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Editor's Notes

Professor Russell Dykstra concludes his fine series on a comparison of the exegesis of John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas. Dykstra points out several significant differences, all stemming from the "...radical effect of the sixteenth century Reformation." Dykstra contends, and rightly so, that the Reformation's bringing of the church back to Scripture as the absolute authority for the faith and life of the believer meant that "...the ax was laid to the root of the sacerdotal tree of Rome."

The Rev. Mark Shand concludes his excellent work on creation "In the Space of Six Days" by showing convincingly from both Scripture and the Reformed/Presbyterian Confessions that the creation week consisted of seven 24-hour days. Shand makes this telling comment: "This is *the* fundamental error. To place God's revelation in the book of creation side by side with His revelation in Scripture is to deny the sole authority of Scripture.... Neither general revelation nor so-called science may ever be permitted to dictate the meaning of Scripture."

The Rev. Ronald Cammenga makes an instructive and much needed contribution to the discipline Homiletics in his well-documented article on "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament."

Mr. Dennis Lee, a third-year seminary student, likewise offers a well-documented and instructive essay on the erroneous doctrine of the so-called covenant of works.

There are offered a number of book reviews from which both lay readers and clergy will profit.

The editor continues his exposition of the Epistle to Titus.

RDD ♦

Setting in Order the Things That are Wanting

An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (8)

Robert D. Decker

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 this 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 God's people in their study of this brief epistle in the sacred Scriptures. So that both those familiar with the Greek language and those who are unable to work with the Greek may benefit from this study, all references to the Greek will be placed in footnotes. The translation of the Greek text is the author's. We present this exposition pretty much as it was spoken in the chapel services, application and all. Perhaps this will help the reader gain some insight into what goes on in the seminary.

Chapter Two

Verse 13

Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Verse 12, as we saw last time, tells us what the grace of God that appears to all classes of men teaches us, viz., that we are to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world in the way of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Verse 13 reveals that this godly living is a living in expecta-

tion of the blessed hope. We are looking for or waiting for the blessed hope with eager expectation.¹ We live the Christian life looking eagerly, joyfully, and without doubting for a moment for the blessed hope. That hope is a certain expectation. We are sure of the realization of that blessed hope because we live by faith and not by sight.

For what are we eagerly looking and waiting? What is that blessed hope? Blessed is that hope because it affords us real joy, the joy of salvation from sin and death, also now while we are looking and waiting for its realization. Here and now in the darkness of this present ungodly world with all of its temptations, its ungodly lusts, its sin and lawlessness, its persecutions and threats of persecution we live joyfully, waiting for the realization of our hope. Here and now, in this present evil world, in our joys and sorrows, in our good times and bad, in our health and sickness and pain and dying, we live godly lives joyfully and with certainty looking for the realization of our blessed hope.

But what precisely is that blessed hope? The answer of the text is, "the appearing of the glory of the great God (and/or) even our Savior, Jesus Christ." The question at this point is, are we waiting for the appearance of the glory of our great God and the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, or are we looking for the appearing of the glory of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who is our great God?

We refrain from going into all of the arguments put forth in favor of each of these views.² The author agrees with A. T. Robertson's interpretation, that we are looking for the appearing of the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the Great God. We agree with Robertson that this is the correct understanding based on the grammar. Writes Robertson, "This is the necessary meaning of the one article (the) with *Theou* (God) and *sooteeros*

1. This is the meaning of the Greek *prosdexomai*, which appears in this verse as a present, middle participle.

2. The reader may consult the standard commentaries for lengthy discussions of the question.

(Savior).”³ We could better translate the clause, “looking for the appearing of the glory of the Great God our Savior, even Jesus Christ” (“even” in the sense of “who is” Jesus Christ).⁴ We hasten to add, however, that it makes no essential difference which view we hold. This is due to the facts that: 1) in either case Scripture (and that over against the error of the Arians) affirms the divinity of Christ and 2) the glory of God is always manifest or revealed in and through the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

The glory of Jesus Christ is the shining forth, the manifestation of all the wonderful attributes, virtues of God’s perfect being. We are given a glimpse of that glory by means of the Word of God. With eager and certain expectation and with deep longing we look for the full and complete revelation of the glory of God in Christ when Christ returns at the end of the ages to judge all men, to destroy the present heavens and earth and to create a new heaven and earth.

This final appearance of Jesus at the end of the ages is the reason He is called “the great God even our Savior.” Jesus is the only begotten Son of God in our flesh. He is the one by whom and for whom all things were made. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the one who dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. That glory will be completely revealed. It will appear in all its fullness and perfection when Jesus Christ appears at the end of the ages.

And Jesus is our Savior! By means of His atoning death on the cross in the place of and on behalf of all the elect given to Him by God from all eternity, Jesus obtained forgiveness of sin. In Jesus’ resurrection those elect in Him were delivered from the fear of the bondage of death. And when Jesus appears the second time, that salvation will be perfectly realized.

3. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, pp. 604-605 and *Grammar*, p. 786.

4. The Greek conjunction *kai*, used here, is often translated “even,” meaning, “that is.”

5. See John 1:1-14 for example. John 1 and Titus 2:13 are not the only texts revealing the divinity of Jesus.

This is our hope. Certain and blessed hope it is indeed! This is the blessed gospel we are privileged to preach. It is this blessed gospel we are privileged to teach you students to preach! There is nothing more worthwhile, more satisfying, than to be called by God and enabled by His grace in Christ Jesus to preach the good news of this blessed hope! ●

... to be continued.

A comparison of Exegesis: John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas (concl.)

Russell J. Dykstra

Synopsis of the three preceding installments.

Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin are theological giants who not only highly esteemed the Bible but also expounded and preached Holy Writ. As to the exegesis of Scripture, Calvin clung tenaciously to the literal meaning of the text, while Aquinas believed that three additional senses could be discovered on the basis of the literal meaning. On the matter of the relationship of the authority of Scripture and that of the church, Calvin and Aquinas parted ways. Scripture is the supreme and only authority, Calvin maintained, and was not bound to the exegesis of the church. Aquinas, on the other hand, followed the church's interpretation closely.

In the last installment, a comparison was made of the exegesis on Ephesians 1:1-14 by Calvin and Aquinas. In this article, the commentary on Ephesians 6:14-17 by Aquinas and Calvin are compared, and a final evaluation offered.

Ephesians 6:14-17 – The Christian's Armor.

Ephesians 6:14-17 contains the well-known description of the armor that the inspired apostle commands every Christian to put on. Neither Aquinas nor Calvin has extensive development of the particular pieces of the armor. Calvin tells us immediately that this is his plan, apparently cognizant of other exegesis that dealt expansively with this section. He writes,

We must not...inquire very minutely into the meaning of each word; for an allusion to military customs is all that was intended. Nothing can be more idle than the extraordinary pains which some have taken to discover the reason why *righteousness* is made a breastplate, instead of a girdle. Paul's design was to touch briefly

on the most important points required in a Christian, and to adapt them to the comparison which he had already used.¹

Calvin's sermon on the armor likewise gives only a brief treatment of the individual parts.

Aquinas divides the armor into three groups. "Some are like clothes, and are meant to cover one." This will include the first three elements (belt, breastplate, and sandals). Other parts of the armor are "to protect him" (shield and helmet). "And still others are for fighting" (the sword). As stated above, Aquinas' commentary is brief, but he shows a mild tendency toward allegorizing — finding a spiritual meaning based loosely on the literal text.

What follows is a comparison of the exegesis of Aquinas and Calvin on the armor.

Loins girt about with truth.

Both Aquinas and Calvin understand "truth" to refer to a moral quality, rather than the objective truth of God. They differ significantly on the meaning of girding the loins with truth.

Aquinas believes that the girding of the loins refers to "check[ing] carnal desires," since the loins are the place "in which sensuality thrives." That this is to be done *in truth* means, "with the right intention and not with pretense."

Calvin begins with *truth* and contends that it means "sincerity of mind." Because the girdle is one of the most important parts of the armor, he concludes that "our attention is thus directed to the fountain of sincerity." And how is this done by the "loins girt about with truth"? Writes Calvin, "[T]he purity of the gospel ought

1. As was noted in the last installment, this and all quotations of Calvin's exegesis will be from his Commentary on Ephesians in *Calvin's Commentaries*, Translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), Vol. 21. All quotations from Aquinas will be from his *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Albany: Magi Books, Inc., 1966). Since the quotations will be from specific verses on which these men comment, the quotations can be easily found and no references will be given.

to remove from our minds all guile, and from our hearts all hypocrisy.”

Breastplate of righteousness.

Aquinas links the breastplate of righteousness with having one’s feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace in this way — both are enjoined upon believers in order to warn “them to overcome greed for created things.” Concerning the breastplate, Aquinas believes that Paul’s point is an injunction not unjustly to “usurp property,” and “justice will look after this.” This covering is needed because it keeps a man “out of other people’s property.” Justice is a breastplate, writes Aquinas, “because it covers all the virtues just as a breastplate does the members.” Aquinas believes he finds a parallel passage to assist his exegesis in Wisdom 5:19 (in the Vulgate; verse 18 in many English translations), a book which the later Protestants rejected as apocryphal — “He will put on justice as a breastplate, and will take true judgment instead of a helmet.”

Calvin maintains that the righteousness is “a devout and blameless life” not, as “some imagine, ... the imputation of righteousness, by which pardon of sin is maintained.” His interpretation is controlled by the context — “for the subject now under discussion is a blameless life.” This is significant because the Reformation’s greatest conflict against the Roman Catholic Church was over justification by faith alone — the imputed righteousness of Christ. Regardless of whether one agrees with Calvin’s exegesis of this passage or not, it indicates that he is not overreacting to this controversy by rejecting the Bible’s use of righteousness in places as describing the believer’s godly life. In other words, his exegesis is not controlled by the church or determined by a major controversy. As for the fact that the specific part of armor is a ‘breastplate,’ Calvin speaks only of the calling “to be adorned ... with a devout and holy life.”

Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

As noted earlier, Aquinas connected this with the previous article of the soldier’s armor as a warning to the Christian to

overcome greed for created things. This particular piece of the armor has to do with the need “to get rid of an excessive care about temporal realities.” That, because “when we are too caught up with these, our feet are not ready to carry out divine pursuits and proclaim its mysteries.” According to Aquinas, *your feet shod* means “one’s inclinations should be determined — *with the preparation of the gospel of peace*.” Then he adds a bit of allegorical interpretation: “As a symbol of this the Lord sent the Apostles shod with sandals. These have soles underneath, by which the raising of the mind from earthly matters is signified....” Aquinas adds that this is the gospel “of peace” since “through the gospel peace is proclaimed to us.” This commentary is not exactly clear in that, on the one hand, Aquinas implies that all must be ready to preach (“proclaim its mysteries”), and, on the other hand, that we need to hear the preaching.

Calvin clearly states that this peace refers to the *effects* of the gospel, “for it is the message of reconciliation to God, and nothing else gives peace to the conscience.” As the greaves of the Roman soldier protected his feet, “so we must be *shod with the gospel*, if we would pass unhurt through the world.” Concerning the *preparation*, Calvin rejects the explanation that we must be prepared for the gospel, for, he reiterates, he considers this term to refer to “the effect of the gospel.” Rather, he maintains that Paul exhorts us to “lay aside every hindrance and to be prepared both for war and journey.” The gospel accomplishes this preparation.

In all things taking the shield of faith.

Aquinas, ignoring the protective character of some of the earlier listed parts of armor, here inserts the comment: “The second function of weapons is to protect.” This introduces the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation, and distinguishes them from the “armor of moral virtues” previously listed. He writes concerning faith that “faith is presupposed to all other virtues just as a shield is basic to all weapons.”

Aquinas makes a point of distinguishing between the use of the previous three parts of the Christian’s armor and the shield of faith. With the first three (what he calls “moral virtues”), believers

“conquer the powers of darkness.” But Aquinas teaches that the shield of faith “consists of the theological virtue of faith.” Although he does not explain the differences in his commentary, Aquinas is following scholastic classifications in this distinction of virtues.² Faith “repels what is aimed against it and gains the victory.” To be more specific, faith “quenches present and transitory temptations with the eternal and spiritual blessings promised in Holy Scripture.” Aquinas sets up Jesus as the example who brought forth “authoritative texts of Scripture to oppose the devil’s temptations.” All this might seem to indicate that Aquinas takes faith to refer to objective faith (faith as the body of truth), but his conclusion indicates otherwise. Faith is called a shield, Aquinas writes, because “as the shield protects the entire chest, so faith must be in our hearts.” Although this could mean having the Word of God in one’s heart, it is more likely that Aquinas refers to faith in the subjective sense of believing.

Calvin understands faith to be the subjective activity of faith. He maintains that “*faith* and the *word of God* are one, yet Paul assigns to them distinct offices.” He explains, “I call them one, because the word is the object of faith, and cannot be applied to our use but by faith; as faith again is nothing, and can do nothing, without the word.”

On “the fiery darts of the wicked” Calvin and Aquinas both agree the darts are from the devil, differing only in the exact meaning of *burning*. Aquinas writes that these darts “are fiery since evil desires burn,” and apparently means that they destroy men, as he quotes Psalm 57:9, *Fire hath fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun*. Calvin, more cautious, says of the darts that

2. Not here in his commentary, but in his *Summa* Aquinas distinguishes three classes of virtue: intellectual, moral, and theological. Faith, hope, and love (from I Cor. 13) are the three theological virtues. They are so named first, because their object is God, since they direct man to God; secondly, because they are infused in man by God alone; thirdly, because these virtues are unknown to man, except by divine revelation, contained in Scripture. Confer Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, II, I, Q. 62.

they “are not only sharp and penetrating, but — what makes them more destructive — they are *fiery*.”

The helmet of salvation.

On this phrase, both Calvin and Aquinas exchange the word *hope* for *salvation*. Aquinas does so without explanation. His exposition is extremely brief. He comments, “Hope ... is referred to as a helmet because, as a helmet is on the head, so the head of the moral virtues is the end, and hope is concerned with the end.”

Calvin indicates that he draws from I Thessalonians 5:8, where the helmet is called *the hope of salvation*. In that light he writes, “The head is protected by the best helmet, when, elevated by hope, we look up towards heaven to that salvation that is promised.” Salvation is a helmet, he maintains, only by becoming the object of hope.

The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Aquinas is vague on the exact meaning of *the Word of God*. He speaks of preaching being the word of God, ignoring the incongruity of putting the sword of the preaching into the hand of the ordinary Christian. The reason for not making it simply the Bible may be due to the Church’s oft discouragement of the common man having the Bible. If so, this is an instance of allowing the teaching of the church to determine the exegesis of the passage. However, Aquinas is not explicit on this.

Treating this in connection with the shield of faith, Calvin simply calls this the “word of God,” obviously referring to the Bible. Without naming names, he takes aim at the Romish Church’s practice of restricting the laity’s use of the Bible.

And what shall we say of those who take from a Christian people the word of God? Do they not rob them of the necessary armour, and leave them to perish without a struggle? There is no man of any rank who is not bound to be a soldier of Christ. But if we enter the field unarmed, if we want our sword, how shall we sustain that character?

Clearly, Calvin insisted that every Christian must take the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

Evaluation.

Making comparisons in the area of exegesis is difficult, and it is even more difficult to remain objective and fair when the two exegetes are separated by nearly 400 years. The later exegete has the advantage of looking back on, and benefiting from, the exegesis not only of the earlier theologian, but also the many works published in that intervening period. It stands to reason that the later exegete ought to have a better development in his exegesis. Taking this into consideration, and having noted some significant differences in the exegesis of Aquinas and Calvin, we still strive for an adequate explanation for these differences.

First, from a formal point of view, much of the difference is attributable to the differences in the age and circumstances. For example, the style of the work is largely determined by the literary context of the exegete. Thomas Aquinas was a scholastic, and his literary style reflects this. It also affects the exegesis of Aquinas, which consists largely of categorization — dividing and subdividing the text, together with the expounding of fine distinctions, as the scholastics were wont to do.

One point that ought not to be missed, however, is that Thomas Aquinas' commentaries are rather innovative for his age. The *Glossa Ordinaria* and Lombard's expansion, the *Magna glosatura*, so dominated the Middle Ages that most commentators felt obligated to comment on the Glosses, more (perhaps even, rather) than on the actual text of Scripture. Thomas Aquinas commented on the text of Scripture. From that point of view, Smalley is correct that "against a background of modern exegesis, one naturally finds the medieval element in them startling; approaching them from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one is more startled by their modernity."³

3. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible*, p. 301, quoted by Lamb, Introduction to *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 18.

Calvin, on the other hand, was a trained humanist and his style was far more rhetorical as a result. He does not follow the Glosses at all. His style is free. He is far more readable for the modern reader than Thomas Aquinas.

The comparison of Aquinas and Calvin manifests one additional, immensely significant factor, namely, the knowledge (or ignorance) of the original languages. Aquinas' ignorance of the Hebrew and Greek puts him at such a disadvantage that it overshadows all comparisons to Calvin in exegesis. The language factor has been documented above and this clearly shows the significant effect on Aquinas' exegesis. He followed the Vulgate, the official translation of the Church in his day. The incontrovertible fact is that Aquinas was frequently led astray by the faulty translation. At the same time, Calvin's exegesis is not only much more accurate, but deeper, as a result of his knowledge and capable use of these languages in exegesis.

Nonetheless, even recognizing all the above, there are additional significant differences in the exegesis of the two men which are not attributable to the above factors, so that a further comparison has validity and merit. Some of these differences are more difficult to document, involving the material differences between the two exegeses. The subjective evaluation is, admittedly, more on the fore. Yet, these, i.e., the material differences, are the significant ones, and it is worth our efforts to attempt delineating them. It is my contention that the root of these differences between the exegesis of Thomas Aquinas and that of John Calvin is the radical effect of the sixteenth century Reformation.

The term *radical* is used advisedly, that is to say, the Reformation is of a different root. The Reformation is not merely the splitting of the church institute into two branches. It rather reformed (i.e., re-formed, reestablished) the church of Christ, and that, back to the Scriptures. The essence of the Reformation is a spiritual change. It began in the heart of Martin Luther over the matter of his salvation. Through his spiritual struggles and his resulting study of Scripture, Luther became convinced that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. It is not in any sense by works.

This truth laid the ax to the root of the sacerdotal tree of Rome. The elevated priesthood was demolished. No longer was the church the only legitimate interpreter of Scripture. The pope was dethroned as the final and infallible authority on the Bible. Besides, the Bible was given back to the people. Being priests, they had the right to interpret it. Since Scripture is perspicuous, they could interpret it. And, most significant, the Bible became the sole authority for doctrine and walk.

Thus there arose out of the Reformation a tremendous emphasis on Scripture. There was a zeal for and an honoring of the written Word beyond anything that Thomas Aquinas ever evidenced or heard from his contemporaries. Scripture was everything. It was the sole source of truth, of theology. It governed the church and her offices. Everything depended on the Scriptures.

This radical change, the Reformation, explains much about the differences in exegesis, even from a formal point of view. Aquinas' reliance upon the Vulgate was part of the Church of Rome's policy --- this was the official Bible. In addition, we find Aquinas quoting from the Apocryphal books in his exegesis, these being canonical according to the Church of Aquinas. Not so Calvin. The authority of the canonical books depends not on the declaration of a church, but on the testimony of the Spirit in and concerning these books.

The doctrines expounded in the commentaries on Ephesians clearly reveal the effect of the Reformation. Aquinas taught semi-Pelagianism, merit, the elevation of the clergy, and the Romish doctrines of saints. Calvin emphasized the sovereignty of God and of His grace, absolutely no merit in salvation, free predestination, and the importance of Scripture for the people.

Another notable dissimilarity is the freedom, or lack thereof, that these men experienced. Calvin was free from the domination of the church. The church did not rule his exegesis. He enjoyed (demanded) the freedom to dissent with other theologians of the Reformation. He was not bound by the exegesis of the fathers, even the most respected, e.g., Augustine. This is not to say that Calvin would advocate absolute freedom. No doubt he considered himself bound by the confessions. History shows that he would not

tolerate exegesis that denied the Trinity, for example. But these doctrines were settled by the church on the basis of the Bible, not on the basis of an infallible priesthood or pope. Within the limits of these confessions, Calvin the exegete had freedom.

