

## Editor's Notes

I apologize for the lateness of the publication of this issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Unforeseen circumstances arose that prevented publication at our usual time. Hopefully our readers will discover that this issue was well worth the waiting.

This issue contains an excellent lineup of articles. The first article is from the pen of the Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor presently in N. Ireland, who is awaiting a visa for himself and his wife so that he can take up the ministry in the Providence Protestant Reformed Church in the west suburbs of Grand Rapids, MI. His article is a critical assessment of the theology of Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664). Amyraut was an instructor in the Academy of Saumur, France. He is best known for his teaching of hypothetical universalism and the controversy that his teaching precipitated in Reformed churches worldwide. Pastor McGeown favors us with an excellent critic of the false teaching of Amyraut. Of special interest to our readers is the fact that pastor McGeown does a fair amount of translation from the French of heretofore untranslated material from Amyraut.

Mr. Peter Vander Schaaf favors our readership with another translation of a work not yet translated into English. The language in this case is Dutch. The selection that he has translated is taken from Dr. Harm Bouwman's *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*. The specific section concerns the nature and observance of Sunday. Although Bouwman lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what he taught concerning Sunday is of timeless value. And it also serves to remind us of what the historic teaching of the Dutch Reformed was regarding the day of rest. Mr. Vander Schaaf's article includes a helpful biographical introduction that informs our readers of the life and influence of H. Bouwman. It is our hope that brother Vander Schaaf will do some further translation from the work of this Dutch Reformed worthy for the future benefit of our readers.

As in our last issue, our readers are again favored with an article by Dr. C. N. Willborn. This is the second of the two speeches that Dr. Willborn gave to the faculty and students of PRTS. The two

speeches featured the theology of the leading lights in the Southern Presbyterian Church in the United States. This speech focuses on the pastoral distinctives of the Southern Presbyterians. Not only did the great theologians of Southern Presbyterianism set forth a sound ecclesiology, but they were also themselves men of pastoral experience. Their practical pastoral care of God's people of different races and economic conditions is the kind of principled care from pastors needed in the church today.

The final feature article is a contribution by the newest (and youngest) faculty member of PRTS, Prof. Brian Huizinga. The title of his article is "John Owen and the Salt of the Covenant of Grace." Prof. Huizinga highlights Owen's teaching of the unconditional covenant of grace. He calls attention to Owen's positive teaching concerning God's covenant, as well as the polemics in which he engaged against the Arminian perversion of the covenant of grace. Owen repudiated the Arminian view of a conditional covenant by limiting membership in the covenant of grace to the elect alone.

Besides our regular articles, as always, this issue of *PRTJ* contains several thoughtful reviews of recently published books. The books reviewed deal with such subjects as common grace and the covenant of grace, Bible history and church history, the well-meant offer of the gospel and the biblical call of the gospel, a gracious love of God for the elect alone and the compromising view of a love of God that includes all men. You will want to read these insightful reviews. You will profit from them. A special word of the thanks to those who have contributed the book reviews.

Now read and enjoy!

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

—Ronald L. Cammenga, editor

# Moïse Amyraut and the Controversy over His Hypothetical Universalism

Martyn McGeown

## Introduction

Moïse Amyraut initially intended to study law, but under the influence of Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, who had founded the Huguenot university and seminary *L'Académie de Saumur* in the Maine-et-Loire region of northwest France in 1593, he was persuaded to study theology. Amyraut became pastor of the Reformed Church of Saumur and was appointed by the provincial synod of Anjou to the chair of theology in 1633, where he remained until his death in 1664.

Amyraut was highly esteemed among the Huguenot nobility and by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Even before it appointed him to the chair of theology of Saumur, the National Synod of Charenton (1631), recognizing Amyraut's accomplishments, delegated him to be orator to present the official grievances of the Reformed churches to the king. Orators from the Huguenot churches customarily kneeled before the king, while representatives of the Roman Catholics were permitted to stand. Amyraut, despite a personal visit from Armand Jean du Plessis (commonly referred to as Cardinal Richelieu) to persuade him to kneel, insisted on standing before the king while he delivered his oration.

Amyraut was devoted to his studies and labors in the pastorate and to *L'Académie de Saumur*. His theology engendered intense controversy within French Protestantism, leading to the weakening of the Reformed faith in France, with impact upon the church in other European nations, such as Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. The spark was ignited by the publication in 1634 of Amyraut's *Brief Traitté de la Prédestination* (*A Brief Treatise on Predestination*).

In a writing published in 1636 Amyraut explains his initial motivation for putting pen to paper:

A man of quality who recently came to our confession... has been accustomed to saying among his acquaintances that the doctrine of predestination, such as is taught in our churches, horrifies him.... [Therefore] I esteemed the best method [to clarify this matter] would be to present this doctrine in a manner, which, without denying the justice or the freedom of God, would highly recommend His mercy.<sup>1</sup>

Amyraut's doctrine of predestination is an attempt, therefore, by emphasizing God's mercy, to soften the perceived harshness of the dogma in order to win converts from Roman Catholicism and to prevent defections from the Huguenot churches. Certainly, the Reformed doctrine of predestination must be carefully explained, since it is the target of many caricatures. Nevertheless, Amyraut fatally compromised the doctrine of predestination, and with it the Reformed faith, rather than defended it.

