

Editor's Notes

The second issue of volume 54 of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* includes a number of worthwhile articles. Hopefully, the titles and my introductory remarks whet the appetites of our readers.

The lead article in this issue is the transcription of a speech that Dr. Brendan Looyenga gave under the auspices of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. The speech was well attended and warmly received. At our request, Dr. Looyenga has submitted the speech for publication in our journal. As an experienced former educator in a Reformed university, he calls attention to a fatal flaw in most professedly Christian institutions of higher learning. It is the fatal flaw explicitly promoted by institutions that embrace Neo-Kuyperian theology. Using the language coined by Martin Luther in the days of the Reformation, he demonstrates that most Reformed and Presbyterian colleges and universities are driven by a theology of glory, rather than the theology of the cross. He points out the devastating consequences that follow from this approach. All pastors, elders, and educators, as well as parents with college-age young people, will profit from this insightful article. They will be equipped to warn their young people attending Christian colleges of the dangers of the Neo-Kuyperian theology of glory.

Mr. Peter Vander Schaaf favors our readers with another translation of an important section in Dr. H. Bouwman's *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*. The matter of the ecclesiastical holidays has always been a somewhat controversial subject in the history of the Reformed church. The translation is preceded by a valuable introduction to this section in Bouwman's work on church polity. Mr. Vander Schaaf shows himself to be an excellent translator as he makes this classic Dutch work available to English readers for the first time.

Dr. Marco Barone favors our readers with an article on the doctrine of the covenant, particularly the prototype of God's covenant in His own triune life within the Godhead. He defends the truth of the simplicity of God as it bears on the doctrine of the intra-trinitarian covenant life of God. And he defends the truth that the essence of the covenant is friendship and fellowship.

As always, this issue features a number of profitable book reviews of recently published theological works. This is generally one of the most worthwhile sections of a theological journal. We hope that our readers find this to be the case with *PRTJ*. If there are recently published books that our readers would like to see reviewed in the pages of our journal, by all means send us an email. Include the title, author, and publisher and we will do our best to secure a review copy of the book and recommend it for review.

May you profit from the contents of this issue of *PRTJ*, intellectually and spiritually. And may we be better equipped to be of service to Christ's church.

Soli Deo Gloria!

—Ronald L. Cammenga, editor

The Neo-Kuyperian Theology of Glory and Reformed Higher Education

Brendan Looyenga

The world of Christian higher education is in trouble. Awash in progressivist theology and cultural accommodation, one institution after another is folding to the demands of faculty and students who want to chart a new course for Christian academia. Perhaps the most visible signal of this change is the normalization of a whole array of sexual behaviors and identities wrapped up in the acronym LGBTQ+, behaviors that only a few years ago would have led to disciplinary action as sin in most Christian colleges. This is no less true for historically Reformed institutions than for those of the broader evangelical tradition. Change is in the air, and it is happening fast.

While much has been said about Scriptural misinterpretation and the errant theology of love that has accompanied the capitulation of Christian colleges and universities, it remains unclear to many conservative Christians how and why the loss of biblical orthodoxy has happened so quickly. As always, there is a considerable risk in trying to oversimplify the narrative to one single explanation that can account for change across the entire breadth of Christian higher education. Having little familiarity with the origins and foundations of broader evangelical higher education, I will primarily address the concerns of this article to Reformed higher education and its founding principles.¹ As we will see, however, the fundamental flaw in the foundation of modern Reformed higher education is shared with other systems

1 The use of the term ‘Reformed’ throughout this article is primarily shorthand for the Dutch Reformed tradition. This is not to dismiss the Scottish and English Presbyterian traditions of the Reformation, which actually preceded the Dutch in setting up institutions of higher learning in the United States—places like Princeton, founded in 1746. Although the theological trajectory of Dutch Reformed colleges and universities is the same as that of Princeton, the history and reasons are somewhat distinct.

of Christian higher education. Failure to recognize this flaw will, I believe, lead to an inevitable corruption of any Christian college or university—Reformed or otherwise.

As we begin this analysis, it is worthwhile to note that the fundamental principles on which most (if not all) Reformed colleges and universities operate today are relatively recent developments within the Reformed tradition. Although this tradition traces its roots back to the sixteenth-century teachings of John Calvin, the theological and philosophical foundations of modern Reformed higher education were primarily established only about a century ago when Dutch Reformed institutions of higher learning were springing up in the Netherlands and among Dutch immigrant communities in North America. The impetus for this revival in Reformed Christian higher education was the adoption of a new, exciting and outward-looking theology that provided a means to integrate orthodox Christianity into a fallen world that had largely rejected the Bible and its teachings. Championed by the great Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, this theology promised that “every square inch” of the cosmos ruled by Jesus Christ would also come under the influence of Reformed Christians.

Roughly one hundred years later, these promises seem rather empty. The world is certainly not more “Christian” than at the opening of the twentieth century, nor has the influence of Reformed Christianity continued to grow within broader culture. If anything, Reformed influence is waning along with membership in denominations that once dominated the tradition. This ought to give us pause. And it ought to make us ask: What went wrong?

To understand this tremendous failure, we ought to know something about Kuyper’s original ideas and how during the past century they were reshaped into something we now refer to as “neo-Kuyperianism.” By analyzing the progression of this movement since Kuyper, we will be able to obtain a better understanding of the trouble that plagues Reformed colleges and universities today. Without acknowledging this foundational problem, little more than surface cracks and flaking on the edifice of Reformed higher education will be addressed. We must get to the root.

While many Reformed believers are familiar with the name Abraham Kuyper and some of the more novel aspects of his theology,

the movement that has taken his name is perhaps somewhat more obscure. So what is “neo-Kuyperianism” and how does it differ from what Abraham Kuyper himself taught? Kevin DeYoung provides a helpful starting point to answer this question:

...neo-Kuyperianism (intellectual descendants of the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper) argue[s] that every square inch of this world belongs to Christ. Therefore, his Lordship should be felt and manifested in politics, in the arts, in education, in short, everywhere. Because the work of Christ was not just to save sinners but also to renew the whole cosmos, we should be at work to change the world and transform the culture.²

In short, neo-Kuyperians are modern Calvinists who view *cultural transformation* as the highest calling of Reformed Christians.³ They believe the basis for this calling can be found in the doctrines of God’s sovereignty (specifically as it applies to the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ) and common grace. The Lordship of Christ provides the authority and mandate, while common grace provides the mechanism to cooperate with unbelievers in this effort.⁴

Painting the movement with too broad a brush, however, makes it difficult to distinguish a neo-Kuyperian from Abraham Kuyper himself. After all, it was Kuyper who introduced the idea of cultural transformation to late-nineteenth Dutch society and founded it upon the doctrines of God’s sovereignty and common grace. If the definition given above was all we had, we would just call its adherents “Kuyperians.” Individuals of this persuasion also exist in the academic world of Reformed higher education, so we ought to distinguish clearly between a Kuyperian and a neo-Kuyperian.

2 Kevin DeYoung, “Two Kingdom Theology and Neo-Kuyperians,” *The Gospel Coalition* (thegospelcoalition.org), August 14, 2009.

3 The first reference to the term ‘neo-Kuyperian’ of which I am aware is in the following publication out of Wheaton College, an evangelical institution that has largely appropriated the transformational vision of Kuyper. Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

4 Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 12-13, 65-69.

Regardless of what one thinks of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace, it must be acknowledged that the man himself was far more circumspect with his Reformed theology than many of his intellectual descendants. Four defining features of Kuyper's theology make this clear. First, he balanced the principle of common grace with that of the antithesis.⁵ Though Kuyper insisted that Christ was the Lord of all "spheres of life" (one of his favorite illustrations), he understood that the church and the world are distinct entities that remain at enmity with one another until Christ returns.

Second, Kuyper clearly distinguished between particular (saving) grace and common grace, so much so that he used distinct Dutch words (*genade* and *gratie*) to describe them.⁶ His version of common grace did not include a well-meant offer of the gospel to all men, but rather focused on the common gifts of God and the restraint of sin in this world. Furthermore, his version of particular grace included an orthodox Reformed articulation of double predestination consistent with the Synod of Dordt and a belief in the strict relation between election and the covenant.⁷

Third, Kuyper maintained a clear distinction between special and general revelation, giving primacy to the inspired Word of God as the "spectacles, enabling us to decipher again the divine Thoughts, written by God's Hand in the book of Nature."⁸ At no point was Kuyper ready to compromise the authority or integrity of Holy Scripture, or to submit it to the sort of "critical analysis" that had so degraded orthodox Christianity in continental Europe of his day.⁹ Scripture was the inspired Word as far as Kuyper was concerned.

5 Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 60-72.

6 Herman C. Hanko, *A Study of the Relation Between the Views of Prof. R. Janssen and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1970), chap. IV. And David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994), 174-75, 190-92.

7 James Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 178-82.

8 Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 120-21.

9 Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, 45-47.

Last of all, Kuyper retained an amillennial eschatology, albeit a somewhat strange version in which the kingdom of man built by common grace-fueled cooperation between believers and unbelievers would usher in the Antichrist, at which point Christians would exit the kingdom in anticipation of the Lord's supernatural return.¹⁰ Though unnecessarily expansive due to Kuyper's inclusion of common grace, his amillennial view of the eschaton is consistent with the confessional Reformed view of history and once again emphasizes Kuyper's insistence on retaining the antithesis as a fundamental principle that would run through history from postlapsarian Eden until the return of Christ in glory. By maintaining balance in all of these key theological distinctions, Kuyper remained firmly planted in Reformed orthodoxy despite his relish for cultural engagement.

The attempt at theological balance that belonged to Kuyper's original vision of cultural engagement and transformation was not lost overnight in Reformed educational circles, nor is it altogether absent among Calvinist academic institutions today. A strong case for this reality was made about a decade ago by William Dennison, who argued that the Kuyperian approach to academic studies once championed by men such as Cornelius Van Til needs to be revived in Reformed institutions of higher learning.¹¹ Dennison decried many of the same problems with neo-Kuyperianism that this article identifies, noting that "under the banner of common grace, Reformed Christian educators have adopted the methods and substance of secular thought without clear discernment."¹² His solution to the problem of secularization among those in the Christian academy is a return to biblical and confessional orthodoxy along with reinstatement of the theological balance that once held common grace in check. Most notably, Dennison advocates for an approach to cultural discernment that leads with an acknowledgement that the "holistic character" of secular learning is antithetical to Christianity, and therefore subjects every truth that is

10 I. John Hesselink, "The Millennium in the Reformed Tradition," *Reformed Review* 52, 2 (1998): 105, 110. Also, Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 368-70.

11 William Dennison, "The Christian Academy: Antithesis, Common Grace, and Plato's View of the Soul," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54,1 (2011): 109-31.

12 Dennison, "The Christian Academy," 112.

gleaned from secular academia to a rigorous comparison with Scripture and the confessions.¹³ This approach, he believes, would reinvigorate truly Reformed analysis of all facets of human culture with Christ as the central figure.

Despite Dennison's noble effort to maintain the original ideals of a Kuyparian worldview within Christian academia, it appears that the battle to balance common grace with theological orthodoxy has largely been lost in Reformed higher education. All those inclined toward such an approach must contend with the historical precedent as it stands today and ask the simple question: "Is it possible to espouse the doctrine of common grace as the basis for engaging with culture while at the same time maintaining Reformed orthodoxy in a doctrinal and practical sense?" The perspective of this article is that this approach is impossible given the trajectory of all Reformed institutions of higher learning that have attempted to build their foundation on Kuyparianism. This foundation inevitably devolves into a neo-Kuyparian worldview with its singular focus on cultural transformation fueled by common-grace theology. It is not a stable foundation.¹⁴

The instability of Kuyparian ideals within Reformed higher education can be demonstrated by the systematic loss of theological balance that has come to characterize the later generations of intellectuals who claim to be following Kuyper's vision. This degeneration began already in the first generation after Kuyper with the enthusiastic development of his theology into a broader philosophical system by the Dutch philosophers Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven, both of whom were recruited to Kuyper's Vrije Universiteit (Free University) in Amsterdam. It was there that they set out to develop their neo-Calvinistic Reformational philosophy.¹⁵ Under these influential

13 Dennison, "The Christian Academy," 114-15.

14 This argument is not new within the PRC. Since the separation of the denomination from the CRC in 1924, there have been repeated calls to the Reformed church world to reexamine the doctrine of common grace based on its negative effects on the church and its witness to the world. For an example, see the four-part series: David J. Engelsma, "The Reformed Worldview: 1-4. The Failure of Common Grace," *The Standard Bearer* 74, (1998): 18-21.

15 *Reformational philosophy* is not a general term for philosophy done from a Reformed perspective, but rather a specific description of the philosophical system articulated by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. It continues

men, the Kuyperian concepts of ‘sphere sovereignty’ and cultural transformation took on an increasingly philosophical flavor that was exciting to many in the Dutch Reformed academic communities of continental Europe and the United States. Here at last was a reason for theologically conservative Reformed Christians to engage with culture in a positive way—they could redeem it on behalf of the Lord who laid claim to all creation!

Despite their initially commendable emphasis on the sovereignty of God, Reformational philosophers quickly developed a number of concepts that can be seen as clear deviations from orthodox Reformed theology.¹⁶ Among the more notable problems is their tendency to undermine the authority of the Bible by making “a sharp dichotomy between the text of Scripture and the Word of God,” the latter of which they defined as a much broader and inclusive category that includes human reason.¹⁷ This significant error predictably leads to other related errors, which include the failure to submit philosophical or scientific reasoning to scriptural exegesis and the loss of biblical emphasis within the sphere of Christian education. Also notable is Reformational philosophy’s view of evangelism, which expands far beyond preaching of the gospel message to include a restructuring of social institutions as a form of redemption.¹⁸ Both the denigration of biblical authority and the dilution of the gospel message conflict with confessional Reformed orthodoxy and the teaching of Abraham Kuyper that we noted above. Though this movement may find its

to be developed to this day by those who are part of the *Association for Reformational Philosophy*. For more on this topic see: Cory Griess, “A Report from the Desert,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 53,1 (2019): 27-45.

16 John Frame, *The Amsterdam Philosophy: A Preliminary Critique* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Harmony Press, 1972). Note that while Frame presents a compelling critique of Reformational philosophy, particularly with regard to its view of Scripture, he fails to mention the doctrine of common grace and its influence within this system of philosophy. Though he cites the idea of a “common basis” and “general validity” (p. 37) between Christian and secular philosophies, his criticism misses the fact that this is not simply a sidenote but a key component of the underlying theology that supports Reformational philosophy.

17 Frame, *Amsterdam Philosophy*, 39.

18 Frame, *Amsterdam Philosophy*, 35-36.

origins in Kuyper's ideas concerning transformation, it lacks the theological balance that characterized his presentation.

In the century following the theological and philosophical developments of Kuyper and the Free University philosophers, neo-Kuyperianism has itself morphed into a somewhat different shape than that which Kuyper likely envisioned—though that is hard to decipher given the changing dimensions of our world compared to that of early twentieth-century Europe and America. The challenge to defining modern neo-Kuyperianism comes from its different manifestations, which can vary widely across the political and theological spectrum of beliefs. On the one hand, there are politically conservative neo-Kuyperians who self-associate with the Religious Right and see moral/ethical change as their central concern.¹⁹ On the other, there are also politically liberal neo-Kuyperians who accept almost the entire platform of cultural progressivism based on their concern for social justice and equity.²⁰ Although these two groups seem almost diametrically opposed to one another, they find common ground in the impetus for their activism.

The best way to identify a person or institution as “neo-Kuyperian” is by evaluating their systematic worldview rather than their specific political association or system of morality. First and foremost, neo-Kuyperians uniformly view *transformationalism* as the primary definition of what it means to be Reformed. For those in this camp, the oft-quoted Kuyperian aphorism that every “square inch” of the cosmos belongs to Christ is not simply *descriptive* of God's sovereignty but *prescriptive* for the whole Christian life.²¹ Within this worldview, the imperative to transform the entirety of human culture—indeed the whole cosmos!—into a Christian enterprise is so great that it tends to exclude other aspects of the Reformed faith such as confessional identity, ecclesiastical fidelity, or Christian piety. All of these key

19 R. Scott Clark, “The New York Times, Sioux Center, and Calvinism,” *Heidelblog* (www.heidelblog.net), August 17, 2020.

20 D.G. Hart, “The Uneasy Alliance of Evangelicals and Conservatism,” *The American Conservative* (April 3, 2021).

21 The full quotation reads: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’” “Sphere Sovereignty” in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

features of the orthodox Reformed identity are neglected, or even rejected, by those who adhere to a neo-Kuyperian worldview. Many volumes have been written from this point of view, though perhaps the most influential in the halls of Reformed higher learning is the book *Creation Regained*, by Albert Wolters.²² In this volume, Wolters traces the entire trajectory of history through phases of creation, fall, and redemption to our current point in time. In line with Dooyeweerd and other Reformational philosophers, Wolters argues that the pervasive effects of the fall imply the need for pervasive redemption, which in turn implies the call for Christians to participate in Christ's work of redeeming and renewing all creation. The shape of this redemption is not, however, primarily determined by the gospel call to repentance and faith. Instead, redemption is defined as transformation or renewal focused on the structures and institutions of culture.

Accompanying the core value of transformationalism is a second characteristic, which is the general rejection of any distinction between the sacred and the secular.²³ We need to be very careful and specific here, because this concept has improper connotations based in the medieval Roman Catholic teaching that denigrated the labor of common believers as 'secular' and elevated the clergy and their work as 'sacred'—a distinction that Calvin emphatically denied.²⁴ What we have in view here instead is the traditional Reformed distinction between the two forms of rule by which God is pleased to order human affairs, which Calvin referred to as the "the twofold government" of God among men.²⁵ In this context, that which is 'sacred' belongs to the gracious rule of Christ over His church, whereas that which is 'secular' belongs to His rule of power over the physical creation and

22 Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005).

23 R. Scott Clark, "Paul on the Sacred/Secular Distinction In 1 Corinthians 8–11," *Heidelbergblog*, January 21, 2017.

24 Alister McGrath, "Calvin and the Christian Calling," *First Things* 94 (1999): 31-35.

25 John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 3.19.15, 140-41; 4.20.1, 651. See also Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 140-81.

the affairs of men throughout history. As the apostle Paul aptly notes in many passages, including 1 Corinthians 8-11 and Romans 13:1-7, Christians submit to the rule of Christ in both spheres; however, their attendance to the means of grace is distinct from their daily labors in the world. Though both activities are done “as unto the Lord” (Colossians 3:23-24), the formal worship of God is not the same as everyday life. For the neo-Kuyperian, though, every aspect of life is in effect a “ministry” to the world—nothing is common, all is sacred. To distinguish between the two is simply dualism.

These two philosophical premises upon which neo-Kuyperianism is built have an important influence on the kingdom theology that emerges among its adherents.²⁶ Because the distinction between sacred and secular realms is blurred and the primary calling one hears is to transform culture, there is a strong tendency among neo-Kuyperians to view the kingdom of God as a temporal and physical reality rather than a spiritual one. This temporal kingdom has a positive, upward trajectory of development with a strong inclination toward post-millennialism that is hard to reconcile with confessional Reformed eschatology. But this is, perhaps, to be expected. When going to work and church are effectively the same thing—both acts of worship—the significance of the means of grace identified by Scripture and the Reformed confessions is easily lost. This rather predictably leads to all sorts of theological accommodation, for why ought one to seek out a true church when the kingdom of God is to be had in any place so long as the believer is transforming that place on behalf of Christ? The gradual exchange of personal redemption for the pursuit of cosmic renewal tends to have a pernicious effect on the spiritual life and walk of neo-Kuyperians, which has become evident from their widespread rejection of personal piety as “puritanism” rather than a mark of godliness.²⁷

26 See four consecutive editorial articles by Barrett L. Gritters, starting with, “A (Sharp) Pastoral Warning to Students in Christian Colleges,” *Standard Bearer* 87, 1 (2010): 4-5. See also Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*, 57-59.

27 DeYoung, *TGC* (thegospelcoalition.org), August 14, 2009. We might add here that though Kuyper was strong in his theology of church reform and theological orthodoxy, his somewhat deficient ecclesiology is puzzling. One wonders whether his personal neglect of the means of grace by failure regularly to attend church services toward the latter half of his life has been

Also common among those within the neo-Kuyperian movement is the use of triumphalist and aspirational language, which flows from a view that the kingdom of God is something to be obtained and built on this earth. One has only to look at the recruiting (or marketing) literature of most Reformed institutions of higher learning to find the vocabulary of neo-Kuyperianism. At such places the Christian is an “agent of renewal” or a “coworker with Christ” in “redeeming culture.” Students at such institutions can expect both themselves and the broader world to “flourish” as they learn how to focus their skills and abilities on the kingdom of Christ. Texts such as 2 Corinthians 10:5 are invoked in this grand enterprise, for who would not want to “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ?”²⁸ Again, the concept of Christ’s Lordship over the creation is not just *indicative* of His power and glory but also an *imperative* for all believers to act upon.

Perhaps the most important thing that separates neo-Kuyperianism from Kuyper himself, however, is the theological drift that is required to sustain the triumphant aspirations of a movement set on winning culture to Christ. Recall that Kuyper himself was careful to hold onto the doctrine of the *antithesis*—a principle of spiritual separation between the church and world—at the same time he developed his doctrine of *common grace*. This tenuous balance, he thought, would be able to curb the potentially dangerous excesses of common grace. That these dangers were evident from the very inception of the development of this doctrine are clear from the words of the synod that adopted this doctrine on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church in 1924.

There is a danger here which ought not be ignored. When Dr. Kuyper wrote about this in his monumental work dealing with this subject [common grace], he indicated that he was aware of this danger that some might be misled and thus lose their way in the world. And history has already proven that this danger is real and more than imaginary.²⁹

seen by some neo-Kuyperians as a justification for their own deficient ecclesiology. For more on this peculiar aspect of Kuyper’s life see Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 128-29.

28 R. Scott Clark, “What ‘Every Thought Captive’ Means in Its Original Context,” *Heidelblog* (www.heidelblog.net), October 14, 2016.

29 *1924 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church*, 135-36.

This declaration was prophetic.

History marched on from 1924 and continues to demonstrate, time and again, that the doctrine of the antithesis cannot survive the assault of common grace. When triumph is the expected end and one's allies in achieving this temporal vision are the unbelieving world, the antithesis is doomed. What is accepted as successful within the paradigm of common grace can never conform to the blessedness described by the Lord Jesus Christ during His ministry, notably in the Sermon on the Mount. Temporal definitions of success framed in secular terms will always be devoid of lasting, theological significance based on biblical standards. Any institution that defines its success by the same criteria as its unbelieving allies will not endure the scorn of the world; it will not suffer for righteousness' sake; it will not sacrifice reputation for the cause of Christ. The Reformed principle of spiritual antithesis must be discarded for the neo-Kuyperian worldview to succeed.

