* which, though they contradict each other, are really in secret agreement. Are we going mad? (p. 296).

In support of the fundamental Arminian doctrine of God's loving desire to save all without exception, Hunt, with every Pelagian, semi-Pelagian, Roman Catholic, and Arminian in the long history of the heresy

of conditional salvation, appeals to II Peter 3:9: "not willing that any should perish." In fact, he appeals to it again and again. Against the Calvinist objection that the text, which directs God's longsuffering "to usward," does not teach a desire on the part of God to save all men, Hunt triumphantly quotes the Presbyterian John Murray from Murray's defense of the well-meant offer, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*:

John Murray, former Westminster Seminary professor, whom Cornelius Van Til called "a great exegete of the Word of God," declared, "God does not wish that any men should perish. His wish is rather that all should enter upon life eternal by coming to repentance. The language in this part of the verse is so absolute that it is highly unnatural to envisage Peter as meaning merely that God does not wish that any believers should perish (p. 278).

With its teachings of a resistible (saving) grace of God in the gospel for all and a loving desire of God to save all, the well-meant offer makes a defense of Calvinism against the Arminian onslaught impossible, renders Calvinism absurd to the



judgment of its foes, and concedes the truth of Arminianism in the basic articles.

The gospel propounded by Dave Hunt leaves as many in hell as does the Calvinist gospel Hunt detests. Hunt's gospel, however, adds one to the number of those who will be ever-

lastingly miserable: God. Hunt's god is forever grieved to his heart that many whom he loved (and loves), for whom Christ died, and whom he desired (and desires) to save, perish. What god is this? Hunt's accurate representation of the god of Arminianism. ■

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*I & II Timothy and Titus*, by Patrick Fairbairn. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002. ix-451pp. \$27.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This volume is part of the Banner's Geneva Series of Commentaries. Here is good, solid exposition of these pastoral Epistles from the pen of Patrick Fairbairn (1805-'74). Included is a rather detailed and instructive Introduction to these Epistles. Also included are three interesting appendices: A. The Peculiar Testimony for Gospel Times; B. The Meaning of the Expression, "Husband of one Wife," in I Tim. III. 2, etc.; C. The Treatment of Slavery in New Testament Scripture.

On some passages, notably Titus 2:1-10, where the apostle instructs the preacher to exhort the aged men and women,

the young men and women, and slaves concerning their respective callings, Fairbairn is far too brief in his exposition.

Patrick Fairbairn was one of the leading theologians and ministers of his day. One of the founders of the Free Church of Scotland (600 of the 800 members of his congregation followed him in the "Disruption of 1843"), Fairbairn served three congregations before becoming Principal of the college in Glasgow. In addition to several commentaries, he wrote three books on principles of biblical interpretation, the most commonly known being *The Typology of Scripture* (1845).

The mid-nineteenth century style of writing is a bit cumbersome, but not distracting. Recommended for both clergy and laity. ■

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***Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions: A Guide for Christians***, by Phil Parshall, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002. 240pp. \$14.99 (paper). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

The reader who wishes to read a more detailed summary of Islam's founder, teachings, and practice than this reviewer's chapter on Islam in his syllabus on World Religions provides, could probably not do any better than to read this book. It is well written and an accurate summary of Islam.

The author has graduate degrees from Wheaton Graduate School, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Fuller Seminary, as well as fellowships with Harvard and Yale Universities. He has written several books on Islam. His knowledge of Islam does not come merely from his academic pursuits. Parshall served as a missionary in Muslim nations for forty years. He knows whereof he writes from first-hand missionary experience.

The author documents his conclusions with numerous quotations from the two most important original sources: the *Quran* and the *Hadith*. The *Quran* is Islam's "Bible"; the *Hadith* is

"the written collection of Traditions about what the Prophet said or did, or how he reacted to others. The Traditions were first transmitted by word of mouth" (226). The bibliography (12 volumes), however, is quite brief for a study of this nature and length. Parshall does include a glossary of terms and an index. Both of these are detailed and helpful to the reader.

Included among the twenty-one chapters are such subjects as: the *Quran*, Salvation, Muhammad, Pilgrimage, Jihad and Violence, Jesus, Women, Muhammad's Wives, Legalisms, Punishments for Sin, Hell, and Paradise. We might add, regarding Muhammad's wives, that he had twelve, and that he "had female captives in addition to his twelve wives. As sexual rights came with the possession of the captives, it is assumed that the Prophet accepted these physical privileges" (p. 182). It is telling to note Parshall's comment, "I have had Muslims express to me their disappointment that Jesus was not married and therefore did not experience all of life's cycles as did Muhammad" (p. 182).

In addition to the above, the book, in the light of 9-11-'01, is timely. ■

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