### The Teaching of the *Brief Traitté*

One quote from the *Brief Traitté* captures the essence of Amyraldianism:

The misery of men being equal and universal, and the desire that God had to deliver them from it by such a great Redeemer, which proceeds from the compassion that He has on them as His creatures fallen into such great ruin [being also equal], since they are equally His creatures, the grace of redemption which He offered must also be equal and universal, provided they are found equally disposed to receive it. And until that point there is no difference between them. The sacrifice that He offered for the propitiation of their offenses is equally for all, and the salvation that He received from His Father to communicate to men in the sanctification of the Spirit and in the glorification of the

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1 François Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication: L'Oeuvre d'Amyraut et la Querelle de la Grâce Universelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), 88. This work, "Orthodoxy and Preaching: the Work of Amyraut and the Quarrel over Universal Grace," written by a French Jesuit theologian and historian in the French language, contains a wealth of information and provides citations from primary sources on Amyraut and his contemporaries. Since it is not available in English, I will quote extensively from it in this article. The translation from the French is mine.

body is intended equally for all, provided, I say, that the disposition necessary to receive it is equal in the same way.<sup>2</sup>

For Amyraut the key word is “equality.” Man’s misery is *equal and universal*; God’s saving desire is *equal and universal*; God’s mercy, which is the source of His saving desire, is *equal and universal*; and Christ’s redemption, which flows from God’s saving will, is *equal and universal*. One ingredient, however, is missing: the disposition necessary to receive God’s salvation must also be *equal and universal*. Amyraut’s theology, therefore, is conditional: “*pourvu que*” (provided that) is a favorite phrase of his. Elsewhere, Amyraut writes:

God’s love is immeasurable to give salvation to men, provided that (*pourvu que*) they do not refuse it. These words, then, “God wills the salvation of all men” are necessarily limited thus: provided that (*pourvu que*) they believe. If they do not believe, He does not will it; this will to give the grace of salvation [being] universal and common to all men, is so conditional that, without the accomplishment of the condition, it is entirely inefficacious.<sup>3</sup>

Amyraldianism is often called “hypothetical universalism,” which captures the convoluted nature of Amyraut’s teaching. Amyraut posits a hypothetical, universal decree of predestination embracing the whole of humanity, which decree is conditioned on man’s response of repentance and faith. According to that hypothetical, universal decree Christ died equally for all, but Christ’s redemption, likewise, is conditioned on man’s response. If men do not believe, they will not obtain salvation by the death of Christ. Thus God has a universal, hypothetical, inefficacious decree, something utterly unworthy of the Almighty. However, since God knew that nobody would fulfill the condition, His counsel includes a second decree, a decree to grant the gift of saving faith to the elect so that they fulfill the condition. Thus God has a particular decree within a hypothetical, universal decree. “One must,” Amyraut writes, “carefully distinguish predestination to salvation from predestination to faith,” about which writes the historian François Laplanche (a native of Saumur), explaining Amy-

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2 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 94.

3 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 96.

raut's thought, "the latter is absolute and the former is conditional."<sup>4</sup> Amyraut explains:

Predestination to salvation being conditional and concerning the whole human race equally, the human race being universally corrupted by sin and incapable of accomplishing that condition on which salvation depends, it necessarily occurs, not by any vice in predestination itself, but by the hardness of heart and obstinacy of the human spirit, that this first predestination is frustrated for those who have no part in the second.<sup>5</sup>

Amyraut, then, teaches universal, divine love displayed in the gospel universally offered on the condition of faith. This, of course, is not the teaching of the Canons of Dordt, a creed with which Amyraut claimed full agreement: "There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved... He hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation and the way of salvation, which He hath ordained that we should walk therein" (Canons 1.8). "The Synod rejects the errors of those who teach that ... there is one election unto faith and another unto salvation, so that election can be unto justifying faith without being a decisive election unto salvation" (Canons 1, Rejection of Errors, 2). Amyraut's convoluted, multi-decree theology fits far better with the Remonstrants than with the Reformed fathers of Dordt.

Amyraut perceives a problem, really two problems, that he addresses in his *Brief Traitté*. First, how can God genuinely offer salvation to men who are unable to receive it, or how can a universal offer be reconciled with the Reformed denial of free will? Second, given that the heathen die without hearing the gospel, how can they be condemned for not believing it, and how is God sincere in seeking their salvation if He denies them the means of salvation? In his answers to those questions Amyraut further compromises the doctrines of sin and grace.

The unbeliever perishes because he refuses to believe in Christ. That statement is uncontroversial (John 3:36). To the objection that the unbeliever cannot believe, Amyraut distinguishes between a

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4 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 102.

5 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 103.

*natural inability* and a *moral inability*. Man is unable to believe, not because he lacks the capacity to believe, but because he is *not willing to believe*. Simply put, if the unbeliever *would*, he *could* believe. The same natural ability to believe and the consequent inexcusability for this unbelief apply to the heathen, too, although they have less revelation to which they might respond. They, too, *could* be saved, if they *chose* to believe (since they possess understanding and will, the rational apparatus necessary for the production of the act of faith), but because of the depravity of their hearts, they remain unbelieving and they perish. Amyraut writes,

God is too good, and if I might use the word, too serious, to present to men vain hopes. That is why it is not at all to be doubted that, if in whatever nation of the world that there might be, even where the name of Christ is unknown, someone might be encountered, who, touched by the testimonies of the mercy that God presents everywhere in His administration of the universe, is truly converted to Him to obtain the salvation of His grace (and we shall see below what faculties or powers there are in man to be thus converted) He would grant him the enjoyment of it. That is to say, although he has not known distinctly the name of Christ, and although he has learned nothing of the manner by which [Christ] has obtained redemption for us, he would not, however, be deprived of the remission of his sins, the sanctification of the Spirit, and glorious immortality.<sup>6</sup>

Behold the teaching of Amyraut as expressed in his seminal work the *Brief Traitté*: the universal, salvific will and love of God; universal, hypothetical predestination and universal, hypothetical redemption (with a secondary particular decree to save the elect with a secondary particular redemption of the elect); salvation conditioned on faith, which, although within man's natural ability, is something of which man is morally incapable; and the distinct possibility, if only they are willing, of the salvation of the unevangelized heathen! These teachings somehow made the Reformed doctrine of predestination more palatable to Roman Catholics. And do not forget, Amyraut published his *Brief Traitté* just fifteen years after the conclusion of the Synod of Dordt!

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6 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 95.