Aquinas did not enjoy (exercise) such freedom. The Church claimed the right of infallible interpretation. Only minor differences would be tolerated. In this exegesis of Ephesians, Aquinas "toed the line." He did not stray far from the official positions or explanations of the Church. This is a serious weakness in his exegesis.

To the Reformation also is to be attributed the elimination of allegorical exegesis in Calvin. In Aquinas we find major improvement over many other exegetes of the Middle Ages. However, even in this relatively straightforward text in Ephesians, Aquinas occasionally strays into allegory, with scant basis in the text or the rest of Scripture. For Calvin, his convictions about Scripture do not allow him to play such games with exegesis. Other exegetes of the Reformation are not so well disciplined, and some still are guilty of allegorizing at times. But the reformational doctrines of Scripture, and the exegetical principle that "Scripture interprets Scripture," are the main reason for its demise.

The Reformation also accounts for another contrast in the exegesis of Calvin as opposed to Aquinas, namely, that Calvin's was antithetical, even polemical. In his commentary on Ephesians, Calvin pointed out how and when the text condemned the tenets of this or that group. In the days of Aquinas, this was not the place of the exegete. The *Church* condemned the heretics, and this was not ordinarily done by proving their error from Scripture. Rather the Church excommunicated by the power of the episcopate, and that because the heretics contradicted the law (or interpretation) of the same. It is not surprising, then, that Aquinas did little of this in his exegesis. He did confirm the former condemnation of the Pelagians by the Church and reject the interpretation of Origen, which virtually everyone did.

The final difference is almost intangible, yet real. While admitting that subjectivity does play a role here, I contend that there is a certain zeal and enthusiasm that permeates the exegesis

of Calvin, which is noticeably absent in the exegesis of Aquinas. This goes beyond merely the differences in style — scholastic versus rhetorical. The spirit of the Reformation, particularly the spirit of *sola Scriptura*, is the difference.

This contrast in the influence and authority of Scripture for Aquinas and Calvin is obvious when one compares their major theological works, Aquinas' *Summa* and Calvin's *Institutes*. Calvin's lifetime of expounding the Scriptures resulted in his constantly "fleshing out" the *Institutes*. The *Institutes* breathe Scripture. Not so the *Summa*. This is only another indication of the different place that Scripture had in the life, work, and thinking of these two theologians. These same characteristics are found in their respective commentaries.

Therefore, in spite of the similarities in the exegesis of these men — as, e.g., the honor paid to Scripture as the Word of God, their striving for brevity and clarity, and their emphasis on the literal meaning — there remain significant differences in style and content, differences rooted in the sixteenth century Reformation as compared to thirteenth century scholasticism. It is tempting to hypothesize about what Aquinas' work would have been like were he a contemporary of Calvin. But he was not. Aquinas, for all his genius, was not able, perhaps not willing, to exegete Scripture with the logical consistency that he required of himself in other aspects of his work. One can only recognize that the genius of Calvin did flourish in the climate of the Reformation, to yield exegetical fruit having such clarity, brevity, and excellence that the church benefits from it even to the present day. ●

In the Space of Six Days

(3)

Mark L. Shand

The Fundamental Error

Having traced the historical view of the “days” in Genesis 1 & 2 from the early church to the present time, we see that the beginning of the nineteenth century saw a marked change in the interpretation given to Genesis 1 & 2 within Reformed and Presbyterian circles. We see, too, that this change coincided with the development and dissemination of so-called scientific views that maintained that the earth was many thousands, if not millions, of years in age. The question that needs to be answered is whether the change in thinking was scriptural.¹

1. It is not intended in the course of this paper to enter upon a specific refutation of the reconstructionist, day age, concordistic, period, or framework theories with respect to the days of Genesis 1. Such theories have received extensive treatment by a range of authors. Cf. William Einwechter, “Modern Issues in Biblical Perspective: The Meaning of ‘Day’ in Genesis 1-2,” <http://www.chalcedon.edu.html>; Kenneth L. Gentry, “In the Space of Six Days,” *Ordained Servant* Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 12-16; Grover Gunn, “Six Day Creation,” <http://capo.org/cpc/sixdays.htm>; Herman Hoeksema, “Evolution, Long Periods, or Days” *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 35, pp. 101; 124-125; 173-174; 197-198; 221-222; 245-246; 269-270; 292-293; 316-317; 340-341; 389-390; 413; 484-485; Vol. 36, pp. 52-53; Homer C. Hoeksema, “The Creation Record Literal,” *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 64, pp. 390-391; 412-414; 464-465; 485-486; Douglas M. L. Judisch, “The Length of the Days of Creation,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 52, 1988, pp. 265-271; Steven Key, “Creation’s Time Frame,” *Standard Bearer*, Vol. 72, 1 January 1996, pp. 157-159; Robert L. Reymond, “In the Space of Six Days,” *The Concerned Presbyterian*, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 2000, pp. 1-7; Frank H. Walker, “The Framework Hypothesis,” February 1998, <http://incolor.inetnebr.com/stuart/framework.htm>. As these articles demonstrate conclusively, there are cogent reasons which demand that the

This question becomes all the more intriguing when it is realized that many of those who were open to views that accommodated the findings of so-called science acknowledged that the plain meaning of the first two chapters of Genesis was that God created the heavens and the earth in six days of normal duration and rested on the seventh day.

Charles Hodge, despite his openness to the day age theory, says with respect to the word “day” in Genesis 1:

It is of course admitted that, taking this account by itself, it would be most natural to understand the word in its ordinary sense; but if that *sense brings the Mosaic account into conflict with facts*, and another sense avoids such conflict, then it is obligatory on us to adopt the other.² [Emphasis MS.]

Bavinck says of the interpretation of Genesis 1:

Granted: revelation can exploit all kinds and genres of literature, even the fable; but whether a given section of Holy Scripture contains a poetic description, a parable, or a fable, is not for us to determine arbitrarily but must be clear from the text itself. The first chapter of Genesis, however, hardly contains any ground for the opinion that we are dealing here with a vision or myth. It clearly bears a historical character and forms the introduction to a book which presents itself from beginning to end as history. Nor is it possible to separate the facts (the religious content) from the manner in which they are expressed.³

“days” of Genesis 1 & 2 be treated as literal 24-hour days. Those reasons include the ordinary use of *yom* within the Old Testament; the employment of the days of Genesis 1 as a pattern for the Sabbath day as indicated in the fourth commandment; the fact that the Genesis account gives no indication of being anything other than a narrative account; and that Jesus Himself gives specific recognition to the historicity of Genesis in Matthew 19:3-6.

2. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Hendrikson Publishers, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 570, 571.

3. Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), p. 124.

Another example is afforded by Nico Ridderbos, who opines:

One who reads Genesis 1 without prepossession or suspicion is almost bound to receive the impression that the author's intent is to say that creation took place in six ordinary days. But we cannot stop there. But it is open to doubt whether that impression is correct.... It is certainly not the product of a naive writer. Hence we must seriously ask ourselves whether it is possible to understand his meaning at first glance. Are we to take literally the representation that for every great work (or two works) of creation He used a day? It is open to serious doubt whether the author of Genesis 1, who proves to have such a sublime concept of God, actually meant to say that.⁴

Edward J. Young, writing on the historicity of Genesis, asserted:

Genesis one is not poetry or saga or myth, but straightforward, trustworthy history, and, inasmuch as it is a divine revelation, accurately records those matters of which it speaks. That Genesis one is historical may be seen from these considerations. 1) It sustains an intimate relationship with the remainder of the book. The remainder of the book (i.e., The Generations) presupposes the Creation Account, and the Creation Account prepares for what follows. The two portions of Genesis are integral parts of the book and complement one another. 2) The characteristics of Hebrew poetry are lacking. There are poetic accounts of the creation and these form a striking contrast to Genesis one. 3) The New Testament regards certain events mentioned in Genesis one as actually having taken place.⁵

The CRC report on Creation and Science also acknowledged that the natural meaning of Genesis 1 was that God made the world in the space of six days.

4. Nico Ridderbos, *Is There a Conflict Between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957), pp. 29, 31.

5. Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1979), p. 105.

A plain reading of the first chapters of Genesis, as it was almost universally accepted by Christians until the nineteenth century, indicates that God made the world in six days a few thousand years before Abraham, that the various kinds of plants and animals were created by him according to their kind, and that Adam and Eve were uniquely created in God's image.⁶

If Genesis 1 upon a natural reading revealed itself plainly to be historical narrative, upon what basis were other, non-literal interpretations entertained? Herman Hoeksema identified the heart of the matter:

In connection with the hexahemeron, or the six-day period of the creation week, the question is, first of all, how we must conceive of the days of Genesis 1. Must we think of those days as long periods, or of six days as we know them, of twenty-four hours? This question, we must remember, first of all, is not an exegetical one. It did not arise out of the exegesis of Genesis 1. It was rather motivated by the desire to give some satisfaction to so-called science, the science of modern times. This science came with facts; and the facts cannot be denied. Those facts bore a testimony. And this testimony was so overwhelming that apparently the conception that the world existed only a few thousand years and is the product of six days of divine work must be deemed untenable.... In the latter half of the preceding century also those who otherwise reverently bowed before the testimony of Holy Writ became afraid in the light of this so-called testimony of history, especially in the light of the testimony that was borne by the strata of the earth. It stands to reason that now the question was no longer one of unprejudiced exegesis of the text in Genesis 1, but that it became rather a question whether the first chapter of Genesis could be so explained that it was brought into harmony with the so-called facts of modern science.⁷

6. Christian Reformed Church of America Agenda 1991, Report 28, "Committee on Creation and Science," p. 401.

7. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1966), p. 178.

If Genesis 1 is exegeted according to the ordinary historical, grammatical method of interpretation, the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that the references to "days" refer to periods of approximately 24 hours duration. However, exegetes have not focused exclusively upon Scripture, but have sought to marry Scripture with so-called scientific evidence, and that has proven to be a very unhealthy relationship.

Archibald Alexander, who was the first professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, reflected the early nineteenth century thinking as regards the relationship between Scripture and so-called science when in his inaugural address in 1812 he stated:

Indeed, to speak the truth, there is scarcely any science or branch of knowledge, which may not be made subservient to Theology. Natural history, chemistry, and geology have sometimes been of important service in assisting the Biblical student to solve difficulties contained in Scripture; or in enabling him to repel the assaults of the adversaries which were made under cover of these sciences.⁸

As the century progressed, the close association between Scripture and science developed; a relationship which blossomed in the twentieth century. Scientific discovery was elevated to new heights, not only in the minds of scientists, but also in the estimation of theologians. The harmonizing of Scripture with science became a repeated refrain in Reformed and Presbyterian circles. Charles Hodge sought to justify this adulterous marriage by contending that "nature is as truly a revelation of God as the Bible, and we only interpret the Word of God by the Word of God when we interpret the Bible by science."⁹

Peter Wallace, commenting on the Princeton theologians, offers this assessment of their view of the relationship between Scripture and science.

8. Archibald Alexander, "Inaugural Address," cited in David Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1996), II, pp. 10, 11.

9. *New York Observer*, March 26, 1863 as cited by David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1996), vol. 2, p. 13.

Regarding theology as the queen of sciences, the Princetonians believed that all natural investigation was, in the final analysis, to submit to revealed truth, yet generally showed a willingness to reconsider particular interpretations of Scripture if the scientific evidence seemed compelling.¹⁰

The contention that both Scripture and science are both the Word of God and so are to be accorded equal authority has become a common plank in the argumentation of those who seek to harmonize Scripture with the findings of so-called science. The pivotal place of such thinking is demonstrated by John De Vries:

The Christian recognizes that there are two documents, with regard to the formation of the universe and its inhabitants, at his disposal. The first, and most important, of these is the Bible, which comes to us with the authority of its sacred inspiration. This revelation fitly opens with a brief account of the creation of the material world, animated nature and man himself. *Side by side, we have another manifestation of the same divine mind, the book of nature, itself the work of God*, which is open to our curious gaze. To man alone, among all created beings, has been granted the privilege of reading in it. This he does by patient and intelligent researches. *Both these books are legitimate sources of knowledge*, but we must learn to read them aright. We should not hope to gain, much less ask, from science the knowledge that it can never give, nor seek from the Bible the science which it does not intend to teach. As the opening chapter of this volume seeks to demonstrate, we should receive from the Bible, on faith, the fundamental truths to which science cannot attain. *The results of the scientific research must serve as a running commentary to help us to correctly understand the comprehensive statements of the Biblical account*. Only in this way can we truly see that the two books, given to us by the same author, do not oppose, but complete each other. Together they form the whole revelation of God to man.¹¹ [Emphasis MS]

10. Peter J. Wallace, "Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and the Darwinian Controversy" <http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/warf.txt>, pp. 1, 2.

11. DeVries, *Beyond the Atom* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan), pp. 37, 38. Note that DeVries uses general revelation and science interchangeably.

Such thinking was also foundational to the report prepared in 1991 by the Committee on Creation and Science for the CRC. One of the conclusions of that report read, "The authority of general revelation, no less than that of special revelation, is a divine authority, which must be acknowledged without reservation."¹² That conclusion was adopted by the synod of the CRC the same year. The statement adopted by the synod read, "The church confesses that both general and special revelation, each in its own unique way, address us with full divine authority."¹³

But is it correct to characterize Scripture and general revelation as being both possessed of divine authority and as such to be acknowledged without reservation? Or to put it another way, was Hodge correct when he asserted that nature is as truly a revelation of God as the Bible, and we only interpret the Word of God by the Word of God when we interpret the Bible by science?

It is true that the revelation of God is twofold. God reveals Himself most fully in Scripture. However, he also reveals Himself in all the works of His hands, which include the entire universe and its related history, or, to put it slightly differently, it includes God's work in creation and His providential dealings with the creation.¹⁴ This latter aspect of God's revelation is often styled general revelation, while the former is designated special revelation. However, it is wrong to conceive of general and special revelation as representing two different and unconnected revelations of God. The revelation of God is one. Therefore, general and special revelation form a harmonious whole and do not conflict in any way.¹⁵

12. Report 28, *op. cit.*, p. 407. The report sought to distinguish between science and general revelation, but for all intents and purposes treated them as synonymous, and that is precisely what is done by those who seek to reinterpret Scripture by reference to scientific discoveries.

13. *Christian Reformed Church in North America, Acts of Synod 1991* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991), p. 766.

14. Homer C. Hoeksema, *In the Beginning God* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1966), p. 61.

15. Hoeksema, *In the Beginning God*, p. 63.

G. I. Williamson emphasizes that point when he writes:

If "genuine science" be taken to mean "truth" drawn from natural revelation, such is impossible, for the simple reason that God is the author of both the "book of nature" and the "book of life" (the Bible). Truth is simply that which really is. There is only one truth, because there is only one reality. Therefore, if the scriptures are true, they merely tell us what really is (or was, or will yet be). When by investigation men also discover what really is in the world of nature, they simply grasp another aspect of the same total truth. So there cannot be any conflict between them. The only reason for conflict is that men have erred either (a) in their investigation of the facts, or (b) in their theories about the facts, or (c) in both.¹⁶

To maintain that nature or general revelation should be accorded the same status as the revelation of God in Scripture is a serious error. The end result of such an approach is that so-called scientific discoveries dictate the interpretation of Scripture; and that is precisely what has happened in the case of those who have rejected the literal interpretation of Genesis 1 & 2. Scientific discovery has overtaken and distorted the true exegesis of Scripture. Exegetes have allowed themselves to be enveloped by a plethora of so-called scientific data which has influenced their analysis of Scripture. Referring to the relationship between Scripture and science advocated by John DeVries, Homer Hoeksema observes correctly:

Put in plain language, this statement means that science, — what we read out of the book of creation and what we derive by way of interpretation of that book of "nature," — must explain the Bible. Scientific theories and conclusions must rule Scriptural exegesis. The book of God in creation must interpret the book of God in Scripture, this method is exactly a case of putting the cart in front of the horse. At root it is a denial of the sole authority of Scripture.¹⁷

16. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia, Pa., 1964), p. 41.

17. Homer C. Hoeksema, *In the Beginning God*, p. 67.

This is *the* fundamental error. To place God's revelation in the book of creation side by side with His revelation in Scripture is to deny the sole authority of Scripture. This thread has been woven into the exegetical thinking of Reformed and Presbyterian theologians.

Neither general revelation nor so-called science may ever be permitted to dictate the meaning of Scripture.¹⁸ They are not even to be placed on a par with Scripture. To raise either general revelation or so-called science to an authoritative position alongside Scripture is to deny the fundamental Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone is to be the only authority for the church.

G. C. Berkouwer is correct when he states:

We may, and must emphatically protest against any two-sources-theory, which places Scripture and tradition, or Scripture and nature or Scripture and history, on one line, as sources of knowledge *of equal import*. Any such equalization has always resulted in a devaluation of Holy Scripture.¹⁹

The proper approach is to start and end with Scripture. This is not to maintain that Scripture speaks in scientific language or that it presents scientific analysis of all that is seen in the world. However, Scripture does record that which is true; it records that which is factual. Therefore, when it comes to analyzing the data of the universe and to determining the origins of the earth, what Scripture maintains is to be taken as truth and not subjected to scientific scrutiny.

Creation is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture; not the reverse. The most basic rule of proper exegesis is that Scripture

18. It should be noted that there is a common fallacy abroad that equates so-called science with general revelation. That is not correct. General revelation is God's making *Himself* known in creation. It does not include so-called scientific discoveries that are unrelated to the knowledge of God.

19. G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1955), p. 280.

must be its own interpreter, and the basis for that contention lies in the recognition of the absolute authority of Scripture. This has always been the approach of the Reformed exegete. It is the testimony of the Reformed creeds. The *Belgic Confession of Faith*, in maintaining “The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the Only Rule of Faith,” states:

Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself.²⁰

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* lays down the following hermeneutical principle which stands in stark contrast to the approach advocated by Hodge:

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.²¹

Calvin states plainly that creation must be interpreted in the light of Scripture, to assist the dullness of our eyes:

Now, in describing the world as a mirror in which we ought to behold God, I would not be understood to assert, either that our eyes are sufficiently clear-sighted to discern what the fabric of heaven and earth represents, or that the knowledge to be hence attained is sufficient for salvation. And whereas the Lord invites us to himself by the means of created things, with no other effect than that of thereby rendering us inexcusable, he has added (as was necessary) a new remedy, or at least by a new aid, he has assisted

20. *Belgic Confession of Faith*, Article VII.

21. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I:IX.

the ignorance of our mind. For by the Scripture as our guide and teacher, he not only makes those things plain which would otherwise escape our notice, but almost compels us to behold them: as if he had assisted our dull sight with spectacles.²²

In considering these matters, it must also be remembered that the ungodly always hold under the truth that God makes known in the creation.²³ They do so in unrighteousness. This is true of the ungodly scientist. His ability to analyze and probe into the creation around him is severely limited. His eyesight is untrustworthy.

Calvin states in his *Institutes* that as a result of sin, each man's mind is like a labyrinth of error. Rashness and superficiality are joined to ignorance and darkness. He says of man's ability to interpret what he sees in the creation:

It is therefore in vain that so many burning lamps shine for us in the workmanship of the universe to show forth the glory of its Author. Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves in no way lead us into the right path. Surely they strike some sparks, but before their fuller light shines forth these are smothered. For this reason, the apostle, in that very passage where he calls the worlds the images of things invisible, adds that through faith we understand that they have been fashioned by God's word [Hebrews 11:3]. He means by this that the invisible divinity is made manifest in such spectacles, but that we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illumined by the inner revelation of God through faith. And where Paul teaches that what is to be known of God is made plain from the creation of the universe [Romans 1:19], he does not signify such a manifestation as men's discernment can comprehend; but, rather, shows it not to go farther than to render them inexcusable.²⁴

22. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 62.

23. Romans 1:18ff.

24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), I.V.14.

Not only can the unbeliever not see God in the creation, nor can he understand the creation itself, because God does not enter into his thoughts.

Even for the believing scientist who has spiritual eyes to see, general revelation does not control Scripture. He does not interpret Scripture in the light of general revelation; much less does he interpret Scripture in the light of the findings of his unregenerate colleagues. What is to be his approach?

