

Editor's Notes

You hold in your hands the April 2020 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. This issue completes the fifty-third year of uninterrupted publication of the *Journal* of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. We thank the Lord for His abundant grace and our readers for their support.

You will find in this issue an article by Dr. C. N. “Nick” Willborn entitled “Nineteenth-Century Southern Presbyterians and Their Theological Contributions.” Dr. Willborn is the senior pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and adjunct professor of historical theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. (Can anyone recall the important role that Oak Ridge had in bringing WWII to an end?) This is the first of two articles that began as presentations that Dr. Willborn gave at the seminary last fall on the theology of the Southern Presbyterians. His lectures focused on the stalwarts of Southern Presbyterianism: Thornwell, Girardeau, Dabney, Palmer, Peck, and others. The lectures were well received by our students and faculty. And we thoroughly enjoyed the fellowship of Dr. Willborn and his wife, Carol. We are grateful for his willingness to have his lectures published in our *Journal*.

The most recent addition to the faculty of PRTS is Prof. Brian Huizinga. This is his first contribution since accepting the appointment and being installed as Professor of Reformed Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies. Prof. Huizinga is presently working on his advanced degree. All will profit from his article entitled “John Calvin and the Reward of Grace.”

The undersigned contributes “A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Languages.” The article addresses the trend that diminishes the importance of learning and retaining the biblical languages for the work of the ministry. It intends to underscore the importance that Reformed churches have placed on the biblical languages since their recovery at the time of the Reformation. And it makes a plea that mastery of Hebrew and Greek continue to be required of seminary students preparing for the ministry of the gospel.

This issue includes two review articles. Review articles are extended critical book reviews. The first is Prof. Douglas J. Kuiper's review article of *A Christian and a Democrat: A Religious Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt*. All will profit from this careful analysis of one of the greatest presidents in the history of the United States of America, known especially for leading the nation through most of WWII.

The second review article is by the Rev. Martyn McGeown, who for several years has labored in Ireland and who recently accepted the call from Providence Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI. Pastor McGeown favors us with an insightful review of *The Crux of the Free Offer: A Biblical, Confessional, and Theological Explanation and Defense of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, by Sam Waldron. The review first appeared recently in the *British Reformed Journal*, of which the Rev. McGeown is editor. Seldom do we print two reviews of the same book. The last issue of *PRTJ* included a review article of this same book by Prof. David Engelsma. But considering the importance of the book and the interaction of its author with the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the well-meant offer of the gospel, it was thought worthwhile to print a second review of the book. Our readers will profit from this second review article.

And last, but by no means least, this issue of *PRTJ* includes numerous book reviews—excellent reviews of recently published books. Special thanks to all our reviewers. The summary of contents and penetrating analysis of the contents of the books reviewed makes this collection of reviews especially worthwhile. Hopefully the reviews will whet your appetite so that you purchase a copy of the book for your own reading pleasure.

Soli Deo Gloria!

—Ronald L. Cammenga, editor

Nineteenth-Century Southern Presbyterians and Their Theological Contributions

C. N. Willborn

I want to express my thanks to the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Three years ago, I met Professor Ron Cammenga when he visited Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in South Carolina. We enjoyed a delightful week of conversation and travel together. A few months after he departed the Palmetto State I was heartened to receive an email from him, which included an invitation to deliver an address to you at some time future. Thank you for your patience in waiting for me to be with you.

The topic assigned to me was twofold: address the theological and pastoral contributions of the men often denominated “Southern Presbyterians.” The men I have selected as representative of the whole are the more visible figures from the nineteenth century. These men were recognized during their era as leaders in the American theological and ecclesiastical theater. In some cases, these men were internationally renowned. Unlike their counterparts in the Northern sector of American Presbyterianism, they have largely fallen out of favor and/or out of sight. James Henley Thornwell, John L. Girardeau, and Robert L. Dabney will be our primary interest in this first installment as we consider their theological prowess.

Interestingly, during the twentieth century the greatest interest in and recognition of the “Southern contributions” came from secular historians. For instance, in the 1930s and 40s Professor H. Shelton Smith directed a number of his PhD supervisees at Duke University to tackle the Southern theologians and set forth their stature and intellectual contributions. Later in the century, Eugene Genovese (pronounced jen-o-VAY-zay) became a leading historian of the American South and found the Southern theologians in general, but the Southern Presbyterians in particular, as most necessary to understanding both the Southern ante- and post-bellum periods. He taught at a number of leading academic institutions that included Cambridge, Rutgers,

and Emory University. However, he is best known for several award-winning books such as *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1975); *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (1998); and *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Cultural War* (1995).

Among the many Southern theologians promoted for research by H. Shelton Smith and scrutinized within his social and political milieu by Eugene Genovese, James Henley Thornwell was most prominent. For that very reason we shall submit Thornwell as our first exhibit and view him and his contributions as among the most significant.

James Henley Thornwell (1812-62)

Thornwell's adult life of labors was spent in the pursuit and dissemination of truth. Like the early Reformers, he was set on drinking from the fount, the spring from which all truth flows. He was eminently a biblical theologian. His biblical and theological convictions led him to certain theological emphases, which in his day were controversial. While controversial, I would submit they were all positive or constructive in their design.¹

Of first consideration is his bedrock starting point of *jure divino* Presbyterianism. His commitment to *jure divino* or divine right ecclesiology extends to a number of subsets of related topics. Here we speak of such ecclesiological matters as the use of boards to handle church affairs such as missions and the rise of parachurch organizations. It was Thornwell's firm conviction that the Scriptures gave the church her marching orders—go make disciples, baptizing, and teaching all that is commanded (Matt. 28: 19, 20). She was not to wield the sword. She was not a legislative body. The sword and national legislating was given to the civil magistrate solely. Thornwell, however, believed equally as strong that God gave His precious church, the Bride of His dear Son, clear instruction on how she is to be governed. In plain English, this meant for Thornwell that the Bible sets forth a repre-

1 To consider the theological controversies and contributions of the man see C. N. Willborn, "Hodge and Thornwell: 'Princes in Israel,'" in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 44-54; and C. N. Willborn, "James Henley Thornwell: An American Theologian," in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 9 (2013): 5-20.

sentative or Presbyterian form of church governance. The rationale is this simple: If Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 5:25), if the Father loved those whom He justified, and adopted them into the household of faith, then surely He would not leave those chosen, regenerate, justified and adopted children to “figure it out on their own.” He loved the church so much He provided all she needed to glorify and enjoy Him as the church. This is a topic over which Thornwell and Charles Hodge disagreed to some degree.

Another distinctive of Thornwell that flowed from his biblical-theological commitment involved the spirituality doctrine of the church, touching such aberrant movements as social gospel, social justice, and the like. The doctrine is set forth in a statement penned by Thornwell and adopted by the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church CSA (1861):

The power of the church is exclusively spiritual; that of the state includes the exercise of force. The constitution of the church is a divine revelation; the constitution of the state must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The church has no right to construct or modify a government for the state, and the state has no right to frame a creed or polity for the church. They are as planets moving in different orbits, and unless each is confined to its own track, the consequences may be as disastrous in the moral world as collision of different spheres in the world of matter.²

Thornwell would apply this definition to the corporate work of the church so as to disabuse churches from entering into political rhetoric, legislative peddling, and social trend setting or, more often, following cultural trends. In other words, where it is perfectly fine for individual Christians to be involved in civil politics, laboring for legislation

2 *Minutes of the General Assembly of the PCCSA* (1861), pp. 51-60. The text of the “Address” is also available in *A Digest of the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Atlanta GA: Office of the General Assembly, 1966), 26-35; and *The Distinctive Principles of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Richmond, VA: PCP, n.d. [1871?]), 5-23; and James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, (1875; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 4:449.

that is morally good for society, and active in the social sphere of the world in which they live, it is not the place for the pulpit. Indeed, the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church are clear on the call of individual Christians and their engagement in and for the public square when it states:

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called thereunto; in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth, so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasion (WCF 23.2).

The church corporate, however, possesses ministerial and declarative powers alone. Those powers are aimed at gathering the elect through evangelism and edifying the gathered saints through the teaching and preaching ministry of the church. This is summarized well in “Of the Church” when one reads:

Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto (WCF 25.3)

The last three emphases that I will bring to your attention in relation to Thornwell are presented summarily, since I have much more to say on two other significant Southerners. But, the points are:

- Biblical-theological approach to ecclesiology, for example, elders-deacons and adoption. His labors on the offices of the church and the doctrine of adoption reveal his commitment to a biblical-theological thoroughness that was willing to upset traditional views. Adoption, he pointed out, is not a subset of justification, but a distinct doctrinal *loci* all its own. Elders and deacons, based upon biblical qualifications and labors, are the only two offices of the church and should serve in complementary fashion rather than stand in hierarchical relations. This approach stems,

no doubt, from Thornwell's devotion to John Calvin's exegetical theology with which we are so familiar in both his commentaries and *Institutes*.

- Supremacy of *Scripture* over reason and tradition. This can be illustrated in his debates over whether Rome is a true church with a valid baptism and a sound view of Scripture. He believed they failed on the latter two questions because they failed to maintain the genuine marks of the church. His rigorous defense of Scripture over reason and tradition emanated from first generation Reformation influence upon Thornwell as well as that of the Scottish Reformation.

- Finally, we should note that Thornwell was thoroughly Calvinian. In his collected works you will find an extensive outline and analysis of Calvin's *Institutes*.³ This will distinguish the old Columbia Seminary theology from both Charles Hodge's Princeton and Union in Virginia where R. L. Dabney reigned for many years. In the cases of both Hodge and Dabney, Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* dominated.

With this overview of Thornwell, we shall continue to consider the most prominent theological descendant of Thornwell, John Lafayette Girardeau.

John L. Girardeau (1825-98)

Like Thornwell, Girardeau was a son of South Carolina. Named for his father and the Marquis de Lafayette, and being of French Huguenot descent, Girardeau was a thorough-going Scottish Presbyterian. His publications included a defense of the Reformed practice of "no instrumentation" in corporate worship.⁴ While by his time his case for instrumentation was widely dismissed, even among Presbyterians, he did garner considerable support from a number of hefty hitters like R. L. Dabney. Another of his books that garnered no little debate was his treatment of philosophical necessitarianism, particularly as branded

3 James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, eds. J.B. Adger and John L. Girardeau (1875; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:597-650.

4 John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Richmond, VA: Whittet & Shepperson, 1888).

by Jonathan Edwards. It was Girardeau's thesis that the standards of the church were committed to what William Cunningham called a libertarian view of the fall of mankind. For instance, the WCF reads: "Our first parents, being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory" (6.1). The Larger Catechism likewise reads: "Our first parents being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the commandment of God in eating the bidden fruit; and thereby fell from the estate of innocency wherein they were created" (WLC 21). And, as you might imagine, Girardeau gathers considerable support on this point from Calvin.

A contemporary of Girardeau was the Scottish don, William Cunningham. He brought forth the same case while admitting, like Girardeau, that a philosophical necessitarianism was arguable.⁵ He believed, however, the case for biblical scholarship was more properly the will in its *theological* relations. In fact, Girardeau gave his book of 485 pages that title, *The Will in Its Theological Relations*.⁶

In Girardeau's book on *The Will*, one of his arguments centers on the covenant of works, namely, whether the probationary offer of life for perfect obedience was a genuine, *bona fide* offer on God's part. If so, then Edward's necessitarian view was defeated. That, of course, was his position. While on the topic of covenant and covenant theology I will mention another Girardeau contribution. He was in the line of

5 William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (1862; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 471-524 and *Historical Theology*, 2 vols. (1862; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 577 ff. In the latter we read: "The *only* necessity or bondage taught by the Reformers and by the standards of our church as a scriptural doctrine, is that which attaches to man as fallen, and is traceable to the depravity which the fall introduced, as its source or cause.... The question, whether liberty of will, in the common sense, is shut out, and necessity established, by a survey of the laws that regulate our mental processes, is a question in philosophy and not in theology, and it is one on which I cannot say that I have formed a very decided opinion" (580-81).

6 John L. Girardeau, *The Will in Its Theological Relations* (Columbia, SC: W.J. Duffie and New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1891).

Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, and John Dick when he held the covenant of redemption as distinguished from the covenant of grace to be superfluous, to use Turretin's conclusion. Rather than bifurcating the two, he held with his forerunners that the covenant of grace is an eternal covenant that God then expressed in successive *berith*-makings (to anticipate Vos) in history.⁷ Thus, he kept the decree between God the Father and Son connected to the elect from eternity through time and space. In Girardeau's words:

It is one and the same covenant. Which, regarded in relation to the means employed and the end contemplated, is denominated the covenant of redemption, that is emphatically designated the covenant of grace when conceived in reference to its source, and to its unmerited application to sinners as the recipients of its benefits. It is peculiarly a covenant of grace to them, since its legal condition was fulfilled, not by themselves, but by another for them, guilty and corrupt.⁸

He developed his argument in *The Federal Theology: Its Import and its Regulative Influence* (1881) and again in *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (1890). Once again, Girardeau found his position to be that of Westminster as expressed, for example, in WLC 31: "With whom was the covenant of grace made? The covenant of grace was

7 For a thorough treatment of the Southern Presbyterians use of biblical theology before the age of Vos, see C. N. Willborn, "Biblical Theology in Southern Presbyterianism," in *The Hope Fulfilled*, ed. Robert Penny (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008). For a complementary article that considers the scholarship at Princeton that anticipates Vos, see Peter Wallace, "The Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology: The Development of Old Testament Biblical Theology at Old Princeton, 1812-1932," in *The Westminster Theological Journal* 59:1 (Spring 1997): 41-69.

8 John L. Girardeau, *The Federal Theology: Its Import and its Regulative Influence* (1881; reprinted Greenville, SC: A Press, 1994), 17,18. This was originally delivered as a address for the 50th anniversary of Columbia Seminary being in Columbia (it had begun in Georgia in 1828) and the 50th anniversary of George Howe's professorship at the same institution. You may find the original in *Memorial Volume of the Semi-Centennial of the Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1884), 96-130.

made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.”

Two other areas of theological work to which Girardeau devoted his life were the doctrines of adoption and the office of diaconate. Whereas Thornwell had done large work concerning the office of elder, Girardeau supplemented the Columbia ecclesiology with his writings on the office of deacon. Girardeau was working in the current of Thomas Chalmers’ diaconal renaissance in the Church of Scotland and subsequently the Free Church of Scotland. His elder churchman and pastor as a college lad, Thomas Smyth, had reintroduced the office of deacon to a Presbyterian church that had largely obscured the office with a heavily ministerial/elder influence. Girardeau’s contemporary and fellow scion of South Carolina, Thomas Peck, also wrote an excellent article on the office (see *Notes on Ecclesiology*). Numerous other Southerners, not the least being James Ramsey of Virginia, devoted much ink to the office and its duties. None, however offered more insight than Girardeau in his 200 pages of articles in *The Southern Presbyterian Review*. We shall develop this aspect of his theology in a future article that includes Girardeau’s pastoral contributions.

Now, I will simply add that Girardeau picked up on a thread from James Thornwell’s work to offer the church a beautiful treatment of the doctrine of adoption. At the same time that Girardeau was writing on the “apex of redemptive grace,” to borrow from Professor John Murray,⁹ the topic was also a point of broad interest among our Scottish brethren. Most notably, James Smith Candlish and Thomas Crawford were laboring to great lengths on the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and included therein the doctrine of adoption. To summarize, Crawford’s contention was that Adam was created as a servant/son of God. Like Adam’s righteousness/justified state, adoption was his created status, yet defectible, contingent on the covenant of works. Had Adam obeyed God (for however long the probation was set by God in eternity), he would have been confirmed indefectibly in his righteousness *and* sonship. Crawford displayed then the parallel we have in the second creation/regeneration where God changes hearts, grants faith, and declares believers to be both just and adopted in-

9 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 2:228, 233.

defectibly. Furthermore, while we are both just and adopted, on the ground of Christ Jesus's work, we are forever servants of God. That is, we are *simul servus et filius* just as the first Adam in his created, prelapsarian condition.¹⁰

After a twenty-six year pastoral life and twenty-year academic life, John Girardeau died a son of God in 1898. He is buried in the Elmwood Cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina near his friend, predecessor, and mentor, James Henley Thornwell.

Finally, we shall shift our attention from old Columbia Theological Seminary to Union Seminary, which at the time was located in Farmville, Virginia, and consider Robert Lewis Dabney.

Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-98)

As staunch a Carolinian as was Girardeau, Dabney was equally or more so a Virginian. A Presbyterian son, he would serve the church as a pastor before settling into a lengthy and esteemed academic career. Teaching for many years as church historian and then as systematic theologian at Union Seminary in Virginia before moving to Austin, Texas where he was on the founding faculty of the University of Texas, Dabney was a widely respected theologian and philosopher.

One of the most significant theological influences upon Dabney was the Swiss-Italian Reformed Scholastic, Francis Turretin (1623-87). Those familiar with his theology lectures will recognize Turretin's influence, but also that of George Hill of St. Andrews and John Dick of the United Secession Church. He often referenced vast numbers of past scholars as well as his contemporaries like James Thornwell and Charles Hodge.

Dabney was no blind follower, for it was often the case that he cast opposition against positions held by highly revered men. Charles Hodge and Jonathan Edwards, Sr. were among those with whom he disagreed on various issues. Examples include Edwards' view of man's ability. Suffice it to say, Dabney thought Edwards gave fallen man too much credit. Like Archibald Alexander and Hodge, Dabney

¹⁰ John L. Girardeau, *Discussions of Theological Questions* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1905), 428-521. For an extended treatment of the doctrine by this author see "Adoption: An Historical Perspective with Evangelical Implications," in *Sanctification: Growing in Grace* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2001), 43-70.

criticized Edwards' view of virtue and natural ability and believed it opened the door to the positivist school of the nineteenth century and revivalism that so burdened the land. With the Hodges (Charles and A.A.) he criticized the mediate imputation of Adam's guilt and corruption, which Edwards held. This view is "that we are condemned with Adam only mediately through, and in consequence of, our having, by natural generation, corrupt natures like his."¹¹ More often we will find Reformed theologians upholding the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt and corruption. Thus, without reference to our own actions, we are condemned. Therefore, "every human soul is born into the world under forfeiture resulting from our just legal responsibility for Adam's action as our federal head and representative."¹²

A notable point where Dabney followed both his contemporary Charles Hodge and Turretin was on the doctrine of adoption. Here he demurred from the position of a host of scholarship, including John Calvin, William Ames, John Owen, Thomas Boston, and contemporaries like Breckinridge, Thornwell, and Girardeau. His position was simple: adoption is part of the legal act of God that justifies a sinner. Justification is "both a pardon and an adoption."¹³ Westminster Confession of Faith 12 presents adoption as a second, albeit concurrent, legal act of God and, thus, a *loci* distinct from justification. Despite Dabney's dismissive air toward the doctrine, the nineteenth century saw much published on the doctrine and so a development of the biblical theological importance of adoption.¹⁴

11 A.A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (reprint, Memphis, TN: Footstool Publications, 1987), 109.

12 Hodge, *The Atonement*, 110.

13 Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* [hereafter *ST*] (1871; rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 627.

14 For representative writings that developed the theme beyond that of Turretin and Dabney see Robert Smith Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1870); Thomas Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1867); Thomas Houston, *Works, Doctrinal, and Practical*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliott, 1876); R. A. Webb, *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947); John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 2:223-34 and *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm.

One other doctrinal area in which Dabney is known is his position on Adam's sin and how it was communicated to his progeny. B. B. Warfield termed Dabney's view as the "Agnostic" view. Dabney set forth his view in articles that challenged Charles Hodge's *Romans* commentary and especially his comments on Romans 5. Dabney's position is that the "guilt (obligation to punishment) of his first sin" alone was imputed to his progeny, us. On the subject of corruption that followed Adam's first sin, Dabney believes we cannot say. Thus, the "agnostic" accusation or label.¹⁵ We do not know if Adam's corruption was imputed, but we do know his guilt was. This flows from Dabney's demurring to those who reject Edward's mediate imputation in favor of a solely immediate imputation. Guilt and corruption are ours by virtue, says Dabney, of both a "natural and federal union with their fallen head."¹⁶

Finally, we would present four areas where Dabney continues to have abiding relevance for the church. Certainly one could argue for more than four, but these appear to be of critical abiding weight.

First, we shall simply state his incisive views into economics and education. In Dabney we find a renaissance man in the purest sense of the word. He was an architect and builder. His work can be seen in a number of buildings standing today.¹⁷ But, particularly, we see his breadth of knowledge displayed in his writings on economics, education, philosophy, and theology.¹⁸ He was greatly concerned with

B. Eerdmans, 1955) 165-76; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 181-208; and David Garner, *Sons in the Son* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016).

15 Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 344. While we have the agnostic label on the table, it deserves mention that Dabney and Thornwell were "agnostic" on the issue of the origin of the soul. See Thornwell, *Collected Writings*, 1:537-39.

16 For an extended treatment see Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 1:143-68. Also, see George Hutchinson, *The Problem of Original Sin in American Presbyterian Theology* (1972; reprint, Toccoa Falls, GA: Sola Fide, 2014).

17 Examples include Tinkling Springs Presbyterian Church in Fishersville, VA and College Church, Hampden-Sydney in Farmville, VA.

18 See Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions*, 5 vols. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1980-99).

industrialization at the expense of agriculture. Further, he remonstrated against the leveling effect in education, that is, governmental provision of a lowest-common-denominator education for scholars. His prophetic voice resounds today, though he be dead.

Second, briefly consider his view of worship. The influence of revivalism was inordinate in his day and continues to wield disproportionate influence today. If anyone should wonder, Dabney and his colleague Thomas E. Peck were not pro-revivalism. They had issues with the extra-ecclesiastical nature of Whitefield, Wesley, and, of course, Charles G. Finney.¹⁹

The question of “for whom is worship designed” is always a critical consideration. For Dabney the answer was God. God is the audience. Yes, worshipers receive divine blessings from and through the act of worship, but God is the only proper object of one’s worship. Therefore, the church is behooved to submit to the instruction of God when it comes to worship. Dabney was a careful adherent to the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21. It is God’s prerogative as to the elements of worship. Thus, worship is regulated by God alone. Personal preferences must be acknowledged and checked. God’s preferences are to be acknowledged and followed. God’s Word as the sole guide to our worship and as it is preached were priorities for Dabney. A lesson for the church today.²⁰

A third area of relevance relates to doctrinal fidelity. In 1897 Dabney delivered an address that was published as “The Doctrinal Contents of the Westminster Confession of Faith.”²¹ He believed a confession could be had for the church because of the very nature of Scripture. Because the Scripture is perspicuous and sufficient for doctrine and life, it is then capable of composition and distribution. Indeed, it is by nature a communication from God to man. A confession is nothing more than the Bible in summary fashion. Because the Westminster Confession of Faith is a statement of what the Bible

19 See Thomas E. Peck, *The Writings of Thomas E. Peck* (1895-97; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 206-24.

20 Peck, *Writings*.

21 Peck, *Writings*, 5:119-42. This address was presented to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1897 in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Westminster Assembly.

teaches, it is trustworthy. This truth is essential if we are to be able to live in peace with one another and make progress toward uniformity in the worship and work of the church of the living God. Another lesson for the church today.

The final emphasis of Dabney's theology that serves the church well in every generation concerns the doctrine of sanctification. The church always struggles with "the Christian life." There is the tension between antinomianism and legalism. To put it another way, is there a role for the law of God in our daily growth in grace? For some, the minute one mentions law, the determination is made that you are no longer a proponent of grace. Listen to our doctrinal standards on this: "Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and *to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience*" (WLC 97, emphasis added). Our Lord Jesus said it this way, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Dabney held clearly that the Christian was bound by love to the holy standard, which is set forth in the law of God. This law Paul called "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). Perhaps Dabney's teaching can best be summarized in theological terms by his friend and master theologian James Henley Thornwell when the South Carolinian wrote:

Those who deny that the law of God is the measure of duty, or that personal holiness should be sought by Christians, are those alone who can properly be charged with Antinomian principles....The natural vibration of the mind is from the extreme of legalism to that of licentiousness, and nothing but the grace of God can fix it in the proper medium of Divine truth. The Gospel, like its blessed Master, is always crucified between two thieves—legalists of all sorts on the one hand and Antinomians on the other; the former [legalists] robbing

the Saviour of the glory of his work *for* us, and the other [antinomians] robbing him of the glory of his work *within* us.²²

Dabney was no perfect man. He became embittered after the Civil War, and this led him to incorrect judgments. He was wrongheaded, for example, concerning the competency of black men for service in Christ's church. Nevertheless, he and others of his generation deserve our attention, for they loved a forgiving God, they trusted a conquering King, and they walked in large measure with the Spirit of holiness. The effects of God's sovereign grace in lives such as Dabney's are obvious in a tender scene just shortly before Dabney entered his heavenly rest. It occurred in Columbia, South Carolina late in 1897. George Blackburn recorded this beautiful story for our blessings. I recount it for the strengthening of Christ's church today.