**The Controversy over the Theology of Saumur: The Pastors of Saintonge and Charenton, the Six Sermons, and *L'Eschantillon***

When strange theological winds begin to blow from one of the leading seminaries of the land, the response is predictable. Sure enough, Amyraut's novel theology immediately started to make waves in French Protestantism. As with many such theological controversies, factions soon began to form, with certain pastors lining up in favor of Amyraut's new theology, some pastors willing to tolerate it although they disliked some of his phraseology, and others vehemently opposed to the novel theology of Saumur.

Among the first opponents of Amyraut were the pastors of Saintonge, a former French province roughly equivalent to Charente-Maritime on the West Atlantic coast. Guillaume Rivet, the pastor of Taillebourg, convinced his colleagues to send an official delegation to meet Amyraut in 1635: Isaac du Soule, pastor of Lusignan, and Philippe Vincent, pastor of La Rochelle. The conference with Amyraut ended with an agreement: "Amyraut explained his method and his doctrine and his contradictors declared themselves satisfied. With respect to him they insisted that he keep silent from now on about thorny questions."<sup>7</sup> Amyraut also mentioned in the course of the discussion his desire to publish six sermons in defense of his doctrine, but the delegation from Saintonge advised him against it, lest he stir up further trouble among his brethren.

Although from Amyraut's point of view the conference with his colleagues from Saintonge was successful, since he had convinced them not to protest his theology further, "calumnies that irritated him continued to be spread concerning him [and his doctrine]."<sup>8</sup> Amyraut next turned to the pastors of Charenton, a southeastern suburb of the French capital, who, unlike the pastors of Saintonge, were favorable to him. Among these Parisian colleagues were Jean Daillé, who had been pastor of Saumur before Amyraut's arrival, and Charles Drelin-court, the pastor of the Parisian congregation. Although Drelin-court "hesitated a little," the pastors of Charenton were "very favorable" to the publication of the aforementioned six sermons, which the pastors of Saintonge had advised him against publishing.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 110.

8 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 110.

9 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 111.



Having obtained the advice and consent of his colleagues in Char-enton, although contrary to the urgings of his colleagues in Saintonge, Amyraut acted quickly. In 1636 *Six Sermons de la Nature, Etendue, Nécessité et Efficace de L'Evangile* (*Six Sermons on the Nature, Extent, Necessity, and Efficacy of the Gospel*) appeared in print, which only served to exacerbate the controversy that had begun to swirl around Saumur and its professor of theology. In the preface of this work Amyraut claimed to be writing against the papists, but the sermons were actually aimed at Amyraut's detractors in the Reformed churches. Laplanche writes,

We know from Daillé and Amyraut himself that the *Six Sermons* were in reality written in response to the Calvinist adversaries of universal grace and not to the Catholics. Why this artifice? Probably Amyraut did not want to irritate those who contradicted him by opposing them directly.<sup>10</sup>

The *Six Sermons* promoted the same theology as the *Brief Traitté*, but with additional appeals to John Calvin, as if the French Reformer would have agreed with the professor of Saumur. In the first sermon, Amyraut appeals to Calvin's commentary on Ezekiel 18:32: "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the LORD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." A lengthy quotation from Calvin's commentary is necessary at this point:

There is no absurdity, as we said before, in God's undertaking a two-fold character, not that he is two-faced himself, as those profane dogs blurt out against us, but because his counsels are incomprehensible by us. This indeed ought to be fixed, that before the foundation of the world we were predestinated either to life or death. Now because we cannot ascend to that height, it is needful for God to conform himself to our ignorance, and to descend in some way to us since we cannot ascend to him ... With respect to the law and the whole teaching of the prophets, God announces his wish that all should be saved. And surely if we consider the tendency of the heavenly teaching we shall find that all are promiscuously called to salvation. For the law was a way of life, as Moses testifies, "This is the way, walk ye in it:" again,

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10 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 111.

“Whosoever has done those things shall live in them:” and, again, “This is your life ...” Therefore God *delighteth not in the death of him who dieth*, if he repent at his teaching. But if we wish to penetrate to his incomprehensible counsel, this will be another objection: Oh! but in this way God is chargeable with duplicity;—but I have denied this, though he takes up a twofold character, because this was necessary for our comprehension. Meanwhile Ezekiel announces this very truly as far as doctrine is concerned, *that God wills not the death of him that perisheth*: for the explanation follows directly afterwards, *be you converted and live*. Why does not God delight in the death of him who perishes? Because he invites all to repentance and rejects no one. Since this is so, it follows that he is not delighted by the death of him who perishes: hence there is nothing in this passage doubtful or thorny, and we should also hold that we are led aside by speculations too deep for us. For God does not wish us to inquire into his secret counsels.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin distinguishes between God’s eternal decree in which the Almighty expresses His will to save only the elect, which decree, remarks Calvin is “incomprehensible” and “secret;” and God’s revealed will to save all who repent. The prophet Ezekiel is concerned not with the former, but with the latter. In Ezekiel’s preaching to Israel “all are promiscuously called to salvation,” so that God gives an incentive to Israel: God receives those who will repent and believe; God will refuse no penitent sinner. Therefore, repent! Ezekiel’s hearers were not to concern themselves with God’s decrees, but to repent and believe, which was their duty before God, trusting in God’s promise to have mercy on the penitent faithful. Laplanche expresses Calvin’s doctrine in these words, where the double negative is deliberate and emphatic: “God cannot *not* pardon the repentant sinner.”<sup>12</sup> The Canons of Dordt express the same idea: “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” (3-4.8). Notice that God does not promise to everyone—even

11 John Calvin, trans. Thomas Myers, *Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel*, in Calvin’s Commentaries, 500th anniversary edition, vol. XII (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 265-267. Calvin’s italics.