What is, therefore, left as a doctrinal foundation for the neo-Kuyperian movement is naked, uninhibited common grace. It ought to be no surprise, then, that the full trajectory of neo-Kuyperianism described above has progressed most rapidly in circles where a mature and all-encompassing doctrine of common grace is articulated. In such a system, all of the theological safeguards that Kuyper set forth are blurred to the point of being lost. It should be no surprise that the traditional Reformed doctrine of Scripture is an early casualty in neo-Kuyperian circles, for the input of secular, unbelieving allies must needs be equally revelatory as the words of Scripture. Furthermore, one cannot risk alienating these allies on the basis of God's Word, and so the line between common and particular grace becomes blurred. Within full-throated neo-Kuyperianism, all that is left is grace. And not grace as divine power to effect change in the hearts of a depraved humanity, but grace as favor for all mankind without distinction, gifts and blessings for all without differentiation.³⁰

If any doubt this trajectory in theology, I would challenge them to visit a Reformed institution of higher learning and ask three questions of its faculty and students: 1) What does the antithesis mean? 2) Is the Bible the inspired Word of God? 3) Whom does God love? The answers will be telling. Common grace has won the day at every level,

30 Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 175.

starting with practice, followed by piety, and terminating in theology. Every part of the Reformed life has indeed been transformed by the neo-Kuyperian movement.

This was inevitable. Why?

The system of neo-Kuyperian theology and philosophy upon which modern Reformed higher education is built is inherently flawed, though it is not a new or even particularly unique flaw that characterizes the perspective. In truth, the flaw has recurred throughout the history of the church since the fall of Adam in Eden, and it inevitably produces the same symptoms: a church that is nearly indistinguishable from the world; a system of doctrine focused on human activity instead of God's glory; institutions focused on temporal progress and kingdom-building. All of which is ostensibly done on behalf of God and His Christ.

Luther had a name for this flaw—he called it a “theology of glory.” In the concise twenty-eight articles of his “Heidelberg Disputation” (1518), Luther articulated a system of doctrine that represented a paradigm shift in Christian theology that eclipses the arguments he published only a year earlier with his more famous “Ninety-Five Theses.”³¹ The foundation for his famous law-gospel distinction is here, along with the seeds for the Reformation doctrines of the antithesis, total depravity of fallen man, and the bondage of the will. In addition, embedded within these stunning declarations, are four articles (19-22) that contrast the “theology of glory” with the “theology of the cross.”

Luther was arguing for a return to the cross because Rome had for centuries been mired in the pursuit of temporal glory. The church of Luther's day was ascendant, and Christ was apparently victorious in His earthly kingdom represented by Rome. After all, had not Christendom won the day in Europe? Was not our Lord obviously triumphant? From Luther's perspective the answers to these questions were a resounding “No!” Things were not well. Rather than Christianizing the West, the church had transformed into a worldly

31 Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann eds., *Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer, Vol. 31* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1957), 39-58. Available online at: *Book of Concord: Heidelberg Disputation (1518)*. <https://bookofconcord.org/sources-and-context/heidelberg-disputation>.

institution of power and glory that was no more holy than any secular polity of its day. Church was world, and world was church.

Luther's explanation for the problem that he observed in the church of his day drew on the great theological paradox described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:21-25. Articles 19, 20 and 22 of the "Disputation" reference the language of this passage along with Romans 1:20-22, where Paul defines the "invisible things of God" as the divine attributes that are revealed in the creation.

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened;

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

The contrast Luther is making in these three articles is between a theology based on the fallen human understanding of God's revelation in creation (described in Romans 1) and a theology based on the divine revelation of salvation (described in 1 Corinthians 1). The former looks to the grand, temporal history of mankind to identify God's ultimate purpose, while the latter looks to the person of Christ and the cross to identify God's true purpose.

Not surprisingly, these two theologies produce diametrically opposed expectations regarding the trajectory of the church and its members throughout history. When one looks to the grand works of God in His creation as a model for human experience, he will expect nothing but grandeur and glory. When one looks to the cross, however, he will expect suffering and sacrifice. This is precisely why unbelieving Jews stumbled at the cross and the pagan Greek world found it to be preposterously foolish (1 Corinthians 1:23). By any human estimation—be it religious or secular—it seems impossible that any good can come in the way of suffering, loss, and ignominy. But the way of the cross is indeed the "foolishness of God" and the "weakness of God" that is wiser and stronger than any notion of man. Such wisdom is inaccessible to natural man by any sort of common

grace built into the creation. It is accessible only by a divine work of regeneration given in the form of particular, saving grace, which opens the spiritual eyes of a man to his suffering Savior and the redemption of the cross.

Luther's paradigm in the *Disputation* correlates very closely with the issues about which we are concerned here. Despite its apparent provenance in the Reformed tradition, the neo-Kuyperian perspective fails because it is inherently a "theology of glory." The problem that Luther saw in the church of his day is the same problem that will eventually plague any Reformed Christian institution that builds its philosophical foundation on common-grace theology with the goal of transforming the world. It will eventually conform to the world around it rather than to the cross of Christ. In effect, Luther perfectly describes common grace as "that wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man." The man that Luther refers to here is one who acknowledges the God of the Bible but does his theology by and in the public square, relying on the common basis of human reason and observation to shape his concept of God. Through this approach, such a man is supposedly able to see the invisible things of God and arrive at what is good and true and wise. Instead, however, such "wisdom" results in a church that is "puffed up, blinded, and hardened" to the gospel of the cross.

This fatal flaw of neo-Kuyperian doctrine is not a mistaken side-effect of the system, but rather a built-in feature that ensures that it is attractive in the first place. This attractiveness is derived from the *aspirational* principle of common grace that becomes the driving force of neo-Kuyperian institutions. Read, for instance, the description of common grace offered by theologian Louis Berkhof:

It [common grace] curbs the destructive power of sin, maintains in a measure the moral order of the universe, thus making an orderly life possible, distributes in varying degrees gifts and talents among men, promotes the development of science and art, and showers untold blessings upon the children of men.³²

32 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 434.

The concept that God's favor ("untold blessings upon the children of men") is revealed in the secular accomplishments of humanity is built into the doctrine of common grace. Without judging the man himself, it is not difficult to see how Berkhof's definition can easily be twisted into a "theology of glory" that looks attractive to any Reformed Christian—especially an aspiring college student. It is flattering to think that one's gifts and talents are God's grace to this world. It is stimulating to think that the development of a high-profile career in science or art would be a divine blessing upon mankind. All of this appeals to a human nature that loves to stoke its own ego.

And ego sells. A successful institution needs to attract students, and nothing is more attractive than the glittering promise of personal accomplishment. No Reformed institution, however, would be so crass as to promise that all by itself. But packaged as the work of "transforming the world for Christ" or "redeeming culture to God's glory," personal accomplishment can seem to be altogether quite orthodox. Though they may be at different stages of development, most if not all Reformed institutions of higher learning share a common basis in the neo-Kuyperian theology of glory. Read through their recruitment materials. Go online to check out their websites. Look up their mission statements. The evidence of this is readily available.

The trajectory of neo-Kuyperianism described above is inevitable because it is a "theology of glory." There is not one Reformed or Presbyterian university or college that I am aware of that has managed to halt the progressive slide of a theology of glory once it has been adopted. If you doubt this, examine the history of Reformed higher education in the Netherlands or Presbyterian higher education in the United States.³³ What happened at the Calvinist Ivy League schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now happening in Reformed colleges: the theology of glory, not the cross, is the leading ethos. There is no place for suffering, sacrifice, antithesis, or scorn from the world in the name of Christ. The cross is sidelined in favor of a grand, temporal kingdom of God on earth, built hand-in-hand with those who deny the existence of God and defy His sovereign authority.

33 George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

The neo-Kuyperian vision represents a degenerated version of Reformed theology that naturally tends toward worldly conformation as it develops. If one wonders how we have gotten to a place in history where the affirmation of LGBTQ+ lifestyles is ardently promoted on Christian college campuses, the answer can be found in the principles upon which these institutions were built. In the “Disputation,” Luther predicted exactly what would happen when a theology of glory is the founding principle:

21. A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

If Reformed Christians refuse to call sin what it actually is, we will have the world at our fingertips in all its glory. But if we do call sin what it actually is, we can expect to carry a cross. And so the Lord reminds us, “the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord” (Matthew 10:24). ●

Introduction to Church Holidays from *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*

by Peter Vander Schaaf

In Book II of *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht (Reformed Church Polity)* Dr. Harm Bouwman lays out the biblical underpinning and the proper exercise of Reformed church polity.¹ He divides Book II into four sections that correspond to the divisions in the Church Order: the church and her offices, the church and her government, the church and the service of her sacraments and ceremonies, and the church and her discipline. In each section he deals with the important principles and practices in a topical manner. In the section on the church and the service of her sacraments and ceremonies, Bouwman devotes two chapters to Article 67 of the Church Order of Dordrecht, which binds the churches to the observance of Sunday and to the observance of the holidays that are named in the article. The Reformed churches are to observe Sunday and special days with worship services. In chapter 94, “Zondag” (Sunday), Bouwman expounds the basis and the proper observance of Sunday. In chapter 95, “Kerkliche Feestdagen” (Church Holidays), he explains the nature of special days, the history of their observance by the New Testament Church, how they came to be recognized by the Reformed churches, and the proper manner in which church holidays are to be observed by believers. Among the commentaries on the Reformed Church Order, Bouwman’s essay on church holidays stands out for its comprehensive exposition of the nature, origin, history, and proper use of special days by the church of Christ. To this day, the Reformed officebearer who wants to address questions related to special days cannot be confident that he has completed his home work until he has read Bouwman on “Kerkliche Feestdagen.”

Before we go any further, we should be aware that Bouwman was giving commentary on the Church Order of Dordt as it had been

1 For more on this Dutch Reformed father and this work, see the November 2020 issue of the *PRTJ* (54.1).

revised by the Gererformeerde Kerken in Nederland (the GKN) in 1905. Article 67 of that revision read, “*De gemeenten zullen onderhouden, benevens den Zondag, ook den Kerstdag, Paschen, Pinksteren en Hemelvaartsdag. De onderhouding der tweede feestdagen wordt in de vrijheid der Kerken gelaten.*” (“In addition to Sunday, the churches shall observe Christmas Day, Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension Day. The observance of second holidays is left to the freedom of the churches.”)

As it was adopted by the Synod of Dordt in 1619, Article 67 read, “*De Gemeenten zullen onderhouden beneffens den Sondach oock den Christ-dagh Paesschen en Pincxsterê met de navolgenden dagh : Ende dewijl inde meeste Steden en Provintien van Nederlandt daerenboven noch ghehouden worden den dagh vande Besnijdinghe ende Hemelvaert Christi zullen de Dienaers overal daer dit noch niet int gebruyck en is byde Overheden arbeyden datse sich met de andere mogen conformeren.*” (“In addition to Sunday, the churches shall observe Christmas Day, Easter, and Pentecost with the following days. And because in most of the cities and provinces of the Netherlands are in addition also observed the Day of the Circumcision and the Day of Ascension of Christ, the office bearers shall work with the magistrates wherever that is not yet the custom that they conform themselves to the others.”)

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America use the revision of the Church Order that was made by the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1914. Article 67 from our Church Order reads, “The Churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, the Day of Prayer, the National Thanksgiving Day, and Old and New Year’s Day.”

What second holidays and the Day of the Circumcision were we shall see as we go along. We will also see why the differences in the lists of recognized holidays is important for our understanding of special days.

The basic principle which guides the use of special days is that they are not sabbaths. Sunday, the Sabbath, is an institution of God. Ecclesiastical holidays are an institution of the church. They exist in the Church Order in order to serve specific and important purposes. Holidays may not be given the status of the Sabbath. Sunday is for the

New Testament church until the return of Christ. The New Testament church has changed and is allowed to change her list of recognized special days.

In the Old Testament the law of Moses established a cycle of holy days that began with the weekly Sabbath and developed in accordance with the number seven. Seven days, the seventh month, seven years, and the seventh year times seven. In addition, the three great feasts of Pentecost, Passover, and Booths reminded the people to thank God for His provision, to remember His salvation, and to rejoice in their covenant God. The coming and work of Jesus Christ fulfilled all types. Therefore, all of the worship of the New Testament church directs her commemoration and thanksgiving to Him. The apostolic church tolerated the observance of Old Testament practices for a while, as a matter of the believer's liberty. But when some in Galatia wanted to make Old Testament sabbaths and feasts into means of salvation for the New Testament believer, Paul warned them that they were leaving Jesus Christ.

In the early church the observance of special days began innocently and modestly. On Wednesday and Friday, aspects of the earthly ministry of Christ were remembered. Passover, or Easter, the Ascension, and Christmas were celebrated. In the fourth century Christmas was assigned to the day of the pagan feast of the winter solstice, December 25. By the sixth century the feast of the circumcision of Christ replaced the heathen celebration of New Year's Day. Festal days multiplied from there. For the holidays that fell on Sunday, the following Monday was added to the festal day so that the people might enjoy a worthy feast and a day off from labor. This day came to be called the second holiday. Holidays to commemorate the lives and work of Mary, the apostles, and then saints were added to the lists of feast days until the Romish church itself issued decrees to limit their number. Improper, and even foolish, innovations were added to the worship services on holidays. Finally, complaints about idleness and behavior that was unbecoming of Christians became widespread. The fathers of the Reformation in the Netherlands used emphatic language to describe the misuse of feast days by the people: *ledig-gang*, *onwijing*, *losbandigheid*, *booze ondeugden*, and *ongebonden dardelheid* ("idleness," "desecration," "debauchery," "wicked vices," and "untethered frivolity.")

In Geneva Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret did away with all ecclesiastical days except Sunday, and Calvin agreed. John Knox brought the prohibition of religious feast days from Geneva to Scotland. The Dutch Reformed wanted to accomplish the same in their country. They succeeded in doing away with all of the days that commemorated Mary, the apostles, and saints; but that is as far as the magistrates would allow them to go. City and provincial governments would not budge on Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Some jurisdictions also held onto Ascension Day and the Day of Christ's Circumcision (New Year's Day). The Dutch Reformed decided that if they could not do away with the holidays that commemorated the works of Christ, they would see to it that the days were put to good use. The Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) decided that worship services must be held on Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost in order to lead the people away from foolishness and to a contemplation of the work of Christ. The synod also wanted to achieve some uniformity in the choice of the holidays that would be observed. Hence the stipulation was made that ministers should work with local magistrates to persuade them to observe Ascension Day and the Day of Christ's Circumcision in places where that was not yet the custom. Bouwman is blunt in his summation of the Dutch Reformed settlement on the observance of religious holidays: "The churches were firmly against it in principle, but the magistracy was for it, not only to do the people a favor, but because by long custom they themselves took the days as vacation. And although the people were in danger of lapsing into idleness and untethered frivolity, the ecclesiastics found it better to tolerate these days ...and accustom the people to preaching on holidays."²

The synod of the GKN that revised the Church Order in 1905 decided to leave the observance of second holidays and of other special days, such as New Year's Day and Good Friday, to the freedom of the churches.

Bouwman gives short histories of each of the holidays that are named in the Church Order of Dordt and in its revision by the GKN in 1905. He also gives the histories of special days whose observance had become widespread in the churches, but which were not listed in the Church Order. These special days were New Year's Eve, New

² *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*, vol. 2, 487-88.

Year's Day, and Good Friday. Since Bouwman was writing in the Netherlands and primarily for Reformed believers in that country, it is not surprising that he did not deal with the fact that in America, the Christian Reformed Church made the Old Year's service and the New Year's Day service obligatory in their churches and had added the National Day of Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving Day was and is a North American holiday. It is surprising that Bouwman made no mention of a special day whose observance had become widespread among the Dutch Reformed in both the Netherlands and America, and which the CRC had made obligatory: the Day of Prayer.

Bouwman concludes that the church has the right to appoint certain days as days of celebration, in which God's people will come together for worship. He warns against the multiplication of religious holidays. Special days may not distract believers from the special position of Sunday. Sunday is the day that God has given for His rest and for worship. On Sunday, God's people come together to receive His Word, to pray, and to take part in the sacraments, to seek His forgiveness, to give thanks for His grace, and to praise Him for His salvation.

Perhaps there are a few conclusions that can be drawn from Bouwman's treatment of ecclesiastical holidays.

1. Sunday and religious holidays are different. They are different in their nature, their institutions, and their proper observance. Reformed churches may not give to religious holidays anything like the same status that Sunday has. Nor should Reformed churches ever stop reminding their people of the differences between the two.

2. Religious holidays have an unusual place in the Reformed Church Order. They are not in the Church Order because either Scripture or principles derived from it by "good and necessary consequence" (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. I, 6) call for them. They are not even in the Church Order because the fathers of the Dutch Reformation wanted them. The Synod of Dordt tolerated some holidays because the churches could not do away with them and because the Synod believed that they could be turned to good purposes. F. L. Rutgers, an older contemporary of Bouwman, makes the same point: "These provisions are concessions to the government and to

the opinion of the people and do not arise from Reformed principles. But they are not so important that this compromise was impossible.”³

3. Throughout their history religious holidays have presented two dangers. The first is that Christians may use the free time to indulge in worldliness. This problem has not been limited to the Middle Ages. The second danger is an inclination to introduce improper elements into the worship services on holidays. The GKN of Bouwman’s day was critical of the Dutch State Church’s (the Hervormde Kerk’s) practice of celebrating the Lord’s Supper during the Good Friday service. The underlying principle of this criticism is that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is reserved for the worship service on Sunday. Reformed believers are warned against using special day services as a playground for liturgical experiments.

4. Reformed Churches have added special days to their Church Order when they had specific and important reasons to do so. In the case of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension Day, and New Year’s Day, the Great Synod of Dordt could see no other wise choice. It appears that special days were added to the Church Order after their observance had already become widespread, when the churches believed it was necessary to have uniformity in the days that are observed, and when the churches decided that it was important to make a special day a part of the churches’ ministry and witness.

5. Because special days are established by the church and for the church, it is fitting for Reformed denominations to re-examine from time to time their observance. It is permissible for Reformed denominations to determine whether traditional practices continue to have the same importance that they had in the past. For example, second holidays are no longer recognized in our Church Order. Also, it is a proper exercise of Reformed Church polity to decide that some liberty may be allowed to congregations in the date of their observation of Prayer Day. It is likewise permissible for a denomination to decide whether holding services on both New Year’s Eve and New Year’s morning is a practice which may be left to the freedom of the churches.

3 *Bespreking der hoofdpunten van het Kerkrecht naar aanleiding van de Dordtsche Kerkkenorde*, F. L. Rutgers (www.kerkrecht.nl/node/1278), Art. 67.

6. The fathers of Dordt were determined to turn the observation of religious holidays to “useful activities.” It is not necessary to claim that Reformed people now observe holidays perfectly in order to assert, nevertheless, that the lesson has been well taken. In our day Reformed people love to be reminded of the reasons for the seasons. They shy away from practices that have become associated with holidays but which distract their attention from Jesus Christ. They readily heed the calls to worship; and after the services they spend the remainder of the days with family and friends, the people whom they love. This is God’s grace. We are thankful for it.

7. Reformed believers have come to love their special day services. We would believe that we had become proud and ungrateful if we declined to come together at certain times to pray for God’s provision, to thank Him for His bounty, to remember His care for us, to seek His grace for the time to come, to thank and praise God for the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of His Son, and for the pouring out of His Spirit. The special services have become part of the fabric of our lives of gratitude. To do away with them now would be as unwise as it is unnecessary.

May God give us grace that we always use our church holidays for useful things. ●

Ecclesiastical Holidays from *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*

by Harm Bouwman
Translated by Peter Vander Schaaf

a. In the Scriptures

The Reformed (*Gereformeerden*) recognized a big difference between the Sabbath and the ecclesiastical holidays, in that the Sabbath was an ordinance of God and the holidays were set by the church. In reaction against the Romish misuses of holidays, the Reformed sometimes overreacted; but the principle from which they set out was unimpeachable.

God had prescribed a specific number of feasts for Israel. These formed an organic whole, a cycle formed according to the holy count of seven, which had its beginning in the Sabbath. Just as God had set aside and sanctified the seventh day, in the same way He also sanctified the seventh month by establishing the first day of the month as a day of joy and of rest and of holy gathering together (Lev. 23:24). The seventh year was sanctified and set aside as the sabbath year (Ex. 23:10; Lev. 25:1-7; Deut. 15:1-11), which was a year of rest in which the usual work must rest, and everything that the ground produced was for the benefit of the poor, the stranger, and the cattle. And after the course of seven Sabbath years there came the Year of Jubilee, the year of redemption and of freedom, in which every Israelite received back all the property and freedom that he had lost since the previous Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee was a prophetic type of that future redemption in which the peace, the salvation, and the freedom of Christ would come.

In addition to the Sabbath, the Sabbath year, and the Year of Jubilee, the Lord also gave to His people the three great feasts: the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, so that Israel would remember that it lived as a redeemed people from the hand of God. The Feast of Passover was a certain reminder of the gracious redemption of the covenant people from the slavery of Egypt, and thereby Israel was to learn that she belonged entirely to the God of

the covenant, and that she was to receive herself and all God's gifts as a sacrifice that she must offer to Him. The Feast of Pentecost, seven weeks after the Feast of Passover, served to confirm more deeply this realization, and to give expression to the wonder of grace for which the people would thank God; not only for His redemption but also His provision and care. For that reason the firstfruits of the harvest were to be brought to the altar of the Lord on the Feast of Pentecost, signifying that the people and the gifts given by Him, belonged to Him, and that they wanted to dedicate themselves to Him. The great feasts were completed with the Feast of Tabernacles, which was held five days after the Great Day of Atonement. The redeemed people lived for seven days in tabernacles, in memory of the time that they had lived in tents during the difficult wandering in the wilderness of Arabia and that God provided for them in a miraculous way.

The foliage roof signified that Israel's God is a constant protector for His people, and that they are in themselves weak and miserable. The foliage huts were made with living branches, with fruit hanging from them. This taught Israel that with the Lord there is an abundance of pleasant things. The command that the people must bring an offering of the produce of the harvest signified that Israel is the possession of God, and must dedicate her gifts and abilities to the Lord.

The religious feasts of Israel were intended only for Israel during the dispensation of the Old Testament. As we have explained earlier, in the consideration of the New Testament Sabbath [Chapter 94, "Sunday", PVS], Christ came not to do away with the law and prophets, but to fulfill them. Christ is the true Servant of the Lord, the only propitiation (Romans 3:25), the perfect offering (Ephesians 5:2), the true circumcision (Colossians 2:11), the true Passover (1 Cor. 5:7), and for that reason His congregation is the true seed of Abraham, the true people of God (Romans 9:25; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; 1 Peter 2:9), the true Zion and Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22). Her complete devotion and love to the Lord is her spiritual sacrifice, and her reasonable service (Romans 12:1; Philippians 4:18). Now the shadow has fallen, and the body has remained and is revealed in its full splendor. Nothing that was of the essence in Israel has been lost; only that which was bound to a certain time. The outward has fallen away. When Christ died and the curtain of the temple was rent

apart, the old dispensation was legally abolished. Yet there remained an after-working for a while, as long as the temple stood and the congregation was not formally separated from the life of the Jewish worship. Rather, in essence, the church was born like a child in Israel's womb, called to an independent life as a spiritual body by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, bearing in itself the Spirit of life and the freedom and the adoption unto children.