When, therefore, Dr. Dabney, himself afflicted with blindness, heard of the partial paralysis of his friend, he came to Columbia to visit him. Their communion was sweet and in a measure the spirit of other days seemed to come back on them. On Sunday, Dr. Dabney preached to the large congregation... on the power of love. The sermon was one of extraordinary power, and when he came in his discourse to the love of Jesus for his aged servants many in the congregation were weeping. Dr. Girardeau himself was deeply moved, while the hearty congregational singing, unaccompanied by any instrument of music, seemed to greatly affect Dr. Dabney. When the service was over the two men came down the aisle together; they were men of imposing presence, each like the son of a king; their faces showed the influence of chastening grace; their foreheads betokened the mighty intellects behind them; venerable men! dignity, goodness, and greatness sat with ease and naturalness upon them. Dr. Girardeau said: "Doctor, that was a glorious sermon this morning." Dr. Dabney replied, "This has been a sweet service to me, and the singing carries me back to old Tinkling Spring." Dr. Girardeau said: "But what will it be in heaven?" The answer of Dr. Dabney was lost in the trampling of the congregation. And so blind, and lame these princes of Israel walked on, talking of

22 James Henley Thornwell, "Antinomianism," in *The Collected Writings of JHT* (1871; rpt. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 2:383, 385. This article appeared as an appendix to a republication of Robert Traill's *Vindication*, which Thornwell brought to print in 1840.

the past and future worship of God. A few months after this meeting they both joined the general assembly and church of the first born in the majestic worship of their God and Saviour.²³

Dabney died only a month or so after this tender scene, in January 1898. He would predecease his friend Girardeau by only five months. Dabney's body lies in wait of the resurrection in the graveyard of old Union Seminary on the edge of Hampden-Sydney College, Farmville, Virginia. ●

23 George Blackburn, ed., *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1916), 368.

John Calvin and the Reward of Grace

Brian L. Huizinga

Introduction

God promises that He will reward the good works of His people. Scripture repeatedly speaks of this reward. In the fifth commandment, which the inspired apostle Paul later identifies as “the first commandment with promise” (Eph. 6:2), God promises His obedient people the reward of prolonged days and His blessings in the land: “Honor thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Deut. 5:16). The psalmist David teaches regarding God’s true and righteous judgments, “Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Ps. 19:11). In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches, “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12), and “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:3-4). Of His second coming, Jesus teaches His disciples, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27). Facing death for the sake of the gospel, Paul confidently exclaims, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

That God gives a reward, and that this reward is somehow connected to the good works of the faithful is indisputable. However, the nature of the reward as to whether it is meritorious and earned

by works, or whether it is purely gracious, has been controversial, especially at the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. One of the major issues in the Reformation involved the Roman Catholic Church's contention that the good works of the believer are meritorious, serving as part of the basis for the sinner's justification before God and his right to God's promised rewards. In the sixteenth chapter of the decree concerning justification, at the sixth session of the Council of Trent in 1547, Rome officially affirmed this teaching of merit:

Hence, to those who work well unto the end and trust in God, eternal life is to be offered, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, and as a reward promised by God himself, to be faithfully given to their good works and merits. For this is the crown of justice which after his fight and course the Apostle declared was laid up for him, to be rendered to him by the just judge, and not only to him, but also to all that love his coming. For since Christ Jesus himself, as the head into the members and the vine into the branches, continually infuses strength into those justified, which strength always precedes, accompanies and follows their good works, and without which they could not in any manner be pleasing and meritorious before God, we must believe that nothing further is wanting to those justified to prevent them from being considered to have, by those very works which have been done in God, fully satisfied the divine laws according to the state of this life and to have truly merited eternal life....¹

In support of its doctrine of meritorious works, the Roman Catholic Church always appealed to the many biblical passages that speak of a reward for good works. Its theologians argued that the promise of a reward necessarily implies something that is earned. In the aforementioned decree on justification, the Council of Trent appealed to 2 Timothy 4:8 and argued that because the Lord is a *just* Judge, He will give to Paul the crown that Paul earned by his fighting and running in the strength of Christ Jesus. Roman Catholic theologians taught that God is obligated to give rewards, not only because He promised to do so but also because His people through the power of His grace in Jesus Christ produce good works that make them worthy of a reward.

¹ H. J. Schroeder, ed., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1950), 41.

Over against the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformers taught that the reward God promises is a reward of *grace*. In other words, God freely gives His people the promised reward, but not because they earned it by their efforts. Some of the most significant Reformed confessions arising out of the Reformation expressed the conviction that the reward is not of merit but of grace. Representative of these confessions is the Belgic Confession (1561), which teaches in Article 24, entitled “Of Man’s Sanctification and Good Works,”

Therefore we do good works, but not to merit by them, (for what can they merit?) nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is He that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written: when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do. In the meantime, we do not deny that God rewards our good works, but it is through His grace that He crowns His gifts.²

Behind the Reformed confessions, including the Belgic Confession, is the influence of John Calvin. Throughout the entire corpus of his theological writings, Calvin emphasized that the reward God promises is not a reward of merit but of grace.³ The purpose of this article is to present the main lines of Calvin’s understanding of the reward of grace, and in particular to uncover his explanation for *why* God promises His people that He will reward their good works. What effect does God intend the knowledge of this reward to have upon the lives of His sons and daughters in the covenant? Should believers look

2 Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 411-12. Similar statements are found in the Second Helvetic Confession (1562), Chapter 16, and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Lord’s Day 24, Q&A 63. For the Second Helvetic Confession see James Dennison Jr., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, vol. 2, 1552-1566 (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). For the Heidelberg Catechism, see Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 327.

3 For Calvin’s influence on the Belgic Confession, see Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 59-70.

to the reward to find the motivation to obey God's commandments? If there are degrees of glory in heaven, as Calvin taught, then does God intend the knowledge of that difference to inspire His people to obedience in the hope of obtaining greater glory? If God does not promise the reward in order to make His people eager to perform good works in the hope that they can earn blessings, then what practical purpose does the reward serve?

The Reformed confessions clearly teach that the reward is gracious, but they do not explain the practical purpose of the reward for the believer.⁴ In this article we will examine Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, some of his polemical treatises, and his commentaries on the relevant Scripture passages. But we will also take a careful look at Calvin's sermons on the relevant passages to see if they can be of special help, since there the preacher is not only explaining the doctrine but applying it to the lives of those in his audience.

What the great Reformed confessions do not contain, Calvin's writings do. From Calvin we learn that God intends the promise of the reward to be a sweet stimulant that further strengthens believers in their resolve to be diligent in obedience, particularly when their pilgrimage is very wearisome, their spiritual warfare very hot, and their cross very heavy.

Preaching on the promised reward of a crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8, Calvin used a vivid illustration to explain clearly and powerfully that God intends to use the promised reward to inject new strength into His weary people:

However much we may languish and fear to perish in our wretchedness, we must persevere regardless. And when the time comes for us to die, we must summon up even more courage and keep moving on, like wearied sailors who, when nearing shore, rejoice on catching

4 This is not surprising because the Reformed confessions in their treatment of the subject of the reward of grace are primarily interested in defending the doctrine of justification by faith alone, apart from works. The confessions are not concerned to produce a comprehensive explanation of the reward of grace. They have a limited scope, and following their explanation of the article of justification, they seek to demonstrate that the Bible's teaching of a reward in no way contradicts the graciousness of justification by faith alone.

sight of the harbor ahead. ‘Wonderful!’ they tell themselves. ‘Two or three hours from now we will be able to rest and relax.’ So if the sight of the harbor injects new strength into these poor men, fatigued and worn out as they are, what should we do when we approach our goal and when our race is done?⁵

Calvin shows us that God’s goodness to His people is so deep that He not only gives them the most powerful motive to obey, love for Him and gratitude for the Savior Jesus Christ, but He also strengthens them in their determination to persevere in obedience by promising a reward of grace.

The Reward: Not of Merit

The doctrine of merit was a significant issue in the theological context in which John Calvin labored. During Calvin’s ministry, the Council of Trent met to make its pronouncements in support of meritorious works. So prominent was the teaching of merit in Calvin’s day that Charles Raith II makes the case that Calvin’s theology can be properly understood only if it is contextualized in the light of the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit. “Without this proper framework,” Raith writes, “misinterpretations of Calvin on topics like predestination, free choice, sin, justification, sanctification, works, and eternal life—all topics related to merit—will necessarily result.”⁶

For John Calvin the reward is not of merit. Human merit—whether merit *de congruo* or merit *de condigno* according to the distinction of Thomas Aquinas and other schoolmen of the Middle Ages—has no place in the reward.⁷ Regarding the notion that a reward implies mer-

5 John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2018), 406-7.

6 Charles Raith II, *After Merit: John Calvin’s Theology of Works and Reward* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2016), 7.

7 Raith, *After Merit*, 37-89. Raith explains the development of the concept of merit through the Middle Ages up until Calvin’s day. Merit *de congruo* refers to works that do not truly deserve a reward, but nevertheless receive merit from God because of His generosity. Merit *de condigno* refers to fully meritorious works that justly deserve and have a right to the reward of God.

it, Calvin wrote, “opponents stupidly reason from reward to merit.”⁸ Almost without exception, Calvin explicitly denounced the notion of merit whenever he addressed the subject of the reward. He opposed the *idea* that the believers’ good works are meritorious before God. He also denounced the very *term* “merit” and opened his treatment of the doctrine of merit in Book III of his *Institutes*, chapter 15, explaining:

I must first make these prefatory remarks concerning the term ‘merit’: whoever first applied it to men’s works over against God’s judgment provided very badly for sincere faith.... How much offense this term contains is clear from the great damage it has done to the world. Surely, as it is a most prideful term, it can do nothing but obscure God’s favor and imbue men with perverse haughtiness.⁹

But more importantly, when in his public preaching Calvin was addressing the hearts of the men, women, and children of Geneva with concern for their salvation, Calvin almost never failed to open up a polemic against the merit-doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, if the biblical passage spoke to the reward. Preaching from Matthew 5:11-12, he declared, “The papists, it is true, have a field day with these words, whenever the term ‘reward’ comes up. Straight away we hear the cry, ‘So our works can merit eternal life after all!’”¹⁰ His sermon on 2 Timothy 4:8 is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that Calvin certainly knew the history of appeal to this text in support of meritorious work.¹¹ Not only did the Council of Trent ground its official teaching of merit in this text, but prior to Trent the medieval Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas used 2 Timothy 4:8 as “his preferred proof text for his teaching on merit.”¹² Furthermore, in

8 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 3.16.2; 1.798.

9 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.15.2; 1:789.

10 John Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, trans. Robert White (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 75.

11 Calvin preached through 2 Timothy in the year 1555. Calvin’s sermons on the Beatitudes were part of a longer series on the Synoptic Gospels begun in the year 1559.

12 Joseph Wawrykow, *God’s Grace and Human Action: “Merit” in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, April 2020

his *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1543), Calvin refuted the Dutch Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighuis and his teaching of a meritorious reward. He wrote: "After he has collected some texts in which reward is mentioned, he brings in as his finale that passage from Paul about the crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge is to award to his servants."¹³ Clearly, Calvin understood the significance of 2 Timothy 4:8 for the Roman Catholic teaching on merit.

What underscores Calvin's awareness of the significance of 2 Timothy 4:8 are two noteworthy features in his sermon on that passage. First, in the course of the sermon, as he was refuting the idea that the crown of glory is earned by good works, he advanced his argument by stating, "Furthermore, the papists especially should note what was said by one of their own whom they call their teacher . . .," and then he named and quoted from Augustine.¹⁴ Only on a rare occasion would Calvin name and cite some authority in his preaching.¹⁵ That he referred to Augustine in a sermon to his congregation indicates how determined he was to employ every legitimate means to refute thoroughly the notion of meritorious works. The second noteworthy feature in his sermon is that he made what is certainly a reference to the Council of Trent and its decree on justification. He explained that merit always leaves those who hold to it plagued in their consciences and doubting their own salvation: "In fact, it is one of their chief articles of faith to say that it is presumptuous for men to be sure of their salvation. This is God's judgment on them, since like wild beasts they have risen up against him. So these poor wretches are left in limbo, that is, in unbelief, for they have no hope of salvation."¹⁶ That Calvin would bring the decrees of the Council of Trent into the pulpit on Sunday indicates his determination to show his congregation that the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit, with all of its fatal implications, is not

2016), 278.

13 John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, ed. A.N.S. Lane, trans. G.I. Davies (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 152.

14 John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 412-413.

15 Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 413. This point is made in an editorial footnote by translator Robert White.

16 Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 414. The reference is likely to the Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, chapter 9 entitled, "Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics." See, Schroeder, *Canons*, 35.

some bogeyman he created for the sake of controversy, but “one of their chief articles of faith.” It is so deeply entrenched in the Roman Catholic system of theology that it is official church dogma. Well aware of the Roman Catholic appeal to 2 Timothy 4:8 as a biblical ground for teaching meritorious works, Calvin preached, “This text, then, is so far from helping the papists prove that works have merit in God’s sight and that we are not saved by faith alone, that it rather gives the lie to them.”¹⁷

We can identify four reasons on account of which John Calvin rejected a reward of merit and, therefore, preached against merit. First, Calvin taught that God can never be put in a position where He is obligated to pay someone something for service rendered. Calvin asserted, “What, then, will the perfect observance of the law deserve, if any such can be found, when Scripture enjoins us to consider ourselves unprofitable servants even when we do everything required of us (Luke 17:10)? For to the Lord we have given nothing unrequired but have only carried out services owed, for which no thanks are due.”¹⁸ Even if someone should render to God a perfect life of perfect works, Calvin contended that God is still under no obligation to bestow a reward because that person gave nothing unrequired. Perfect obedience is always demanded by God. To his congregation in Geneva, Calvin preached that all that we are and have we owe to God:

What about us? Our good deeds might exceed God’s standard a hundred times over. We would be wrong, however, to think that we had gone beyond the call of duty. We must frankly admit that we owe everything we are to God. And since we are accountable to Him in everything, what debt can He possibly owe us? What obligation can He have toward us?¹⁹

Secondly, Calvin denied a reward of merit because the idea of merit undermines the person and work of Jesus Christ. Against the teachers of merit, Calvin wrote:

17 Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 414.

18 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.15.3; 1:790.

19 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 77.

On no account will they allow us to give Christ the honor of being called our righteousness, unless their works come in at the same time for a share of the merit. The dispute is not, whether good works ought to be performed by the pious, and whether they are accepted by God and rewarded by Him, but whether, by their own worth, they reconcile us to God; whether we acquire eternal life as their price, whether they are compensations which are made to the justice of God, so as to take away guilt, and whether they are to be confided in as a ground of salvation. We condemn the error which enjoins men to have more respect to their own works than to Christ. For instead of Christ, they adore themselves.”²⁰

Calvin was not exaggerating the implications of the doctrine of merit in its denial of Christ. Calvin knew that when the Roman Catholic theologians spoke of meritorious works they were not referring to works done apart from grace, but to works done in and by the power of Christ. Nevertheless, he still insisted that the error of meritorious works enjoins believers to take their attention off Christ and put it on themselves. If salvation and its reward are not earned exclusively by Christ’s perfect works, but are of Christ’s perfect works *and* the believer’s imperfect works, then the believer’s own works are what make the difference. Invariably then, and even necessarily, the believer’s good works receive the respect and adoration. As soon as a good work becomes meritorious and earns a reward, then it is in competition with the work of Christ the Mediator. Zealous to preach the worth and glory of Christ who has obtained all of the divine blessings through His own perfect work as Mediator, Calvin preached against merit: “The word ‘reward’ gives the papists an apparent excuse to obscure Christ’s grace, and even to extinguish it, if that were possible.”²¹ With noticeable excitement Calvin preached merit in what he believed to be the true and orthodox sense of the word: “We have a reward, one won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ and which is ours through the merit of His death and passion. There we have merit which cannot fail!”²²

20 John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, in “Tracts and Treatises,” vol. 1, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 135.

21 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 75.

22 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 76.

Thirdly, good works cannot merit a reward, according to Calvin, because none of the good in a good work is the doer's own good. All of the good in a good work must be attributed to the grace of God. Merit only makes sense if the believer gives to God something that he was not first given. If I give a poor man a gift, he cannot return it to me and expect some reward or wage for giving it to me. It was mine to begin with. Similarly a believer cannot give his good works of obedience as an offering to God and expect, much less demand, some payment in return. Calvin wrote: "There is no doubt that whatever is praiseworthy in works is God's grace; there is not a drop that we ought by rights to ascribe to ourselves. If we truly and earnestly recognize this, not only will all confidence in merit vanish, but the very notion."²³

The fourth reason Calvin gave why good works cannot merit a reward is that the believer's good works are defiled with sin. This reason constituted Calvin's primary objection to the teaching of his opponents. Referring to Augustine, Calvin stated, "He gives two reasons why he dared not vaunt his works before God; because if he has anything of good works, he sees in them nothing of his own, and secondly, because they are also overwhelmed by a multitude of sins."²⁴ If good works are defiled with sin because of the sinful flesh that still clings to believers, then good works certainly are not worthy of a reward. Mingled with the believer's highest and most fervent act of worship is always a little pride, or mingled with the kindest act of charity is always a little self-serving. As Calvin taught his congregation, the ultimate judge of perfection is God and not our neighbor, and God "will find much to reprove even in our best endeavors; the finest virtue which people see in us will prove to be defiled."²⁵ The best works of a child of God never match the standard of divine perfection; they can never correspond perfectly to the infinite righteousness of God and meet His approval.

Calvin went so far as to preach that because of the sin that taints the believer's best works, those works deserve a curse. "Understand also," Calvin instructed, "that even when we mean to do good, we

23 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.15.3; 1:790

24 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.20; 1:787

25 Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 413.

limp and shuffle, we are in no hurry. Our intentions are always flawed, always we fall short. Everyone who is not a hypocrite admits as such. So we conclude that all our works would merit God's curse, except that in His great goodness he chooses to approve them."²⁶ In another sermon, intending to promote humility among his audience, Calvin stated, "It is on the remission of our sins that we rely, so that we may call to him, saying: 'Lord, since you are pleased to bear with us and to be merciful to us, we owe you all the more. And if you choose to accept our works which are imperfect and defiled, it is because of your unmerited goodness.' That, I say, is how this thought ought to humble and abase us."²⁷

It is no overstatement to say that John Calvin disdained the doctrine of merit. As Charles Raith contends: "[T]here is no one who disdained the doctrine of merit more than John Calvin."²⁸

The Reward: All of Grace

According to Calvin, the reward is a reward of grace. First, the reward must be understood as a reward of grace because even though good works deserve condemnation because of the sin that accompanies them, God promises to reward them out of the sheer generosity of His will. God is gracious. God does not reward good works because those works have *earned* a reward that He must justly bestow, or because they are *due* a reward that He must justly bestow, or because they have an intrinsic value that makes them *worthy* of a reward. Rather, God rewards good works because He, in pure grace, wills to bestow an undeserved reward upon the good works of His children. The cause of the reward is not located in the one who is rewarded, but in the One who rewards. The Roman Catholic theologians appealed to 2 Timothy 4:8 and argued that the reward of a crown is meritorious because God is a righteous Judge who will bestow upon Paul the crown that Paul deserved for his faithfulness. Calvin responded: "This justice, then, refers more to the truth of the divine promise than to the equity of rendering what is due."²⁹ In other words, that God is just in bestowing

26 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 77.

27 Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 415.

28 Raith, *After Merit*, 19.

29 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:18.7; 1:829.

a reward does not mean that God will give to Paul the crown Paul earned. Rather, God's justice is revealed in keeping His Word and giving to Paul the crown He promised in His grace. The reward is sure, and Paul will not be defrauded of the reward due unto him—due not because of his faithfulness, but because of God's gracious promise. In his sermon on Matthew 5:11-12, Calvin preached concerning good works, "If God counts any of them good—for in themselves they are corrupt, unworthy of acceptance—it is because of his sheer grace, his generosity and his fatherly love towards us."³⁰ Elsewhere he explained: "Good works then are pleasing to God and are not unfruitful for their doers. But they receive by way of reward the most ample benefits of God, not because they so deserve but because God's kindness has of itself set this value on them."³¹

Secondly, Calvin explained that the reward is purely gracious because in bestowing a reward God is crowning His gifts with grace. This language, later included in the Belgic Confession, is derived from Augustine. Calvin wrote, "How often does this thought recur in Augustine: 'God does not crown our merits but his own gifts'; 'we call "rewards" not what are due our merits, but what are rendered for graces already bestowed!'"³² The works that God rewards are not evil works, but good works. The only explanation for the virtuous character of good works is that God breathes His Spirit into the believer, and by the effectual power of the Spirit the believer wills and does those good works. Therefore, when God crowns good works with a reward, He is graciously crowning His own gifts. Calvin did not deny that believers are willing and active in the performance of good works, nor did he deny that those good works are rightly said to be the believer's own good works. However, Calvin was careful to teach that the only possibility for doing good works is found in God's Spirit, so that when God rewards He is rewarding His own gifts.

Thirdly, Calvin taught that the reward is a reward of grace because when God receives good works, He does not do so for the sake of the intrinsic worth of those works but for the sake of Christ. If the believer's good works are tainted in sin and unworthy of a reward,

30 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 76.

31 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.15.3; 1:791.

32 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.5.2: 1:318.

then the supremely just God cannot issue a reward. Unthinkable is a divine reward for something defiled. However, as the believer is in communion with Christ by the instrument of faith, God not only graciously pardons and accepts the person that deserves condemnation, but also the works which deserve condemnation. Of God's grace, Calvin wrote, "He receives these very works with pardon, not imputing the imperfection with which they are all so corrupted that they would otherwise be reckoned as sins rather than virtues."³³ Calvin added, "Therefore, as we ourselves, when we have been engrafted into Christ, are righteous in God's sight because our iniquities are covered by Christ's sinlessness, so our works are righteous and are thus regarded because whatever fault is otherwise in them is buried in Christ's purity, and is not charged to our account."³⁴ It is only as God sees His own children righteous in Jesus Christ that God can reward their works.

The Reward: What Is It?

Nowhere did Calvin clearly define and explain the content of the reward. He was far more concerned to impress upon the people of Geneva the gracious *nature* of the reward than the *identity* of it. Charles Raith states: "Given the number of times Calvin addresses works and rewards in his corpus, he is surprisingly (though possibly intentionally) vague as to the content of the rewards."³⁵

Calvin did teach that God rewards believers both in this life and in the life to come: "Yet because he examines our works according to his tenderness, not supreme right, he therefore accepts them as if they were perfectly pure, and for that reason, although unmerited, they are rewarded with infinite benefits, both of the present life and also of the life to come."³⁶ He also instructed, "[A]nd as God has of his own will most liberally promised reward to those working, he designs to reward them both with temporal blessings and eternal life."³⁷

33 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.17.3; 1:805.

34 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.17.10; 1:813.

35 Raith, *After Merit*, 149.

36 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.15.4; 1:792.

37 John Calvin, "The Adultero-German Interim," in *Tracts and Treatises*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust,

Although Calvin spoke of rewards in this present life, he did not precisely identify what the “temporal blessings” might be. Charles Raith provides an analysis of Calvin’s doctrine of temporal rewards and explains that saving benefits such as reconciliation with God, the remission of sin, the imputation of righteousness, the first implanting of the newness of life, and perseverance in salvation do not fit Calvin’s description of rewards.³⁸ Raith adds, “In general, Calvin seeks to remove from the realm of reward any part of God’s salvific economy that might undermine our assurance of salvation.”³⁹ Furthermore, Raith explains that, according to Calvin, God does not reward “the right use of grace with, say, relief from physical suffering or a larger pay check,” but, Raith continues, “Calvin sees the reward of grace more in terms of help in the midst of such hardship . . . grace sweetens the loads Christians carry; it does not lighten the load itself, even if such ‘sweetening’ makes the load *seem* lighter.”⁴⁰ Raith understands Calvin to teach that as the believer diligently serves the Lord his God even in the hardships of life, God graciously rewards that believer with grace that takes away some of the weight of the burden that is felt.

One possibility is that Calvin considered “usefulness” to be a temporal blessing God bestows upon the faithful as a reward. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-28), the man who received five talents went out and traded and gained five more talents. In explaining and applying this parable Calvin wrote, “Now the gain which Christ mentions is general usefulness, which illustrates the glory of God.”⁴¹ Although Calvin does not explicitly call the gain of five

2009), 200.

38 Raith, *After Merit*, 154-5, 172-3.

39 Raith, *After Merit*, 173.

40 Raith, *After Merit*, 155. Raith offers as support for his conclusion this quotation from Calvin’s *Commentary on Matthew* 19:29, “Though persecutions always await the godly in this world, and though the cross, as it were, is attached to their back, yet so sweet is the seasoning of the grace of God, which gladdens them, that their condition is more desirable than the luxuries of kings.”

41 John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), Bk. 1, Vol. 2, 443.

talents (usefulness) a temporal reward, it seems that he understood it to be so. The reward, then, is greater usefulness so that as believers are busy in the kingdom of God using the position and abilities God has bestowed, God rewards believers already in this life by giving even greater usefulness. With the gain or reward of greater usefulness, believers receive an even greater capacity for service in God's kingdom to the joy of their own soul and the profiting of many.