12 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 111.

conditionally—that they shall be saved, but His promise is particular (although promiscuously preached) to believers only. God’s revealed will, writes Laplanche, is “manifested in the promise to be merciful to all those who shall believe.”<sup>13</sup> That is true, but Amyraut meant more than that. The question as to whether God sincerely desires the salvation of the reprobate—those who do not believe and to whom God does not give the gift of faith—is a separate issue and not in Calvin’s purview in this place. Amyraut affirmed it; Calvin did not.

Moreover, Amyraut goes beyond Calvin by positing two “mercies” in God, something the French Reformer never does:

[God] wills that all men be saved. It is true and He wills it with affection: but it is according to this mercy that presupposes a condition, and not otherwise. If the condition is not found in them, He does not will it. He wills that few among men be saved. It is true, but it is according to this second sort of mercy that does not demand the condition, but creates it: which does not presuppose it, but makes it in man.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, with one sort of mercy God desires the salvation of all men *if they believe*. If they do not fulfill the condition of faith, God does not desire their salvation and they perish, despite God’s “mercy.” With a second kind of mercy, God creates faith in His elect, so that they fulfill the condition necessary for salvation, with the result that they believe and are saved. Of course, Scripture knows nothing of two kinds of mercy, only one of which brings a sinner to heavenly bliss. God’s mercy is efficacious, particular, and everlasting: “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever... [He] overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth forever” (Ps. 136:1, 15). Particular, efficacious, everlasting mercy for Israel, but wrath and destruction for the Egyptians: this is the teaching of Holy Writ.

Our French historian asks:

To conclude this analysis we ask which new elements do the *Six Sermons* contain compared to the doctrine of the *Brief Traitté*? They are principally developments of “double mercy” and the “evangeli-

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13 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 111.

14 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 112.

zation” of the pagans by the exhibition of creation. Under color of defending Calvin’s doctrine Amyraut explains himself on the most controversial points of his theory: universal calling of men to salvation, the possibility of salvation offered to pagans, and the action of grace in conversion.<sup>15</sup>

Amyraut was, however, not ready to put down the pen just yet, for in the same year (1636) *L’Eschantillon de la Doctrine de Calvin* (*The Sample of Calvin’s Doctrine*) appeared. This work was inspired, writes Laplanche “by the same tactic,”<sup>16</sup> that is, under the pretense of attacking Roman Catholicism Amyraut sought to defend his own doctrine against detractors in the Reformed Churches by appealing to Calvin, as if the French Reformer were in agreement with him. Laplanche recognizes the weakness of Amyraut’s case: “The commentary that [Amyraut] shall give of the texts of the Reformer is very often a personal interpretation, which visibly has the aim of supporting the doctrine of the *Brief Traitté*.” Nevertheless, adds Laplanche, Amyraut’s distinctions of “double divine mercy,” “double salvific will of God,” “double intention of Christ in his death,” and “double inability” are absent in the writings of Calvin, despite Amyraut’s protestations to the contrary. Laplanche summarizes this point:

After the publication of the *Six Sermons* and *L’Eschantillon de la Doctrine de Calvin* the public were perfectly up to date concerning the intentions and the ideas of the young professor of Saumur. On a certain number of points, the double mercy of God, the efficacy of the death of Christ, [and] the salvation of pagans, the doctrine of the *Brief Traitté* showed itself to be precise and complete, and henceforward polemics would be carried on simultaneously against the three works as the “manifestation” of the “new theology.” Their continuity is, in effect, evident. Doubtless, the intention in the two later works to respond to Catholics was more apparent than real: but Amyraut was thus placed in the best possible position to defend his doctrine ... Besides, the adversaries of the theologian of Saumur will not be mistaken and will understand very well that he was defending Calvin in order better to attack them.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 113.

16 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 113.

17 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 117.

The pastors of Saintonge—among them Isaac du Soule and Philippe Vincent—who had advised Amyraut against the publication of the *Six Sermons*, condemned Amyraut's doctrine at their provincial synod that met at the beginning of 1636: they informed *L'Académie de Saumur* of this condemnation.<sup>18</sup> Battle lines were being drawn.

### **Pierre du Moulin and *L'Académie de Sedan***

In northeastern France there was another Protestant stronghold with its own theological academy, *L'Académie de Sedan*, which was founded by Princesse Françoise de Bourbon-Vendôme in 1579. Pierre du Moulin occupied the chair of theology in Sedan in the Ardennes region of France. Laplanche describes Du Moulin as “the most tenacious and the most intelligent of Amyraut's adversaries” with a “fierce spirit of orthodoxy ill prepared to accept Amyraut's innovations.”<sup>19</sup> Du Moulin, it should be noted, had been delegated to attend the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619), but King Louis XIII forbade his attendance. Having addressed the errors of the Remonstrants in his writings and having been instrumental in the French Reformed Churches' adoption of the Canons of Dordt, the professor of Sedan was already a sworn foe of Arminianism. Du Moulin was also thirty years Amyraut's senior, Amyraut being thirty-eight years old and du Moulin sixty-eight years old when the *Brief Traitté* appeared.

Shortly after Amyraut published his novel theology, du Moulin began to attack him in his theological lectures. In addition, “in one hundred pages du Moulin drew up a formal indictment against the tenets of universal grace and asked the next national synod to intervene to put an end to these scandalous innovations.”<sup>20</sup> After thundering against the new doctrine of Amyraut (and Paul Testard of Blois, who was a less able proponent of the same teachings) du Moulin proposed as the best solution “to impose on all French ministers a formula explicitly rejecting the errors of Saumur.”<sup>21</sup> Du Moulin's document against Amyraut was published in Amsterdam in 1638 with the title *L'Examen de la Doctrine de Messieurs Amyraut et Testard Touchant la*

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18 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 117.

19 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 118.

20 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 118.

21 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 119.

