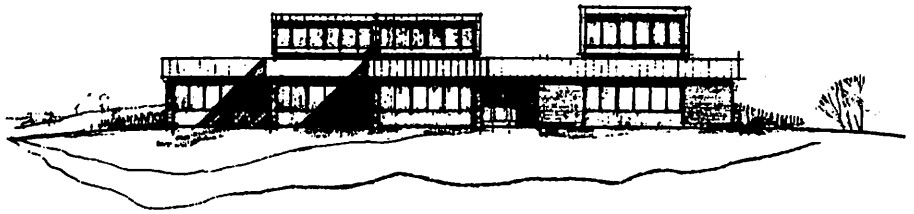


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by
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Editorial Notes

In this issue of our *Journal* we are continuing two series which were begun in earlier issues. Prof. Hanko continues his series on "Calvin, Beza, and the Doctrine of Predestination," and Prof. Engelsma continues and concludes his series on Martin Bucer. As we wrote in an earlier issue when Prof. Engelsma's series was begun, these articles were first delivered in lecture form in Mid-America Seminary in Orange City, Iowa. They are also printed in the *Journal* of that Seminary. Prof. Hanko's article was originally prepared as part of his work towards a Master's Degree from Calvin Seminary.



The Reformed Churches have always held the office of elder in high esteem. John Calvin, the great Reformer of Geneva, was the one whom God used to restore this office to its proper place in the church after long neglect and abuse within Roman Catholicism. The Protestant Reformed Churches have followed this tradition and have emphasized the importance of this office. In fact, the system of church government which Reformed and Presbyterian Churches have maintained to be Biblical is called, "The Presbyterian System." The word "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek word for "elder." Prof. Decker held a four-week class for elders in the month of January so that the elders of the Protestant Reformed Churches might be instructed in their office and calling. He has prepared the lectures given in these classes for publication in our *Journal*. We are of the conviction that they can be used by God to strengthen this important office in the church of Christ in a time when the office is in danger of eclipse.



Continuing our practice begun a few issues back, we have included in this issue a number of book reviews. It is our hope that these book reviews will assist our readers in buying books which can be valuable additions to their libraries.



In our last issue we announced that two new syllabi were available from our Seminary: Prof. Decker's thesis on the preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Prof. Hanko's thesis on a study of the relation between the views of Prof. R. Janssen and common grace. These syllabi have been reprinted and can be obtained from the Seminary.

Because many requests have been made for the series on the history of the free offer of the gospel, it was feasible to reprint these articles which appeared in the *Journal* in syllabus form. They are now ready and can be ordered from the Seminary, the address of which appears in the inside cover. Some editing has been done to make them suitable for publication in this form, but the basic contents remain, for the most part, unchanged.

The Doctrine of Predestination in Calvin and Beza

Prof. H. Hanko

(In an earlier article in the Journal we described the problem which this series addresses: Were Calvin's views of predestination significantly altered by Beza and subsequent Reformed and Presbyterian theologians? This point is often argued by students of Calvin. We examined first of all the question from the point of view of some who argue that not Beza, but Calvin himself altered his views on predestination in the course of his life. Some argue this from an analysis of the different places Calvin treats the doctrine of predestination in various editions of his Institutes. Others argue this position from a comparison of Calvin's Institutes and his polemical writings, particularly the writings which emerged from his controversy with Bolsec, a bitter opponent of predestination. We showed that these arguments are without foundation. In the last article in the Journal we began a discussion of the question: Did Theodore Beza modify or change Calvin's views on predestination? We described the arguments which are raised in support of this position. In this article we want to offer an analysis of the issues before, in a future article, we compare the views of Calvin and Beza on the truth of predestination. As we wrote earlier, we are convinced that Calvin himself did not alter his views, but we are equally convinced that Beza made no substantive changes in Calvin's position. It is clear from the evidence that those who argue for such changes are really enemies of predestination and are attempting to bolster their attack against the doctrine by appealing [though without foundation] to important differences between Calvin and his successor in Geneva.)

Chapter IV

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

We intend to answer the questions posed in the concluding paragraphs of the last chapter in two sections. In the first section we will analyze the issues involved and attempt to come to some clarification and evaluation of them. This will be done in this chapter. In the next chapter we will compare the views on predestination as presented in the writings of Calvin and Beza and examine any possible differences in these views.

We turn then, first of all, to an analysis of the issues.

We are not persuaded that Calvin himself altered his views on predestination during his own lifetime. Neither the different places in which he treated the doctrine in subsequent editions of the *Institutes* nor a comparison of his views as developed in the *Institutes* and in his later polemical writings gives evidence of this.

That no alteration in his views can be deduced from a change of place in the treatment of the doctrine in the *Institutes* is evident from the following considerations.

1) Calvin himself nowhere tells us the reason for this change of place. Brilliant thinker that he was, one would almost expect that should Calvin have changed the place of treatment because he modified his views on predestination in subsequent editions, he would almost certainly have given his reasons for doing so.

2) Almost all students of Calvin agree that Calvin's theology, while it went through some process of development, was nevertheless present in germinal form at a very early stage of his post-conversion life. Schaff¹ writes:

Calvin did not grow before the public, like Luther and Melancthon, who passed through many doctrinal changes and contradictions. He adhered to the religious views of his youth unto the end of his life. His *Institutes* came like Minerva in full panoply out of the head of Jupiter. The book was greatly enlarged and improved in form, but remained the same in substance through the several editions.

3) Although it is true that Calvin did not treat his doctrine of predestination till later in his *Institutes* nevertheless the doctrine is repeatedly mentioned almost from the outset. In fact, so all-pervasive is this truth in

1 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VIII (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 262.

the body of the *Institutes* that not one doctrine is discussed apart from it. Although, in every instance, the terms themselves may not be specifically mentioned, the doctrine is clearly implied. One can hardly read a single page without finding some reference to this truth. We cannot take the time or space to prove this point. We call attention only to the following.

Already in his treatment of the knowledge of God, Calvin refers to the sovereign distinction God makes among men.² In the next paragraph Calvin speaks of the impious as being reprobate.

In his treatment of Scripture, Calvin repeatedly stresses that the true knowledge of the Scriptures is given only to the elect.³

Calvin applies the truth of predestination even to the angelic world.⁴

In dealing with the doctrine of providence he discusses the crucial question, so closely connected with predestination, whether God's sovereign control extends also to sin. To this he answers affirmatively.⁵

In Book II, in connection with his discussion of the question of free will, Calvin also refers to predestination.⁶

It is not surprising that Calvin also treats of this truth in connection with the work of salvation.⁷ We have referred to only a few passages where the doctrine of predestination is referred to or presupposed. A closer investigation of Calvin's teachings on this subject must await a later chapter. Our purpose is only to show that there is no single doctrine of the truth which Calvin discussed which does not include a mention of predestination. All of these passages appear in the *Institutes* prior to Calvin's actual formal discussion of the doctrine. It is woven into the warp and woof of all Calvin's teachings. It is presupposed in all he writes. It is so completely a part of Calvin's thought that he refers to it on every occasion.

Niesel⁸ is wrong, therefore, when he says:

Everything else that Calvin has to say about God, Christ, the appropriation of salvation, has already been said *without any mention of election* (under-

2 I, 5, vii. The edition which we have used throughout is the translation of John Allen, 2 volumes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949).

3 See, e.g., I, 7, v.

4 I, 14, 16, 17.

5 I, 16, v-viii, 1, 17, 2.

6 See II, 1, xii, xx; II, 3, v, viii.

7 II, 3, x; II, 4, iii, v; II, 5, v; II, 6, iv, xxi; II, 12, 5; III, 1, ii, xi, xii, xxxi, xxxv.

8 Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, tr. by Harold Knight (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), p. 166.

scoring ours, H.H.). . . Calvin could not express himself more plainly from a formal point of view that the doctrine of election has no intrinsic significance for theology in the sense that other doctrines might stem from it.

Bromiley⁹ comes much closer to the truth when he admits ignorance as to why Calvin moved the place of the treatment of predestination in his *Institutes* and says: "The crucial role of the doctrine is not at all suggested by its location."

Nor does any evidence support the contention that Calvin altered his views on predestination when he engaged in polemics with those who opposed his position. We cannot enter into the question here in detail.¹⁰ It is sufficient for our purposes to point out that the one doctrine of predestination became the object of attack more than any other. Pighius, Bolsec, Castellio, Trollet, and Georgias all attacked it, and their objections which they made against this doctrine were, strikingly, not only often the same, but also presupposed a view of the doctrine which many say Calvin did not expound until he actually wrote against them. We refer, e.g., to the objections that Calvin makes God the Author of sin, that Calvin denies the activity of the human will, that Calvin destroys all sense of human responsibility, etc. If men today do not understand what Calvin taught on predestination in his *Institutes*, Calvin's enemies surely did.

Nor ought it to surprise us that Calvin's polemical writings against these attacks included a more fully developed and more clearly argued doctrine than appears in the *Institutes*. It stands to reason that as Calvin came to the defense of this central truth of his theology he would draw the lines more sharply, develop the doctrine more fully, and express himself more clearly to answer the objections which were brought against it. But that these writings make fundamental changes in his theology is an assertion without warrant. If there is one aspect of Calvin's thought which is agreed upon by the majority of scholars it is that throughout his life no essential change can be detected in Calvin's own writings.

What about the assertion that Calvin's friend and successor, Theodore Beza, altered his views on predestination?

We must clearly understand the problem. The question is not whether we can detect any different emphasis in Beza; any slightly different nuance in Beza's thought; any modification of Calvin's approach to this truth.

9 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 251.

10 A later examination of Calvin's writings both in his *Institutes* and in his polemical writings will serve as a basis for the contention we make here.

The question is whether Beza so altered Calvin's teaching and made such fundamental modifications in Calvin's view that the original truth of Calvin was lost and subsequent continental and Puritan theologians directed into such different channels that what Calvin taught can no longer really be found in these writings.

This question involves various other considerations. And to each we give some attention.

In the first place, the question arises whether a difference is to be found in the writings of Calvin and Beza concerning the question of infralapsarianism vs. supralapsarianism. It is maintained by some that while Calvin was more than likely infralapsarian in his views, Beza took a supralapsarian approach to the doctrine of predestination, and thus effected a significant change in Calvin's views. Several observations have to be made in this connection.

1) In the first place, it is evident from the writings of those who address themselves to this problem that there is a great deal of misunderstanding concerning what the issue between infra- and supralapsarianism actually is. This is somewhat surprising in the light of the fact that subsequent theologians in the Calvinistic tradition always clearly defined the issues. And we suspect that the charge of supralapsarianism is sometimes made rather unthinkingly in an attempt to cast aspersions on the doctrine of sovereign predestination.

Hagenbach¹¹ speaks of the Reformed theologians as being supralapsarian when they "maintained that the fall of man itself was predestinated by God." With this Fisher¹² agrees when he says that supralapsarianism teaches that: "The Fall itself, the primal transgression, (is) the object of an efficient decree." In another work¹³ he says that supralapsarians "made the final cause or end of the divine administration to be the manifestation of God's attributes, — of His justice in punishing, and of His mercy in saving." Yet even here he is not consistent, for he says that the *Belgic Confession* makes this same distinction, although from an infralapsarian viewpoint. He makes another mistake when, in the same book, he makes the astounding assertion that the *Institutes* are supra, but that the *Consensus Genevensis* is more moderate.

11 K.R. Hagenbach, *A Textbook of the History of Doctrine* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1861), p. 268.

12 George Park Fisher, *The Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 177.

13 *History of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908), pp. 300, 301.

Bangs¹⁴ claims that supralapsarianism is characterized by making predestination an end in itself. And Seeburg¹⁵ makes the serious mistake of saying that the next generation of reformers (Beza, Zanchi, Musculus) developed an extreme form of supralapsarianism which was adopted by the Synod of Dort. Even Berkouwer¹⁶ seems to make the mistake of describing the problem in terms of God's relationship to the fall, rather than in terms of the relationship between the decrees.

Although it is beyond the scope of this discussion to enter into this subject, it is important to understand that the historic question between supra- and infralapsarianism is a question of the relation between God's eternal *decrees*. The infralapsarians maintain that the *decree* of the fall precedes the *decree* of salvation in Christ, while the supralapsarians maintain that the *decree* of salvation precedes the *decree* of the fall. And, because no time element may be interjected into the eternal counsel of God, the question is one of the *logical* relation between the two decrees. That is, does God elect His church from out of a fallen human race? or does God decree the fall as a means to accomplish the decree of election?

2) If the problem is understood in this light, then the question is not easily answered. The simple fact of the matter is that, as Cunningham¹⁷ and Hunter¹⁸ observe, Calvin did not even consciously face the problem. Hunter¹⁹ says:

Calvin himself, ever imbued with practical religious aims and dogmatic only when authorized by Scripture, seems to have given the question little definite thought. His position is certainly sufficiently undefined to allow of both parties claiming him as sponsor for their view. He professed to have a hearty dislike for subtleties, as he once told Beza, and this was essentially the kind of matter over which he would be indisposed to waste time. Logical he was, but logic became an irrelevancy and irreverence when it attempted to penetrate audaciously into the realm of ultimate divine mysteries. So little importance did he appear to attach to the question that he subscribed to and indeed inspired two Confessions whose terms might bear a contrary significance in regard to this point. The Consensus Genevensis (1552) assumes the

14 *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

15 *Op. cit.*, pp. 421, 422.

16 Gerrit Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, tr. by Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 263.

17 *Op. cit.*, pp. 366ff.

18 *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

19 *Ibid.*

supralapsarian view, while the French Confession, of which Calvin was practically the author, is infralapsarian in affirming that God chose out of the universal corruption and damnation in which all men were submerged some to eternal life. Cunningham stoutly asserts that the latter more truly represents the Reformer's real opinion, yet it is significant that Beza, who so largely echoed Calvin, was a supralapsarian.

While one cannot agree with everything which Hunter says concerning Calvin, it is clear that any attempt to force Calvin into one or the other mold is to become guilty of anachronism.

The conclusion is, therefore, that while it perhaps cannot be determined with certainty whether Calvin was infralapsarian or supralapsarian, Beza's supralapsarianism did not make such significant changes in Calvin's views so that the course of Reformed theology was altered. What Hunter says in the above quote is undoubtedly true. And his assertion that Beza, also in the matter of supralapsarianism, was an echo of Calvin is our conclusion as well.

Perhaps a more serious charge against Beza is the claim that Beza "scholasticized" Calvin's theology. Also in a consideration of this charge several points must be considered.

1) A major question, quite obviously, is: What precisely is meant by scholasticism? Of what was Beza guilty when he allegedly "scholasticized" Calvin's thought?

We do not agree with vanderWalt²⁰ when in an article entitled, "Was Calvin a Calvinist or was/is Calvinism Calvinistic?" he says, "Calvinism after Calvin's time was either Scholastic Calvinism or Reformed Scholasticism — a clear deviation from the thought of the Reformer of Geneva."²¹ As we have already noticed, he gives six characteristics of such Calvinistic scholasticism: 1) It stresses the necessity of a logical or doctrinal system. 2) It is strongly dependent on the philosophy of Aristotle. 3) It lays great stress on reason and gives reason almost the same status as revelation. 4) It considers the Bible to be a set of propositions so that a theology may be constructed on its basis. 5) It distorts faith "to the status of intellectual submission to the truths of Scripture."²² 6) It "does not only imply a different *method of thinking* or a different mentality. It also leads to the achievement of different *results* of thought from those

20 B.J. vanderWalt, *Our Reformation Tradition* (Potchefstroom: Institute for Reformation Studies, 1984).

21 *Ibid.*, p. 369.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 370.

of the Reformation.”²³

Only the first point has any validity. To say that Beza depended on the *philosophy* of Aristotle is to fly in the face of the repeated condemnation of heathen philosophers found in his writings. To assert that reason is given almost the same status as revelation is a mixture of concepts which does not even make good sense. Reason is a method of knowing, something to be compared with faith. Revelation is objective and the object of our intellectual and pistic pursuit. But even then, one can only wonder how such a statement can be made when Beza's writings are filled from beginning to end with references to and explanations of Scripture. To say that the second generation of reformers considered Scripture to be only a set of propositions is to assert something wholly without proof, and to ignore the many correct explanations of Scripture which the reformers made. To call the reformers' view of faith only intellectual submission to truth is to denigrate their many writings which emphasize faith's spiritual character. If this is what is meant by a scholasticizing of Calvin, it is false on the face of it.