In Judea the young congregation kept the Sabbaths, the ceremonies, the feast days, even circumcision for a few years (Acts 18:21; Galatians 3). But it went differently with the Christians who came out of heathendom. The apostle Paul held to the historical tradition in order to win the Jews; but in order to win the Greeks, he took a stand point above the law (1 Cor. 9:19-21). He did not rebuke the Christians from among the Jews who wanted to maintain the O.T. Sabbath (Rom. 15:4), but he explained that the O.T. Sabbath did not have any preference above another day. But when the Galatians saw a principle in the maintaining of the O.T. Sabbath and the Jewish feast days, Paul firmly rebuked them and warned them that in so doing they denied Christ (Gal. 4:9-10).

b. In History

The Christian holidays are not an institution of God, but of the church. It cannot be exactly determined when they originated. In addition to Sunday, Christians in the early days also celebrated the Sabbath. That happened mostly in the churches of the East where the influence of the Jewish Christians was greater; but also in some places in the West the Sabbath was celebrated. But as a rule the Sabbath was placed below Sunday. Because the Sabbath was highly regarded in the East, the church in the West saw more clearly a Jewish danger in the keeping of the Sabbath. And after Pope Innocent I forbade by law fasting on the Sabbath and Gregory the Great declared that the forbidding of work on the Sabbath was antichrist, this became a factor in the separation between the Eastern and the Western church.¹ In addition to Sunday, Wednesday and Friday were also commemorated

¹ Augusti, *Handbuch der Christlichen Archäologie I.* 516-518; Bingham *origins five antiquities ecclesiastical IX.* 51-65; Carl Bertheau, R. E. 6, Art. *Kirchliche Feste.*

as ecclesiastical days. Wednesday recalled the decision of the Jewish council to arrest and kill Jesus (Matt. 26:3-5), while on Friday the congregation commemorated the crucifixion of Jesus.

In addition to these weekly observations, of which Sunday was maintained in the whole church and established as an ecclesiastical day by church and imperial decrees, the ancient church also recognized annual holidays. Among these were the Passover and Pentecost, also Ascension Day and Christmas. The ancient church believed that maintaining these days was certainly not necessary for salvation, but that for the sake of ecclesiastical order and the wellbeing of the congregation, the church had the freedom to institute holidays. So the church established the feast of the baptism of Christ. This feast was kept in the Eastern church from the third century and had already appeared in the Western church in AD 360. January 6 was chosen as the date of that holiday. The holiday of the birth of Christ was already widely celebrated on December 25, from about the middle of the fourth century, while in the sixth century the feast of the circumcision of Christ was set on January 1, between Christmas and the Feast of Epiphany, in order to keep Christians from the heathen celebration of the New Year's Day. Soon days of preparation for the Feast of Christmas were instituted during the time of Advent.

An annual feast cycle was organized around the primary feasts. In addition to the Feast of the Trinity, which was first celebrated by the entire church in AD 1334, there were feasts in honor of Mary, the apostles, and the saints. In addition there were the feasts of the consecration of the local church and of the ordination of the bishop, and the Sacraments Day was celebrated on the sixtieth day after Easter. As a rule, with the commemorations of the martyrs and saints, a feast day was set on the day of their death because that was considered to be the day of their birth in heaven. The feast of a martyr was preferably celebrated at the place of his grave. The Feast of All Martyrs was celebrated by the Greek church on the Sunday after Pentecost, while the Romish church, in about the eighth century, set November 1 as the feast of All Saints and November 2 as the feast of All Souls.²

2 Caspari, *Art. Allerheiligen, en Art. Allerseeleentag*, R.E. I. 375; C.Bertheau, *Kirchliche Feste*, R.E.Teil VI; Akustik, *Die Feste der alten Christen Denkwürdigkeiten*, 1820.

Especially in the fifteenth century the number of ecclesiastical feasts increased so greatly that all the days of the calendar were filled and there was complaint about idleness on and the desecration of the days by worldly entertainment. Synods of the Romish church in 1512 and 1524 finally took measures to limit the number of ecclesiastical feasts.³

No wonder that from the beginning of the Reformation in the sixteenth century onward, a strong reaction against the feast days showed itself. At first, Luther, for pedagogical reasons and in order to combat laziness, impoverishment, and revelry, was inclined to do away with all feast days during the week and to shift these to Sunday. He wrote in his “Sermon on Good Works” (1520):

Would that God grant that in Christendom there be no feast days, that men held the feasts of the Virgin and the saints on Sunday, then many evil vices would be left behind, and by the labor of the workdays the land would not be so poor and awry. But now we are plagued with so many feast days, to the ruin of souls, bodies, and goods, whereof there is much to say.

However, Luther later changed in his thoughts about the maintaining of Christian feast days that had to do with the works of salvation and which were included in the confession of faith [Apostles’ Creed]. He did away with the holidays that were specifically Romish and those that were not grounded in the gospel, although for the time being he allowed some holidays which were deeply rooted in the life of the people. He emphasized, however, that on these holidays, God alone was to be praised, not the person for whom the day was set aside.

Among the Reformed churches, in some places only Sunday was observed, as Zwingli and Calvin had advocated. In Zurich, Zwingli restricted the number of feast days. In addition to the days that commemorated the works of salvation, he wanted to maintain only the Day of St. Stephan, the days of John the Baptist, of Peter and Paul, and of the Annunciation to Mary. On these days, however, after one had heard God’s Word and took part in the Lord’s Supper, the usual work of the day was to continue peacefully. Zwingli did not even disapprove of the idea that one might work after he attended the morning sermon on

3 Hefeke, *Conciliengeschichte VIII*. 547; IX. 381.

Sunday, “for the believer is over the Sabbath.”⁴ After Zwingli’s death, under Bullinger and in connection with the other Swiss churches, all of the days that had to do with Mary and the apostles were done away, and only the primary feast days were maintained.⁵ In Geneva, concurrently with the implementation of the Reformation in 1536 under the leadership of Farel and Viret, all ecclesiastical and commemorative days, except Sunday, were done away with, and the daily Mass was replaced with the daily morning sermon. Calvin was in agreement with this. And in emulation of Geneva, in the Scottish churches also the feast days were not tolerated, primarily through the efforts of Knox. The reason was that these feast days were not instituted by God, that they diminished the high significance of Sunday, that they easily gave rise to the expansion of their number and the institution of holy days as in the Romish churches, and that they gave rise to debauchery and pagan festivities. Calvin took the freedom to preach on a text from Deuteronomy (21:10-14), while he dealt with the Christmas gospel on the immediately preceding Sunday.⁶ The Puritans and the Independents drew the logical conclusions of that starting point and did away with all the feast days except Sunday. They did not even hold themselves to the ecclesiastical year, so that on Easter a sermon on the birth of Christ might be given.

In the Netherlands the ecclesiastical leaders at first tried to do away with all the feast days. The Synod of 1574 decided that one “should be content with Sunday alone,” and that one ought to deal with the birth of Christ on the Sunday before Christmas, but they allowed the ministers to preach on the history of the resurrection and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Easter and Pentecost.⁷ Because some feast days were maintained by the authority of the government, the Synod of 1578 allowed that there would be a sermon on the second feast days, as well as on the New Year’s Day and Ascension Day in order to avoid idleness and debauchery. But the churches should attempt to

4 *Zwingli’s Werke*, ed, Schuler und Schulthess (Zürich, 1828-42), I. 317.

5 R. Staehelin, *Huldreich Zwingli* (1895-1897), I. 296; II. 64.

6 *Calvin Opera*, Vol. 25, p.605 v.v.; F. L. Rutgers, *Calvijns invloed op de Reformatie in de Nederlanden*, 1899, bl.95.

7 Rutgers, *Acta der Nat. Syn.*, 142.

do away with the feast days, except Christmas, as much as possible.⁸ The Synod of Middelburg (1581, act. 50) also included Ascension Day among the obligatory feast days.⁹ However, the Synod of the Hague in 1586 limited the recognized feast days to only Sunday, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. But in places where, by order of the government, more feast days were held in commemoration of the saving works of Christ, such as the days of the Circumcision of Christ and the Ascension, the preachers were required “to redirect the vanity of the people to holy and useful activities.”¹⁰ Thus the situation at the beginning of the seventeenth century was that Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, along with the days immediately following, were universally observed. There was some difference over the day of the Circumcision of Christ or the New Year’s Day, and over Ascension Day. In some places in Utrecht¹¹ and in South Holland¹² some began to celebrate Good Friday also, but serious opposition arose against that. And so, the question was brought to the General Synod of Dordrecht (1618/19) by various provinces in order to come to unanimity on the keeping of feast days. The synod decided to sanction the celebration of the New Year’s Day, or the day of the Circumcision of Christ, and Ascension Day, which in most of the Dutch cities and provinces were already being observed, largely to carry out the preference of the [local] governments. The churches were firmly against it in principle, but often the government was for it, not only in order to do the people a favor, but also because they themselves by long custom took those days as a vacation.¹³ And although on these days the people were in danger of lapsing into vanity or unbounded frivolity, the ecclesiastics found it better to tolerate them as ecclesiastical holidays and to accustom the people to preaching on festal days.

Nevertheless, the voice of opposition continued to raise itself. Voetius declared that the holidays may well be tolerated by the

8 Rutgers, *Acta*, p. 253.

9 Rutgers, *Acta*, p. 394.

10 Rutgers, *Acta*, p. 501.

11 Hooyer, *Oude K.O.*, p. 404.

12 Reitsma, *Acta d. Prov. Sy.* II 345.

13 Voetius, *Pol. Eccl. I.* 294: IV. 173; *Desp. See.* III. 1344; Dr. H.H. Kuyper, *De Postacta*, bl. 152.

churches, but by no means approved. And it took a long time before people in all the provinces conformed themselves to the decision of the Synod of Dordrecht. In some places, as in Dordrecht, the Feast of Circumcision was introduced very late, while in Amsterdam and in Zeeland it was never celebrated.¹⁴ As a rule, however, Article 67 of the Church Order remained in force:

The churches shall observe, besides Sunday, also Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, along with the days immediately following. And because the day of the Circumcision and of the Ascension are also observed in most of the cities and provinces of the Netherlands, the ministers should everywhere, where this is not the custom, work with the government, so that they may conform with the others.

This decision was modified by the revision of the Church Order by the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in 1905 so that Article 67 now reads: “The churches shall observe, besides Sunday, also Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and Ascension Day. The observation of the second holidays is left to the freedom of the churches.” There was no mention made of New Year’s Day or Good Friday. The celebration of special days was left to the local churches.

c. The Ecclesiastical Year

Except for these general rules for the observance of holidays, the Reformed churches know of no official regulation of the ecclesiastical year. By the ecclesiastical year, we understand the annual cycle, which in distinction from the civil year, is determined by the days on which the Christian church specially commemorates the central works of salvation, and which begins with the fourth Sunday before Christmas.

Advent has gradually become a time of preparation for Christmas. The number of weeks varied for a long time, but from the eleventh century onward four Sundays were officially established in Rome, whereof the first Sunday could change from November 27 to December 3.¹⁵

Christmas. We find the first evidence of the celebration of the birth of Christ among the Gnostics and specifically among the followers of

14 Schotel, *Eeredienst*, bl. 248, 283.

15 Rietschel, *Lehrbuch der Liturgik*, 1900, I 202; E. Car. Achelis, *Lehrbuch der prakt. Theologie*, 1898, I. 272.

Basilides, who taught that the Spirit of God came down upon the person Jesus at His baptism in the Jordan. By this means the commemoration of the baptism of Christ easily connected with the commemoration of Christ's birth. No wonder that the church was at first averse to the celebration of the birthday of Christ, although already toward the end of the third century there is evidence that in the Eastern church, and also in Gaul and in Spain, January 6 was celebrated as the baptism and birthday of Christ. January 6 was also observed by the Eastern church as the New Year's Day.

In the West, as early as the third century, December 25 was considered to be the day of Christ's birth, without the day being celebrated as a feast day. Why the twenty-fifth of December was set as the date of Christ's birth cannot be determined with certainty. It is certain that the ecclesiastical celebration of that day was established in Rome in the middle of the fourth century, according to Duchesne in the year AD 336 and according to Usener and A. Harnack in the year AD 354. The Christmas celebration spread to the East, where it was first introduced into Constantinople by Gregory of Nazianzus. Since that time the celebration of the feast was universal in the church. Before long it was seen as the high point of God's work of mercy: the great feast on which one should abstain from all work, on which even the slave should rest. Fasting was forbidden on the day. The joy had to be spiritual. Public and worldly feasting was forbidden. Later on the celebration of the birth of Christ was mixed with a variety of heathen and superstitious admixtures. In order to make an impression on the people, ecclesiastics introduced beautiful ceremonies and dramatic presentations that directed the eye away from the Savior. Furthermore, in many churches there was the custom of going early in the morning to church, where there was a crib with the Christ child, in order to rock the child. Presentations were made of the stall with an ox and an ass by the crib. These silly performances reached their epitome in the so-called Fools' Feasts, a deformation of the old Roman Saturnalia, wherein even clergymen appeared in the church dressed not only in animal masks, but also as women and as magicians. In place of sacred songs, disgusting tunes were sung. In the place of the host, sausages were placed on the altar. All kinds of lewdness occurred in public places. The church was forced to take strong measures against these

sins. On June 9, 1435 the Council of Basil categorically forbade the holding of fools' and children's feasts, plays, dances, festivals and annual markets in the church or in the churchyards, and decreed that the leader who allowed such was to lose his income for three months. But when such measures had no effect, the holding of such shameful celebrations was forbidden by decree of the government in 1445.¹⁶ The Reformation took over Christmas as one of the high ecclesiastical holidays, but wanted to give it a higher tone by the preaching of the gospel of the birth of the Savior.

The Feast of Epiphany, because of Christmas, lost more and more of its significance as the feast of the baptism of Christ.

Rome and North Africa, however, took over the Feast of Epiphany as they did Christmas. They made Epiphany a feast of commemoration of the coming of the Wise Men from the East (Matthew 2) as the firstfruits of the heathen on whom the glory of the Lord had appeared. Thereafter the day was given the name the Feast of the Magi, of the Star, or of the Three Kings. The three kings were likely named Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar by Bede. The gifts that they brought, that is gold, frankincense, and myrrh, were brought by them as representing the three parts of the world. The Reformed did not take over this holiday because it is more of a saints day than a day of remembrance of a central work of salvation.

The First of January, the beginning of the Roman civil year, on which the highest officials of state assumed their offices, was a day of celebration for the Romans in which the people, as a rule, gave themselves over to wild excesses. In order to discourage the participation of Christians in this heathen festival, the church turned the first of January, the eighth day after the feast of Christ's birth, into a feast day that commemorated the circumcision of Christ. The Synod of Tours (567) made a regulation to that effect. The church had her own ecclesiastical year which in the West began with Christmas (the nativity of Christ), but also with March 1 or March 25 (from the incarnation, from the annunciation, or the conception of Mary), or also with Easter (from the resurrection). For that reason Martin of Bracava could speak in 572 of the error of the simple that began the new year

¹⁶ Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte* VII. 598; VIII. 10; G. Boehmer, *Art. Narrenfest*, R.R. 13.

with January 1. And so in the Roman Missal and in the Roman Breviary, January 1 was designated only as the day of the circumcision of Christ. However, because in civil life the year began with January 1 and all calendars held to that beginning of the year, the church could eventually do nothing else than conform itself to that rule. But many bad practices had crept into churches on New Year's Day and proper deportment and gravity were not observed. Luther thundered against such a misuse of the pulpit, that useless fables were preached instead of God's Word. And he exhorted that on January 1, one should preach on the circumcision of Christ and on the name "Jesus."¹⁷

In the early years of the Reformation, New Year's Day was not observed as an ecclesiastical holiday in our country [Netherlands]. But since the time of Philip II, the beginning of the year having been set on January 1, in accordance with Roman usage, people in our country began to observe the day as an ecclesiastical holiday. In 1581, in all Roman Catholic lands, the Julian calendar was abolished and replaced with the Gregorian by Pope Gregory XIII. In the Netherlands, the Count of Anjou ordered the introduction of the Gregorian calendar by renaming the fifteenth of October as the twenty-fifth. This decree was implemented in Brabant, Flanders, Artois, Hainaut, Holland, and Zeeland, but elsewhere, especially in Gelderland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Friesland, and Groningen the old, or Julian calendar, remained in use.¹⁸ Although Leicester tried to do away with the papal calendar and to change the year back into the old style, this attempt got nowhere and the Gregorian calendar remained in use in the above-named provinces. After 1701 it was accepted in all the provinces. Now that the civil year no longer began on Easter, as it had earlier in Holland, Zeeland, and West Friesland, and people generally began the year with January 1, there was a sermon given on that day in almost every place, normally about the circumcision of Christ.

The Old Year's Day has nothing to do with church life. It seems to have been unknown as an ecclesiastical day of celebration in the days of the Reformation. The synod of the Netherlands Reformed (Hervormde) Church, however, established the evening of the day as

17 *Auslegung der Episteln*, Erl. Ausg. X 319.

18 Bor, *Nederl. Oorlog* 17, bl. 336; van Meteren, *Ned. Hist.* XI. 196; Wagenaar, *Vad. Histor.* VII. 469.

a time for a church service of thanksgiving because it “is appropriate to turn ourselves to serious meditation regarding ourselves and the ways of God with us.” Besides, it is in any case fitting that the congregation come together on Old Year’s Day in order to thank God for all His benefits, in order to confess sins before the face of God and to plead for His forgiveness, and in order to be strengthened in faith in God’s faithfulness and mercy.

The practice of the ancient church to commemorate in the preaching the suffering of Christ on the Sundays before Easter was followed at all times. With Palm Sunday, the so-called quiet week begins. In the ancient church and in the Middle Ages work was stopped. All classes of society had to prepare themselves for the celebration of the holy days. Even prisoners were released from their cells. After all, as Chrysostom said, in this week “the long strife is ended, death is defeated, the curse lifted, the tyranny of Satan broken, the reconciliation of God with man wrought, and heaven opened for men.” On each day of this “great week,” the believers came together for a worship service. The fasting was strict. The Lutheran Church held only the Green Thursday and the Good Friday as half-holidays. The Reformed churches regarded them both as normal workdays.

Good Friday or the sixth day or the Quiet or the Great Week before Easter, the day of the crucifixion or the Paraskene, the preparation in a special sense for the feast, was since ancient times also observed as a day of sorrow. Already in the ancient church it was a day of strict fasting on which the clocks and the organs were silent. Even the elements of the Lord’s Supper were not consecrated. A special ceremony was the adoration of the cross. The cross that was covered on White Thursday was uncovered. The priest, having received the cross from the hand of a deacon, spoke the words, “This is the wooden cross.” Then the priest, the deacon and the sub-deacon answered, “on which the safety of the world depends.” Thereafter the adoration began with a special ceremony. By the Romish Church, Good Friday was regarded as a half-holiday on which one could work. Luther honored the days on which the memory of the death and resurrection of Christ were celebrated as the most important of all holidays. In the Lutheran church, Good Friday is considered the most important of the days for the celebration of Lord’s Supper.

Good Friday was not celebrated by the Reformed in our country. We read of it first in 1589. In some places, the Romish practices were maintained and there was a sermon on Good Friday evening. The Synod of Gouda (Art. 30) declared that this practice was unedifying, and for that reason, the classes in which that takes place should suppress it.¹⁹ In Gelderland, where German practices had a strong influence, the provincial Synod of Zutphen (1596, Art. 22) declared that the preachers of the Lowlands should on all Fridays during Lent proclaim the story of the Christ's suffering. The day was named "Good Friday" by the classis of Nijmegen in 1611. The observing of holidays in that classis was forbidden "upon a fine of a dollar," from which the Friday before Easter [Good Friday] was excepted. In the Remonstrant Church Order of 1612, Good Friday was numbered among the ecclesiastical festal- and holidays, but the Reformed had never given the day ecclesiastical sanction.

Under Lutheran influence, especially after the appearance of Pietism, Good Friday was observed in some provinces. But it was only decided in 1787 that, "in view of the fact that the day of the death of Him Who is life for us and for the world" is celebrated in only a few provinces, on this day a worship service should be held. Only in the nineteenth century did Good Friday become an ecclesiastical holiday among the Netherlands Reformed (Nederlands Hervormde). On the basis of requests that it had received, the Synod of the Netherlands Reformed (Nederlands Hervormde) Church of 1853 sent a request to the church councils that the day be celebrated in a more worthy manner, which purpose could especially be served by the holding of the Lord's Supper on that day. Since then, Good Friday has been included as a religious holiday. Attempts have been directed to the government of the country by the Reformed (Hervormde) synod that Good Friday be numbered among the generally recognized holidays, but to this day the government has denied these requests.

It lies in the nature of the case, that it would not be improper for the church to celebrate Good Friday, just as she does Ascension Day. There is also no need to object to the convoking of a preaching service on that day. All the days of the week are with equal propriety, just as our entire lives are to be dedicated to the Lord. But it is a misconcep-

¹⁹ Reitsma en Van Veen, *Acta* II. 345.

tion to honor Good Friday as an especially holy day. With this we run into the danger of giving less honor to Sunday as the day of the Lord. Not on Good Friday but on Sunday, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, should the congregation come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, the feast of salvation.

Easter is the great holiday of the Christian church, the holiday of life, the overcoming of death and of the grave. In the first years, the Christians from among the Jews celebrated the Jewish Passover in a christianized way. The content of the Passover celebration was changed. But the further the church came from the land of its birth, the more the Christian celebration of Easter took on an independent character, and was always held on the day of the Lord.

In the second half of the second century, we find for the first time, during the strife over Easter, a witness that Easter was celebrated annually. When Polycarp visited Rome in AD 155, he and Bishop Anicetus held a discussion of the difference in viewpoints over the celebration of Easter without disturbing the peace of the church. The Asians held to the fourteenth of Nisan on which the Jews celebrated their Feast of Passover. They professed that they were bound to that date, whether that date fell on a day of the week or on Sunday. For that reason they were called the quartodecimanen. They called the Feast of Passover the journey into death (*Pascha staurosimon*), while they always celebrated on the sixteenth of Nisan, the Feast of Resurrection or the return into life (*Pascha anastasimon*). In the West, however, people held to the weekly schedule, and elevated the week that followed upon the first full moon after the Lenten equinox to a week of commemoration of the suffering and death Christ; and people followed the succession of days. The Sunday following Passover Friday received especially joyful consecration as the resurrection day. The Saturday was considered to be the day of deepest sorrow because Jesus lay in the grave and the hope of the disciples was gone. The congregation fasted on Friday and Saturday until Sunday morning at three o'clock, the vigil of Easter night, at which hour the time of rejoicing began and the believers greeted each other with the joyful call, "The Lord is risen indeed." The Lord's Supper was held on Easter Sunday as the New Testament fulfillment of the Jewish Passover (1 Cor. 5:7).²⁰

20 E. Schürer, *Die Passastreitigkeiten des 2 Jahrh. in Zeitschr. f. Hist.*

In AD 170 the issue came to strife in Laodicea. One party wanted to celebrate Easter entirely in the Jewish manner and held the Lord's Supper on the fourteenth of Nisan. The other party, to which Appollinarius counted himself, wanted nothing of the Judaizing tendency. The Judaizing tendency appealed to the synoptic gospels, in which Jesus was to have established the Lord's Supper at the Passover meal on the fourteenth of Nisan, as a preparation for His death which followed on the fifteenth of Nisan. While the other party appealed to the Gospel of John, which indicated that the Passover lamb was eaten by the Jews on the evening of Jesus' death. Up to this point the Judaistic teaching was defended in Rome by a presbyter named Blastus. The church took very strong action against the Asia Minor Easter celebration. Bishop Victor of Rome (192-194) sent a letter to the primary bishops on the matter. Many synods were held on the issue and the churches of the West, Egypt, Palestine, Pontus, and Croatia (Oskroëne) declared themselves for the Western position. But when Polycrates of Ephesus and those of Asia Minor held firmly to their living tradition, and appealed to Melito, Polycarp and the apostle John, Victor wanted to excommunicate them. But Ireneas reprimanded him because this course would damage the unity of the church. Ireneas appealed to Bishop Anicetus. Victor agreed to that. But the strife persisted until the Synod of Nicea condemned the position of the quartodecimanen as heretical. It was decided at the Council of Nicea that Easter must be celebrated on Sunday, and on the Sunday which was calculated, according to the nineteen-year cycle of the Alexandrian church, to be the first Sunday after the full moon which appeared on or near the beginning of Lent.²¹ This rule was not generally followed immediately. As late as AD 341, the rule was again reissued along more stringent lines. The Alexandrian bishops, to whom the annual calculation was assigned, had to complain repeatedly about the confusion. And only after Leo I (440-441) had pressed hard for the observing of the decision of Nicea, did it, using the calculations of Dionysius Exiguus (535), find general acceptance in the West.