He comes with his science to the Scriptures, and he is willing to bow before the Scriptures with his science. And if apparently there is disharmony between the two, he says, "I will have to re-examine and adjust my science and my scientific conclusions so that they are in harmony with Scripture."²⁵

The impact of the fall is virtually disregarded or negated by those who seek to harmonize Scripture with so-called scientific discovery. This is particularly evident in the CRC report on Creation and Science, which works the error of common grace into the equation. Addressing the impact of the fall upon general revelation, the report maintained:

The fall into sin neither eroded the content of general revelation nor destroyed its authority. The fall did turn humanity into an unfaithful respondent to this revelation of God coming to us through creation and history. Consequently, the sinner needs the Scriptures as the "spectacles" by which, through faith in Jesus Christ, one is enabled to read God's revelation in creation faithfully. We now need both books of revelation to understand each.

In response to the question, "Have not sin and unbelief so suppressed [the unbelieving scholars'] receptivity to the truth that their work can no longer have any benefit for us?", the report stated:

25. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.V.14, p.69.

Although some Christian traditions may affirm such a position, the Reformed tradition does not support such a stance.... the Reformed tradition places on its adherents a moral obligation, in fact, a religious duty, to acknowledge truth wherever it is found. How the tradition accounts for moments of truth in an unbelieving response to revelation is not the key issue for us. Calvin spoke of a "general grace," the subsequent Reformed tradition of "common grace.".... In any case, the tradition does not allow us an easy appeal to the noetic effects of the fall as a reason for simply dismissing secular or unbelieving scholarship. We are at least compelled in any specific case to assess the extent (if any) to which sin has distorted the truth.²⁶

The report contends that God's common grace is working in the unregenerate scientist who is thereby enabled to receive and interpret the testimony of nature. From this it is argued that the believer is obliged to receive the testimony of the unregenerate scientist and to accept that the earth is billions of years old. Having done so, the believer is confronted with special revelation, which teaches something that appears to be entirely different. Being confronted with two apparently conflicting words of God, the believer is compelled to accept a reinterpretation of Genesis 1 & 2 to allow for an old earth. The result is that God's common grace, as disclosed in nature, overwhelms special revelation and that, as we have noted, is contrary to the Reformed tradition.

Conclusion

Closely allied with a failure to accord Scripture its rightful place is the ultimate rejection of the foundation of the Christian faith. The attempt to harmonize Scripture and science contradicts the very heart of faith. True faith holds for truth all that God has revealed in Scripture. It does not do so because everything in Scripture can be established to the satisfaction of the mind. Rather, it does so because Scripture is the very Word of God. Therefore, true faith cannot be induced by any evidence or argu-

26. Report 28, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

ment that can be adduced from the creation, to doubt or deny what God has revealed explicitly in His Word.

Now the reaction of the natural man is to regard such thinking as absurd. But does the appearance of absurdity in the eyes of the world mean that those things which the believer maintains are not true? Does it mean that to believe such things is absurd? Absolutely not! Faith believes many things that men consider to be absurd. It maintains things that the natural man considers to be impossible.

Faith believes that Jonah, having been swallowed by a great fish, lived for three days in the belly of that fish. It believes that Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, was raised to life again; it is not overwhelmed when Scripture declares that Jesus, the Son of God, was born of a virgin and that He died on a cross, only to rise from the dead after three days. Can such things be proven? The answer is no. Do they accord with the reasoning of men? No, to the natural man the thought of such things is absurd. Dead men cannot be brought back to life, nor can a virgin conceive and bear a son. But the Christian believes those things; he holds them for truth, not because they can be proven, but because God declares them to be so in His Word. So too with the creation of the world in six natural days. "*Through faith* we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."²⁷

If the Christian is obliged to harmonize Scripture with the claims of so-called science, then he ought also harmonize all of the miracles of the Scripture with the demands of science. The result is that all of the miracles will be rejected as being scientifically unsustainable. However, the reason that they are scientifically unsustainable is that they are what they claim to be, miracles, and without the eyes of faith they appear ridiculous in the sight of men.

To pander to the demands of those who seek to harmonize Scripture with so-called science has resulted and will continue to result in the destruction of the Christian faith. Where is our faith, if there was no incarnation or if Jesus Christ did not rise from the

27. Hebrews 11:3.

dead? If those truths are rejected, then the modern day Huxleys can say with justification that orthodox Christianity has been forced to retire from the lists, not just bleeding and crushed, but totally annihilated. This is ultimately what is at stake when the literal interpretation of the “days” of Genesis 1 & 2 is abandoned.

Does the believer comprehend all things concerning the creation of the world? Is he able to reconcile all things concerning the days of Genesis 1 & 2 to his ultimate satisfaction? No, but he would do well to heed the advice of Luther:

If, then, we do not understand the nature of the days or have no insight into why God wanted to make use of these intervals of time, let us confess our lack of understanding rather than distort the words, contrary to their context, into a foreign meaning.... If we do not comprehend the reason for this, let us remain pupils and leave the job of teacher to the Holy Spirit.²⁸ ●

Appendix A

The French Confession (1559)

Article VII

We believe that God, in three co-working persons, by his power, wisdom, and incomprehensible goodness, created all things, not only the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, but also invisible spirits.[1] some of whom have fallen away and gone into perdition,[2] while others have continued in obedience.[3] That the first, being corrupted by evil, are enemies of all good, consequently of the whole Church. The second, having been preserved by the grace of God, are ministers to glorify God’s name, and to promote the salvation of his elect.

28. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, Missouri, 1958), p. 5.

The Scotch Confession of Faith (1560)

Article II Of the Creation of Man

We confess and acknowledge this our God to have created man, to wit, our first father Adam, to his own image and similitude, to whom he gave wisdom, lordship, justice, free-will, and clear knowledge of himself, so that in the whole nature of man there could be noted no imperfection.

The Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)

Article XII The Creation of All Things, Especially the Angels

We believe that the Father by the Word, that is, by His Son, has created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, when it seemed good unto Him; giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; that He also still upholds and governs them by His eternal providence and infinite power for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God.

He also created the angels good, to be His messengers and to serve His elect; some of whom are fallen from that excellency in which God created them into everlasting perdition, and the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and every good thing; to the utmost of their power as murderers watching to ruin the Church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all; and are, therefore, by their own wickedness adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments.

Therefore we reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees, who deny the existence of spirits and angels; and also that of the Manichees, who assert that the devils have their origin of themselves, and that they are wicked of their own nature, without having been corrupted.

Article XIV The Creation and Fall of Man, and His Incapacity to Perform What Is Truly Good

We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous,

and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God. But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but wilfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life: having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he has lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and retained only small remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehended it not; where St. John calls men darkness.

Therefore we reject all that is taught repugnant to this concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin, and can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven. For who may presume to boast that he of himself can do any good, since Christ says: No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him? Who will glory in his own will, who understands that the mind of the flesh is enmity against God? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God? In short, who dares suggest any thought, since he knows that we are not sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God? And therefore what the apostle says ought justly to be held sure and firm, that God worketh in us both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. For there is no understanding nor will conformable to the divine understanding and will but what Christ has wrought in man; which He teaches us, when He says: Apart from me ye can do nothing.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

Chapter VII Of the Creation of All Things: Of Angels, the Devil, and Man

God Created All Things. This good and almighty God created all things, both visible and invisible, by his co-eternal Word, and preserves them by his co-eternal Spirit, as David testified when he said: By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath

of his mouth (Ps. 33:6). And, as Scripture says, everything that God had made was very good, and was made for the profit and use of man. Now we assert that all those things proceed from one beginning. Therefore, we condemn the Manichaeans and Marcionites who impiously imagined two substances and natures, one good, the other evil; also two beginnings and two gods contrary to each other, a good one and an evil one.

Of Angels and the Devil. Among all creatures, angels and men are most excellent. Concerning angels, Holy Scripture declares: Who makest the winds thy messengers, fire and flame thy ministers (Psa. 104:4). Also it says: Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? (Heb. 1:14). Concerning the devil, the Lord Jesus himself testifies: He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Consequently we teach that some angels persisted in obedience and were appointed for faithful service to God and men, but others fell of their own free will and were cast into destruction, becoming enemies of all good and of the faithful, etc.

Of Man. Now concerning man, Scripture says that in the beginning he was made good according to the image and likeness of God; that God placed him in Paradise and made all things subject to him (Gen., ch. 2). This is what David magnificently sets forth in Psalm 8. Moreover, God gave him a wife and blessed them. We also affirm that man consists of two different substances in one person: an immortal soul which, when separated from the body, neither sleeps nor dies, and a mortal body which will nevertheless be raised up from the dead at the last judgment in order that then the whole man, either in life or in death, abide forever.

The Sects. We condemn all who ridicule or by subtle arguments cast doubt upon the immortality of souls, or who say that the soul sleeps or is a part of God. In short, we condemn all opinions of all men, however many, that depart from what has been delivered unto us by the Holy Scriptures in the apostolic Church of Christ concerning creation, angels, and demons, and man.

The Westminster Larger Catechism

Q15: What is the work of creation?

Ans: The work of creation is that wherein God did in the beginning, by

the word of his power, make of nothing the world, and all things therein, for himself, within the space of six days, and all very good.

Q16: How did God create angels?

Ans: God created all the angels spirits, immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power, to execute his commandments, and to praise his name, yet subject to change.

Q17: How did God create man?

Ans: After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man, endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls; made them after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q9: What is the work of creation?

Ans: The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

Q10: How did God create man?

Ans: God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

Preaching Christ from Old Testament Historical Narrative Texts

Ronald L. Cammenga

The Centrality of Christ in Preaching

Every serious-minded Reformed pastor wants to see his congregation grow in grace under his ministry. He wants to see the members develop in their understanding of the truth and in holy living. He wants to see the congregation strengthened in unity and in mutual service. He wants to see godly families and strong marriages. He wants to see children growing up into Christ, in fulfillment of God's covenant promise. He wants to see young people coming to spiritual maturity and taking their places actively in the congregation. He wants to see qualified men equipped to serve capably in the special offices. He wants to see outreach into the community that results in members added from without who are solid additions to the congregation. He wants to see sinners brought to repentance, the weak strengthened, the discouraged fortified, the sorrowing comforted, the despairing uplifted, the burdened relieved. In short, he wants to see a people united in the thankful worship of the Lord, both on the Lord's Day and in their day-to-day living in the world.

This earnest desire on the part of the serious-minded Reformed pastor is coupled with the conviction that none of these things can be realized apart from the preaching of the gospel. Reformed pastors have a deep conviction of the primacy of preaching. They understand that God is pleased to use the preaching of the gospel for the salvation and the preservation in salvation of His people. With Paul they are persuaded that "...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," (Rom. 10:17).

The Reformed pastor is bound to this high view of preaching by the Reformed confessions. Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 65, states: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His

benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." In complete agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism is the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.A. 155: "How is the word made effectual to salvation? The spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation."

But it ought also to be the conviction of the Reformed pastor that preaching that is God's means unto the salvation of His elect people is the preaching *of Christ*. Preaching that brings to salvation and keeps in salvation is the preaching of the gospel. But the gospel is centrally the gospel of Christ. The gospel is the good news of what God has done, is doing, and will do in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ, therefore, must be preached. The serious-minded Reformed pastor must not only have a strong conviction of the primacy of preaching, but equally as strong a conviction of the centrality of Christ in the preaching of the gospel.

The Scriptures demand the centrality of Christ in the preaching of the gospel. Paul says in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel *of Christ*: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." It was for this reason that Paul says in I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The reason for this Christ-centeredness in Paul's preaching was his desire that the faith of his hearers "...should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:5).

Since Christ is to be preached, the great endeavor of the Reformed pastor is to make Christ the center of his sermons. Whatever the text of his sermon, whatever the nature of the textual material, he must make Christ the focus of his preaching. The main

point of the sermon must be connected to Christ, grounded in Christ, firmly established in the person and work of Christ.

This must be true whether the sermon text is taken from the Old Testament or from the New Testament. The Old Testament must be preached in such a way that what is preached looks forward to its fulfillment in the coming Jesus Christ. The New Testament must be preached as having been fulfilled in the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross.

The challenge to make Christ the center of the sermon is especially great when preaching on the Old Testament. History and experience, I believe, bear this out. This is not to imply that preaching Christ from the New Testament is an easy matter. Not at all; preaching Christ from the New Testament has its own challenges. It is not so easy, for instance, to preach the exhortations and commands of the New Testament as arising out of the good news of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Too often it happens that the exhortations and commands of the New Testament are preached, as Australian theologian Graeme Goldsworthy says, "...as simple imperatives of Christian behavior; as naked law."¹ This ought not to be!

The relationship between what is and what ought to be, that is, the relationship between the finished work of Christ and the task of the believers, is often well flagged in the text. Paul, for example, frequently indicates the relationship by using the word "therefore" or a similar indicator of consequence.... How easy it is to ignore the "therefore" and to see the injunctions and exhortations ... as standing alone and not, as Paul expounds them, as the implications of the grace of God in Christ.²

Although preaching Christ from the New Testament has its unique challenges, the greater difficulty seems to be preaching Christ from the Old Testament. What Reformed pastors must be convinced of is that it is not only possible to preach Christ from the

1. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), p. xiv.

2. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. xiv.

Old Testament, but this is the only proper way to preach the Old Testament. Like the New Testament, the Old Testament is gospel. As gospel, the Old Testament is, no less than the New Testament, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. This is what Christ Himself said to the unbelieving Jews in John 5:39: "Search the scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament Scriptures); for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify *of me*." To the two travelers to Emmaus, Jesus said the same thing, according to Luke 24:27: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures (again, the Old Testament) the things *concerning himself*." The reason for the Old Testament Scripture's testimony concerning Christ is the preeminence of Christ in the Old Testament. Graeme Goldsworthy is correct in underscoring this important truth.

We remember from our Christian standpoint that the original plan and purpose of God was the kingdom brought about through the suffering and death of his Son. We must never regard the gospel as an afterthought because things went wrong in Israel. The gospel was always God's forethought to everything, including creation, for how else can God have chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:4)? It is important, then, to remind ourselves in sermon preparation that the gospel is God's forethought to the entire historical process in the Old Testament.³

Included in the calling of the Reformed pastor to preach Christ from the Old Testament is the calling to preach Christ from Old Testament history. I have chosen this to be the focus of my presentation.⁴ I have done this because so much of the Old Testament is history. It has been estimated that seventy-five

3. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 141.

4. It goes without saying that the possibility of preaching Christ from Old Testament historical narrative texts rests on the presupposition that the history contained in the Old Testament is real, reliable history, inasmuch as it is part of the canon of the infallibly inspired Scriptures. This is the presupposition of this paper.

percent of the Old Testament consists of historical narrative. Not only is historical narrative the most prominent of the genres of Old Testament Scripture, but more than any other genre it contains other forms of biblical literature, such as law, psalm, wisdom, and prophecy.⁵ At the same time, historical narrative is found in all the other genres of the Old Testament: in prophecy (e.g., Isaiah and Jeremiah), in the wisdom literature (e.g., Job), and in the Psalms (e.g., Psalms 78 and 106).

The Old Testament is built on historical narrative. From a certain point of view, the Old Testament *is* historical narrative. It is history recorded and explained — *what* happened and *why* it happened. The Old Testament opens up with the beginning of history in the creation of the heavens and the earth. And then it traces the progress of history: Adam, Noah, and the patriarchs, the bondage and exodus, the conquest of Canaan, the period of the monarchy and the divided kingdom, the captivity, and finally the restoration. Kenneth Matthews contends that the Old Testament consists basically of

...*narrated* events which are interpreted theologically by the authors and compilers of Israel's two canonical histories. The Primary History, consisting of Genesis through Kings in the Hebrew Bible, is a continuous account tracing the rise and fall of national Israel during which God formed a believing people. The Secondary History, which includes 1-2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, retells the story from a later vantage point and goes beyond the first history by recounting what happened to the faithful few who returned from Babylon.⁶

The Hebrew Old Testament does not categorize any books as historical. The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Nevertheless, in all three of the major

5. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 189.

6. Kenneth A. Matthews, "Preaching Historical Narrative," in *Reclaiming the Prophetic Mantle*, George L. Klein, ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 19.

divisions of the Hebrew canon, historical narrative can be found. In the Torah, especially Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers contain history. In the Prophets, history is prominent in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. In the Writings, primarily Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, Esther, and Daniel are historical in nature.

The prominence of historical narrative in the Old Testament Scriptures, sadly is not often mirrored in preaching. Too often ministers shy away from preaching on Old Testament history. In evangelical pulpits today there appears to be a decided preference for New Testament material as opposed to Old Testament. When the Old Testament is preached, the historical narratives are avoided, or frequently preached wrongly. Some years ago, Peter Y. DeJong expressed his concern for what he perceived as a neglect of preaching on Old Testament history by Reformed ministers in North America.

Today, we fear, sound preaching on Old Testament historical materials is not a strong suit in the Reformed and Christian Reformed, the Protestant Reformed and the Netherlands Reformed congregations in Canada and the United States.⁷

Why is there so little preaching on the Old Testament? Undoubtedly, a number of reasons can be given. Preaching on the New Testament may simply be the preacher's personal preference. Because of the work involved in exegeting and preparing sermons on Old Testament history, a shortage of preparation time may be a factor. Or, neglect of Old Testament history may be due to the rigors of dealing with the Hebrew language.

Whatever the reason, if we preachers neglect to preach on Old Testament historical narrative, we are guilty of wrongdoing. We are guilty of robbing the church of a significant aspect of the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), which we are pledged to preach. We

7. Peter Y. DeJong, in the "Introduction" to M.B. Van't Veer, *Christological Preaching on Historical Materials of the Old Testament*, trans. John Piersma (Orange City, IA: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, n.d.), p. iv.

are responsible for undercutting the church's conviction that *all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for edification and godliness. Most seriously, we are guilty of robbing God of His glory, for it is God in the glory of His being and works who is revealed in Old Testament history.

It is the purpose of my presentation to inspire the preachers here today to preach Old Testament history. If you have been doing that, carry on. If you have not been, at least not with any frequency, my hope is that you will be given reason to reevaluate your preaching, perhaps with the assistance of your elders. P.Y. DeJong to the contrary notwithstanding, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America have a worthy tradition of writing and preaching on Old Testament history. An examination of our tradition bears this out. When one thinks of this tradition, names like Hoeksema (father and son), Ophoff, Vos, and Heys come to mind. I am sure that the Presbyterian tradition has its own worthies who excelled at preaching from the Old Testament. May our discussion today rekindle our resolve to maintain this tradition.

Pitfalls to Be Avoided

In preaching Old Testament history there are a number of pitfalls to be avoided. I will be concerned in this paper to caution against two. I choose these two because I am convinced that they ever have been and are still today the two besetting sins of sermons on Old Testament history. A historical survey of preaching would show the frequency with which even well-intentioned preachers fell into these two errors. And a critical evaluation of our own preaching, I believe, would yield the admission that we too, from time to time, if we have not fallen headlong into these errors, have at least not avoided them altogether.

The first pitfall is what Walter Kaiser identifies as the "dry-bones-history-and-grammar approach" to preaching Old Testament historical narrative.⁸ The history is retold. Attention is paid to the formal structure of the narrative. The grammar is treated.

8. Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 201.

Textual critical information is taken into consideration. Perhaps the light of some archaeological discovery is shone on the text. A lot of attention is paid to the details of the narrative. But that is as far as the sermon goes. The history is treated, but it is treated in such a way that it remains history, nothing more.