Regarding the eternal reward in heaven, Calvin clearly taught that this reward consists of eternal life. But he also taught that corresponding to the life of good works performed on earth, there are degrees of glory among the saints in the eternal life of heaven. That there is some connection between the reward and good works Christ taught when He said that He "shall reward every man according to his works," (Matt. 16:27). There was among various Protestants of Calvin's day great reluctance and even refusal to teach degrees of glory, lest the Christian life degenerate into a kind of spiritual commercialism in which seeking higher heavenly prizes becomes the motive for godly living. Moreover, there was also the fear that the truth of justification by faith alone would be compromised by the teaching of degrees of glory. If all believers freely receive the imputed righteousness of Christ and with it the right to eternal life, then many supposed that there could be no differences of glory in eternal life unless the believer's good works make the difference. Some Protestants, like the French preacher Jean Veron, explicitly rejected distinctions of heavenly glory out of the fear of opening up a doctrine of merit. Nevertheless, the majority taught the concept, integrating it successfully with Reformed soteriology.⁴² Having provided this survey of the Protestant teaching of degrees of glory, E. Disley concludes:

The position frequently adopted by the majority of Protestant theologians who expressed a view on the subject was as follows: It was conceded that there were, indeed, degrees of reward and punishment, and that these degrees were in some way related to our works in this life; but exponents of this position strictly denied that degrees of reward were merited, affirming the gross inequality between the works

42 Emma Disley, "Degrees of Glory: Protestant Doctrine and the Concept of Rewards Hereafter," *Journal of Theological Studies* 42, no. 1 (1991): 77-105, especially 86.

of which we are capable and the heavenly gift which exceeds our comprehension. That is to say that the scriptural notion of reward does not imply condign merit; it refers, rather, to God's great gift which He bestows upon us because He has promised so to do. The notion that we can earn any reward, either eternal life itself, or rewards within eternal life, was absolutely rejected by orthodox Protestants.⁴³

That Calvin believed there are degrees of glory in heaven corresponding to works done on earth is evident from his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:41, in which he explained that while this particular passage does not teach the concept of degrees of glory for the saints, other biblical passages do:

Not only is there a difference between heavenly bodies and earthly, but even the heavenly bodies have not all the same glory; for the sun surpasses the moon, and the other stars differ from each other. This dissimilarity, accordingly, appears in the resurrection of the dead. A mistake, however, is commonly fallen into in the application; for it is supposed that Paul meant to say, that after the resurrection, the saints will have different degrees of honor and glory. This, indeed, is perfectly true, and is proved by other declarations of Scripture; but it has nothing to do with Paul's object.⁴⁴

Calvin strongly affirmed as biblical truth the concept of degrees of glory in heaven, but significantly he did not attribute the difference in degrees to the believer. The individual Christian does not make the difference; God does. Calvin explained:

We should regard as above all controversy the teaching of Scripture that, just as God, variously distributing his gifts to the saints in this world, beams upon them unequally, so there will not be an equal measure of glory in heaven, where God shall crown his own gifts....In short, as Christ begins the glory of his body in this world with manifold diversity of gifts, and increases it by degrees, so also He will perfect it in heaven.⁴⁵

43 Disley, "Degrees of Glory," 79.

44 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 49.

45 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.25.10; 2:1005.

All receive the glory of eternal life with God in heaven, but there are degrees. All receive a crown, but there are degrees of glory in the crown. An illustration commonly used is that in heaven all will have their vessels full, but some vessels will be larger than others. Calvin did not teach that the reality of higher or greater degrees of glory is to be explained by the fact that some believers stand out because they are more industrious, or more faithful, or somehow outperform their fellow Christians in obedience. The difference in degrees of glory is not determined in a mechanical and atomistic way by counting each individual's good works one by one and totaling the sum in order to discover which Christian yields a quantitatively higher number of good works than another—the more works you do, the greater your reward. Neither is it the case that the sum total of good works produced by some believers is somehow qualitatively superior to that of their fellows saints—the better your works, the greater your glory.

The difference in degrees of glory in heaven is to be explained by God's sovereign will in fitting each person for their unique position of service in the body of Christ so that each one has a different capacity for service. Although Calvin did not use the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-28) to explain degrees of glory in the eternal reward of grace, he did provide in his explanation of this parable a good description of how God sovereignly and wisely creates each person with a different capacity for service. It would not be an imposition upon Calvin's theology to apply this description to our present subject of degrees of glory. Calvin wrote that "each has a certain office enjoined him," and "let us know that the Lord does not bestow on all indiscriminately the same measure of gifts (Eph. 4:7) but distributes them variously as he thinks proper (1 Cor. 12:11), so that some excel others."⁴⁶ He continued:

What then is meant by saying that the master of the house gives to each person more or less, according to his own ability? It is because God, as He has assigned to every one his place, and has bestowed on him natural gifts, gives him also this or the other injunction, employs him in the management of affairs, raises him to various offices, furnishes

46 Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, Bk. 1, vol. 2, 441.

him with abundant means of eminent usefulness, and presents to him the opportunity.⁴⁷

As far as each person's capacity for good works, there are many differences among the members of the body of Christ. First, God bestows different gifts, both natural and spiritual, gifts which can be cultivated throughout one's life. Additionally, God gives to His people many different offices, positions, callings, responsibilities, opportunities, and life-circumstances in which to serve Him with their gifts. God gives to each one of His children the Holy Spirit so that they can devote their lives to Him in loving service, but each person has a different capacity for service due to the gifts and responsibilities bestowed. As there are different capacities for service, so there are different degrees of reward.

As we relate Calvin's description of the different places God assigns in the body of Christ to the concept of degrees of glory, we can illustrate the point by thinking of a woman like the poor widow of Zarephath. When the prophet Elijah came to her she was gathering sticks to prepare one last meal for herself and her son before they perished during those dark days in which King Ahab had instituted the idolatry of Baal worship. Compare that poor widow with a God-fearing, young Christian who lives in brighter days as a member of a faithful Reformed church in a financially prosperous and peaceful nation, and who enjoys loving parents and good health, and then is painlessly taken to heavenly glory through a sudden tragedy. Two women—both live their lives unto God, zealously producing fruits of thanksgiving, and both will be rewarded according to the good works they performed. It seems reasonable for us to make an argument that the glory of the widow of Zarephath will excel the glory of the young woman. The reason is not that the widow was more faithful. Both were faithful, both devoted their lives unto God in the position in which they were sovereignly placed; both were resolved to use their gifts and opportunities for the glory of God. Each one abounded in good works. However, apart from any decision or doing of her own, the widow of Zarephath was given a greater capacity for everlasting

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, Bk. 1, vol. 2, 442.

glory because she was given a greater capacity for God-honoring service in all the unique circumstances and opportunities of her life. God made that difference by putting each woman in a different place in the body of Christ.⁴⁸ Then when God bestows the reward of eternal life, freely earned by the merits of Christ, that glorious crown will perfectly accord with the life each saint lived.

Calvin did not carefully spell out his understanding of degrees of glory in the eternal reward of grace. In none of his sermons that we have consulted do we find Calvin ever alluding to, much less attempting to explain, the concept of degrees of glory while he was in the pulpit before his congregation. Where he did broach this subject in his teaching, he was very careful to offer a sober-minded treatment.

As far as I am concerned, I not only refrain personally from superfluous investigation of useless matters, but I also think that I ought to guard against contributing to the levity of others by answering them. Men hungry for empty learning inquire how great the difference will be between prophets and apostles, and again, between apostles and martyrs, by how many degrees virgins will differ from married women. In short, they leave no corner of heaven exempt from their search.⁴⁹

Clearly, Calvin did not want to contribute to vain speculation or become the occasion for Christians to start looking each other over, categorizing and ranking each other, and then constructing a hierarchy of individual glory in heaven—a hierarchical framework which would be inimical to the very nature of the body of Christ in which all the different members are tempered together to form one organic whole.

48 In His eternal decree of election, God makes the difference that will be manifested in everlasting glory. Concluding his commentary on Matt. 20:21-23 (Jesus' response to the mother of James and John in her request for high positions for her sons), Calvin remarked, "It is also worthy of our notice, that these words do not imply that there will be equality among the children of God, after they have been admitted to the heavenly glory, but rather that to each is promised that degree of honor to which he has been set apart by the eternal purpose of God." Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, Bk. 1, vol. 2, 422.

49 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.25.11; 2:1006.

The Reward: God's Purpose in Promising It

Calvin's most helpful contribution for understanding the reward of grace is his explanation of God's purpose in promising a reward to His people. In setting a reward before His children, God is not introducing the new motive for obedience. God does not intend to take His unmotivated children and move them to obey Him by producing in them the thought that they will get something for their obedience, in which case they either become anxious, fearing they will never get any reward because their obedience is so meager and defiled, or they become arrogant, ready to lay claim to what their industrious hands have earned. The motives of *love* for God, who is worthy to be adored and served as the highest good, and *gratitude* to God, who is worthy to be adored and served for giving to unworthy sinners the unspeakable gift of His only begotten Son and everlasting salvation in Him, are not deficient motives that need to be replaced or improved upon. True believers saved by grace and indwelt by the Holy Spirit are not complacent but motivated to serve God, devoting their lives unto Him in a life of good works according to His commands because they love God their Father (and for His sake, their neighbors) and are profoundly thankful for their salvation.

Calvin contended against the Roman Catholics who insisted that justification by faith alone and a reward of pure grace stifle zeal for good works, while only a reward of merit properly motivates believers to regulate their lives aright. He wrote of the true motive of love: "For if it is only a matter of men looking for reward when they serve God, and hiring or selling their labor to him, it is of little profit. God wills to be freely worshipped, freely loved. That worshipper, I say, he approves who, when all hope of receiving reward has been cut off, still ceases not to serve him."⁵⁰ Calvin also identified gratitude for salvation as a motive for good works, when he taught, "All the apostles are full of exhortations, urgings, and reproofs with which to instruct the man of God in every good work (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17), and that without mention of merit. Rather, they derive their most powerful exhortations from the thought that our salvation stands upon no merit of ours but solely upon God's mercy."⁵¹ Calvin argued that even if

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.2; 1:799.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.3; 1:800.

there were no mention of a reward, love for God and gratitude for His mercy would powerfully motivate believers to pursue the glory of God's name through a life of good works.

It is true that God holds out the promise of a reward, and that the promise positively affects believers in the pursuit of holiness, but Calvin did not identify the hope of a reward as the motive that drives obedience. After explaining the motive as gratitude for the mercies of God (Rom. 12:1) and the desire for the glory of God's name (Matt. 5:16), Calvin continued by explaining that only if the doctrine of justification by faith alone lives in the heart will believers be fit for obedience:

And I do not say this because I either despise or neglect the kind of exhortation that Scripture very often uses in order not to overlook any means of arousing us. For it recalls how "God will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. 2:6-7, Matt. 16:27, 1 Cor. 3:8, 14-15, 2 Cor. 5:10, etc.). But I deny that this is the only thing, and even the principal thing among many. Again, I do not concede that we should take our beginning from that point... Finally, I say that it is of no use unless we give prior place to the doctrine that we are justified by Christ's merits alone, which is grasped through faith, but by no merits of our own works, because no men can be fit for the pursuit of holiness save those who have first imbibed this doctrine.⁵²

Positively, in all his writings and sermons Calvin taught that God's purpose with the reward is to take His people, who are already motivated to be zealous for good works, and sweetly stimulate, animate, encourage, excite, and inspire them to persevere in their determination to be holy in all good works.

In his comments on Psalm 62:12, Calvin speaks of the promise of a reward animating, stimulating, and encouraging God's people.

It is with a very different design than to encourage any such opinion [salvation dependent on meritorious works], that the Spirit promises a reward to our works — it is to *animate* us in the ways of obedience.... Since the Scriptures promise a reward to the saints, with the sole intention of *stimulating* their minds, and *encouraging* them in the

52 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.3; 1:801.

divine warfare, and not with the remotest design of derogating from the mercy of God....⁵³

Calvin speaks of the promise of a reward exciting believers to good works. He writes in his comments on Matthew 16:27: “When a reward is promised to good works, their merit is not contrasted with the justification which is freely bestowed on us through faith, nor is it pointed out as the cause of our salvation, but is only held out to *excite* believers to aim at doing what is right, by assuring them that their labor will not be lost.”⁵⁴

Referring to the crown of glory in heaven, Calvin also preached that the promise of a reward inspires Christians. In a sermon on 2 Timothy 4:8, he stated, “Should this not *inspire* us to walk loyally on and to fight steadfastly to the very end?”⁵⁵

The promise of a reward is not what creates the motive to obey in believers, as if they would only obey if they knew a reward was coming. Knowledge of the reward is not the engine or power that drives a holy life. Calvin did not even believe that the promise of a reward is essential to the Christian life of obedience because, as we have seen, he taught that even if all hope of a reward is lost, Christians will still be motivated to serve the God they love. However, the promise of a reward is a sweet stimulant God uses to increase the strength of the believer’s motivation. The reward is added as an incentive to excite believers to persevere in obedience. Embracing God’s promise of a reward spurs believers on and increases their resolve and determination to be faithful to God. While the expectation of a reward is neither “the only thing” to arouse us, nor “the principal thing among many,”⁵⁶ it is intended to have a subordinate and secondary motivating influence within the believer.

The great difficulty of obedience unto God is the reason that God in His infinite love sweetly stimulates His children with the promise of a reward. Whenever Calvin taught the reward of grace, he invariably

53 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 432. Emphasis added.

54 Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, Bk. 1, vol. 2, 306. Emphasis added.

55 Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Timothy*, 403. Emphasis added.

56 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.16.3; 1:801.

reckoned with the tremendous difficulty of obedience. He understood that in the midst of their spiritual warfare believers are tempted to grow weary in well-doing, suppose all their labor will be lost, and give up when they are cruelly scorned for their faith and obedience. Calvin opened his sermon on Matthew 5:11-12 with the words, “We saw last Sunday that it is not easy for believers to live in peace when they desire to do their duty both to God and their neighbor.”⁵⁷ Often in Calvin’s audience in Geneva were many refugees who had fled hostile homelands under persecution. Acknowledging how difficult it is for believers to find a peaceful existence as they obey God in this world, Calvin came to the reward of grace in his sermon and explained that it is not intended to make believers walk in obedience, but to make their difficult walk easier:

We see, then, that our Lord’s intention here was not to question the basis of our salvation, or to ask what value anything we do for God might have. His object was to show that, if in seeking to do the Father’s will we find that men hate us, cast us out and persecute us, our efforts to do good are not wasted. The trials we face should not stop us following our appointed path. Why? Because to serve God on earth involves much conflict. Where, then, does victory lie? In heaven – it is to heaven we must look. Let us set our sights not on winning merit, but on steadfastly walking in God’s service. We have a reward, one won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ and which is ours through the merit of his death and passion...God draws us toward heaven so as to make it easier for us to walk among thorns, leap ditches, and even scale rocks and mountains when we have to.⁵⁸

Commenting on John 4:36, Calvin made special application to pastors because he knew firsthand all of the rigors of being a pastor in Geneva—rigors that might cause one to be dismayed:

And certainly, both considerations ought greatly to encourage the ministers of the word, that they may never sink under the toil, when they hear that a crown of glory is prepared for them in heaven, and know that the fruit of their harvest will not only be precious in the sight of God, but will also be eternal. It is for this purpose that Scripture

57 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 65.

58 Calvin, *Sermons on the Beatitudes*, 76-7.

everywhere mentions reward, and not for the purpose of leading us to judge from it as to the merits of works, for which of us, if we come to a reckoning, will not be found more worthy of being punished for slothfulness than of being rewarded for diligence? To the best laborers nothing else will be left than to approach to God in all humility to implore forgiveness. But the Lord, who acts toward us with the kindness of a father, in order to correct our sloth, and to encourage us who would otherwise be dismayed, deigns to bestow upon us an underserved reward.⁵⁹

In his *Institutes*, where he has a section entitled, “The purpose of the promise of the reward,” Calvin wrote of the necessity of this promise:

First, let everyone consider with himself how hard it would be for him to leave and renounce not only all his possessions but himself as well. Still, it is with this first lesson that Christ initiates his pupils, that is, all the godly. Then he so trains them throughout life under the discipline of the cross that they may not set their hearts upon desire of, or reliance on, present benefits. In short, he usually so deals with them that wherever they turn their eyes, as far as this world extends, they are confronted solely with despair. . . . Lest they fail amidst these great tribulations, the Lord is with them, warning them to hold their heads higher, to direct their eyes farther so as to find in him that blessedness which they do not see in the world. He calls this blessedness “prize,” “reward,” “recompense” (cf. Matt. 5:12, 6:1ff., etc.), not weighing the merit of works, but seeing that it is a compensation for their miseries, tribulations, slanders, etc.⁶⁰

In teaching and preaching the practical purpose of the reward of grace, Calvin showed himself to be a faithful pastor who understood and had a heart for his fellow saints in all the adversities of earthly life. To be a faithful Christian diligently walking in the law of God in this world is exceedingly difficult. There is a bitter struggle in every regenerated Christian, a struggle between the old man or flesh of disobedience and the new man of obedience. Constantly the devil

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 171-2.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.18.4; 1:824.

assaults God's children with temptations to turn aside from the way of obedience. The world is full of hatred for God, His truth, His Christ, and His church, so that faithfulness to God will always be met with some form of opposition. Often the most painful opposition comes from within the walls of the church. A pastor may be called by Christ to carry a heavy cross for faithfulness in contending earnestly for the holy gospel, or for admonishing the wayward and troublemakers. Furthermore, this earthly life is a vale of tears in which God's people suffer so many grievous afflictions. There is no such thing as an easy Christian life. Obedience is difficult. Calvin understood this, and Calvin taught that because of this difficulty, God, in the infinite riches of His grace, promises a reward to His people to stimulate them unto continued obedience. In the words of the Lord Jesus, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12).

Calvin showed himself faithful to Scripture, for his explanation of the purpose of the reward harmonizes perfectly with the commendable activity of Moses according to Hebrews 11:24-26, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Moses was willing to suffer many distresses with the people of Israel because he loved God and would rather have the riches of salvation in Israel's Messiah than the riches of Egypt. When the way for Moses became unbearably difficult in the wilderness, he looked unto the promised reward and it lifted his spirits and encouraged him to persevere in his service unto God.

Conclusion

John Calvin preached the grace of God. In all his teaching of the reward he emphasized grace. Understanding the context in which Calvin labored in Geneva makes his emphasis upon the graciousness of the reward all the more powerful. There was a problem in Geneva for which Calvin needed a solution: dissoluteness of life. Robert

Kingdon relates that Calvin “was to observe frequently throughout his career in Geneva that he found the people of that city to be quite willing to accept the truth of the interpretation of Christianity he taught, but all too often reluctant to let Christian teachings guide their styles of life.”⁶¹ Geneva’s problem is the perennial problem for the church in the world.

When many others, including especially the theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, encountered the problem of immorality of life, the recommended solution was always to preach and teach merit. It was alleged that while the doctrine of salvation by grace alone makes people careless and profane, the doctrine of merit properly creates the motive to obey. That is to say, the solution to the problem of sinful conduct was to teach a salvation dependent in some sense upon works. If there were ever a theologian seemingly primed to assume that mentality and teach a reward of merit in order to emphasize the great urgency of obedience, it would have been John Calvin in disobedient Geneva. In his great desire to curb and even root out the rampant unholy behavior of the citizens of Geneva, John Calvin pushed hard to establish and maintain official ecclesiastical discipline. He also issued the sharpest warnings to the impenitent and warned them of the impending judgment of God. But as to doctrine, Calvin never abandoned the theology of grace for a theology of works. He was steadfastly opposed to merit. He was determined to preach grace, including the reward of grace, believing that where the knowledge of God’s grace took root in the heart there would always be the fruit of good works of obedience. ●

61 Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin’s Geneva* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 11.

A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Languages

Ronald L. Cammenga

I teach Hebrew in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS). Hebrew is a language like no other language. It is a beautiful language. It is a richly expressive language. It is a picturesque language. For good reason it was the language in which God inspired the Old Testament Scriptures. Students at PRTS are required to take five semesters of Hebrew. Besides Hebrew, all students at PRTS must also study Greek, the language of the New Testament. It was the language in which the gospel accounts were written, which describe the birth, life, suffering and death of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the language of Paul and the apostles. Two years of Greek belong to the pre-seminary requirement. Once in seminary, students are required to take two more semesters of Greek language studies. In addition to the study of the biblical languages themselves, every student must complete three semesters of Old Testament exegesis and four semesters of New Testament exegesis. Clearly, PRTS places great importance on mastery of the biblical languages.

PRTS requires proficiency in the biblical languages because it is the seminary's purpose to prepare preachers of the gospel, preachers especially for the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, her sister churches, and the churches with whom she has special ecumenical relationships. Because preaching depends on faithful exposition of Scripture and faithful exposition depends on the ability to work with the original languages of Scripture, it is imperative that students graduating from PRTS possess the ability to work with the original languages of Scripture. Only those students with a high level of ability in Hebrew and Greek graduate from the seminary. That ability is tested at students' synodical examination (*praeparatoir*, or, preparatory examination) and subsequently their classical examination (*peremptoir*, or, decisive examination).¹

1 Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, "Decisions pertaining to Article 4," in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Prot-*

I share the concern of many—seminary professors, ministers and elders especially—that increasingly it is the case that seminary graduates lack competency in the biblical languages. More and more the thinking gains headway that proficiency in the biblical languages is unnecessary for those entering the pastoral ministry. Perhaps mastery of the biblical languages is necessary if someone is interested in pursuing a vocation in academia. But if one’s goal is the pastoral ministry in a local congregation, thorough knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek are of minimal importance. With all the helps available today, including powerful computer programs that can identify grammatical forms simply by pointing a cursor and clicking, expertise in the biblical languages is unnecessary.

Ministerial students frequently come into seminary with the attitude that study of the biblical languages, although required, is not important, if not a waste of time altogether. Whereas in the past seminary professors impressed upon their students the importance of the biblical languages by telling them that God calls to the ministry through the Hebrew and Greek departments, that attitude seems to have become outdated. In response to contemporary trends, many seminaries have scaled back their language course requirements. Study of the biblical languages has become optional in some institutions. Biblical language offerings, particularly Old Testament Hebrew, are offered as electives and are not any longer core requirements. Or, Hebrew language course offerings are mainly limited to online courses. The net result is that knowledge of the biblical languages is on the wane.

Though becoming more widespread, this trend is not new. For many years the seminaries have been forced to contend with this mindset. In an article entitled “Should New Testament Greek be ‘Required’ in Our Ministerial Training Courses?”, an article that appeared in the January-March, 1934 issue of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Dr. Henry C. Thiessen bemoaned the increasing neglect of the biblical languages in the seminaries. “It is a matter of regret,” he opined, “that so many theological institutions are adopting this viewpoint” that undervalues the importance of mastery of the biblical languages.² The neglect of

estant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 380.

² Henry C. Thiessen, “Should New Testament Greek Be ‘Required’
April 2020

the biblical languages that Thiessen viewed as a threat in 1934 has not gone away. An examination of current seminary catalogs and websites demonstrates that the symptoms that were beginning to appear in the early part of the twentieth century have become an epidemic by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

If this trend is going to be reversed, students and the churches that support and train ministerial students must be convinced anew of the importance of a thorough understanding of the biblical languages for preparation for the ministry. What must be recognized is how indispensable a working knowledge of the biblical languages is for exegesis (interpretation of Scripture) and preaching (proclamation of Scripture). As indispensable as these are to the being and wellbeing of the church, so indispensable is a grasp of the biblical languages upon which they depend.

Luther and the Biblical Languages

The Reformers were instrumental in restoring the biblical languages to the church. This was another important fruit of the Reformation. Philip Schaff calls attention to this in his masterful work, *Theological Propaedeutic: A General Introduction to the Study of Theology*:

In the Middle Ages the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew almost disappeared from the Latin Church; the study of the Bible was sadly neglected, and all sorts of unscriptural traditions were accumulated, and obscured the Christian faith. The Revival of Letters in the 15th and 16th centuries by Agricola, Reuchlin, Erasmus, Melancthon, and others, was a very important preparation for the Revival of primitive Christianity. The Reformers were good Greek and Hebrew scholars, and rank among the best translators and commentators of all ages.³

C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch credit the Reformation with the recovery of Hebrew:

in Our Ministerial Training Courses?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 91 (361) (January-March, 1934): 34.

3 Philip Schaff, *Theological Propaedeutic: A General Introduction to the Study of Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 102.

But at the time of the Reformation, the light of the day which had already dawned first spread in all its brightness over the Old Testament. The knowledge of Hebrew, until then the private possession of a few, became the public property of the church.⁴

The Reformers called for the Scriptures to be translated into the language of the common people. But the Reformers called for the Scriptures to be translated from the original languages, the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. The Reformers also restored preaching to its rightful place as the chief means of grace in the church. But the Reformation called for preaching that was based on sound exegesis of the original text of Scripture. Especially for these reasons, the Reformation recognized the value of studying the original languages.

As was the case in so many respects, Martin Luther led the way. His translation of the Scriptures into German is an enduring monument to Luther's ability to work with the biblical languages. Add to this his lectures, sermons, treatises, and massive correspondence, and Luther's mastery of the Hebrew and Greek is well attested. Sprinkled throughout his works are the evidences of his aptitude in the languages.

The recovery of the biblical languages is another instance of God's use of the Renaissance in the service of the Reformation. With the Renaissance's insistence on a return to the sources, study of Hebrew and Greek were revived. And that revival bore fruit with the Reformers. Luther's exposure to Hebrew began with Johann Reuchlin's Hebrew grammar, *Principium libri: De rudimentis Hebraicis*. This grammar was more of a lexicon than a grammar. Over time Luther benefited from the Hebrew texts written by Matthäus Adriani, Johannes Cellarius, Konrad Pellikan, Wolfgang Captio, and Moses Kimhi. Still later, Luther and Melanchthon facilitated the publication of the Hebrew manuals of Johann Böschenstein, and Matthaëus Aurogallus in Wittenberg. Luther and Melanchthon also sought the leading Hebraists of their day to teach at the University of Wittenberg.⁵

4 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Volume IV: Job* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans), 33.