*Prédestination et les Points qui en Dépendent (The Examination of the Doctrine of Messieurs Amyraut and Testard Touching Predestination and the Points that Depend upon It).*

Du Moulin presents the following exposition of orthodox, decretal theology:

We put in the first place the decree by which, from the corrupt mass of the human race, fallen by the fault of the first man, God out of pure grace has chosen some in order to deliver them from perdition, and to give them salvation and life, leaving the others in their natural corruption and in the accursedness that they have merited. The second decree in order is that by which God resolved to send His Son Jesus Christ into the world to purchase and to reconcile to Himself those whom He predestined to salvation. The third decree is that by which God resolved to give faith to His elect, which out of pure grace He plants into their hearts by His Word and Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption.<sup>22</sup>

Notice that, in distinction from Amyraut's scheme, there is no contradiction between the decrees of God, but perfect harmony in God's eternal counsel: God elects a people; God sends His Son to redeem only that people; and God sends His Spirit to work faith in the hearts of only that people. Du Moulin's presentation, unlike Amyraut's, is also in perfect agreement with the Canons of Dordt.

Du Moulin goes on to dismantle Amyraut's theology, accurately portraying the scheme of salvation proposed by the professor of Saumur. According to Amyraut, so writes du Moulin, God says, "I will and I decree seriously and with a vehement desire to save all men, provided that (*pourvu que*) I find faith in all of them, which I know that they do not and never shall have, and which they cannot have, and which I do not will to give to them."<sup>23</sup>

The professor of Sedan also takes issue with one of Amyraut's illustrations: Amyraut compares God to a man who loves a lady, "provided that (*pourvu que*) certain conditions are met in her, such as wisdom and beauty. However, if these conditions are not present, that man declares himself unwilling to love her or to marry her."<sup>24</sup>

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22 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 119-20.

23 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121.

24 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121.

Who is this lady? “By the first lady [Amyraut] intends the human race,” explains du Moulin.<sup>25</sup> For the first lady (the entire human race) God has universal, hypothetical, conditional love and salvation; but He never marries the lady, that is, He never saves the ungodly world, because she is both mad and ugly. He (the man, who in the illustration is God) loved her “with vehemence,” but only conditionally. The same man, continues du Moulin, commenting on Amyraut’s illustration “shall come to love another lady absolutely and without condition, [whether she be] beautiful or ugly, wise or mad; in short, he wants to have her.”<sup>26</sup> Who is this second lady? “By the second lady [Amyraut] intends only those elected to faith, such that the second lady is part of the first lady [a subsection of the human race, therefore] which is an idea a bit difficult [to conceive].”<sup>27</sup> So God, represented by this man seeking a wife, loves all men, if the right conditions are found in them; and He loves some men unconditionally, whatever characteristics they might have.

Du Moulin objects because, as he puts it, “about this man thus disposed toward these two ladies five things must necessarily be presupposed,”<sup>28</sup> none of which could apply to the Almighty:

First, the man does not know whether this second lady is wise or beautiful ... If this man knew that this lady was mad or ugly, he would never say, “*If* she is wise and beautiful, I want to marry her.” Second, the one who speaks thus presupposes that this lady *could be* wise or beautiful. Third, it must be presupposed that it is not in the power of this man to make the mad lady wise or the ugly lady beautiful because, if he had that power, he would doubtless correct those faults in her before he married her, since he loves her vehemently. Fourth, I say that this man must have a “dislocated brain” if he is thinking of marrying a lady without knowing whether she is mad or ugly. Fifth, it is impossible that the man could be touched by two different affections toward the same lady at the same time, that is, to desire *absolutely* to marry her, and at the same time to desire to marry her under *only*

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25 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121.

26 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121.

27 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121.

28 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121.

*under certain conditions*, even under those conditions that *he knows that she does not have*.<sup>29</sup>

Du Moulin concludes: “We cannot say of [God] that He does not know if we have faith, nor that He presupposes things that are not; nor that He does not possess the power to correct our faults; nor that He is utterly senseless; and to make matters worse, Monsieur Amyraut wants [to conceive of God as being] touched by two incompatible affections toward the same people without any diversity of time.”<sup>30</sup> Such conceptions of God cannot be entertained, warns du Moulin, “without outraging His Holy Majesty.”<sup>31</sup>

Du Moulin takes aim at Amyraut’s doctrine of the atonement, following the wisdom of the Synod of Dordt:

The satisfaction of Christ is sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world, and no one is lost except by his own fault; but Christ could never have had the intention to redeem those who have been reprobated from all eternity. Against this very clear and satisfying doctrine Amyraut opposes an inconsistent theory: what use is it to say that Christ died *equally for all* (*également pour tous*), if he immediately adds that it is on the condition that they all equally (*tous également*) believe? With this reservation he recognizes that Christ did not die equally for all (*également pour tous*). Besides the strange doctrine of Amyraut has been condemned in advance at the Synod of Dordt, and he cannot invoke any text of Scripture in its favour.<sup>32</sup>

The reader should note that the language of “equally for all” (*également pour tous*) would be the bone of contention at the French synod that would examine Amyraut’s doctrine. That language, more than any other, would be offensive to the orthodox. It is that language that Amyraut will be required to avoid using in future.

About Amyraut’s “unheard of and absolutely condemnable novelty” that God might call the non-evangelized heathen to salvation du Moulin writes,

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29 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 121-2. Italics added.

30 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 122.

31 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 122.

32 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 123. Italics added.