2) This does not imply that Beza had no use for Aristotle at all. Carl Bangs²⁴ quotes a letter from Beza to Ramus in which he gives his reasons why Ramus' application to teach in the Academy is being rejected. Beza writes:

The second obstacle lies in our determination to follow the position of Aristotle, without deviating a line, be it in logic or in the rest of our studies.²⁵

It is clear from this statement of Beza that in some respects the Academy made use of some of Aristotle's thought. However, the question of what use particularly was made of it is important. From this quote as well as from the writings of post-Calvin theologians it becomes apparent that the scholastic method which they followed was a method which 1) Attempted to construct a unified and systematic theology; 2) Made use of Aristotelian logic in accomplishing this; 3) Made use of a method which raised questions and answered them, raised objections against doctrines and analyzed them carefully while bringing to bear upon them the Scriptural data; 4) Made use of many distinctions within concepts to bring out their truth more clearly.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

²⁵ The role Ramus played in the development of philosophy is an important one, but one into which we cannot here enter.

4) Whether this was in fact a scholasticizing of Calvin's thought of such magnitude that it altered Calvin's theology is another question. Various considerations must be taken into account to answer this.

a) The use of Aristotelian logic in itself cannot be *a priori* considered unBiblical. While it would not be within the scope of this study to enter into this question in detail, it must be remembered that logic as a system of rules which guide right thinking is a neutral subject, analogous to mathematics.²⁶ The application of such principles of logic to thinking, even theologically, cannot be wrong.

b) The scholastics of the medieval times not only incorporated into their theology Aristotelian logic, but attempted in many respects to marry Aristotelian philosophy with theology. This the Reformers not only did not do, but they fiercely reprobated it in their writings.

c) The goal of the post-Reformation theologians was to construct a logically coherent system of theology. They did this in full recognition of the fact that the revelation of the truth of God in the Scriptures, just because it is revelation, constitutes an organic whole. The organic unity of this revelation implies that the individual parts of it are related to each other, and that that relation is a logical one. The application of logical categories to the system which they constructed is not to be construed, therefore, as an innovative technique which, by virtue of its application, necessarily altered the teachings of Calvin. The case has to be decided on other grounds. Emile Leonard²⁷ correctly points out that even Calvin often attempted to force his view of predestination into a logical mold — although we would not, of course, agree with the perjorative term “force.”

Hall²⁸ is wrong when he writes:

A change of emphasis came with Beza, (Calvin's) successor there, who altered the balance of Calvin's theology, saw, and in part approved, that successful repristination of Aristotle among Protestants which led to the Reformed scholasticism that distorted the Calvin synthesis.

Muller²⁹ is much more correct. He is careful first of all to define what is meant by these terms. While we have quoted this before, it is important

26 It does not require regeneration and faith to learn that $4 + 4 = 8$ any more than it requires regeneration to know that A cannot be both A and non-A at the same time in the same sense.

27 Emile G. Leonard, *A History of Protestantism*, Vol. I (London: Thomas Nelson Ltd., 1965), p. 302.

28 Duffield, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

29 Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1986).

enough to quote again. He writes:³⁰

Two terms that appear most frequently in the evaluation of theology after Calvin are "scholasticism" and "orthodoxy." From the first, we need to be clear that these terms are neither laudatory nor perjorative; they are only descriptive of the method and the intention of theologians in the century and a half following the demise of Calvin, Vermigli, and Musculus. In other words, characterization of post-Reformation Protestantism as "scholastic orthodoxy" denotes the historical form of that theology and in no way implies that the theology of the seventeenth century can provide either the right method or the right teaching for the present.

He then defines scholasticism as

a methodological approach to theological system which achieves precision of definition through the analysis of doctrinal *loci* in terms of scripture, previous definition (the tradition), and contemporary debate.³¹

Orthodoxy, he says, has several characteristics.

First, and perhaps foremost, it indicates the desire to set forth the true faith as over against the teaching of several adversaries confronted in polemic. Right teaching is for the edification of the church on both the positive and the polemical levels. Second, "orthodoxy" indicates also a sense of catholicity, of continuity both with the revelation contained in the scriptural deposit and with the valid teaching of the church in past centuries. Orthodox theologians of the seventeenth century felt quite at ease in their use not only of the fathers but also of medieval thinkers. Third, the term implies a strong relationship between systematic theology and church confessions, the confessions acting as a subsidiary norm in the development and exposition of doctrinal systems: even at its most rigid and formal extreme, orthodoxy is theology in and for the church. Fourth, and finally, the production of an orthodoxy, so-called, relates to the conviction that true doctrine can be stated fully and finally in a series of strict doctrinal determinations. In this sense, orthodoxy involves an approach to scripture as the deposit of truth out of which correct definitions may be drawn. This assumption in itself entailed the development of a theological method more logical, more rigorous, and more rationalistic than that of the Reformation, though no less committed to the principle of *sola scriptura*.³²

While certainly we do not agree with every detail of Muller's analysis, the general point is correct. Muller's conclusion is:

We need to be aware from the outset, therefore, that the question of continuity or discontinuity of Protestant scholastic theology with the western theological tradition is highly complex and not at all to be reduced to the

30 p. 11.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

relationship of the doctrine of predestination developed by Beza or Zanchi to that of Calvin. Rather the question must be raised in terms of the influence of Calvin and his contemporaries upon a developing Augustinian theology the roots of which extend into the middle ages, indeed, back to Augustine; in terms also of methodological continuities and discontinuities both with the Reformers and with medieval doctrines; and finally in terms of the changes that occur in theological ideas as they develop systematically, recognizing that continuity is found in developing traditions rather than in a static reproduction of ideas from one generation to the next.³³

There are two more questions which must briefly be answered. The first has to do with the main theological principle of Calvin's theology; the second has to do with the rationale behind the assertion that Calvin's theology was significantly altered by Beza.

The first question has bearing on our subject in different ways. In a certain sense it stands connected with the question of the significance of the place Calvin's treatment of predestination occupies in the *Institutes*. But more to our present point, it has to do with the question of whether predestination was a subsidiary doctrine in Calvin's system or whether it occupied a chief and principle place.

Opinions on this question also differ from one scholar to another.

In an article entitled "Calvin on Predestination," Frank A. James III³⁴ writes:

Past interpreters of Calvin often fell victim to the misconception that predestination resided at the center of his theology. However, today most acknowledge that he never discussed predestination as his most basic presupposition.

However, the same author adds: "Admittedly he did accord a growing importance to predestination in succeeding editions of the *Institutes*," although, "had it not been for Pighius and Bolsec, one wonders if Calvin's name would have been so closely associated with predestination."³⁵

Bangs³⁶ very generally states that Beza lifted the doctrine of predestination to a preeminence which it did not have for Calvin, although he adds that Beza made predestination an end in itself.

McKim³⁷ writes that predestination was not the center of Calvin's

33 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

34 *Christian History*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 24.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

37 *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

teaching but that he developed it and accorded a greater importance to it under the influence of Augustine and Bucer and "under the sway of ecclesiological and pastoral preoccupations rather than in order to make it a foundation of his theology."

Somewhat along these same lines, J.I. Packer³⁸ writes:

Predestination, the eternal purpose of God concerning grace, is not, as used to be thought, the focal theme of Calvin's theology; rather it is the undergirding of the Gospel, the ultimate explanation of why the Son of God became by incarnation Jesus the Christ, and whence it is that some who hear the Word come to faith, and how it is that Christians have a sure hope of heaven.

So also Walker³⁹ says that "To Calvin election was always primarily a doctrine of Christian comfort."

Along almost entirely different lines, James Orr⁴⁰ says, "Mounting to the throne of God, Calvin reads everything in the light of the eternal divine decree."

These conflicting judgments, perhaps colored by the view the authors themselves take concerning the truth of predestination, are nevertheless proof that one cannot easily come to any conclusions on the matter. But there are some writers who give more thoughtful consideration to the problem and come much closer to what in our judgment is a correct appraisal.

Even Daniel-Rops,⁴¹ though a Roman Catholic, comes very close to the truth of the matter when he finds Calvin's view of predestination rooted in his principle of the absolute glory of God. John Murray,⁴² in an article entitled, "Calvin, Dort, and Westminster on Predestination — A Comparative Study," discusses the importance of reprobation in the thought of all three and then concludes with the remark:

But the doctrine is the same and this fact demonstrates the undissenting unity of thought on a tenet of faith that is a distinguishing mark of our Reformed heritage and without which the witness to the sovereignty of God and to His revealed counsel suffer eclipse at the point where it must jealously be maintained. For the glory of God is the issue at stake.

38 Duffield, *op. cit.*, pp. 171, 172.

39 Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 393.

40 James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), p. 291.

41 *Op. cit.*, p. 406.

42 P.Y. DeJong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), p. 157.

The point which Murray makes is particularly important, for he finds that not only did the reformers basically agree among themselves, but that Dort and Westminster stand in essential agreement with the reformers. This is also the position of Polman⁴³ and Warfield.⁴⁴ The latter writes:

The exact formulation of the formative principle of Calvinism. . . has taxed the acumen of a long line of distinguished thinkers. Many modes of stating it have been proposed. Perhaps, after all, however, its simplest statement is best. It lies then. . . in a profound apprehension of God in His majesty, with the poignant realization which inevitably accompanies this apprehension, of the relation sustained to God by the creature as such, and particularly by the sinful creature. The Calvinist is the man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in His glory, is filled on the one hand, with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God's sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners.

The deepest principle of Calvin's teaching was the absolute glory of God: *solī Deo gloria*. In closest relationship to this principle of God's glory stands the truth of God's absolute sovereignty. God is not only glorious in Himself, but He reveals His glory in all that He does. If all that He does is a revelation of His glory, then sovereignty characterizes all His works. God is the Sovereign Who does all His good pleasure. And this sovereignty must also be applied to the work of salvation. God is sovereign in saving sinners. He is not dependent upon them in any respect. But if He is sovereign in the salvation of sinners, then the truth of sovereign and double predestination follows.

Yet with all this we do not mean to imply that Calvin, proceeding from the principle of God's glory, simply argued rationalistically to the conclusion of predestination. He gleaned what he taught from the Scriptures, and each doctrine is supported by copious references to God's Word. But Calvin also saw the coherence, the unity, the internal logical relationships between the various doctrines. And thus, insofar as one can call Calvin's theology a system, the truths he taught reflected the organic unity of Scripture itself.

No one will argue that the same is not true of Beza. When efforts are made to set Beza over against Calvin these efforts are designed to minimize

43 A.D.R. Polman, *De Praedestinatieleer van Augustinus, Thomas van Aquino en Calvijn* (Graneker: T. Wever, 1936), pp. 307ff.

44 B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1974), p. 491.

the importance of predestination in Calvin's thinking. But if it is true that the main principle of Calvin's theology is God's glory, as any reading of Calvin's works will show, then no conflict can be found between Calvin and his successor in Geneva. Both were men imbued with a sense of the glory of God. Both sought that glory in everything they did. And because this was the deepest principle of both, both held with equal firmness to the doctrine of sovereign predestination.

Closely related to this question stands also the question of whether Beza's theology in distinction from Calvin's was "decretal." In a paper delivered on February 10, 1977 at Calvin Seminary entitled, "Predestination in Calvin, Beza, and Later Reformed Theology,"⁴⁵ Prof. P. Holtrop took this position and argued not only that Beza made basic changes in Calvin's theology at this point, but that Beza was the one who influenced all subsequent thought. We quote rather extensively from this paper in order to demonstrate the point being made.

Thus, decretal theology, as it comes to be seen in Reformed Orthodoxy, begins at this point; the absolute pre-historic decree of God now comes to be seen as a necessary ontological base for everything that happens (deductive theology), and everything that happens, or exists, is now seen in terms of the essence of God (immutability; mercy and justice; love and hate seen in aesthetic balance). If the doctrine of predestination is the "crown of soteriology" for Calvin, it is the main structure for all theology in Beza.

In that theology the point of departure is the hidden counsel of God, not the actualized relation of God and man, the revelation-and-faith correlate, or man before the face of God. What God has decreed is inviolately executed in history: that means, for Beza, that we must take our standpoint in God and His decree. Predestination in Calvin is a support for the assurance of salvation; hence he looks from sanctification to predestination (observe position of treatment in 1559 *Institutes*). Calvin's view is a view of man to God. But in Beza's theology that relation is reversed: looking from God's predestination of man's sanctification he remained preoccupied with predestination for his entire life.⁴⁶

Beza wants his doctrine to be one of "equal ultimacy" – the results of hardening are as much a work of God as the results of faith; eternal death is as much decreed by God as eternal life; there is no disjunction in the mode of decree and election and reprobation; both redound to the glory of God. Everything is seen as the unravelling of God's decree.⁴⁷

The point of these remarks is that Holtrop wants to set Beza over

45 So far as I know this paper has not been published, although copies were distributed at the meeting.

46 p. 6.

47 p. 12.

against Calvin in the crucial area of reprobation. That is, he wants to defend the position that Beza altered Calvin's theology at the crucial juncture of this aspect of sovereign predestination. This is important for two reasons. In the first place, if this is true, then indeed the alteration which Beza made in Calvin's theology is of such sweeping importance that indeed Beza can almost be called an opponent of Calvin on this point. And if Beza so influenced subsequent theology to the extent that it is claimed, it is surely true that all subsequent theologizing from Beza on, both in continental and English theology, cannot be said to be faithful to the genius of the reformer from Geneva, but is rather a perversion of his thought.

It is not our purpose to enter into this question in detail at this point. We hope to do that in the following chapter. But, secondly, the importance of this question is closely connected to various views which in recent times have been promoted within Reformed circles in connection with the question of sovereign predestination. We refer to the views of G.C. Berkouwer, J. Daane, H. Boer, and others, men to whom also Holthrop refers approvingly.⁴⁸ These and others have attacked particularly the doctrine of reprobation and have lodged against it criticisms such as Holthrop makes: e.g., that the Bezan doctrine makes election and reprobation equally ultimate; that this conception of predestination is rooted in decretal theology; etc.

It is not within the scope of our purpose to answer all these charges nor to deal with such recent criticisms of sovereign predestination.⁴⁹ The reason why we bring them up here is because they stand connected with the question which we are addressing. And, it is our judgment that much of the effort which is put forth to set Beza and Calvin at odds with each other is motivated by a desire to deny the doctrine of reprobation and to try to find some historical justification for this in a reinterpretation of Calvin which presents him as teaching a modified view of this doctrine which is quite different from Reformed theology of the present.

It is sufficient to point out at this juncture only one basic point, the point of revelation. If it is true that all Scripture is the infallible record of God's self-revelation (as has been historically maintained by all Reformed theology since the time of the Reformation) then it is also true that

48 In an essay entitled, "Recent Reformed Criticisms of the Canons," K. Runia speaks of some of these same questions. P.Y. DeJong, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-171.

49 Some of these matters will be dealt with in the next chapter and in the Conclusion. We have dealt somewhat in detail with the problems involved in a paper on the subject: "Predestination and Equal Ultimacy in Canons I."

whatever may be found in Scripture is the revelation of God. This has crucial consequences for our subject. While some may speak rather scornfully of "decretal theology," God's self-revelation has implicit in it His own absolute sovereignty. And this sovereignty is the key to His eternal decrees, according to which He brings all things into existence and makes all things serve the purpose for which He has made them. That this should extend to the eternal destination of men surely follows in the very nature of the case.

That this is the view of both Calvin and Beza is the subject to which we turn in our next chapter. □

Martin Bucer – "Fanatic of Unity"

by David J. Engelsma

The description of Martin Bucer as a "fanatic of unity," or as we might say, an "ecumaniac," was that of one of his contemporaries. Margaret Blauer, member of a prominent Protestant family of that day, called Bucer, "the dear *politicus* and *fanaticus* of unity." With this assessment of Bucer, all scholars agree. John T. McNeill describes Bucer as "the most zealous exponent of the ideal of church unity of his age."¹ E. Gordon Rupp calls Bucer "the very model of a modern ecumenical."² David F. Wright, translator and editor of a recent, important volume of Bucer's writings, entitles his introductory essay, "Martin Bucer: Ecumenical Theologian."³

Throughout his ministry, this Reformed pastor and theologian spent much time and expended enormous energy on behalf of church union. In the interests of the unity of the Church, he wrote much – books; letters to parties all over Europe; confessions intended to serve as the basis of

1 John T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: The Ecumenical Spirit and Its Persistent Expression* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 144.

2 Quoted in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, David F. Wright, tr. and ed. (Appleford, Abingdon, Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), p. 14. Hereafter: Wright, *Martin Bucer*.

3 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, pp. 15-71.

union; and accounts and defenses of the proceedings at conferences where unity was the purpose. Bucer attended many such conferences, or colloquies, usually as one of the main participants. This required that he be endlessly on the road, tirelessly travelling all over Germany and Switzerland. Bucer spent a good part of his life in the saddle.

One simply cannot do justice to the subject, Bucer, if he omits Bucer's pursuit after church union. Only when one takes into account this aspect of Bucer's ministry does he come to know the complete Bucer, and only then does he have an eye for the full ministry of this many-sided, and sometimes surprising, Protestant theologian.