Theologie, 1870, S. 182; Erw. Preuschen, Art. *Passah und Passahstreitigkeiten*, R.E.³ 14; W. Moeller, *Kirchengeschichte*, 1902, I. 276, 764; Eusebius, *K. G. V.* 24.

²¹ Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte* I. 326-36.

Easter was celebrated with joy in the ancient church. The spiritual joy was not to be disturbed by any earthly joy. The activities of everyday life stood still. The entire Easter week was a week of festivity. But because the festive week was vexatious in many ways and in the days of spiritual decline gave occasion for gross debauchery, it became necessary to shorten the festive week. Thus the Synod of Constance (1094) shortened it to the Sunday and the two following days.²² As a rule Easter was celebrated with great ceremony during the Middle Ages.²³ However, heathen practices continued to have an influence, and in many places unsettling things took place. First of all, dramatic performances were given on the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, as often inside of the church as outside. Some played upon the worldly mindedness and the yearning for pleasure among the people and tried to entertain the people with vain display and base jokes. Along with the sermons of some of the clerics, silly and bold displays were presented. However, the government and the church moved against such displays, but they were never entirely done away with. The annual proclamation that was made in the cities with strikes of the cymbal to “keep away from all insolence, rowdiness in the inns, drunkenness, rabble rousing, dice, cats, and awls (gambling)” shows all too clearly that Easter was not well spent even in our own country.²⁴ After the Reformation of the sixteenth century these conditions were not much improved. The people wanted to say, “adieu to the Romish church, but not to the Romish customs.” The government did, upon the insistence of the church, ensure that the first Easter day was celebrated as a serious day with the Lord’s Supper, when everything was to be quiet on the streets and it was “disgraceful” to sit in the taverns. But on the second feast day, nature reasserted itself. The people enjoyed themselves in all kinds of games and indulged in licentiousness and foolish singing.

It was the custom in the early years of the Reformation, under the influence of tradition and insistence of the governments, that the Lord’s Supper was celebrated at the great feasts: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. Later the churches thought that it would be better, because

22 Hefele, *Conc.* V. 212.

23 Schotel, *Eeredienst*, 1870, bl. 267.

24 Schotel, *De openbare Eeredienst*, bl. 270.

the heart of the holiday was being pushed to the background, that the sacrament be held on an ordinary Sunday. This latter is certainly more to be recommended. We celebrate on all Sundays the memory of the great redemption through Christ's resurrection, and so Sunday is the designated day for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This was, therefore, correctly understood when the synod of the Reformed Churches, in the revision of the Church Order in 1905, dropped the old provision that it was "edifying" to hold the Lord's Supper on the great Christian holidays.

Ascension Day is one of the oldest festivals celebrated by the Christian church. Origen was not yet familiar with it. In contrast, the fourth-century *Constitutiones apostolicae* (5, 19; 8, 33), Chrysostom (*Hom.* 85) and Augustine (*Ep.* 54 *ad Jan.*) mention the Feast of the Ascension as a long-standing feast. Socrates mentions that in AD 390 this feast was celebrated by the people in a suburb of Constantinople according to old custom.

In general, the Ascension was celebrated in the ancient church in a wonderful manner. Especially in the Church of the Assumption in Jerusalem, which was illumined for the occasion, it was commemorated in a manner full of splendor. In many places a procession was held to depict the walk of Jesus with His disciples to the Mount of Olives. Later on this feast was also marred by all sorts of foolish and superstitious additions, by sins and excesses of all kinds. Vulgar representations were given in some churches, representing, among other things, Christ entering the gate of heaven and driving the devils into flight. Here and there the dew-pedaling or dew-striking was in vogue—a parody of the early morning walk of Jesus to the Mount of Olives—where sometimes crowds of people arose very early in the morning to sing and play outside in fields or in forests, many of whom occasionally behaved in very unedifying ways.

After the Reformation, the situation remained essentially as it was. The Reformed were generally against the holidays, but had to accommodate the people according to the wishes of the government. After 1581, Ascension Day was counted among the Christian holidays. However, in the first few years after that, it was not yet observed everywhere as an ecclesiastical day. And where preaching was not faithfully maintained, Ascension Day was considered as a day off, on

which people could go out, receive family visits, etc. This is still the practice on Ascension Day. On one day in the middle of the week in early summer, it is so appealing to go out and hold meetings for missions or Christian associations. This is not necessarily due to an underestimation of the gospel of the ascension, but it may very easily be accompanied by a neglect of the purpose of the day. And therefore it is necessary that the church should consecrate the tone of the day by preaching the glorious gospel of the resurrection of Christ, who as our Mediator has ascended into heaven to guide, care for, and quicken His people with His life and strength, and prepare them for His return.

Pentecost is the joyful holiday, on which the congregation commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit, to make His dwelling in the congregation, to make her a dwelling place of God, to endow her with the full treasure of Christ, and to awaken her to the holy warfare on behalf of King Jesus.

In the most ancient times of the Christian church, the word Pentecost was used in a broader sense. The days between Passover and Pentecost were understood to designate the entire feast of the *quinquagesima*, the fifty days after Passover. These fifty days were days of joy when public entertainment was forbidden, but labor was permitted. The fiftieth day, which concluded the feast time, was the great feast day, “the feast of all feasts.” As a result, the name of the fifty days, Pentecost or the fiftieth, was also passed on to the fiftieth day itself. This day appears for the first time in the Canon of Elvira (AD 305) under the name Pentecost when it was declared to be an ecclesiastical feast day.

According to the decisions of the ancient councils, this feast had to be celebrated with dignity. Initially, the celebration lasted only one day, but the Councils of Mainz (AD 813) and Ingelsheim (AD 826) decreed that it should last eight days. Later, in view of the abuses, it was necessary to shorten this festival as well as the Easter festival. The first day was the great day. Baptism was administered, and the Lord’s Supper was held.

The Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) Churches in the Netherlands have ordained from the beginning that on the Sunday on which the Pentecost fell, the “pouring out of the Holy Spirit” should be preached. In 1578, the date of the celebration of Pentecost was calculated by the

church, and, to avoid vanity and licentiousness among the people, it was decreed that on the second day of the feast there should also be preaching in the church. Moreover, it is good and necessary for a generally recognized Christian holiday to be ecclesiastically set apart by the preaching of the gospel. If the government recognizes a day as a public holiday and a day of rest, the government must also take this into account and apply the Sunday Act to that day. It follows that the government should recognize as few days as generally recognized holidays as possible. But if a day is accepted as a Christian holiday, the church should also consecrate that day by the public preaching of the gospel.

The church has the right to designate certain days as ecclesiastical days of celebration. It could, therefore, also designate the day of the Reformation or another day on which people commemorate the benefits of God in nature or in the history of the country or church as an ecclesiastical day of celebration. But if such a commemorative day is not generally held and is not designated by the government as a recognized holiday, such a day of celebration may be held in the church for a particular event, such as that of an anniversary, or of a special day of prayer or thanksgiving. But the church should be warned against adding other days beside the generally recognized Christian holidays. On Sunday the faithful meet at regular times for the ministry of the Word, and on that day, as a rule, all the concerns and needs of the congregation can be brought to mind, God's grace besought for specific needs, and His name thanked and praised for His gracious favors. ●

The Perfectly Simple Triune Covenant God

Marco Barone

Introduction

In the Protestant world, the classical doctrine of God (His one being, three persons, and attributes) is often addressed with the phrase “classical Christian theism.”

The approach of classical Christian theism is what one discovers in older Protestant confessions such as the Belgic Confession, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Westminster Confession of Faith and Second London Confession of Faith. This approach is basically in keeping with the view of God as found in the works of patristic and medieval Christian theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. It is marked by a strong commitment to the doctrines of divine aseity, simplicity, eternity, immutability, impassibility, and the substantial unity of the divine persons. The underlying and inviolable conviction is that God does not derive any aspect of His being from outside Himself and is not in any way caused to be.¹

1 James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 1. For the church father Augustine, see G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine: Fifth Edition* (London-New York: Continuum, 2007), 83-137, 252-79.

Classical Christian theism as defined above finds vocal supporters also among Reformed, Lutherans,² Arminians,³ and Roman Catholics.⁴

However, classical Christian theism has repeatedly been criticized and rejected, especially in the last decades.

In contrast to this older view of a radically independent, simple, and purely actual God stands the newer approach of theistic mutualism, dubbed by some “theistic personalism.” In an effort to portray God as more relatable, theistic mutualists insist that God is involved in a genuine give-and-take relationship with His creatures. Theistic mutualists may disagree among themselves on precisely how much control God has over the give-and-take process, but all are agreed that God is somehow involved in such an exchange ... The method of theistic mutualism begins with the assumption that God is a person comparable to human persons, only without a number of our limitations.⁵

Although there are differences among those who hold to these revisionist views of God, they all share similar concerns.

There are both hard and soft versions of theistic mutualism. The harder sort regards God as a person who allows other beings to function as first causes or absolute originators of actions, events, or objects and who himself stands as an onlooker within creation, susceptible to an increase in knowledge. Hard theistic mutualism also tends to regard God as needing the world in some respect and so compelled to create and sustain it. It is this harder theistic mutualism that is espoused by

2 For example, Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On the Nature of God and on the Trinity* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2007); Carl L. Beckwith, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics: Vol. 3: The Holy Trinity* (Ft. Wayne, IN: The Lutheran Academy, 2016).

3 For example, Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Vol. 2: God and Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2003), 17-419; Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology: Vol. One: The Living God* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2001).

4 For example, Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 73-107.

5 Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 1-2.

open theists and process theists. Soft theistic mutualism, by contrast, tends to hold that God does not create the world by dint of absolute necessity or need the world in any significant sense. Moreover, many soft theistic mutualists do not believe that God is intellectually open or in process of development. Indeed, many who ascribe to the softer variety of mutualism have stood firmly against intellectual and volitional “becoming” in God. They maintain that God doesn’t learn or depend on creation for His knowledge and that His will is not changed by the actions of creatures. Nevertheless, they do allow for a measure ontological becoming and process in God inasmuch as they, with the harder theistic mutualists, insist that God undergoes changes in relation and in those alleged emotive states of His that are thought to be correlative to His changing relations with creatures. This ontological openness to change, whether enacted by God from within or by creatures outside Him, is the common denominator in all forms of theistic mutualism. Theistic mutualists may disagree among themselves on precisely how much process and development to allow in God or even over what the ultimate source or cause of such development might be. But all hold to a divine ontology that allows for God to acquire and shed actuality of being.⁶

Sadly, today many Evangelical, Protestant, and even Reformed exponents deny some of the classical, biblical, and comforting divine attributes that are expounded in traditional Reformed dogmatics and systematic theologies.

The orbit of theistic mutualism extends well beyond the realm of philosophy. It has also made significant inroads among evangelical theologians, perhaps most notably those of the open theist persuasion. Somewhat surprisingly, though, is how deeply theistic mutualism has taken root in the thinking of many who adhere to the older Protestant confessions. Theologians within the various confessional branches of evangelicalism, usually Calvinists, have been among the most vociferous opponents of openness theology, in particular with regard to the question of divine exhaustive foreknowledge. Nevertheless, many of them share with open theists the theistic mutualist belief that God’s being is such that he is capable of being moved by His creatures. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this adherence to theistic mutualism among modern evangelical Calvinists and it is

6 Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 3-4.

not my purpose in this volume to investigate each of these reasons. Suffice it to say that confessional Calvinists who uphold any aspect of theistic mutualism are faced with the peculiar and perhaps insurmountable challenge of reconciling their mutualist understanding of the God-world relation with the language and intent of the classical Reformed symbols.⁷

One of the outcomes of this revisionist approach is that the God described by classical Christian theism has been accused of being “lifeless.” For instance, Richard Swinburne claims that the timeless view of God (God as being outside of and not bound to time) depicts a God who is lifeless.⁸ Alan G. Padgett says something very similar: “Is not this God in a box, a changeless being that ‘lives’ only in a very stretched sense of the word? The ‘life’ of a changeless, atemporal being is lived only in the ‘space’ of logical order, not in real time. Is this not also a problem? Does this kind of God seem anything like the biblical God?”⁹

Augustine of Hippo once said regarding the study of “the unity of the Trinity, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” that “in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable.”¹⁰ Similarly, Jonathan Edwards said that “those doctrines which relate to the essence, attributes, and subsistencies of God, concern all; as it is of infinite importance to common people, as well as to ministers, to know what kind of being

7 Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 2-3. For summaries and commentary of the contemporary Protestant situation on the doctrine of God, see also James E. Dolezal, *God Without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 1-30; Bradford Littlejohn, “Introduction”, in Brad Littlejohn, ed., *God of our Fathers: Classical Theism for the Contemporary Church* (Moscow, ID: The Davenant Institute, 2018), vi-xviii.

8 Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence on Theism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), 242.

9 Alan G. Padgett, “Response to Paul Helm,” in Gregory E. Gansle ed., *God and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 61-62.

10 Augustine of Hippo, *On the Trinity*, 1.3.5. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). For online access, see www.newadvent.org/fathers/130105.htm.

God is.”¹¹ If Augustine and Edwards are right, then such departure from the classical and biblical doctrine of God is highly dangerous. The present article will limit itself to offering a view of the triune God that presents the concept of family¹² as applicable to the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. It is here argued that, contrary to the false charge of being lifeless and dry, the classical Christian doctrine of the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit is *the very archetypal pattern of life*. I will show this by emphasizing the trinity of God, that is, the relationships that the three persons eternally and fully enjoy with each other. Even though it is not here argued that this perspective on the Divinity will necessarily answer all objections, it will at least show that personal theism’s objection of the lifelessness of the eternal and immutable triune God is unfair at best. Grounded in this concept of God as holy family life, the presentation will conclude with some brief criticism of the traditional

11 Jonathan Edwards, “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth,” in Eilson H Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, Douglas A Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1999), 36.

12 As it will become clear, this is *not* an endorsement of the contemporary social doctrine of the Trinity. “Social trinitarianism is a recent departure from classic Trinitarianism and provides an alternative answer to how God is one in essence and three in person: the three persons are distinguished not by their relations of origin but by relationships. That is, the three persons of God each possess what we would call a personality, including a distinct volitional will, and how these relate to one another is what distinguishes Father, Son, and Spirit. Typically, both the economic roles and the volitional relationships that bind them (e.g., eternal material subordination) distinguish Father, Son, and Spirit ... social trinitarianism [is] a seemingly modern innovation and one lacking in biblical warrant.” Matthew Y. Emerson, “The Role of Proverbs 8: Eternal Generation and Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern,” in Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain, eds., *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 46, 65. Moreover, some emphases of this approach tend to consider the three persons of the Trinity as three divine beings, against the orthodox formulation of the three persons in one being. See David J. Engelsma, *Trinity and Covenant: God as Holy Family* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006), 42-49, for a constructive criticism of social trinitarianism.

Reformed covenantal doctrine. This view sees the covenant of God as a contract or agreement between God and elect humanity, as well as a means to the end of salvation. In its place, the present proposal will offer a view of the covenant of God as the very end of salvation itself and intended as a relationship of fellowship sovereignly established by God with His elect people and, in this sense, comparable to the relationship of marriage (Ezekiel 16).

The Triune God as Holy Family

God is three; He is not only one. He is one in being, and three in persons, according to the terminology that the universal church has adopted. The Scripture ascribes divine names and works to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. The last mentioned is not an impersonal force but a person. By “person” I mean “the subject of all actions and experiences in moral, rational nature.”¹³ A person is someone who consciously says “I” in distinction to other persons.

Although God is one in being, each of His three persons can say “I” in distinction to each other. The Scripture reveals to us the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By definition, the Father cannot be the Father without the Son. The Son cannot be the Son without the Father. The Holy Spirit cannot be the Spirit of the Father and the Son without these two. Therefore, each person of the Trinity has different relations to the others, and although they “are not identical with the relations, they are *identified* by the relations.”¹⁴

God is eternal, and outside time. Therefore, the Father does not become the Father, nor the Son become the Son, nor the Holy Spirit become the Holy Spirit. The three persons are in eternal relationship to each other so that the Father is eternally the Father in Himself, the Son is eternally the Son in Himself, and the Holy Spirit is eternally the Holy Spirit in himself.

The Father eternally begets the Son. We read of the eternal generation of the Son in John 1:14, John 3:16, and Psalm 2 (even though this Psalm refers primarily to Christ’s exaltation, as Acts 13:33 and Heb. 1:3-5 tell us). The Son is distinct from the Father inasmuch as

13 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:207.

14 Engelsma, *Trinity and Covenant*, 58. Emphasis added.

the Father is the logical source of the Deity and He is the person who plans and leads the plan of salvation. The Son is eternally generated by the Father and is the person who reveals in time through His incarnation the plan of redemption of the Father. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and applies the redemption in time. The eternal generation (begetting) of the Son can be described as follows:

...an act of both the Father and the Son, of the one generating and one generated, actively performed by the Father, passively accomplished by the Son. Scripture explicitly refers to the generation of the Son (Psalm 2:7) and to the fact that the Son is beloved (*dilectus*: Matt. 3:17; 17:5), the proper (*propius*) Son of God (John 5:18; Rom. 8:32), and only begotten (*unigenitus*: John 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9). This generation is, moreover, eternal and perpetual, and unlike the generations of things in the physical world. Marckius argues, thus, that the generation of the Son is not a physical but a “hyperphysical generation from which—as in the *via negativa* approach to the attributes—all “imperfection, dependence, succession, mutation, division, and multiplication” is absent. Nonetheless, this is a “proper,” not a “metaphysical,” generation, a genuine filiation flowing (*fluens*) from the Father according to which the Son is the true image of the invisible God, the representation of the glory and character of the Father’s person (cf. Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). By this generation, the Son is “produced from the” in an “eternal and incomprehensible communication of the unitary divine essence.”¹⁵

What about the Holy Spirit? Here we find one of the most amazing truths of the doctrine of the Trinity, a truth that we can understand to a certain degree, but that we cannot comprehend (from the Latin *cum*, with, and *prehendere*, to take, or even to embrace fully and entirely). The Holy Spirit *is* the love of God, He is the personal bond of love between the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son love each other in the Spirit. The Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. The Father delights in the Son and the Son delights in the Father. This is done in the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. This love and communion between the

15 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725: Volume 4: The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 287.

first and second persons of the Trinity is a person.¹⁶ The love that is “the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:13), which the saints practice with one another, is the *vestigium trinitatis*. It is the trace of that perfect love that the Father and the Son mutually breathe to one another in the Holy Spirit. It is the archetypal and personal love, love in the most absolute sense.

But does equating the Spirit with the bond of love damage the personality of the Spirit? Jonathan Edwards acknowledges the problem, and offers an explanation that not only preserves the personality of the Holy Spirit but that is also instrumental in showing how the triune God is in Himself a relationship of persons—a family.

One of the principal objections that I can think of against what has been supposed is concerning the personality of the Holy Ghost, that this scheme of things don't seem well to consist with that, [that] a person is that which hath understanding and will. If the three in the Godhead are persons, they doubtless each of 'em have understanding: but this makes the understanding one distinct person, and love another. How therefore can this love be said to have understanding? Here I would observe that divines have not been wont to suppose that these three had three distinct understandings, but all one and the same understanding. In order to clear up this matter, let it be considered, that the whole divine essence is supposed truly and properly to subsist in each of these three— viz. God, and His understanding, and love—and that there is such a wonderful union between them that they are after an ineffable and inconceivable manner one in another; so that one hath another, and they have communion in one another, and are as it were predicable one of another. As Christ said of Himself and the Father, “I am in the Father, and the Father in me” [John 10:14], so may it be said concerning all the persons of the Trinity: the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father; the Holy Ghost is in the Father, and the Father in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Ghost is in the Son, and the Son in the Holy Ghost. And the Father understands because the Son, who is the divine understanding, is in Him. The Father loves because the Holy Ghost is in him. So the Son loves because the Holy Spirit is in Him

16 Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 6.5.7; Anselm, *Monologion*, 49-55; Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, 46; Jonathan Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Vol. 21*, ed. Sang Huyn Lee (New Haven-London; Yale University Press, 2003), 121-32.

and proceeds from Him. So the Holy Ghost, or the divine essence subsisting in divine love, understands because the Son, the divine idea, is in Him. Understanding may be predicated of this love, because it is the love of the understanding both objectively and subjectively. God loves the understanding and the understanding also flows out in love, so that the divine understanding is in the Deity subsisting in love. It is not a blind love. Even in creatures there is consciousness included in the very nature of the will or act of the soul; and though perhaps not so that it can so properly be said that it is a seeing or understanding will, yet it may truly and properly [be] said so in God by reason of God's infinitely more perfect manner of acting, so that the whole divine essence flows out and subsists in this act. The Son is in the Holy Spirit, though it don't proceed from Him, by reason that the understanding must be considered as prior in the order of nature to the will or love or act, both in creature and in the Creator. The understanding is so in the Spirit, that the Spirit may be said to know, as the Spirit of God is truly and properly said to know and to "search all things, even the deep things of God" [1 Corinthians 2:10].¹⁷

The triune God reconciles in Himself unity and plurality in the unity of being and the plurality and distinction of the three persons. A static, monistic God cannot be love. God is love (1 John 4:8). The context of the assertion of the apostle John is trinitarian. Both the Father and the Son are mentioned, the former as the One who sends the Son into the world and the latter as the One who reveals the Father's plan of redemption (1 John 4:9-10). God is love *in Himself*. He does not need the family of elect believers in order to be love or loved. God is love and loves essentially. He loves Himself in the communion of the three persons. This love is expressed in the eternal, perfect fellowship between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the Father is essentially the Father, and the Son is essentially the Son. Not as earthly fathers and sons, of course, but rather as an eternally complete *family*, the ultimate family, the highest family, the archetypal family, the family after which "the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:15), the family after which the earthly family

¹⁷ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 133-134. For Edwards' doctrine of God, see Peter Sanlon, *Simply God: Recovering the Classical Trinity* (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 180-86.

is created. God is fellowship in Himself, and although He is the *only* God, He is far from being a *lonely* God.

God's Covenant: A Relationship of Love

God is a family God. A family is much more than formal contracts and official agreements. A family is ultimately defined by its relationships. Now, the Bible teaches us that God is a covenant God. In this section, I will show how the covenant that God establishes with believers and the institution of the human family (Genesis 2) are what they are because the triune God is what He is. In other words, the covenant of God with believers and their seed reflects and is shaped according to God's own being. This implies that the divine family of the three persons is the ground for our understanding of the family and the pattern according to which we define and shape the relationships of the community of believers among themselves and, in turn, their relationship with God.