5 Mateusz Oseka, "Reformation Exegesis Encountering the Jewish Legacy: Luther and Calvin Reading Genesis 4:1," *The Reformed Theological Review*, 74:1 (April 2015): 40-1.

Luther especially promoted the value of knowledge of biblical Hebrew. He bemoaned the general ignorance of Hebrew on the part of the clergy of his day who were content with the accuracy of the Latin Vulgate. Pinchas E. Lapide quotes Luther as having said:

The Hebrew language is the best of all ... because no one can really understand the Scriptures without it. For although the New Testament is written in Greek, it is full of Hebraisms and Hebrew expressions. It has therefore been aptly said that the Hebrews drink from the spring, the Greeks from the stream that flows from it, and the Latins from a downstream pool.⁶

In Luther's estimation, every preacher of the gospel should have the ability to work with the original language of the Old Testament. At the same time, Luther was well aware of the challenges of Hebrew, especially when it came to the work of Bible translation. On one occasion he complained,

Ach, Gott! How hard and laborious it is to compel the Hebrew writers to speak German. How they do resist and refuse to leave their Hebrew and imitate the barbaric German tongue! Just as if one tried to force the nightingale to leave her fine tune and imitate the cuckoo, whose tune she abhors... I openly confess that I took too much upon myself when I decided to translate the Old Testament.⁷

Luther also had an excellent working knowledge of Greek. In the providence of God, in 1516, one year before Luther posted his Ninety-Five Theses, the Dutch humanist scholar, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, published his Greek New Testament. Steven Lawson says that "[t]his Greek text produced by Erasmus proved to be the fuse of dynamite that, when lit by Luther, caused the explosion of gospel truth in the Reformation."⁸ Luther's mastery of the biblical languages

6 Pinchas E. Lapide, *Hebrew in the Church*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), iii.

7 John Louis Nuelsen, *Luther: The Leader* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906) 134.

8 Steven J. Lawson, "Martin Luther: Thundering Voice of the Reformation," *Expositor* (March/April 2017), 8.

became the basis for all his exegetical work and gave him deep insight into the meaning of the text of Scripture.

In his treatise “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that they Establish and Maintain Christian Schools” (1524), Luther underscored the importance of the recovery of the biblical languages and the need for education in them. In reference to the recovery of the languages, Luther wrote that

the devil smelt a rat, and perceived that if the languages were revived, there would be a hole knocked in his kingdom which he might have difficulty stopping. Since he was unable, however, to prevent their being revived, his aim is now to keep them on such slender rations that they will of themselves decline and pass away. They are like an unwelcome guest who has come to his house; so he determines to show him such [meager] entertainment that he will not tarry long. Very few of us, my dear sirs, see through this wicked plot of the devil.⁹

Luther went on to insist that although the gospel comes to us through the Holy Spirit alone, the medium that it pleased the Spirit to use was the languages. Therefore, “[i]n proportion . . . as we prize the gospel, let us guard the languages.”¹⁰

Luther gave several reasons for his insistence on the necessity of maintaining the biblical languages in his treatise, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.” First, Luther was convinced that thorough knowledge of the languages was necessary to prevent the church from falling back into the errors from which she was delivered through the Reformation. How is it to be accounted for, he asks, that the church had fallen into so many errors and continued in those errors for so long a time? How can it be explained that even good men had erred in their understanding and application of the Scriptures? His answer was that so many “attempted to expound Scripture without [a knowledge of] the

9 Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” trans. A. T. W. Steinhaeuser, in *Works of Martin Luther, volume 4* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, repr. 1982), 113.

10 Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 114.

languages.”¹¹ Ignorance of the original languages, reliance on translations, chiefly the Latin Vulgate, caused many well-meaning men to fall into and defend various errors. The remedy to this situation was the recovery of the original languages by preachers and teachers in the church.

Second, Luther was convinced that polemics demanded knowledge of the original languages. It was especially in her defense of the truth and exposure of error that the church required theologians who could accurately appeal to the Hebrew and the Greek.

A simple preacher, to be sure, is in possession of so many clear passages and texts from translations that he can know and teach Christ, lead a holy life and preach to others. But to interpret Scripture, to treat it independently, and to dispute with those who cite it incorrectly, to that he is unequal; that cannot be done without [the biblical] languages.¹²

Knowledge of the original languages was indispensable to Luther’s own struggle against the enemies of the gospel: “I should indeed have failed egregiously if the languages had not aided me and given me a certain and positive knowledge of Scripture.”¹³ He goes on to indicate that apart from his knowledge of the biblical languages, “I should have left undisturbed the pope and the sophists with the whole antichristian realm.”¹⁴

Third, a thorough knowledge of the original languages gives to preachers, in Luther’s view, a depth that otherwise their preaching would ordinarily lack.

[T]hough the faith and the Gospel may be proclaimed by simple preachers without [a knowledge of] the languages, such preaching is flat and tame, men grow at last weary and disgusted and it falls to the ground. But when the preacher is versed in the languages, his discourse has freshness and force, the whole Scripture is treated, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and works [i.e., illustrations].¹⁵

11 Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 116.

12 Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 117.

13 Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 119.

14 Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 119.

15 Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 119.

Biblical exegesis that arises out of interpretation of the original text of Scripture remains as fresh as Scripture itself. Among other things, preaching that is grounded in the Hebrew and Greek text of Scripture can draw out the meaning of the biblical words, the significance of various grammatical constructions, nuances of meaning, and the figures of speech that are frequently used. A knowledge of the biblical languages ensures a richness that otherwise would be absent from a minister's preaching.

Finally, and most importantly, Luther was convinced that the truth of the gospel depended on the original languages of Scripture: “[L]et us be sure of this: we shall not long preserve the Gospel without the languages.” In characteristically graphic language, Luther continued:

The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the casket in which we carry this jewel; they are the vessel in which we hold this wine; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and, as the Gospel itself says, they are the baskets in which we bear these loaves and fishes and fragments. If through our neglect we let the languages go (which God forbid!), we shall ... lose the Gospel....¹⁶

Luther was convinced that the loss of the biblical languages would ultimately lead to the loss of the gospel itself. So highly did he value the languages.

Calvin and the Biblical Languages

John Calvin was as insistent on the value of the biblical languages as was Luther. He was a vehement opponent of the arbitrary exegesis that resulted from the allegorical method of interpretation in vogue in the Middle Ages. He detested allegory as a bunch of monkey business, monkey business that twisted the Scriptures to support the heresies and false worship of the Roman Catholic Church. The corrective to the arbitrariness of allegorical interpretation was exegesis of Scripture that was based on an ability to work with the original languages—grammatical-historical exegesis.

Calvin was equally or even more adept at working with Hebrew and Greek than his fellow Reformer in Wittenberg. Besides his pro-

¹⁶ Luther, “To the Councilmen,” 114.

ficiency in French and Latin, Calvin was proficient in the original languages of Scripture. His classroom lectures, his sermons, his treatises, his extensive correspondence, and especially his commentaries and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* exhibit the extent of his abilities in the biblical languages. A. M. Hunter says that “an impartial student of his commentaries cannot but admit that he was more than adequately equipped to deal authoritatively with the originals of both the Old Testament and New Testament.”¹⁷ In the foreword to Calvin’s *Sermons on the Deity of Christ*, Richard Gamble comments that “[t]here are certain elements to all of Calvin’s sermons. First is the consistent freshness of his translations of Scripture. His ability with the original languages gave him opportunity to see nuances and expressions that come only from such skill.”¹⁸

Calvin’s commentaries and his published sermons are sprinkled with references to the original Hebrew and Greek. He frequently referred to particular words and word meanings, as well as to grammatical structures, various idioms, and semantic issues that determined the correct understanding of the text of Scripture. Knowledge of the biblical languages was the foundation of nearly everything that Calvin did. Judging the Reformer’s abilities, John D. Currid says: “He may not have been the top Hebraist or Greek master in Europe in his day, but he was highly capable and competent with those languages.”¹⁹ Later, speaking of his relative abilities in the biblical languages, Currid states that although Calvin “had greater ease with and could work better with Greek than he could with Hebrew,” yet that he was very capable in both languages.²⁰

One of the outstanding evidences of his abilities is the well-attested fact that the only thing that Calvin brought with him when he mounted the elevated pulpit in the church of Geneva was his Hebrew or Greek Bible. From the biblical Hebrew and Greek, he read the Scripture and his particular sermon text, translating it from the original prior

17 A. M. Hunter, “The Erudition of John Calvin,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 18 (1946): 203.

18 Richard Gamble, “Foreword” to *Sermons on the Deity of Christ*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1997), 8.

19 John D. Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages* (Geanies House: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 29.

20 Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 41.

to the sermon preached to the gathered congregation. With only the biblical text in front of him, he expounded the Word of God. David Steinmetz comments that

Calvin accepted without hesitation the humanist belief that the understanding of an ancient text depended in the first instance on the mastery of the language in which it was written. Calvin therefore preferred to read the Bible in its Greek and Hebrew originals, going so far as to take the Hebrew and Greek text into the pulpit with him.²¹

John Currid concurs:

That Calvin entered the pulpit only carrying his Hebrew Old Testament and his Greek New Testament underscores the man's phenomenal memory. But, more than that, it demonstrates his considerable ability to work with the original texts. Calvin may not have been an expert Hebraist, along the lines of the contemporary Reuchlin or the later Gesenius, but he had a thorough working knowledge of the Hebrew language. He may not have been the top Hebraist in Europe, but he was highly capable and competent with the language.²²

This is not to say that Calvin went to the pulpit unprepared, relying exclusively on the Spirit's leading in the moment of preaching. Not at all! He did careful preparatory work in his study before he preached. His preparation included, among other things, careful consideration of what he would say from the pulpit. But especially did his preparation include study of his text in its original language. When he climbed the stairway into the pulpit, Calvin was prepared to read and translate his text from the Hebrew or Greek.

Calvin's competence with the biblical languages becomes apparent in his commentaries. Throughout his career, Calvin wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. Many of his Old Testament commentaries were student (classroom) lectures. One of the outstanding features of his commentaries was his own translation

21 David C. Steinmetz, "John Calvin as an Interpreter of the Bible," in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 287-8.

22 John D. Currid, "Calvin as Hebraist: Guarding the Sacred Deposit," *The Reformed Theological Review* 63, no. 2 (August 2004): 65.

from the original text, followed by comments that frequently called attention to peculiarities of the Hebrew or Greek. James Luther Mays underscores this important aspect of Calvin's interpretive process in his remarks on his commentary on the book of Psalms.

The second part of the format [of Calvin's commentaries] is a translation from the Hebrew text. The translation makes it obvious how well Calvin understood the importance of translation as an interpretive act. The nuances observed in its execution and the disquisitions on the choices to be made in moving from source to target language show how thoroughly the translation was grounded in the resources for philological work available in his time. But even when dealing with such specialized matters as comparing the functions of the Hebrew prepositions ... or working out the semantic value of [Hebrew words], Calvin writes with a simplicity and clarity free of technical terms to allow his general readers to follow the argument. In these and other matters that are occasions for scholarly intensity, Calvin does not lose an orientation to his audience. The items chosen for discussion, moreover, are those that affect the meaning of the text used by the readers. Even the agenda of his explanatory comment seems to be a concern with the use of the psalms.²³

Reflecting on Calvin's commentaries, Currid concludes:

In summary, Calvin's commentary work was securely anchored in his linguistic study in the original biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. And that is the primary reason that his work was fresh and engaging for the day in which he wrote, and it is also one reason that his labors continue to influence biblical scholarship of our own day.²⁴

Fairly early in his student days, Calvin took up study of the original languages. By the time he began his university work, the original languages had been revived and were being taught in a number of the leading universities of Europe. Allan Menzies writes:

23 James Luther Mays, "Calvin's Commentary on the Psalms," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 198-9.

24 Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 43.

In point of knowledge of the original languages [Calvin] was well equipped. He had seized every opportunity that presented itself in his youth of learning Greek. There was no Greek to be had at Paris in his undergraduate days; but at Orleans, and later at Paris when the King instituted his Royal lecturers, and later still at Basel, he applied himself to Greek study.²⁵

Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, refers to Calvin's study of the biblical languages. He writes in his biography of Calvin that while he was studying at the Academy of Bourges, Calvin formed a friendship with Melchior Wolmar, professor of Greek. "His learning, piety, and other virtues, together with his admirable abilities as a teacher of youth, cannot be sufficiently praised. On his suggestion, and with his assistance, Calvin learned Greek."²⁶ Later, Calvin expressed his appreciation by dedicating his *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* to his Greek teacher.

[I]t was at your instigation and under your tuition that I also took up the study of Greek, of which you were at that time a most distinguished teacher. It was not your fault that I did not make greater progress.... Nevertheless my indebtedness to you for this is still great for you gave me a good grounding in the rudiments of the language and that was a great help to me later on.²⁷

Throughout his life, Calvin continued his study of Greek. It was during his time in Basel, between his first and second stints in Geneva, that Calvin became a close friend of Simon Grynaeus. Grynaeus was an expert in Greek and we may believe that it was a privilege to be a tutor to his friend Calvin. Later he would become a professor of Greek in the Academy of Geneva.

25 Allan Menzies, *A Study of Calvin and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1918), 198-9.

26 Theodore Beza, "The Life of John Calvin" in *Tracts Relating to the Reformation, vol. 1*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), xxiii.

27 Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 18-9.

Beza also mentions that while in Basel, after his expulsion from Geneva, Calvin “devoted himself to the study of Hebrew.”²⁸ A number of scholars, including John Currid, have demonstrated that Beza did not mean, as it is often thought, that Calvin *began* his study of Hebrew in Basel. The fact that he “devoted” himself to the study of Hebrew means, rather, that he gave himself to the study of Hebrew, the rudiments of which he had already mastered.²⁹ After his return to Geneva, Calvin put his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek into even greater service on behalf of the gospel.

A strongly held conviction of Calvin was that those who aspired to the office of pastor and teacher in the church must be trained. Speaking of the necessity of training for those who desired to be ministers of the gospel, Calvin insisted that “[t]hose whom the Lord has destined for such high office, he first supplies with arms required to fulfill it, that they may not come empty-handed and unprepared.”³⁰ In Calvin’s view, an important part of that preparation was thorough instruction in the biblical languages. He secured for the Academy of Geneva some of the most skilled linguists of the day. Through their instruction, young men from all over Europe were trained in the original languages of Holy Scripture. The academy produced pastors who were exceptional scholars for their day, proficient in Hebrew and Greek. Mastery of Hebrew and Greek became the foundation of their exegesis; exegesis became the basis for their sermons. And more than anything else, Calvin was committed to the preparation of men who could preach the Word of God—preach the Word of God faithfully and with power.

Other Voices on Behalf of the Biblical Languages

It is worthwhile to hear from some of the others who have championed knowledge on behalf of the biblical languages. The Swiss Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), in a work entitled “Of the Education of Youth,” wrote,

28 Beza, “The Life of John Calvin,” xxvii.

29 Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 14.

30 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. Mc Neill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 4.3.11; 2:1063.

Once a young man is instructed in the solid virtue which is formed by faith, it follows that he will regulate himself and richly adorn himself from within: for only he whose whole life is ordered finds it easy to give help and counsel to others.

But a man cannot rightly order his own soul unless he exercises himself day and night in the Word of God. He can do that most readily if he is well versed in such languages as Hebrew and Greek, for a right understanding of the Old Testament is difficult without the one, and a right understanding of the New is equally difficult without the other.³¹

Zwingli's regard for the importance of an understanding of biblical Hebrew comes out in the following remark that he made: "Ignorance of Hebrew forms of expression is responsible for many erroneous interpretations of scriptural passages not only by ignorant and reckless men ... but also by genuinely pious and learned persons."³²

Francis Turretin (1623-1687) was born of Italian refugees in Calvin's Geneva. Later, he became pastor of the Italian congregation in Geneva and successor of Calvin as professor of theology in the Academy of Geneva. He was a zealous opponent of Amyraldianism and a staunch supporter of the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19. Turretin, who was himself an accomplished linguist, promoted proficiency in the original languages of Scripture on the part of his students. Speaking out against the Council of Trent and its exaltation of the Latin Vulgate as supreme in all matters of doctrine and worship, Turretin warned that thereby the authority of the Hebrew and Greek autographs have been dealt a fatal blow. Over against Rome, he insisted that "the Hebrew of the Old and the Greek of the New Testament have always been and still are the only authentic versions by which all controversies of faith and religion (and all versions) ought to be approved and tested."³³ For

31 Ulrich Zwingli, "On the Education of Youth," in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, vol. 24, The Library of Christian Classics, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 108.

32 Quoted in John D. Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 68.

33 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 112-3.

this reason, the pastors of the church should be thoroughly trained in Hebrew and in Greek, in Turretin's view. His own proficiency in the biblical languages is evident to anyone who reads his magnum opus, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Time and again, Turretin grounds his arguments in the original Hebrew or Greek. Frequently, his arguments are advanced on the basis of what can only be called fine points of grammar, such as the distinction between two pronouns or the difference of emphasis between synonyms. So thorough was Turretin's knowledge of the original languages.

The seventeenth-century Anglican theologian, James Ussher (1581-1656), was a strong proponent of proficiency in the biblical languages on the part of all those serving in the gospel ministry. In his systematic theology, written in catechetical form, *A Body of Divinity*, Ussher promoted his viewpoint.

What assurance may be had of the right understanding the Holy Scriptures?

For the words, it is to be had out of the Original Text, or Translations of the same: for the sense or meaning, only out of the Scriptures themselves, (Nehem. 8.8.) which by places plain and evident, do express whatsoever is obscure and hard touching Matters necessary to eternal Salvation.

Why must the interpretation of words be had out of the original Languages?

Because in them only the Scriptures are, for the Letter, to be held authentic. And as the Water is most pure in the Fountain or Spring thereof, so the right understanding of the words of the Holy Scriptures is most certain in the Original Tongues of Hebrew and Greek, in which they were first written and delivered to the Church, out of which Languages they must be truly translated for the understanding of them that have not the knowledge of those Tongues.

What gather you from hence?

That all Translations are to be judged, examined, and reformed according to the Text of the Ancient Hebrew and Original Chaldee, in which the Old Testament was penned, and the Greek Text, in which the New Testament was written. And consequently that the vulgar Latin Translation, approved by the Tridentine Council for the only

Authentic Text, is no further to be received of true Christians, than it agreeth with the Original of the Hebrew and Greek Text.³⁴

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 8, the worthies of the Westminster Assembly expressed their view of the importance of the biblical languages.

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But, because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.³⁵

One of the questions put to the Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, was:

Whether it is fitting and necessary to translate the Bible from the Hebrew into the Nederduits language or at least to oversee the general translation, and who shall be given this task. Answer: In time the Bible should be translated from the Hebrew. In the meantime the French, Latin, and other, especially the new Heidelberg translation, shall be surveyed, adding to this the French annotations of the Old Testament. But it shall be observed that this work is not laid upon one person alone, and Lord [Philip de Marnix] de St. Aldegonde and Peter Datheen are appointed to seek qualified men who are capable of competently carrying out this work.³⁶

34 James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 1648, repr. 2007), 19-20.

35 Westminster Confession of Faith, *Confession of Faith and Subordinate Standards* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland, 1973), 5-6.

36 P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual, Including Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matter Relating to* April 2020

An interesting aside is that this same synod was asked whether the *Institutes* of John Calvin should be “correctly translated into the Nederduitsh language,” to which the synod responded affirmatively and appointed Peter Datheen to carry out this work.³⁷

Reformed churches from the Reformation onward placed the greatest importance on mastery of the biblical languages. Sound preaching of the gospel depended on faithful exegesis. And behind faithful exegesis was the ability to read, parse, and translate the sacred text. Proficiency in Hebrew and Greek was indispensable—absolutely indispensable!

Current Threats to the Study of the Biblical Languages

Despite the necessity placed on proficiency in the biblical languages by the Reformed churches throughout their history, this viewpoint is threatened today. Many Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries, and still more seminary students, are undervaluing the importance of mastery of Hebrew and Greek as part of preparation for the ministry. My years of experience teaching Hebrew at PRTS lead me to identify some of the outstanding threats to study of the biblical languages, as well as retention of proficiency in Hebrew and Greek. Some of these threats are longstanding; others arise out of the unique circumstances of our time. I am convinced that these threats need to be recognized and addressed, if study of the biblical languages is going to continue to thrive in the seminaries and in ministers after seminary graduation. If our ministers are going to continue to be proficient in the languages, these threats need to be countered effectively.

One threat to thorough-going instruction in the languages is that course offerings in too many seminaries are determined by student interest. They have become consumer-driven institutions. Rather than dictating to students what they will need for the work of the ministry, seminaries increasingly cater to what students want. Frequently, they are the courses that are viewed as more “practical” for the pastorate—counseling, youth ministry, community outreach for example. Students

the Government of the Churches, trans. Richard R. DeRidder (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), 102.

37 Biesterveld and Kuyper, *Ecclesiastical Manual*, 102.

are often too shortsighted in their estimation of what they truly need for the greatest benefit of the souls that will be entrusted to their care.

A second threat to the study of the biblical languages is the sheer difficulty of learning Hebrew and Greek. Some students have a knack for learning foreign languages. They are the exceptions. For many students, the biblical language courses are some of the most demanding of their entire seminary career. The challenge of memorizing the vocabulary and grammar of Hebrew and Greek make the study of the biblical languages daunting, to say the least. The long hours of study required to master the languages is frequently off-putting. The challenges posed by the hours of study demanded to achieve good grades in the languages pose a real threat to students' willingness to invest time and effort in mastery of Hebrew and Greek.

A third threat to the study of the biblical languages is the widespread denial in our day of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. It is no accident that we are witnessing two things in the churches today. On the one hand, there is increasingly the loss of commitment to the historically Reformed doctrine of infallible, verbal inspiration. Not the words of Scripture, but merely the ideas contained in the Bible, it is contended, are inspired of God. On the other hand, in the seminaries there is an escalating loss of emphasis on the importance of mastery of the original languages. The latter is the fruit of the former. Where there is wholehearted embrace of the truth of verbal inspiration, the conviction that the very words of Scripture are divinely inspired, it is of the utmost importance to understand those words. It is important to understand those words as the human writers of Scripture were moved to write them down. That requires a good understanding of the Hebrew and Greek languages in which those words were inspired. A commitment to the verbal inspiration of Scripture demands on the part of preachers of the Word proficiency in the original languages.

A fourth threat to ongoing study and retention of the original languages is the sheer busyness of the ministry, especially in the first couple of years of the pastorate. Constant demands are placed on the time and abilities of the minister. Even in a smaller congregation, a minister can often be pressed out of measure. And if he is called to serve in a larger congregation, there are not enough hours in the day and not enough days in the week to complete all the work required

of the minister: two good sermons, catechism classes, Bible studies, sick visitation, family visitation, counseling sessions, consistory and council meetings, writing for church papers, work on classical and synodical committees, marriages and funerals, and so much more. Besides all that, he must cultivate his marriage and spend time with his children.

All too often, the busyness of the ministry results in neglect of the biblical languages. Time spent on reading and translating the text of his sermons, especially longer or more difficult passages, is valuable time that the minister often judges he can ill afford to spend. And the longer the minister neglects the use of the Hebrew and Greek, the rustier his skills become. The rustier his skills become, the more inclined he is to neglect their use. And so it goes, unless the vicious cycle is broken. The vicious cycle *can* be broken, only if the minister is convinced that it *ought* to be broken. Even if he is convinced that it ought to be broken, it takes a great deal of self-discipline and commitment on the part of the minister to keep his language skills honed.

Let me offer some suggestions for retaining or recovering, as the case may be, mastery of the biblical languages. Get up early to brush up on your Hebrew or Greek, perhaps working through the chapters of one of the introductory or intermediate grammars.³⁸ Do your daily de-

38 My experience indicates that it is more difficult for seminary graduates to retain Hebrew than Greek. In the last several years, a number of good Hebrew grammars and resources have been published. Let me recommend some helps for retaining or recovering Hebrew language skills. First, I recommend the third and revised edition of Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt's *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, published by Zondervan. Besides the latest edition of their introductory grammar, Pratico and Van Pelt have published a considerable number of supporting materials, which can be used separately or in conjunction with their grammar. These helps include:

- *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Workbook*, with study exercises and passages for translation practice.
- *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Video Lectures*, featuring 36 video lessons accompanying the passages in the textbook.
- *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide*, a handy, at-a-glance reference offering summaries of Hebrew grammar, paradigms, a lexicon, and more.

votions not from the English, but from the Hebrew Bible or Greek New Testament. Become a member of a reading group with colleagues—a little healthy competition and accountability never hurts. Or, use a devotional that is based on the Hebrew or Greek text of Scripture.³⁹

- *Old Testament Hebrew Vocabulary Cards*, including 1,000 vocabulary flashcards for mastery of the more frequently occurring words.
- *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary Audio*, a digital download from Olive Tree Bible Software, available through an access code, of audio pronunciations of the vocabulary from the grammar to help with vocabulary memorization and acquisition. It features both Classical (by Miles V. Van Pelt) and Modern (by Nancy L. Erickson) Hebrew pronunciations.
- *Biblical Hebrew Laminated Sheet*, for a quick reference guide to common Hebrew language questions.