Bucer himself regarded his efforts for unity as one of his most important tasks, indeed as a sacred calling from God. When his zeal for unity was criticized, as it was, hotly and from every quarter, Bucer never apologized. "*Fanaticus* of unity," for him, was not condemnation, but commendation.

The conclusion of Bucer's ministry was fitting. At the end, he was found in England, a Reformed theologian from Germany laboring in and for the Church of England. Thus, his life's circumstances expressed one of the most outstanding features of Bucer's ministry, as well as that which was dearest to the man's heart.

This aspect of Bucer's ministry takes on special significance in our ecumenical age. Protestants convinced of the necessity of church union point to Bucer as example and stimulus. The spirit that drove Bucer, as well as the methods that he employed, are held up for emulation. We may expect that, as Bucer's works become available and as he becomes better known, his zeal and effort on behalf of church union will be emphasized even more. In his recent study of Bucer's efforts to reunite Protestantism and Roman Catholicism at Regensburg, Basil Hall concludes:

... attempts at a better understanding between "Catholic" and "Protestant" might well find a starting-point in the themes which lay behind the *Regensburg Book*.⁴

Bucer's Efforts for Church Unity

Bucer's later, more pronounced attitude and more explicit efforts regarding church unity were foreshadowed already early in his ministry, in

4 Basil Hall, "The Colloquies Between Catholics and Protestants, 1539-41," in: *Councils and Assemblies*, Volume 7 of *Studies in Church History*, G.J. Cuming and Derek Baker, editors (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), p. 266.

his dealings with the anabaptists. In the 1520s, anabaptists flocked to Strasbourg from all over Europe, including some of the leaders – Carlstadt, Denck, Franck, Hubmeier, and others. Their purpose was not only to find refuge for themselves, but also to establish their movement. They preached their doctrines to the citizenry of the city with the intent to proselytize Strasbourg. Bucer, at the first, was tolerant of the anabaptists and their views. He held conferences with these men, at which the anabaptists were permitted to air and defend their errors in public, as though they were a party standing on an equal footing with the orthodoxy of the Reformation. Bucer was conciliatory towards them, showing a readiness to make crucial, doctrinal concessions to them. In 1524, he was willing to admit that Scripture does not require infant baptism and to allow baptism to be postponed to years of discretion. His purpose was to find accord with the anabaptists, or to win them to the faith of the Reformation.

In this, Bucer was unsuccessful. Instead of gaining the anabaptists for the Reformation, Bucer's tactics threatened the Protestant Church in Strasbourg. The anabaptist tenets proved attractive to many of the people. Bucer's own colleague, and, next to Bucer himself, the most influential pastor of Strasbourg, Wolfgang Capito, was carried away by the anabaptists and was in danger of being lost to the Reformed faith. Capito published a commentary on Hosea in 1527 in which he taught that the baptism of infants was unwise; advanced chiliastic notions; and exalted the inner word of the Holy Spirit above the written Word of Holy Scripture. Only by great effort did Bucer manage to deliver Capito from these doctrines and save him for the Reformation.

As a result, Bucer's attitude hardened towards the anabaptists, and his approach to them changed. He more sharply condemned their errors and more vigorously defended the truths they denied, e.g., the covenant and infant baptism. Upon their refusal to recant their errors, the leaders of anabaptism were banished from Strasbourg. It was, in part, because of the threat to the Protestant Church in Strasbourg from anabaptism that Bucer came to see the necessity of church government exercised by a body of elders, including excommunication.

One interesting aspect of the controversy between Bucer and the anabaptists, which also brings out the similarity between 16th century anabaptism and present-day neo-Pentecostalism, concerned the anabaptists' teaching of perfectionism. Appealing to I John 3:6 ("Who-soever abideth in him sinneth not"), the anabaptists asserted that true Christians can live sinless lives. Bucer responded that this position is refuted by the 5th Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our

debts. . . .” One of the anabaptists replied that this is the prayer of a man before the Holy Spirit is poured out, and that he himself could not pray this petition, without lying.

Despite Bucer’s subsequent condemnation of anabaptism and his own sound teaching on the issues at stake in the controversy with anabaptism — the covenant, infant baptism, the divine institution of the magistrate, the sole authority of Scripture, predestination, and the Church, 25 years later, when Bucer was banished from Strasbourg, some in the Strasbourg Church accused him of “enthusiasm,” i.e., of being infected with anabaptist notions.

The difference between Bucer’s handling of the “left wing of the Reformation” and Luther’s handling of it at about the same time is unmistakable. Luther immediately saw the fundamental, irreconcilable differences between the faith of the Reformation and that of the anabaptists. He saw too that the success of the doctrines and practices of anabaptism would mean the death of the Protestant Reformation. In fact, for Luther, the evil of “enthusiasm” was as great as that of Roman Catholicism. Therefore, Luther’s meeting, in Wittenberg, with the leaders of anabaptism was not on the order of a conference, but on the order of a confrontation. To their advocacy of their “Holy Spirit,” apart from and above the doctrine of Scripture, Luther was quite unconciliatory, snapping, *“Ibrer Geist haue er uber die Schnauze.”* Already in 1525, in his *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, Luther drew the lines of antithesis clearly and sharply between the Protestant Reformation and the anabaptist movement:

The Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit (is the refrain of the anabaptists — DJE). . . . But should you ask how one gains access to this same lofty spirit they do not refer you to the outward gospel but to some imaginary realm, saying: Remain in “self abstraction” where I now am and you will have the same experience. A heavenly voice will come, and God himself will speak to you. . . . I want to warn everyone truly and fraternally to beware of Dr. Karlstadt and his prophets, for two reasons. First, because they run about and teach, without a call. . . . The second reason is that these prophets avoid, run away from, and are silent about the main points of Christian doctrine. . . .⁵

The result was that Wittenberg was not troubled by the influences of the anabaptists and that many Protestants outside Wittenberg were preserved from this movement.

On the other hand, it should be noted, as David F. Wright points out, that

5 Martin Luther, in: *Luther’s Works*, Volume 40 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 147, 222.

Bucer achieved the only mass recovery of Anabaptists into the established Church in the whole of the sixteenth century. It happened in 1538 in Hesse. . . , when he was summoned by Philip to curb the Anabaptist expansion that had defied all previous measures of control. Hundreds of dissenters rejoined the Church of Hesse as a result of a series of debates conducted in a pleasingly calm atmosphere in which Bucer evinced a readiness to learn as well as teach.⁶

The Unity of Protestantism

The first real program of Bucer for church unity concerned the unity of the Protestant Church. From about 1525, the Protestant Church was dividing into two distinct and hostile bodies. The one church-body was the Lutheran, having its center of influence in Wittenberg and its leaders in Luther and Melancthon. The other was the Reformed Church, having its center first in Zurich and then in Geneva, with Zwingli and Calvin as its leading theologians. The issue that divided Protestantism was the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, particularly the manner of the presence of Christ in the Supper. Luther insisted on a physical presence. Zwingli held a merely symbolical presence. Bucer and Calvin taught a spiritual presence, which doctrine eventually became the credal teaching of the Reformed Church.⁷

Efforts to unite Lutherans and Zwinglians climaxed at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529. The dramatic failure of union at Marburg marked the permanent division of Protestantism into Lutheran and Reformed branches. Although a moving force in calling the Colloquy, Bucer was rather a spectator than a participant at this conference. The chief spokesmen were Luther and Melancthon, on the one side, and Zwingli and Oecolampadius, on the other. Agreement was found on all main points of doctrine, except the doctrine of the Supper; but this one difference divided the Protestants, insomuch that Luther refused Zwingli the right hand of fellowship, alleging that the Swiss had "another Spirit than we."

Whereas for the others Marburg sealed Protestantism's division, for Bucer it was the occasion for tremendous, almost frenzied, and, from a certain point of view, heroic, efforts to achieve the union of the divided churches and preachers. For some ten years, Bucer poured himself into a

6 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, p. 31.

7 On the controversy within Protestantism over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, particularly the role and teaching of Martin Bucer, cf. David J. Engelsma, "Martin Bucer's 'Calvinistic' Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," in: *PRTJ*, Volume XXII (November, 1988), pp. 3-29.

self-chosen mission: to make peace between Lutherans and Zwinglians; and in carrying out this mission, the Strasbourg Reformed "offered" himself, to use Paul's expression in Philippians 2:17. These efforts culminated at the Wittenberg Conference of 1536. By this time, Zwingli and Oecolampadius were dead. Zwingli's successor, Bullinger, refused to attend the conference. Bucer, therefore, took it upon himself to represent the cause of the Zwinglians, although other representatives of the Zwinglian view were also present. Luther and Melancthon argued the Lutheran position on the Lord's Supper. The outcome was a document of concord in which Bucer, both for himself personally and for the Zwinglians, expressed agreement with Luther's doctrine of the physical presence in its three basic aspects: the substantial presence of Christ's body in the bread; the taking of Christ's body by the communicant with the mouth; and the reception of the body and blood of Christ by the unworthy. The "Articles or Formula of Concord" read, as follows:

- 1 . . . with the bread and the wine the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and presented and received. . .
3 . . . the Lord's body and blood are truly offered to the unworthy also, and. . . the unworthy receive them when the words and institution of Christ are observed. . .⁸

In his own explanation and defense of this "Concord," Bucer wrote:

We all granted that on account of the sacramental union that exists between the bread and Christ's body it could be said. . . that the Lord's body is there received into our very hands, mouth, and stomach.⁹

This was total capitulation to Luther's doctrine of the Supper, and a betrayal, for the sake of unity, of that which Bucer knew to be the truth of the Supper. Bucer was not, in fact, converted to Luther's view whatsoever. Later writings show clearly that Bucer repudiated Luther's doctrine of a physical presence. But Bucer signed the formula for the sake of peace. What makes this even more inexcusable for Bucer is that, from the outset of the conference, Luther laid down what he called "hard terms." First, Bucer and his associates must publicly recant their previous errors on the Supper. Second, they must promise to teach the people "that in the holy Supper the true body and true blood of Christ is truly had and received even by the mouth, and that no less by the wicked than the good."¹⁰ Understandably, Luther was suspicious of Bucer's willingness to

8 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, pp. 362, 363.

9 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, pp. 359.

10 Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), pp. 198, 199.

assent to the "hard terms" and to sign the articles of concord. Before he would receive Bucer and the Zwinglians as brothers, on the basis of the "Concord," Luther interrogated each one individually, whether he truly believed the physical presence of Christ in the Supper.

Although Bucer exerted himself with might and main, for some two years, to gain the acceptance of the Wittenberg Concord by Bullinger and the main body of Zwinglians, he failed. The reason was obvious. As one writer has put it, "Zurich was not about to swallow the Lutheran camel." The concord was spurious. No union of Lutherans and Reformed was accomplished by it. Bucer's reputation sank, if not stank, among the Zwinglians.

Protestant and Roman Catholic Reunion

As though to prove that his zeal for church unity was no incidental characteristic and that his readiness to compromise for the sake of unity was no temporary aberration, Bucer plunged himself into the treacherous waters of Protestant and Roman Catholic reunion. Although his main work for the union of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism followed the failure of his efforts for internal Protestant unity, during the years 1539-1541, Bucer had been working for the reunion of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism since 1530. In 1530, he was present at the Diet of Augsburg, where the Emperor, Charles V, was attempting to reconcile Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the interests of his empire. Bucer and the other representatives of what might be called the Reformed Churches were not allowed to sign the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, drawn up by Philip Melancthon, unless they subscribed to it in its entirety; and since they could not agree with the crucial article on the Lord's Supper, they might not put their names on that creed. Therefore, Bucer, with the help of Capito and Hedio, drew up his own confession, to present to the Emperor — The Tetrapolitan Confession, or Confession of the Four Cities. This was the first confession of Reformed Churches in Germany. As Bucer himself later admitted, this creed was deliberately vague on the doctrine of the Supper, in the interests of peace. It merely stated that in the Sacrament the true body and blood of Christ are truly given to eat and drink:

... with singular zeal they (the men of the Four Cities — DJE) always publish this goodness of Christ to his people, whereby no less today than at that last Supper, to all those who sincerely have given their names among his disciples and receive this Supper according to his institution, he deigns to give his true body and true blood to be truly eaten and drunk for the food and drink of

souls. . . (Chapter XVIII, "Of the Eucharist").¹¹

As was the case also with the Augsburg Confession, the creed did not criticize Rome's doctrine of transubstantiation, although Chapter XIX, "The Mass," did sharply condemn Rome's doctrine of a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ for sins, as well as Rome's teaching that the celebration of the Supper is a meritorious work. Nor did the Tetrapolitana give expression to Bucer's differences with Luther's doctrine of the physical presence. David F. Wright is correct when he says that "the article on the eucharist was irenic, but characterised by that evasive weakness for which Bucer was to gain such an unhappy renown,"¹² although this judgment ought to be tempered by a recognition of Bucer's inclusion in the article, however subtly, of the distinctively Reformed confession that the body and blood of Christ are received only by the believer:

. . . this goodness of Christ to his people. . . to all those who sincerely have given their names among his disciples and receive this Supper according to his institution. . . .

Nothing came of Bucer's efforts for unity at Augsburg. Indeed, his creed was not even read before the Diet.

In 1534 and 1535, Bucer accepted an invitation to submit "position-papers" for a conference of Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians proposed by King Francis I of France to resolve differences between the Churches. Bucer was optimistic about such a conference, envisioning the possibility of Protestant and Roman Catholic reunion: "Bucer was enthusiastic: he could not hear of a reunion movement without the excitement of a noble hound on the scent."¹³ Bucer's "position-papers" conceded so much to Rome as to make it a matter of gratitude to God that the proposed conference never came off. They granted papal supremacy; accepted the authority of the Fathers and of the canons of the early Church as the basis of discussion; and virtually concealed the fact and importance of the doctrinal differences between Rome and Protestantism.

It was at the Diet of Regensburg in 1541 that Bucer made his supreme

11 The Tetrapolitan Confession of 1530 (Confession of the Four Cities, Strasburg, Constance, Memmingen and Lindau. Wherein They Set Forth Their Faith to His Imperial Majesty in the Diet of Augsburg.) in: *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, Arthur C. Cochrane, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 54-88.

12 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, p. 35.

13 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, p. 165.

attempt to unify the entire Christian Church; and it was at this meeting that "the compromising Bucer," as Philip Schaff calls him, outdid himself in giving up the truth and manipulating formulations of doctrine, for the sake of the desired unity. A preliminary conference was held at Worms in 1540. Here, Bucer and Capito entered into secret negotiations with a team of Roman Catholics, in order to draw up articles of agreement that would serve as the basis of discussion at Regensburg the following year. The result was the *Regensburg Book*, a "draft basis of theological agreement at the Colloquy to be held during the imperial Diet at Regensburg in the following year."¹⁴ In the *Book*, Bucer made the most serious concessions to Rome, particularly on the vital doctrine of justification. Luther, to whom the *Book* was sent in the hope of his approval, blasted it: "We hate the book worse than a dog or a snake." He referred to it as "that utterly wretched book."

The forecast of compromise in the *Regensburg Book* was fully realized at the Diet of Regensburg. The Diet was a significant meeting. It was summoned by the Emperor, who needed the unity of his Protestant and Roman Catholic citizens for his political ends. The Emperor himself attended. Prominent, powerful men represented both Churches. Bucer, Melancthon, and Pistorius represented the Protestants; and Gropper, Eck, and Cardinal Contarini, the Roman Catholic Church. John Calvin, at that time exiled in Strasbourg, accompanied Bucer, and witnessed the proceedings. A mighty effort was made to reunite the Churches, from both sides. Regensburg was the "high-water mark of reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant, not only in the Reformation period, but perhaps in the whole pre-Vatican II era."¹⁵

Bucer compromised the Faith of the Reformation. He agreed to a statement on justification that did not affirm justification by faith alone, but rather spoke of justification as both the imputation of righteousness and the infusion of righteousness. He approved the declaration that the Church is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. He authored a draft article that taught transubstantiation:

We affirm that the Lord's body is truly present but that the bread is converted or changed by a mystical change whereby there is now brought about after the consecration a true presentation of the body that is present. And we understand this mystical change to be not merely of signifiatory import but one

14 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, p. 42.