The doctrine of the covenant is a very important one for Christianity. Particularly in the Reformed tradition, it has been and currently is controversial. This biblical doctrine has also become the object of interest also in evangelical circles more broadly defined. More importantly, it is related to the doctrine of the Trinity. Reformed theologians such as Herman Witsius and Heinrich Heppé believed that the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of the doctrine of the covenant.

“The Trinity ... is the foundation of the covenant of God with elect sinners.”¹⁸

“The foundation of the entire doctrine of the covenant of grace and of Christian faith in God *simpliciter*, is the doctrine of the Three-in-ness of God.”¹⁹

This article will attempt to show the accuracy of this claim.

The covenant is a recurring concept throughout Scripture. We find one of its first and clearest formulations in Genesis 17:1-8: “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after

18 Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertation on What is Commonly Called the Apostles' Creed: Vol. 1*, trans. Donald Fraser (Edinburgh, 1823), 129.

19 Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 2015), 105.

thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” The passage contains the so-called covenant formula: “I will be thy God, and ye shall be my people,” a formula that we find in many other passages of Scripture (for example, Exodus 6:7, Jeremiah 31:33, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Revelation 21:3).

The most common Reformed definition of this covenant, however, seems disharmonious with the triune being of the covenant God. It is significant to see how Herman Witsius, a Reformed theologian who believes that the doctrine of the covenant is grounded on the triunity of God, describes the covenant of God with His people: “The covenant of grace is a gratuitous *agreement* between God and the elect sinner, in which by his free good pleasure God assigns to a fixed seed through the injunction of repentance and faith righteousness and inheritance in the Mediator. Man moreover concurs in this promise and mandate through faith, and thus possesses the right to ask for the heavenly inheritance.”²⁰ The foundation of this covenant is usually placed in the *pactum salutis*, the covenant of redemption, that is, an eternal agreement or bargain with conditions to fulfill that the Father and the Son made for the salvation of the elect church. Moreover, this covenant is often viewed as a means to an end, that is, the salvation of the church.²¹

This conception of the covenant seems rather incompatible with God’s own triune Being. First of all, regarding the *pactum salutis*, from a point of view of philosophical theology, it is difficult to understand how an eternal, immutable, simple God can make something like an “agreement” within Himself, that is, it is difficult to understand how the concept of agreement can be applied to an immutable and eternally complete being. The mutual and perfect relationship of love and friendship with the Father with the Son in the Holy Spirit from eternity seems to leave little space for something like a contract, or a bargain. We should recall here the doctrine of divine simplicity: God is not made of parts, and all that is in God *is* God and eternally so. God, therefore, *is* His will. Edwards goes so far as to say that the will of God *is* the Holy Spirit:

20 Witsius, in Heppes, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 383. Emphasis added.

21 See Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:401-80, where the author quotes and criticizes several theologians on the idea of the covenant of redemption as an agreement or contract.

There must be these distinctions in the Deity, viz. of God (absolutely considered), and the idea of God, and love and delight; and there are no other real distinctions in God that can be thought [of]. There are but these three distinct real things in God; whatsoever else can be mentioned in God are nothing but mere modes or relations of existence. There are His attributes of infinity, eternity and immutability: they are mere modes of existence. There is God's understanding, His wisdom and omniscience, that we have shown to be the same with His idea. There is God's will: but that is not really distinguished from His love, but is the same, but only with a different relation. As the sum of God's understanding consists in His having an idea of Himself, so the sum of His will or inclination consists in His loving Himself, as we have already observed. There is God's power or ability to bring things to pass. But this is not really distinct from His understanding and will; it is the same, but only with the relation they have to those effects that are or are to be produced. There is God's holiness, but this is the same—as we have shown in what we have said of the nature of excellency—with His love to Himself. There is God's justice, which is not really distinct from His holiness. There are the attributes of goodness, mercy and grace, but these are but the overflowings of God's infinite love. The sum of all God's love is His love to Himself. These three—God, and the idea of God, and the inclination, affection or love.²²

But thinking of the *pactum salutis* as a contract or bargain between the persons of the Trinity risks placing a *quartum quid* (that is, a fourth element) in the Godhead that is philosophically difficult to reconcile with God's simplicity, eternity, and the perfect unity of will between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit (or, as Edwards would the perfect unity of will between the Father and the Son which *is* the Holy Spirit). Moreover, such contractual view of the *pactum salutis* does not have scriptural support.²³ Differently, we preserve ourselves from

22 Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 131.

23 In fact, Hoeksema prefers to talk about *counsel of peace* rather than *pactum salutis*, see Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:471-72. Consider also Palmer's words: "The intention of God from eternity to redeem a people to himself certainly must be affirmed. Before the foundation of the world God set his covenantal love on his people. But affirming the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality fla-

April 2021

these dangers by limiting ourselves to scriptural language and by considering the *pactum salutis* as the will of counsel of God to share His life with elect men and angels in the covenant of grace.²⁴

This conception creates problems also regarding the covenant of God with believers, the covenant of grace. God is the sovereign ruler of the universe, and He does not make contracts with men: “If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?” (Job 35:6-7). If we hold to the Augustinian and Calvinist doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, it is not consistent to identify God as the only author of salvation when we discuss soteriology, and then adopting contractual language that contemplates parties and conditions when discussing the covenant of God with the church.

The covenant of God both *ad intra* and *ad extra* is better defined as a relationship of love and friendship.²⁵ First of all, God sovereignly establishes the covenant and unconditionally and freely decides to make it with elect mankind (Genesis 3:15). Secondly, the biblical

vours the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God’s eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God. To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian ‘covenant’ with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety.” O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 53-54.

24 It has to be remembered that “the covenant of grace is not the counsel of peace itself, but rather the revelation and realization of it.” Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:471. The assessment thus far regards the counsel of peace or *pactum salutis*.

25 Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed*, trans. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1997); *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:401-80; Henry Danhof, “The Idea of the Covenant of Grace”, in David J. Engelsma, ed., *The Rock Whence We are Hewn* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 2-58; David J. Engelsma, *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005); *Trinity and Covenant*, 108-34; Herman Hanko, *God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1988).

descriptions of this covenant include walking with God (Enoch, Genesis 5:22; Noah, Genesis 6:9) and being God's friend (Abraham: 2 Chronicles 20:6-7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). In John 15:13-15, Jesus calls His disciples and, therefore, all believers, friends. Jesus makes this assertion in John 15, a passage that, with John 14 and 16-17, has a strong trinitarian emphasis, with the fellowship between the Father and the Son and of them with the believers in the Holy Spirit. All these descriptions imply a relationship, a lively friendship between God and the elect.

This assessment of the previous paragraphs makes sense if we see the covenant *ad extra* in the light of the covenant *ad intra*. God is a covenant and family God, three persons who eternally and perfectly fellowship with one another in the oneness of being. God has eternally decreed to reveal this life outside of Himself, electing a body of believers who are made partakers of this covenant and life. The Father eternally chooses the elect in Christ. The elect are engrafted in Christ and have fellowship with Him, and therefore with the Father, by the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit, the personal bond of love between Father and Son, the elect share God's covenant life and fellowship. The counsel of peace among the persons of the Trinity, grounded in the very life of the three persons of the Trinity, is revealed to us by the covenant of grace with the believers. This is their salvation. The covenant of God with believers is not the means to reach the salvation of the elect humanity, but it is the end itself of this salvation, that is, eternal fellowship of love and friendship with God. John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." "Dwelt" can also be translated as "tabernacled."²⁶ Thus it couples very well with Revelation 21:3: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

Considerations of Philosophical Theology

A proper consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity does not damage but rather supports classical Christian theism and, vice versa, God's relationality is more coherent in the light of classical theism. God's

²⁶ Engelsma, *Trinity and Covenant*, 119.

trinity and relationality, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, preserve God's self-sufficiency, simplicity, and impassibility. God is His attributes. God does not adapt Himself to a wisdom that He obtains, but He *is* His own wisdom. The second person, in fact, is called the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24) and the *logos* of God (John 1:1). The Holy Spirit is God's bond of love. Love does not come from the outside to God. God *is* love (1 John 4:8, 16). The ultimate and highest love is not a passion that affects God. Passions necessarily modify the being they affect.²⁷ God, however, is immutable. Therefore, whatever He does, HE does it "dispassionately."²⁸ It is fully correct to say that God eternally begets the Son in infinite love. But this love is not something outside of God, nor something that only has a beginning inside God. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit Himself, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. Thus God's simplicity, self-sufficiency, and impassibility are preserved: God has all that He needs in Himself for the inter-trinitarian life. And this is the same regarding God's relationship with His people. In fact, His people are in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1), and they are included in Christ by the operation of the Holy Spirit in them (2 Corinthians 16:14). Thus they are in God and God is in them. In this respect, believers change and something is added to them. But nothing changes and nothing is ever added to God.

Regarding divine immutability, the classical doctrine of immutability is fully coherent with the doctrine of the Trinity here presented. The Father begetting the Son and the Son being begotten by the Father is not something that changes God's being, because it is a state eternally essential to His being, inasmuch as "there is no state of the Father that is not a begetting of the Son, and no state of the Son which is not a being begotten by the Father ... There is no possible world

27 "passio: *passion* or *suffering*; as distinct from *passiones* (q.v.) or emotions in the faculty psychology. Understood broadly in the logical sense of the categories of predication, passion is opposed to action (*actio*, q.v.): whereas action brings about an effect in a subject, passion involves being acted upon or suffering an effect." Found in Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017) 255.

28 Heppes, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 121.

where the Father exists and not the Son.”²⁹ Trinity does not rule out God’s simplicity, that is, the absence of divisions or parts in himself.

Clearly, in a finite essence, generation implies some sort of division or separation—but in the infinite, simple divine essence, generation does not indicate a division or separation, much less a partitioning of the divine essence ... The claim that such a generation is impossible, [John] Owen comments, rests on the error of arguing limitations of the divine on the basis of ‘properties and attendancies of that which is finite.’³⁰

The three persons are not “parts” of the Godhead. An example may help here. If a man loses one of his limbs, he remains a man. As traumatic as it is to lose one’s arm or leg, one does not lose his manhood nor is less of a man. But if we take away the Son from the Trinity, God is not God anymore. He may still be a kind of divine being, but certainly not the triune God of the Bible. In fact, without the Son, the Father would not be Father and His name would be improper. The Holy Spirit would not be the Spirit of the Father and the Son and, more seriously, the improperly named Father in question would have nobody to whom to breathe forth the Spirit and from whom to receive the Spirit again. With the absence of the Son, the being of the triune God would not merely be modified, but He would be lost.

Some further considerations may be stated about the approach that personal theism takes toward the issue of God’s personality and life. It is claimed that the eternal, unchangeable God lives only in “a very stretched sense of the word.”³¹ However, the question may be asked: “What is the sense and meaning of the word ‘lives’?” Do we presuppose our human definitions and then we apply them to God, or rather do we know God as revealed in the Bible and from that revelation we deduce concepts like “life”? Does not the former procedure beg the question, presupposing that for a being to be “lively,” time and temporal conditions are necessary? It is hard to disagree with the Augustinian and Anselmian call for a *fides quaerens intellectum*,

29 Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 285-86.

30 Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 4*, 284.

31 Padgett, “Response to Paul Helm,” *God and Time*, 62.

that is, a faith that requires understanding in developing the rationality of faith. However, the rationality of faith should not turn into a faith in rationality or, even worse, rationalism. Our investigation of the Godhead should not consider our condition of creatures and our categories as the criterion for judging divine things that transcend us.

Furthermore, it seems to me that the statements quoted above are grounded in a misconceived notion of the God of classical theism. The latter is conceived and judged partially, for example, judged from the point of view of His atemporality as separated from the other attributes of God and His tri-unity. The God of Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards is a relational God who not only has relationships with His creatures but also and especially within Himself. Moreover, these thinkers thought about God differently from the way that many theologians and philosophers do today. They did not separate their philosophizing from their interpretation of Scripture and development of theology. For them it was not an option to study some of the attributes of God independently of the other attributes and of revelation as a whole. It makes no sense to place God in time or to anthropomorphize Him in order to see how He may interact with creation and be alive and living in Himself. Rather, an appreciation of the triunity of God and His dealings with elect humanity in the covenant of grace may help us to see how divine attributes such as immutability, simplicity, and eternity picture the Christian God not as cold, static, or lifeless, but rather the most perfect Being. In fact, God is a covenant God in Himself where “covenant” is defined as a relationship of friendship and love. And, in the light of what God is in Himself, He establishes a covenant with His elect people, extending “out of Himself” the family that He Himself is, marrying His elect church to His incarnated Son Jesus Christ. It is difficult, in fact impossible, to think of someone more active, living, and relational than the triune God.

The doctrine of the Trinity implies that God is the living God. He is life, and He lives in and through Himself. Life is energy, expressing itself in perfect activity, and it presupposes harmonious relationship. Life cannot be in solitude; it is always some kind of communion of fellowship. God is the implication of infinite energy; in Him there is

an infinite depth of divine power, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, goodness, love, mercy, and truth, incessantly active. In the triune God there is also the infinitely perfect relationship and harmony for this energy to express itself into constant activity, for He is one, and this oneness is the eternal basis of the divine unity and harmony.³²

Family and Marriage

It is not accidental that the Bible depicts the covenant of God with His church using the picture of marriage. The church is God's wife (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Ephesians 5:22-33); God is married to His church in Christ. The aim of the relationship of human marriage has often been described as deep friendship. The married man and woman are advised to care for and nourish their marriage so that they may be each other's best friend. One of the reasons why God created man male and female is to reflect the plurality in unity that He Himself is. "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18) because God Himself is not alone, but He is perfectly blessed and happy in the unity and fellowship of the three persons. A married man and woman, even though distinct by their respective gender, become one in marriage (Genesis 2:24). Thus, marriage becomes a sort of *vestigium trinitatis*, a trace in creation of God's trinity. Of course, marriage is not absolutely necessary to experience this fellowship. In fact, another *vestigium* is the fellowship of believers. By the Holy Spirit, believers share the divine life of God. The Holy Spirit is in the believers, and they love each other in the Spirit of truth, imitating in godliness, and according to their creaturely and limited capacities, the perfect fellowship that the Father has with the Son in the Spirit. Thus they become partakers of the divine life.

Finally, the doctrine of the Trinity as family, coupled with the doctrine of the covenant of God as a relationship of friendship, has significant implications to the Christian view of marriage and family. Negatively, it implies that marriage and the family that marriage produces can be only the union between a man and a woman, as both the church and society has believed for millennia. This is because as the covenant God is diversity of persons in unity of being, so the human family is diversity in unity. Marriage is the diversity of the man and

³² Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:217.

the woman in a one-flesh union. Although both humans, a married man and woman complement and complete each other in marriage, not in spite of, but *because of* their differences and by means of their respective strengths. Positively, the most blessed fellowship of the Trinity, and the perfect love that the Father has for the Son and the Son for the Father in the Holy Spirit, encourage us to imitate the same love in our families and in our churches. Therefore, the genuinely biblical and orthodox doctrine of the triune God gives to the church not only intellectual material in order to fight the current attack on family and marriage, but encourages believers to defend Christian ethics against today's challenges.

A fitting conclusion to this modest treatment of the Trinity and its practical significance are the words of Edwards:

I don't pretend fully to explain how these things are, and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made, and puzzling doubts and questions raised, that I can't solve. I am far from pretending to explain the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it. I don't pretend to explain the Trinity, but in time, with reason, may [be] led to say something further of it than has been wont to be said, though there are still left many things pertaining to it incomprehensible. It seems to me that what I have here supposed concerning the Trinity is exceeding analogous to the gospel scheme, and agreeable to the tenor of the whole New Testament, and abundantly illustrative of gospel doctrines; as might be particularly shown, would it not exceedingly lengthen out this discourse.³³

Augustine's words are equally instructive:

Beginning, as I now do henceforward, to speak of subjects which cannot altogether be spoken as they are thought, either by any man, or, at any rate, not by myself; although even our very thought, when we think of God the Trinity, falls (as we feel) very far short of Him of whom we think, nor comprehends Him as He is ... first, I pray to our Lord God Himself, of whom we ought always to think, and of whom we are not able to think worthily, in praise of whom blessing is at all

33 Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 134.

times to be rendered, and whom no speech is sufficient to declare, that He will grant me both help for understanding and explaining that which I design, and pardon if in anything I offend. For I bear in mind, not only my desire, but also my infirmity. I ask also of my readers to pardon me, where they may perceive me to have had the desire rather than the power to speak, what they either understand better themselves, or fail to understand through the obscurity of my language.³⁴ ●

³⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity* 5.1.1.

Book Reviews

The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective, ed. Matthew Barrett. Foreword by D. A. Carson. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. Pp. 912. \$60.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1433555411. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

As huge as its subject is grand, this book is the Protestant, Reformed, and biblical doctrine of justification in virtually all its aspects. The book explores, explains, and defends the doctrine of justification in four sections, twenty-six long chapters, and 912 pages.

The four sections are “justification in biblical perspective”; “justification in theological perspective”; “justification in church history”; and “justification in pastoral practice.”

The authors are twenty four Calvinistic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Reformed scholars, each writing on that aspect of justification for which he is most qualified. Among them are Matthew Barrett, who is also the book’s editor; David Van Drunen; J. V. Fesko; and William A. Van Gemeren. With varying degrees of insight, all are agreed that justification is, as Luther is reputed to have said, and as is the book’s

title, “the doctrine on which the church stands or falls.”

The book deserves to be read in its vast entirety. It will amply reward the complete reading. The minister or layman who finds the size of the book daunting, but desires to benefit from a selective reading of the chapters that are especially instructive and edifying, is advised (with the apprehension and acknowledged dangers that always accompany selection) to read chapter five by Brian Vickers, on justification in the gospels, where a casual looking for the word “justification” would not often find the doctrine; chapter seven by Brandon Crowe, on justification in the Pauline epistles; chapter nine by Timo Laato, which, although devoted to the controversy with the New Perspective on Paul, is one of the few contributions that, seeing that the truth of the covenant is basic to the doctrine of justification, presents the covenant as

a relationship rather than as a contract; chapter twelve by Matthew Barrett, which demonstrates the vital role of the resurrection of Christ in justification; chapter fourteen, again by Brandon Crowe, which proves that also the active obedience of Christ is the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to the believer and which chapter acknowledges the importance of Herman Bavinck in the development of the doctrine of justification; chapter fifteen by David VanDrunen, one of the best chapters, doctrinally astute and extremely helpful for the right understanding of justification by even the theological novice; chapter sixteen by R. Lucas Stamps, which describes the new “Finnish” interpretation of Luther and explains the relation of justification and sanctification; chapter eighteen by Gerald Bray, which shows that the early church fathers were not as ignorant of justification as they are often made out to be and which chapter contends convincingly that assurance of salvation was a major concern of Reformed soteriology from the very outset of the Reformation.

With regard to this last, concerning assurance of salvation, a later chapter quotes Luther on the wickedness of the denial that

faith is the assurance of salvation. Corey Maas quotes Luther as insisting that “we should make an effort to wipe out completely that wicked idea which has consumed the entire world, namely, that a man does not know whether he is in a state of grace. For if we are in doubt about our being in a state of grace and about our being pleasing to God for the sake of Christ, we are denying that Christ has redeemed us and completely denying all His benefits” (667, 668).

Chapter twenty, again by Matthew Barrett, is one of the most significant in the book. Barrett argues that the root of the Pelagian conception of justification that prevailed in the medieval church and against which Luther contended in 1517 and throughout his subsequent ministry was a heretical doctrine of the *covenant*. In medieval, semi-Pelagian theology, the heretical doctrine of justification by the will and works of the sinner was rooted in the doctrine of a conditional covenant. God on His part graciously establishes His covenant, as a contract, with all the baptized children, or adults as the case may be. Whether, however, this covenant ends in eternal life depends upon the fulfillment of

the condition of the covenant of believing and obeying by the one who has been baptized. “This [conditional] covenant is critical to [medieval theology’s] *processus iustificationis*” (626).

Describing the covenant conception out of which arose the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by works, Barrett in fact describes the theology of Norman Shepherd and of the “liberated” Reformed, without naming them. Later in the book, J. V. Fesko will name Shepherd, condemning his theology as departure from the orthodox doctrine of justification, thus implicating the covenant conception—a conditional conception—of the “liberated” Reformed of which Shepherd’s theology is the natural, inevitable development.

Prior to Luther, medieval theology made salvation conditional, some by free will before any work of salvation in the sinner, others by the free will of the sinner after God had begun the work of salvation. But in the end, in Roman Catholic teaching, salvation depends upon the will of the sinner. Salvation is conditional.

It follows that although the *pactum* [conditional covenant] may have chronological prior-

ity, man’s *liberum arbitrium* [free will] has causal priority, for whether God rewards man with infused grace depends entirely on man’s undetermined choice. The *pactum* may issue a promise, but whether it is fulfilled or finds its application in man rests on *liberum arbitrium*—and not just any free act but man’s *best* free act (642).

The chapter by Barrett is significant also for its demonstration that for Luther the righteousness of justification is “passive”: the elect sinner does nothing to obtain it. “Here we work nothing” (653).

Korey Maas proposes that every faithful, strong defense of justification by faith alone draws the charge of antinomism. He illustrates his thesis from a history of Lutheranism, beginning already in the lifetime of Luther (chapter twenty one). It is safe to say that that a doctrine that fails to draw the charge of antinomism is not sound doctrine. A Reformed theologian ought to rejoice in this charge against his theology of grace. The biblical evidence is Romans 3:31, 6:1, and 7:7.

J. V. Fesko’s contribution is outstanding (chapter twenty two). The former professor at

Westminster West in California (now at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS) gives a succinct account of the defense and development of the doctrine of justification in the Reformed tradition up to and including the present day. This account is at the same time Fesko's own defense of the orthodox doctrine. The examination includes a critique of Norman Shepherd's corruption of the doctrine. Fesko charges that Shepherd "denied key elements of the doctrine [of justification by faith alone]" (735). Also the Federal Vision comes under Fesko's critical scrutiny. Fesko concludes with a moving encomium of the truth of justification by faith alone, delivering his chapter and the entire work from the allegation, or misunderstanding, that they are merely academic treatment of an abstract theological issue.

Until that glorious day [of the coming of Jesus Christ], the prayer for the future of the Reformed tradition should be that it would remain a faithful sentry on the ramparts of the church and defend justification *sola fide* so that the world always knows that right standing with God comes only by faith alone in

Christ alone through God's grace alone. Only in God's act of justification can fallen humans receive pardon of sin and the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, which alone, indefectibly, immutably, and irreversibly grants them right and title to the blessings of eternal life (737).

In the course of his examination of the Reformed tradition, Fesko demonstrates that the doctrine of Jonathan Edwards was the heresy of justification by faith and by love. For the Reformed tradition, and for Fesko (and, one might add, for the Reformed creeds), works, particularly and especially the work of love, are the "effects and evidences of faith and...the signs or tokens of justification" (733).