In addition to Pratico and Van Pelt, a good introductory Hebrew grammar is *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, by C.L. Seow, published by Abingdon Press. I would also recommend *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew: A Beginning Grammar*, by Russell T. Fuller and Kyoungwon Choi, published by Kregel Academic. As a companion to their grammar, Fuller and Choi have published an accompanying workbook. Recently released, they have also published *Invitation to Biblical Hebrew Syntax: An Intermediate Grammar*. This looks to be a very worthwhile mid-level grammar that could serve well not only as a reference work, but as an excellent Hebrew grammar refresher. It includes numerous biblical examples for specific individual topic covered. Finally, I would recommend *Introduction to Hebrew: A Guide for Learning and Using Biblical Hebrew*, by William Fullilove, published by P&R Publishing Company. Besides the grammars, there are also a number of workbooks that can profitably be used, as for example, *A Workbook for Intermediate Hebrew*, by Robert B. Chisholm Jr., published by Kregel Academic.

39 Some suggestions for devotionals that make use of the original languages would include: 1) *Keep Up Your Biblical Hebrew in Two Minutes a Day* (2 vols.) and *Keep Up Your Biblical Greek in Two Minutes a Day* (2 vols.), by Jonathan G. Kline, published by Hendrickson. 2) *Devotions on the Hebrew Bible: 54 Reflections to Inspire and Instruct*, ed. Milton Eng and Lee M. Fields and *Devotions on the Greek New Testament: 52 Reflections to Inspire and Instruct*, ed. J. Scott Duvall and Verlyn D. Verbrugge, published by Zondervan. 3) *A Hebrew Word for the Day: Key Words from the Old Testament* and *A Word for the Day: Key Words from the New Testament*,

These are just some of the possibilities. The important thing is that pastors must be committed to do whatever it takes to retain or recover their abilities in the biblical languages.

A fifth threat to the study of the biblical languages is the availability in our day of computer programs—amazing computer programs. Some argue that such computer programs make proficiency in the original languages obsolete. Why continue to study the biblical languages when electronic aids do all the work of identifying forms and translating the biblical text. All that the hard-pressed seminary student or busy minister needs to do is place his cursor on the form, and instantly the form is identified (parsed), along with its meaning.

The solution, of course, is not to throw away our computers or the Bible programs downloaded onto our computers. But the solution is to make proper use of these programs without relying on them unquestioningly. They ought to be a helpful resource, without becoming an indispensable crutch. If students and clergy have a good foundation in the biblical languages, the computer programs can be used to verify parsing, word meaning, and translation. They can be used, but they must not be abused. A computer program must never be a substitute for thorough knowledge of the biblical languages. The pastor ought to have confidence in his abilities, not in his computer program.

A sixth threat to the study of the original languages is the undermining of the importance of careful exegesis in preparation for preaching. In our day it is all too often the case that ministers do not do the painstaking work of careful exegesis. They do not spend the amount of time in their studies that is required for exegesis based on the original Hebrew or Greek. Too often ministers give slight attention to exegesis of the original text of Scripture. At times they may satisfy themselves with making sermons based on the English text of Scripture. Or, rather than to preach expository sermons, instead ministers make and preach topical sermons. Topical sermons can be made without the hard work of exegeting the original text of Scripture.

by J. D. Watson, published by AMG Reference. 4) *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation*, by H. H. Harding II and *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation*, by Benjamin L. Merkle, published by Baker Academic.

Ministers of the gospel must be committed to the demanding work of exegesis of the original text of Scripture. Elders and members of congregations must require faithful expository sermons of their ministers. Seminary professors must prepare their students for the work of making sermons based on the original Hebrew and Greek text of Scripture. This is what God requires of those who preach His Word and those who prepare preachers of His Word. Since God inspired the original manuscripts of the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, ministers must to be able to work with the original languages. Translations are good and necessary, but they can never convey the fullness of the semantic, stylistic, and theological richness of the original languages.

Someone has said that reading Scripture in any other language than the original Hebrew or Greek is like kissing a beautiful woman—one's wife—with a veil between your face and hers. Reading a translation of Scripture is better than nothing. But it is not nearly as wonderful as reading God's Word in the Hebrew or Greek, with the linguistic veil removed. For the sake of the health and wellbeing of Christ's bride, this is what is required of ministers of the gospel. And this glorifies God who gave His Word in the Old Testament in Hebrew and in the New Testament in Greek. ●

Review Article: FDR: Nominal Christian and Influential Democrat

Douglas J. Kuiper

A Christian and A Democrat: A Religious Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt, by John F. Woolverton with James D. Bratt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. Pp xvii + 291. \$32.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-0802876850. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Generally speaking, a theological journal is not the place to review a biography of a politician. That the book under review is a *religious* biography, that it asserts that Franklin Roosevelt was a *Christian*, and that it argues that his “faith contributed to his leadership of the American democracy through some of its gravest trials” (1), justifies including a review here. The main purpose of this review is to evaluate the book’s analysis of FDR as a Christian, *not* as a Democrat.

The author, John Woolverton, was ordained in the Episcopal Church (in which church FDR had been member) and was professor of church history at Virginia Theological Seminary. Woolverton did not know FDR personally, but knew several who did know FDR personally. He penned this book as a manuscript before his death in 2014. Subsequently, James Bratt edited the book for publication, and wrote the preface and the ninth chapter (FDR’s last year, death, and burial). The bulk of the book, including its title, is Woolverton’s, not Bratt’s. Eerdmans includes the book in its series “Library of Religious Biography.” One can find other books in this series at www.religiousbiography.com.

Overview

The first three chapters comprise the first part of the book, “Formation.” Chapter one treats FDR’s pedigree. His father, James, left the Dutch Reformed Church (“Roosevelt,” after all, is a Dutch name) for the Episcopalian church when he married Sara Delano. FDR devoted years of service to this church—both the denomination and his own parish, St. James Episcopal Church in Hyde Park, NY. In 1906 (at

age 24) he was elected to the parish vestry, and from 1928 until his death in 1945 he served as the church's senior warden, its "chief lay officer" (26), who was to be present at every meeting of the vestry. His upbringing led him to believe that "Christian faith and democracy were inseparable" (31).

The influence of Endicott Peabody on FDR's life and thought is the subject of chapter two. Peabody was the headmaster of Groton School, the boarding school from which FDR received his high school education during the years 1896-1900. FDR's years at Groton and at Harvard University (1900-1904) receive attention in chapter three. During these years he began to manifest interest in politics, developed in his religious thought, edited the *Harvard Crimson*, and received a reputation for being a bit arrogant.

Part two, "Faith," covers FDR's mature years. Chapter four, "Hope," covers his early years in politics (he was elected governor of New York in 1929 and 1931). This was less than a decade after he contracted polio. Comparing FDR's physical paralysis to the nation's economic paralysis of the Great Depression, Woolverton notes that FDR's polio taught him to have hope, which hope served him well as a leader during the depression era. His famous fireside chats held out this hope to his American disciples.

Chapter five, entitled "Charity," covers the years from his first term as president (beginning in 1933) to the onset of World War Two. Roosevelt's "charity" primarily manifested itself in the New Deal which he envisioned and worked to accomplish, improving the earthly lot of many.

Roosevelt needed "Faith" (chapter six) during his later years in the White House, for two reasons: first, these were the war years, and second, some of his initiatives met with significant political opposition. His faith was manifested, among other ways, in his D-Day prayer (145ff.).

The titles of chapters four through six are based on the triad of spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13. This was FDR's favorite Bible text, and at each of his six inaugurations, his hand was placed on a Bible opened to this passage. He believed that faith, hope, and charity promised a society in which "greater fairness, opportunity, and equality could be realized" (80). However, Woolverton's impo-

sition of this triad on FDR's political career is forced. For one thing, Woolverton's structure leaves the impression that FDR manifested one of those spiritual virtues during one era of his life, and another during another era, not all three at once. For another, "the greatest of these is charity" (2 Cor. 13:13)—but in the book's structure, FDR's era of charity was followed by his era of faith.

Concluding part two is the seventh chapter, "Prophet, Priest, and President—FDR in World War II." As "prophet," FDR spoke of an inevitable victory that America and the allies would enjoy, though at great cost. As "priest," he was both America's intercessor and her pastor ("priest" in the Episcopalian sense). And as president, he introduced another New Deal to help members of the armed forces find jobs and an education.

Part three is entitled "Interpretation." The eighth chapter explains that FDR, who had a positive view of humanity, could only make sense of the evils of Nazism by adopting Kierkegaard's notion of humanity's brokenness. As previously noted, chapter nine covers FDR's death and burial. The "Afterword" compares FDR to two other presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Herbert Hoover, with respect to their politics and religion. Although I read the afterword with interest, I claim no ability to evaluate Woolverton's view of the relationship between these three politicians.

FDR, the Politician

Without question, FDR served as president at a critical time in America's history—the era of the Great Depression and World War II. None can disagree that FDR found a way to gain the nation's trust, and to hold out hope for America. Indisputably, with his New Deal, he contributed to the modernization of America, put the unemployed back to work, and encouraged advances in agriculture. Americans today take for granted much of what FDR worked to achieve. From an earthly standard, he was a great president.

The reader who did not know what FDR's New Deal entailed will know it by the time he finishes reading the book. How broad its scope! Initially, it provided for the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Public Works Administration, The Tennessee Valley Authority, the Rural

Electrification Association, and the Works Progress Administration (99-105). Later, FDR worked to implement the Home Owners Loan Corporation (intended to keep homeowners from defaulting on their loans), Social Security, capital gains tax, and a host of other attempts to provide better housing, better wages, better working conditions, better health, fair prices, and all that goes with it (117-121). All this would give security, that is, happiness (116)!

The book's title states prominently that FDR was a "Democrat," but the book itself makes rather little of that point. Perhaps Woolverton is suggesting that FDR could accomplish all he did *because* he was a Democrat, and could not have had he been a Republican. But the book does not explicitly defend that thesis; at the most, it assumes it. In fact, the book's title comes from FDR himself. When asked at a press conference regarding the source of his "political philosophy," the president said, "that he was a Christian and a Democrat" (1). The primary emphasis of the book is that FDR was a man of faith, and that his faith influenced his politics.

In two ways, our society has moved far beyond Roosevelt's New Deal. FDR was one of the first to propose the idea of health insurance. The American Medical Association opposed the idea, preferring "the private-entrepreneurial nature of American health care delivery" (119). If the AMA today still prefers that, it certainly has lost the battle; President Obama's "Affordable Care Act" has seen to that.

Also, Roosevelt's New Deal not only included giving *money* to the unemployed but also *work*. Many unemployed, collecting a check from the government, could *earn* their check by helping build and rebuild America's infrastructure. Today, during the COVID-19 crisis, over eighty percent of Americans are under stay-at-home orders, and told "don't work!" (Of course, the stay-at-home order is more nuanced than just a simple "don't work," but the effect for many is simply that: lack of freedom to work.) But don't worry, a government stimulus check is coming! Meanwhile, in Michigan, the roads

But I digress. I am not a politician, and am in little position to evaluate the politics of the book. What about FDR, the Christian? This review examines this question in two headings—his theology, and his practice.

FDR's Theology

Although FDR was not a theologian, he was guided by theological convictions and presuppositions. The book brings to light four distinct tenets to FDR's theology. First is his view of divine providence: God exists, He orders and guides all things including world events, and "people in positions of authority must apply themselves and be in touch with that guidance" (94). Ultimately, FDR was convinced that this God of providence helps those who help themselves; "man's feeble powers" work "with God's great power" (85), and "God was on the side of those who worked in that direction" (the direction of progress, 80-81). This tenet of his faith had an antithetical aspect to it: liberal philosophers and theologians were undermining the idea of the existence of a God who governed all things. FDR rejected their notion.

Second, FDR had a distinct and positive view of eschatology (the end times). God's creative work was continuing and civilization was improving. FDR rejected the hopeless fate of Darwinism, but also rejected a view of a utopia because he saw suffering. Nevertheless, the world was becoming a better place. FDR's was an *earthly* hope.

Third, FDR had a distinct anthropology (view of man). He viewed humanity as essentially good, and consciously dismissed the doctrines of original sin and total depravity (127). He redefined, rather than dismissed, the idea of sin: "Sin for him was the destruction of community and fellowship by self-love exhibited in the denial of security for all by the greed of some" (127).

Not until FDR was confronted with Nazism in the 1940s did he reconsider his view of humanity's essential goodness. Chapter 8, as earlier indicated, treats FDR's reexamination of his anthropology. After Howard Johnson, a young Episcopalian cleric in Washington, DC, introduced the president to Kierkegaard, FDR adopted a view of original sin as something that each human brings on himself, and so must work to overcome (193). He also expanded his view of sin: "Sin was not vice or moral turpitude, a lack of virtue; sin was distrust, betrayal, a lack of faith" (198). But man, essentially good, can work to overcome his sin.

The "Social Gospel" was the fourth main tenet of his faith. This is no mere inference on the reader's part; the term is used explicitly and often throughout the book. Christ left us a legacy that those who

were more privileged should help those who were less privileged. When everyone does what we all can to help each other and to help society, the world becomes a better place. That was FDR's gospel. FDR was a reader and had a personal library. In that library were books authored by Walter Rauschenbusch, the great advocate of the social gospel. These books gave evidence of having been read.

That these tenets of FDR's faith do not reflect orthodox Protestant Christianity, every Reformed believer can sense. In fact, they do not even accord with the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1563). However, Episcopalians today view the Thirty-Nine Articles as having no binding authority, and do not call that document a confession or creed.¹ That a man with such unorthodox views could be a vestryman and senior warden of his parish says something about the Episcopal Church in FDR's day.

FDR's Christianity

For FDR, Christianity was not what one *believed* but what one *did*. He said, "We call what we have been doing 'human security' and 'social justice.' In the last analysis all of those terms can be described by one word; and that is 'Christianity'" (110).

Accordingly, Woolverton says that FDR viewed his New Deal as "the works of righteousness that amounted to Jesus' test of 'true religion'" (98). The chapter on "charity" emphasizes that seeking social justice *is* love. *Love* drove FDR to provide unemployment welfare and to protect the "security" of the citizens of this country. This love was both universal and particular: it manifested itself in a love for all men and love for America. But such love still had enemies, not only abroad (Hitler), but also at home: those who used the nation for their own economic gain (112-113), or who sought to become dictators (such as Senator Huey Long, and General Douglas MacArthur, 135-142), were enemies. Even the love of the social gospel is not, in the end, a love for each and every person head for head.

The book's first part indicates that FDR's view of Christianity was ingrained in him from his youth, and reinforced by his high-schooling at Groton. The book underscores the importance of teaching our chil-

1 See <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/thirty-nine-articles-or-articles-religion>, accessed April 14, 2020.

dren the principles of Scripture from a young age. It makes this point not by indicating that FDR was taught the principles of Scripture, but by revealing that he was taught another gospel that is no gospel (Gal. 1:6-7). Furthermore, FDR read the likes of Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who taught that the gospel accounts laid the foundation for true democracy and that Christianity consisted of moral principles that did not pertain to any one religion (73-75).

Analysis of FDR's Christianity

Not only was FDR's theology suspect, but his view of Christianity was also wrong. His Christ was a teacher and a doer; but FDR did not apparently speak of Christ as the Son of God who took on Himself the human nature in order to atone for sin by dying on the cross. He did not know, apparently, the risen Christ who arose in the body to bestow on us true happiness and to work in us the sure hope, not of the advancement of culture and of a prosperous earthly life, but of sinless perfection with God and the saints in heaven. Whether FDR even *knew* of these doctrines is an unanswered question. If he knew *of* them, he certainly did not confess them.

Regarding faith itself, FDR denied that it was assent to propositions (131). FDR viewed faith as "consent of one person to another" (131, quoting John Rawls). Faith is placed, not in Christ nor in God, but in man. Every child of God agrees that faith is not *merely* the reciting of words or the knowing of certain content. Nevertheless, true faith always does speak, "I believe . . ." (Rom. 10:9-10, 2 Cor. 4:13).

Consequently, when Woolverton speaks of what nurtured FDR's faith, he does not mention the Bible (though FDR did read that), but rather "the tradition of Christian literary expression" (150), referring to any book, person, or speech that reflected Biblical terminology and symbolism.

I found Eleanor Roosevelt's analysis of her husband's faith to be a judgment against him.

I always felt my husband's religion had something to do with his confidence in himself. . . . It was a very simple religion. He believed in God and in his guidance. He felt that human beings were given tasks to perform and with those tasks went the ability and strength to put

them through. He could pray for help and guidance and have faith in his own judgment as a result.²

Perhaps she meant it positively. Were my wife to analyze my faith in these words, I would consider that an indictment.

Some charged that FDR's faith was merely a civil religion, not the true biblical religion. Woolverton devotes a section to defending him against this charge (142-144). The author refers specifically to FDR's D-Day prayer (145), which included petitions for faith in God, in the armed forces, in humanity, and in the cause of the Second World War, and ended with the words "Thy will be done. Amen." But Woolverton's defense is not convincing. FDR used biblical imagery, words, symbolism, and ideas, but he used these in the service of national politics. His religion was civil. This is not to suggest one should not pray for one's nation, or that the president may not do so. The point is rather that Woolverton presents FDR as nothing more than a nominal Christian who manifested his nominal Christianity as president.

Final Thoughts

Although Woolverton puts FDR in a good light in the book, he does not completely ignore FDR's warts. His college classmates had reason to think of him as arrogant (70). He was guilty of sexual sin at least once (82). And he could be ruthless and deceptive in politics (86, 91).

Two bold statements, both made in an attempt to put FDR in broader context, are questionable as to their accuracy. One is Bratt's, who said that President Trump is "the most forthright pagan ever to occupy the Oval Office" (xi). I do not challenge his negative assessment of the faith of our president. I challenge his assertion that past presidents did not equal or surpass him. The second is Woolverton's, who called John Calvin "the godfather of early American theology" (81). To be clear, some early Americans were Calvinists. But it is arguable whether such a thing as "American theology" exists now, or ever did in the past. If one successfully defends that proposition, it is then arguable whether Calvinism ever was that theology. In fact,

2 The quote is from Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), 69-70.

Woolverton seems to view Calvin's theology in a political light, just as he viewed FDR's Christianity.

This reviewer does not dispute that FDR's faith shaped his politics. This reviewer does dispute that FDR's faith was the faith of true Christianity; both in its tenets and in its social gospel presentation, FDR's faith appears to be different from true Christian faith.

The book itself can still be read with profit. Anyone interested in the political history of the United States of America, or in FDR specifically, will read this book with pleasure. Earthly pleasure, that is. But regarding Christianity, be followers of others, not FDR (1 Cor. 4:16, Eph. 5:1, Phil. 3:14, Heb. 13:7, 1 Pet. 2:21). ●

Review Article: A Critique of Sam Waldron's *The Crux of the Free Offer of the Gospel*

Martyn McGeown

The Crux of the Free Offer of the Gospel, by Sam Waldron. Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2019. Pp. 143. \$18.00 (softcover). ISBN: 9781599256023. [Reviewed by Martyn McGeown.]

Introduction

Sam Waldron's book "The Crux of the Free Offer of the Gospel," with endorsements from such evangelical heavyweights as Paul Washer, Joel Beeke, Richard D. Phillips, and Jeffrey Smith, is rare among books on the free offer of the gospel, in that it mentions, although it does not interact with the arguments of, the theologians of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and, therefore, with the friends and sisters of the Protestant Reformed Churches, such as the British Reformed Fellowship. For once, it is nice to be mentioned, since usually in books on this subject we are ignored, although we are the leading theological opponents of the free offer in the modern church.

Waldron identifies three classes of Calvinists. The "first class" includes Joseph Hussey, John Gill, and the Gospel Standard Strict Baptist Churches, whom we would also classify as classic hyper-Calvinists, for they deny duty faith and duty repentance. The "second class" includes Herman Hoeksema, Herman Hanko, and David Engelsma. The "third class" includes the Marrow Men, Thomas Boston, Andrew Fuller, Ned Stonehouse, John Murray, the Majority Report of the Orthodox Reformed Church, and the Christian Reformed Church. Waldron advocates "third class" Calvinism. These types of Calvinists differ on how they answer two basic questions: "Does God command faith and salvation of the non-elect?" and "Does God desire faith and salvation of the non-elect?" The "first class" Calvinist answers "No" to both questions; the "third class" Calvinist answers "Yes" to both

questions; and the “second class” Calvinist answers “Yes” to the first question, but “No” to the second question.

We answer “Yes” to the first question, but “No” to the second question.

Waldron’s main point throughout the book is that if God has commanded something, He must also desire it. Therefore, since God commands all who hear the preaching of the gospel to repent and believe, He must desire the salvation of all hearers of the gospel. For Waldron, therefore, God’s will of command is synonymous with His desire.

To answer Waldron’s argument we need to define our terms, beginning with God’s will.

The Will of God: The Sovereign Determination of His Infinite Mind

I define God’s will as follows: God’s will is the sovereign determination of His infinite mind concerning all things. First, God has determined that the creature exists. “Thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Second, God has determined which creatures exist and how they relate to one another: “[God hath] determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Third, God has determined the end of all creatures so that they serve Him and His glory: “The purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11).

God’s will, which is the sovereign determination of His infinite mind, is not like our wills. We, too, since we are rational, moral creatures, have wills. We determine things for ourselves and for other creatures. Nevertheless, our will, unlike God’s will, is not sovereign and perfectly free, for it is the will of a creature, because our will is subject to God’s will, which is the sovereign determination of God’s infinite mind concerning us and concerning our lives. Paul explained to the philosophers of Athens: “[God hath] determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).

Take a concrete example. God determined that the Greek philosopher Socrates should be born in Athens c. 470 BC (historians do not know the day of his birth, but God knew and determined it with exactitude) and would spend his life in Greece. God also determined that Socrates would die in 399 BC of hemlock poisoning administered by

his own hand at the command of the authorities of Athens. Crucially, God also determined that Socrates would never hear or believe the gospel of Christ, but would perish everlastingly in hell for his sins, as a vessel of wrath fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22). God did not purpose the salvation of Socrates; God did not decree the salvation of Socrates; and God did not will the salvation of Socrates. In other words, Socrates was reprobate.

God never acts involuntarily, but always purposefully. God never acts reluctantly, but what God does, He does willingly. God never acts under compulsion, for no one compels Him to act contrary to His will and no one compels Him to will something or not to will something else. God is sovereign and free to will or not to will according to His own determination and good pleasure. In other words, God is God.

God could have willed not to create the universe, but He willed otherwise. God could have willed not to save a people, but He willed otherwise. God could have willed to save Socrates, but He willed otherwise. God could have seen to it that Socrates heard the gospel, but He willed otherwise. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased," writes the Psalmist, "that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6). Wicked, pagan Nebuchadnezzar confesses this truth concerning God's sovereignty in Daniel 4:35: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

In addition, God's will is in perfect harmony with His being. God's will is eternal, for God decreed all things in eternity. God's will is holy, for in His decrees He seeks Himself and His glory. God's will is just and righteous, for what He determines is always in perfect harmony with His holiness. God's will is wise, for with perfect knowledge, He knows how best to bring glory to His name. God's will is unchangeable, for God never alters His determination concerning anything. Finally, God's will is powerful and irresistible, for no creature can frustrate God's will.

To return to our example of the pagan philosopher, God eternally determined not to save Socrates, that is, He eternally reprobated him. God's will to destroy Socrates in the way of his sins is holy, for God determined that He would best be glorified not through the salvation of Socrates, but through the damnation of Socrates. God's will to de-

stroy Socrates is just, for God Himself is the standard of justice and Socrates, as a sinful man, was not entitled to God's mercy, could not demand it, and did not even desire it. If Socrates expostulated with God: "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Rom. 9:19), the Almighty would respond, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? (Rom. 9:20). God's will to destroy Socrates is unchangeable, powerful, and irresistible, so that no creature in heaven or in earth could prevent the execution of God's decree of reprobation, and therefore the damnation, of that ungodly man. About that ungodly philosopher, we can paraphrase the words of Solomon: "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even Socrates for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). About Socrates we could write, "When Socrates sprang up as the grass, and when all such ungodly, unbelieving, pagan, and idolatrous philosophers flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed forever" (Ps. 92:7). While it is true that God's "tender mercies are over all his works," Socrates, although a creature, was not a "work" of God in the sense of Psalm 145, for all God's works "shall praise [Him]...and all [His] saints shall praise Him, [speaking] of the glory of [His] kingdom and [talking] of [His] glory," which is not true of Socrates, who never praised the true God; instead "the LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked (including Socrates) will he destroy" (Ps. 145:9-11, 20). Socrates was not included in the "world" that God loves and saves (John 3:16). Socrates is not included in the "whole world" whose propitiation and advocate Christ is (1 John 2:1-2). Socrates was not one whose perishing God did not will (2 Peter 3:9), but rather one whose perishing God determined. Socrates is not among the "all men" whom God wills to be saved and for whom Christ made a ransom (1 Tim. 2:4-5), something that even Waldron would concede, because with respect to John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4-5, and 2 Peter 3:9 he writes, "I actually do not regard any of these passages as proof texts for the Free Offer" (132).

In addition, had Socrates visited Jerusalem in the fourth century BC and met some of God's children there (which, of course, God never decreed that Socrates, the bounds of whose habitation God had determined, should do), and if he had come across a copy of the Old Testament Scriptures, he would have been duty-bound to believe in the

true God, to serve Him, and to believe in the promise of the coming Messiah. Although Socrates was under obligation to turn from sin and believe in the true God, according to the testimony of Romans 1 (where we learn that Socrates and men like him have enough knowledge of the true God to be without excuse, but insufficient knowledge to be saved), God determined that Socrates would live and die in pagan darkness under His wrath and curse.