15 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, p. 44.

whereby Christ's body becomes present.¹⁶

Bucer went so far as to acknowledge that the sacramental adoration of Christ in the bread of the Supper need not be rejected as a matter of principle, i.e., he sanctioned that worship of the host which the Heidelberg Catechism calls "an accursed idolatry."¹⁷

Despite all this well-nigh incredible compromise on the part of the Protestants, as well as an approach to Protestant formulations on the part of the Roman Catholic participants that drew the ire of their more rigid colleagues, the Regensburg Colloquy failed to accomplish the desired reunion, largely because of the adamant opposition of Luther in Wittenberg and of the Pope in Rome. "In those troubled waters the ark which Gropper and Bucer launched sank almost without trace."¹⁸ But a storm of criticism fell upon the head of Martin Bucer from all quarters of Protestantism. Calvin faulted his spiritual mentor, and at the time his earthly host, for his "ambiguous and dissimulating formulae concerning transubstantiation." Luther, irate, said, "Bucer, the rascal, has absolutely lost all my confidence. I shall never trust him again; he has betrayed me too often." On another occasion, Luther remarked, "Bucer stinks sufficiently on his own account because of the Regensburg Articles."

By his readiness to go to these ends to gain unity, Bucer earned for himself, in his own day, the opprobrious title, "fanatic of unity."

Judgment on These Efforts

Exercising that Christian virtue which was dear to the Strasbourg Reformer — charity — as fully as is commensurate with honesty, let us recognize several factors that mitigate our judgment on Bucer's fanaticism for unity. First, Bucer's irenic spirit undoubtedly rooted in a heartfelt love for the one Body of Christ and in a sincere grief over her divisions, as Bucer saw them. Wilhelm Pauck observes that "communion was his great ideal," quoting Bucer:

Nobody truly knows Christ who does not feel the necessity of a communion, of mutual care and discipline among his members. . . Christ suffered and taught for no other purpose but that we should be one and embrace each

16 Wright, *Martin Bucer*, p. 45.

17 Question 80: ". . . the mass teaches. . . that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshipped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than. . . an accursed idolatry."

18 Hall, "Colloquies," p. 266.

other with the same love with which he embraced us, and that we should seek our common salvation with the same eagerness with which he sought ours.¹⁹

Feeling this "necessity of a communion," Bucer abhorred strife and division. He once wrote, "If we cannot agree, we are not of Christ." He went on to speak of the apostle Paul's tireless labors on behalf of the communion of the saints and concluded, "now another spirit is at the helm, which flees all union."²⁰ Early in his ministry, Bucer set himself a policy of peace:

Right from the time when I first conceived the way of godliness, not from commentaries composed by men but from the Scriptures themselves through the teaching of the Spirit, I purposed at heart both to esteem nothing more highly than love and to keep as far distant as possible from party passions and contentions, especially in matters of religion. . . Nothing can less benefit the servant of God than favouring sectarianism and indulging in disputes which dispel the truth, sow envy and malice, and occasion the total shipwreck of the whole of true authentic Christianity. . . So I took pains to keep out of disputes, by leaving the ungodly to flourish unchallenged and by refusing to cast pearls before swine, by instructing the weaker brethren in a spirit of peace and by tendering an open ear and mind to brethren more richly endowed with the divine wisdom of the Scriptures. In this way I thought I could avoid any possibility of being diverted into strife and dissension. . . .²¹

In keeping with his ideal of communion among the people of God, Bucer desired that the saints love one another. He wrote: "My aim is. . . that Christians should recognize and embrace each other in love."²² Luther noticed this in Bucer and, on one occasion, complained that whenever anyone disagreed with Bucer, Bucer would accuse him of a lack of love.

It surely has to be one of church history's supreme ironies that when Bucer's body was about to be exhumed for burning, upon the coming to power of England of Mary Tudor, the sermon that was preached to condemn him took for its text Psalm 133, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" in order to damn Bucer as a violator of this unity!

Second, Bucer himself firmly maintained the great Reformation doctrines, even when, for the sake of unity, he was compromising them in the

19 Wilhelm Pauck, *The Heritage of the Reformation* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), pp. 85-99.

20 Pauck, *Heritage*, p. 98.

21 Quoted in Wright, *Martin Bucer*, p. 33. Bucer wrote this in 1526.

22 Pauck, *Heritage*, p. 97.

formulas of unity that he was devising. After all the efforts at unity had failed, and even Bucer saw the hopelessness of his cause, he wrote sound expositions, and strong defenses, of the Reformed Faith, sharply condemning the errors both of Rome and of Lutheranism. Even while he was compromising the truth, Bucer usually, if not invariably, did so by way of ambiguous phrases, so that Bucer, at least, could still understand the concession in a sound sense. An example of this is Bucer's concession to Luther at the Wittenberg Conference of 1536 that the unworthy eat and drink Christ's body and blood in the Supper. Bucer created a distinction, in his own mind, between the unbelieving ungodly and unworthy believers. By the unworthy who still eat Christ's body, Bucer then would understand the unworthy believers. He knew full well, of course, that Luther meant, and supposed that Bucer also meant, the unbelieving ungodly. Bucer's personal steadfastness in the truth was manifested at the end of his life by his rejection of the Interim of Augsburg, which required acceptance of Roman Catholic worship, even though the price he paid was banishment from Strasbourg and exile from Germany.

Third, as regards Bucer's attempt to make peace between Lutherans and Zwinglians, in the matter of the Lord's Supper, men ought to have labored long and hard to heal the breach. That division within Protestantism was, in fact, a grievous event – separating very brothers; giving the Roman Catholic adversaries of the Reformation occasion to blaspheme; and seemingly hindering the great work of the increase of the Word of God. Besides, Bucer really did see that Luther's deepest concern for a real presence of Christ in the Supper did not require the physical presence that Luther opted for. He saw also that Luther's demand for a physical presence of Christ actually contradicted Luther's own basic doctrine that salvation is by faith, and by faith only, and, therefore, is for the believer, and for the believer only. Luther's own Gospel denied that salvation is by mouth, or for everyone with an open mouth at Communion. More than once, as Luther was pouring out his fury on Bucer's doctrine of a spiritual presence and a spiritual partaking, Bucer responded as he did in 1524, in his *Grund und ursach*: "Dr. M. Luther himself always directed our gaze toward the Spirit and to faith, as he has in fact written." There is something noble about Bucer's dogged pursuit of a Protestant peace, when many of the parties were settling comfortably into their divided state.

Nevertheless, Bucer's zeal for unity, like the Jews' zeal of God, in Romans 10:2, was not according to knowledge. It was fanatical – frenzied, foolish, fired by feeling. For this reason, it was dangerous. Still worse, in its practice, Bucer's zeal for unity was wicked. It falls under the judgment of God's Word. First, it is not men's communion with each

other, but our love for God is primary. "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God" is the first and great commandment, not "thou shalt love thy neighbor." This love for God is expressed in the love of His truth; and communion with Him consists of the fellowship of the Word and doctrine. John T. McNeill is wrong, therefore, to defend Bucer by asserting that "he need not be thought unprincipled because he put the principle of charity before that of theological rectitude."²³

Bucer compromised God's truth, endeavoring to create peace at the expense of the truth. For this, in the second place, the judgment of God's Word falls upon Bucer's efforts at church unity. It is painful for a Reformed man to relate that the Roman Catholic historian, Joseph Lortz, excoriated the "conciliatory theology" of those who were laboring for the reunion of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism at Regensburg, with particular reference to Martin Bucer. In his important work, *The Reformation in Germany*, Lortz harshly condemns the theological relativism that prevailed at the conferences of the Protestants and Roman Catholics during the period, 1539-1541:

It was perfectly logical that the most active centres of conciliation should have come to be – on the Protestant side – those territories where the a-dogmatic standpoint inherited from humanistic relativism, was most in evidence.²⁴

Lortz is searing in his indictment of Bucer:

Martin Bucer. . . was a humanist. His accommodating tendencies in politics were in harmony with his mediatorial ideas in the sphere of Church and theology. This theological humanist sought to achieve utter simplification – beginning with himself. He was completely relativistic, and with him theological distinctions lost all weight. He was a disaster for Protestantism, for he was unable to avoid this relativism. . . . And so the notion that dogmatic distinctions were irrelevant gained more and more ground. . . .²⁵

One need not accept this judgment upon Bucer to agree with Lortz that, at the conferences at Hagenau, Worms, and Regensburg in 1540 and 1541, "the truth. . . has become in some degree the object of negotiation."²⁶ This was an attack on God's Name and worship; and it was a threat to the Reformation itself. Besides, it was powerless to effect any genuine unity, for true unity is the unity of faith, i.e., the unity of the doctrine of Holy

23 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, p. 147.

24 Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, Ronald Walls, tr., Volume 2 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 254.

25 Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, Volume 1, p. 340.

26 Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, Volume 2, pp. 254, 255.

Scripture.

In contrast to Bucer, Luther and Calvin clearly saw the evil of compromise for the sake of unity. At the time of the conference at Augsburg in 1530, Luther wrote Melancthon, who was also afflicted with the willingness to surrender truth for peace: "You must not give up any more of the truth. . . To my mind, you have given up too much already. The truth is not yours to give up, but God's." In 1538, in a letter to Bucer, Calvin criticized Bucer's concessions to Luther in the interests of Protestant unity. Bucer, wrote Calvin, "had yielded too much to Luther, who mingled ambition with his piety, instead of seeking 'a sincere concord in the pure Word of God.'" ²⁷ On another occasion, Calvin gave Bucer a stinging rebuke:

If you want a Christ Who is acceptable to all, you must not fabricate a new gospel for that purpose. ²⁸

Third, Bucer placed too much emphasis upon the organizational aspect of church unity; and he depended far too much, therefore, upon man's shrewd efforts to achieve it. If only Bucer could hammer out a formula, if only he could get all parties to sign a document, churches previously divided would be united. Therefore, Bucer resorted to deliberate ambiguity, equivocation, and tortured qualifications that rather concealed differences than revealed oneness. He was not above sheer dishonesty. Once, having been authorized to translate a book of Luther's sermons, Bucer inserted his own views on the Lord's Supper, in order to manufacture agreement between Lutherans and Zwinglians, before the Protestant public. This enraged Luther. To the end of his life, Luther bitterly complained of Bucer's treachery:

. . . first (Bucer wrote). . . a virulent and sacrilegious preface, then in noxious notes he has crucified my work. ²⁹

The extremes to which Bucer would go in making distinctions and qualifications, supposedly to clarify, but actually leaving all in a state of bewilderment, is apparent in Bucer's definition of the word, "truly," in

²⁷ McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, p. 181. In accounting for Bucer's concessions to Luther, one should not discount the factor of Luther's powerful, personal influence. David C. Steinmetz remarks that "even such an experienced ecclesiastical politician as Martin Bucer could be reduced to putty when Luther turned on the full force of his personality." Cf. *Luther in Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 113.

²⁸ Letter of Calvin to Bucer, January 12, 1538. Quoted in Pauck, *Heritage*, p. 89.

²⁹ Quoted in Eells, *Martin Bucer*, p. 81.

the context of the presence of Christ's body in the Supper, at an important conference:

I believe that by virtue of the words, "this is my body," the body of the Lord is truly (that is, substantially and essentially, but not quantitatively or locally, that is, substantially and really, but not in measure of size or quality or measurement of the place) in the Supper, is present and is given.³⁰

Worldly statesmen appreciated Bucer's methods. Chancellor Bruck praised him: ". . . among all the theologians now living, Bucer is truly an excellent man for negotiating in theological affairs after the manner of the world,"³¹ damning praise for a Reformed theologian. The admiration of the shrewd Cardinal Contarini for Bucer's "subtlety and ingenuity" at the Diet of Regensburg was similar:

The Germans also have Martin Bucer, a man deeply learned in the principles of theology and philosophy, and in disputation he shows such subtlety and ingenuity, that all by himself he was able to withstand our doctors.³²

These same methods were odious to the Protestant theologians. Bullinger coined the word, "bucerize" – a verb meaning 'to equivocate, to deceive, to play ecclesiastical politics.' Even Bucer's dependency on conferences for producing unity must be faulted, inasmuch as this replaced dependency upon the Holy Spirit working unity by the truth. Again, it was Luther who saw this flaw in the innumerable conferences and exclaimed, "I care nothing for diets and councils, believe nothing, hope nothing, think nothing – Vanity of vanities!"

Fourth, Bucer's exertions on behalf of church unity were tainted by political motivations (which is not to say that these were selfish, or self-seeking, motivations on Bucer's part). In those days, church unity was desirable to the princes for the sake of political union and their own earthly advantage. Bucer, a close friend and chief advisor of Philip, the Landgrave of Hesse, allowed himself to be used by Philip for Philip's political ends in the matter of seeking the unity of Protestants. As regards the conferences that sought the reunion of Roman Catholics and Protestants, at which Bucer played a leading role:

Those colloquies were deeply involved in the oppositions of imperial, papal and French politics. . . Charles (V, Emperor – DJE) greatly needed a settlement in the Empire (on account of France and the Turks – DJE), which

30 Quoted in Hastings Eells, "The failure of church unification efforts during the Germ. Ref. (1529-1555)." *Archiv. Ref.* (42, 1951), p. 164.

31 Eells, *Martin Bucer*, p. 255.

32 Eells, *Martin Bucer*, p. 293.

meant a religious settlement, in order to meet these political challenges.³³

"Not all was pristine purity at Hagenau, Worms, or Regensburg, the sites of the colloquies," writes Hans J. Hillerbrand. "Over the colloquies hovered a peculiar mixture of political and religious considerations, and the former may even have been more important than the latter. The emperor considered religious concord in Germany to be of utmost importance for his political plans. . . ." ³⁴

To permit political motives to intrude upon a seeking of the unity of the Church is to corrupt a spiritual enterprise with carnal considerations. Invariably, this proves fatal to the spiritual enterprise. Worse still, when the Gospel is made to serve the ambitions of princes, Christ is prostituted to the whims and pleasures of the rulers of this world.

Lessons for Our Time

The divisions in the visible Church that Bucer vainly tried to heal were real, significant divisions, due to serious departure from the truth of the Word of God – the division between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism; the division between the Reformation Church and anabaptism; and also the division between the Reformed Church and Lutheranism. These divisions could not be healed slightly by Bucer's methods. It would have been detrimental to, indeed destructive of, the Reformed Faith, if Bucer had healed the divisions by his methods. Although division in the Church is grievous and although those responsible for the division will bear their judgment, Jesus Christ Himself is the cause of division, in the offense of His truth and gospel: "So there was a division among the people because of him" (John 7:43).

The fanaticism of Bucer for unity reminds us of the weakness of man, including good and godly men, so that we never put our confidence in ecclesiastical princes, but in God only, as He is revealed in Scripture. Nor do we commit ourselves unconditionally to the guidance of any man, no matter how highly we otherwise esteem him, but only to the guidance of the Holy Spirit given in the Bible. In seeking the unity of the Church, as in all else, *sola scriptura!*

The lessons to be learned from Bucer's efforts for unity are timely for the Reformed at the end of the 20th century. Ours is the ecumenical age.

33 Hall, "Colloquies," pp. 237, 245.

34 Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The World of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 99.

Reformed Churches are pursuing unity with the very same religious bodies to which Bucer gave his attention. Alliances are sought and formed with the spiritual descendants of anabaptism – Baptists; fundamentalists; and, especially, the charismatics. Rome is wooing all the Christian Churches; and the Reformed are not showing themselves impervious to Rome's blandishments. The Reformed and the Lutherans are holding conferences that seek, and find, unity.³⁵

The passion that Bucer had for unity is in evidence today. If Bucer spent much of his ministry in the saddle, many a modern churchman spends much of his time in airplanes, jetting to and from conferences, committee meetings, and church assemblies, the purpose of which is church unity.

All of Bucer's errors are resurrected. Unity is the supreme calling and goal of the Christian Church, overriding "theological rectitude." Sound doctrine is compromised, or simply ignored. Union is created by formulas that conceal division and by negotiations that rival those of the politicians in cleverness and evasiveness. One may suspect that behind much of the ecumenicity are political ends.

The calling of Reformed men and Churches is not to despise unity and peace, for the unity of the Church is the precious work of the Holy Spirit of Christ. The believer is to esteem unity and to endeavor to keep it (Ephesians 4:1ff.). The Church must manifest the true unity and catholicity of the Church on earth in as far as that is possible. But the Reformed Church must rejoice in the spiritual unity of the Church that the Spirit makes a reality, despite all appearances to the contrary; must pray for, and labor towards, the manifestation of this unity on the basis of the

35 Between 1962 and 1966 Lutheran and Reformed theologians held "theological conversations" under the auspices of the North American Area of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian Order and the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. In addition to the churches represented by these organizations, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Church, and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod participated in the conferences. At the final session, the participants adopted the statement, that they "have recognized in each other's teachings a common understanding of the Gospel and have concluded that the issues which divided the two major branches of the Reformation can no longer be regarded as constituting obstacles to mutual understanding and fellowship." The papers read at the conferences were published as *Marburg Revisited: A reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966). The quotation given above appears in the "Preface." The mediating role of Bucer in the controversy between Lutherans and Reformed did not go unnoticed at the conferences (cf. pp. 44, 45).

truth, without any compromise; and must reject all spurious unity, as well as all Christ-less unity-efforts.