I say therefore that this doctrine that men could be saved without knowing Jesus Christ is a new gospel because it establishes a faith about which the gospel says nothing and proposes a way of believing in Jesus Christ without even knowing that there is a Jesus Christ. By this doctrine the sun and the rain become evangelists, and this [Amyraut proposes] without being able to produce a single example of a man who has been saved by this means ... It is something unimaginable how by the [mere] contemplation of creatures a man could have saving faith in Jesus Christ, by the sun, the moon, the rain, etc.... Because by these things a man will never learn that God in His counsel has provided for the propitiation of our sins by the death of a Redeemer. On the contrary, every man who is moved by natural reason, seeing lightning, hail, earthquakes, floods, pestilences, sterilities, etc., will conceive a fright, considering the whole of nature armed against man, and all creatures conspiring to his ruin, without ever perceiving any means of peace and reconciliation with God. All nations, indeed the greatest philosophers, who never had any other instruction except that from nature, have never conceived, by the least suspicion or conjecture, of the doctrine of our redemption.<sup>33</sup>

Du Moulin is correct: through the natural creation “the *wrath* of God [not His mercy] is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

The professor of Sedan also demolishes Amyraut’s natural/moral inability distinction:

Where it is a matter of the conversion of man so that he is saved, it is an abuse to distinguish natural inability from moral, since the moral has become the natural, and since vices are turned into nature, just as the apostle calls our concupiscence “our members” (Col. 3:5), so that to take away [our concupiscence] is as if one would cut off a man’s arm or leg. The devil also has natural faculties, that is, understanding and will: shall we say from this that he has the natural ability to convert himself and that there is in him only a moral inability? It is the same with unregenerate man because this inability that one calls “moral” comes from original sin, which is natural, and consequently this inclination to evil that is moral is also natural.<sup>34</sup>

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33 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 123-4.

34 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 125.

Du Moulin was influential in the region of Normandy in northern France and had many relations, notable among them Jean-Maximilien de Langle, his nephew, pastor of Rouen; and André Rivet, his brother-in-law, whose brother, Guillaume Rivet, one of the pastors of Sain-tonge, we have already encountered. Du Moulin, Laplanche informs us, convinced the Norman Synod of 1636 to draw up a collection of erroneous propositions from Amyraut's works to be used against him at a future national synod.<sup>35</sup>

### **Jean Daillé and Attempts at Reconciliation**

Jean Daillé and his colleagues in Charenton had hoped for a peaceful resolution with the publication of the *Six Sermons*, but the violence of the responses of du Moulin and others moved especially Daillé to intervene "in order to explain the intentions and the true thoughts of Amyraut."<sup>36</sup> Daillé viewed the debate as "confusion over words" so that the orthodoxy of Saumur should not be questioned.<sup>37</sup> Fearing schism, he wrote to de Langle, du Moulin's nephew, beseeching him to use his family influence with du Moulin and Rivet to convince them not to bring the matter to the national synod: "Recourse to the judgment of the next national synod," wrote Daillé, "is the worst possible solution that there could be. If the assembly approves du Moulin and Rivet, it will do a grave wrong to Amyraut; if it finds [Amyraut] innocent, the others will cry out even more strongly and will threaten secession."<sup>38</sup> Daillé was also moved by political calculations. In a letter to André Rivet he warns, "If this matter explodes at the national synod ... the adversaries will take occasion to tear our body into two pieces, to exclude one of them from the benefits of the Edict."<sup>39</sup>

We should understand that the position of the Huguenots was precarious at this time. Although they enjoyed official toleration under the Edict of Nantes (1598), schismatic groups not part of the official Reformed churches of France did not enjoy such legal protection. Schism, therefore, was not only perilous for the soul, but also for the body, and should be avoided, urged Daillé, at all costs.

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35 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 127.

36 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 133.

37 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 134.

38 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 136.

39 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 136.

Around the same time the professors of *L'Académie de Montauban* in the region of Occitanie in southern France wrote to du Moulin and Amyraut. Laplanche explains, “In the quarrel between Sedan and Saumur the men of Montauban were ready to form a third party, hostile to Amyraut, but without excess. Their letters invited the adversaries to disarm.”<sup>40</sup> In France, then, factions were forming: the pro-Amyraut pastors, the anti-Amyraut pastors, and the undecided pastors. These three factions would meet at the upcoming synod.

### **The Venerable Company of the Pastors of Geneva**

The Swiss had been following matters closely in the Reformed Churches of France. Close, fraternal relationships existed between theologians in both nations, each church taking a keen interest in the other, and taking heed to one another's doctrine and life. In 1620 Geneva had delegated Benedict Turretini to the Synod of Alès in the region of Occitanie in southern France to “insist that the decisions of Dordrecht be ratified at the assembly.”<sup>41</sup> Any deviation from Dordt, therefore, was met with alarm.

In the *Registre de la Compagnie Vénérable des Pasteurs de Genève* (the *Register of the Venerable Company of the Pastors of Geneva*) we find this note from November 6, 1635: “For the present [it is] not expedient to write [to Amyraut and the pastors of Paris] seeing that those whom it concerns have the matter in hand, but that we could insert something about the aforementioned matter into the letter that we will write to the next national synod.”<sup>42</sup> Amyraut's book was assigned to be read, however, and at the meeting of November 13, 1635 it was decided that, having found “doctrines in it which are not orthodox, but which tend to Arminianism and Pelagianism,” Monsieur [Frédéric] Spanheim would write to Amyraut to report the [our] findings, namely, “that there are [in his work] opinions that are contrary to sound doctrine and which could cause grave harm and trouble in *L'Académie de Saumur* and in the churches of France.” Amyraut should be urged to “remedy [the situation] before it advances further.” Spanheim was also charged to write to du Moulin not to “become heated against Amyraut... but rather to work to restore him

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40 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 138.

41 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 139.