It would, therefore, be utter madness to suggest that God desired the salvation of Socrates. And if God did not desire the salvation of Socrates or of the multitudes that lived in the same era and region as Socrates, He does not desire the salvation of all men.

Therefore, whether man lives or dies, whether he is happy or miserable, whether he is wicked or good, whether he is elect or reprobate, whether he believes or disbelieves, and whether he repents or remains impenitent, he always does God's will. He can never escape God's will. In this sense, we can say that even the devils do God's will. They are in His hand, and they are subject to His will. The Heidelberg Catechism refers to this in its treatment of providence: "All creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move" (A 28). The Belgic Confession makes a similar statement in Article 11: "He rules and governs [all creatures] according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment... Nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father." Jesus applies this to something as simple as a sparrow or the hair of our head: they do not fall to the ground without the will of God, or to state it positively, they fall to the ground according to God's will (Matt. 10:29-31).

The Will of God: The Duty of Man

What we have described so far is God's will of decree or His decretive will. Waldron correctly identifies this will: "The decretive will tells us what God will do" (43). A better explanation, however, is, that the decretive will tells what God has determined to do or has determined to be done. Synonyms of God's decretive will are His counsel and His good pleasure.

But there is something else that the Bible calls God's "will." It is not what God has determined to do or what God has determined to do with His creatures, but it is what God has commanded His crea-

tures (especially human beings) to do. The Bible calls what God has commanded us to do His “will.” Christ says, for example, in Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” And the Heidelberg Catechism encourages us to ask, “Grant that we . . . may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good” (A. 124). This will—or this aspect of God’s will—is His will of command or His preceptive will, the will of God’s precept, which must be contrasted with His will of decree or decretive will. Since the Catechism refers to our “obeying” that will of God, the reference is not to God’s decree, but to His command. God’s will of command is expressed fully in the Law.

God’s will for the creature is fulfilled whether he obeys God or not. If God (in His decretive will) has determined the everlasting destruction of a man, he will not obey God’s will (His preceptive will). He cannot be subject to God’s law (Rom. 8:7-8), which inability is the sinner’s own fault. Nevertheless, God’s will is not thwarted, for a disobedient, unbelieving, impenitent man is destroyed in the way of his sins and perishes justly for his iniquity. When a man hears the Law, it is not his business to ask, “What has God determined concerning me in His eternal counsel. Should I obey or not?” Instead, that man should ask, “What does God *command me to do*?” and then he should do it. Because he does not do it, that man is condemned. Similarly, when a man hears the gospel with the call, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31), he must not ask, “What is God’s eternal determination concerning me: am I elect or reprobate?” Instead, he must believe. He must lay hold of Jesus Christ, forsaking his sins, and trust only in the crucified and resurrected Saviour. When he does not believe, he is damned, deservedly so.

So far I have used the example of Socrates (c. 470-399 BC), the ungodly philosopher who lived and died without hearing the gospel. I used him to illustrate God’s decree of reprobation. The Canons of Dordt explain reprobation: “Not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God; whom God . . . hath decreed to leave in the common misery . . . and not to bestow upon them saving faith . . . and at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever” (Canons 1.15).

However, Socrates never heard the gospel. Therefore, I offer a second example, one of Christ's disciples, Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot can never say that he never heard the gospel, for he was one of the twelve disciples, and therefore very close to Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16). Judas heard many of the sermons of Jesus Christ, such as His parables and the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25). Judas witnessed many of Christ's miracles. Judas was even sent forth with the other disciples to teach, preach, heal, and cast out devils (Matt. 10:7-8). Yet Judas was reprobate: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). "Ye are clean, but not all" (John 13:10). "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" (John 13:18). "None of them is lost, save the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled" (John 17:12).

What we have said of Socrates applies equally to Judas. God eternally determined not to save Judas, but to reject him in His sovereign decree of reprobation. But since reprobation must serve election, God determined that Judas should be the human instrument by which Jesus was delivered to His enemies. Thus, wicked, perfidious, treacherous Judas served the salvation of the church, unwillingly, unconsciously, and unwittingly. Peter explained this in Acts 1:16: "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." Later the church prays even more emphatically, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28). The actions of Judas were preordained or predetermined—even willed—in God's eternal decree. Yet Judas does not escape responsibility or accountability in the least: he acted most willingly, wickedly, and greedily. Covetousness motivated him, not a desire to fulfil God's decree.

Judas heard the gospel, but God had eternally decreed that Judas should not be saved. Judas heard the gospel, but God had determined to harden Judas through the gospel (Rom. 9:18; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). What, then, was God's will concerning Judas and the gospel? And what, then, is God's will with respect to every reprobate sinner who hears

the gospel? That is the issue that divides us from advocates of the Free Offer, such as Sam Waldron; and hyper-Calvinists, such as the Gospel Standard Strict Baptist Churches.

According to God's will of decree or His decretive will, Judas, although he should hear the gospel, should not believe it, for God decreed not to give him faith. According to God's will of command or His preceptive will, Judas was duty-bound to believe the gospel. God commanded—required and demanded—of Judas that he should love, honor, and obey Jesus Christ. God commanded—required and demanded—of Judas that he should believe in Jesus Christ (John 5:23), that is, that he should know Him, trust in Him, and appropriate Him for salvation. God commanded—required and demanded—of Judas that he should turn from his sins in the true sorrow of repentance to live a new and godly life. God commanded—required and demanded—of Judas (although not for salvation) that he should keep the law of the ten commandments perfectly. And God's command—requirement and demand—was so serious that God damned Judas to everlasting punishment in hell because Judas did not love, honor, and obey Jesus Christ. God commanded—required and demanded—this of Judas although God had determined never to save Judas, although God never loved Judas, but always hated him, and although Christ did not make atonement for Judas' sins, so that for Judas forgiveness of sins, justification, and everlasting life were impossible.

Judas is an unusual case, of course, because we *know* that he was reprobate. Such is not true with the congregations in which we hear the gospel today. An unbelieving visitor might be reprobate, but we cannot tell. A member, one currently in good standing, might be a hypocrite and a reprobate, but we cannot tell. Moreover, charity forbids us even to *suspect* a fellow church member. We may not say or even think, "I wonder if he is truly a child of God. Maybe he is reprobate." The Canons of Dort forbid us to speak and think thus: "With respect to those who make an external profession of faith and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner" (Canons 3/4.15).

We summarize. God's will, sometimes called His "will of decree," is the determination of His infinite mind concerning all things. God's will of decree *always happens*. No creature can stop God's will of decree from being fulfilled. Whatever happens in history is the out-

working in time of God's eternal will of decree. In addition, there is God's will of command. God commands the creature to do certain things: He commands us to love Him and our neighbors. He commands us to believe in Jesus Christ and to repent of our sins. God's will of command is *rarely obeyed*: no wicked, unbelieving person performs it; Satan and his demons disobey it; and even believers have only a small beginning of obedience to it. Only Christ and the angels—and the saints in glory—perfectly obey God's will of command.

So far Waldron agrees, although his presentation of reprobation is considerably softer than mine.

The Will of God: What God Desires or Wants

Waldron introduces a third idea: there is God's will of decree, God's will of command, and God's will of *desire*. Waldron argues that God did not decree to save the reprobate (we agree against the Arminians), and that God commands the reprobate to repent and believe the gospel (we agree against the hyper-Calvinists), and that, therefore, God desires to save the reprobate (we disagree against Waldron and other advocates of the free offer). Waldron writes, "God commands, wills, and desires, the salvation of all who hear the gospel. On the other hand, ... God has not decreed, or predestined, or willed, the salvation of all who hear the gospel" (42). "God earnestly desires the salvation of every man who hears the gospel. He sends them the gospel—with the desire, intention, and will—that they might be saved by it" (100). "God genuinely and sincerely desires the salvation of all those to whom we are preaching" (142). Citations from Waldron could be multiplied.

The problem with Waldron's contention is his introduction of a facet of the will that Scripture does not reveal God to have. God decrees or determines all things (His will of decree or decretive will). God commands His creatures to do certain things (His will of command or perceptive will). These two facts are clearly revealed in Scripture as God's will, but where does the Bible speak of God *desiring* something and especially of desiring something *that does not occur*?

In human beings a desire expresses an emotional attachment to something: if I desire something, but I do not have it, then I am sad, disappointed or frustrated, and must learn contentment with God's

will not to grant me my desire. If I desire something and do possess it, then I am happy, content or satisfied, but I must be careful not to have inordinate or even sinful desires, which the Bible calls lusts. If a human being has desires, he must find a way to fulfil his desires or he must ask someone—such as God—to fulfil his desires: “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4).

But we cannot speak thus of God. God is not disappointed, sad, or frustrated if He does not possess what He desires. God does not need to learn contentment to cope with unfulfilled and unsatisfied longings. God does not have to ask someone to fulfil His desires, for He is the Almighty. A god with unfulfilled desires is not the perfectly wise God of Scripture who knows exactly what to do in order to achieve His goal. What God desires, He decrees. What God does not desire, God does not decree. It really is that simple.

Why, then, does God *command* something that He has not decreed? Why did God command Adam not to eat the forbidden fruit, when He had determined that Adam should fall? Why did God command reprobate Cain to love his brother, when He had determined that Abel should die at his brother’s hand? Why did God command Joseph’s brothers to love him, when He had determined to save Israel by means of Joseph’s enslavement and future exaltation in Egypt? Why did God command reprobate Pharaoh to let Israel go and then harden his heart so that he did not let them go, since God had determined to deliver Israel through the ten plagues, the destruction of Egypt, and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart? We could multiply biblical examples. And why does God command every reprobate person who hears the gospel to repent and believe, when He has determined *not* to give them saving faith and repentance?

Waldron’s answer, which is the answer of all advocates of the free offer, is that God did not decree it, but that God commands it, and therefore God *desires* it—He earnestly, sincerely, and passionately desires it. Or to put it differently, He *wants* it, although He knows that He can never have it because He has made it impossible for it to happen. Instead of electing the reprobate, He rejected them; instead of redeeming the reprobate, He excluded them from Christ’s satisfaction; instead of regenerating the reprobate, He hardened them in their

sins—and yet we are supposed to believe that when God sends the gospel to (some of) the reprobate He *wants* them to repent, believe, and to be saved.

The answer is simply this: when God commands, He does not express His desires, but He simply expresses what is *the duty of man*. Because God is good, what He commands man to do is good. Because the law is the expression of the holiness and righteousness of God, the law is good (Rom. 7:12). Therefore, God commands man to keep His law because His law is the good standard according to which a man must live. The same thing applies to faith and repentance: faith and repentance are pleasing to God; therefore, a man should repent and believe. There really are only three possibilities: either faith and repentance are *pleasing* to God, or faith and repentance are *displeasing* to God, or God is *indifferent* with respect to faith and repentance. Only the first option is the truth: God is pleased with faith and repentance. The holiness and justice of God demand that the reprobate sinner repent and believe the gospel when he is confronted with the message of Christ crucified. But the gospel simply tells man what his duty is: it does not tell him whether God is pleased to save him or not; it is not in itself an expression of grace to a man; and it does not express God's desire with respect to a man.

This is the teaching of the Canons of Dordt, which do not teach the free offer of the gospel, while at the same time they reject hyper-Calvinism. “Men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified” (Canons 1.3). “The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not” (Canons 1.4). “The promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be published” (Canons 2.5). “God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him” (Canons 3/4.8).

In appealing to the last quotation of Dordt, Waldron uses the Schaff translation: “God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him, namely, that all who are

called *should comply with the invitation*.”¹ The Latin is “*Serio enim et verissime ostendit Deus verbo suo, quid sibi gratum sit, nimirum, ut vocati ad se veniant.*” One does not need to be a Latin scholar to see that “invitation” is not in the text. The Latin verbal form *veniant* comes from *venire*, which is the verb “to come.” (Readers who have studied French or Spanish will recognise that *venir* is the verb “to come” in those languages. Other readers may be familiar with Julius Caesar’s famous dictum, “*Veni, vidi, vici,*” which translates as, “I came, I saw, I conquered”). Homer Hoeksema, commenting on the Schaff translation, writes:

There is the most glaring inaccuracy of the translation, “... should comply with the invitation.” It is difficult to understand how the translators could ever arrive at such a rendering, except upon the basis that they deliberately attempted to insert their own view into the Canons and had themselves already lost the spirit of Dordrecht. For certainly the article in the original breathes nothing of an “invitation.” Both the Dutch and the Christian Reformed revision of the English render the Latin literally and accurately by “... should come unto him.” On the other hand, it is rather ironic that the Christian Reformed Church, which in 1924 principally adopted the Arminian view in their infamous First Point of Common Grace, should make this revision, and thus eliminate from our creeds any mention of any “invitation.”²

The difference should be glaringly obvious. The Bible never uses the word “invitation.” The confessions never use the word “invitation.” The Authorized Version of the Bible uses the verb “invite” in only three Old Testament passages, 1 Samuel 9:24; 2 Samuel 13:23; and Esther 5:12, but in each of those places the underlying verb is “call,” and the person inviting is not God. While some modern Bible versions use the verb “invite,” the biblical and creedal term is “call.” Waldron understands the difference: “‘Offer’ contains in it the notion of a proposal presented to someone which the one presenting it desires for the person to accept” (10). “The obligation savingly to believe the

1 Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, repr. 2007), 3: 565-66.

2 Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 485.

gospel is to be construed not simply as an authoritative demand, but as a gracious offer or invitation” (52).

While in English an “offer” or an “invitation” certainly implies graciousness on the part of the one making the offer or giving the invitation, the same is not true for the call of the gospel. That should be obvious, for an offer or invitation does not come with a *threat* to the one who does not come, but the call of the gospel certainly does: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not *shall be damned*” (Mark 16:15-16).

An invitation is not a subpoena!

So what must a person conclude when he hears the gospel? He must conclude this: Jesus Christ is a wonderful Savior and God commands me to believe in Him. What incentive does a person have? God promises eternal life to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. What warning does a person receive? If I do not believe, I will be damned—and justly. What should an unbeliever conclude about God’s disposition toward him: does God love him, desire his salvation, or want him to believe? An unbeliever can conclude nothing of the sort: he concludes only what his duty is, not what God has determined concerning him. An unbeliever can know this, however: faith and repentance are pleasing to God, while unbelief and impenitence, which are sins, are displeasing to God. Therefore, he should, nay, must, believe. And the preacher should unhesitatingly and unashamedly urge him to believe.

The Bible goes no further than that. The Bible need go no further than that. The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains this very succinctly: “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man” (A. 3). The Scriptures do not teach what desires God may or may not have, for the Bible does not use those terms. The Bible simply states what God has decreed to do, some of which He has revealed, and what God commands us to do.

Waldron’s Appeal to John 5:34

Waldron devotes a whole chapter to one text, one to which to my knowledge no other advocate of the free offer has appealed, namely,

John 5:34: “But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved.” To understand this text, we first survey the context.

At the beginning of John 5 Jesus heals an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, which led to accusations of Sabbath-breaking against Him. Jesus does not defend His actions by categorizing His miracle an act of mercy, which He did on other occasions, but He gives a detailed explanation of His relationship to the Father. Since the Father is always working, Jesus works too, even on the Sabbath (v. 17). In brief, Jesus is the Son of the Father, which is a relationship of intimate love and affection (v. 20); He shares life with the Father (v. 26); and He enjoys open and free communication with the Father (vv. 19-20). His relationship with the Father is a relationship of communion and fellowship, therefore. Jesus also performs the works of the Father, such as quickening the dead (v. 21) and judging all men (v. 22), and Jesus is equal in glory and honor with the Father (v. 23).

Although as the Son of God Jesus does not need witnesses, He provides four witnesses to leave the Jews without excuse. The first witness is the Father, who sent Jesus into the world (vv. 30-32, 37). The second witness is John the Baptist, who as a burning and shining light testified of Jesus (vv. 33-35). The third witness is the miracles that Jesus performed (v. 36), which are the works that the Father sent Him to do (v. 36). The fourth, and final, witness is the Scriptures, which testify of Jesus and which the Jews must search, for in them they will find eternal life (vv. 39, 45-47). In connection with that fourfold testimony Jesus says, “These things I say, that ye might be saved” (v. 34).

Waldron argues a number of points from verse 34. First, the audience is unbelieving, which we grant: most, if not all, of the people in the audience were unbelievers, at least with respect to Jesus as the Messiah. They were religious Jews, not atheists. Nevertheless, they were Jews hostile to Jesus’ claims to be the Messiah, and they even wanted to kill Him (v. 18). Second, the audience consisted of people who were finally lost, that is, reprobates. However, Waldron cannot prove that every hearer was reprobate, nor do we claim to be able to prove that any hearer was elect, nor is such proof necessary. We can agree that, with every public discourse in the gospel accounts, the audience was mixed. Third, Christ’s purpose in preaching was the

salvation of His audience: “that ye might be saved,” where the word “that” expresses purpose and could be rendered “so that.” We agree that the primary purpose of Christ’s preaching and teaching ministry was salvation (Luke 9:56; 19:10; John 12:47). Nevertheless, that fact does not preclude a secondary purpose, which is the hardening of some. No preacher says to his audience, “I preach these things to you that you might be hardened,” and neither did Christ, although Christ recognized God’s sovereignty in His preaching, as do we. Ultimately, of course, God’s purpose in preaching was the glory of His Father. Indeed, Christ can say, “These things I say, that ye might be saved,” without implying that His purpose was the salvation of *every* hearer in the audience. Jesus does not say, “That every one of you might be saved,” but simply makes a general statement concerning His purpose in preaching. Fourth, since Jesus is the Son of God, His purpose (“that ye might be saved”) is God’s purpose; therefore, God purposed the salvation of Jesus’ audience, or Jesus’ words in John 5:34 are the expression of the will of God. We do not object to Waldron’s contention here, for certainly as the Son of God Christ expresses God’s purpose in the preaching, although we disagree that there is expressed here a desire for the salvation of all the hearers. Waldron concludes wrongly that, since Christ’s purpose, which is God’s purpose, in the preaching of the gospel is the salvation of the hearers, God must desire the salvation of the hearers—all the hearers—in John 5:34.

We disagree with Waldron on that last point. Christ does not speak of any desire or will—either His own desire or will or God’s desire or will—but only of His purpose. Therefore, we must not speak of the will of God’s precept, and certainly not of His desire, but of God’s will of *decree*, which is what He has purposed to do: God has purposed in Christ’s preaching the salvation of Christ’s hearers, although not all of Christ’s hearers. If Waldron wants to make application to the will of God’s precept, he must conclude that God commanded Christ’s hearers to believe and thus to be saved, but Waldron cannot prove that Christ *desired* the salvation of all His hearers, or that God’s desire was unfulfilled or thwarted. In fact, God *did* save Christ’s hearers—not all of them, of course—for many Jews who heard Christ’s preaching were saved, either on that day or at a later day, such as on the Day of Pentecost or during the days of the apostles after Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 2:41, 47; Acts 6:7).

Final Arguments: Different Kinds of Love

While Waldron argues for the free offer in other ways, many of his arguments have been answered elsewhere, for example in the *British Reformed Journal*. We finish this critique by focusing on a cluster of arguments concerning the love of God. Waldron posits various kinds of love in God: the Almighty supposedly loves the elect in a certain sense, but He also loves the reprobate in a different sense, although at the same time God hates the reprobate. Or to put it differently, God loves and hates the reprobate, although He does not love and hate the elect. Waldron concedes that God hates the reprobate, but he also contends that “both God’s love for sinners and hatred for sinners must be carefully qualified” (40), adding that we should neither preach that God hates sinners “without careful qualification,” nor that we should preach that God loves sinners “without careful qualification” (40). For example, “God does not so love [sinners] as to cease demanding their repentance” (40). Moreover, writes Waldron, “you cannot preach a God who has nothing but hatred for the non-elect and not produce a people who tend to be like him” (40). Finally in this connection, Waldron contends that, if you teach that the preacher ought to desire the salvation of all his hearers, but you also teach that God does not desire the salvation of all, “the implication of this is that we are more loving and kind-hearted than God” (33).

We examine these arguments in turn.

First, the two kinds of love in God that Waldron posits are His love of benevolence and His love of complacency. We could add God’s love of beneficence. God’s love of benevolence is His goodwill: He wills (Latin: *volentia*) well (*bene*) for the objects of His love. God’s love of beneficence is His love according to which He does something good for the objects of His love: He does (Latin: *ficus*) well (*bene*) for His beloved. God’s love of complacency is the delight that He has in the objects of His love: He is pleased (Latin: *placere*) with (Latin: *com*) His beloved. While theologians use these distinctions, they are theological, not biblical, distinctions. Waldron argues that a father might have benevolence for the homeless people to whom he preaches in a mission—he wills their welfare and desires their salvation, although their sins and their filthy condition disgust him—but he has a love of complacency and delight in his own daughter (39). While we grant that with respect to man, Waldron does not prove any love for the

reprobate *from Scripture*. The Bible does not teach that God loves the reprobate with the love of benevolence, while He withholds from them the love of beneficence or complacency. The Bible simply teaches that God does not love, but hates, the reprobate. Besides that, we are not God: we do not measure God by ourselves (Ps. 50:21). Indeed, Herman Bavinck, although an advocate of common grace, writes,

Now it is indeed possible to speak of God's love to creatures or people in general (the love of benevolence), but for this the Scripture mostly uses the word "goodness," and as a rule speaks of God's love, like his grace, only in relation to his chosen people or church (the love of friendship).³

Therefore, God has goodwill (benevolence) for, does good (beneficence) for, and delights in (complacency) His elect only. God has no desire for the salvation of the reprobate; God does nothing for the salvation of the reprobate or even for the temporal welfare of the reprobate, and even when He gives them good gifts, He does not bless them. The Bible does not categorize gifts such as food, shelter, good health, riches and long life as blessings, but as snares (Ps. 73:18). Finally, God does not delight in the reprobate, but He loathes them.

Second, the idea that a preacher who desires the salvation of all his hearers is more loving and kind-hearted than God if God does not also desire the salvation of all hearers is absurd. God's love, mercy or, grace is not measured by the number of its objects: when God loved Noah and his family (eight people), but hated and destroyed the rest of humanity, was God less loving and kind-hearted than Noah who presumably desired the salvation of his neighbors? God's love is infinite. If God loved no one outside of Himself, His love would not be one whit less infinite: the Father loves the Son in the Holy Spirit within the Godhead with infinite love. If God loved only one man, (and remember that He loves an innumerable throng of men), His love directed toward that one man would be infinitely greater than the love that that one man could show his wife, his three children, his siblings,

3 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2 *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 215.

his parents, his grandparents, and all his neighbors. The infinity of God's love is seen in the greatness of the gift that God bestowed upon His people, the greatness of that salvation, and the cost of that salvation. Our wishing something good for our neighbors—even if we earnestly desire their salvation, and even if a preacher preaches with that desire (Acts 26:29; Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1)—is *nothing* in comparison to God's actually giving us salvation. While Paul might desire the salvation of all of his Jewish brethren, he understood that God had not purposed it, and, therefore, that God did not desire it. As Job writes, "What his soul desireth, even that [God] doeth" (Job 23:12). Paul was content to submit his desires to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. Our desires are not the measure of God's desires.

Finally, does "hard shell" Calvinism produce hateful people, that is, people with a "hard, compassionless view of the lost" (40)? Undoubtedly, there are people who twist the truth in that manner. There are some Calvinists who, shame on them, almost delight in the damnation of their fellow creatures. Nevertheless, Paul, who taught double predestination, was not such a "hard shell" Calvinist: he had great zeal for the salvation of lost sinners, which explains his life and ministry: he was willing to endure affliction for the salvation of souls, and the love of Christ constrained him (2 Cor. 5:14). Finally, the Canons of Dort, the gold standard of Calvinism, forbid such an attitude toward the lost and perishing "As to others, who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not as if they were. But we are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ" (Canons 3/4.15).

We do not need the free offer to motivate us to preach. We preach and pray with the earnest desire that people be saved. We know that it is not God's purpose to save everyone, but since we do not know God's purpose in individual cases, we preach and pray, trusting that God will perform His good pleasure. Since God is God, all His purposes will be fulfilled. For the believer, the pillow of God's sovereignty should be the best place to rest his weary head. For the preacher, the truth that God has an elect people who will be saved only through the preaching of the gospel is motivation enough to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. ●

Book Reviews

Broken Pieces and the God Who Mends Them: Schizophrenia Through a Mother's Eyes, by Simonetta Carr. Forward by Michael Horton. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019. Pp. 359. \$15.99 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1629953960. [Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.]

One of the best commendations I can think of giving a book is that I would like to meet its author. This is the case for *Broken Pieces*, a book written by a Christian mother about her experience of dealing with her son's affliction we call schizophrenia. The heartbreaking story is written by a godly mother of eight children who does not hide the pain of the family or the sin that is always involved in such struggles. But it is written with the grace that does not say everything that could be said, and yet says enough to make the reader feel the family's pain and shame and cry with their tears. The openness and humility of the author makes one say, "This is the kind of person that would make a good friend." The author writes in such a way that you would believe her to be the kind of person most people would like to meet.

Simonetta Carr is also the award-winning author of many—mostly children's—books. She was an elementary school teach-

er, has home-schooled her own children, writes for magazines, and translates works to and from Italian, her native tongue. She is a member of a United Reformed Church in San Diego, California.