As so often, Martin Luther said it well. When Bucer met him at Coberg, in 1529, after the Marburg Colloquy, with its final rupture between Lutherans and Zwinglians, observing Bucer's despondency over the division and desperation for union, Luther gently chided the Reformed Pastor of Strasbourg:

Martin, Martin, are you really serious? It's better for you to have us as your enemies than to set up a merely fictitious fellowship.³⁶

□

The Elders of the Church

Prof. Robert D. Decker

Samuel Miller, the great Princeton theologian of the 19th century, said that if he could address all the members of the Presbyterian churches in America he would write them as follows:

Christian Brethren,

Every consideration which has been urged to show the importance and duties belonging to the office of Ruling Elders, ought to remind you of the important duties which you owe to them. Remember, at all times, that they are your ecclesiastical Rulers; Rulers of your own choice; yet by no means coming to you in virtue of mere human authority; but in the name and by the appointment of the great Head of the Church, and, of course, the "ministers of God to you for good."

In all your views and treatment of them, then, recognize this character. Obey them "in the Lord," that is, for his sake, and as far as they bear rule agreeably to his word. "Esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake." And follow them daily with your prayers, that God would bless them, and make them a blessing. Reverence them as your leaders. Bear in mind the importance of their office, the arduousness of their duties, and the difficulties with which they have to contend. Countenance, and sustain them in every act of fidelity; make allowance for their infirmities; and be not unreasonable in your expectations from them.

Many are ready to criminate the Elders of the Church, for not taking notice of particular offences, as speedily, or in such manner, as they expect. And this disposition to find fault is sometimes indulged by persons who have

36 Martin Luther's "Table Talk" in: *Luther's Works*, Volume 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 196.

never been so faithful themselves as to give that information which they possessed, respecting the alleged offences; or who, when called upon publicly to substantiate that which they have privately disclosed, have drawn back, unwilling to encounter the odium or the pain of appearing as accusers, or even as witnesses. Such persons ought to be the last to criminate church officers for supposed negligence of discipline. Can your Rulers take notice of that which never comes to their knowledge? Or can you expect them, as prudent men, rashly to set on foot a judicial and public investigation of things, concerning which many are ready to whisper in private, but none willing to speak with frankness before a court of Christ? Besides, let it be recollected, that the session of almost every Church is sometimes actually engaged in investigating charges, in removing offences, and in composing differences, which many suppose they are utterly neglecting, merely because they do not judge it to be for edification, in all cases, to proclaim what they have done, or are doing, to the congregation at large.

Your Elders will sometimes be called – God grant that it may seldom occur! – But they will sometimes be called to the painful exercise of discipline. Be not offended with them for the performance of this duty. Rather make the language of the Psalmist your own; – “Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.” Add not to the bitterness of their official task, by discovering a resentful temper, or by indulging in reproachful language, in return for their fidelity. Surely the nature of the duty is sufficiently self-denying and distressing, without rendering it more so by unfriendly treatment. Receive their private warnings and admonitions with candor and affectionate submission. Treat their public acts, however, contrary to your wishes, with respect and reverence. If they be honest and pious men, can they do less than exercise the discipline of Christ’s house, against such of you as walk disorderly? Nay, if you be honest and pious yourselves, can you do less than approve of their faithfulness in exercising that discipline? If you were aware of all the difficulties which attend this part of the duty of your Eldership, you would feel for them more tenderly, and judge concerning them more candidly and indulgently than you are often disposed to do. Here you have it in your power, in a very important degree, to lessen their burdens, and to strengthen their hands.

When your Elders visit your families, for the purpose of becoming acquainted with them, and of aiding the Pastor in ascertaining the spiritual state of the flock, remember that it is not officious intrusion. It is nothing more than their duty. Receive them, not as if you suspected them of having come as spies or busy intruders, but with respect and cordiality. Convince them, by your treatment, that you are glad to see them; that you wish to encourage them in promoting the best interests of the Church; and that you honor them for their fidelity. Give them an opportunity of seeing your children, and of ascertaining whether your households are making progress in the Christian life. Nay, encourage your children to put themselves in the way of the Elders, that they may be personally known to them, and may become the objects of their affectionate notice, their occasional exhortation, and their pious prayers. Converse with the Elders freely, as with fathers, who “have no greater joy than to see you walking in the truth.” And ever give them cause to retire

under the pleasing persuasion, that their office is honored, that their labors "are not in vain in the Lord." In short, as every good citizen will make conscience of vindicating the fidelity, and holding up the hand of the faithful Magistrate, who firmly and impartially executes the law of the land: so every good Christian ought to feel himself bound in conscience and honor, as well as in duty to his Lord, to strengthen the hands, and encourage the heart of the spiritual Ruler, who evidently seeks, in the fear of God, to promote the purity and edification of the Church.¹

We want to begin by examining the several terms found in the Scripture to refer to the office of Elder. In the Old Testament there is the word *zageer* which is translated "Elder." In some instances this word refers to old age. (Cf. Gen. 43:27 and similar passages.) More often the word is used to refer to the chief men or the rulers of the people. (Cf. Ex. 3:16; 17:5; 18:12, 17-27; 24:1, 9; Num. 11:16; Deut. 25:7-9; Josh. 7:6; Judges 2:7; I Sam. 4:3; II Sam. 3:17; I Kings 8:1.) From these and other passages we may conclude that at least from the time of Moses Israel had Elders over the nation (perhaps this refers to the seventy, Num. 11:24), as well as elders over cities and towns; elders over thousands, over hundreds, over fifties, and over tens. These elders judged and ruled both civil and ecclesiastical (moral, ethical) matters. It ought to be remembered in this connection that Israel is the typical theocracy. At least in ecclesiastical matters (doctrine and life) we may trace the origin of the office of elder to these elders in Israel.

In the intertestamentary period we find the rise of the institution called the synagogue. The precise origin of the synagogue is unknown. They probably arose after the captivity of Judah and during the time that the Jews were dispersed. This would place them sometime during the four hundred years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. These synagogues were places of worship where the law and the prophets were expounded. The synagogues were governed by a chief ruler who did the teaching and by a group of elders or rulers.²

In the New Testament we find the word *presbuteros* which corresponds to the Hebrew *zageer*, and this word is translated "elder." This word refers to aged men and women in some passages of Scripture. (Cf. I Tim. 5:1, 2.)

1 Samuel Miller, *The Ruling Elder* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1987), pp. 211-214.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-43. Miller traces the New Testament Office of elder to that of the elders of the synagogue and the elders of Israel. While this is partly true, it is better to find the origin of the office of elder in the threefold office of Christ; *viz.*, the kingly aspect of the office of Christ.

More frequently, however, it refers to the office of elder in the church (cf. I Tim. 5:17-19; I Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20:17, 28; James 5:14). These latter two passages speak of the "elders of the church." These men need not be older or aged men, but they must be mature in the faith. (Cf. I Tim. 3:6.)

A second word is *episkopos* and is translated "bishop" in the Authorized Version. The literal meaning of the term is "overseer," "one charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly," or "superintended." (Cf. J.H. Thayer, *Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*.) That this term refers to the elders of the Church is plain from I Timothy 3:1-8 where the apostle describes the qualifications for the office of elder in the church. In a parallel passage (Titus 1:5-9) both *presbuteros* and *episkopos* are used and, therefore, both refer to the elders of the church. The basic notion of this word is that of oversight or rule.

Another term *poimeen* is translated "shepherd" and is used with the *didaskalos* (Eph. 4:11). Notice that here Scripture makes no distinction between the ruling and the teaching elder. Both are included in the "pastors and teachers," i.e., both ministers and elders are pastors and teachers in the church. The elders, therefore, are pastors who shepherd the flock of God primarily by means of teaching.

In addition there are various verbs in both the Hebrew and Greek which give us some insights into the office of elder. The verb *heegeomai* means "leader, to go before, to have authority over" (Heb. 13:7, 17). The verb *poimainoo* means "to tend a flock of sheep, to shepherd." This is a comprehensive term which also means "to nourish, protect, guide, rule, correct," etc. (Cf. I Pet. 5:2; John 21:16.) The Hebrew verb *raab* means the same as *poimainoo*, and is translated "to shepherd" (Ps. 23:1; Jer. 3:15). The Greek verb *boskoo* is a bit narrower in scope than *poimainoo*. This word means "to feed" in the sense of nourish. (Cf. Luke 8:32; John 21:15.)

The fundamental principle of the office of elder is that Jesus Christ is *the* office bearer of God's church. This is abundantly clear from Scripture. In John 10:11-30 Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." I Peter 2:25 teaches that Christ is the "shepherd and bishop of our soul." Christ has the right to "rule or shepherd the sheep" through His cross and resurrection. In Matthew 28:18 our Lord says "all power is given unto me." The word "power" is the Greek word *exousia* which means "authority." This truth is beautifully taught in the Reformed confessions.³

3 The Heidelberg Catechism, questions 31; 54; 65-68; 83-85. The Belgic Confession, articles 27-29; 30-32.

Christ cares for His church, exercises His right to rule the church through the elders whom He calls through the church. Scripture teaches this in many passages (cf. Matt. 28:18-19; Eph. 4:11ff.; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). The Reformed confessions teach this as well.⁴

This truth has serious implications both for those whom Christ calls to serve in office and for those over whom they rule. The elders are *servants* of Jesus Christ. They do not receive their mandate or right to govern from the congregation. The church is not a democracy. Wm. Heyns, commenting on this point, said:

According to the Calvinistic conception of the ecclesiastical offices the office-bearers are servants and representatives of *Christ*, as officials who are appointed by Him and receive from Him their mandate and authority, to the end that they should serve Him in the continuation of His official work. This means that the elders are appointed and authorized to serve Him in His kingly work of governing the church.⁵

Elders are accountable in all of their labor to Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:17). From this point of view the elders are not representatives of the people. We must not define the office in terms of service and servanthood to the people of God as so many do in our day. Wm. Heyns was correct when he said:

Having thus placed in the foreground that the official relation of the office-bearers is primarily a relation to Christ, that they are first of all His representatives. . . and that the ecclesiastical power and authority were given directly to them, we may now consider in what sense it is also true that the Elders are representatives of the people, that the office-bearers are organs of the church, and that the ecclesiastical power was given to the church. That the elders represent the people cannot be denied. It is expressly stated in the Form of Ordination of Elders, and evidenced in actual church government. In this Form we read that "The ministers, together with the elders, form a body or assembly, being a council of the church, representing the whole church." And in actual church government the actions and decisions of the consistory take the place of actions and decisions of the whole church. The elders are, therefore, representatives of Christ, and they also represent the people, but there is a difference in the manner in which they represent both, depending on the difference of the nature of their official relation to Christ, and that of their official relation to the church. Their official relation to Christ is that of *servants*, and it is in that capacity, and in so far as they are true to the charge He gave them, that they represent Christ. Their official relation to the church,

4 Cf. the references in note 3 above. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, art. 3-4.

5 Wm. Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1928), p. 17.

however, is that of lawful *rulers*, being appointed and authorized by Christ to rule His church in conformity with His Word, and it is in this capacity that they represent the church.⁶

The elders must care for God's people with the Word of God. They must not come with the words of men or their own opinions. In all their ruling, watching, and caring for the flock of God they must come with the Holy Scriptures. And God's people must obey them. (Cf. Heb. 13:7, 17; I Thess. 5:12-13.)

This ought to be a tremendous encouragement to the elders of the church. The Christ who calls them and gives them the right to govern His blood-bought sheep is the Christ who also qualifies them by His grace for their work. The elders may depend on this. Through them Christ will care for His church. He will give them the strength, the ability, a word in season and out of season. But Christ does this by means. And this means that the elders must study, know, and grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures and be much in prayer, for God gives His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who with sincere desire continually ask them of Him and are thankful for them (cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 116).

In general the task or duties of the elders are described in several articles of the *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. Article 16 speaks of the duties which the elders have in common with the minister, and these duties are church discipline (cf. Art. 71-86). Article 23 also says that everything must be done decently and in good order in the church. This article reflects the scriptural teaching of Hebrews 13:7, 17 and I Thessalonians 5:14, 15 which admonish the elders to take the rule over the people of God. Article 23 of the *Church Order* teaches that the elders must oversee the work of their fellow office-bearers including the minister. The elders must conduct family visitation. In addition they must visit the families of the congregation in order to comfort and instruct them and to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion. Article 21 of the *Church Order* speaks of the elders' responsibility to see to it that there are good Christian schools.

The Qualifications for the Office of Elder

Scripture has much to say on the subject of the qualifications for the office of elder and in many passages. Two of these passages demand careful and detailed examination. The first of these is I Timothy 3:1-7 which reads:

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

1. This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.
2. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach:
3. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;
4. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;
5. For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?
6. Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.
7. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

The second passage is Titus 1:5-9 which reads:

5. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:
6. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.
7. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;
8. But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;
9. Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

There are four comments we wish to make in general about these qualifications. These gifts and/or qualifications do not apply to the elders of the church only or exclusively. These must characterize all of God's people. But especially must they be seen in the elders.

While it is true that all of these qualifications must be evident in a man if he is to be an elder in the church not all of the elders will possess all of the qualifications in equal or full measure. One man, for example, may possess more of one qualification than others. But all in some measure must characterize every elder. Elders too, it must be remembered, must grow and develop in sanctification.

Note the little word "must" in I Timothy 3:2. Literally the verse reads: "It is necessary therefore, that the bishop be blameless. . . ." This same word "must" is used by Jesus in John 3:7: "Ye *must* be born again." Regeneration is essential to salvation. Without this work of the Holy Spirit in one's heart he cannot even see the kingdom of God. Likewise these qualifications (the "must" applies not just to "blameless" but to all of the qualifications) are essential gifts for the office of elder. Without them a man cannot and may not serve as an elder. Hence consistories

and congregations must take great care in nominating and electing men who possess these gifts of the Holy Spirit. Lawrence Eyres puts the matter well when he writes:

As complex as the application of such rules may seem under certain life situations, there is no excuse for our setting them aside or taking them with anything less than the utmost seriousness. The flock of Christ is too dearly bought for us to afflict it with the rule of men less gifted and diligent than the Word of God specifies! It ought to be the constant prayer of the church that her Lord and Head will raise up such men to teach and rule His people. And let those who aspire to this office set foot upon that narrow path with fear and trembling. They are not, in themselves, sufficient for these things; their sufficiency can only be from the Lord, who dearly loves His bride the church.⁷

I Timothy 3:1 speaks of a man desiring the office of a bishop. While young men desire or aspire to the office of the ministry we do not often think of men desiring and/or seeking the office of elder. This ought not be! We should think of men desiring this office. Young men, possessing these qualifications, ought to desire the office of elder. They ought to prepare prayerfully for the office by reading and studying the Scriptures and the confessions of the church. They ought to prepare by reading good Christian books on doctrine, church history, the *Church Order*, etc. They ought to cultivate and develop these gifts and be willing to serve if called by Christ through His church.

The first group of these qualifications is largely positive. The list is headed in the I Timothy 3 passage by "blameless." The Greek term here is *anepilepton* which literally means: "not open to censure, irreproachable." In all of his life there must be nothing worthy of censure, not even a hint of anything. The elder must be a man of unquestionable morality and uprightness.

He must also be the "husband of one wife." This does not mean that the elder must be a married man. Paul as an apostle was also an elder (I Pet. 5:1) and he was a bachelor. The point is that the elder must be beyond reproach in his marriage. He must be a good and faithful husband, married in the Lord. He must not be a fornicator or an adulterer. He must be chaste whether he be married or living in single life.

The next three qualifications may be taken together though they must be distinguished. The elder must be "vigilant." Vigilant means the elder must be seriously minded. He must as well be alert to the dangers which

⁷ Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975), p. 36.

threaten God's people both in doctrine and in life. He must be aware of the temptations God's people face from the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh. The word sober, *soophroan* in the Greek, means "of sound mind." The elder must be discreet and not swayed by sudden impulses. He must always be ready and willing to listen and to form sound judgments. "Of good behavior," *kosmion* in the Greek, refers to orderliness, a well-ordered life. The elder must live with decorum and modesty. He must have his life's affairs in order: his work, family, finances, etc. Taking all three of these together the elder must have a good mind, be able to look at things objectively and fairly. He must be able to rise above his own feelings and prejudices about others. The next qualification mentioned is "given to hospitality," *philoxenon* in the Greek. Literally this term means "a lover of strangers." This does not merely mean that the elder's house is open to all or that he is willing to provide food, shelter, fellowship to the needy. It means this too, but there is much more. A hospitable elder is one whose heart is open to the needy, the poor, the lonely widow or widower, the little lambs of the flock, the young man or woman in the church who has no friends, the sick, the sorrowing, the anxious, the despairing, the fearful. Hospitality refers to a willingness to spend one's self and be spent for the saints. It is to be truly sympathetic, to "feel with" God's people in their needs after the example of our merciful Highpriest, Jesus (Heb. 4:15, 16).