Kaiser writes:

Nothing can be more discouraging and disheartening for contemporary believers gathered to hear the Word of God than to listen to a simple recounting or bare description of an Old Testament or Gospel narrative. This kind of preaching is nothing more than narrating a "B.C. story" or "first-century A.D. homily." This kind of preaching merely strings verses or events together. It does not attempt to come to terms with the truth taught by the writer in that narrative. It is, then, a poor excuse for expository preaching.⁹

Warning against this approach to preaching Old Testament historical narrative texts, Goldsworthy is correct when he writes:

The story is never complete in itself and belongs as part of the one big story of salvation culminating in Jesus Christ. Simply telling a story based on a piece of Old Testament historical narrative, however complete in itself, is not Christian preaching.¹⁰

This erroneous way of preaching Old Testament history is aided and abetted by much that passes for modern biblical scholarship. A large number of Old Testament commentaries that have been published in the last couple of decades have not furnished preachers with the material needed for making sermons on Old Testament history. At best, they have majored in minors. This is true not only of commentaries that are written from a decidedly higher-critical point of view. Even many evangelical commentaries on the Old Testament exhibit a preoccupation with literary-

9. Kaiser, *Towards an Exegetical Theology*, p. 197.

10. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 150.

historical exegesis, so that the gospel in Old Testament history does not receive its due.

In his book *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, Sidney Greidanus issues a call to preachers to preach texts and not bare facts. He points out that sometimes this preaching of the facts is motivated by the well-intentioned desire to “prove” the historicity of an account over against the challenge to its historicity by modern, liberal scholarship. He points out especially two bad consequences that result from this preaching of the facts rather than the text. One consequence is that “...by concentrating on ‘the facts,’ the interpreter looks right through the text as if it were a transparent windowpane.”¹¹ In other words, he looks past the gospel in the text. In the second place, “... preachers who try preaching facts run into the problem that they present ‘objective facts’ and then have difficulty making an application that does not appear to be tacked on.”¹²

A second pitfall that needs to be avoided in preaching Old Testament historical narrative is what is sometimes referred to as the exemplaristic or moralizing method. DeJong expresses his judgment in this regard.

We have not escaped the snare of *exemplaristic* preaching with its moralizing which dims the glory and grandeur of the historical passages in Scripture and may easily obscure the riches of God’s sovereign grace in Christ who by his Spirit and Word gathers, defends, and preserves the church called to life everlasting.¹³

With regard to this sort of approach to preaching Old Testament historical narrative, Goldsworthy writes:

... the exemplary sermon is more inclined to lead us to ask, “How does this character (or event) testify to my existence?” By

11. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, p. 196.

12. Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, p. 196.

13. Peter Y. DeJong, in the “Introduction” to *The History of Redemption in the Preaching of the Gospel*, by Benne Holwerda, trans. John Piersma (Orange City, IA: Mid-America Reformed Seminary, n.d.), p. iii.

contrast, the redemptive-historical approach is more inclined to lead us to ask, "How does this event (or character) testify to Christ?" Let us never forget that our existence is only properly defined in terms of our being either in Christ or outside of Christ. If we really want to know how a text testifies to our existence, it must do so via its testimony to Christ. That is basic to any Christian sermon.¹⁴

In this connection, Goldsworthy offers a sharp but accurate criticism of the modern Sunday School that is worth repeating.

While I certainly do not want to appear to be carping and critical of the multitude of faithful volunteers who prepare curricula and teach them in Sunday Schools, I get the impression that both tasks are often carried on with little or no understanding of the big picture of biblical revelation. Consequently, children are often taught a whole range of isolated Bible stories, each with its neat little application deemed appropriate to the respective age levels. So much of the application is thus moralizing legalism because it is severed from its links to the gospel of grace. By the time many of these children reach their teenage years they have had a belly full of morality, enough, they would think, to last them for the rest of their lives. They thus beat a retreat to live reasonably decent but gospelless lives.¹⁵

Closely associated with the exemplaristic method is the tendency to allegorizing. All kinds of "lessons" are drawn from the narrative that apply to Christians today, but many of these lessons are derived from strained exegesis that spiritualizes the details of the account. Long ago, Holwerda warned preachers of his generation against this pitfall.

There is quite a bit of preaching which truly tries to be 'Christocentric,' and yet is not. One can say many true and

14. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 151.

15. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture*, p. 151.

beautiful things about what God in the coming of Christ meant to Abraham, and then draw a parallel with what He is for us in the Christ who has come. But unintentionally ... you no longer ask what meaning or purpose Abraham, Elijah, etc., had for God's one, ever-increasing, progressive work in Christ but the very opposite — what significance God in Christ had for them. Surely the Christian stands in the center here though that was not the intention.¹⁶

The danger of this erroneous way of preaching Old Testament history is illustrated in Walter Kaiser's *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. For all the value of this work, in my judgment Kaiser falls into the snare of exemplaristic preaching. He does this when he advances as the key responsibility of the preacher preaching on Old Testament historical narrative what he calls "principlizing." This is what he writes:

Principlizing a Biblical passage is ... that procedure which seeks to discover the enduring ethical, spiritual, doctrinal, and moral truths or principles which the writer himself set forth by the way in which he selected his details and arranged the contextual setting of his narrative. Principlization seeks to bridge the "then" of the text's narrative with the "now" needs of our day; yet it refuses to settle for cheap and quick solutions which confuse our own personal point of view (good or bad) with that of the inspired writer.¹⁷

Don't misunderstand. I am not contending that there ought not to be application in sermons preached on Old Testament historical passages. There ought to be. Application that arises out of the text and that speaks to Christians living in the twenty-first century. But what I am arguing is that this is not the first or main calling of the preacher. To construe it as the preacher's main calling is to cross the line into exemplaristic preaching.

Why are the two pitfalls of the "dry-bones-history-and-grammar" approach and the exemplaristic method to be avoided?

16. Holwerda, *The History of Redemption in the Preaching of the Gospel*, p. 12.

17. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 198.

The simple answer is: *They do not preach Christ.* For their differences, the two methods have this in common. They do not preach the gospel of God's sovereign grace in Jesus Christ as that gospel is set forth in historical narrative. The sad result is that sin-stricken sinners are sent home without hearing the comfort of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

This becomes plain in Kaiser's application of his proposed method to preaching through the Book of Nehemiah. He offers the following sermon titles for such a series:

- I. The Primacy of Prayer in Any Undertaking in Life (Neh. 1).
- II. The Significance of Setting Goals (Neh. 2).
- III. The Principles of Successful Leadership (Neh. 3).
- IV. The Way to Meet Opposition to God's Work (Neh. 4-6).
- V. The Way to Encourage Spiritual Renewal (Neh. 8).
- VI. The Importance of Learning from History (Neh. 9).
- VII. The Necessity of Preserving the Gains Made in the Work of God (Neh. 10-13).¹⁸

The question begs to be asked: "Where is Christ here?" The clear note of the gospel is missing entirely. And although it is certainly conceivable that the cross of Christ would be brought into these sermons, the sermon themes make plain that the cross is not at the heart of any of the messages.

We echo the worthwhile comments of DeJong:

Of all the sermons ... none requires more effort on the part of the preacher than Gospel proclamation rooted in Old Testament historical materials. Anyone acquainted with the Word can learn how to tell its stories with a degree of skill. Nor is it at all difficult to distil from many of its pericopes some moral lesson or devotional inspiration. But this is a far cry from opening up the riches of God's revelation in Christ Jesus which is the sum and substance of the Old as well as the New Testament.¹⁹

18. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, p. 207.

19. DeJong, "Introduction" to *Christological Preaching on Historical Materials of the Old Testament*, p. i.

Proper Preaching of Old Testament Historical Narrative Texts

Proper preaching of Old Testament historical narrative requires the use of the Christocentric or Redemptive-Historical method. For our purposes, these are two different names for basically the same method. This method aims to identify and set forth the cross of Jesus Christ, which is at the heart of all Old Testament history. We concur with Van't Veer:

Here then is our mutual starting point. It is our prejudice of faith. In Old and New Testament we have *God's revelation in Christ Jesus*, and therefore *every sermon must be Christological*.²⁰

Van't Veer expresses agreement with a certain Prof. T. Hoekstra who wrote:

Let it be shown in every sermon what is the connection between the Word of God that was chosen as a text and the central part of revelation. Even from the part of the circle that is farthest removed there is a way to the center, and this must be shown. *For a sermon without Christ is not a sermon, is not a service of the Word*.²¹

To preach Christ — this is the great task of the faithful minister. To this task belongs his preaching on the Old Testament, and especially now his preaching on Old Testament history.

In his very worthwhile book, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, Sidney Greidanus offers seven ways for the minister to preach Christ from Old Testament historical narrative. He speaks of these as the “many roads (that) lead from the Old Testament to Christ.” These seven roads are:

1. The Way of Redemptive-Historical Progression
2. The Way of Promise-Fulfillment
3. The Way of Typology
4. The Way of Analogy

20. Van't Veer, *Christological Preaching on Historical Materials of the Old Testament*, p. 19.

21. Van't Veer, *Christological Preaching on Historical Materials of the Old Testament*, p. 19.

5. The Way of Longitudinal Themes
6. The Way of New Testament References
7. The Way of Contrast²²

It is worth our while to describe briefly each of these ways.

The way of redemptive-historical progression "...links Christ to Old Testament redemptive events which find their climax in him."²³ Greidanus describes the redemptive-historical method in this way:

Redemptive-historical interpretation seeks to understand an Old Testament passage first in its own historical-cultural context. Only after we have heard a passage the way Israel heard it can we move on to understand this message in the broad contexts of the whole canon and the whole of redemptive history. It is at this point that the questions concerning Jesus Christ, the center, emerge.²⁴

A second way to preach Christ from the Old Testament is the way of promise-fulfillment. Writes Greidanus, "The way of promise-fulfillment is embedded in redemptive history, for God gives his promises at one stage of redemptive history and brings them to fulfillment in subsequent stages."²⁵ Van't Veer agrees with this approach to preaching Old Testament history, at the same time indicating its relevance to the New Testament congregation.

The difference between the two Testaments is further indicated (according to Luke 4) as one of *promise* and *fulfillment*. But what does fulfillment mean in this instance? "Fulfillment" may never be interpreted to mean that the promise is now ended. That would be true if the fulfillment of the promise was not in itself a promise, and indeed a reinforced promise. The apostles and believers of the present time are conscious of their solidarity with the believers of

22. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 203ff.

23. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 204.

24. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 228.

25. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 206.

the Old Covenant in the matter of expectation. We continue to be a waiting, hoping church. "Fulfillment" means: the promise is being fulfilled. Not: the promise as promise is past, conquered, and that which was promised has taken its place. But precisely the opposite: the promise is now in full force. Therefore the difference between the Old and New Testament is that at first there was the promise, and now the full and reinforced promise.... The fulfillment, as we constantly understand it, will be at Christ's return.²⁶

Yet another way of preaching Old Testament historical narrative identified by Greidanus is the way of typology.

As promise-fulfillment functions within redemptive history because God makes and fulfills his promises in redemptive history, so typology functions within redemptive history because God acts in redemptive history in regular patterns. God accomplishes his redemptive plan not only progressively from promise to fulfillment but also uniformly through similarity of redemptive acts. The New Testament writers are able, therefore, to discern analogies between God's present acts in Christ and his redemptive acts in the Old Testament.²⁷

In connection with this method of preaching Old Testament history, Greidanus issues a warning against "typologizing," the exegetical sin of making a type rather than discovering a biblical type. The rule must be followed that an event or person is a type because the Scriptures themselves make it a type.²⁸

The fourth method of preaching Christ from the Old Testament is described by Greidanus as the way of analogy.

We can describe the way of analogy for preaching Christ from the Old Testament as the move from what God was for Israel to what God through Christ is for the New Testament church. In distinction

26. Van't Veer, *Christological Preaching on Historical Materials of the Old Testament*, p. 7.

27. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 212.

28. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 254ff.

from the analogy of typology, the analogy here lies between the relationship of God to Israel and that of Christ to the church. This relationship allows for different emphases.²⁹

In addition to analogy, Greidanus speaks of preaching Christ from the Old Testament by means of longitudinal themes.

The Bible discloses the gradual development of themes because God progressively reveals more of himself and his will as he works out his redemptive plan in history. We see this development of themes already in the Old Testament itself. For example, some of the Psalms celebrate the victories of the present or future kings. But during the exile, when there is no Davidic king, the prophets extend this theme of victory from the royal king to the coming Messiah king.³⁰

Yet another way of preaching Christ from Old Testament historical narrative is the way of New Testament references. This is not really a distinct method, but ought to be used to reinforce the other methods.

Many New Testament references consist of the ways of promise-fulfillment, typology, or longitudinal themes. If preachers had failed to discover these ways by themselves, these New Testament references are a good corrective of oversights. If preachers had already discovered any of these ways, the New Testament references serve not only as confirmation but can often be used as stepping stones in the sermon to make the point for the congregation.³¹

Last, Greidanus speaks of the way of contrast as a valid way of preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

Because of the progression in the histories of redemption and revelation, it should not come as a surprise that the message of an

29. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 221.

30. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 222.

31. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 269.

Old Testament text will sometimes stand in contrast to that of the New Testament.³²

Greidanus goes on to speak of the way of contrast as the most appropriate way to preach those passages which concern the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. By His coming, Christ has fulfilled and abolished the Old Testament laws, as for example circumcision. As an example of one who frequently used the way of contrast in preaching Old Testament history, Greidanus makes reference to Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

In evaluating Greidanus' seven ways to preach Christ from the Old Testament, we see that there is significant overlap between the various methods. The distinctions are not so scientifically precise that the use of any one method rules out a collaborative use of one or more of the other methods. In fact, the seven ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament are quite closely related.

As helpful as Greidanus' suggestions are, the shortcoming of his proposals is that he does not set forth a single, unifying principle for preaching Christ from the Old Testament. That principle, I would suggest, is the covenant. Proper preaching of Old Testament history is covenantal preaching. All the methods put forward by Greidanus may be used, but *the* way of preaching the Old Testament, and now particularly Old Testament history, is from the viewpoint of God's covenant. That covenant God realizes in time and history. Throughout history, and now particularly throughout the history of the Old Testament, God's covenant is established and maintained. As history progresses, God reveals more and more of the richness and beauty of His covenant. It is from the viewpoint of the covenant that Old Testament history must be preached.

The Old Testament itself demands that this is the way it is to be preached. The opening chapter of the Bible reveals the God who is a covenant God in Himself, establishing His covenant with His creature, man. In that covenant, Adam enjoyed God's friendship and fellowship in the Garden. After the violation of the covenant

32. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, p. 271.

by man's fall into sin, Genesis 3:15, the "protevangel" or "mother promise" reveals God's will to maintain His covenant with His people in Christ Jesus. The whole of Old Testament history is the record of God's faithfulness to the covenant and His fulfillment of the covenant promise to save His people in the Mediator of the covenant. It is, at the same time, the record of Satan's efforts to frustrate God's covenant purpose, to destroy the covenant people, and to prevent the realization of the covenant in the coming of Christ. That is the perspective on Old Testament history that a passage like Revelation 12 gives us.

This is the unifying principle of all Old Testament history. Every event and every person mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures can be understood properly only in light of this principle. This is the way Old Testament history must be preached. The question that the preacher must face is: "How is this particular incident connected to the revelation of God's covenant? How does this incident reveal the covenant God?" This method will assure that the gospel is preached from Old Testament history. And this method will lend itself to ready application to the New Testament church and believer.

Some Practical Suggestions

By way of conclusion, let me offer some practical suggestions for preaching Old Testament historical narrative. First, some practical suggestions for exegesis. Let me recommend the following steps when dealing with any given passage.

1. Interpret the text.
2. Relate the text to its immediate context.
3. Relate the passage to the preceding and foregoing narratives. The succession of narratives is meaningful.
4. Relate the passage to the context of the book in which it appears.
5. Relate the passage to the context of the Old Testament as a whole.
6. Relate the passage to the New Testament, especially direct references to the text or part of the text in the New Testament.

As far as preaching Old Testament history is concerned, the following practical suggestions may be made.

1. Tell the story. Tell it in as interesting a way as possible. Of more than one of our ministers it has been said that when he preached on a certain Old Testament historical figure, you thought it was Moses or Elijah himself in the pulpit. Let that be said of us.
2. Give the meaning. Draw the lines sharply from the text to Christ. Make plain how the text stands related to the revelation of the covenant of God, that is, the gospel.
3. Make the application. Indicate the way or ways that the text applies to Christians today, living in a different dispensation of the covenant, but living in the one, everlasting covenant of God.

In Amos 8:11, the prophet warns of God's judgment over His people that will take the form of a famine of hearing the word of the Lord. Not a famine of hearing sermons, but a famine of hearing *the word of the Lord*. As John teaches in John 1, Christ is the Word of the Lord. Wherever Christ is not present in the preaching, there is a famine of the Word. May God in His grace spare us that famine! May we continue to proclaim and may God's people continue to hear through us the Word of the Lord, that is, Christ in our preaching of Old Testament history! ●

A Brief Study of the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works in the Reformed and Presbyterian Tradition: Pre-Creedal History, Varying Interpretations, and Critique

Dennis Lee

Part One: History of Dogma

Early Beginnings of the doctrine of the Covenant of Works

To begin our discussion, we take the broad definition of the doctrine of the covenant of works as Adam's pre-Fall covenantal relationship with God that carried with it a promise of eternal life in connection with Adam's obedience to God. This doctrine has long been closely linked to covenant theology at large in both the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. To begin with, it has been widely recognized that covenant theology finds its roots and conception in Switzerland (and not so much Calvin), and then later in the German Reformed theologians Olevianus and Ursinus. Of the covenant idea in the early Swiss theologians and Calvin, Geerhardus Vos tells us:

In Switzerland, the Reformers had come into direct conflict with the Anabaptists.... In their defense of infant baptism, they reached for the Old Testament and applied the federal understanding of the

sacraments to the new dispensation. *Zwingli* did this in 1525. In the various catechisms that were published by *Leo Judae* from 1534 on, the material is strongly penetrated by the covenant idea. "The Decades", a series of sermons by *Bullinger*, saw the light of day between 1549 and 1551, and in 1558 they appeared in German translation under the modified title, "The Housebook". *This work is structured entirely by the covenant idea. In Calvin*, too, mention is frequently made of the covenants. However, his theology was built on the basis of the Trinity, and therefore the covenant concept could not arise as a dominant principle in his case. He is the forerunner of such Reformed theologians who allocate to it a *subordinate* place as a separate locus. Even his Geneva Catechism, where one would most expect this idea to be elaborated, bypasses it. The theologians of Zurich, on the other hand, are to be regarded as the forerunners of federal theology in the narrower sense insofar as the covenant for them becomes the dominant idea for the practice of the Christian life.¹ [emphasis mine]

Of Olevianus and Ursinus, Geerhardus Vos writes:

... the well-known Heidelberg theologians, stood in the closest connection to the Zurich theologians. Olevianus had spent time in Zurich, and Ursinus had even been there twice. It is, therefore, obvious that the influence which the covenant concept had on them is to be attributed to this connection. Ursinus applied it in his "Larger Catechism". We have two works by Olevianus in which the covenant is dealt with, namely, the "Interpretation of the Apostolic Symbol" and "The Substance of the Covenant of Grace between God and the Elect", which saw the light of day in 1576 and 1585, respectively.²

Developing the contribution of Olevianus and Ursinus, Vos shows that the idea of the covenant of works first appears with them in clear seed form.

1. Geerhardus Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology* (Internet URL: "www.biblicaltheology.org/dcrt.htm"), p. 1 of 20 of my printout from the Internet.

2. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p. 2.

... whoever has the historical sense to be able to separate the mature development of a thought from its original sprouting and does not insist that a doctrine be mature at birth, will have no difficulty in recognizing the covenant of works as an old Reformed doctrine. Already with Ursinus in the Larger Catechism the question: "What does the divine law teach you?" is answered: "What kind of a covenant God entered into with man at the creation and how man behaved in the keeping of that covenant," etc. Likewise, Olevianus speaks of the covenant of law, the covenant of nature, the covenant of creation in contradistinction to the covenant of grace.³

According to Vos (and unverifiable by myself), Ursinus' doctrine of the covenant of works is found in seed form in the ninth question (left untranslated by Vos in his paper) of his Larger Catechism.⁴

Development in the Continental Reformed Tradition

We now trace how the doctrine of the covenant of works, from its seed form, developed in Continental Reformed circles, to the point where it received creedal status. Continuing to trace the history of covenant theology, Vos writes:

From that time on federalism did not recede from the Reformed system. It appears in Switzerland with Musculus (1599, *Loci Communes*), Polanus (*Syntagma*, 1609), and Wollebius (*Compendium*, 1625); in Hungary with Szegedin (1585); in Germany with Pierius (1595), Sohnius (*Methodus Theologiae*), Eglin (1609), and Martinus. In the Netherlands we again find the main ideas of federalism in Junius, Gomarus, both the Tricatuses and Nardenus, until finally with Cloppenburg a worked-out system emerges in which the covenant idea is wedded to a strict Calvinism. He is followed by Cocceius.⁵

3. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p. 2.

4. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, footnote 5.

5. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p.2

Notably, in his *Compendium* of 1625, the Swiss Reformed theologian Wollebius clearly identifies the covenant of works as a pre-Fall covenant, and in doing so, it would seem to me, hints the following ideas: one, the idea of a “probation” (Beardslee translates this as “proof”); two, that “eternal happiness” for obedience is that of the “highest good” (since he speaks of the “loss of the highest good” with disobedience) and thus indirectly hinting that Adam, after being proved by God, if successful on obedience, would gain for him and his posterity heavenly, eternal life (and not continued earthly existence in Paradise, for what “highest good” can there be apart from heavenly life?):

- (1) God’s covenant with man is twofold, a covenant of works and one of grace: the first before the Fall, and the second after it.
- (2) The covenant of works was confirmed by a twofold sacrament: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, both of which were located in the midst of paradise.
- (3) Their purpose was twofold: [1] That Man’s obedience *might be put to the proof, by his eating or abstaining*; [2] *that the first might signify eternal happiness for those who obeyed*, and the second, *the loss of the highest good* and the coming of the greatest evil for those who disobeyed.⁶ [emphasis mine]

Later, and after the Westminster standards had been drafted in 1648, his fellow countryman and colleague, Heidegger, would define the covenant of works as follows:

The covenant of works is God’s pact with Adam in his integrity, as the head of the whole human race, by which God requiring of man the perfect obedience of the law of works promised him if obedient eternal life in heaven, but threatened him if he transgressed with eternal death; and on his part man promised perfect obedience” (Heidegger IX, 15).⁷

6. John Beardslee III, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Baker Book House, 1977), p. 64.

7. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Baker Book House, 1978), p. 283.

Such a conception would also be in agreement with Dutch Reformed theologians, notably Cocceius and Herman Witsius, who write:

The covenant of works is the agreement between God and Adam created in God's image to be the head and prince of the whole human race, by which God was promising him eternal life and felicity, should he obey all his precepts most perfectly, adding the threat of death, should he sin even in the least detail; while Adam was accepting this condition (Witsius I, II, 1).⁸

The Dutch Reformed theologians would follow after these two prominent theologians, and held this doctrine in contrast to the Socinians and Arminians, who denied Adam's imputation of sin, and thus rejected it. This is Louis Berkhof's observation:

Cocceius and his followers were not the only ones to embrace the doctrine of the covenant of works. This was done by others as well, such as Voetius, Mastricht, a Marck, and De Moor. Ypeij and Dermout point out that in those days a denial of the covenant of works was regarded as heresy. The Socinians rejected this doctrine altogether, since they did not believe in the imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants; and some of the Arminians, such as Episcopius, Limborgh, Venema, and J. Alting, who called it a human doctrine, followed suit.⁹

Thus, for Dutch Reformed theology, the covenant of works became a part of orthodoxy, and rejection of it would be deemed heretical. Indeed, in its being used to reject Arminian and Socinian error, the idea of Adam's federal status had become intimately but far too narrowly¹⁰ equated to subscription to the doctrine of the covenant of works in Dutch Reformed theology — Ypeij and

8. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 283.

9. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 2002), p. 212.

10. All Presbyterian and Reformed orthodoxy needed was to establish that there was a covenant relationship with Adam, and not all the other erroneous elements in the doctrine of the covenant of works.

Dermount then, and presently also implicitly in Berkhof's thought (as is evident in the citation above), and even in Kersten's treatment in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.¹¹ Yet, by God's providence, the covenant of works is not mentioned in the Three Forms of Unity, neither explicitly nor implicitly.¹²

Finally, in continental Europe, owing to Heidegger, the covenant of works was elevated to creedal status as it was formulated in the Helvetic Consensus Formula of 1675, written to refute the theology school of Saumur. It adopted the same formulation of the covenant of works as Heidegger and Witsius, and, with respect to the promise of eternal life, unmistakably and very strongly asserted that it was to a higher, heavenly life and not to a continued life of existence in earthly Paradise:

(8) The promise annexed to the covenant of works was not just the continuation of earthly life and felicity, but primarily the possession of eternal heavenly life, in heaven of course, if it had finished a course of perfect obedience, to be passed in unspeakable joy in communion with God in both body and soul.

(9) Therefore we do not assent to any view of those who deny that any reward of heavenly obedience was pronounced to Adam, if he should obey God, and do not recognize any other promise of the covenant of works than that of enjoying perpetual life overflowing with every kind of good things – and that in an earthly paradise.¹³

11. G.H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Eerdmans, 1994), vol. 1, p. 292-3: In Chap 15, entitled "The Covenant of Works," Kersten broadly speaks of the doctrine of covenants and its importance in relation to the imputation of Adam's sin to all his posterity, and thus views Vlak and Bekker's rejection of the doctrine of the covenants of works as a rejection of covenant theology altogether.

12. We insist on this over and against Kersten in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 202-3, where, without basis, he makes the Three Forms read otherwise. The Three Forms merely and correctly teach that there was a covenant between God and Adam. This is likely due to Kersten's inaccurate equation of the covenant of works with the truth that God had a covenant relationship with Adam.

13. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 295.

Development in the British Presbyterian Tradition prior to the Westminster Standards

On the other hand, what was the development of covenant theology, and more specifically the covenant of works, in the British Isles before it received creedal formulation in the Westminster standards? Is it true that the British merely imported covenant theology wholesale from the Dutch? Geerhardus Vos thinks otherwise:

It used to be thought rather generally that British theologians had followed the Dutch on this score. Closer research has speedily shown that it is not a matter of imitation but of independent development. Mitchell, in his work, "The Westminster Assembly" (Baird Lecture 1882), says on page 377: "With respect to the doctrine of the Covenants, which some assert to have been derived from Holland, I think myself now, after careful investigation, entitled to maintain that there is nothing taught in the Confession which had not been long before in substance taught by Rollock and Howie in Scotland, and by Cartwright, Preston, Perkins, Ames and Ball in his two catechisms in England."¹⁴

Among these British theologians cited by Mitchell, Robert Rollock, the principal of the University of Edinburgh from 1583 to 1599, would be the earliest and clearest exponent of a very developed doctrine of the covenant of works. While his other British colleagues would make interesting and sometimes even pointed remarks concerning the covenant relationship God had with Adam, Rollock spent the most significant time elaborating it. In 1597, Rollock's theological lectures were published in part under the title "Treatise on Effectual Calling," and appended to this was "Short Catechism concerning the Way in which God from the Beginning revealed Both Covenants to the Human Race." An English translation appeared in 1603. According to Vos, Rollock proceeds from the idea that God says nothing to man apart from the covenant, and his doctrine of the covenant is stated as follows:

14. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p. 3.

*After God had created man in His image, pure and holy, and had written His law in man's heart, He made a covenant with him in which He promised him eternal life on the condition of holy and good works which should answer to the holiness and goodness of the creation, and conform to the law of God.*¹⁵ [emphasis mine]

Clearly, Rollock saw that the covenant was *not* of the essence in the creation of Adam by God, but only something that God *added on* after His act of creation. It is a means to an end, and not of the essence. Further, the proximity of "condition" and "good works" suggests that Rollock at least taught an aspect of merit by Adam, that is, Adam would earn eternal life for himself and his posterity through his perfect obedience. To this latter thought Geerhardus Vos lends support with his comment on exactly this observation in Rollock's statement:

The law has remained as it existed apart from the covenant of works; *it has been done away with as a covenant rule*. Good works in the first covenant were not *strictly* meritorious, but were richly rewarded by free favor. One can easily see how the main features have already been drawn here very clearly.¹⁶ [emphasis mine]

Not strictly meritorious, but, admittedly, there is undoubtedly an idea of merit nonetheless! Finally, we would note from the italicized remark that Rollock has also set the tone for a dangerous and groundless distinction between law and gospel by his description of the covenant of works. This is confirmed by his teaching on Christ and the doctrine of the covenant of grace: for him, the work of the Mediator with respect to the covenant of grace was nothing but a carrying through in him of the covenant of works broken in Adam:

Christ, therefore, our Mediator, subjected himself unto the covenant of works, and unto the law for our sake, and did both fulfill

15. Cited in Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p. 3, from "Tractate," Robert Rollock, Woodrow Society of Edinburgh, 1849, p. 34.

16. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p. 3.

the condition of the covenant of works in his holy and good life ... and also did undergo that curse with which man was threatened in that covenant of works, if that condition of good and holy works were not kept.¹⁷

Then, the Irish Articles of Religion (1615), written by Archbishop James Ussher and endorsed in the Irish Episcopal Church, says something of similar effect to Rollock's teaching, though without the name "covenant of works," in Article 21:

21) Man...had the covenant of the law ingrafted in his heart, whereby God did promise unto him everlasting life upon condition that he performed entire and perfect obedience unto his Commandments, according to that measure of strength wherewith he was endued in his creation, and threatened death unto him if he did not perform the same.¹⁸

So, before the Westminster divines had met in 1643, we have evidence from Rollock and the Irish Articles of the theological climate with respect to God's covenant with Adam. Especially Rollock, being the Principal of the University of Edinburgh for over fifteen years, had cast an important dye with respect to the doctrine of the covenant of works and undoubtedly influenced at least some of the Scottish theologians who were delegates to the Westminster Assembly. Further, his doctrine of the covenant of works is also more markedly developed than Wollebius' treatment in his *Compendium* of 1625. And Cocceius' work, *The Summa Doctrinae de deo et de testamento*, did not appear till 1648, and in that year the Westminster Confession had already been completed.

From this historical treatment, it is evident that the doctrine of the covenant of works had become a part of standard British Presbyterian and Continental Reformed theology, and thus a part

17. Vos, *The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology*, p. 9.

18. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (Harper & Brothers, 1905), vol. 3, p. 530.

of the Reformed consensus, even before the Westminster standards had given it a creedal status.

PART TWO: Definition and Description of the Covenant of Works

Definition and Direct Inference from WCF 7.1 and 7.2

It has been widely acknowledged that the first precise, focused and significant creedal description of the covenant of works appears in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The description of the covenant of works is found in Chapter 7, entitled “Of God’s Covenant with Man,” and specifically in the first two sections, which deal with God’s relationship to man before the Fall. WCF 7.1 states unmistakably that God’s relationship to our first parents was a covenant relationship:

WCF 7.1 The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.(1)

(1) Isa. 40:13-17; Job 9:32, 33; 1 Sam. 2:25; Ps. 113:5, 6; Ps. 100:2, 3; Job 22:2, 3; Job 35:7, 8; Luke 17:10; Acts 17:24, 25.¹⁹

Then, we have the definition of the covenant of works, which we take for the rest of this paper. In describing the covenant relationship with Adam, WCF 7.2 calls it a “covenant of works,” and gives two clear elements that belong to it, as follows:

WCF 7.2 The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, (1) wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, (2) upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.
(3)

19. *Confession of Faith & Subordinate Standards* (Free Church of Scotland, 1973), p. 13

- (1) Gal. 3:12.
- (2) Rom. 10:5; Rom. 5:12-20.
- (3) Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10.²⁰

The following observations are to be made concerning these two statements:

1. Preliminarily, but leading into the covenant of works, from the heading of the chapter, the Westminster divines clearly recognized that there is only one covenant in Scripture. We say this in spite of their apparently conflicting terminology subsequently of describing two covenants – the first being a covenant of works (WCF 7.2), and the second being a covenant of grace (WCF 7.3 ff.). Perhaps they use this language because Scripture speaks of many covenants: the covenant of Noah, the Davidic covenant, etc. Yet, unhelpful as it is, the heading of the chapter clearly shows that the divines recognized that there was one covenant and not many covenants, and that it was revealed and unfolded in different and richer ways through the Bible. Thus, if we were to take them in the best light, they would mean that the one covenant of God with Man had two aspects they would define: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.
2. Our second introductory remark related to the covenant of works is that although the Westminster divines did not use the term “grace” (which they could have done without any problem at all – since grace is “undeserved favor” or “unmerited favor”), they understood that whatever Adam had from God was undeserved, for WCF 7.1 speaks of “voluntary condescension on God’s part” because of the fact that “the distance between God and the creature is so great.” Yet the absence of the word “grace” here does make the pre-Fall covenant prone to the idea of merit and works (in distinction from “grace,” as in the second), a proneness that has sadly been picked up by many subsequent Presbyterian and Conti-

20. *Confession of Faith & Subordinate Standards*, p. 13

mental Reformed theologians – both wittingly and unwittingly — as we shall see.

3. Then, the WCF explicitly teaches that the covenant of works had two elements:
 - a. First, it contained a promise of life to Adam and to his posterity.
 - b. Second, this promise was conditioned on perfect and personal obedience.
4. Finally, we only note that the divines chose to use the term “covenant of life”²¹ in the WSC and WLC interchangeably with the term “covenant of works.”

So the Westminster divines rightly and significantly maintained that there was a covenant relationship between God and pre-Fall Man — that is — in Adam, who stood as a federal head of all his human posterity. Further, they made this important deduction (this has repercussions on the doctrine of original sin and the doctrine of total depravity) based on the significant section, Romans 5:12-21.

But three important questions need to be answered, and it is not immediately clear, in fact rather vague, what WCF 7.1 and 7.2 teaches regarding these. First, was it that God’s covenantal relationship with Adam came about after Adam was created (i.e., incidental) or by virtue of Adam’s creation (i.e., essential)? Second, just what did the Westminster divines mean concerning a promise of “life” to Adam and to his posterity? Third and finally, how do we handle the word “conditioned”? Though the answers to these questions cannot be gotten from the Westminster divines as a whole (since we know of no extant records of their discussion), nevertheless, we do have some answers.

Interpretation by Thomas Goodwin, a Westminster Divine

All by itself, the Westminster Confession’s wording in WCF 7.1 and 7.2 does not teach explicitly Rollock’s doctrine. In fact,

21. See WSC Q/A 12, WLC Q/A 20 where this is used, but WLC Q/A 30 where the remark is made “commonly called the covenant of works.”

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), a very respectable Westminster divine, provides a very different interpretation to WCF's formulation of the covenant works.

In relation to the idea of "infinite distance between God and man" and with the original state of Man, Goodwin writes:

The first estate I would term, upon many accounts, the estate of pure nature by creation-law; and as rightly as our divines do call the covenant we were by nature brought into *foedus naturae*, the covenant of nature, which is founded upon an equitable intercourse set up betwixt God and the Creator and his intelligent unfallen creatures, by virtue of the law of his creating them, and as by their creation they came forth of his hands; God dealing with the creature singly and simply upon the terms thereof, and the creature being bound to deal with God according to that bond and obligation which God's having created him in his image, with sufficient power to stand, and having raised him up thereunto out of pure nothing, lays upon him ... the first covenant of works under which Adam was created is termed by *divines foedus naturae*, the covenant of nature; that is, of man's condition, which from and by his creation was natural to him²²

Therefore, this condescending act of God relating to Adam by way of covenant did not happen as an afterthought after his creation, for Goodwin talks about it being existent "by virtue of the law of" God's creating him. For Goodwin, a Westminster divine, the covenant is therefore a relationship that is essential to Adam's creation. This has a significant upshot: God's covenant with man is not a pact or agreement, but a bond that is essential to and intimately tied to his being created by God.

Second, and in answer to the question concerning the "promise of life," Goodwin makes it clear that he did not have heavenly life in view, but a continued existence in earthly Paradise:

Answerably, the reward, the promised life and happiness that he should have had for doing and obeying, was but the continuance of

22. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 7 (Edinburgh: Nicholl, 1863), pp. 22-23.

the same happy life which he enjoyed in paradise, together with God's favour toward him. Which continuance in happiness was natural to him; even as our divines say that immortality was, namely, in this sense, that it was a natural due unto him whilst he should keep from sin, for God to preserve him in that state wherein at first he stood;... reasons are 1) Because Christ in 1 Cor 15:47, 48, is called the "heavenly man," and the "Lord from heaven"; and that in opposition to Adam, when at the best, whom the apostle calls but an earthly man. And this difference in their condition he there evidently mentions, to shew that Christ was the first and only author of that heavenly life which the saints in heaven do enjoy, and He himself coming from heaven He carries us thither. But on the contrary, Adam, as he was of the earth, so he was but an earthly man, (so v. 47), and his happiness should have reached no higher.²³

Third and finally, for Goodwin, the "condition" of obedience is not merit but simply a means of continuance of earthly Paradise, this being argued lucidly, confidently, and on biblical grounds, and in close connection to his interpretation of the "promise of life," as follows:

I think that Adam's covenant, and the obedience unto it, *was not able to do so much as confirm him, and secure him in that condition he was created in*, so far was it from being able to have transplanted him into heaven. For (1) I know no promise for it, that after such a time, and so long obedience performed; he should stand perpetually. And without such a promise, we have no warrant so to think or judge of it. And (2) Surely a creature being defectible, the covenant of nature with that creature, which proceedeth according to its due, and the obedience of that creature, could never have procured indefectibility, for that must be of grace; and He was more than a creature that did that for elect angels and men, even Christ, God-man.²⁴ [emphasis mine]

23. Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, p. 49-50.

24. Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, p. 51.

Another Interpretation in "The Sum of Saving Knowledge"

Yet, we have evidence of a very different interpretation in the time of Westminster. Though WCF 7.1 and 7.2 does not necessarily teach Rollock's conception of the doctrine of the covenant of works, and though a respectable Westminster divine such as Thomas Goodwin teaches otherwise, "The Sum of Saving Knowledge," which appears as part of the Westminster standards, and apparently worded by David Dickson and James Durham states:

... Adam and Eve, the root of mankind, both upright and able to keep the law written in their heart. Which law they were naturally bound to obey under pain of death; *but God was not bound to reward their service, till he entered into a covenant or contract with them, and their posterity in them, to give them eternal life, upon condition of perfect personal obedience; withal threatening death in case they should fail. This is the covenant of works.*²⁵

The Generally Accepted Interpretation as represented by Charles Hodge

Sad to say, but it is a widely acknowledged fact that Goodwin's interpretation is not the interpretation favored today in Scottish and American Presbyterian circles.²⁶ Instead, the wording in "The Sum of Saving Knowledge" has become the prevailing interpretation. From what we can see, this position had all but taken over Scottish Presbyterianism by the eighteenth century.²⁷

25. *Confession of Faith & Subordinate Standards*, "The Sum of Saving Knowledge," Head I, p. 190. According to Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, p. 214, this is written by David Dickson & James Durham.

26. We see this in the classic Systematic works of Presbyterian and Reformed theologians and WCF commentaries: for example, in Beardslee III's *Reformed Dogmatics*, Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*, Kersten's *Reformed Dogmatics*, Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, AA Hodge's *The Confession of Faith*.

27. Subsequent major works such as John Brown, *The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington*, p. 192ff., and Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession*, p. 85ff., written in 1782 and 1845 respectively, attest to this.

Further, this position has gained much acceptance and prominence in North America through the full-orbed development by the influential Princeton Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge. Because of the wide acceptance of Hodge's treatment,²⁸ we will use it as the representative voice of what has become the doctrine of the covenant of works in the Westminster standards. In his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge writes:

God having created man in His own image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience, forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil upon the pain of death.²⁹

Taking on WCF 7.2, Hodge picks up the idea of "works" and now naturally adds a third element not explicitly present in WCF 7.2, the element of punishment. Significantly, Hodge himself could not find the basis for this statement in the Scriptures, but nevertheless is able somehow to justify it:

This statement does not rest upon any express declaration of the Scriptures. It is, however, a concise and correct mode of asserting a plain Scriptural fact, namely, that God made to Adam a promise suspended upon a condition, and attached to disobedience a certain penalty ... is plain that the Bible does represent the arrangement made with Adam as a truly federal transaction. The Scriptures know nothing of any other than two methods of attaining eternal life: the one that which demands perfect obedience, and the other that which demands faith. If the latter is called a covenant, the former is declared to be of the same nature.³⁰

In sharp contradiction to Thomas Goodwin, for Hodge, the life that was promised to Adam and his posterity was "the happy,

28. Notably, Hodge's explanation is quoted and adopted by the Dutch Reformed CRC theologian Louis Berkhof in his prominent work, *Systematic Theology*.

29. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Charles Scribner & Sons, 1798), vol. 2, p. 117.

30. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 117.

holy and immortal existence of soul and body.” Even more, Hodge is bold enough to take his “reasonable” hypothesis one step further: he posits and clearly develops the idea of a probationary period in Paradise, in which, on condition of perfect (but non-perpetual) obedience (he never says how long this period of time is!), Adam could have gained for himself and his posterity eternal, heavenly life:

The question whether perpetual, as well as perfect obedience was the condition of the covenant made with Adam, is probably to be answered in the negative. It seems to be reasonable in itself and plainly implied in the Scriptures that all rational creatures have a definite period of probation. If faithful during that period they are confirmed in their integrity, and no longer exposed to the danger of apostasy. Thus we read of the angels who kept not their first estate, and those who did. Those who remained faithful have continued in holiness and in the favor of God. It is therefore to be inferred that had Adam continued obedient during the period allotted to his probation, neither he nor any of his posterity would have been ever exposed to the danger of sinning.³¹

In essence, Hodge’s doctrine of the covenant of works, which has today become the prevailing interpretation of Westminster’s doctrine of the covenant of works, contains the following three points in contradistinction to and conflict with Goodwin’s interpretation:

1. First, the covenant (of works) between God and Adam (and his posterity) was a transaction between them — an *agreement* in which all the stipulations were given to Adam by God *after* his creation, which Adam was able to fulfil (by his original rectitude), and *not* in essence to his creation.
2. Secondly, the covenant is a *promise of eternal, heavenly life* (thus, this covenant would be only a means to an end) for all humanity, and not simply continuance in earthly Paradise.
3. Thirdly, to this promise is annexed a *condition* of perfect

31. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 119-120.

obedience during a period of probation, failing which would result in the penalty of eternal death for all humanity.

PART THREE: Our Critique of the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works

Objections to the doctrine of the Covenant of Works

To begin with, we register the fact that it irks us to object to the Westminster standards and the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition at large in this doctrine. Indeed, in general, we should take any deviation from the mainline Presbyterian and Reformed tradition with great gravity, reluctance, and discomfort. But we are convinced, nevertheless, that this doctrine is in serious error.

Yet, we may happily begin this section on a positive note. Positively, the doctrine of the covenant of works clearly teaches the undisputed truth that God had a covenant relationship with Adam, and that Adam stood as federal head with respect to his posterity. In affirming the scriptural idea of Adam's covenant headship, it served the important purpose of refuting Arminian and Socinian heresy, especially but not limited to the Dutch Reformed circles. This is because the Arminians and Socinians, who taught that Man still had a free will, was basically good, and was not affected by the Fall of Adam as held by the orthodox Reformation theologians, had to deny such a covenant relationship in order to maintain their teaching. This having been said, it has very, very severe problems from start to finish.

We begin by raising four broad, general objections to the doctrine at large.

First, the doctrine has no scriptural warrant. We noted earlier that Charles Hodge himself recognized this. But Hodge is not alone in his honest admission. G.I. Williamson quite candidly admits this too:

The elements which constituted the "covenant of works" are not formally stated in Scripture. They are nevertheless clearly implied.³²

32. G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1964), p. 64.

But the claim of clear implication is without ground. Herman Hoeksema is right on target with this critical point of the absence of scriptural warrant for the doctrine of the covenant of works. It is his chief objection to the entire doctrine and ours too:

... First of all, there is the chief objection that this doctrine finds no support in Scripture. We do read of the probationary command, prohibiting man to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and of the penalty of death threatened in the case of disobedience. But nowhere do we find any proof in Scripture for the contention that God gave to Adam the promise of eternal life if he should obey that particular commandment of God. It is true, of course, that Adam would not have suffered the death penalty if he had obeyed. But this is quite different from saying that he would have attained to glory and immortality. This cannot be deduced or inferred from the penalty of death that was threatened. Adam might have lived everlastingly in his earthly state. He might have continued to eat of the tree of life and live forever; but everlasting earthly life is not the same as what Scripture means by eternal life. And that Adam would have attained to this higher level of heavenly glory, that there would have come a time in his life when he would have been translated, the Scriptures nowhere suggest. Besides, this giving of the probationary command and this threat of the penalty of death are no covenant or agreement, constitute no transaction between God and Adam.... In vain does one look in the Word of God for support of this theory of a covenant of works.³³

Second, even in the mildest form as taught by Thomas Goodwin, we would have objection to the terminology “covenant of works.” While we are in broad agreement with how Goodwin sees this covenant relationship, we still have a serious objection to the idea of “works” being in the name of the covenant. Why not simply call it the “covenant of creation” or the “Adamaic covenant”? Like Barth, we think that this unfortunate name allows Pelagianism to creep in, even with regard to original, earthly Paradise, and this is not acceptable. Earlier, we had seen Vos’

33. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1988), p. 217.

statement that it was not *strictly* meritorious. Far worse, Kersten makes this unabashed and objectionable statement:

In his own power man, in the state of rectitude, *was able to merit* eternal life, being adorned with the image of God and working in complete obedience to the demand of God.³⁴ [emphasis mine]

And in our time, there is Cornelis Venema's outright insistence that Adam merits with God:

... the fact is that God has, by entering into covenant with man, *bound himself by the promises and as well the demands/obligations of that covenant*. This means that Adam's obedience to the probationary command, though it were an outworking and development within the covenant communion in which he was placed by God's prevenient favor, would nonetheless "merit" or "deserve" the reward of righteousness God himself had promised. In the covenant itself, God bound himself to grant, *as in some sense a reward well-deserved*, the fullness of covenant fellowship into which Adam was called. The terms of the probationary command, the implicit promise of life in the case of obedience — warrant a *qualified use of the language of "merit" or "reward."*³⁵

We agree with Herman Hoeksema's assessment:

... it is quite impossible that man should merit a special reward with God. *Obedience to God is an obligation*. It certainly has its reward, for God is just and rewards the good with good. But obedience has its reward in itself: to obey the Lord our God is life and joy. Sin is misery and death. Life and joy there are in obedience. To keep the commandments of God and to serve Him is a privilege. But the covenant of works teaches that Adam could merit something more, something special, by obeying the command of the Lord.³⁶ [emphasis mine]

34. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, p. 196.

35. Venema, Cornelis P., "Recent Criticisms of the Covenant of Works in the Westminster Confession of Faith," *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 195-6, (1993, vol. 9, no. 2).

36. Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 217-218.

We insist that we can never, never merit with God. In Luke 17:10, Jesus says, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." We agree with Luther in his *Bondage of the Will* that "merit" is an impious word when used in connection with man relating to God, though not with Christ's work with God.

Third, it diminishes the work of Christ, and it does so in various ways. *One*, this entire scheme is an impossibility to begin with. As Thomas Goodwin rightly pointed out in his reference to 1 Corinthians 15:45, how could Adam, an earthy man and having his source from the earth, take us into heaven? It takes someone having his source from heaven to take us into heaven! *Two*, this view does no justice to Colossians 1:16, where it is clearly stated that all of creation is for Christ. Christ must receive the pre-eminence at creation. This view leaves out Christ completely and puts the focus on Adam and his meriting heaven. *Three*, in this view, Christ did *not* accomplish what Adam could have accomplished for the *entire human race*, head-for-head. For by His suffering and death, Christ redeemed only the elect, a very small part of the whole human race in entirety. *Four*, it makes a mockery of Christ's suffering and death. What Christ accomplished with all His suffering and death was superseded by Adam's negative action of not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? What an insult to Christ's great efforts — His suffering, His blood, His death, yea, His whole life beginning with His Incarnation and ending with His redeeming work at Calvary!

Fourth, it is objectionable also because it implies that God's plan in history was a failure. God wanted to have the whole of mankind in heaven, but this was foiled by the serpent. Now, to salvage a meager sum of what was lost, God had to come up with a "Plan B" that would cost Him His very own, beloved, only-begotten Son — to have Him die, and then save only a small portion of humanity. Yea, God would be grieved eternally, for the vast majority of mankind would be in hell!

Now, we turn our objections to the specifics within the doctrine of the covenant of works.

First, we object to the covenant of works being a *bilateral pact between two parties*, and *means to the end of highest good*. God's covenant is a *bond* of friendship to Himself! *It is the highest blessing!* It is not just the way to attain blessedness that may be done away with once the end is reached. *It itself is the blessedness!* So also, with the covenant of grace, it is not the means for us to attain heavenly life, but the covenant, real in principle now, will be fully realized in Heaven. Revelation 21:3 says, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and *they shall be his people*, and *God himself* shall be with them, and be their God." The covenant with Adam was a very part of the creation and not added on afterwards by God. Thus, also, the covenant was not an agreement or mutual pact made after creation that was dependent on the fulfilment of conditions. Instead of finding any of this in Genesis 2, we find there a *duty* stipulated and a penalty or punishment stated for disobedience in verses 15-17. But this is not a cold relationship of duty alone, for God would walk with Adam in friendship in the cool of the day, and gave him the blessing of being able to eat of every other tree.

Hence, second, we have no element of *promise of eternal, heavenly life*. There is no such promise in Genesis 2. In particular, Genesis 2:15-17, the traditional basis for the covenant of works, gives no hint of such a promise. At most, the only inference that may be drawn here is that God promises that Adam and his posterity would continue in earthly Paradise in the way of obedience. The strong emphasis of the text is God's stipulation of Adam's duty toward Him as his servant-friend.

And third, in keeping with our earlier observation of Luke 17:10, there is no notion of *merit* or "*condition*" of *perfect obedience*. Adam cannot earn heavenly life, let alone earn continued existence in earthly Paradise. Man's part in the covenant is simply his faithful duty as stated by God. It is *in the way of* Adam's dutiful obedience, that things would continue *status quo* in earthly, original Paradise.

Finally, there is a serious implication to the covenant of grace from this thoroughly flawed doctrine of the covenant of works.

This would come from attempts to model the covenant of grace from the conception of the covenant of works. One could fall prey to that nebulous word “condition,” which is used in the covenant of works. For example, just as Adam’s gaining eternal life is on condition of his perfect obedience, Reformed theologians could speak of Man obtaining eternal life on condition of faith. In other words, from this problematic word “condition” appearing in the covenant of works, faith would no longer be a means to salvation, but a basis for Man’s salvation! Sadly, Charles Hodge falls prey to such a conception (though he does state that he does not use the word “condition” in the sense of “merit”³⁷) in treating the covenant of grace and unwittingly leaves the door open not only for Arminianism but also universalism:

Salvation is offered to all men on the *condition of faith in Christ*
 In this sense, the covenant of grace is formed *with all mankind*....
 Salvation is offered to all men on the condition of faith in Christ....
The condition of the covenant of grace, so far as adults are concerned, is *faith in Christ*.³⁸ [emphasis mine]

Positive Treatment of God’s covenant with Adam

What, then, is the correct teaching of the covenant that Adam had with God? That there was a covenant relationship between God and Adam is clear from Hosea 6:7, KJV’s mistranslation of “other men” notwithstanding. Many Presbyterian theologians (though not Charles Hodge) such as Robert Shaw³⁹ and BB Warfield,⁴⁰ as well as Dutch Reformed theologians such as Berkhof and Hoeksema, in their Systematics textbooks, saw this. We may also infer this covenant relationship from Romans 5:12-21, which unmistakably compares Adam and Christ as covenant heads. In what follows, we state the correct covenantal relationship of God

37. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 365.

38. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, pp. 362-4.

39. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Christian Focus, 1990), p. 85ff.

40. BB Warfield, “Hosea 6:7: Adam or Man?”, *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 1 (P&R, 1970), pp. 116-29.

with Adam, and in doing so we show that it is inaccurate to equate God's covenant with Adam as being the covenant of works. When rejecting the covenant *of works*, we are not heretics.

Specifically, there are these elements in God's covenant with Adam.

First, it was an intimate, living bond of fellowship that God had with Adam. God was the Sovereign-Friend of Adam. God fellowshiped with Him and gave him his duty. And Adam knew and loved God, and was God's servant-friend. He knew how to name the animals the way it would bring glory to God. Adam could do so because he bore the image of God – original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And God walked and talked with him in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8).

Second, God established and maintained His covenant with Adam unilaterally. Did God ever invite Adam to talk to Him and negotiate a mutual agreement? We have no such evidence in Genesis. Rather, we have God commanding Adam his duty — and this included the forbidding of him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Here, we see God's sovereignty in this friendship with Adam. God is the Sovereign-Friend of Adam, while Adam is the obedient friend-servant unto God. Adam's happiness and blessedness would continue *in the way of* his obedience to his Sovereign-Friend. This would be a faithful work by Adam, but empowered by God.

Third, this covenant relationship was of the essence as image-bearer of God and son of God. Negatively, God made no contract afterwards, but positively, He did so at the point of creation.

Concluding Remarks

Our conclusion is beyond doubt. The traditional doctrine of the covenant of works is objectionable from start to finish. Right from its very name. And down to its every element and thought.

Having gone through this study from a historical, exegetical, and confessional viewpoint, I must make a few observations.

One, hardly any Reformed theologian made a direct case for the preeminence of Christ in the doctrine of the covenant of works. Had they done so, they would have been sorely uncomfortable with

this scheme. Colossians 1:16 was, for some unknown reason, mysteriously left out in the consideration and formulation of this doctrine. Every one of these theologians, many of whom were good and solid in many, many regards, seemed to be content to leave it to later (that is, in the covenant of grace) to put Christ into the picture.

Two, it mystifies me just as much how some could accept the notion of "merit" or earning in Paradise. By and large, Presbyterian and Reformed theologians who teach this seemed to have been content to retain this notion on three counts. First, Adam was in the state of original rectitude. Second, many of the better theologians thought they could get away with the notion of "merit" simply by calling God's promise a "gracious" promise. Finally and implicitly, contentment and confidence in the doctrine had likely set in, since it was used successfully to combat Arminian and Socinian heresy, which denied original sin from Adam, so much so that some, like Kersten, could not even seem to discuss the idea of a covenant with Adam without talking about the covenant of works, as we have seen earlier. The truth is that only Christ, having a divine nature, and not his wholly earthly type, Adam, could merit anything with God!

Three, we saw that the generally accepted doctrine of the covenant of works is not necessarily demanded by WCF 7.1 and 7.2. Clearly, WCF 7.1 and 7.2 is very, very ambiguous. This is somewhat incongruous to the great precision, care, and even at times, beauty exercised in framing and wording the document. One cannot but be impressed by the Westminster Confession of Faith in certain sections. Among some of its impressive features are its doctrine of Scripture, its very carefully worded section on "Good Works," and the foresight and wisdom of the Assembly in devoting an entire chapter on a doctrine as basic as "Repentance."⁴¹ We have seen that Thomas Goodwin, a prominent and reliable Westminster divine, had quite a different handling of

41. Much of today's evangelical churches preach a gospel of love devoid of sin and repentance.

WCF 7.1 and 7.2, one that was in sharp contrast to the wording found in “The Sum of Saving Knowledge,” which is a part of the Westminster standards. What accounts for this ambiguous wording? Could the statement have been a compromise between two parties, one favoring Goodwin’s interpretation (he was a Westminster delegate), and the other one favoring Hodge’s treatment at the Assembly? We believe this to be very possible indeed, but are unable to verify this.

Whatever the case, this makes me thankful that the Three Forms of Unity were not so developed in certain doctrines. In particular, there is no covenant of works. We have a beautiful heritage in the Three Forms of Unity. Yet, in all this, let us also humble ourselves and be prepared to submit to the ultimate authority of the Scriptures should there be (however unlikely it seems to us now) any doctrinal problems with the Three Forms in the proper, honest, and ecclesiastical way. For the Westminster standards, the Presbyterian creedal standard, and an internationally recognized and very fine creed indeed, surely have two known errors at present — that of divorce and remarriage, and also, as this paper indicates, the covenant of works. May God continue to bless and develop His truth for His beloved church and may we exercise great faithfulness, humility, and care in doing the vital task of theological defense and development on behalf of the churches of Jesus Christ. ●

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Book Reviews

The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric, by John Carrick. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust. Pp. 202 (cloth). No price given. [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

John Carrick (Assistant Professor of Applied and Doctrinal Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Taylors, South Carolina, and one of the principal homiletics instructors at that seminary) is convinced that there is a "sacred rhetoric." The *Oxford English Dictionary*, Carrick notes, defines "rhetoric ... as *the art of persuasion, or the art of the orator*" (p. 2). Writes he, "The central thesis of this book is that the essential pattern or structure which God himself has utilized in the proclamation of New Testament Christianity is that of the *indicative-imperative*. In other words, God himself has, in the gospel of Christ, harnessed these two fundamental grammatical moods and invested them with theological and Homiletical significance. Clearly the scope of a *sacred*

rhetoric is potentially much wider than that of these four categories; nevertheless, there is something foundational about them" (p. 5).

What he means by indicative preaching Carrick explains in chapter 2. The indicative mood is "assertive of objective fact" (p. 9). Examples are cited from the Scriptures such as, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God..." (John 1:1-14); "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. 5:19). For many more examples see pages 9-12.

Carrick concludes this point by asserting, "The indicative mood is, then, in its very nature, ideally suited to that element in preaching described by the Reformed tradition as *explicatio verbi Dei*. In other words, the indicative mood is ideally suited to the *explication* or the *explanation* of the Word of God" (p. 13). Preaching or a good sermon, Carrick rightly declares, with the support of John A. Broadus, R. L. Dabney,

and Sinclair Ferguson, must expound the sacred text in its context. It must explain the text, it must be didactic, i.e., a good sermon must teach God's people the true doctrine of the Word of God (pp. 14-15).

In this connection we need to note that Carrick is too hard on John Bettler when he criticizes the latter for writing that "preaching is application." Carrick is really creating a false dichotomy between exegetical/indicative preaching and application. Bettler's point is that doctrine is relevant to our living; doctrine applies to our lives (cf. John F. Bettler, "Application," in *The Preacher and Preaching*, Samuel T. Logan, Jr., ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986, pp. 332-334. Note especially Bettler's quotation from John A. Broadus on p. 333).

In chapters 3 through 6 Carrick discusses: The Exclamative, The Interrogative, The Imperative. Chapter 7 is a Conclusion. Chapters 3 through 6 follow the same format, viz., a definition of the subject, examples of each type from Scripture, and examples from the sermons of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Samuel

Davies, Asahel Nettleton, and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. While these men are fairly well known and certainly are regarded as good preachers, the book would have been enriched by examples from some of the other worthies in the pulpit.

Carrick rightly observes that the relationship between the indicative and the imperative is always this: the latter flows out of the former, or the indicative always leads to an imperative. He stresses too that there must be a proper balance in preaching.

In chapter 6 Carrick discusses the Homiletical controversy of the 1930s and '40s in the Netherlands between advocates of exemplary preaching and redemptive-historical preaching. Carrick contends in a section in which he is very critical of K. Schilder that the redemptive-historical method lacks application. Carrick's conclusion is that proper preaching must explain the text and explain how the text applies to the lives of God's people. This is reminiscent of Wilbert VanDyk's emphasis in his Homiletics classes at Calvin Theological Seminary. Every sermon, VanDyk stressed, must

answer two questions: What? and So What? What does the text teach? And how does that teaching affect the life of the believer.

While the book contains

some good points, there's really nothing in it that has not been written on by many others. R. L. Dabney's *Sacred Rhetoric* remains the best on the subject, in this reviewer's opinion. ♦

Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City, by Robert P. Swierenga. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. Pp. x-908. \$49.00 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

This is as fine and detailed a book on the history of the Dutch in Chicago and her suburbs as one could hope to find. Spiced with a goodly number of fascinating anecdotes, the book reads like a good novel. One can hardly put it down!