42 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 139.

gently.”<sup>43</sup> Laplanche summarizes: “The Genevans condemned Amyraut only with moderation and showed themselves very concerned for the peace of the French churches.”<sup>44</sup>

Michel Le Faucheur (who had been born in Geneva), one of the pastors of Charenton, intervened to convince the Swiss brethren of Amyraut’s orthodoxy, outlining in a letter to Théodore Tronchin, a member of *La Compagnie Vénérable* on June 3, 1635 the “history of the quarrel.”<sup>45</sup> Geneva’s response was guarded: while they had found “a lot of good” in the *Six Sermons*, they had also found “certain forms of speech that seemed novel to [them] and capable of giving occasion to stumble,”<sup>46</sup> hardly a ringing endorsement of Amyraut’s work. Louis Cappel, professor of Hebrew at Saumur, also intervened in a letter to Spanheim to attest to his colleague’s orthodoxy. He asked *La Compagnie Vénérable* to write to Amyraut’s adversaries “to ask for their silence” and even to write a “circular letter to all the provinces of the French Reformed to avoid the extension of troubles,” something that *La Compagnie* and Spanheim refused to do.<sup>47</sup> Instead, *La Compagnie* charged Tronchin to write to Amyraut and du Moulin. In summary, the Genevan pastors evidenced “very strongly disapproval of novel ideas, but moderation and courtesy towards persons.”<sup>48</sup>

### The National Synod of Alençon (1637)

The matter came for adjudication to the National Synod at Alençon in Normandy in northern France. The pastors of Charenton prepared a defense of Amyraut, having produced a public document giving their judgment on the quarrel at the provincial synod of Île-de-France, a region surrounding Paris, in March 1637. The aforementioned provincial synod “enjoined all ministers of the province to be silent concerning these questions [those raised by Amyraut in his controversial work]” and decided to write to du Moulin “to ask him to cease every

43 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 139.

44 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 140.

45 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 140.

46 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 140.

47 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 140.

48 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 143.

attack and to Amyraut to advise him to adopt the spirit of concord.”<sup>49</sup> The same synod advised Amyraut that “in the event that he would republish his book on predestination [he should] remove the terms of universal, conditional predestination, of Christ having died equally for all (*également pour tous*), and of the gift of salvation to some without the knowledge of Christ in the New Testament.”<sup>50</sup> They hoped to have the national synod adopt the same procedure and in this manner to “avoid the condemnation of Amyraut.”<sup>51</sup>

Laplanche names the provinces hostile to Amyraut prior to the national synod: La Saintonge, Normandy, Poitiers (where André Rivet was influential), la Basse-Guyenne, Le Bas-Languedoc, and Montauban, who while hostile to Amyraut, were in favour of unity.<sup>52</sup> The provinces favorable to Amyraut included Bourgogne and Île-de-France, while the provincial synod of Anjou “refused to deliberate on the case of Amyraut.”<sup>53</sup> *Le Conseil Académique of Saumur*, something akin to a theological school committee, vigorously defended their professor, judging that there was nothing “written in Amyraut’s writings, neither in the things that he teaches, nor in the expressions that he uses to explain things, that in any way shocks the foundations of the faith.”<sup>54</sup>

The officers of the national synod were Benjamin Basnage, pastor of Sainte-Mère-Église in Normandy (president); Daniel Couppé, pastor of Loudun (vice-president); and David Blondel of Roucy and de Launay, an elder of the church in Paris (clerks). Controversy marked the synod from the beginning, when Amyraut, who perceived (rightly according to Laplanche), that Basnage, the president of synod, had attacked him in his inaugural sermon on Sunday May 31, 1637, refused to be judged by him. Amyraut and Basnage disputed publicly, left the room, and it required the intervention of five delegates to reconcile them.<sup>55</sup> The synod then read several letters concerning

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49 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 145.

50 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 145.

51 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 145.

52 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 148.

53 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 148.

54 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 149.

55 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 150.

“the affair,” including from du Moulin and Le Faucheur, the former of which, says Laplanche, was “very violent.” Du Moulin urged the synod not merely to “prescribe silence,” for “you would leave minds in suspense, and you would place the error in the same rank and at the same level as the truth.”<sup>56</sup> Only decisive condemnation of the guilty (that is, of Amyraut and Testard) would “serve as a warning to posterity,” argued the professor of Sedan.<sup>57</sup> Le Faucheur argued that both points of view (Amyraut’s and Amyraut’s adversaries) were “legitimate.”<sup>58</sup> For example, Le Faucheur argued that “there certainly exists in God a universal, conditional, salvific will: from all eternity God wills to save all men, in the sense that He commands all to believe and promises salvation to their faith. Why not call this universal, salvific will a decree of God?”<sup>59</sup>

Josué de la Place, a colleague of Amyraut at Saumur and a theologian who would become controversial with respect to his doctrine of original sin, sought the recusal of de Langle, du Moulin’s nephew, which recusal the synod refused. De Langle responded by demanding the recusal of Daillé and de Launay because they were favourable to Amyraut, which recusal the synod also refused.<sup>60</sup>

The Genevan brethren, in a letter signed by Diodati, Tronchin, Chabrey, Prévost, and Pauleint, congratulated the French churches “on their constancy in the faith,” and urged them to persevere, adding, “we have learned with much astonishment and extreme chagrin that you have recently been moved to your bowels by the publication of new doctrines which concern the principal points of our common belief, which seem to have been substantially altered, and whose face and natural beauty appears completely disfigured.”<sup>61</sup> This “nascent heresy,” urged the Swiss, must be “extinguished.”<sup>62</sup> “We ask you to make use of your full authority and to use every care to try to save what can be saved, and to recover what seems to be lost, without moving away from charity and truth, and not to employ a connivance that could

56 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 151.

57 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 152.

58 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 152.

59 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 153.

60 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 154.

61 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 154.