The elder must be "apt to teach," *didaktikon* in the Greek. The elder must be "apt," i.e., skillful in teaching, qualified to teach. This certainly implies that the elder has a calling to teach. He is a "pastor-teacher" according to Ephesians 4:11 and I Thessalonians 5:12-15. The reference here is not merely to teaching catechism or Sunday School classes or leading Bible-study societies. But in all his spiritual oversight of the fellow office-bearers and congregation the elder is busy teaching. Family visitation, sick-visiting, comforting the sorrowing, counseling those with problems, ruling and governing the congregation, admonishing the wayward, exercising discipline; all of these functions involve teaching. God's Word must be brought to bear in all these circumstances and to all of these needs. Elders need teaching skills and they need to develop this gift of teaching first by prayerful study of the Word of God itself. They must also study the doctrines of Holy Scripture as set forth in the Reformed confessions. They must as well study the good books on Christian doctrine and the Christian life. They must study the fathers of the church.

The second group of qualifications listed in these passages is largely negative. The elder must be "not given to wine." Literally the elder must not be "one who sits long at his wine." In plain words the elder must not

be a drunkard, one addicted to alcohol. Scripture does not forbid the use (moderate) of alcohol. Jesus made and drank wine. Paul in this same letter tells Timothy to use "a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (I Tim. 5:23). But drunkenness is everywhere condemned by Scripture; and certainly one who is enslaved by this sin is not fit for the office of elder.

The elder must be no "striker," *mee pleekteen* in the Greek. This man is a bruiser, always ready with a blow, contentious, pugnacious, and quarrelsome. Closely related is the "brawler," *amachon* in the Greek, mentioned in the same verse. This latter term was no doubt added for emphasis. It refers to hardheadedness, unreasonableness and hence a brawler, one who is always fighting. We ought to note in this connection that most brawling in the church is done with words. We do well to take to heart these comments of Samuel Miller:

These, and simliar considerations, serve clearly to show, that no degree of piety can supercede the necessity of prudence in ecclesiastical rule; and that, of all characters in a congregation, an indiscreet, meddling, garrulous, gossiping, tattling Elder, is one of the most pestiferous.⁸

Such men do not seek the peace of Jerusalem. In pride they seek themselves. The result is that the congregation is torn by schism and strife, confusion, and all kinds of evil. God's people cannot grow in the knowledge of the truth and in the grace of the Lord Jesus under such circumstances. Such men scatter the sheep and are not fit to rule and care for God's people!

By way of sharp contrast the elder must be "patient," *epieikee*. The elder must be no striker and no brawler, but he must be patient! The word itself means: "seemly, suitable, equitable, fair, mild, gentle." This kind of man is fair-minded, willing to listen to all sides of a question. When convinced by the Word of God he stands without compromise, but when convinced by the Word of God that his position is in error, he readily admits that he is wrong. Gently and with the long suffering of Christ he leads and guides the sheep. He bears with the weak. He does not try to drive the sheep, which always results in scattering them.

The elder must not be "covetous," *aphilarquron*. This word is literally to be translated "not a lover of money." The love of money is the root of all evil. (Cf. I Tim. 6:6-10.) Riches or money in themselves are not sinful. To love money and to seek wealth is indeed very sinful. We are called to be good, faithful stewards of the Lord's gifts. Our money must

⁸ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

be used for God's kingdom. Certainly a covetous lover of money is unfit to oversee God's church. We should note that "not greedy of filthy lucre," *mee aischrokerdee*, does not appear in the best manuscripts. The word means "eager for base or ill-gotten gain." This whole idea is certainly covered by "covetousness."

Verses 4-7 of 1 Timothy 3 list three other qualifications. An elder must rule well his own house. He must be no tyrant, but a faithful husband and father. The elder must be one who has his children in subjection with all gravity. An elder must not have unruly, disobedient children. The reason given for this is that if one does not know how to rule his own house he can not take care of the church.

The elder must be "not a novice," *mee neophuton*. A novice is one newly planted in the faith, a recent convert. These are often full of zeal initially, but they have not yet been tested or proved in the battle of faith. They need experience and need to be proved. The danger in electing a novice is that he will become proud and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

This is no doubt why Paul and Barnabas waited one year before ordaining elders in the new churches established on their first missionary journey (Acts 14:21-23; cf. also 1 Tim. 5:22). Some churches have a rule that new converts or people coming from other denominations must attend services and participate in the life of the church for one year before becoming members.

Finally, the elders must have a good "report of those outside of the church." In the Greek the term is *marturian kaleen*. A good report means a good testimony. An elder must not have a bad reputation in the work place or neighborhood or community. He must be known as a sincere, honest, and irreproachable Christian. If he does not have this testimony he falls into reproach and the snare (trap) of the devil and this brings shame to the name of Christ and His body, the church.

Putting all the above mentioned qualifications together it may be said that the elder must have the following qualifications or gifts of the spirit. He must have spirituality or genuine piety. An elder must be a child of God. It is true that there are hypocrites among the elders. Two things may be said about this: 1) These never last. Sooner or later they are exposed and leave the church or are put out of office. 2) These are not the rule but the exceptions. Elders must be spiritual, pious, godly men. They must be men saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God's gift. Elders must be men in whose hearts burns the love of God in Christ, men who love God and God's people, His church and cause.

Elders must be men of humility. There is no room for pride among the

elders. Pride, the Bible says, goes before destruction. Self-seeking pride, selfishness, the seeking of the praise of men, all these are abominable sins among God's people, especially among elders. Elders must be humble men. As apostles they are slaves of God and His church. Elders give their lives in the service of the church. Thus elders are men of prayer. They know that all that they have and are are of God. They know that they cannot watch for the souls of God's people, admonish one wayward saint, visit one sick person, apart from God's grace. They pray without ceasing for God's grace and Holy Spirit to enable them to shepherd the flock of God.

Elders must be men of sympathetic understanding. Jesus, our great Highpriest, is touched with the feelings of our infirmities and was tempted in all points as we, yet without sin. That is why we can find in Him mercy and grace to help in our need. The servants of Christ must know God's people, their needs, struggles, joys, afflictions, sorrows. And elders must feel with God's people and understand them so as to bring God's Word to those needs.

Elders must also be men of courage or boldness. The apostle Paul asked the saints to pray that he might have boldness to preach (Eph. 6:18, 19). The elders need boldness too. They need boldness to hold fast the truth and insist on good preaching. They need boldness to discipline the wayward even to the point of the last remedy if necessary. With the ministers and deacons of the church the elders stand in the front line of the battle of faith. This takes spiritual courage! Finally the elders must be examples to the people of God. The apostle in Philippians 3:17-21 admonishes the people of God to be followers of Him. Followers are imitators of Him. The elders likewise must be able to say to the congregation "follow us as your examples. Do as we do, speak as we speak, live as we live." The actions of the elders must not contradict their teachings (1 Tim. 3:4-12).

Addendum

Some guide questions for sermon evaluation.

1. Does the theme capture the main thought of the text?
2. Is the main thought of the text clearly and logically developed, so that the congregation is able to follow and understand the sermon?
3. Is the thought of the sermon properly applied? Does this application arise out of the text?
4. In close connection with this, is there *direct application* in the sermon? Is the congregation *addressed*? Does the sermon speak *to* the people of God, or merely *about* them?
5. Is the text viewed in its context? Is it viewed in the light of the

whole Scripture? – in the light of the fact that Scripture interprets Scripture?

6. Is the language of the text correctly and thoroughly explained?
7. Are the concepts in the text adequately and correctly developed?
8. Are the relationships between the various parts of the text adequately explained?
9. Are the above three items merely talked *about* and *skirted*, or are they explained directly?
10. Does the sermon expound the main thought of the text?
11. To sum up, is the Word of God in Christ, as conveyed by the text, clearly expounded and proclaimed? Is Christ crucified central in the sermon, either explicitly or by clear implication?
12. Is the sermon soundly Reformed and free from heresy?
13. Is the sermon antithetical, both with respect to doctrine and life?
14. Is our distinctive Protestant Reformed position (particularly in connection with 1924 and 1953) set forth? This does not mean that 1924 and/or 1953 must be explicitly mentioned in every sermon. But does the sermon reckon with and emphasize our distinctive heritage?
15. Does the sermon give evidence that it is made in the light of our confessions and in unity with the church of the past and the heritage of our fathers?
16. Does the sermon serve to edify the congregation?
17. Does the sermon hold the attention and interest of the congregation?
 - a. With respect to delivery – is the sermon interestingly or dully delivered? Eye contact? Reading? Gestures? Change of volume, pitch, and rate in voice?
 - b. Is the language clear, interesting, emphatic?
 - c. Does the sermon and its delivery give evidence that it lives in the heart and soul of the preacher?

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Book Reviews

Genesis, A Devotional Commentary, by W.H. Griffith Thomas. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, Publishers, 1988. 507pp. \$14.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. D.H. Kuiper.]

We are informed on the back cover and in the foreword that William Henry Griffith Thomas (1861-1924) "was a minister, scholar, and teacher, born in Owestry, Shropshire, England. His varied Christian service included pastoral work in Oxford and London, England, professorate at Wycliffe College in Toronto, Canada, worldwide Bible conference ministry, and prolific writing. He was also co-founder with Lewis Sperry Chafer and Alex B. Win-

chester of Dallas Theological Seminary." However, Thomas died in June of 1924 before he could take up teaching duties at Dallas. This volume is one of eight that Kregel is printing under a series entitled "W.H. Griffith Thomas Memorial Library."

This book claims to be a devotional commentary, and it fulfills this claim admirably. There are sixty-eight chapters; each chapter is introduced by the text of Genesis in the King James Version. Although this is not a verse-by-verse commentary, the important features of each chapter are developed under several perceptive headings, and each chapter ends with a practical, applicatory section. The Foreword, by Walter

C. Kaiser, Jr., informs us that "Thomas has divided the fifty chapters of Genesis into sixty-seven teaching/preaching units. Each of these blocks of text can be used as a basis for an individual devotional on the text or as a teaching block of text." Although we would not agree that the Book of Genesis could be adequately preached upon in sixty-seven sermons, nor that the book adequately faces and answers every question, without doubt Thomas has caught the importance of this introductory book and sets it forth in a beautiful, devotional style. He writes clearly and reverently. Delightful quotes from unnamed sources abound. Any student of Scripture would profit from a careful reading of this commentary, and it would serve well for society preparation.

The commentary has several strengths. First, Thomas sees Genesis as a book of generations and observes that the phrase "these are the generations" occurs ten times. He lists these generations (p. 15), and counsels that all thorough study of Genesis ought to proceed along these lines. This is the same view of Genesis, as to plan or division, that is taught in our Seminary, which makes for comfortable reading.

Secondly, Thomas has allowed Scripture to speak to him when he comes to the important idea of the covenant. Without preconceived

ideas, he comes to the conclusion that the covenant is a relation of friendship and fellowship between God and His people; that it is unilateral; that it is universal or cosmic in scope; and that the result is not equality between God and man, but humble, reverent service by the friends of God. Several quotes will show Thomas' emphasis here:

The Source of the covenant naturally comes first. Its author was God. Human covenants were entered into mutually between two parties, but here the entire initiation was taken by God. "I, behold, I" (9:9); "I will" (vs. 11); "I make" (vs. 12); "I have established" (vs. 17). The significance of this is due to the fact that it was of God's free grace alone that the covenant was made. His blessings were to be bestowed even though nothing by man had been done to deserve them. Everything is of grace from first to last. (p. 89)

The Scope of the covenant is also noteworthy (vss. 9, 10). It comprehended Noah and his seed, and not only these, but "every living creature." Thus the blessings of God were to be extended as widely over the earth as they could possibly be. This is not the only place in Scripture where the destiny of the lower creation is intimately connected to that of man (Is. xi:6-8; Rom. viii:19-22). (p. 89)

The Duration of the covenant is also revealed (vss. 12-16). "For perpetual generations." "The everlasting covenant." The un-

conditional and permanent character of the covenant is thus emphasized. God did not demand any pledge of obedience in response to the covenant, but assured Noah of the unconditional Divine faithfulness to His word throughout all generations. (p. 90)

This is another illustration of the fact that God's covenant of grace is divinely one-sided. God is the Giver; man the receiver, not the equal. (p. 155)

In this section we have an illustration of fellowship with God and some of its essential features. Fellowship is the crowning purpose of God's revelation (I John 1:3). There is nothing higher than this, for man's life finds its complete realization in union and communion with God. (p. 161)

It is noteworthy that God only passed through the pieces, and not Abraham as well. This clearly shows that a Divine covenant is not a mutual agreement on equal terms between two parties, but a Divine promise assured and ratified by means of a visible pledge of its fulfillment. This at once takes the Divine covenant out of the category of all similar agreements. It is divinely one-sided. God promises, God gives, God assures. (p. 145)

Abraham's attitude on this occasion is noteworthy. He quickly realized Who had come, and although he had all the privileges of fellowship, he never forgot his own true place and position. So it is always with the true believer. He never forgets that, notwithstanding all the privileges of fellowship, God is

God, and he himself is nothing. Reverence is never separated from the fullest, freest realization of the Gospel of Grace. While we have "access," it is "access into the Holiest" (Heb. x:19). (p. 161)

So we could go on. We appreciate this emphasis and the warm way in which the covenant passages in Genesis are treated. This is not to say that the covenant of grace gets a full treatment, or that we can agree with every statement regarding the covenant. Nothing is said of the covenant as it exists eternally in God; nothing is said of the fact that the covenant is established, first and foremost, with Christ; and sadly, Thomas speaks of four different covenants, "each with its own characteristic features and elements; and only one, the Mosaic, is conditional, a covenant of world" (p. 145). Perhaps we could say that Thomas has grasped the truth of the covenant piecemeal, without seeing it as the unifying truth of all Scripture. Nevertheless, he sees more clearly and confesses more forthrightly this cardinal truth than do most in the Reformed community where covenant consciousness ought to be at the very highest!

As we might expect from a founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, Thomas allows his pre-millennialism to surface at times. He writes, "For the first time God promises the land to Abraham himself. 'To thee will I give it';

hitherto the land had only been promised to his seed (xii:7). Let us ponder these wonderful promises. They are to be interpreted literally and spiritually. They are already having their primary fulfillment in the Church of Christ as Abraham's spiritual seed (Gal. iii:7-9, 16), but there will surely be a literal fulfillment in the future to the Jewish nation (Rom. xi:26-29)" (p. 125). To understand Galatians 3, but not Romans 11 in the light of Galatians 3, is surprising! But these statements are rare, and really do little to detract from the book's value.

We must, however, fault the book seriously in two areas. The first area is that of Thomas' view of the Word of God and its inspiration. Intimately connected to one's view of inspiration, of course, is one's view of creation. In both these areas, Thomas says some things with which we can heartily agree. But in both areas of inspiration and creation, he says strange things, contradictory things, things which fault the book to such an extent that it has little value for the current debate that is dividing churches. He writes in the last chapter, entitled "Review," "Above all, Genesis must ever be studied as the first book of a volume which is called the Word of God. Its presence in this volume is the simple fact that gives it whatever authority it possesses. Unless we ever keep in mind its place as an integral part of a volume which we

believe to be in some sense divinely inspired, we shall never enter into its meaning or really profit by its lessons" (p. 507).

The ambiguity expressed in the words "which we believe to be in some sense divinely inspired" comes across most often in the opening chapters where the author comments on the creation narrative. He asks of the opening chapters of Genesis, "Is it history? This were obviously impossible, since no one was present to observe and record for posterity the events here stated. The contents clearly refer to prehistoric events and time" (p. 25). Again, "As these existing materials are described as 'the dust of the ground,' we see at once how true to scientific fact the statement is in man's point of contact with material creation. If, therefore, we are inclined to hold that so far as man's bodily structure is concerned he is a product of evolution, having come upward from below, we may find in the story of Genesis a possible suggestion of this point" (p. 40). We could wish Thomas less tolerant of evolutionary views, less fond of quoting secular scientists, and more decisive in stating his view of inspiration and creation, and the place that faith in Christ plays in these areas.

With the above noted reservations, we find the book helpful to the understanding of this book of beginnings. □

✓ *Science and Hermeneutics, Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation*, by Vern S. Poythress; Zondervan Publishing House, 1988; 177pp., \$12.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

This book is Volume 6 in the series published under the auspices of Westminster Theological Seminary under the general title, "Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation," of which series Moises Silva is the general editor. Three volumes have thus far been published: a history of Biblical interpretation by the editor, which we have earlier reviewed in this periodical; O.T. interpretation and literary approaches by Prof. Tremper Longman; and this present volume.