Swierenga records the history of the Reformed Churches (RCA) and Christian Reformed Churches (CRCNA) of the Chicago area. He describes the institutions these immigrants founded, the Christian schools, Holland Home, etc. He includes detailed histories of some of the more prominent ministers and churches. Swierenga also includes detailed accounts of the

struggles and controversies in which the churches and schools were engaged (the Wezeman case, which involved Chicago Christian High, e.g.). The author also provides interesting descriptions of the everyday work of the hardy Hollanders: the truck farming, the garbage companies (scavengers), and cartage companies.

There are given interesting insights into what life was like for the Dutch in Chicago. There's even a chapter included on, "The 'Other' Hollanders: Jews and Catholics."

The book is enhanced by 250 photos and illustrations, a detailed index, and a solid bibliography.

There were three errors found by this reviewer. Rev. Herman Veldman (p. 229) was a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches as was his brother, Rev. Richard, for all but the last nine years of his

ministry (pastor then of First CRC, Oaklawn, IL). Also, Rev. Richard Veldman is cited as "Jr." He was not related to the Rev. Richard Veldman, a pastor for many years in the CRC (p. 229). On that same page the author implies, in the mind of this reviewer, that Rev. Herman Hoeksema was a prominent minister in the CRC. He among others was put out of the CRC (1924-'26) for their opposition

to the error of common grace and was one of the founding pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Highly recommended. Especially the Dutch who have their roots in the Windy City or are currently living there will find the book a very good read. Anyone interested in this aspect or any other aspect of the history of the Dutch in America will enjoy this book as well. ♦

Men and Women in the Church, by Sarah Sumner. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003. Pp. 332. \$17 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Sarah Sumner considers herself a conservative evangelical.

She writes on the related subjects of women's ordination to the ministry of the gospel and the headship of the husband as regards his wife. She intends to reconcile "egalitarians" and "complementarians." The former are those whose doctrine of equality opens up all church offices to women and recognizes no authority of husband over wife. The latter are those who oppose ordination of women to

church office and affirm the authority of the husband in marriage and the family.

Dr. Sumner is herself an ordained minister, teaching theology in a seminary.

On the basis, mainly, of what to her is the obvious ability of women to preach and rule in the church and the success and acceptance of such female preachers as Billy Graham's daughter, Anne Graham Lotz, Sumner argues that gifted women may "lead" in church as well as men. "Leading" includes preaching and ruling. Because the Bible connects rule by men in the church with the husband's headship, Sumner must deny that headship involves authority.

In fact, this "conservative" evangelical argues the case of the egalitarians against the complementarians. Thus are the conflicting positions "reconciled."

As for the New Testament texts that decide the issue now confronting evangelical Christianity in North America, all of them are hopelessly unclear. "We don't know how to translate I Timothy 2, much less interpret it correctly or apply it appropriately to today. That's why this passage is so humbling; to some extent it has stumped us all, scholars and practitioners alike. My best answer, then, is to publicly confess that I don't know" (p. 248).

Likewise, "we are unsure of what Paul meant" in I Corinthians 14:34, 35 (p. 251). The only texts that are clear are those used by egalitarians: Galatians 3:28 and Romans 16:1.

Arguing the unbiblical notions that women may preach and rule at church and that husbands have no authority over their wives at home ties one who professes to honor Scripture in knots. Take headship. If headship is not allowed to mean authority, for example, in I

Corinthians 11:3 and in Ephesians 5:22-33, the expositor must come up with some other meaning. She must discover an explanation of headship that describes God's headship with regard to Christ, Christ's headship with regard to the church, and the husband's headship with regard to his wife. This explanation must have nothing to do with authority.

Dr. Sumner has discovered that headship, which is the quality of masculinity, means that one is less vulnerable physically than the one over whom he is head. God is less vulnerable physically than Christ; Christ is less vulnerable physically than the church; the husband is less vulnerable physically than the wife (pp. 185ff.).

The implication of this explanation of biblical headship, which Dr. Sumner boldly accepts, is that in relation to God, His head, "Christ is feminine. I'll say it again. Insofar as Christ became 'physically more vulnerable' than God, Christ took on femininity" (p. 186).

Sumner contends that men, that is, husbands, cannot have authority over women, that is, wives, because "the Bible says clearly that all authority

(*exousia*) has been given to Christ" (p. 249). Her commitment to women preaching and ruling in the church has blinded her to the obvious fact that on this reasoning parents cannot have authority over their children, elders cannot have authority over the congregation, and magistrates cannot have authority over the citizenry. All authority has been given to Christ.

It is impossible to accept the ordination of women in church office, with the accompanying rejection of the authority of the husband in marriage and family, and be "conservative," if "conservative" means

reverencing Holy Scripture as the Word of God.

The book makes apparent the appalling spiritual bankruptcy of evangelism in North America in the highest reaches of evangelicalism. Sumner repeatedly appeals to Billy Graham's approval of the preaching ministry of his daughter. The seminary that gladly trained Sarah Sumner to be a preacher of the gospel is Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Carl F. H. Henry is an ardent supporter of Sumner, her ministry as a preacher, and this book. The publisher of the book is InterVarsity. ♦

Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation, William G. Naphy. Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. Pp. x, 272 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

In a blurb on the very first page of the book, the claim is made that this book "presents a complete re-evaluation of Calvin's rise to power in Geneva." It goes on to say: "Calvin's consolidation of his position and particular brand of Protestantism was of paramount importance to the wider Refor-

mation movement, especially in France, Scotland and England. Extensive research in Geneva's archives has produced this new in-depth view of Geneva's politics, ruling elites, and socio-economic milieu. The book effectively widens the previously known interpretation of Geneva beyond Calvin and a few prominent Genevans to include the entire political class, the other ministers, the French refugees, and Calvin's local Genevan supporters on the Consistory, Geneva's ecclesiastical court."

The general purpose of the

book is to demonstrate how completely the reformation under Calvin in Geneva was affected by cultural, political, economical, and social currents and events. The more specific purpose is to describe how the Calvin reformation finally triumphed against strong opposition and through great turbulence. The history of all this is traced carefully by the author. His argument is as follows.

When Calvin returned to Geneva from his exile in Strassburg he found that the company of pastors was largely composed of extremely incompetent pastors, many of whom were simply tools in the hands of the secular magistrates. They proved their lack of commitment to the reformation by refusing to follow Calvin when he was expelled from Geneva, and their incompetence proved a major obstacle in the work of reform. By 1546, through strenuous efforts and by teaching new men himself, Calvin succeeded in changing this, so that the company of pastors was well-educated, sound in doctrine, capable of preaching the gospel with force, and loyal to the work of reformation.

Factors which led to dis-

sension in the city and its enormous problems were: 1) the political factions in the city. 2) The fear of French domination due to the large influx of Protestant refugees from France who were fleeing the bitter persecution there. 3) The need to placate Berne (a nearby city on which Geneva depended for military protection). 4) The efforts of Calvin and the Company of Pastors, along with the Consistory to impose on the city a strict morality.

The fear of French domination was a major problem. There were many native citizens in Geneva who had been born and raised Roman Catholic and who resented Protestant teaching and biblical morality. As an aside, we might note that these people were, in large measure, licentious, given to partying, immorality, dancing, drunkenness, and such like sins, a sad commentary on the Roman Catholic Church, which winked at all these vices. It is not difficult to understand, however, that these natives of Geneva who had ruled the city for decades were alarmed when, because of the influx of refugees, they saw power slipping from their hands and a new system of religion imposed on their city.

Other factors were involved in this struggle. For one thing, all reform in the city had to be carried on with the cooperation and through the legislation of the ruling bodies. The big question was always: Who has a majority in the ruling bodies? Closely connected with this struggle for power in the civil magistracy was the question of the citizenship of French refugees. If they could receive citizenship, they could vote, and the majority of them were followers of Calvin. Their voting power would determine the theological and moral direction of the city. A great deal of time is spent in the book following the voting year by year, and interesting charts are used for purposes of comparison.

Although generally the magistracy favored reformation and supported reform, the constituency of the ruling bodies (and there were several) determined how strongly reform was pursued. The magistracy was empowered to level civil penalties against the violations of God's law: imprisonment, beatings, fines — for drunkenness, public blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, adultery, etc.

In addition to that, the mag-

istracy was entrusted with the role of enforcing orthodoxy among the preachers and the people. Heretics (Bolsec, Servetus, and others) appeared from time to time in the city to spread their views, and the magistracy had to deal with them and prevent their heresies from spreading.

The key issue, however, was an important one. In fact, it was this issue that resulted in Calvin's banishment. The issue was to whom was given the power of excommunication, that is, the right to exercise key power? The magistrates consistently refused to give up this power, a power which they had exercised under Roman Catholic domination, but Calvin insisted the exercise of the keys belonged to the church and was, by Christ, entrusted to the church. Calvin was, of course, right. But it does not take much imagination to envision the situation in the city, where the immoral Patriots (as they were called), citizens of Geneva and with a majority in the ruling bodies, came under the discipline of the church, but were sheltered by the civil magistrate who refused to excommunicate them. One can imagine the

trouble keeping the sacraments pure under these circumstances.

But the imposition of morality created the major battles. People then as today simply did not want anyone telling them how they ought to live. And the morality preached from the pulpits, encouraged by the Consistory and enforced by the arm of the law, was rigid.

Calvin succeeded also in getting solid elders in the office so that the work of reformation in the preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline was done according to the command of Christ. So the battle lines were drawn: on the one side a solid company of pastors and a strong body of elders, both led by Calvin, along with many (though not all) French refugees who supported them; on the other side the Patriots, many weak folk among the refugees and the citizens, along with a ruling body which changed with each election, but which, while favoring reformation in general, was not always strongly in favor of Calvin's rigorous application of God's demands in Scripture.

The struggle to impose a biblical morality on Geneva re-

sulted in some (to us) strange episodes. Fines were levied and prison sentences were imposed for card playing, dancing, and other less important infractions of the law. But baptism became a real issue. It was common among the citizens of the city to give traditional names to their newborn children. Sometimes the names of Roman Catholic saints were used; sometimes names that were associated with Roman Catholic history or practices were used. The reformers favored biblical names. The Consistory ruled that no names associated in any way with anything Roman Catholic could be given to children. Some parents gave forbidden names to children in spite of this ruling and presented their children for baptism. The minister administering the sacrament would frequently change the name on the spot and baptize the child under a different name than the parents had chosen. Sometimes, when this happened, the father would snatch the child out of the minister's arm before it could be baptized and refuse to allow baptism for the child until the name chosen by the parents was agreed upon.

The author rightly ob-

serves, however, that many were critical of Calvin's preaching because he condemned sin and they preferred to hear "sweet promises" while remaining in their sin (pp. 160, 161).

1555 was a decisive year. A few years prior to it the balance of power began to swing towards the Calvinists, until in 1555 the Calvinists succeeded in gaining a majority on the city councils. The book deals extensively with the factors that led to this triumph of the Calvinists. And when finally they were in power, they quickly consolidated their power. They drove out of the city the opponents of reform, now called Perrinists (after the name of one of their leaders Ami Perrin). They increased the number of men serving on the ruling councils. They admitted more French refugees to the city and made them citizens with full voting rights. And they elected sizable majorities to the ruling bodies.

All of this makes for fascinating reading and gives valuable background to the Calvin reformation in Geneva. Nevertheless, the author frequently overstates his case, in my judgment. Calvin is sometimes presented as vindictive and unfor-

giving. Calvin's own interpretation of events is often rejected by the author in favor of interpretations that seem to be supported by extremely meager and inconclusive arguments. On this latter point, the author himself frequently suggests that his conclusions are tentative by using such words as "It seems as if...", "It is quite probable that...", "The evidence suggests..."

While it is not the author's intent to evaluate the Calvin reformation in Geneva (it would go beyond the scope of his book to criticize him for failing to do this), the fact remains that such an evaluation would have been helpful and would have aided in putting Calvin's work in the right light. The strong impression is left that Calvin was interested primarily in mere power, with the purpose to dominate Genevan politics, the Genevan economy, and the social life of its residents. This is not true, although it is a thesis developed in other works on Calvin.

Taking into account the then current views of the relation between church and state, Calvin's motive in all he did was to establish a church in Geneva and a city in which the

church was located which in every respect was faithful to the Word of God. One could criticize Calvin for adopting a view of the relation between church and state that is no longer in favor in our day; but Calvin's sole purpose was to make Geneva a godly city. Who can criticize him for wanting a strong company of pastors? Who can find fault with his strong desire to have an eldership faithful to God's Word? Who can bring criticisms against his efforts to put the exercise of key power firmly in the hands of the eldership? And, given his views on church and state, who can level against him accusations of lust for power when he merely sought a society in which God's law was honored?

Nor in my judgment was sufficient attention paid in the book to other aspects of Calvin's work which had a profound in-

fluence on Geneva and Europe. I refer to the establishment of the Academy, the emphasis on the education of the children, the erection of hospitals for the care of the sick and orphanages for the care of the parentless, the definition of the office of deacons and the care of the poor, the efforts made to provide spiritual and material help for thousands of persecuted refugees, frequently at great cost to the city and church? And we can never forget that Calvin was used by God to give to the church a Reformed system of doctrine, a Reformed liturgy for the worship of God, and a Reformed church government all of which have survived the centuries. While it might be argued that such material would go beyond the scope of the book, such things are necessary to prevent an unbalanced and incorrect assessment of Calvin's labors. ♦

Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the 19th Century. Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999, 158 pages + xviii. \$18 (soft cover). [Reviewed by Russell J. Dykstra.]

The history of the Reformed church in the Netherlands and in America is important to the Reformed believer. Most Reformed Christians know something of the Afscheiding (Secession) of 1834, where men such as DeCock, Scholte, and

VanRaalte were put out of the established Reformed Church in the Netherlands and formed the church anew. Furthermore, the date 1857 stands out as the year of the formation of the Christian Reformed Church in Western Michigan. *Family Quarrels* takes the reader into the conflicts to describe the people and their struggles. Whether one knows little about these conflicts, or is well informed on them, this book is as fascinating as it is valuable.

This work provides brief histories and background for four distinct events: 1) the Secession of 1834 and the subsequent emigration to America; 2) the union of the Afscheiding group led by VanRaalte with the existing Reformed Dutch Church in America (present day Reformed Church in America); 3) the 1857 secession of the 150 families and two ministers from Classis Holland in the RCA to form the True Dutch Reformed Church (later the Christian Reformed Church); and 4) the 1882 controversy in the RCA over Freemasonry, which resulted in a significant exodus from the RCA, most of which entered the CRC, including the congregation of the then deceased

VanRaalte (now called Pillar Church in the CRC).

The title — *Family Quarrels* — aptly describes the content of the book in that the authors focused not only on the above-described unions and secessions, but also on the divisions within the various movements. Consider the Afscheiding. A broad overview considers that the Afscheiding was a reformation of the church due to corruption in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands. DeCock objected to Arminian hymns and defended the Psalms, attacked fellow preachers for Arminian preaching and writings, and inveighed against the church's departure from the doctrines and church order of the great Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19). Because of this, he was suspended, and after much fruitless appeal, the longsuffering DeCock and his consistory withdrew from the denomination. Ministers who agreed with him were likewise disciplined, and the small group of men had thousands of convicted believers follow them to their own physical and economic peril.

That is all correct, but *Family Quarrels* reveals many

of the currents flowing through the movement, as well as the surprising amount of dissension among the Afscheiding leaders. The authors point out that in all secession movements, differences exist as to what sort of church should be formed. The same was true among the leaders of the Afscheiding. The book states (pp. 27, 28):

Some, like deCock and vanVelzen, wanted to restore the Dortian traditions of historic Dutch Calvinism. Others, like Scholte, wanted to restore an experiential gospel ("primitive Christianity") and congregational independence. Yet a third way, that of VanRaalte and Brummelkamp, was to adapt the old church rules to modern times by defending liberty of conscience and building a church independent from the state.

Then the book demonstrates some of the specific issues that caused dissension. For example, there was violent disagreement early on over whether or not to apply for government approval (when once this was available). Scholte did early on (1843), and some of the congregations planted by VanRaalte

followed suit. Others in the Afscheiding were fiercely opposed to it.

The ministers divided over whether or not to baptize the infants of non-members. De Cock followed the practice of the national church by doing so. The other opposed it. The men were divided over what church order to adopt. Scholte drew up a brief church order that favored a severe limitation of the powers of classes and synods. The others were in favor of returning to the church order adopted by Dort, with some revision. Scholte wanted all lay preachers (*oefenaars*) banned, while DeCock argued that they be allowed to continue to exhort.

Doctrinal division also manifest itself. The authors maintain that there was a significant difference between the Brummelkamp-VanRaalte party of the southern provinces and the deCock-vanVelzen party in the north. They write that the "ecumenical spirit of the south conflicted with the sterner Calvinism of the north" (p. 2)

A significant rift developed between Scholte and the rest of the men. Already in 1839, Scholte and his consistory in Utrecht "charged that

vanVelzen's preaching overemphasized divine election and was coldly formal. He 'preached a conglomeration of theoretical truths without the living Christ, without a regenerating Spirit, and without the living and active faith'" (p. 31). VanVelzen was one of the strongest defenders of the Reformed faith. Quotations from one of his sermons demonstrate this. He preached, "Man *can do nothing*, yea, *may not do anything*" to obtain salvation "because this would be one's own work, and that such work is condemned before God" (p. 31). The Synod of 1840 demanded that Scholte retract the charge. His refusal to do that, as well as his rejection of the church order that synod adopted, resulted in his being deposed. Scholte would continue to go astray, even adopting premillennialism.

Family Quarrels demonstrates that VanRaalte was not of the stronger party (doctrinally) in the Afscheiding. He was also most reluctant to leave the established church, where his father preached (p. 42). As late as 1842, he and his brother-in-law (C. G. de Moen) drew up an "Appeal" addressed to the Synod of the Hervormde Kerk

on behalf of some of the Afscheiding churches, expressing a desire for unity (p. 34).

The book is a treasure house of information, including even the prison sentences of the ministers and the fines levied against the elder of one Seceder church for allowing his congregation to use his barn for worship. The elder was James VandeLuyster, who, we are informed, later founded Zeeland, Michigan (p. 25).

Fascinating, too, is a major theme of the book that "the seeds of 1857 were sown in 1834." As noted, the book posits the different character of the northern ministers with their followers, when compared to the churches and ministers of the southern provinces. The authors contend that the immigrants from the southern provinces of Noord Holland, Zuid Holland, Utrecht, Gelderland, and Overijssel tended to flow into the RCA. On the other hand, the immigrants from the northern provinces of Friesland, Gronigen, Drenthe (with parts of Overijssel and Gelderland) and the one southern province of Zeeland swelled the ranks of the CRC. The book supplies the statistics to confirm the pattern.

The rest of the book is equally valuable and gives a view from the inside of the controversies. The authors write from the perspective of the RCA. However, they made a conscious commitment to be evenhanded, and they largely succeeded in their effort.

At the same time, the weakness of the book is that it downplays *doctrinal* differences. One glaring and (for a Reformed man) inexcusable error is the false assertion that Arminius was a “moderate Calvinist.” The book claims that “Arminius...wanted to avoid anything that looked like determinism, so he rejected the supralapsarian or ultra Calvinistic position of some delegates at the synod, such as Gomarus, Arminius’s opponent” (p. 39). That this statement is not even historically accurate is evident from the fact that the Canons of Dort, which thoroughly rejected the teachings of Arminius, were written from the infralapsarian view.

In line with this trend, the book evaluates the conflicts in terms of social, geographical, or familial relationships, and doctrinal differences may be just one of the factors that caused

division. A point is made, for example, of the fact that the four brothers-in-law voted against Scholte (i.e., vanVelzen, Brummelkamp, VanRaalte, and de Moen) in the synod of 1840. Troublemaking elders and ministers were a major cause of the 150 families leaving the RCA to form the CRC. Resistance to Americanization was a major factor in the 1857 formation of the CRC and (especially) the 1882 exodus from the RCA over Freemasonry. While there is an element of truth in all these examples, this does not do justice to the church of Jesus Christ that struggles to remain faithful to the truth and the principles of godliness. It makes the differences to have the character of mere *family quarrels* — not based on principles, not differences based on the confessions or the right interpretation of the Scriptures, but squabbles due to personality and divergence of viewpoint.