There are weaknesses in the book's treatment of justification, some of them serious. A couple of authors explain Romans 2:13 as teaching what is a reality, namely, that doers of the law shall be justified in part by their doing, if not here and now, then in the final judgment. One appeals to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Scott Hahn and to the federal vision doctrine of Ken Gentry. Yet another concedes that "the works of the law" for Paul in Romans

are merely ceremonial works, rather than all works of any kind whatever. In defense of his baptistic commitment to the essential difference of the Old Testament covenant from the new covenant of the New Testament, a Baptist argues that not being “under the law” in the New Testament means that the New Testament believer no longer is bound to the Ten Commandments as the rule of a thankful life. One misguided soul attempts to find justification by

faith alone in Thomas Aquinas. In Thomas! Another, more misguided still, looks for support of orthodoxy in Tim Keller. In Tim Keller! Occasionally, profound scholarly profundity overwhelms and obscures the theme of justification.

Nevertheless, in this book the precious truth of justification by faith alone finds its contemporary advocates and defenders. Knowledgeable advocates and devoted defenders! ●

The Attributes of God: An Introduction, by Gerald Bray. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 160. \$15.99 (softcover). ISBN: 978-1433561177. [Reviewed by Marco Barone]

The Attributes of God: An Introduction belongs to a series titled “Short Studies in Systematic Theology.” The volume consists of a preface, four chapters, and an appendix.

The preface briefly introduces the goal of the book: “to clarify what the attributes of God are and to present them in a way that can command general assent.” Chapter 1 defines the terms and further describes the goal of the book. Chapter 2 discusses what Bray calls God’s essential attributes, in turn divided into

“attributes describing what God is” (26), attributes “describing what God is like” (33), attributes “contrasted with time” (47), and attributes “contrasted with space” (56). Chapter 3 talks about what the author calls God’s relational attributes, that is, the communicable attributes. Chapter 4 is a brief explanation of the importance of the doctrine of the attributes of God. The book ends with a historical appendix titled “God’s Attributes in Christian Tradition.”

There are several reasons why I consider this book problematic.

First, even though the book is supposed to be a short study on systematic theology, it also offers practical and pastoral applications, which is, of course, not a bad thing. However, these practical considerations, although helpful, end up repeatedly breaking up the flow of the arguments. One reason for this is that often the dogmatic part is clearly separated from the practical or pastoral part. This makes the writing a little rambling.

Second and more importantly, ambiguous theological points abound. To begin with, Bray makes a peculiar distinction between the divine nature and the divine Persons as related to creation: “In His essence, God is timeless and eternal, and because that essence has no contact with finite, created reality, it is unaffected by it. But as three persons, God is relational, and at that level He can and does enter into the time-space universe He has created.” (55). This is caused by the fact that the author, first, does not clearly define divine essence and/or divine nature (it is unclear whether they are synonyms for him); second and consequently, he makes an unlawful distinction between the divine essence and the divine Persons: “For Chris-

tians it is necessary to make a *radical* distinction between God’s personhood and His nature because in His persons He is relational, whereas in His nature He is not” (80, emphasis added). This seems to be confirmed by another passage, again, about God’s relationship with creation: “In the divine essence there is no residual potential, because His perfection demands that His power must be fully realized in Himself. There is no room left for Him to ‘grow,’ which in any case would make no sense in that He dwells outside of time. However, in His personal capacity, God can and does choose how He will act in His dealings with His creatures. It is here, more clearly than anywhere else, that we see how the persons of the Trinity are in control of how they act through the divine nature and are not obliged always to act in accordance with every aspect of it” (69).

To make claims such as “the persons of the Trinity are in control of how they act through the divine nature” (69) based on a “radical” distinction between divine essence and Persons (80) is on the verge of making the divine nature a *quartum quid*, that is, a fourth “thing” in the Godhead in addition to the three Persons.

Differently, orthodox Christian theology proper has always held that the three Persons *are* the divine essence.

The divine nature cannot be conceived as an abstract generic concept, nor does it exist as a substance outside of, above, and behind the divine persons. It exists *in* the divine persons and is totally and quantitatively the same in each person. The persons, though distinct, are not separate. They are the same in essence, one in essence, and the same being. They are not separated by time or space or anything else. They all share in the same divine nature and perfections. It is one and the same divine nature that exists in each person individually and in all of them collectively. Consequently, there is in God but one eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient being, having one mind, one will, and one power. The term “being” or “nature,” accordingly, maintains the truth of the oneness of God, which is so consistently featured in Scripture, implied in monotheism, and defended also by unitarianism. Whatever distinctions may exist in the divine being, they may not and cannot diminish the unity of the di-

vine nature. For in God that unity is not deficient and limited, but perfect and absolute. Among creatures diversity in the nature of the case implies a degree of separation and division. All created beings necessarily exist in space and time and therefore live side by side or sequentially. But the attributes of eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, goodness, and so on, by their very nature exclude all separation and division. God is absolute unity and simplicity, without composition or division; and that unity itself is not ethical or contractual in nature, as it is among humans, but absolute; nor is it accidental, but it is essential to the divine being.¹

1 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Vol. 2: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 300. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 39; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Vol. 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992), 278-282; Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Vol. 2: Faith in the Triune God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 503-505; Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London, United Kingdom: The Wakeman Trust, 2015), 6.9-11.

Confusion only increases when Bray, after claiming that “it is necessary to make a *radical* distinction between God’s personhood and His nature because in His persons He is relational, whereas *in His nature He is not*” (80, emphasis added), says in the next page that “it is a basic Christian belief that God is a personal, relational being. *Everything* we say about Him reflects and reinforces this point” (81, emphasis added). It’s unclear how *everything* we say about God, and therefore also about the divine nature, reinforces the point that God is relational, even though that divine nature is not relational.

Things get even worse when Bray addresses the issues of God’s communicable attributes. The author presents a rather curious view of God’s holiness.

God is “holy” in contrast to everything else that we see around us, but because the word is meant to emphasize His distinctiveness from other things, it has no applicability inside God Himself. He cannot be holy in contrast to something that is unholy if there is nothing that He can be compared with. Holiness is a spiritual state that is meaningful only in relation to other be-

ings, and only now that some of those beings have rebelled against Him (85).

Holiness is not something intrinsic to His being but reflects the way we understand and relate to Him [God] ... If we think of God as He is in Himself, the word “holiness” has no obvious application. It cannot mean anything in metaphysical terms, since there is no way the Creator would ever mistake a creature for Himself to worship it. Nor does it make much sense in moral terms, since God cannot sin (94-95).

The author’s claims (together with the support he offers) collapse because Bray fails to realize the biblical meaning of God’s holiness. Holiness is not merely distinction or separation from something else, as Bray assumes. Rather, as Hoeksema proves at great length, “the holiness of God is that wonder of the divine nature according to which God is absolute, infinite, eternal and ultimate ethical perfection, Himself being the standard, motive, and purpose of all the activity of His personal nature, so that He is eternally consecrated to Himself alone as the only good.”² Moreover, God’s

2 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed*

holiness is not simply a relative attribute that is applied to God in way of comparison to created things. Van Mastricht says that holiness belongs to God “not as some kind of accessory, but as His very essence, for the one who in Isaiah 45:23 is said to swear by Himself says in Psalm 89:35 and Amos 4:2 that He has sworn by His holiness,”³ and he paraphrases Leviticus 19:2 (“for I am holy”) as follows: “I am holiness itself (Isa. 63:15), the source of all holiness, the one who sanctifies you (Ezek. 20:12, the idea and pattern of all holiness.”⁴ Even more, one could mention several theologians who not only believed that holiness is an essential attribute of God, but also that the holiness of God *is* one of the three Persons, the Holy Spirit, as the bond of holy love and loving holiness between the Father and the Son.⁵

Dogmatics: Vol. 1 (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 144. Hoeksema offers evidence for his definition on pp. 135-142.

3 van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Vol. 2*, 412.

4 van Mastricht, 408.

5 “330. HOLY GHOST. It appears that the Holy Spirit is the holiness, or excellency and delight of God, because our communion

With such a low view of God’s holiness, the author unsurprisingly misunderstands the nature of the law of God when he says that “as soon as we try to transpose the commandment of God from our lives, we realize that they are meaningless with respect to Him. God could not be holy in our sense of the word if He tried” (94-95). True, the law does not apply to God in the way it applies to us, since He is the sovereign Ruler and Lawmaker,

with God and with Christ consists in our partaking of the Holy Ghost (2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Corinthians 6:17, 1 John 3:24, and 1 John 4:13). The oil that was upon Aaron’s head ran down to the skirts of his garments [Psalms 133]; the Spirit which Christ our head has without measure is communicated to his church and people. The sweet perfumed oil signified Christ’s excellency and sweet delight. Philippians 2:1.” Jonathan Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”*: (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), ed. Harry S. Stout, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (online) Vol. 13, 409. See also Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 6.5.7; Anselm, *Monologion*, 49-55; Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, 46; Jonathan Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Vol. 21*, ed. Sang Huyn Lee (New Haven-London; Yale University Press, 2003), 121-132.

but that is different from saying that transposing the law to God renders those commandments “meaningless.” On the contrary, such a comparison shows how God’s law is the reflection of His character and nature. We shall have no other gods before Him because He *is* God, the only divine Being, the sole Creator of all things. We shall not have any image or statue because “there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good” (Belgic Confession, Article 1). We shall not take the name of the Lord in vain because God *is* His name (Exodus 3:14). We shall not steal because God *is* the Creator (and, therefore, Owner) of every single creature, including ourselves (Psalm 24). We shall not kill because God *is* life, and the only one who owns life and death (Deuteronomy 32:39). We shall not lie because God *is* truth (Psalm 31:5). And so on.

Upon these premises, it is unsurprising that a similar treatment

is also given to divine righteousness and goodness. There are other unhappy claims and conclusions in this little volume, but this review has already reached a certain length.

There is some good in this book (for example, Chapter 1 has some helpful considerations on God’s incommunicable attributes). It is true that no book is perfect, especially on a topic as unfathomable as the nature of God. It is also true that God’s attributes have been categorized in different ways in the history of Christian theology (on this, the book’s appendix is helpful), so there is a certain degree of freedom in that regard. However, and despite the glowing reviews at the back and on the first pages of the book, Bray confuses terms and concepts, sees problems where there are no problems, offers arguable solutions to those alleged problems, and proposes ways of thinking about the divine essence and Persons which are deficient at best. I am inclined not to recommend this book, certainly not to the inexperienced reader. ●

The Attributes of God: An Introduction, by Gerald Bray. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 159. \$15.99 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1433561177. *The Person of Christ: An Introduction*, by Stephen J. Wellum. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 206. \$18.99 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1433569432. *The Church: An Introduction*, by Gregg R. Allison. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 181. \$14.99 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1433562464. *The New Creation: and the Storyline of Scripture*, by Frank Thielman. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021. Pp. 142. \$15.99 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1433559556. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

As their subtitle identifies them, these four slim volumes are “short studies” of their subjects. They are part of a larger set of books that summarize all the leading topics of Christian theology. The authors set themselves the task, usually successfully, of giving the “essence” of their theological subject. The set is a valuable course in theology both for the minister and for the layman.

Adding to the worth of the works is their treatment of their subject in light of the church’s creeds and in light of the history of dogma. Consideration of the history of dogma includes an examination of various heresies concerning the subject in the history of the church. The book on *The Person of Christ*, for example, briefly explains the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition, as well as the heresies that these

creeds of the church condemned, including Apollinarianism and Nestorianism.

In addition to its generally sound clarification of the essential attributes of God in the face of challenges to, and difficulties with, some of the attributes, for example, immutability, and to its polemical defense of these truths, the volume on the attributes of God traces the development of the doctrine of God’s attributes in the history of the church, from early post-apostolic times to the modern era, with some critique along the way. “Calvin’s reticence in describing the attributes of God was to some extent compensated by the work of his contemporaries Andreas Hyperius (1511-1564) and Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563)” (123, 124).

The book errs significantly by denying that the communicable attributes, for example, holiness,

are “intrinsic” to the being of God. This would mean that God is holy only in relation to humans; He is not holy in His own being. And it is debatable that Karl Barth was a “neoconservative.”

The Person of Christ is a brilliant study of the person and natures of Christ with regard especially to the distinction of the two natures and the oneness of the person. The volume clearly explains the contemporary Christological deviations of a “Christology from above and from below” and of the “quest for the historical Jesus.” Against the heretical doctrine that in the incarnation the Son of God put off His Godhead in one way or another, the book explains that the incarnation was “addition” (of a human nature), not “subtraction” (of the divine nature). It does justice to the mystery of the reality of the one, divine person of Christ in two natures, specifically regarding Christ’s willing in Gethsemane (“not as I will, but as thou wilt”). “No doubt, we are left with plenty of unknowns regarding Christological metaphysics, yet there is no logical contradiction. All there is, is worship and wonder for such a glorious Redeemer who meets our every need” (171).

This book takes Christian

Reformed theologians to task for their rehabilitation of the kenotic heresy, as though in the incarnation Christ “laid aside” certain divine attributes (127ff.).

In the volume on the church, *The Church: An Introduction*, the Baptist (dispensational) heresy held by the author clearly and significantly appears and asserts itself. Both Allison, the author of *The Church* and Stephen J. Wellum, author of *The Person of Christ*, are professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Allison does boldly declare that the foundation of the church is election. But he denies that Jewish believers are part of the church. His dispensational false doctrine compels him to deny that the temple of God at the end will include the saved Jews. Christians are the temple; the Jews are not. “This metaphor of the temple of the Holy Spirit applies only to Christians who constitute the new covenant church. That is, it does not apply to the old covenant people of Israel” (41). This exclusion of the Jewish believers from the biblical temple is not only theologically in error; it is also ironic. In light of the overwhelming testimony of Old Testament Scripture, the temple is, if anything, a Jewish reality.

Given the dispensational differentiation between the Jews and the Gentiles in the saving works of God, it ought to be the Jews who constitute the temple, not the Gentile believers. And if, in fact, it is the largely Gentile church that is the reality of the temple of Old Testament Israel, the oneness of Old and New Testament believers stares the dispensationalists in the face.

Allison handles the wide differences among the various denominations of churches in an inventive way. First, he sets forth a “mere” ecclesiology, consisting, supposedly, of that which all the churches have in common. Then, he delves more deeply into the doctrine of the church by means of a “more” ecclesiology, consisting of the features of the doctrine of the church that are distinctive of each prominent denomination. All churches administer the sacrament (or, for the Baptists, ordinance) of the Supper (the “mere” doctrine of the church). The “more” doctrine would include that Presbyterian churches teach the spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Supper, whereas the Baptists teach no presence at all, but only a memorial of Christ’s death.

The New Creation is bibli-

cal theology. The Presbyterian, Frank Thielman, traces the will and work of God for a new creation from the fall of Adam to the second coming of Christ. There is a great deal of exegesis of both Old Testament and New Testament passages that bear on the truth of the new creation. The volume stresses the beginning of the new creation already now, in the church and in the Christian. “The Acts of the Apostles is basically an account of how the Holy Spirit...transforms the earliest followers of Jesus into the restored people of God, the beginnings of God’s new creation” (80).

In Thielman’s description of the new creation there is a dubious emphasis on issues that exercise present-day social activists: exploitation of their workers by large corporations; racism; nationalism; and the like popular liberal causes. There is little in Thielman’s new creation of the pure worship of God; of sinless devotion to God; and of sound confession of the doctrine of gracious salvation, to the glory of God. But he does recognize deliverance in the new creation from certain of the evils that are emphasized in Scripture: sexual promiscuity; abuse of their wives

by brutal, nominally Christian husbands; and the break-up of marriages and families.

There is also an instructive comparison of the New Testament description of the new creation with the Old Testament prophecies. The New Testament is in this regard the fulfillment of the Old Testament. “John describes the

life of God’s people in God’s presence [in the new creation—DJE] using the imagery of the tabernacle and temple, the structures that symbolized God’s presence with Israel” (115).

Even the theologian will benefit from these introductions to the prominent doctrines of the Christian faith. ●

Middle Knowledge and Biblical Interpretation: Luis de Molina, Herman Bavinck, and William Lane Craig, by Sze Sze Chiew. New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016. Pp. 225. \$59.95 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-3631672549. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

The importance of the book for the Reformed, indeed Protestant, thinker is that its subject is at the heart of both the Roman Catholic and the Arminian theology of salvation. A middle knowledge of God was the fundamental doctrine of salvation of James Arminius. Arminius borrowed the doctrine from the Roman Catholic, Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina. And Molina derived the doctrine from the ancient heretic Pelagius by way of semi-Pelagianism. Molina’s motivation was his detestation of Augustinianism, recently recovered by the Reformation, which ascribes the salvation of the sinner to the predestinating

will of God.

Middle knowledge is a supposed knowledge of God that intervenes (hence, “middle”) between God’s “natural knowledge,” which, in the theory, is God’s knowledge of all possibilities, and God’s “free knowledge,” which is His knowledge of what will actually be. Essentially, it is the counsel of God concerning all of history, but especially concerning salvation, that depends upon God’s foresight of what sinners will do in response to the offer of the gospel. Middle knowledge gives, and is intended to give, humans “libertarian freedom,” which is an absolute freedom,

a freedom that is outside the government and control of God. Upon His foreknowledge of what humans will do with this libertarian freedom depends God's knowledge, that is, His decree as to what humans will actually decide and do. God does have an eternal knowledge, that is, eternal will, concerning all that humans perform in history, especially their response to the gospel and, therefore, their salvation or damnation, but this eternal knowledge depends upon His (middle) knowledge of what humans will decide and do. This deciding and doing of humans are absolutely free of any and all sovereign control on the part of God. God depends on the will of humans, especially in the matter of salvation.

In Chiew's words, according to the theory of middle knowledge "God acts on the ground of His knowledge of actual events that He has not willed" (138).

Middle knowledge claims to be the solution of the mystery of the relation between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The "solution" is the denial of divine sovereignty in the interests of libertarian freedom, that is, human sovereignty.

The Jesuit Molina himself was mainly concerned to apply

his middle knowledge to the reality of the salvation of the sinner, and to do so in such a way as to make salvation dependent on the will of the sinner, rather than on the predestinating will of God. With explicit reference to "predestination and freedom," Chiew remarks that "it is the Molinists' utmost desire to preserve libertarian freedom" (142). That is, man's will determines election and salvation. The faith or unbelief of sinners is not governed by God, but by the sinner himself.

With His middle knowledge, God merely foresees whether a sinner, under the circumstances of his life, will believe or refuse to believe, and ordains accordingly.

Middle knowledge is essentially the subsequent Arminian theory of foreseen faith or unbelief. Salvation depends upon the will of the sinner.

Chiew examines and rejects the main biblical basis of Molinism: Psalm 139:3-5; Isaiah 41:23; Isaiah 48:5; Hebrews 4:13; John 14:29; 1 Samuel 23:6-13; and Matthew 11:20-24. As part of her examination of the texts appealed to by Molina and the Molinists, Chiew conducts a study of two modern theorists of biblical exegesis, Brevard Childs and Anthony Thiselton. This study

adds little to the book. Chiew might better have drawn upon the interpretation of Scripture of John Calvin, with whom she is familiar. Upon a painstakingly careful examination of the passages, Chiew concludes, “I have come to the conclusion that Scripture does not warrant middle knowledge” (205).

Herman Bavinck comes up for consideration as the representative of orthodox Reformed thinking on middle knowledge. Bavinck rejected middle knowledge out of hand. According to Bavinck, God does not know, that is, decree, on the basis of the foreseen will of the creature: “[God] does not act on the grounds of His knowledge of counter-factual events that He has not willed” (96). Middle knowledge, for Bavinck, as for the creedal Reformed faith, is Pelagian. Taking hold of Molinism at its heart, Bavinck rendered this devastating judgment upon the heresy, according to Chiew: “[In Molinism], God becomes dependent on the world, and derives knowledge from the world that He did not have and could not obtain from Himself” (97). Chiew quotes Bavinck regarding the main purpose of Molinism, namely, making God’s grace in

salvation dependent upon the will of the sinner: “[According to Molinism], grace is dispensed, according to merit; predestination depends on good works” (97).

For the Reformed faith, as represented by Bavinck, Chiew rightly states, “There is no fore-known condition to God since God’s knowledge is not caused or constrained by the external finite order. There is no being independent of the divine will” (100).

Boding well for the church in Malaysia in which Chiew is a theologian is the conclusion of Chiew with regard to middle knowledge:

I have come to the conclusion that Scripture does not warrant middle knowledge; and that to accept the Molinists’ account of God’s knowledge and their metaphysical definition of freedom leads to sacrificing and downplaying the overall biblical-theological account of God—the sovereign and saving God who creates, redeems, and consummates His creation (205).

Scattered throughout this authoritative study of middle knowledge are any number of interesting and significant observations related more or less loosely to the

subject of the volume. One is that on the issue of middle knowledge, Karl Barth was on the side of the angels, and for the right reason: “God is known through God, and through God alone” (184).

Another, extremely important aspect of middle knowledge, is that middle knowledge makes man’s will and activity the “condition” of the knowledge and will of God. All genuinely Reformed theologians and churches must, by this time, immediately recognize every form of a conditional salvation as gross heresy. Indeed, the word and concept “condition” regarding the entire relation of God and humans, anywhere in this relation, sacrifices the Godhead of God on the altar of the divine-like sovereignty of humans. The relation of the knowledge of God and the full, real responsibility of humans is in the end a mystery. Chiew makes no attempt to solve the mystery. But the solution is not “condition.”

To refer to no other, the highly acclaimed Christian Reformed philosopher and theologian Alvin Plantinga is an admitted and acknowledged Molinist. This is not altogether surprising—shocking, but not surprising. Implicit in the doctrine of a well-meant offer of salvation to all humans, which

the Christian Reformed Church adopted in 1924, is the essence of middle knowledge. A sincere desire for the salvation of all sinners on the part of God implies the dependency of election and its certain salvation upon the acceptance of the offer by the sinner. And inasmuch as the divine desire for the salvation of all sinners is well meant, the implication is that God knows, that is, decrees, the sure election and salvation of sinners as something unknown to Himself of and through Himself, but known only as the libertarian freedom of sinners. In short, in the language of middle knowledge, God’s free knowledge of the saved sinner depends upon God’s middle knowledge of what the sinner himself will decide, namely, accept a well-meant offer.

That the theology of a common grace, expressed by a well-meant offer of salvation to all, is essentially the doctrine of middle knowledge is evident in Chiew’s analysis of the theology of the contemporary exponent of middle knowledge, William Lane Craig:

Craig attempts to provide a possible answer to the question of why not all persons are saved by God. Craig argues that the loving God

who desires the salvation of all, supplies sufficient salvation to every individual [in a gracious, well-meant offer to all alike—DJE], yet it is not feasible for Him to create a world in which all are saved, as through His middle knowledge. He knows that there is no world in which everyone freely receives Christ [by accepting the well-meant offer—DJE]. Therefore God chose to actualize a world having an optimal balance between the number of the saved and the number of the damned [by well-meaningly offering salvation to all, and making (helplessly permitting?) salvation to depend

upon humans' acceptance of the offer—DJE] (130).

The Canons of Dort had Molinism squarely in its sights when, in Error 1 under the first head of doctrine (concerning predestination), it condemned those

who teach that the will of God to save those who would believe and would persevere in faith and in the obedience of faith is the whole and entire decree of election unto salvation, and that nothing else concerning this decree has been revealed in God's Word. ●

The Church's Hope: The Reformed Doctrine of the End: Volume 1: The Millennium, by David J. Engelsma. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Associations, 2021. Pp. 350. \$29.95. ISBN-13: 978-1-944555-67-2. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown]

The church must have hope, a great future blessing that God has promised and that, therefore, is certain of fulfilment. "Hope—[true hope]—maketh not ashamed" (Rom. 5:5). Like everything that the church has, believes, and teaches, hope is controversial. It ought not be so, but it is because of the malice of

Satan and the sins of men. False teachers misconstrue the church's hope, while Satan seeks to rob the church of her hope, usually by substituting a counterfeit hope.