When I first picked up this volume, I thought that Prof. Poythress would deal with the problems which arise in the so-called creation/evolution debate as those who are proponents of some form of evolutionism attempt to harmonize Scripture with the findings of science; but this is not the case. Prof. Poythress' concern is of an entirely different kind.

He is concerned with the question of how it is possible for students of Scripture to arrive at different meanings of a given Biblical passage. Using Romans 7:14-25 as a model, he gives a number of different interpretations

of this passage which have been held over the years and wonders aloud on the pages of this book how such widely differing interpretations can all be made of the same passage.

To answer this question, he appeals to a work by Thomas S. Kuhn which has the title, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions." In Kuhn's book, the idea is developed that differing assumptions, experiences, and methods are responsible for differing interpretations of scientific findings. Kuhn, however, does not merely use this obvious fact to explain differing interpretations of scientific data, but also finds in this fact something beneficial to science: important breakthroughs in science which lead to clearer understanding of scientific truth.

Poythress applies this same principle to Biblical interpretation. He explains that differing explanations of various Biblical passages are to be explained by such differing assumptions, experiences, theological traditions, and hermeneutical methods. While sometimes these differences lead to directly opposing interpretations of the text, in which only one interpretation can be right, sometimes differing interpretations do not cancel each other out, but are in their own way compatible. The result is fresh approaches to the text which will lead finally to a correct understanding of God's Word. ?

That is the general drift of the book and that theme Poythress is at great pains to develop.

There is, undoubtedly, an element of truth in what Poythress writes, but I have grave reservations about this approach nonetheless. There are three elements in Biblical interpretation to which Poythress does not pay sufficient attention (although he does give a passing nod to them).

How does the child of God interpret Scripture aright? And how does he know that his interpretation is the correct one when others differ from him in their interpretation? This is an important question. The three truths to which Poythress does not give sufficient account are old truths, dating back to the Reformation when the Reformers faced the same problem by insisting on the sole authority of the Word of God and the right and ability of the individual believer to interpret that Word. The Reformers, after all, were charged by Rome with subjectivism in their position. Rome mockingly accused the Reformers of releasing the Bible to the uneducated and ignorant and allowing each to make the Bible say what he wants. Rome insisted that the church alone had final authority in Biblical interpretation, and that to take the position of the Reformers would not lead to freedom of interpretation, but to heremeneutical license. And they eagerly pointed to the many

divisions in Protestantism to prove their point.

The answer of the Reformers was emphatic and precise; and in giving their answer, they laid down three principles of importance which churches of the Reformation have since maintained.

The first of these is that the one fundamental rule of all Biblical interpretation is this: Scripture Interprets Scripture. This point, so strongly stressed by the Reformers, is given insufficient attention by Poythress. It means that Scripture is its own interpreter. And Scripture is its own interpreter because of a deeper principle: The Holy Spirit is the only One Who is able to interpret God's Word. The Bible is the Holy Spirit's book. He interprets His own book with His book. Scripture must agree with itself. How crucial this is.

Secondly, and still in line with the great truth that the Holy Spirit is Scripture's Interpreter, the Reformers insisted that the child of God who possesses the Spirit is able, by the work of the Spirit within his heart, ^{to} come to an understanding of what the Bible teaches. Luther especially (though Calvin too) spoke of this again and again. We must trust the work of the Spirit. Just because the Spirit is the only Interpreter of Scripture, the enlightening work of the Spirit in the hearts of God's people is absolutely indispensable for

correct Biblical interpretation. So when the Spirit works in the hearts of God's people and they bow in humility before Scripture as a whole, they may be sure that the Spirit will, through Scripture, speak to them the truth. God's people must have confidence in this truth. They must believe that this will surely take place, for if they doubt this, they will despair of ever knowing the truth of God's Word. (If one seeks more information on Luther's view of Scripture, I heartily recommend A. Skevington Wood's book, "Captive to the Word.")

3) Undoubtedly Poythress would argue that, while all this is true, the fact remains that many people, who claim to possess the Spirit and who claim to compare Scripture with Scripture, nevertheless cannot agree on what Scripture teaches in a given passage. The answer to this objection is another principle of the Reformation, one especially emphasized by Calvin. And this too involves the great principle that the Holy Spirit is the Interpreter of Scripture. Calvin pointed to the fact that the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth, promised by the Lord Himself (see John 14-16), leads and guides the church into all truth. The church has a body of truth which has been gleaned by the saints in their study of God's Word over the ages. This body of truth is not, of course, infallible, nor does it

possess an authority greater than the authority of Scripture itself; but it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and must be received as such. Hence all Biblical interpretation which is genuinely dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit must be done within the context of the Confessions of the church. Biblical exegesis is exegesis within the Confessions. The believer who does this does not exalt tradition to a position of authority, but bows in humble submission to the Spirit who has worked in the church from Pentecost. The Bible interpreter who is conscious of this always studies the Scripture with the question in his soul: What did the fathers say about this passage? He does his work as a part of the church. He is never independent of it. He knows that only in fellowship with all the saints and with the great men of God in the past can he do his work. To do anything else is arrogance. This great truth Poythress does not mention.

In summing up his thesis, Poythress says in the last chapter:

The common thread through all our discussion has been the theme that world views, frameworks, and overall contexts influence knowledge and discovery in all areas. Knowledge is qualified by its context (p. 159).

He finds the implications for Biblical interpretation in the following points which he makes:

We are challenged to become

more aware of our dependence on God and of the significant role of the Holy Spirit and of our Christian commitment in influencing the acquisition of knowledge in general and biblical interpretation in particular. . . . At the same time, none of us escapes the influence of our own sin or the sinful biases of the surrounding culture. Hence, we must be self-critical as well as critical of others.

Second, by becoming more aware of the influence of theological systems on interpretation, we are in a better position to conduct dialogue with those adhering to other systems.

Third, as the surrounding culture changes, we may be called upon to undertake a reorganization of our theological system or our interpretive practices in order, without compromising the biblical message, to communicate it more effectively to the people inhabiting the culture. . . .

Fourth, our observations about perspectives challenge us to look at old passages of the Bible in new ways. . . . (pp. 160, 161).

As a footnote, it can be observed that while the editor assures us that this book will help *lay students* as well as professionals in the work of Biblical interpretation, I found the book extremely hard going and could hardly understand at times what the author was saying. This is to be deplored if the book is to assist lay students. The greatest help lay students can receive is the constant assurance that faithful, diligent and humble study of God's Word will lead to

its understanding, for God speaks to His people — all of them, in Scripture. □

Justification by Faith, by Alistair E. McGrath; Zondervan Book House, 1988; 176pp., (no price given). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko].

Alistair McGrath, a young Oxford don, is said to be a rising star in the ecclesiastical sky. His reputation is especially based on a two-volume work on the doctrine of justification by faith, although he has written on other theological subjects, including the doctrine of the trinity. It was with some eagerness that I picked up this volume because the truth of justification by faith was, after all, the central doctrine of Luther's great work of Reformation.

I must admit, however, that the book was a major disappointment. McGrath's treatment of this great reformation truth was not Biblical in many respects, was not always historically accurate, and was developed in a context totally foreign to Reformed thinking.

Undoubtedly the difficulty lies in his stated reason for writing the book and his approach to the doctrine. I want to quote at length from McGrath's book on this point because it is so important. The approach is defined, as one would expect, in the introduction.

From this quotation it is apparent that the author's approach is that of existential philosophy.

Another stumbling block theologians have put in the way of recovering the vitality and relevance of this doctrine (of justification by faith) stems from a mixture of Cartesianism and Platonic idealism. This is the concept of a universal abstract truth that is valid for all people and for all time. For some theologians, the doctrine of justification embodies exactly this sort of universal abstract truth. But is this really right? Is it not actually the case that the doctrine of justification by faith points to a central theme of both the Old and New Testaments — namely, that God wants and intends the restoration of a lost world to himself and to its true nature and destiny by breaking down whatever barriers are placed between it and him, and that in Jesus Christ he actually makes this possible? What we are talking about here is the mediation and manifestation of God's determination to restore his lost world through Jesus Christ *from whatever specific historical forms the human predicament takes at any given moment in time* (emphasis is his).

It may be that the lostness that is experienced in one moment in human history is that of being held captive in slavery in an alien land — in which case the theme of justification by faith points to God's gracious act of liberation in the Exodus. It may be that the lostness experienced at another moment in that history is a profound sense of guilt at moral inadequacy — in which

case the same theme points to God's gracious act of a real and costly forgiveness through the cross of Christ, in which all is squarely faced and all is fairly forgiven. It may be that the lostness experienced at another time is a deep and genuine desire for meaningful and purposeful existence — and once more there is a need to *particularize* the gospel by demonstrating how such an authentic way of existing is made available as a gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like any good preacher, the theologian must know the hopes and fears of his audience if he is to ground the gospel in their experience in order to transform it.

This existential approach is developed in various parts of the book, but particularly in chapter VI, "The Existential Dimension," in which the author finds the chief need of our modern world to which the doctrine of justification must be addressed as that of *Angst*, or anxiety.

But more serious than this, in the very next paragraph following that quoted above, the author discusses his view of what doctrine is.

A further point that must be made concerns the intimate relationship between *doctrine* and *experience*. Doctrines are fundamentally concerned with experience rather than with abstract conceptual truths. In other words, doctrines are attempts to preserve something that is all too easily lost through misunderstanding, namely, an experience. To

use a famous analogy that goes back to Augustine, doctrine is like a hedge that protects a field. The field is the richness of the Christian's redemptive encounter with the living God through Jesus Christ, here and now – and the doctrine is simply an attempt to ensure that this experience can be *verbalized*, put into words, so that it can be passed down from one generation to another. And yet what is passed down from one generation to another is not merely a doctrine, a formula, a form of words, but the living reality and the experience that lie behind them. The doctrine of justification by faith is concerned with the Christian's experience of a redemptive encounter with the living God. It affirms that this encounter really can and does take place and attempts to explain how it may take place – what it is that we must do if we are to have this experience. It cannot adequately describe this experience of God into words, but it points to the reality of the experience and describes how it may be actualized (pp. 12-15).

While this idea is further developed, two additional statements in this same introduction are worth quoting.

What the doctrine of justification by faith offers is not truth concerning God but the possibility of encountering God.

The general principle at issue is that of *contextualization* – or, to put it in plain English, of taking the trouble to think through what the gospel proclamation might mean to the specific situation faced by your hearers.

This is a theme repeatedly discussed.

... The modern preacher must learn to direct his proclamation of the gospel to the felt needs of modern humanity.

... It means taking the trouble to determine how the gospel, with its richness and multifaceted character, impinges upon modern humanity. *The transformation of human existence depends upon prior correlation with that existence* (p. 77).

It is this fundamental error, Barthian in character, which leads to other errors, which we can only briefly mention here. He defines both righteousness and justification as used in the Old Testament incorrectly (pp. 24, 26). He makes faith the condition of justification (p. 29). He suggests that Augustine held to a doctrine of free will and that, therefore, fallen man has only a "serious bias" towards sin (p. 36). He uses the language of existentialism to describe man's condition: "Whether we like it or not, we must all recognize that we enter the world already in a state of inauthentic existence, alienated from our true way of being." "The New Testament... has relatively little interest in *how* we came to be sinners: the important thing is that God has addressed our condition directly in Jesus Christ" (p. 85).

We may observe in parentheses that this kind of vague language is a very strange way to make the

gospel relevant to twentieth century man, for it is doubtful to say the least that he has any idea of what such language is all about.

But apart from this, although the author repeatedly describes justification as a gift, it is nevertheless offered to all, available for all, and must be accepted by faith. It is stressed that man can do nothing, that justification is without works, but that man must accept it — thereby making faith a work (p. 104).

Universalism is rejected by the author but only because justification is conditional (pp. 105, 106). Liberal views of the perfectability of man are scathingly denounced (p. 124), but man is described as being perfectly able to open himself to God's overtures.

As so many in our day, Calvin is embraced, but Beza is anathematized for corrupting Calvin's doctrine of predestination — a position I have dealt with at length in recent articles in this journal.

Of more than passing interest, however, is his attempt to show that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are basically in agreement on the doctrine of justification by faith. After describing (on the whole correctly) Augustine's view of justification and after stating that the whole issue was confused in the Medieval times, especially prior to the Reformation, the author finds these areas of agreement between the two positions:

1. As a result of original sin, all human beings — whoever they are and whenever and wherever they live — stand in need of justification.

2. Christians have no hope of final salvation and no basis for justification before God other than through God's free gift of grace in Christ, offered to them through the Holy Spirit. Our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on the promises of God and the saving work of Jesus Christ, expressed in the gospel.

3. Justification is a completely free act of God's grace, and nothing we can do can be said to be the basis or ground of our own justification. Even faith itself must be recognized as a divine gift and work within us. We cannot turn to God unless God turns us first. The priority of God's redeeming will and action over our own actions in bringing about our salvation is expressed by the doctrine of predestination.

4. In justification we are declared righteous before God, and the process of making us righteous in his sight through the renewing action of the Holy Spirit is begun. In that justification, we receive by faith the effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as we respond personally to the gospel, the power of God for salvation, as we encounter the gospel through scripture, the proclamation of the word of God, and the sacraments, and as it initially awakens and subsequently strengthens faith in us.

5. Whoever is justified is subsequently renewed by the Holy Spirit and motivated and enabled to perform good works. This is

not to say that individuals may rely upon these works for their salvation, because eternal life remains a gift offered to us through the grace and mercy of God.

While all of this, in itself, does not sound too bad, one nevertheless wonders whether this apparent agreement between Rome and Protestantism is not a wholesale sell-out, partly because Rome's insistence (in the Decrees of the Council of Trent — still official position of Rome) on justification by faith *and works* remains, and partly because McGrath refused anywhere to say that justification is, as Luther so strongly insisted, by faith *alone*. □

The Great Divide, Christianity Or Evolution, by Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster; The Christian's Liberty Press, 1988; 176pp., \$8.95. [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

Written by two men who are ardent opponents of evolutionism and strong defenders of the Biblical doctrine of creation, this book has as its starting point and main thesis that evolutionism destroys the doctrine of redemption and makes the work of redemption another religion. The authors are convinced that any other doctrine of redemption than that set forth in the Bible makes redemption man's work and not the work of God.

This is a noble purpose. Those who defend any kind of theistic

evolution and try to hold to evolutionism and the teachings of the Bible insist on making Scripture's teaching on creation something unrelated to and distinct from the doctrine of redemption. Already when I was attending college and the so-called Period Theory was being taught, my professors insisted that it does not really make any difference what one believes concerning the doctrine of creation. The central message of Scripture is the truth concerning salvation, and whether one believes in creation in six days of twenty-four hours or whether one believes in some form of evolutionism makes no difference in what one believes concerning salvation. The two are distinct and unrelated.

So it is also that VanTill, Menninga, and Davis, while holding to a world of some 15 million years old, nevertheless profess faith in Christ and loyalty to Him. Thus they too hold that one can be an evolutionist without denying the Biblical doctrine of salvation in Christ.

This book is written to put a stop to that kind of thinking. It is concerned with the truth that the doctrine of creation is woven into the very warp and woof of all the other doctrines of Scripture, including that (and centrally that) of redemption. To accomplish this purpose, the authors demonstrate in a vivid way the relationship which Scripture itself establishes

between creation and other doctrines.

We give here a few examples. Evolutionism, according to the authors, denies providence because it relies entirely upon natural law, which natural law denies God's providential control over all things. Evolutionism denies the solidarity of the human race in Adam because it denies that Adam was created by God and teaches that he came into existence by evolutionary processes and descended, therefore, from lower forms of life. Evolutionism denies the institution of marriage because God instituted marriage as the fundamental relationship of mankind between Adam whom He created from the dust of the ground and Eve whom He formed from Adam's rib. Evolutionism denies the fall because a creature who has only lower forms of life as his ancestors cannot fall. And thus, evolutionism denies redemption in Christ, the second Adam.

We applaud vigorously this approach to a criticism of the heresy of evolutionism. It is simply a fact that the thesis of this book is indeed the teaching of Scripture. One cannot deny creation as a work of God without denying every doctrine of Holy Writ. One cannot deny that God formed the world in six days of twenty-four hours without denying that salvation is through the atoning blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The relation between the two in Scripture is unmistakable.

However, we have reservations of a rather serious kind to some positions which the book teaches. The book presents a wrong conception of the image. While insisting rightly that no descendant of the animal world can be an image bearer, the book says that "Christianity views us as God's image-bearers, an image marred indeed but not wholly lost in man's Fall" (p. 49). This wrong conception of the image lies at the bottom of a denial of total depravity.