There have ever been in the church since the Reformation, two schools of thought on the issue of church splits. Understand, that no sincere believer relishes division. And schism, understood as a deliberate attempt to divide the church need-

lessly, is a censurable sin in every faithful Reformed church. Given that agreement, there remain two distinct positions. One group insists that institutional unity is the most important thing. Differences must be tolerated — be they doctrinal, social, personal, or what have you. Erasmus decried the Reformation on that count; Luther was needlessly rending the body of Christ over nonessential matters, he opined. No doubt also there were Christians in the Hervormde Kerk in 1834 who chose not to secede with de Cock and the rest for the similar reasons. And still today, in the Hervormde Kerk there is the Gereformeerde Bond, churches in the HK that are united in their disagreement with many of the doctrines and practices of the denomination, but who choose not to leave it.

The other school of thought is that there are times when God reforms His church which is apostatizing. That reformation by God is usually a re-forming of the church institute in order that the church of Christ may be formed back to the Bible. This was the work of God in 1571, and in 1834, and in 1857. This position insists that faithfulness

to God's truth is more important than family relationships, friendships, and the institutional unity. This is the viewpoint of a host of believers, led by such men as Luther, Calvin, de Cock, Kuyper, and Hoeksema.

This book, written, as was noted, from the perspective of the RCA, takes the former stance. Concerning the division in 1882 over Freemasonry, it reports concerning those who did not secede: "The RCA in the Middle West despised Masonry, but it hated schism more" (pp. 134, 135) That sentence captures the viewpoint of the authors.

This is not an insignificant weakness. Nonetheless, the book is a valuable publication, worthy of welcome in the body of Reformed church history literature. It is "No. 32" in The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, and is a product of the A. C. VanRaalte Institute and Hope College. Ministers, seminary students, and any Christian interested in the history of the Reformed church will profit from reading *Family Quarrels....*◆

Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century. Edited, with Historical Introductions, by Arthur C. Cochrane. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Pp. xvii + 336. \$24.95 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This reprint of the 1966 original edition, now long out-of-print and hard to find, is a valuable work. It contains twelve Reformed confessions from the sixteenth century. Some are little known, but ought to be known better. Another important confession is not included in most collections of confessions. This is the Second Helvetic Confession, in its day as highly regarded and widely known as any of the Reformed confessions. The original edition of Philip Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom* published the Second Helvetic only in the Latin. The 1966 Baker reprint edition of volume three of Schaff's *Creeds* includes the English translation as an appendix.

Reformed Confessions contains the following twelve confessions: Zwingli's Sixty-seven Articles of 1523; the Ten Theses of Berne, 1528; the Tetrapolitan Confession of

1530; the First Confession of Basel, 1534; the First Helvetic Confession of 1536; the Lausanne Articles of 1536; the Geneva Confession of 1536; the Confession of Faith of the English Congregation at Geneva, 1556; the French Confession of Faith, 1559; the Scottish Confession of Faith, 1560; the Belgic Confession of Faith, 1561; and the Second Helvetic Confession, 1566.

The Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563, and the Barmen Theological Declaration, 1934 find a place in an appendix. Why the Heidelberg Catechism should be relegated to an appendix is puzzling. It certainly was a major Reformed confession of the sixteenth century. Perhaps, the explanation is its form as a catechism.

Volume three of Schaff's *Creeds* has only nine Reformed confessions from the sixteenth century, and four are not translated into English (the Scots Confession of Faith appears in the old English).

The volume of creeds edited by John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, includes only two Reformed confessions from the sixteenth century, and one of

them — the Second Helvetic Confession — is severely abridged.

Arthur C. Cochrane states the importance of these sixteenth century Reformed confessions:

The Reformation Churches were born with the Confessions of the sixteenth century.... If Presbyterian and Reformed Churches today are "to look to the rock from which they were hewn, and to the quarry from which they were digged," they must return to the Confessions of the 16th century. Here they will find the authentic and pristine witness to the content and form of a genuine confession of faith, that is, the original teachings of the Reformed Churches and the Reformed understanding of the nature of a confession (p. 30).

To each of the confessions included in this volume, editor Cochrane has written an informative, helpful historical introduction.

A look at one of the less familiar confessions will indicate the worth of the book. Cochrane tells us that the "Confession of Faith of the English Congregation at Geneva, 1556"

originated with the English exiles in Geneva during the reign of "Bloody Mary" in England. The author was probably Whittingham.

The confession is Trinitarian in structure, very much like that of Calvin's *Institutes*. Article one confesses the triune God and His work of creation and providence. Article two is devoted to the person and work of "Jesus Christ the only Savior and Messiah." Article three expresses the Reformed believer's understanding of the Holy Ghost and His distinctive activity within the children of God. Emphatically, this activity includes "persuading us most assuredly in our consciences that we are the children of God."

Article four, with article two the longest of the articles, sets forth the truth of the Church according to the Reformed faith. This article, following Calvin very closely, inserts into the treatment of the Church a statement concerning the state ("a political magistrate"). The state and its duties are related to the Church by this curious line: "And besides this ecclesiastical discipline, I acknowledge to the Church a political magistrate," etc. "*To the Church* a political

magistrate." And this magistrate is "to the Church," *"besides this ecclesiastical discipline."*

Although brief, the four articles are packed with Reformed doctrine. They speak to contemporary issues and controversies. Article four distinguishes the "one holy Church" of the elect, which "is not visible to man's eye but only known to God," from the instituted Church, "which is visible and seen by the eye."

Affirming that infants must be baptized, article four states that the significance of baptism is that sin shall not be imputed to the elect.

By baptism once received is signified that we (infants as well as others of age and discretion) ... are received into His family and congregation, with full assurance that although this root of sin lies hidden in us, yet to the elect it shall not be imputed.

The confession concludes with a lovely eschatological line that describes not only the Marian exiles in 1556 but also all true Christians in every age. Upon the return of Christ, "we who have forsaken all men's

wisdom to cleave unto Christ shall hear the joyful voice, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world, and thus shall go triumphing with him in body and soul."

There is always a fly in the ointment. The reprint adds to the original edition a "new introduction" by Jack Rogers. Rogers' introduction is a brief for the theological modernism of the twenty-first century. Theological modernism repudiates the sixteenth century confessions as faithful expressions of Holy Scripture, the inspired Word of God. This, of course, is what those confessions claimed to be. For this reason, the Marian exiles and many others were ready to die for the faith they confessed in those confessions. For this reason too, those confessions were binding upon Reformed believers and Reformed churches.

Not so for Jack Rogers. The sixteenth century confessions were merely time and culture-bound expressions of what "Reformed people most deeply believe" at any given time. "To use confessions from previous centuries as contemporary laws [""laws" is the pejorative mod-

ernist word for “authoritative” and “binding” — DJE] fails to recognize that humans not only applied the gospel to their situation, but that they did so with the assumptions of their time and culture” (p. xiii). Earlier in his “new introduction,” Rogers had suggested that Reformed Christians of the present time should write a new confession settling “the primary issue convulsing the Church in the 1980s and 1990s, namely whether homosexual persons should have the right to hold ordained office in the church.” What he intends, of course, is that the new

confession would settle this issue in favor of homosexuals seeking to hold office (p. xi).

What the publishers were thinking when they inserted Rogers’ statement of unbelief into a volume of confessions of the Reformed faith, only they know. But in the providence of God, the jarring dissonance serves a purpose. It demonstrates that the faith of the Reformed confessions, which a remnant in the world still believe with all their heart and boldly confess, and theological modernism are two different religions. ♦

Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope, by Keith A. Mathison. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1999. Pp. xii + 287. \$14.00 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

In no way does this volume on eschatology establish postmillennialism as a doctrine of hope. What it does establish is that the doctrine of the last things condemned by the Second Helvetic Confession as “Jewish dreams” is alive and well among reputedly conservative Presbyterian publishers

and theologians. The publisher is P&R. The author is a recent graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary.

In the main, the book is a cursory explanation of carefully selected texts of Scripture that are susceptible to a post-millennial interpretation and the consignment of all contrary passages to A.D. 70.

The handling of Scripture leaves much to be desired. Against the objection to postmillennialism that Romans 8:17ff. teaches the persecution of the church throughout the

present age, and thus exposes the postmillennial "hope" of earthly victory as false, Mathison replies that the passage refers only to the Christian's struggle with sin (p. 184). In fact, Romans 8:35 ("tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword") clearly teaches the persecution of the New Testament church, just as the Old Testament text quoted in verse 36 taught the persecution of the saints in the time of the old covenant.

Mathison is cavalier in his dismissal of the certainty of persecution: "Suffering by persecution is not a *sine qua non* of the church. If it is, there are few if any true churches in North America today" (p. 185). He ignores II Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." He ought to take seriously his own standard for judging true churches. The number of true churches in North America may very well be far fewer than comfortable Reformed and Presbyterian church members suppose. If Mathison will investigate, he will discover that there are Reformed churches in North America that

are hated, slandered, and mocked for their confession of the truth and for their walk of holiness.

Instead of dismissing persecution, Mathison should be warning the churches in North America of overt persecution that is about to break out against them.

But this author of a work on biblical eschatology is blind to the impending great persecution. The reason is his dream of an earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ in history. To preserve this dream, he explains all the New Testament prophecies of apostasy, tribulation, and Antichrist as having been fulfilled in A.D. 70 in the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew 24, I Thessalonians 5, II Thessalonians, II Timothy 3, and all of Revelation up to chapter 20, among many other passages, refer exclusively to the events of A.D. 70. "The vast majority of [passages that teach a gradual worsening of conditions on earth prior to the Second Coming] refer specifically to first-century conditions at the time of Christ's coming in judgment upon Jerusalem" (p. 183).

Basic to Mathison's eschatology is the preterism of

J. Marcellus Kik and of Christian Reconstruction. It is no surprise that the book comes highly recommended by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and R.C. Sproul. With good reason, Mathison finds it necessary to distinguish his own very nearly full preterism from "full preterism" in an appendix.

There is candid acknowledgement of the purpose of the preterist interpretation of all the New Testament warnings of apostasy and persecution.

If these things [foretold by Christ in Matthew 24] have already occurred in connection with the coming of Christ in judgment on Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then they have no bearing on the repeated promises of victory for the gospel in this age (p. 115).

What Presbyterian defenders of Christian Reconstruction's theology of carnal dominion must do is demonstrate from Scripture and the Reformed confessions that the Messianic kingdom is earthly in nature and that its victory in history is physical and political. To no purpose do Mathison and his colleagues exert themselves to show, with a great display of

accomplishment, that the Bible teaches that Christ has established His kingdom in this world and that His kingdom progressively triumphs. Reformed amillennialism has always confessed this. Christian Reconstruction postmillennialism, incidentally, teaches that Christ and His kingdom have been defeated up to the present. But Reformed amillennialism holds that the kingdom is a heavenly kingdom in this world and that its victory in history is spiritual. The issue is Christ's spiritual kingdom.

Although most of the book is a restatement of Christian Reconstruction teachings on the golden age and dominion, Mathison adds a new ground for the expectation of a future conversion of a majority of mankind: God's common grace (pp. 164, 165).

If common grace is understood as Abraham Kuyper intended, Mathison is guilty of a gross logical fallacy. Common grace is to be distinguished from saving grace. Common grace is merely favor in this life. It gives rain and sunshine. From a common grace of God, nothing follows for the salvation of men.

But if common grace is

understood as a loving will of God for the salvation of all men without exception, as Mathison and most Reformed and Presbyterian theologians today indeed understand it, the argument from common grace proves too much. Common grace does not merely prove that a majority of humans will be saved in the future. It proves that *all without exception* will be saved in the future. Indeed, it proves that all who have ever lived will be saved in the future. Does not God love and sincerely desire to save *all*?

At least one leading Christian Reconstruction postmillennialist has proposed that in the coming millennium every single human will be converted and saved, although his reason for thinking so is not common grace, but the victory of Christ.

What is going on in the most conservative Presbyterian churches and seminaries as regards eschatology? What is going on in the face of the clear, forceful, urgent, abundant warnings of Scripture that in the last days the church of Christ must contend with rampant lawlessness, wholesale apostasy, and fierce persecution? What is going on in the face of the rapid development in North America and the world of these very realities?

The postmillennialism of Christian Reconstruction and Keith Mathison is not an eschatology of hope. It is an eschatology of delusion, of "Jewish dreams." And it is a grievous threat to the welfare of the church and the saints. ♦

The Atonement Controversy in Welsh Theological Literature and Debate, 1707-1841, by Owen Thomas. Tr. John Aaron. Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth, 2002. Pp. xl + 392. \$25.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Angus Stewart.]

As a book on doctrinal controversies in Wales, this work belongs to a rare breed. Its liter-

ary history too is unusual. The material now found in *The Atonement Controversy* was first published as a lengthy chapter in Owen Thomas' biography of John Jones of Talsarn. It has been translated from Welsh into English by John Aaron, who also provides us with a superb introduction.

The author, Owen Thomas

(1812-1891), was "one of the leading Welsh scholars of his day" (p. xi) and "the most respected preacher in Wales" in the 1870s (p. xii). His classic work on John Jones is "acknowledged generally as the best biography ever written in Welsh" (p. ix). For this work and his many scholarly articles, he was awarded a D.D. from Princeton in 1877 (p. xii). John Jones (1796-1857), the subject of Owen Thomas' biography, was likewise a man of parts. As a child, he could recite the whole New Testament and several Old Testament books. He mastered Greek and Latin and collected possibly the largest library ever possessed by a Welsh minister (p. xiii).

However, both Owen Thomas (the biographer) and John Jones (his subject) compromised the truth of the gospel in Wales. John Jones was a "practical" preacher, "an advocate of a less doctrinal, more socially aware" gospel (p. xiv). He advocated a more moderate "modification" of Calvinism. Owen Thomas carries John Jones' position further. "He is on the side of the reformers. He wishes the 'New System' to prevail" (p. xxvi), and has "an element of sym-

thy towards" the governmental theory of the atonement (p. xxxiv).

Owen Thomas' summary of controversies on the extent of the atonement from Augustine to nineteenth century American Presbyterianism (pp. 111-150) is deeply flawed at several key points. Gottschalk, he opines, held "extreme views of predestination and election" (p. 118). "Unquestionably," Calvin "considered Christ's sacrifice as bearing a general aspect and as offered for all mankind so as to establish a ground of hope for all" (pp. 123, 124-125). Thomas holds a very weak interpretation of the *Canons of Dordt* on limited atonement (pp. 124-125, 131). The "celebrated" Bishop Davenant is quoted with approval as he compromises Christ's atonement to find common ground with the Arminians, while Augustus Toplady is sidelined (p. 125). Andrew Fuller in England (pp. 130-134) and Drs. Brown and Balmer in Scotland (pp. 134-141) are given sympathetic treatment, as is Amyraut in France (pp. 142-143) and the "New School" in the US (pp. 149-150).

The book is divided into three parts. Part I traces the

controversies between Calvinists and Arminians, 1707-1831; part 2 follows the controversies amongst Calvinists, 1811-1841; and part 3 treats the controversies amongst Calvinistic Methodists, 1814-1841.

The same arguments against limited atonement made today were made then, and in both cases the attacks are often made by professed Calvinists. Many were arguing that the atonement was *sufficient* for all and hence *universal*. Thus Christ makes salvation *possible* for all. Temporal blessings were supposedly purchased at the cross for all, including the reprobate (pp. 159, 163, 164; cf. xxxviii). Some held that God desires the salvation of all (pp. 214-215), which also seems to be the view of Owen Thomas (p. 119). God supposedly loves everybody, and this, apparently, is John Aaron's position too (p. xvi). Reprobation is largely, if not totally, ignored, and paradox theology is evident (pp. 160, 276). Apparently there is much truth in Arminianism, and eventually peace is made between the "Calvinists" and the Arminians, for we need to evangelize and promote revivals, and, after all, the debates are largely a matter of semantics,

and God's truth is larger than human "systems" (pp. 103-104, 275-276, 363-364).

Many lessons can be learned from this book. First, it is striking that the debates in Wales began with the preaching of Welsh-speaking Arminian Methodists (p. xv). Heresy always brings disruption. Secondly, the work as a whole testifies to the influence of false doctrine from abroad. The apostasy started through the followers of Wesley and gained speed through the influence of Finney (p. 264), but "modified" Calvinism from various parts of the world also leavened Wales. The ideas of Grotius in Holland (through his disciples in many parts of the world), Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins in New England, and Andrew Fuller and Edward Williams in England, united in the total overthrow of the doctrines of grace in Wales by 1900. In a survey of 1841-1900 (pp. xxxi-xxxix), John Aaron sketches the main lines in the apostasy of the Welsh churches subsequent to Owen Thomas' narration that covered up to 1841.

After reading Owen Thomas' work one comes away with at least three nagging concerns. First, Thomas does not believe

that the debate over the extent of Christ's atonement is really as important as many of the protagonists thought it was (p. 363). Secondly, Thomas would also lead us to think that perhaps, after all, the extent of Christ's redemption is a tortuously difficult subject shrouded in mystery. Thirdly, the readers might also be tempted to think that this is a subject that has never been decisively dealt with by the church of Christ.

The *Canons of Dordt* deal effectively with all three issues. Its Second Head of Doctrine ("Of the Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men Thereby") is the church's *definitive* answer against a death of Christ for all: Christ died for the elect "and those only" (II.8). It states, moreover, that the Arminian theory of an ineffectual, universal atonement "bring[s] again out of hell the Pelagian error" — so this is an *important* issue (II.R.3). The first line of the "Conclusion" to the *Canons of Dordt* addresses the subject of the *clarity* of the five points, which include limited atonement. It reads, "And this is the perspicuous, simple, and ingenuous declaration of the orthodox doctrine respecting the five ar-

ticles...." Particular atonement is a "perspicuous" and "simple" doctrine. The Scriptures clearly teach it, and a little child can grasp it — Christ died for those whom He has chosen and He did not die for those whom He passed by. Owen Thomas' *The Atonement Controversy* provides plenty of evidence that the theories concocted by those who compromised on this article of God's truth are both various and complicated. The Arminians and the "moderate" Calvinists fall under the condemnation of the Canons' "Conclusion" as those who "controverted" the orthodox faith, "troubled" the churches, and "violated all truth, equity, and charity, in wishing to persuade the public."

John Jones, the subject of the biography, knew fine well the truth of Christ's particular redemption. As a teenager, he translated John Owen's *Death of Death* into Welsh (p. xiii)!

Owen Thomas also understood limited atonement. However, he writes with evident approval of the broadening of the mind of Henry Rees, one of the more Calvinistic men of his day. Through "reading and studying" Andrew Fuller and others, Rees had his mind

Enlarged to such an extent that, although he never left the essential theology of his old teachers, Dr. Goodwin and, particular, Dr. Owen, he yet perceived that there are other truths in the divine revelation, as essential to the gospel as the particular truths emphasized by them, to which they had not paid so much attention (p. 363).

Moreover, it was not only Fuller who “enlarged” Rees’ mind so that he could tolerate Arminianism but “Dr. Arnold, Julius Charles Hare, and Thomas Carlyle” also had a hand in this broadening process (p. 363)!

Owen Thomas does not voice even a guarded criticism of all this. He concludes in his last paragraph,

Consequently, the preachers amongst us now feel quite free and unfettered, within the confines of revelation, and *not bound by any system*. Furthermore, and in one sense even more valuable, *the people nearly everywhere not only tolerate this but demand it* (pp. 363-364; italics mine AS).

Apostasy by now has ripened: “The prophets prophesy falsely ... and my people love to

have it so” (Jer. 5:31). It started with the incursion of Arminianism through the followers of John Wesley and it ended up like this!

John Aaron rightly warns about “the consequences of acquiescing in a ‘modification’ of Calvinism.” His words concerning nineteenth century Wales apply equally to our day:

In the prevailing theological current it was inevitable that any position of small modification could never be maintained; it would only act as a focus for further dilutions. By the time theological stability would be regained, the general theological landscape would be very different (pp. xxvii-xxviii).

The same “wooden horse” (p. xxxiv) of moderate Calvinism is at work in Presbyterian and Reformed churches today. The notion that God loves everybody and wants to save everybody is eroding the truth of particular redemption, and John Wesley, whose disciples brought the heresy of universal atonement into Wales, is widely touted by professedly Reformed men. ♦

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