Broken Pieces and the God Who Mends Them is divided into two parts. Part one is "Through the Unknown: Jonathan's Journey." This portion of the book (almost 200 pages) is the poignant chronicling of the mother's intense involvement in her son Jonathan's gradual decline into mental and spiritual chaos, a chaos that included the entire family. Jonathan, the fifth of eight children, was quite gifted intellectually, and developed like most children. In his late teens he began his struggle with what is often described as the most serious mental problem anyone can experience and one of the most difficult to address. As the problem manifested itself, the parents also learned that their son was using marijuana, prompting the question whether the drug may

have precipitated the affliction or was his way of trying to medicate himself for the curious mental and spiritual struggles that he felt descending upon him. Mrs. Carr's journal of her family life enabled her to write an almost day by day account of the parents' personal interactions with their son, their seeking professional help, and their wise consultation and communication with their pastor and elders.

What made this first part of the book so compelling is that the reader (especially a Christian parent, school-teacher, or elder) cannot help but be hopeful with the family at every sign of improvement, and thus also feel the devastation the parents must have felt at each downturn or disaster, especially when they were helpless to prevent what each night they dreaded might befall them the next day. As the crises increased in frequency and intensity, the Carr family sought all the help they knew to seek, spiritually, medically, and psychologically. Jonathan was prescribed medications. He was frequently hospitalized and then sent home without remedy. He was put under Christian discipline by his church, which was eventually lifted when he repented. His

mother—the book's sub-title is *Through A Mother's Eyes*—tells the dramatic and sad story that needs no embellishment. The book is hard to put down.

The end of the story is the death—the tragic, unexpected, sin-caused death—of her son for whom she had given so much of her life.

The second half of the book is called "Love and Courage: Support for Helpers" and is aimed at providing help for others in similar situations. The chapter headings themselves give good understanding not only of Carr's views of schizophrenia but of her wise approach as a parent: "The Unknown and Unexplainable," "The Medical Dilemma," "All in the Family," "Don't Burn Out," "Communicating the Gospel," and more.

Carr introduces the book with the caveat that it is not a "how-to book" (13), but it serves as such on so many levels. Even her further caveat—"it might very well be a 'how-not-to' book"—calls attention to their admitted mistakes in addressing their son's affliction, but mistakes can be as instructive as positive teaching, and they were. It may not be a manual for diagnosis and treatment of schizophrenia, but

manuals are not so easy to digest, and this story-teller writes in such a way that the lessons are learned inductively. Even the first half of the book, purportedly ‘only’ the story, is full of good instruction: the therapeutic value of work, the importance of one’s church family, the difference between proper and improper guilt, and especially the vital labor of bringing the Word of God to a son, even when he becomes an adult.

The book breathes of biblical wisdom—explicit biblical wisdom. Carr quotes the Reformed confessions, both the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity, and appeals to the Heidelberg Catechism to drive home the importance of constancy in prayer. She points to the history of John Newton helping his friend, the poet William Cowper, whose mental and spiritual suffer-

ing may well have led him to suicide but for the help of Newton. The chapter on “Communicating the Gospel” (289-309) was especially helpful.

Broken Pieces is a must read for pastors. The book is good counsel for anyone dealing with a family member who suffers afflictions, and not only schizophrenia. If anyone thinks simplistically about mental problems, *Broken Pieces* will make them careful with their judgments. Any member of a church will grow in their sympathy for families who struggle with a family member’s mental illness.

Some problems cannot be remedied. Some mental illnesses endure, become worse, and never disappear. Sometimes God does not mend the broken pieces until glory. That’s a good lesson for all Christians to learn. ●

Unfolding Covenant History: An Exposition of the Old Testament, Volume 6: From Samuel to Solomon, by David J. Engelsma. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020. Pp. 197. \$28.95 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1944555634. [Reviewed by H. David Schuringa.]

Unfolding Covenant History is a multi-volume commentary on the Old Testament initiated by Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema (volumes 1-4), and taken up by

Prof. David J. Engelsma. Following his completion of volume 5 on the period of the Judges, is now released volume 6, covering Samuel through Solomon.

To get a good whiff of the pleasant aroma in these volumes, one would do well to reread the introduction to the series in Volume 1 where we learn that OT history is not on a parallel track with world history. Rather, it is the very center of history, with church history and general or world history as orbiting outer rings in a meaningful, organic relationship (xix). Such a perspective makes all the difference in the world, and is the only way correctly to understand history in all three dimensions and rightly divide the truth of sacred history that is the basis for all time from beginning to end.

Engelsma displays such as he ushers us forward in the unfolding of covenant history to understand what is going on in Scripture, the church and the world—yesterday, today and tomorrow. His commentary is unique in that instead of a verse-by-verse exposition, he gifts us with an enlightening episode-by-episode interpretation of this period of salvation history.

But be forewarned. Engelsma's exposition has a way to make you squirm in your seat and shout hallelujah! at the same time. Never has this reviewer come across a commentary quite like this. And it has arrived in the

nick of time.

What has happened is, with no small help from German Higher Criticism, the Old Testament in the hands of "scholars" has lost its cohesiveness. Their mishandling of the text as a somewhat randomly selected and assembled collection of ancient, errant documents comes up with contradictory messages, if any at all, for life today.

And even where maintaining a measure of literary cohesiveness is in vogue, the historicity of the events portrayed is all but denied. And to suggest at academic venues that the "Hebrew Scriptures" (N.B. the nomenclature) have anything to say about Jesus and His church in the NT, well, is simply rejected out of hand with a polite but dismissive, degree-studded chuckle.

So, thanks to the "experts," what is left behind on their littered and dusty trail for the church is a book of sometimes inspiring fairytales couched in creative poetry from which one might possibly strain some moral lessons, since this is still somehow the Word of God. But such is a mirage since there is no true point of reference for interpreting the accounts that had been "cobbled" together. Besides, the often dubi-

ous lives of its human characters appear less than edifying even as negative examples, unless one cherry-picks Sunday School stories from David and Goliath, Ruth and Boaz or Daniel in the lion's den.

It comes as no surprise, then, that pastors busy at their workbenches, researching for their sermons, can crack open a dozen commentaries and still come up empty. And parishioners are left scratching their heads when seeking to study the Word for themselves with "helps" from the bargain bins.

In this sixth volume of a marvelous set in the making, Prof. David J. Engelsma manages as a systematic theologian with superb exegetical skills to give the Old Testament (Samuel to Solomon) back to the church in all its richness and fullness.

Engelsma operates on the basis of the sound presupposition that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for instruction and training in righteousness. That means the Bible from Genesis to Revelation was penned ultimately by one author, the Holy Spirit. So we know that everything in God's Word is true. He mines the gold of the text itself, his headlamp the system of doctrine revealed in all

of Scripture. And in the treasure chest of every passage he discovers Jesus Christ, the Messiah, about whom, and from whom, the unfolding history of the covenant sounds a certain trumpet for the army of God.

Keeping safe distance from "moralism," Engelsma is generous with practical application for believers and the church today. In fact, his exegesis pulsates with relevancy and makes the Bible come alive. Or rather, it shows how Scripture is alive and pertinent for our salvation, the renewing of our minds, and living our daily lives.

What is his basic hermeneutical method?

The chief tools the eminent theologian employs are the covenant and the kingdom (10, 52, 61, etc.). The former he defines as the relationship of God's sovereign friendship with His own, and the latter as the rule of that Covenant Friend for His people in all of their lives. So, it is a relationship of enormous and eternal proportions, generating within the bride of Christ deep esteem overflowing with awe, gratitude, and heartfelt love.

With this pair of implements in hand, there is nothing in the stories to paper-over, be it Samu-

el’s failure to confront his wicked sons, Israel’s sinful desire for a reprobate king, or even David’s fiascos oozing with sorry aftermath. Truth is, the professor shakes us up as he shows from his exposition how God punishes the reprobate and chastises the elect—sometimes both looking similar, but with very different ends from the sovereign point of view (135-6, etc.).

For the sheep have a Friend who would die for them. So while these dark times stand out as grave warnings for the flock, the Good News shines so brightly that you have to squint as the Good Shepherd speaks His faithful Word through the prophet Samuel, strong-arms Israel into longing for a faithful king, and establishes the throne forever for the Son of David. Yes, through a shepherd-boy named, David,

saved-sinner, whom God molds after His own heart and through whose illegitimate offspring springs forth a victorious, anticipatory Solomonic Golden Age for the Seed of the Woman—all for the glory of God’s great name (161, 170, 188).

Indeed, astounding, incomprehensible, amazing grace. One cannot even begin to figure it out, until he looks in the mirror.

Recommendation: Are you planning to study, teach or preach from this particular portion in the history of the unfolding covenant? You would do well to begin by nosing around in Engelsma’s competent, constructive, yet concise coverage of these historic, transformational events. Here proclaims the blessed gospel—our sovereign God in Christ on the way to Bethlehem and Golgotha.



Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly, by Whitney G. Gamble. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018. Pp. xvi + 187. \$40.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1601786142. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This outstanding study of antinomianism, or antinomism, examines the struggle against the heresy at the Westminster Assembly. It demonstrates how

important this struggle was for the orthodox confession especially of justification in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), Chapter 11. Also Chapter 19, “Of

the Law of God,” expresses Presbyterian orthodoxy in deliberate condemnation of antinomianism: “The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof...”; “although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them...as a rule of life,” etc.

“Concern over antinomianism...[was] the assembly’s ‘hot debate,’ ‘great question,’ and ‘great scruple’” (87). “If not for the antinomian controversy and subsequent weeks of sophisticated theological debates in 1643, it is doubtful whether the confession would have been so full and clear” (133). The book brings to “light for the first time the significance of antinomianism for the assembly’s debates, doctrine, and documents” (155).

The study of the controversy at Westminster over antinomianism is possible because of the recent discovery of “volumes of the assembly’s minutes that had been lost for centuries” (xiii).

Although the subject of the book is the controversy of Reformed orthodoxy with antinomianism in Great Britain in the early seventeenth century, the book sheds light on the struggle of

Christian orthodoxy with antinomianism everywhere at all times. Augustus M. Toplady has written that “Christ is always crucified between two thieves: Arminianism and Antinomianism.” This light begins with enlightenment as to what the heresy is. Like the charge of hyper-Calvinism regarding the call of the gospel, today the charge of antinomianism has become a handy epithet with which to blacken any rejection of the law in the work of salvation, including a teaching of the law that corrupts the gospel of salvation by grace. “Antinomianism” is not a theological wax-nose. Whitney begins with a general description of the false doctrine: “Antinomians can be described as those who deny in some way the ongoing relevance of some part or even the whole of the moral law” (1).

Quoting the orthodox theologians of the time and the reports of the various committees, Whitney establishes that, more precisely, antinomianism is the denial that the law of God is the authoritative rule, or guide, of the holy, thankful life of the justified child of God. A vigorous opponent of the antinomians wrote, in 1631, that they rejected “the morall law, as a rule of our actions” (34;

original spelling). A prominent antinomian had written that “faith needed no guidance from the moral law” (34). Another leading antinomian of the day wrote that “the law as delivered in Sinai by the hand of Moses is not a rule by which a believing Christian doth walk” (49). Yet another antinomian was even more vehement: “Christians have no more to do with the moral law ‘then a man hath with a divorced wife and the morall law is but a dead letter’” (59; spelling, that of the original). The report to the assembly by the “antinomian committee” listed as the “first antinomian point...that the moral law is of no use at all to believers, no rule to walk by, nor to examine their lives by and... that believers are free from the mandatory power of it” (67).

The name of the false doctrine, therefore, accurately describes it: “Antinomianism,” which literally is “against the law.”

Over against this fundamental error concerning the use of the moral law of God by Christians in the new covenant, Westminster confessed that “[the moral law is] a rule of life” for true believers (WCF 19.6).

Because the antinomians insisted on representing the Presby-

terian doctrine of the law as a rule of the Christian life as an attack on the gospel-truth of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the law, the Westminster divines made plain in the controversy that Christ’s “fulfilling of the law for *justification* did not erase its role as a guide and rule for the believer’s *sanctification*” (105). It is inexcusable error, indeed deliberate, misleading tactic, on the part of the theologians of antinomism to represent Presbyterian doctrine of the law as the guide of the Christian life as a departure from the gospel of gracious justification. The issue is sanctification, not justification, and even with regard to sanctification, not whether sanctification is the gracious work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, but whether the Spirit uses the law as the guide of the holy life of the Christian.

Although the issue of the role of the law as the guide of the Christian life was, as it is still today, fundamental in the controversy of Reformed orthodoxy with antinomianism, it was not, and still today is not, the only issue. Clustered about it were, and still are today, a number of other important issues. Gamble lists them, describes something of the (instructive) debate over

them in the history leading up to and including the Westminster Assembly, and demonstrates the relation of them all to each other. The other, related errors of antinomians include the following: the radical difference, as two different covenants, of the old and new covenants; the rejection of infant baptism (denying that circumcision and baptism are essentially the same sign of the one covenant of grace, antinomians are necessarily Baptists); the denial of justification by the faith of the elect believer; the doctrine of eternal justification, instead of the doctrine of justification in time by the instrumentality of the believer's faith; denial of the continuing sinfulness of the justified believer and, with this, denial of the necessity of the believer's repenting of sin and of daily forgiveness; conflation of justification and sanctification; and more.

The conflict with antinomianism raised two significant disputes among the orthodox themselves. One was the relation of faith and repentance. Does faith precede repentance, or does repentance precede faith, or are they simultaneous? The other was whether the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to the believer by means

of his faith is both His active and His passive obedience, or only His passive obedience. The former was never settled. After long and heated debate, the assembly voted "almost unanimously that both Christ's active and passive obedience were necessary for justification" (108). In the debates leading up to the formulation of the WCF, Christ's active and passive obedience were referred to as His "whole obedience."

This issue is raised again in our day by the men of the Federal Vision. They deny the imputation of Christ's active obedience, again in connection with the place of the law in the work of salvation.

The Dutch Reformed reader will be amused by the response to a proposal at a doctrinal conference leading up to the Westminster Assembly that the Church of England settle its theological disputes over the doctrines of grace by establishing the Canons of Dort as authoritative in the Church of England. Supporters of one who was denying unconditional election and the other doctrines of grace recently confessed at Dort vehemently opposed the proposal to make Dort binding in the Church of England with these, shall we say haughty, con-

descending words: “[We must not] borrow a new faith from any village in the Netherlands” (30). Magnificent London would not be beholden to *Stadt Dordt*.

The book gives a glimpse into the tense meetings and airs the heated debates of one of the truly great ecclesiastical assemblies in the history of the church over fun-

damental truths of the gospel. It surveys antinomianism in the full scope of that heresy (which word, strangely, Westminster hesitated to apply to the false doctrine). It is a salutary warning against the threat of the false doctrine in every age. And it is fascinating reading. ●

Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy, by Paul C. Gutjahr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xl + 477. \$54.00 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-0199895526. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Charles Hodge is everything a good biography ought to be. First and foremost, the subject is one of great importance in history—in this case, the history of the church. Charles Hodge was the most prominent and influential Presbyterian of the nineteenth century. His work of both teaching—at Princeton Seminary—and writing guided the large Presbyterian Church, influenced multitudes of Presbyterians and other Christians, and defended the Christian, Reformed faith against numerous heresies. Concerning this last, Hodge was a controversialist, even though personally a mild-mannered, kindly, and peace-loving man.

Second, the biography teach-

es not only about the subject of the book but also concerning many other important theologians with whom Hodge had contact—in many cases continuing contact—and concerning a number of fundamental truths of the Christian religion. The Reformed Christian in the Dutch Reformed tradition usually has little knowledge of his Presbyterian cousins and of their struggles on behalf of sound doctrine and the true church. What do we know of Transcendentalism; of the “Old School/New School” divide of the early 1800s; of the “Second Great Awakening” of the middle 1800s and its threat to the Calvinism of the Presbyterian Church; of the controversy in the Presbyterian Church

over recognizing the validity of Roman Catholic baptism; of the titanic debate between Hodge and Thornwell over the nature of the church at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1860; of the influence of Charles Darwin upon Presbyterianism; of the struggle in the Presbyterian Church over the biblical or un-biblical nature of slavery in the years leading up to the Civil War; and more?

Third, the book is pungent, excellent writing, carrying the reader into all of this doctrine, controversy, and other features of the life and labor of Hodge.

Hodge devoted his entire ministry to teaching theology at Princeton Seminary. He taught from 1820 to his death in 1878. He never pastored a congregation. Princeton Seminary began in 1812 in the home of Archibald Alexander, founder of the seminary a mere eight years before Hodge came on the scene. For many years it was the only seminary of the Presbyterian Church. During the tenure of Alexander, Miller, Hodge, and their immediate successors, it was orthodox, deliberately according to the standard of the Reformed faith set forth in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. In

large part, the abiding orthodoxy of the seminary was due to the reality that Hodge himself pointed out when he famously declared that “a new idea never originated in this Seminary” (363). Hodge taught thousands of Presbyterian pastors and missionaries, as well as a large number of ministers from other denominations. By an influential theological journal that he founded and by his other writings, he defended and spread conservative Calvinism, not only throughout America, but also throughout the world. Hodge had contacts, students, and friends throughout Europe.

His best known and most influential book was his commentary on Romans. The book was occasioned by a popular commentary on Romans by a fellow Presbyterian, Albert Barnes, who made the epistle to the Romans an Arminian gospel. In his own commentary, Hodge made the fifth chapter of the book, with its teaching of the imputation of Adam’s sin and of the atonement of Christ, truths that Barnes denied, his emphasis.

Much of Hodge’s controversial writing contended with a powerful movement of unsound and misguided evangelical fervor within the churches. The move-

ment minimized sound doctrine (mere “head knowledge”) in favor of passion and enthusiasm on the part of the revivalist (“knowledge of the heart”). Charles Finney was having his Arminian and Pelagian way in the Presbyterian Church in the name of “evangelism.” Finney began his career as a Presbyterian. The theological thinking that Hodge opposed was expressed by one of the liberals in these words: “True Christianity [is] found not in cold doctrine but in ‘a heart that breathes kindness and love’” (353).

The issue of Arminian evangelism was at the heart of the “New School” schism in the Presbyterian Church. The so-called “Second Great Awakening” contributed to the schism. “Tensions continued to flare around particular issues in the mid-1830s, one of the most pronounced being revivalism” (162). George Whitefield, who in some circles is revered as a Calvinistic evangelist, found no favor in the eyes of Charles Hodge, as indeed he ought not find favor in the eyes of any Reformed theologian. Not only was Whitefield a “free-lancer,” operating on his own, under the authority and supervision of no consistory, but also his evangelistic methods were unsound, if

not absurd.

Aside from their blatant disregard for ministerial decorum [with reference to their sheer independency and disregard for the instituted church-DJE], Hodge looked askance at how Whitefield and Davenport credited vibrant, bodily manifestations of the Holy Spirit as signs of true conversion. He saw their preaching as too often bent on encouraging outward signs when they had little or no correlation to true conversion. He found offensive Whitefield’s comment that “he never saw a more glorious sight, than when the people were fainting all around him, and crying out in such a manner as to drown his own voice.” Violent shaking, shouting, hysterical convulsions, fainting, and wild laughter had little to do with Hodge’s precious sense of order. He very much doubted whether the Holy Spirit could be the force behind such chaos. Hodge went so far as to characterize such phenomena as belonging to a “whole class of nervous diseases” (191, 192).

The church political antics by Presbyterians of both the Old

School and the New School at a General Assembly in 1838 defy the Reformed imagination (183, 184).

One can only regret that he was born too late to listen in on the eight-day debate between Hodge and James Henley Thornwell, outstanding theologian of the Presbyterian Church in the South, at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1860. The issue was the doctrine of the church (288-292). At that time, there were ecclesiastical giants in the land, and broader assemblies carried on lengthy, solid debates on significant issues. A speaker was not told at his rising to debate that he had six and one half minutes to present and argue his case.

One aspect of Thornwell's doctrine of the church was his contention that church and state are separate: "Thornwell taught that the Church was a spiritual body that should abstain from joining itself to secular institutions or causes" (289). Thornwell argued this contention in the setting of the onset of the Civil War. He held that the Presbyterian Church in the North had no right to speak out on the issue of slavery. Hodge, who himself had slaves (whom he treated kindly

and about whose slavery he had misgivings), argued that the church may pronounce on social issues in the name of Jesus Christ.

As a sidelight on Hodge's slaveholding, Gutjahr notes that in 1989 narrow-minded, liberal (but I repeat myself) seminarians at Princeton Seminary took down Hodge's picture from the wall of the seminary in protest that Hodge did not sufficiently oppose slavery (389). These are the same prospective ministers who genuflect at the feet of professors who deny the deity of Jesus.

Thornwell defended the secession of the South from the union of the States as a matter, not of slavery, but of states rights—a defensible position in theory, but not so much in hard reality. Hodge exerted himself to preserve the denominational unity of the Presbyterian Church in the South and of the Presbyterian Church in the North, to no avail.

A philosophy that Hodge held in tandem with his Calvinistic theology undid him in the important matter of the doctrine of creation. The philosophy was Scottish Common Sense. Roughly, it amounted to the idea that every human has a genuine common sense reception to the truth, not only as found in Scripture, but

also as found in nature. Implied is that there is an authoritative revelation of God in nature that must be allowed to determine the belief of the Christian with, and in some cases overriding, the revelation of Scripture. This philosophy betrayed Hodge into accepting the seeming finding of science that the world is very old, contrary to the revelation of Scripture. Hodge, therefore, was open to the theory that the age of the earth is millions, if not billions, of years. This theory demands what we now call “theistic evolution.” This opened the way in the Presbyterian Church to an evolutionary explanation of origins, with all the compromise of other fundamental doctrines that this theory entails. Hodge allowed scientific “findings” to explain the days of Genesis 1 as ages (367, 368).

However, this same Hodge wrote a vigorous, popular attack on Darwinian evolutionary theory at the time that Darwinian evolutionary thought was threatening the Presbyterian Church (371).

The Presbyterian Church of Alexander, Miller, and Charles Hodge is no more, that is, it is no more the Presbyterian Church of the Westminster Confession of

Faith. It is a false church, denying every fundamental truth of the gospel of grace. The Church became fertile in conceiving and giving birth to “new ideas.” But its heritage did not die with the death of that institution. It lingered in the person and work of B. B. Warfield. It passed on to J. Gresham Machen and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (377-385).

Space would fail me to refer to all the instructive, fascinating, and delightful aspects of this superb biography, including that Hodge wrote all his many and often lengthy works with a fountain pen—“old faithful pen” (350).

Sixteen pages of pictures and brief biographical data identifying Hodge’s family, colleagues, correspondents, and doctrinal adversaries give visual reality to well-known names, including Mrs. Hodge, the many Alexanders and other Hodges, Miller, Finney, Nevin, Park, Schaff, Schleiermacher, Tennent (son of the Log College), Turretin, Warfield, and many more.

Our Presbyterian cousins were a theologically and educationally gifted and lively lot. It is gratifying and rewarding to get to know them. ●

The Man of God: His Preaching and Teaching Labors, Pastoral Theology, Volume 2, by Albert N. Martin. Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2018. Pp. xiii + 651. \$47.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1943608126. [Reviewed by Barrett L. Gritters.]

Pastor Albert Martin's second volume on the *Man of God* is his treatment of the minister's preparation and delivery of sermons. Whereas volume one treated the minister's calling and qualifications, this volume treats the minister's primary work—preaching. We could call it Martin's homiletics proper.

The strength of this volume is the same as the first: it not only gives the practical and principled wisdom of a Christian man who preached for 60 years, but it also includes the wisdom of a multitude of preachers, from ancient to modern.

The first three chapters treat deep and abiding principles regarding preaching, showing that Martin has the highest regard for this highest of callings. Here, Martin urges preachers to aim at Christ-centered and Spirit-filled sermons that glorify God, edify congregations, and convert unbelievers. (Later in the book, Martin has a short rebuke for preachers who suppose that the *main* emphasis of preaching is evangelistic—to convert unbe-

lievers). Practical as Martin always is, even in these sections on principles, he does not fail to give good advice to preachers: “Ask God to give you the hide of a rhinoceros, and then ask your people about their views on the length of your sermons, the clarity of your illustrations, the accessibility of your vocabulary, and their overall sense of the pulpit ministries” (50).

Following the principles of preaching, Martin treats the classic subjects of homiletical manuals: form and structure, applications, illustrations, conclusions, length, the question of fully-written-out sermons or the use of outlines only, etc.

What may be of most interest to preachers is Martin's discussion of the various types of sermons: topical, textual, and consecutive-expository. He argues the legitimacy of each kind, believes that all of them have been blessed by God over the years, and rightly concludes that whatever kind a preacher chooses, every sermon must be, in the end, exposition of the Scripture. The reader will

have to judge whether he agrees with this reviewer, that Pastor Martin gives too much credence to topical preaching, at least the kind of topical preaching he describes—"The Bible and AIDS," or "The Bible and the present economic distress," or scores of sermons on one doctrinal topic. But if one agrees with Martin's defense of topical preaching, he will have a great deal of difficulty criticizing with a clear conscience the historic practice of *catechism* preaching, specifically Heidelberg Catechism preaching, in which the preacher is given his topic by the church and asked to expound the Scripture while he teaches the congregation the church's official creed. Finally, regarding topical sermons, Martin's strong warning against *textual* sermons that fail to preach the text in its *context* (331ff.) is a warning that applies in a far greater way to topical sermons, which by their nature do not allow for careful exegesis of a single passage. "Preach the word" means "exegete Scripture."