The book has a wrong interpretation of Genesis 2:7 concerning which the authors write:

But hear the Genesis report: "And the Lord God formed man out of dust from the ground. . . .

But, did the dust, then, become a "living" human being?

No, the dust, even when shaped as man by God Himself, clearly had no "life" to endow. Life came to man only after God "...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Three steps there. Take note of them.

1. God forms man out of the dust from the ground. No life yet.

2. God breathes into man's nostrils. God's breath is His Spirit.

3. Then, and then only, does man become "a living soul" (p. 56).

For a correct interpretation of this important passage in Scripture one can consult Rev. Herman Hoeksema's exegesis found in his

“Reformed Dogmatics” in the chapter on the creation of man.

In proving the relation between redemption and creation, the authors engage in some wild allegorizing.

This parallel between Eve as mother of all living and the Church as mother of all believers was vividly confirmed for the early Church Fathers in the Genesis account of the making of Eve, and St. John's account of Christ's death on the Cross. The Church has long seen the detailed Genesis description of the taking of Eve out of the *side* of the sleeping First Adam as prophetic. For out of the *side* of the Second Adam, “asleep” on the Cross, God took the symbols of the New Eve, the Church. . . .

No, it is not coincidence at all, as perceived through faith, that Genesis so minutely describes the making of Eve. Her making prefigures the symbolic making of the Church out of the side of Him who entered the flesh which Adam and Eve bequeathed to all mankind (p. 66).

A poor argument of this sort does more harm to the general thesis of the book than good.

In defense of the same proposition, namely that creation and redemption are related, the authors deny the sovereignty of God over sin and the fall. They write:

God asked freely-given obedience only of a man God *first* made “very good,” that is, gifted with His image to be truly free. Of such a man, evolution has nothing to say. It knows of none,

and thus divides from Christianity and the Plan of Redemption.

We may say that God took at least a triple risk in giving man the perfection of His image.

1. God's risk of losing the obedient love of man.

2. Man's risk of losing the communion with God which the Bible calls “life.”

3. God's risk of having to exercise His commitment made “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) to re-open for man the communion which is “life.” God keeps that commitment by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, as sacrificial “Lamb” to die for man's sin and evil (pp. 98, 99).

While we are appreciative of the sharp and often biting criticism of the foolish theory of evolution, and while the thesis developed in the book is one sorely needed, we wish that the theology of the writers was more Reformed. □

The Nations, Israel and the Church in Prophecy, by John F. Walvoord; Zondervan Publishing, 1988; 497pp. (no price available) (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko]

The author of this book is the chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, the leading Seminary in pre-millennial thought. The book was originally published as three books: “The Nations in Prophecy,” “Israel in Prophecy,” and “The Church in Prophecy.” These three books are now published in one volume by Zondervan.

The first book, "The Nations in Prophecy," gives a brief summary of the whole history of the world from the viewpoint of the prophetic writings in Scripture; the second book, "Israel in Prophecy," deals with the prophecies which, in the author's opinion, treat the history of the Jews; the third book, "The Church in Prophecy," discusses those prophetic utterances which deal specifically with the church.

There are many differences among premillennialists over many questions of prophecy: differences with respect to various dispensations; differences concerning the interpretation of individual texts as they relate to both Israel and the church; differences between pre-tribulationists and post-tribulationists on the question of the rapture; and differences concerning the role of the nations in relation to Israel. The author occupies something of an intermediate position — if that expression can be used. While opposed to covenant theology, he does not hold to rigid dispensationalism as propounded, e.g., by the well-known Scofield Bible. He does not hold to an absolute literal interpretation of Scripture, but allows for symbolic interpretation where the context requires this. He does not even make a clear-cut distinction between the church and the "kingdom people," although the distinction is surely present in his thinking. Nevertheless, his

position is squarely in the tradition of pre-millennialism.

In general, he holds to the fact that, with the crucifixion of Christ, the Jews went into exile. The ages of the new dispensation up to this point are the times of the Gentiles when the church is gathered. This time of the Gentiles will be brought to an end by the rapture which can occur at any point. Those who have been faithful from the church, both living and dead, will be caught up into the air. Immediately following this, the nation of Israel will establish a covenant with the nations and live in peace for three and a half years during which a kingdom in Israel will be firmly established (something which is already taking place with the establishment of that nation in Palestine). After three and a half years, Russia, the revived Roman Empire of Europe (developing now in the common market), and the nations of the East, will march against Israel and a time of great persecution and suffering will begin for the Jews and for those Gentiles who, during this period, turn to God. This also will last three and a half years after which Christ will come again with those who have been taken in the rapture. This coming of Christ will usher in the millennium. Christ will reign on Mt. Zion. The temple and the sacrifices will be restored. The faithful Jews throughout history will be raised, including David, to live in

the millennial period. The nation of Israel will enjoy a millennium of unparalleled prosperity. All the Gentiles will also live with the Jews in that kingdom. This millennium will be brought to an end by the gathering of the nations against Israel and the great battle of Armageddon will be fought. All the enemies of Israel will be defeated by Christ and the eternal joy of heaven will be ushered in.

We cannot, in a book review, evaluate the position of premillennialism. We call attention to three areas which, in our judgment, are basic to a criticism of this position.

The first area is that of Hermeneutics. This is, to us, most crucial. It involves the whole question of the "literal" interpretation of Scripture. While Walvoord is ready to grant that Scripture must be interpreted symbolically in some places, he calls the amillennial interpretation of prophecy a "spiritualizing" of prophecy. Especially when amillennialists refer prophecies of the Old Testament to the church when Israel is mentioned, he demurs and castigates amillennialists for refusing to take Scripture literally. He refuses to recognize that the New Testament itself refers such passages to the church. I have in mind, e.g., such passages as Amos 9:11-15 and Acts 15:15-18, Hosea 2:28 and Romans 9:25, 26, and others. In fact, although the passage in Amos 9 is briefly treated,

he does not even mention these other passages.

In connection with this, he, along with all premillennialists, does not understand the *typical* character of the Old Testament. This is a serious error and leads to many wrong interpretations.

The second area is the whole area of the forced division between the nation of Israel and the church. He admits that the Scriptures speak of the elect Gentiles as the seed of Abraham as well as the Jews, but the very nature of premillennial thought makes an identification of the two impossible. He does not reckon with the fact that Stephen, in his speech before the Sanhedrin, literally refers to the nation of Israel in the wilderness as the "church." He claims, wrongly, that the word "Israel" never means "church" in Scripture. And so he denies that the church in all ages is one, that Christ is both the Head of this one church and the King of the kingdom in which all the people of God are citizens, that this one universal church, gathered from the beginning to the end of time from both Jews and Gentiles has its great unity in Christ Jesus the Head and Lord of all. This too is a fundamental error.

The third area is his obviously wrong exegesis of texts which are twisted to fit his premillennial conceptions. I can give only a few examples. Both John 14:1-4 and I Corinthians 15:51-57 are said to be

descriptions of the rapture, an obvious impossibility. Psalm 2:6, 7 is said to refer to the resurrection of David and his reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom, an obvious contradiction of Acts 13:33 where Paul explains that Psalm 2 was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The whole premillennial conception also brings to the fore various serious doctrinal questions which the premillennialists seem incapable of answering. I refer to such questions as: Why, if the one sacrifice of Christ is complete and perfect, will the sacrifices have to be restored in the millennial kingdom? Walvoord answers that they will be merely symbols of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. But this stands in conflict with Hebrews which tells us that the symbolic and typical sacrifices of the Old Testament, which could not take away sin, are forever removed by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Another problem is the question of how it is possible that the glorified bodies of the people of God taken up into the air at the time of the rapture can live with the earthly bodies of the people who live in the millennial kingdom of Israel. Walvoord brushes this question aside as being unimportant. Still another question is how the sounding trumpet of I Corinthians 15:52 can be called the "last" trumpet when it only ushers in the millennium and when another trumpet will have to be

sounded at the end of the age.

The clearly written book of Walvoord not only describes in a very understandable way the position of premillennialism, but sharply defines its many weaknesses. □

The Trinity, by Gordon H. Clark (Trinity Foundation, P.O. Box 169, Jefferson, MD 21755, 139pp., 1985, \$8.95). [Reviewed by Garrett P. Johnson]

In 1915, the great Princeton theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield said: "The Trinity of the Persons of the Godhead, shown in the incarnation and the redemptive work of God the Son, and the descent and saving work of God the Spirit, is thus everywhere assumed in the New Testament. . . . By the means of this doctrine. . . [a Christian] is able to think clearly and consequently of his threefold relation to the saving God, experienced by Him as Fatherly love sending a Redeemer, as redeeming love executing redemption, as saving love applying redemption. . . . Without the doctrine of the Trinity, his conscious Christian life would be thrown into confusion and left in disorganization. . . , with the doctrine of the Trinity, order, significance and reality are brought to every element of it. Accordingly, the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of redemption, historically, stand or fall together."

In 1989, most Reformed ministers express little or no interest in the doctrine of the Trinity. The reason for this disinterest is quite simple. For 50-odd years or more, Reformed seminaries have frequently misrepresented this doctrine as a paradoxical formulation of Scripture, utterly incomprehensible to the human finite mind. These arrogant Professors and their students (now ministers), wallow in their paradoxical contradictions and vehemently attack all who assert a rational comprehension of the Trinity. They have been largely responsible for suppressing this doctrine and have opened the church doors to the heretical gospels of the past. The Biblical gospel of salvation by God's grace alone has been supplanted by the Arminian gospel of salvation by man's free-will. Call it spiritual rededication, charismatic renewal, evangelical experience, or new life, contemporary Christian attitudes are united in their denial of knowledge and understanding of the Trinitarian Godhead as the author and finisher of our salvation.

Far above this pathetic morass of theological confusion stands one Jeremiah, Gordon H. Clark, and his defense of the Biblical Trinity. Clark begins with eight pages of preliminary Scripture and continues throughout the book to prove the Trinity from Scripture alone.

He also presents the doctrine in its historical context, beginning

with Athanasius' defense of the Trinity against Arius at the Council of Nicaea, in A.D. 325. Clark asserts: "One should never forget that theology cannot be divorced from church history. . . . Contrast and even controversy are good teachers. They force the attention of indifferent 'practical' Christians."

Clark gives extensive analysis to the Post-Nicene Fathers, Marius Victorinus, Hilary of Poitiers, and Gregory of Nyssa, in their Trinitarian defense against the Arians. The views of Augustine are explained in careful detail. Clark asserts: "Augustine. . . made it quite clear that the Godhead was one in one sense and three in a different sense. . . . The important point, . . . is that there is a difference between what is three and what is one." The reader should note that this point is explicitly denied by Westminster Seminary.

Nearly 40 pages are devoted to the incomprehensibility of God. He begins with the Athanasian Creed and the views of the Reformers. The views of Hodge, Berkoff, Bavinck, and VanTil are explained and criticized. Clark defends the view that man's incomprehensibility of God does not exclude regenerate, univocal knowledge based on scriptural information. Man can know the same scriptural propositions that God knows in the same, qualitative sense. The Trinity can only be

derived from scriptural propositions, and the propositions alone are the object of man's knowledge. This position is Clark's seminal contribution to theological history.

The closing chapters of the book discuss the theories of individuation and eternal generation. Individuation is the process of defining the Persons of the Godhead. Is the Person of Christ, for example, an abstract idea, a pure concept, or a set of scriptural propositions? Eternal generation is the process of defining the relationship of one Person of the Trinity to another. Was the Son begotten or generated by the Father, as held by Athanasius and the Reformers, or was He created by the Father, as held by Arius and the Mormons? Clark presents the Biblical position with utmost clarity.

Warfield said that a proper understanding of the Trinity would establish "order, significance, and reality" to our Christian lives. More importantly, it establishes our love for God, which is the first and greatest commandment of all. If we love Christ, and wish to keep His commandments, then we should study this book. □

Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins, by Richard A. Muller; Baker Book House, 1986; 240pp., no price, (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko]

Beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century, students of Calvin and the subsequent development of Reformed theology have increasingly taken the position that theologians who followed Calvin were not faithful to Calvin, but altered significantly Calvin's teachings at certain crucial points. Many of our readers are, e.g., aware of the fact that Dr. Kendall has insisted that Calvin never taught particular redemption, but that this doctrine is a perversion and corruption of Calvin's thought.

The chief attacks, however, have been lodged against Calvin's successors in their views of the truth of sovereign predestination. The point that is being made is that those who have followed Calvin, claimed to be his students, carried on the tradition of "Calvinism," and influenced subsequent Reformed thinking, have, in fact, distorted Calvin's teachings. Those who fall under this judgment are such men as Beza, Ursinus, Perkins, Ames, Gomarus, the fathers of Dort and Westminster, Turretin, etc.

This book examines this entire question in detail by a study of major themes in the theologies of Calvin, Bullinger, Musculus, Vermigli, Beza, Ursinus, Zanchi, Polanus, and Perkins. The author, after careful analysis, is convinced that the thesis of these critics is wrong. His proof is overwhelming.

It is not my intention to enter into this question in detail. I have,

myself examined the question in a series of articles which is now running in the *Journal*, and my position is set forth in them. I will, therefore, quote fairly extensively from the latter part of the book where the author summarizes his conclusions. In this way our readers can hear for themselves what the author says, and, at the same time, gain some flavor of the book.

“Once the dates of the major confessions and early systems have been set before us, we are able to see the consistent development of Protestant system toward a Protestant orthodoxy beginning in 1521, the year Melancthon published his *Loci*, barely four years after the posting of the *Ninety-five Thesis*. Once, moreover, that the gradual character of the change has been recognized and once we realize that there was never a generation of Protestant Reformers unaware of or unable to cope with the complexity of scholastic argument. . . there remains no possibility of representing Protestant orthodoxy as a strange distortion. Instead it is a product of the historical growth of Protestantism standing in some methodological discontinuity but in general doctrinal continuity with the Reformation” (p. 176).

“Over against the previous scholarship, I would make two points. First, the thesis of the ‘predestinarian system,’ . . . applies no better to the orthodox system than

it does to Calvin’s thought. Second, the notion that Calvin’s christocentrism and his placement of the doctrine of predestination in the 1559 *Institutes* imply a de-emphasis or diminution of the impact of the causal focus of his theology must be rejected. As we have learned from Barth, the various placements of the doctrine of predestination point to multiple implications of that doctrine, not the least of which is its relation to the Christology and its soteriological importance. What we encounter in all of the Reformed systems from Calvin to Polanus and, indeed, in the orthodox system as far as Turretin and Heidegger, is a theology with multiple *foci* in which the definitively theocentric causal pattern guarantees the thoroughly christocentric soteriological structure. What we have seen, then, in the course of this essay is the inapplicability of the central-dogma theory as such to the study of Reformed orthodoxy; that the theory, as a representative of a particular method in theology, belongs to the nineteenth century and stands as a mode of theological thinking foreign to the dynamic of late sixteenth and of seventeenth century thought. There are, indeed, crucial *loci*, organizational patterns and principles – Trinity, Christ, the divine causality, covenant, but the idea of a central dogma and a single organizing principle for scholastic orthodoxy

is an anachronism.

"Anachronism also is the claim that the development of Reformed orthodoxy brought about the formulation of a deterministic system; the orthodox are no more and no less deterministic than Calvin himself. This issue for all the theologians noted in this essay is the establishment of the divine will in Christ as the ground and foundation of our salvation. . . . But this is no philosophical determinism; as JH. K.S. Reid remarked of Calvin's doctrine, predestination belongs to a different order of being from our willing and therefore does not interfere with human responsibility. . . . Predestination stands, simply, as the guarantee of divine sovereignty in the work of salvation; indeed, as the guarantee of the efficacy of Christ's work. In this doctrinal assumption there is continuity from Calvin's time onward into the early orthodox codification" (pp. 178, 179).

All this does not mean that there were not differences; but these differences were in two areas, according to Muller: they are, first of all, in the area of development and, secondly, in the area of greater systematization. And so Muller's conclusion is:

"Much of the scholarship has described changes in Reformed theology after Calvin as distortions, a description which involves both a theological value judgment (which is not at all based on historical

evidence or historical methodology) and the assumption that a development in the history of thought can be frozen at some arbitrarily designated optimum moment. There is an essential absurdity in criticizing theologians in 1570 or 1590 or 1610 or 1650 for not remaining true to Calvin. Calvin was not their only predecessor and the context of thought in their day demanded different formulation. . . . The historical analysis of Protestant orthodoxy must describe development and change, continuity and discontinuity; it ought not to postulate golden ages or optimum moments from which all else is decline."

The book is not easy reading, but it will prove profitable to those who take the time to study it. □