In the service of the church's hope Engelsma writes on eschatology. This, volume one of a two-set work on this glorious subject, treats the magnificent

subjects of the intermediate state and the millennium. A future volume will, Lord willing, treat the precursory signs and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is the church's hope so important? Engelsma explains: "It is by hope—the expectation of the resurrection of our body—that we are saved (Rom. 8:24). It is by hope—the longing for the bodily coming of Christ—that we are motivated to live a holy life in the world (1 John 3:3). It is hope—the anticipation of being glorified together with Christ at His coming—that enables us to endure the sufferings of this present age (Rom. 8:17). Touch the hope of the church and Christian... and you touch our patience in suffering, our struggle to live godly and purely in a wicked world, and our salvation" (202). "The biblical hope of the second coming, according to all of Scripture, does not galvanize the believer into an effort to transform society and the world. Rather, it mightily moves the child of God to crucify his own corrupt nature with its lusts, to endure his sufferings with patience, to separate himself spiritually from the wicked world, and to live a holy life in accordance with the law of God" (269).

The hope of the Christian

is the visible, bodily, glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ on the clouds of heaven with the resurrection of the Christian's body, the public vindication of the Christian at the Last Judgment, and the enjoyment of the glories of the new creation. In connection with that hope, the Christian has a lesser hope, which is the glory of the intermediate state. The Christian's ultimate hope is not to go to heaven after death—that is part of his hope, an important part—but the intermediate state is of necessity incomplete. Glory in soul *and* body in the presence of the glorified Christ in the new creation in which righteousness dwells is our ultimate hope. "Looking for," says Paul, "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13).

Glory for the soul! Listen to Engelsma: "Christ purges the soul from all sin. The soul is as defiled with original sin as is the body. The soul is full of lusts. The soul is stained with innumerable iniquities of pride, envy, self-seeking, anger, desire of revenge, covetousness, sloth, adultery, and much more... At the moment of the believer's death, Christ perfects the sanctification of the soul by the Holy Spirit...

Christ cleanses the soul of every one of His people at death by the water and fire of the Holy Spirit” (76). Heavenliness for the soul! Consider this wonderful description: “Christ also translates the believer’s soul so that it is perfectly heavenly in nature, adapted to live the new life of the risen Christ in heaven. No longer is it an earthly soul. Sharing fully in the heavenly nature of the exalted Christ, it has become a heavenly soul. It is still a human soul, but it is now a heavenly soul. Its relations are heavenly; its attachments are heavenly; its pleasures are heavenly; its desires are heavenly. Even its thoughts of God, spiritual in nature (as was also the case with the regenerated soul’s thoughts of God during the man’s earthly life) are after a heavenly manner. Thus by a wonderful, direct act of salvation upon the soul, Christ takes the believer to himself at death” (76-77).

In connection with the same topic the intermediate state of the unbeliever (conscious torments in hellfire) is explained, while the errors of soul sleep, purgatory, and the immortality of the soul are refuted.

The bulk of the book is devoted to a thorough analysis of the millennium, with a vigorous de-

fense of Reformed amillennialism and a devastating critique of the two main errant millennial views, postmillennialism and premillennial dispensationalism. Engelsma provides the Reformed amillennial exegesis of key passages such as Daniel 9, Matthew 24, Romans 11, and Revelation 20, subjecting the views of postmillennial, premillennial dispensational, and even on occasion, Herman Hoeksema, to penetrating analysis, and if necessary, correction. Especially thorough is Engelsma’s critique of postmillennialism, which he sees as a more immediate threat to Reformed churches. That premillennial dispensationalism even needs to be refuted Engelsma sees rightly as an embarrassment to Reformed churches and their pastors. As he transitions from the treatment of postmillennialism to premillennialism, Engelsma writes, “In this study of the biblical truth of the millennium, I move from Postmillennialism to Premillennialism. Thus I move *from fantasy to absurdity*” (284, emphasis added).

Both postmillennialism and premillennial dispensationalism subvert the church’s hope, which is what makes them dangerous. The former fixes the believer’s hope on a golden age *within*

history in which the church will be dominant—a carnal victory, as Engelsma describes it. The latter fixes the believer’s hope on a fictitious rapture, which will snatch the church *out of the world* so that God can fulfil His program in history with the Jews, supposedly interrupted by the parenthetical dispensation of grace during which the church is gathered—another carnal victory, but this time for the Jews! Both views leave the church unprepared for the future: one promises earthly victory with no need to prepare for the rise of Antichrist (since he is dead and buried, having died pre-AD 70); the other promises an “escape hatch” via the rapture with no need to prepare for the rise of Antichrist (since the church will be safely in heaven when Antichrist rages against the Jews).

I end with an excerpt from Engelsma in which he explains how postmillennialism is not only erroneous, but even unnecessary—unnecessary in light of the truth of God’s Word concerning Jesus Christ and His kingdom: “But if the messianic kingdom is everlasting; if Jesus is an everlasting king *as the Christ of God*; if His coming again, rather

than writing *finis* to His kingdom, will be and is intended to be the consummation of His kingdom; if at His coming He transforms for all His citizens the kingdom of the cross of history into the kingdom of glory of eternity; if the outwardly, visibly powerful and glorious kingdom of Christ is the goal of history (at the coming of Jesus Christ) rather than an event within history, then the postmillennial dream concerning a kingdom of glory within history is unnecessary. The dream is, among other serious errors, guilty of grievous confusion of the order of the coming of the kingdom as determined by God and made known in scripture. Postmillennialism is unholy impatience with the divine timetable” (199, Engelsma’s italics).

Read this book and it will encourage you to “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). Read this book and it will quicken your hope. Read this book and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope maketh not ashamed in the day of Jesus Christ. ●

Watchman on the Walls: The Life and Influence of Simon van Velzen, by Joshua Engelsma. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021. Pp. 229. \$26.50 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1944555733. [Reviewed by Robert P. Swierenga]

Students of Dutch Reformed history have waited more than one hundred years for a modern biography in English of Simon van Velzen, a “true father of the *Afscheiding*” (211) and defender of orthodox Calvinism in the Netherlands. Joshua Engelsma’s sparkling popular account of the life and influence of this longest-lived reformer supplants Johan A. Wormser’s *Karakter en Genade: Het Leven van Simon van Velzen* (1916), Dutch-language tome, one of a series of five Separatist clerics. Wormser’s book is woefully inadequate, although he had first-hand knowledge of his subject, thanks to his father, Jan A. Wormser, an influential elder in the Amsterdam congregation.

Van Velzen (1809-1896) was the leader of the conservative northern wing of the *Afscheiding*, and had his hand in synods and theological education from the 1830s to the 1890s. Engelsma argues cogently that, compared to the other leaders, he had the “most significant and positive influence on the churches of the *Afscheiding*” (207). Van Vel-

zen served Separatist churches in Friesland and trained many pastors in his parsonage, before taking the pulpit of the flagship Amsterdam congregation. In 1854 he was appointed professor at the fledgling Separatist Theological School in Kampen, where he was the leading voice until he retired in 1891. His last hurrah was to facilitate the merger in 1892 of the *Afscheiding* and Doleantie (Kuyperian) churches to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland* (GKN).

With the early death in 1842 of De Cock, the “Father of the *Afscheiding*,” and the emigration in 1846 of Hendrik Scholte and Albertus Van Raalte, the mantle of *Afscheiding* leadership fell on Van Velzen. Engelsma takes issue with Mees te Velde, professor emeritus at the Reformed Theological School *Vrijgemaakt*, Kampen, who gave pride of place to Anthony Brummelkamp in his definitive biography (in Dutch, 1988). Engelsma allows that Brummelkamp played a major role in the history of the *Afscheiding*, but his influence was “not

always positive” (206), because of his ecclesiology and promoting the “well-meant offer of the gospel” (143). Van Velzen, as editor of the church paper, *De Bazuin* (The Trumpet), vehemently opposed anyone who taught conditional election. Engelsma expands on this controversy, which still lingers in Reformed circles. Brummelkamp and Van Raalte shunned Van Velzen as “the fifth wheel on the wagon” (145). The two “were bitterly opposed to each other for years,” but made up later and Van Velzen spoke movingly at Brummelkamp’s funeral (203). Similarly, Scholte broke with Van Velzen, charging him with “preaching dry doctrines” and being “duplicitous, quarrelsome, and imperious” (128). For his intemperate charges against Van Velzen, Scholte was deposed by Synod 1840.

Van Velzen was born in Amsterdam in 1808 under the radical French regime and he interrupted his university studies to volunteer for the House of Orange against Belgian revolutionaries. After graduating from the University of Leiden department of theology, he was ordained in the Drogeham (Friesland) Hervormde Kerk, but was soon drummed out for opposing heresy in the state church.

He joined the Afscheiding and suffered severe persecution, planting congregations in his bailiwick of Friesland before taking the pulpit of the flagship Amsterdam congregation.

In 1854 Van Velzen joined Brummelkamp, Helenius De Cock (Hendrik’s son), and Tamme F. de Haan as founding professors at the Kampen seminary. Van Velzen taught Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French in the preparatory department. In the seminary department, his forte was preaching (that is, homiletics), a course he taught for thirty-seven years. His aim was to prepare lively orthodox exegetes, not the dry, lifeless “Dutch style” then in vogue (168).

This book is aimed at a general audience, but specialists will find many fresh insights and nuggets of information. Engelsma has a knack for explaining complicated events succinctly, such as the Napoleonic regime, King Willem I’s 1816 regulations that set aside the Dort Church Order and gutted the Form of Subscription, the Reveil evangelical movement of the 1820s, conventicle worship under lay preachers (*oefenaars*), the young turks in the Scholte Club at Leiden University, De Cock’s secession of 1834, turmoil in Afscheiding synods from 1836

to 1854, and the oft-neglected period thereafter. The book covers all the important ecclesiastical and theological controversies—church orders, historical or saving faith, the doctrine of election, covenant or “volk” baptism, closed or close communion, hymns, lay preachers, and even clerical garb.

Most valuable are Engelsma’s classification of Separatists into groups that continue to the present day—the “far-right” pietists rooted in Old Writers of the Later Reformation (Netherlands Reformed and Heritage Reformed), the “center-right” orthodox and confessional men led by Van Velzen (Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed), the “center-left” compromisers led by Brummelkamp and Van Raalte (Reformed Church in America), and the “far-left” radicals led by the eccentric independent Hendrik Scholte (Reformed Baptist). Based on synodical debates over church polity and doctrine, the author further aligns the groups geographically into three clusters of provinces. Defenders of the Dort Church Order, led by Van Velzen, hailed from the northern provinces—North Holland Groningen, Drenthe, and Friesland. Delegates who rejected the Dort Church Order, led by Scholte,

came from Utrecht, Zeeland, and South Holland (I would add North Brabant). Delegates who valued unity over polity, led by Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, represented the southern provinces of Overijssel and Gelderland.

Informative tidbits abound. Van Velzen’s university education cost the family 3,500 guilders (\$1,400, or \$40,000 in current dollars). In catechetical instruction, he used the actual document, not a compendium. He trained five hundred ministers at Kampen, a number of whom took calls to the nascent Christian Reformed Church in America. And he outlived three wives, the first Johanna de Moen, died after only three years of marriage. She was a sister to Maria de Moen (Mrs. Brummelkamp), Catherina de Moen (Mrs. Van Raalte), and Carel de Moen.

The author is unabashedly sympathetic to Van Velzen, calling him a “spiritual father” (3), but he pictures the leader warts and all. Negative quotes of historians, that he was narrow-minded, domineering, polemical, and blunt, are offset by favorable quotes of other historians. The differing views say as much about the scholars as it does their subject. Van Velzen was forthright and fearless—the

only Afscheiding pastor to declare the state church a “false church” as judged by Article 29 of the Belgic Confession (85). He was quirky, but “students truly loved him.” He was fiery and not an “easy person to get along with” (209), but he was highly respected and valued. Among the chief Afscheiding clerics scholars have portrayed Van Velzen as the odd man out. Engelsma raises him to the forefront as “a tireless and fearless defender of the faith, a true father of the Afscheiding” (210-11).

Van Velzen sadly destroyed all his personal papers and correspondence before his death, and tasked his son-in-law to scuttle any items he may have missed. Engelsma overcame this handicap by digging deep in Dutch language sources, both in print and in electronic form. He mined seven of Van Velzen’s published booklets and essays, several ex-tant sermons, reminiscences, *De Bazuin* editorials, and Acts of synods from 1836 to 1869. He tapped local church records collected in multi-volume works by Cornelis Smits and Jan Wesseling, and C. Veenhof’s book on election in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. Of course, the author took full advantage of Wormser’s biography,

and a topical essay on Van Velzen by Jaap van Gelderen, published in 1999 by Theological University Kampen.

Engelsma triangulated on his subject via modern biographies of contemporaries: te Velde’s *Brummelkamp*, Harm Veldman’s *De Cock*, Lubbertus Oostendorp’s *Scholte*, and Eugene Heideman’s *Scholte*. Secondary sources included David J. Engelsma’s anthology, *Always Reforming*, (2009), W. De Graaf’s history of the Kampen Theological School (1955), and Harm Bouwman’s *Crisis der Jeugd* (1914), among others. In short, the author’s documentation is wide and deep. The lack of a modern Van Raalte biography, now in progress by this reviewer, may explain why this leader got short shrift, in comparison to Brummelkamp and Scholte.

The book’s title, *Watchman on the Walls of Zion*, is a paraphrase of the title of Van Velzen’s booklet: “Voice of a Watchman on Zion’s Walls” (in English translation). Several dozen small photos enhance the text. The absence of a subject index is lamentable. Scholars will have to dig for discussions of baptism, the well-meant offer, election, the form of subscription, hymns,

clerical garb, synods, and many more themes. The book lacks a brief genealogy of the Van Velzen family, to augment the brief two-page family history. Van Velzen had ten children, one by his first wife, one (still-born) by his second wife, and eight by his third wife, seven of whom lived full lives. One can find these details and the names of the children in Wormser's biography.

Engelsma graduated from Calvin College (now University) in 2010, Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in 2014, and since then has served Doon (Iowa) Protestant Reformed Church. In a course at Calvin

Seminary on Herman Bavinck, he wrote a paper on Van Velzen, which led to his first publication, "'Father' van Velzen: The Significance of Simon van Velzen for the Reformation of 1834" (*Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 2013). Having "tasted blood" with his name in print, he was persuaded to expand the paper into this delightful book. In the interim, he published a pastoral guide: *Dating Differently: A Guide to Reformed Dating* (2019). This readable story of the Afscheiding leader who most impacted orthodox Dutch Calvinist in North America should be in every church library. ●

The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism and Gospel Assurance – Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters, by Sinclair B. Ferguson. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016. Pp. 256. \$24.99 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1433548000. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

I surprise myself by writing a somewhat favorable review of a favorable treatment of the Marrow controversy. The Marrow controversy was a complicated doctrinal struggle in Scotland in the early 1700s over the teaching of a difficult book written in 1645 – 1648. Because the controversy was raised at a Presbyterian assembly in the small Scottish town

with this unpronounceable name, the Marrow controversy has come to be identified as a creed expressed in a convoluted statement adopted at the assembly in this town with the difficult name: the "Auchterarder 'creed.'"

The dense book from which the convoluted statement arose, and around which the doctrinal controversy swirled, at the church

assembly that met in the Scottish town with the difficult name was titled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. Hence, the defenders of the theology of the book are known as the “Marrow men.”

The convoluted statement that constituted the Auchterarder creed and upon agreement with which the candidacy of a prospective minister was made to depend was: “I believe that it is not sound doctrine and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God” (28).

A more or less favorable review of a book—*The Whole Christ*—by a creedally Reformed reviewer is surprising because an important aspect of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* is a defense of universal atonement on behalf of a conception of the preaching of the gospel as God’s well-meant offer of salvation to all humans, reprobate and elect alike. Universal atonement is taught, admittedly obscurely, in the line, “[in the death of Jesus] God hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all [all members of the human race without exception—DJE].” This line is the doctrinal basis of the *Marrow*’s preaching to “every man, without exception, that here is good news for him! Christ is

dead for him!”

The well-meant offer is based upon universal atonement.

As a modern Marrow man, Ferguson defends these statements and their theology.

Granted, the statements confessing the false doctrines of the well-meant offer (offering Christ to every human in the affirmation that God hath made a deed of gift and grant to all mankind) and of universal atonement (Christ is dead for every man) are not expressed perfectly clearly, so that even the heresies are obscure. Everything of the Marrow theology, and of the subsequent controversy, is dense and difficult. This alone renders the theology of the Marrow dubious.

Ferguson’s treatment of these doctrinal issues is a defense of them. Thus, he sides with the Marrow men in the controversy over their doctrines of the well-meant offer and of universal atonement.

If this were all that there was to the book and controversy of the Marrow, and, therefore, to Ferguson’s book, no Reformed reviewer could possibly write anything favorable about the book. But there was more to the Marrow controversy than only the well-meant offer and its nec-

essary implication, a universal atonement. There were especially two other issues of enduring significance to Reformed and Presbyterian theology. One was the controversy of legalism and antinomianism. The other was the issue of the assurance of salvation. It is these issues that are the main concerns of Ferguson's book, *The Whole Christ*.

Ferguson sheds bright light on both of these important issues and conflicts, even where he himself goes wrong on one of the issues: assurance of salvation. On the former issue, that of legalism and antinomianism, he is sound and helpful. He has antinomianism straight: "[Antinomianism is the rejection of] the *obligatory*... nature of the Decalogue for those who are in Christ" (155). Legalism is not, as is the common opinion, in fact, the opposite of antinomianism. One does not, therefore, correct legalism by a strong dose of antinomianism, or, as is probably the greater danger, antinomianism with a dose of legalism. Rather than being opposites, the two errors are related. In Ferguson's terminology, they are "non-identical twins." They have the same parentage: denial of the fullness of the gracious work of Christ—denial of the "whole

Christ." This explains the title of the book.

There is only one genuine cure for legalism. It is the same medicine the gospel prescribes for antinomianism: understanding and tasting union with Jesus Christ himself. This leads to a new love for and obedience to the law of God, which he now mediates to us in the gospel. This alone breaks the bonds of both legalism (the law is no longer divorced from the person of Christ) and antinomianism (we are not divorced from the law, which now comes to us from the hand of Christ and in the empowerment of the Spirit, who writes it in our hearts). Without this both legalist and antinomian remain wrongly related to God's law and inadequately related to God's grace (157).

Ferguson's treatment of assurance of salvation, however, leaves much to be desired. He is master of the history and doctrinal controversy concerning assurance. But with regard to the gospel-truth itself, he is seriously in error. With appeal to a widely accepted distinction between the "direct" act of faith and the "reflexive" act of faith, Ferguson

denies that faith *is* assurance of salvation. He concedes, without any evidence of distress over the concession, that many believers, despite believing on Jesus, may yet lack assurance of their salvation. Evidently this was the doctrine of the *Marrow* and of the Marrow men. It came to be the opinion of the leading Puritans, and is still today the doctrine of the disciples of the Puritans.

The distinction between direct and reflexive activities of faith ought to be challenged, at least in the form in which the distinction is commonly and popularly understood. The distinction amounts to this: believing on Jesus Christ directly, I have the assurance of my salvation; however, putting the question to myself, reflexively, whether I do truly believe, I doubt my salvation. The end result is doubt of salvation as virtually the norm for the believing child of God. Few believers are convinced that they do truly believe. This is now the wretched spiritual condition of multitudes of professing believers.

If this is the meaning of the distinction and if this is the spiritual condition that results from the distinction, the distinction ought to be banished to perdition, whence it came! Doubt arises out

of the pit, as assurance has its source in our Savior in heaven.

The reality, or legitimacy, of a reflexive act of faith that calls into question the direct act of faith must itself be called into question, regardless of its appearance in the Reformed tradition. The believer trusting upon Christ, as is the reality of true faith, simply does not ask, doubtfully, whether he does truly believe, or whether his faith is genuine. That he does believe with a true faith is an aspect of faith's certainty, an aspect of the assurance of faith.

What child trusting upon his father then asks himself whether he does, in fact, trust his father? or that his trust is, in fact, trust? His trust in his father is, in reality, as trust, the confidence that his trust is certainly trust, without putting the reality of his trust to some test. Doubt that his trust is trust is not assurance. It is doubt. And faith is not doubt. According to the Reformed creeds, "faith *is* assurance" (cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 21). It is not only assurance that Jesus is a Savior, but also that He is the Savior of *me*. This implies the self-certifying nature of true faith.

In keeping with the rest of the book, the appendix also is confusing. It is an exposition of assur-

ance by a leading Marrow man, Thomas Boston. As a Marrow man, Boston shares the doubt of the *Marrow* that true faith essentially is assurance of the believer's salvation, suggesting, therefore, that many believers lack assurance. But then are quoted many Reformed creeds and statements on assurance by leading Reformed theologians *affirming* that faith is assurance. Typical is the "Palatine Catechism" of 1592:

True faith...is...an assured affiance [that is, confidence—DJE], kindled in my heart by the Holy Ghost, by which I rest upon God, making sure account, that forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and life, are bestowed, not only upon others, but

also upon me, and that freely by the mercy of God, for the merit and desert of Christ alone (242).

That this certainty of faith is attacked by many adversaries, above all, by Satan, is another matter altogether. Faith *is* assurance of salvation.

The serious weaknesses of the book with regard to substantial aspects of the gospel make a hearty recommendation of the book impossible. Adding to the doubtfulness, not now of salvation, but of the book is a foreword by the heretical Tim Keller.

Nevertheless, the reader will learn the Marrow controversy and its enduring issues. The book is informative. This is something. ●

Job: God's Sovereignty in Suffering, Ronald Hanko. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021. Pp. 160. \$19.50 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1944555825. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown]

If you are like this reviewer, your approach to *Job* is to read chapter 1-2, wade through chapters 3-37 trying to comprehend the speeches of *Job* and his friends, and then with a sense of relief to read the concluding chapters of the book when the Lord appears.

Or perhaps you have read a thick verse-by-verse commentary on the whole book, which would be no mean feat. (Two standard works—by Matthew Henry and Keil and Delitzsch—are 236 pages and 390 pages respectively; I remember that there was in the

seminary library a multivolume series of sermons on Job by a Puritan preacher: his congregation must have had “the patience of Job”!).

Ron Hanko has rendered the believer a great service. Without giving a verse-by-verse commentary on the book, he has supplied a section-by-section explanation of Job. He also includes study questions so that this book can be used as an aid to group Bible studies. The whole book comprises fewer than 150 pages, which is very manageable. The book also divides very simply: “The History of Job” (1:1-3:26), “Three Rounds of Speeches” (4:1-31:40), “Elihu’s Entry” (32:1-37:24), and “God and Job” (38:1-42:17).

Four themes are developed in the book: God’s sovereignty in the afflictions of His people; Job’s exemplary uprightness; the foolishness (even wickedness) of Job’s friends, a sin that is so serious that God requires Job to make an atonement for it; and Job’s sinful questioning of God’s ways. Yes, Job sinned in the book: he did not sin in the way that Satan wanted (Satan wanted him to curse God), but he did fall into sinful questioning of God, which sin God rebukes.