Some other weaknesses of the volume ought to be mentioned.

Martin's organization of the topics in this volume is somewhat confusing. "Form and Structure" is immediately followed by the subject of application. Then

come, in order, illustration, the need for simplicity, and sermon length. After this is a forty-page discussion of the preacher's use of the manuscript in the pulpit, which comes up again in the last part of the book on delivery. "Sacred Rhetoric" is the subject of the opening chapter in "Unit Four;" and preaching Christ is the concluding chapter in this unit which treats the body of the sermon. Each of these would fit logically at the beginning of the book. A homiletics professor may have a hard time using the book as a text.

The next judgment of weakness, which of course is subjective, is pastor Martin's expansiveness. A strength of many books is an economy of words: say what needs to be said. This reviewer felt that Martin tried to say everything that could be said. Thirty pages on sermon conclusions became dreary; seventeen pages on how long sermons ought to be and twelve pages on preaching attire, grooming, and physical fitness seemed overdone. Also, the frequent and extensive quotations of old preachers at times will make the reader determined to read their preaching manuals; often it became tedious. Martin is a follower of the Puritans, and the

Puritans are not usually known for brevity.

A third weakness is the lack of confessional references. This may not be surprising for a book by a Baptist preacher, but it does surprise me because Martin is a Calvinistic Baptist; he would call himself a Reformed Baptist. Reformed Baptists have their creeds. For them, these creeds are authoritative. Yet the book is filled with quotes from the fathers, but has only half a dozen references to the Westminster Standards and only one reference to the main Baptist creed (1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith). For Reformed preachers, the voice of the church ought to speak louder than the voice of individuals.

In spite of these criticisms, I still suggest that every preacher ought to read this second volume. And I can promise that everyone who reads will profit a great deal.

Let me mention a few of the more profitable items that will make a preacher want to pick up this volume.

Martin gives seven reasons (over many pages) to justify a fully written manuscript for a sermon. Realizing that many preachers will not be able to sustain this in a busy pastorate preaching more than once each week, he

even suggests the possibility of writing almost nothing at times. But he concludes by recommending a synthesis. A young preacher will appreciate the struggle, and Martin's conclusion.

Introductions receive a fine treatment. And this homiletics professor appreciated the caution against introductions that go too long, as well as the warning to lazy preachers who imagine sermons need no introduction.

Martin takes thirty pages to treat sermon conclusions. The book argues convincingly that a sermon that ends poorly is not a good sermon. No one should disagree that how a sermon ends is important. But the section makes this reviewer want to do more justice to this subject in the instruction of his students; and any of his former students will benefit from reading Martin's treatment.

Not the *most* important part, but my favorite part of the book was its lengthy third unit on the "Act of Preaching" (441-626). Here, Martin treats all the aspects of sermon delivery. Martin lays the groundwork for the section with an engaging—and exegetical—argument that the *manner* in which a sermon is delivered should never be underestimated.

After giving a good ‘dressing down’ to the preacher who does not give good attention to the manner of *reading* the Scripture, Martin shows from Scripture and history the importance of good

delivery. Anyone who doubts the importance of delivery and style, tone and voice, pauses and volume and variety, will very likely come away convinced by the biblical case Martin makes. ●

Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek: A Refresher Guide to Grammar and Interpretation, by Benjamin L. Merkle. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. Pp. xv + 171. \$19.99 (softcover and ebook.) ISBN-13: 978-0801098772. [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.]

This book reviews basic points of Greek grammar and syntax, and provides exegetical illustrations of those points from biblical texts. It is intended primarily for pastors, students, and teachers of Greek—to whom I heartily recommend the book as a brief refresher of Greek usage. The author is qualified to write it; he is professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

The Book’s Value for Those Who Know Greek

Each of the book’s thirty-five chapters treats one specific point of Greek syntax or exegesis. Merkle devotes one chapter to each of the five Greek noun cases (3-7). Five more chapters (13-17) cover the Greek verb

tenses in the indicative mood, and subsequent chapters (18-24) are devoted to the other verb moods or to participles and infinitives. Comparatives and superlatives, articles, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, particles, conditional sentences, each get their own chapter. Some chapters (2, 30-35) do not treat points of Greek syntax; rather, they are devoted to other necessary aspects of exegesis, including textual criticism, figures of speech, context, word studies, exegetical fallacies, discourse analysis, and sentence diagramming. On average, each chapter is just under five pages. Consequently, the overview of the points of syntax is brief, consisting of approximately one-half of each chapter.

Reading this book is no substitute for learning Greek by using

a grammar textbook. Yet for those who know Greek, the overviews are beneficial in two ways. First, they provide a good review by stating the grammatical points succinctly. Second, many chapters include a review of the various uses of the particular point of syntax that is being treated—of the various cases, tenses, moods, participles, infinitives, etc. The chapter on figures of speech includes a review of seventeen different figures of speech. Such pages are a handy reference for the student or pastor. He should carefully compare them with his grammar textbook to see if they vary in any way. Generally, I found them reliable.

Let me illustrate the benefit of a refresher. Pastors, do you remember the Granville Sharp Rule (chapter 9)? It “states that when a single article governs two nouns (substantives) of the same case that are connected by *καί*, they refer to the same person” (39-40). In Titus 2:13, for instance, the Holy Spirit teaches that we look for the appearing of one person (Jesus Christ, who is at the same time both God and Savior), rather than for two people (God, and Jesus Christ).

And, fellow exegetes, do you properly apply Colwell’s Canon

(chapter 10)? It “states that a definite predicate nominative does not usually take the article when preceding a copulative (linking) verb” (44). Merkle’s case in point is 1 Timothy 6:10, which the KJV translates: “for the love of money is the root of all evil.” The Greek New Testament includes the definite article before “love of money,” but not before “root of all evil.” Consequently, some translations (including the NIV and ESV) translate the verse using the indefinite article rather than the definite article: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” Applying Colwell’s Canon favors the KJV reading.

The Book’s Value for One Who Does Not Know Greek

One who has no knowledge of Greek would likely not be interested in buying this book. However, such a person would still find some benefit from reading it.

One area of benefit regards those chapters that focus on exegetical methods. Every student of Scripture can appreciate the need to ask whether a figure of speech is used in a particular verse and, if so, which one (Chap. 30). All can appreciate the reminder to study the context of a passage in order

to understand the passage better (Chap. 31). One who knows Greek will be better equipped to apply the warning regarding exegetical fallacies (Chap. 33) and the reminder to do word studies, (Chap. 32) but to a limited degree one who does not know Greek could benefit from such instruction as well.

The second area of benefit regards that portion of every chapter in which Merkle explains a passage to illustrate the grammatical point that he is treating. Every chapter begins with an introduction in which Merkle notes an exegetical question regarding a certain passage. Next he gives the overview of the particular point of Greek syntax. Then he returns to the passage to which he referred in the introduction, and gives an explanation of the passage. Often he considers several possible interpretations, giving his reason for preferring one and rejecting the others. Consequently, this book contains brief explanatory comments on thirty-five different New Testament verses or short passages.

The Value of the Exegetical Sections

As has been noted, the exegetical sections are valuable in that

they illustrate the point of syntax which that chapter treats. At the same time, the discerning reader must decide for himself whether Merkle properly applied the syntactical point to the passage that he uses to illustrate that point. In chapter 33, for instance, Merkle warns against four exegetical fallacies, including the fallacy of supposing that when a verse uses two or more synonymous terms, the exegete must always find some deep significance for the use of the synonym(s). Applying this to John 21:15-17, Merkle suggest that the different verbs for “love” and that the interchange of the words “sheep” and “lambs” are merely stylistic. Both in giving this warning, and in applying it to John 21:15-17, Merkle follows the lead of D. A. Carson.¹ I agree with Carson and Merkle that it is a fallacy to suppose that the use of a synonym always has exegetical significance. However, I do not agree that John 21:15-17 is a fair case in point. For one thing, the Greek verbs ἀγαπάω and φιλέω are different in meaning not by just a shade; they have significantly different ranges of meaning. For another, while every lamb is

1 D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 52-53.

a sheep, not every sheep is a lamb; to refer to an animal's young is to underscore something particular about those young, in distinction from the animal itself.

My disagreement on that particular point illustrates that believers have freedom of exegesis in understanding Scripture. But one is *not* free to ignore Greek syntax when interpreting a verse. All can appreciate the emphasis of Merkle's book that proper exegesis must be rooted in a proper understanding and use of Greek syntax.

Final Critiques

In chapter two, this book attempts the impossible: in five pages, it gives an overview of textual criticism, and shows how textual criticism makes a difference in understanding Romans 5:1. Granted, Merkle assumes that his reader has already learned about textual criticism at length. However, textual criticism is too complex a matter to be summarized, and its principles applied to a particular passage, in five pages. Also, while Merkle reminds us to weigh (evaluate) manuscripts, five pages is not enough to remind us of all the criteria that must be considered when weighing. This reviewer remains of the opinion,

expressed in an earlier review², that brief chapters on this subject are not helpful and should not be included in books of this nature.

One statement is ambiguous. That believers must persevere in faith, and that any professing believer who does not persevere to the end will not be saved, as Merckle states in his explanation of Colossians 1:23 is all true. But what does this statement mean? "A believer's perseverance in the faith is *conditioned* on, but not *the basis for*, Christ's presentation of the believer to God" (133; the italics are Merkle's). Not "*the basis for*," certainly; that is clear enough. But "conditioned on" is not the same as "a condition to"; is Merkle saying that our perseverance is a condition to our final salvation, or that Christ's presentation of us to God is a condition of our perseverance? In fact, neither of these is correct, and perhaps Merkle meant something different yet. The statement is ambiguous.

2 See my review of Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017) in the April 2018 issue of *PRTJ*.

The book is indeed a guide to grammar and interpretation, as its sub-title claims. Whether it is a “refreshing” guide is for each reader to judge. Certainly, it was “fresh.” ●

Theoretical – Practical Theology, Volume 2: Faith in the Triune God, by Petrus Van Mastricht, tr. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019. Pp. xxxv + 660. \$50.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1601786746. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Scholastic though it may be (at one point, Van Mastricht explicitly is critical of scholasticism [p. 504]), the theology of Petrus Van Mastricht repays the laborious reading and study. This first volume of Van Mastricht’s dogmatics proper (the volume of prolegomena has preceded) in English translation consists of a lengthy treatment of the attributes of God and a shorter exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity.

As forecast in the opening volume of prolegomena, every distinct section of the dogmatics is treated according to the following divisions: exegetical; dogmatic; elenctic; and practical. The opening exegetical part explains a text that teaches the doctrine under consideration. The dogmatical part sets forth the fundamental truths that the doctrine, or dogma, consists of. The elenctic defends the truth against objections and errors. The practical applies the

dogma to the life and practice of the church and believer.

Especially profitable, and often moving, is the practical application of every doctrine. Dogmaticians do well to take heed to this aspect of Van Mastricht’s study, as exemplar for their own work. The practical theology of the attribute of “the truthfulness and faithfulness of God,” for example, includes the “consolation” of the believer “in all kinds of adversities... [that] God will neither nullify his kindness by them [the adversities], nor in them will he lie, against the assurance he has given (Ps. 89:33; Heb. 6:17-18)” (289).

Van Mastricht’s entrance into Reformed dogmatics in the book is suspicious. Rather than begin with the doctrine of God, as is usual in dogmatics, he begins with faith—the faith of the believer. No explicit defense of this opening of dogmatics is given. But the

impression is left that the receptor of the truth of revelation—faith—controls, and thus shapes, the revelation itself. It is as if there is no objective revelation “out there,” quite regardless of the faith of humans. This would be a theology similar to a philosophy that makes man himself the creator of his knowledge of the world outside himself, if there is indeed a world “out there” at all. Besides, believing man does not come first in Reformed, or any other, theology. God is first, in the truth about Himself. Faith comes later, in the locus of the doctrine of salvation. The order of the Belgic Confession sets the standard for Reformed theology. Faith comes up in Article 22.

Nevertheless, the explanation, defense, and application of the doctrine of God show no ill effects from this dubious beginning. Van Mastricht draws his theology from Scripture and defends it, for the most part, with Scripture. “For the most part,” inasmuch as occasionally there is lengthy defense of sound doctrine from pure, and in the end unintelligible, reason. Overall, there is solid exegesis and abundant, apt quotation of Scripture.

There are also many quotations of other theologians, includ-

ing the church fathers. Among the other benefits of the volume is an education in the history of dogma.

Van Mastricht’s development of dogma is exhaustive, for the reader, sometimes exhausting. However it may be accounted for, Van Mastricht had the gift, or weakness, of worrying a concept, if not to death, then to the wearying of the reader. This is the case, for example, with his work on the issue whether certain things are impossible for God, for example, denying Himself. The ordinary theologian contents himself with asserting that God cannot deny Himself because this is contrary to the very nature of God as God. Similarly, to use a less lofty example, God cannot make $2+2=5$. This would be contrary to the God-ordained nature of reality and, therefore, absurd.

Does this simple, and brief, explanation satisfy Van Mastricht?

Not at all!

He goes on for more than two pages examining and clarifying this relatively unimportant issue (431-33).

Even more offputting is the Reformed theologian’s penchant for extended, extraordinary examination of really insignificant points of grammar. He pursues

the possibilities of meaning into the furthest reaches of research in many languages. Regarding a Hebrew particle found in Psalm 2:7, 8, by the time the two-letter word has been examined in Hebrew, Arabic, the Massorettes, the Septuagint, the Targum, the Ethiopic, the Vulgate, and throughout the Hebrew Old Testament, one supposes that the entirety of the Christian religion rises or falls with the modest word, *el*. And then, at the end of this harrying of the particle, the surprising conclusion is that no decisive identification of the word is given. Instead, “whatever may be the case...” (540).

Especially prominent in the book, and important for Reformed churches and theologians in the 21st century, is Van Mastricht’s ardent and consistent defense of the sovereignty of God in salvation. He carries on a vigorous polemic against Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism. The polemic takes the form of a repudiation of a universal, saving (or, would-be saving) grace of God that fails to save many, because this grace is dependent on the will of the sinner. For Van Mastricht, the grace of God is strictly particular, for the elect only. And this grace of God in the gospel of

Jesus Christ is effectual.

The Reformed theology of Petrus Van Mastricht is the theology of the Synod of Dordt. It is not the theology of most Reformed churches and theologians in the 21st century. One can hope that an effect of the translation of the dogmatics of Van Mastricht into English will be that Reformed churches and theologians will reconsider their theology of a common (saving) grace of God as expressed in the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel. At the very least, it ought to silence their claim that the doctrine of a well-meant offer is the Reformed “tradition.”

Again and again, in the most explicit, clear language, Van Mastricht contends for the particularity and efficacy of the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. On page 314 is an extended argument against the theology that God wills all humans to be saved. Van Mastricht condemns the idea that there are “contrary wills in God, of which one wills, for example, that Judas be saved, and the other does not.” In this context, the Dutch theologian distinguishes God’s will of “decree” from His “legislative” will, the latter being His command to all hearers of the gospel to repent and believe

(314). With a happy phrase, he dismisses a will that has God desiring the salvation of all humans as a “fatuous will” (315).

Van Mastricht denies that 2 Peter 3:9 teaches a desire of God for the salvation of all humans: “The apostle does not say that God wills all altogether to be saved and none of them to perish, but only all believers” (318).

Only “the Pelagians and Pelagianizers, the Jesuits, and the Remonstrants (captivated by a perverse love of the dogma of the universal will of God to save everyone...)” teach “that God “will[s] each and every person to be saved” (334, 335). At once, Van Mastricht appeals to the Reformed doctrine of “absolute reprobation” (335-37). It is not amiss here to observe that with the increase of the noise in Reformed circles in the 21st century in defense of a well-meant offer of salvation, with its saving grace for all humans, there is a steady decrease in the volume of a confession of reprobation.

Answering the question, “whether the saving grace of God extends equally to each and every person,” Van Mastricht demolishes the popular, contemporary theology of a well-meant offer of salvation, which loudly claims

to be the Reformed “tradition.” Writes Van Mastricht: “saving grace concerning things that accompany salvation they [the Reformed] do not allow, except as a grace proper to the elect” (367). The Reformed “acknowledge no universal grace concerning saving things, whether that grace be objective or subjective, because: (1) Scripture teaches no saving grace that is universal” (370).

Rejecting Arminian doctrine that God wills the universal salvation of humans, which will nevertheless is not realized, Van Mastricht affirms that whatever God wills concerning salvation He brings to pass. He appeals to Paul in Romans 9:18: “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (439-40).

In the elenctic section of the “All-Sufficiency or Perfection of God,” Van Mastricht charges that the Pelagians and semi-Pelagians deny the sufficiency and perfection of God by their teaching:

(3) when there is alleged for him a willingness, or an imperfect willing, by which he earnestly wills what he never achieves, and is by that reason impotent, for he cannot produce what he wills, and likewise unhappy, inasmuch

as he does not have what he desires. (4) When they attribute to him that he earnestly wills, in particular, that each and every person be actually saved, and since the majority escape this wish, he is sufficient neither for himself and for his own wish, nor for those for whom he wills this salvation (462-63).

In many other respects also, Van Mastricht showed himself to be soundly Reformed and a bold defender of the faith. Against those who deny or shrink from the doctrine of reprobation, he declared: “When there is no reprobation, there is also no election” (376). Concerning the apparent blessing of the ungodly with good earthly things and happenings, he stated: “God never sends upon his own, upon the godly, anything truly evil, or upon his enemies, upon the ungodly, anything truly good (Isa. 3:10-11), but only apparent good.” He added: “for the ungodly their good is harmful” (390).

As for justification, faith is not a work, an act of obedience, but “consists in the reception of... Christ as the one and only Mediator” (18-19).

Van Mastricht was at pains to ascribe all the glory of the good works of the believer to God: “[Our good works] are more God’s works than ours” (393).

Again and again, the Reformed theologian condemned the notion of a “conditional” salvation as Pelagianism (see 307-310). A God of a conditional grace and salvation is not the true God (310).

By stressing fellowship as the practical theology of the Trinity, Van Mastricht implies that fellowship is the essence of the covenant (520-26).

Admittedly, the book is heavy lifting, both as a volume (more than 600 pages) and regarding the content. At times, the author engages in proving or applying biblical doctrine by sheer reasoning. Occasionally, his profundity becomes virtually unintelligible.

Nevertheless, the book is solid, profitable Reformed doctrine. It reminds Reformed churches and theologians of the genuine Reformed tradition, especially with regard to the gospel of salvation by sovereign, particular grace, having its origin in God’s eternal election. ●

Word of Life: Introducing Lutheran Hermeneutics, by Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019. Pp xii + 164. \$29.00 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1506402826. [Reviewed by Douglas Kuiper.]

Did Martin Luther have a distinct method of hermeneutics (Scripture interpretation)? If so, what made it distinct? Was it peculiar to Luther alone, or did other Lutheran theologians in his day share that method? And is it still used by Lutheran theologians today?

Timothy Wengert answers these questions in this book. Wengert is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the mainline Lutheran denomination), and emeritus professor of Reformation church history at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He argues that Luther did have a distinct method of hermeneutics; that his colleagues, particularly Philip Melancthon, adopted the same method; and that at least some Lutherans still use that method today.

Overview

Because he was born and raised in the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, Luther initially used the common hermeneutical method of his day.

Consequently, he explained every passage from four viewpoints: the literal (what the text actually says), the allegorical (what it teaches regarding doctrine), the tropological (what it teaches regarding how we must live), and the anagogical (for what we are to hope). Luther later rejected this method with its emphasis on allegory, and emphasized instead the text's literal and historical meaning. This background and introduction to Luther's hermeneutics is the subject of the first chapter. Chapters two and three explain what his distinct contribution was; more on that presently.

The fourth and fifth chapters contain illustrations of Luther's method—chapter four, by using sermons that focus on Jesus' last words from the cross, and chapter 5, by using meditations from the Psalms. The fourth chapter opens with a sermon that Luther preached in 1519 on Christ's passion, then includes six of Wengert's own sermons on Christ's last words. The fifth chapter begins with a gem, Luther's "Preface to the Psalms." Wengert then

provides his own meditations on nine different Psalms (1, 6, 13, 23, 46, 119:1-8, 130, 139, and 145), introducing each meditation with a quote from Luther's summary of that Psalm. Wengert wrote these meditations to his daughter who was away at college while her mother (his wife) was dying of cancer. These last two chapters indicate that Wengert strives consciously to follow Luther's hermeneutical method.

Luther's Method

The first distinctive aspect of Luther's hermeneutics was his insistence that a text's meaning depends both on its grammar and on its effect on those who hear or read it (18-44). At this point, a clarification: many liberal interpreters today believe that the text's effect on its hearers is important regardless of its literal meaning. What Moses, David, Isaiah, Paul, and Peter meant does not matter; how the text moves you is the issue. And how it moves you depends on your culture and circumstances.

Emphatically, that was not Luther's point. He emphasized the need to understand the text—its grammar, its plain meaning, its place in the context of the book as a whole—and its effect on the

hearer. Reading Luther's commentaries, one finds that he explained the text's meaning briefly, but spent more time showing how the doctrine of the text changes the believer's life and gives us hope.

The second distinctive feature of Luther's hermeneutic was his desire always to find Christ as Savior in the text (44-9). What allegory attempted to do in a wrong way, because it was arbitrary, Luther sought to do in a proper way. Consequently, he viewed the Psalms as Christ's own speech to the faithful, and the Christ-filled believer's speech to God. This also enabled Luther properly to view the relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Christ is at the center of both, and both speak of Him.

Luther's theology of the cross is a third distinctive feature of his hermeneutic (56-59). The term "theology of the cross" assumes the doctrine of the atonement, but is not a reference specifically to that doctrine. Rather, it refers to the fact that God reveals Himself in ways that humans do not always understand. Here Luther took his starting point from 1 Corinthians 1:23ff.: apart from God's revelation, humans would never think to look to Christ's

death on a cross as the foundation for salvation. Yet God revealed His justice and mercy exactly that way. Likewise, throughout Scripture, God “hides” Christ in a text; the believing exegete must search a text thoroughly to find Christ, and be ready to find Christ in a place that we might not expect to find him.

Finally, Luther’s distinction between law and gospel is central to his hermeneutic (chapter three). For Luther, “law” and “gospel” were not two different kinds of Scripture, such as the Old Testament (“law”) and the New Testament (“gospel”). Again, “law” did not refer to a scriptural command, nor “gospel” to a particular promise. Rather, these two terms referred to two effects that every Scripture passage had on every believer. In this way Luther made a specific application of the principle that the text’s meaning regards also the effect it has on the hearer.

Functioning as law, all of Scripture accuses the believer of being a sinner. Even the gospel promises function as law in this respect, when they remind us that we do not deserve the salvation that God has promised. Functioning as law, Scripture impresses on us that by our works

we could never earn salvation nor help God save us. Functioning as law, Scripture insists that we depend entirely on God’s grace. Only the regenerated person will understand that which Scripture, functioning as law, teaches, and it will lead us to repentance.

Functioning as gospel, all of Scripture points the believing sinner to the salvation God has prepared for us in Christ. Even the commands of Scripture do so, when they show that the regenerated believer will walk in obedience to God.

Evaluation

Wengert convincingly demonstrates that Luther had a distinctive hermeneutic. Here Wengert is fresh, but not innovative: other scholars have recognized this for centuries. This is no criticism. We ought to be wary of any writer who claims to have found some distinctive aspect of Luther’s hermeneutical method that no one else has noticed in the five centuries since Luther.

In his demonstration that Luther’s method lives on today, Wengert is original. He would have made his case more strongly by including sermons and meditations from fifteen different Lutheran pastors, rather than by

including fifteen sermons and meditations from only one Lutheran pastor, himself.

The third chapter, regarding law and gospel, was certainly beneficial. However, Wengert appeared to digress from his argument in the sections regarding the law's civil use and regarding its use to guide Christians in thankful living. That Luther spoke to these matters is to be granted. But they do not appear to have been distinctive aspects of his hermeneutic.

Protestant Reformed subscribers of this *Journal* who read Wengert's book will note a striking contrast between Wengert's sermons and those that are usually heard from PR pulpits. Although Wengert's sermons are based on exegesis, they lack depth, and the exegesis doesn't permeate the sermon. Although based on Christ's last words, they do not so much as mention the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, let alone develop that doctrine at any length. Many readers of this *Journal* will also disagree with Wengert's distinction between an

invitation and a command (88), as applied to the call of the gospel.

Yet the book's gems should not be overlooked. Every reader will profit from reading Luther's "Preface to the Psalms." And we can appreciate the point that Wengert makes when commenting on the words of Jesus regarding the camel going through the eye of the needle. Some say this refers to a gate in Jerusalem that camels found difficult, if not impossible, to get through. Others allege that Jesus' point was that camel's hair is too coarse to use when stringing a needle. Wengert's pointed response is this: if either of these be true, "the impossibility of the comparison is lost on the hearers" (66, footnote).

Indeed! The simple meaning of the text is not so difficult to understand. The more one tries to force the text to make sense to the human mind, the more one misses the point. This is what Luther underscored by insisting on the literal meaning of the text, and by his "theology of the cross." Wengert's reminder is apt. ●

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