The book begins with Job’s

integrity. Job was “perfect” (1:1), which does not mean without sin, but has a reference to “conduct that is above reproach” (12). Nevertheless, warns Hanko, “Job’s uprightness did not shelter him from God’s chastening hand or mean that he was above chastening” (13). That is important to note because God did not chasten Job for one particular sin, but to display His own glory in Job, to purify Job, and to teach Job.

Suffering, of course, is the experience of everyone, including believers. Hanko applies the word to the suffering believer, emphasizing God’s sovereignty:

The sins to which we are tempted in suffering are many. We sin by questioning God’s justice and goodness, by complaining and being discontented, by thinking we deserve better than God sends us, by taking out our frustrations and discontent on others, by attempting to find a reason for our trials beyond what God reveals in His word (as Job did), by using our trials as an excuse to commit deliberate sins, by cutting ourselves off from God and from others in suffering. Satan is there to tempt us to these sins, though the lesson of Job’s suffering is that we must watch diligently

for his lion-like and devouring presence (15).

If God gives me good things and then impoverishes me, I may not complain. I must confess that it was all His anyway. If God gives me health and then takes it away, I may not be discontent but must acknowledge that my very existence is a gift from Him. If God gives me a child and then takes that child away, I must not be angry with Him but confess that it was a privilege to have that child for a short time and be thankful for the short time that child was in my arms and my home. What Job did in his trials, I must do in mine (20).

The longest and most difficult part of Job is the series of speeches, the back-and-forth between Job and Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. What are we to make of these long, poetic speeches? Are these men speaking the truth to Job: if so, why does God sharply rebuke them at the end of the book; if not, why are they found in inspired Scripture? The answer, as Hanko explains it, is that these men do speak truth (what they say is factually correct), but they misapply the truth to Job. This misapplication is *sin*.

How are we to understand their speeches to Job, which God calls folly and for which He condemns them (Job 42:8)? A careful reading of their words shows a deep knowledge of God and reverence for Him. What they say is not in itself wrong. Calvin calls it “pure truth” and the “foundations of religion.” They do not lie as Satan did, but though their words are factually correct they are misapplied in the case of Job and therefore are folly. Misinterpreting and misapplying the word of God is sin against the third commandment, the sin of taking God’s name in vain... It is as much a sin as lying. God’s later condemnation of their speeches confirms this (27).

In other words, Job’s friends are believers, they are pious men, and they have a grasp of good doctrine. They understand God’s sovereignty, His holiness and righteousness, His punishment of evildoers and His vindication of the righteous, but they misread God’s providence and they make terrible charges of sin against Job, which are entirely unwarranted. Hanko warns that we are prone to this sin:

There is a warning for us in that. It is easy to think that because we quote the Word of God, our words must be true and right; but misapplying them is as great a sin as misquoting them. In the case of Job's friends, their sin was such that atoning sacrifice and intercessory prayer were necessary. We commit their sin and need forgiveness when we apply the Word of God to others and not to ourselves as we ought to do. We commit their sin when we use the Word of God to condemn others harshly, unjustly, and without a hearing. We commit their sin when we use God's Word to number fellow believers among the ungodly and unbelieving, banishing them from our hearts and lives. The Word must be handled carefully and not deceitfully (29).

We must take others at their word unless we have clear and unmistakable evidence to the contrary... We do not think, suspect, or charge others with evildoing unless we have proof, and even then, of course, pointing out their sin must be done humbly and carefully and within the guidelines of Matthew 18. Not only must we have proof, but the proof must be sustainable...

Eliphaz ... sins against charity in his judgment of Job, in his twisting of Job's own words, and in his refusal to take Job at his word (65).

As difficult as it is to read of how Job was treated by his friends, it is something that happens often. In controversy and disagreement, charity, kindness, and mercy are quickly forgotten (66).

Job himself insists upon his integrity throughout the book—he is not guilty of some gross public sin, despite the feverish imaginations and the uncharitable suspicions of his friends. However, Job was not a man without sin: Job's sin was his questioning of God's ways and his repeated demands for an answer from the Almighty. That was his folly, and yet how easy it is for us to fall into such sinful questioning of our Father! Again and again Hanko exposes this sin and warns against it:

Questioning God's ways seems such a small thing, but it is not small in God's eyes, for He will not give His glory to another. Job had to learn that God is God. Our children learn this lesson when we refuse to answer their persistent

“Why?” insisting that they must submit to our authority because we are their parents. We must all learn that lesson in relation to God. Submission is unquestioning and bows without knowing (52)

Still he does not realize that by putting God to the questions he wishes to ask, he is sinning against God. Whether he sins in expressing his hopelessness and desire to die, God only knows, for God never charges him with sin in that respect. In demanding an answer to his “why” he does sin and sins grievously, and that, too, is a lesson for all of us who suffer. God will overlook the language we use in expressing our grief and sorrow, but He will not overlook our asking Him to explain His ways to us (70).

To ask why is to set ourselves on the throne of God and call Him to account as though He is nothing more than a cringing menial in relation to us. It is a denial of His lordship and absolute sovereignty. When finally we do understand, then we will do as Job did: we will put our hand on our mouth and be silent. Not only is questioning a denial of God’s sovereignty, but it is a denial of salvation

by grace alone. We have no works, no merit, that earn for us an answer to our questions. Our standing with God is all through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and in Him alone we must rest. We, too, when we question God’s ways and think we cannot be at peace unless He explains Himself to us, will find Him a God who hides Himself. He is there always to sympathize, to help, to soothe, but He will not be there to stand prisoner at the bar of our questions and to be judged by us (96).

Poor Job—suffering, seeking answers and finding none, while his friends mercilessly assail him! Yet the book ends with a display of God’s mercy: “Ye have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11). God appears: He reproves, and *He forgives*—He forgives Job and He forgives Job’s friends, and, as the fruit of that forgiveness, Job forgives the harsh words of his friends. God’s merciful goal, writes Hanko, is “Job’s growth in grace, stronger faith in his redeemer and in the resurrection of the body, and greater insight into the majesty and greatness of God, a worthy end indeed” (133).

This is a delightful little book, full of penetrating insights into the person and history of Job. I recommend it highly. ●

God Has Chosen: The Doctrine of Election Through Christian History, by Mark R. Lindsay. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2020. Pp. 248. \$30.00 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-0830853229. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper]

This book's title is misleading.

For one thing, the subtitle suggests that the book traces the development of the doctrine of election. Anticipating the misunderstanding that the subtitle occasions, Lindsay tells the reader that he would have used a different subtitle, *A History of the Doctrine of Election*, if that were his purpose (3). The reader is left to surmise how the subtitle that Lindsay used conveys something essentially different from the one he did not use.

For another, nothing in the title indicates what the book is really about. The book is really about the place of *Jews* in God's electing work, and more specifically, the place of Jews "*Through Christian History*," that is, in the New Dispensation.

Merits

Misleading title aside, the

book has its merits.

One positive point is the book's insistence that a right doctrine of election must be grounded in Scripture. Emphasizing this point, chapter one includes an examination of five Scripture passages. Three of them are classic passages regarding election: Deuteronomy 7:6-11, Romans 9-11, and Ephesians 1:3-14. The others, Genesis 12:1-9 and Genesis 32:22-32, serve Lindsay's purpose in that they speak of the call of Abraham and Jacob, who were Jews. However, while these passages assume the doctrine of election, they speak explicitly to the doctrine of *calling*. Failing to point out the distinction between calling and election, and using passages that speak of calling in support of election, Lindsay appears to confuse the two.

A second merit of the book is that, although not presenting a "video view" of the doctrine of

election (a history of the doctrine), it presents instructive “snapshots” of that doctrine throughout history. Chapter two gives a picture of the doctrine of election in the early church fathers, with focus on Ignatius of Antioch, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, and Augustine of Hippo. Chapter three glances at the Middle Ages, with special notice given to Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Chapter four depicts the views of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Jacob Arminius. Chapter five is a snapshot of the doctrine in the nineteenth century—think of Friedrich Schleiermacher and John Nelson Darby. And chapter six examines Karl Barth’s thinking on election. As this chapter indicates, Lindsay is a Barth scholar; he is acquainted with scholarship about Barth’s view, and engages the scholarship.

A third merit of the book is its attention to some fundamental characteristics of divine election: its unmerited and unchanging character, its expression of God’s free and sovereign will, and its being centered in Christ. To be clear, Lindsay is not developing the doctrine of election; rather, he is observing what others said about it. But in highlighting these

characteristics of election in a historical survey, he appears to give them his stamp of approval.

A fourth merit is that the book faces a good question: *who* are the elect? The question does not have *individuals* in mind, but *groups*: Lindsay’s point is to demonstrate that Christians may not say of ethnic Jews, *simply because they are Jews*, that they are not elect. His selection of Bible passages in chapter one lays the foundation to make this point. The early church fathers, who did not explicitly develop a doctrine of election, generally viewed the elect as being found in the church, thereby excluding ethnic Jews. The medieval fathers often classified Jews in the same category as Moslems—reprobated—and pointed to the Jews’ rejection of Christ as evidence. Lindsay finds in Aquinas and Scotus some indication that they did not think as harshly of the Jews. Schleiermacher taught that all humanity would finally be saved. Darby gave the Jews a prominent place in the future kingdom of God. And Barth’s doctrine of election included a defense of the positive place of the Jews in God’s plan; at least in part, it was his response to the Nazi anti-Semitism of his day.

Only in the chapter regarding

the Reformer's view of election does Lindsay say virtually nothing about the place of the Jews, apart from than noting that Calvin viewed Abraham's seed as in the covenant. The main thrust of that chapter is to show that Calvin drew the line between election and reprobation fairly rigidly, and appeared to make the reprobate the larger number; that Arminius did the opposite; and that Beza was in the middle of the two.

The main thrust of the book is to defend the idea that Jews, as an ethnic people, are not excluded from the decree of election, and that election is the free and unmerited choice of God. Much in the book is true, and can be read with profit by one who appreciates a robust Reformed and Calvinistic doctrine of election.

Wait a Moment - Really?

One who appreciates a robust Reformed doctrine of election will, while appreciating some aspects of the book, also be puzzled at other aspects.

For one thing, Lindsay ends his book with a plea to view God's electing will differently than many do and have: "And it is here that I enter my closing plea for a more expansive view of God's electing will—a view that does

not need to impose into God's own eternity a choice between groups of people but that instead takes quite seriously the radical inclusivity of God's call and offer. 'Let *everyone* who is thirsty come. Let *anyone* who wishes take' (Rev. 22:17)" (11, 218.)

Second, he ends with a clear denunciation of the idea that God did in fact eternally elect and reprobate:

Yet all of this has been predicated on the a priori assumption that it is God's eternal determination . . . to so divide His human creation into these two camps [elect and reprobate]. But what if that assumption is wrong?

. . . Therefore, perhaps at least part of the solution is to refuse any such bifurcating will on the part of God. Perhaps, even if we as human beings tend always to separate ourselves into camps—the Us and the Them—that is not in fact what God chooses to do.

At this point I remind the reader that Lindsay said, "All doctrines are, or should be, grounded in the church's Scriptures" (14). That Revelation 22:17 is in the Bible is beyond doubt; but it regards the doctrine of the *call* of God,

not the *electing work* of God, and not the *eternal character* of that work. This reader would be helped if Lindsay could use pertinent passages to support his dismissive approach to election and reprobation. As it is, Ephesians 1:4-6 and Jude 4 (as well as other passages) stand in the way of such a dismissal. These passages refer to the eternal character of election (Ephesians 1) and reprobation (Jude). Because they touch on precisely the point that Lindsay wants to dismiss, and because they are part of the Scriptures, he ought interact with them.

Lindsay's dismissal of eternal, double predestination apparently explains his assessment of the doctrine of election during the Reformation era. He does not appreciate Calvin's view: it contains "the notion of a capricious, arbitrary God" (126; the Canons of Dort, in their conclusion, expressly regard this idea as a

misrepresentation of Reformed doctrine of election). Lindsay views Arminius' view as a *development* of Reformed theology, rather than a *departure* from it (129). Then he misrepresents the Synod and Canons of Dort when he says: "The Canons of Dort did not explicitly anathematize either the Remonstrant party or Arminius himself" (135). In fact, that the Canons explicitly rejected the Remonstrant position, and that the Synod expressly condemned the Remonstrant leaders is a matter of historical record.

The book's historical survey, though consisting only of momentary snapshots, is appreciated. Its insistence on unmerited election, and election being the free choice of God, is refreshing. But its denial of eternal, double predestination is troubling, for the church's Scriptures teach these aspects of the doctrine of divine election as well. ●

The Two Wills of God: Does God Really Have Two Wills? by C. Matthew McMahon. Coconut Creek, Florida: Puritan Publications, 2005. Pp. 543. \$39.99 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1626631243. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

This poorly written and carelessly edited volume (on pages 241-243 alone are at least nine

errors of grammar and spelling) nevertheless has its virtues. It is a worthy theological study:

Does God will, in any way, goodness, blessing or love to the reprobate (the seed of the serpent), with the desire of making those who receive His blessings, loving-kindness, or goodness, happy as a result? Does God intend their salvation when the free-offer of the Gospel is given to them and falls upon their ears? Is there such a thing as a free “offer” (offer as in the strict sense) of the Gospel if God wills all things, even the election and reprobation of men? (p. 19).

The book vigorously denies that God has both a will for the salvation of some only—the elect—and a contradictory will for the salvation of all humans without exception, expressed in a gracious desire in the preaching of the gospel. In this connection, the book boldly flies in the face of the nearly unanimous, contrary verdict among reputedly Calvinistic churches and theologians today by asserting that God is, and must be, “logical.” (Can one conceive a more ridiculous, objectionable deity in the 21st century than one who is “logical,” that is, one who can be known, one who is, according to John 1, the Logos?) The consensus today is that God is illogical in decreeing the salvation of some only while desiring the

salvation of all in the “well-meant offer” of Christ in the gospel.

The author proves his denial of two, contradictory wills in God from Scripture, from the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds, indeed, from the early Christian creeds, and from various outstanding theologians in all ages of the Christian church.

Another, related virtue is the rejection of a “common grace” of God. By “common grace,” McMahon refers to both a saving grace of God for all humans and to a non-saving grace in the good things of earthly life—rain, sunshine, health, wealth, and the like. According to McMahon, God is gracious in any respect whatever only to the elect in Jesus Christ. Both the gospel and rain and sunshine are curse to the reprobate wicked, hardening them and storing up wrath in the day of judgment.

For this doctrine too, the author offers abundant biblical proof, with extended exegesis of the passages commonly appealed to by the defenders of a common grace of God.

In light of this theology, it comes as a surprise that McMahon dismisses the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) as hyper-Calvinists. In part, his charge

is due to his misunderstanding of hyper-Calvinism. In McMahan's thinking hyper-Calvinism is "emphasizing the hatred of God for the wicked without acknowledging His *divided sense* desire for their salvation, or *indiscriminate providence* for their bodily sustenance" (p. 158). Apart from the fact that the PRC do not so emphasize the hatred of God as to fail to acknowledge God's indiscriminate providence for the bodily sustenance of the reprobate ungodly, McMahan sucks his description of hyper-Calvinism out of his thumb. Hyper-Calvinism is not whatever it suits the latest writer on the subject to make of it. Hyper-Calvinism has a certain, definite, specific meaning. It is the theological error that denies that God calls, or summons, all who hear the gospel to repent of their sins and to believe in Jesus Christ, regardless whether he is elect or reprobate. According to hyper-Calvinism, the gospel is to be preached only to the elect (as though this were even possible). The PRC are not guilty of this error. No one has ever made this charge stick. No one can.

In part also, the charge against the PRC is due to McMahan's inconsistency in his denial of a will of God for the salvation of the rep-

robate. As his description of hyper-Calvinism implies, McMahan contends that there is, after all, a certain "desire" of God for the salvation of all wicked persons, reprobate as well as elect. This "desire" is what McMahan calls God's "divided sense desire for their salvation." The PRC do indeed deny that there is any divine "desire" for the salvation of the reprobate whatever. But this does not make them hyper-Calvinists. On the contrary, it establishes them as genuine Calvinists.

In addition to the sloppy writing and editing, the book suffers from a serious weakness. Basic to the author's argument concerning the will, or wills, of God, indeed, the burden of the book, is a strange, obscure distinction between a "compound" sense of the will of God for the salvation of sinners and a "divided" sense. At his clearest, McMahan identifies his distinction as virtually that of the traditional distinction between God's "decretal" will and His "preceptive" will: "God has a will of decree and a will of precept, a compound and divided sense" (p. 315). In this case, McMahan's "compound" will of God is His decree of predestination, whereas his "divided" will is God's command to all who hear

the gospel that they repent and believe. If this is the meaning of McMahon's unfamiliar distinction, he ought to have worked with the traditional distinction of "decretal/preceptive," and to have left his peculiar, obscure, confusing distinction of "compound/divided" in his pen.

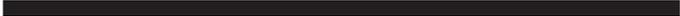
But there is evidence that McMahon intends more with his "divided" sense of the will of God than the Reformed tradition means by God's "preceptive" will. He definitely makes his "divided" sense include the anthropomorphisms of Scripture. Fatally compromising the main theme of his book, and contrary to what he states elsewhere, McMahon makes the "divided" sense of the will of God consist of a gracious "desire" of God *in the preaching of the gospel* for the salvation of all.

In reality, God has no more a will, or desire, for the salvation of the reprobate in the (passionate) preaching of the gospel than He has in the eternal decree. Nor

does the "preceptive" will of God teach this. The preaching of the gospel expresses God's "*precept*": the summons to repent and believe. A precept is a command, not a desire compromising the divine decree, as God's command to Pharaoh to let the people go was His precept, hardening the monarch's heart, in harmony with the decree that the king of Egypt perish by disobeying the precept (cf. Romans 9).

McMahon's quite illogical conception of the "divided" will of God explains his condemnation of the PRC as hyper-Calvinists. In the (logical) harmony of the "preceptive" will of God with the "decretal" will of God (that McMahon rightly demands, but himself violates), the PRC deny that the "preceptive" will of God in the preaching of the gospel—"Repent! Believe!"—is a well-meant, gracious offer to the reprobate.

God does not have two wills. ●



Ancient Roots for Reformed Polity, by Campegius Vitringa, Sr., tr. Joshua L. Bernard, ed. H. David Schuringa. Monee, IL: North Star Ministry Press, 2020. Pp. 220. \$12.95 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1646336333. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

One's initial response to a book on the Jewish synagogue, that it must lack relevance to the Christian church and interest to the believing reader, is ruled out at once by recognition of the book's author. Campegius Vitringa, Sr. was a notable theologian in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands (1659-1722). From 1680 to his death, he taught oriental languages, theology, and church history at the University of Franeker. Among his other works was (in English translation) *The Synagogue and the Church*. Of this originally more than 1,000 page book, the present volume is the translation and abridgment.

The book does not only present a fascinating description of the worship practices and government of the Jewish synagogue, which gatherings and their order began after the Babylonian captivity in the days of Ezra. Reference to this worship of the synagogue is found in Nehemiah 8.

But, as is of more interest to the believer, the book traces the order of worship and church discipline back to the worship and discipline of the synagogue. The

large work of which this book is an abridgment "traces church order to the Synagogue" (11).

There is strong presumptive evidence, amounting almost to certainty, that the early Christians, when offering and arranging their places and forms of worship, the discipline, the government, etc. of their Church, had especially in view the Jewish Synagogue (145).

The worship and church order of the New Testament church are patterned in important respects after those of the synagogue in the time of the Old Testament. Included are the content and order of the worship; the services themselves; the nature of the preaching (as exposition of a passage of Scripture); church discipline, culminating in excommunication; election of the officebearers (by the members of the congregation); the very arrangement of the seating of the congregation; and the number of families necessary for the establishment of a congregation (at least 10 families).

There are a number of references in the New Testament to the nature and practice of the worship of the synagogue, admittedly mostly negative. James 2:1-9 refers to the practice of the synagogue of reserving the most prominent seats in the building for the rich. Likewise, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for loving the “chief seats in the synagogue” (Matthew 23:6). Unfortunately, this was a practice that was followed for many years by Reformed churches in the Netherlands in that wealthy farmers bought the best seats in the church auditorium, while the poor laborers were required to wait for the “back-benches” left over after the rich were seated.

An aspect of the order of the synagogue that the church did take over was the discipline of impenitent members. The synagogue cut off fellowship with them, culminating in excommunication. Even in respect of discipline, however, the church developed this discipline. The church did not practice shunning. Nor did the early church flog the impenitent sinner, as did the synagogue. Jesus speaks of this aspect of the discipline of the synagogue in Matthew 10:17: “they will scourge you in their synagogues.”

Paul confesses that formerly he was responsible for this kind of discipline of Jewish converts to Christianity: “I punished them oft in every synagogue” (Acts 26:11).

Of special interest to this reviewer is the information that, following the example of the worship of the synagogue, the early church *stood* to pray. The first congregation of the present writer, coming as the members did out of the German Reformed tradition, had this worship practice. They did not follow another characteristic practice of the synagogue and early church, that of the rabbi’s and minister’s sitting while preaching.

The book is enhanced by explanatory notes by the learned editor, Dr. H. David Schuringa.

One strong impression with which the reader comes away is the all-consuming devotion of the synagogue to the law of God. For the synagogue, the law simply was all. Every jot and tittle of the Old Testament law, ceremonial as well as moral, was bound upon the Jewish worshippers. The inevitable result was that man-made rules were added to the Old Testament biblical injunctions. For example, if in copying the Old Testament manuscripts the slightest mistake was made, the

entire copy was destroyed, and the copyist began anew.

In all this emphasis on the law, the message of grace in the Old Testament was lost. Salvation was taught as wholly the matter of the sinner's obedience to the law. Of the opening of a fountain of salvation prophesied in Zechariah 13:1, the synagogue gave the explanation, "the doctrine of the law will be opened as a fountain of water," although it was added that God would "remit" sins (109).

It becomes more understandable, then, that Christ and His apostles contended so vigorously with the Jewish religion against the doctrine that salvation is achieved by keeping the law. Significantly quoting the Old Testament, Paul condemns the religion that is characterized by the

legalism of "touch not, taste not, handle not" (Colossians 2:21). He found it necessary to devote an entire book to exposing the lie that salvation is by the "works of the law" (Galatians). Jewish converts from the synagogue were tempted especially strongly to fall back into the religion of works-righteousness.

On the other hand, the apostles and other leaders in the Christian church were sensitive, as much as possible, to the consciences of the Jewish converts to the Christian faith (Acts 15:19-21).

For those who have some interest in the nature of the Jewish synagogue and its worship and in important development of the order of the church from the synagogue, this is the book. ●

Contributors for this issue are:

Marco Barone, member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church (Wyoming, MI), staff member of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (Jenison, MI), and independent scholar.

David J. Engelsma, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

Douglas J. Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (Wyoming, MI).

Brendan Looyenga, elder in Zion Protestant Reformed Church (Jenison, MI) and a member of the Theological School Committee of the PRCA.

Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence Protestant Reformed Church (Hudsonville, MI).

Robert P. Swierenga, Research Professor, A. C. Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, and Professor of History Emeritus, Kent State University.

Peter Vander Schaaf, elder in Faith Protestant Reformed Church (Jenison, MI) and a member of the Board of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society.