62 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 154.

be fatal.”<sup>63</sup> Finally, the Swiss warned the French not to permit these “unnecessary questions” to spread throughout the world “to the great scandal of all the faithful.” Instead, the “surest and most innocent remedy” would be to keep silent about these matters, not to preach or write about them, and to “keep to the simplicity of our confession of faith and to the Canons drawn up by the famous Synod of Dordt without intermingling these new hypotheses, phrases, and distinctions.”<sup>64</sup>

On June 16, 1637 the synod began the examination of Amyraut. The professor of Saumur first sought the recusal of de Langle because he had written Amyraut “an insulting letter,” which Amyraut produced the following day. Although de Langle recognized the letter as his own, he did not remember writing it. The synod rejected Amyraut’s request for his recusal.<sup>65</sup> A committee (notable among them de Langle, Daillé, and delegates from Saintonge, Bourgogne, and Montauban) worked for four days (June 27-30, 1637) to summarize the declarations of Amyraut and to bring advice to the synod, which report was approved on July 1.<sup>66</sup> After much deliberation the synod exonerated Amyraut, merely admonishing him to avoid certain offensive phrases:

Although the Assembly is satisfied, it decrees that this phrase, “Jesus Christ dying equally for all” (*également pour tous*), should be subtracted, because this expression, “equally” (*également*) has been, and could again be, a stone of stumbling for many.<sup>67</sup>

Laplanche comments:

The strictest Calvinists did not deny that, in itself, the sacrifice of Christ, from the viewpoint of the dignity of the priest and the victim, had infinite value, and was sufficient to expiate the sins of the entire human race [see Canons 2.3-4]. But the question of the intention of Christ dying on the cross was more delicate. Was [the intention], or was it not, to save all men? Approved by the synod, Amyraut and Testard declared that the intention of Christ is toward the elect, only

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63 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 154.

64 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 155.

65 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 157.

66 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 158.

67 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 159.

as far as the efficacy of His death is concerned: Christ knew who they would be to whom He would give faith, and who would really participate in the salutary fruits of His sacrifice. In that sense, He did not die to save all men. The idea that the two ministers rejected, however, with the contentment of synod, is that Christ has deliberately excluded any from the fruit of His redemptive death.<sup>68</sup>

Synod declared, concerning Amyraut's "conditional decree" that by this the professor of Saumur meant nothing more than "the revealed will of God in His Word: to be gracious and to give life to those who would believe."<sup>69</sup> That, however, the reader will note was *not* what Amyraut had written: he taught very clearly a vehement desire of God to save all men on condition of their faith. Amyraut and Testard also denied the errors "imputed to them by their adversaries" on other points of doctrine. For example,

Doubtlessly, they held, in agreement with everyone, that God by the spectacle of the world invites men to faith and repentance. But they affirmed totally that no person has ever been saved in that way. More, under the New Testament, none would ever be saved except by a distinct knowledge of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

This is fine, but it is not what Amyraut had taught. The synod, writes Laplanche, "accepted this explanation, but forbade Amyraut to reemploy this abuse of language."<sup>71</sup> Concerning the question of the salvation of pagans, the explanation was accepted that "faith [is] impossible for fallen man without the sweet, invincible, and ineffable operation of God," which again is not what Amyraut had affirmed in his writings.<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion, then, although synod disapproved certain phrases ("curious questions," "new expressions which could be interpreted in a bad sense") and urged men "not to dispute continually about questions or interpretations, nor to propose new matters of controversy," Amy-

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68 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 159.

69 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 160.

70 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 161.

71 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 162.

72 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 162.



raut's "fundamental doctrine was not condemned at all" and "we do not see that the synod required of Amyraut a full or partial retraction of his theories. Therefore, we can affirm that at the Synod of Alençon the Reformed Churches of France guaranteed the orthodoxy of the theologian of Saumur."<sup>73</sup>

### **The Aftermath of the National Synod of Alençon**

Since the National Synod of Alençon had taken a moderate approach, exonerating Amyraut while disapproving certain phrases, it is hardly surprising that the various factions in the French Reformed Churches interpreted the decisions differently and that none was completely satisfied with the outcome. Amyraut, Testard, and their friends viewed themselves vindicated: "a victory for their doctrines."<sup>74</sup> Amyraut's adversaries, however, "esteemed that [Amyraut] had been condemned at Alençon, but they deplored the moderation of the condemnation."<sup>75</sup> De Langle, who served on the pre-advice committee at synod, in a letter to André Rivet remarks: "There was found no one [at synod] who approved their expressions that had given scandal," and added, "we did not believe their heterodoxies merited deposition, except that this rigor would have interested certain persons whose names are great in our churches."<sup>76</sup> De Langle continues, "We were content to make them speak like us and according to the terms of the Synod of Dordt, erasing their most scandalous expressions, and abolishing their conditional decrees."<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, the decisions of the synod did not satisfy Rivet and du Moulin, who wrote to Geneva and elsewhere that "the assembly has healed the hurt of the church slightly," a reference to Jeremiah 6:14: "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the decisions of Alençon "had not completely reassured *La Compagnie*

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73 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 164.

74 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 165.

75 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 165.

76 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 165.

77 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 165.

78 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 166.

nie of pastors” in Geneva.<sup>79</sup> Du Moulin was, of course, correct in his analysis, and the Swiss had reason for skepticism, for the compromise of Alençon failed to secure peace in the French churches. Although the synod had tried to stifle debate by prohibiting further writings on these subjects, the writing of polemical letters continued.

In 1640 Amyraut, urged by de Langle, had an opportunity to respond to an anonymous Arminian writing that had been spreading throughout England and the Netherlands. Amyraut accepted this opportunity “with pleasure,” writing *Defensio Doctrinae Johannis Calvini de Absoluto Reprobationis Decreto Adversus Anonymum* (*A Defense of John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Decree of Absolute Reprobation Against an Anonymous Adversary*) in 1641.

Laplanche describes the work:

Under a more philosophical and developed form the work took up again the theories already supported in Amyraut’s recent publications. The expressions condemned by the synod no longer appear, but all the doctrines dear to Amyraut are reproduced: the universal extent of redemption and the promises of salvation (Chapters I and IX), moral inability and conversion (Chapter VIII), the double will of God considered as Legislator, on the one hand, and as Father, on the other hand (Chapters VIII, IX, and XVI), the theoretical possibility of faith for the non-evangelized (Chapter XII), [and] the action of grace in the illumination of the understanding (Chapter IV). Once again, to respond to traditional objections to Reformed doctrine Amyraut judged it indispensable to have recourse to the diverse theories of “conditional universalism.”<sup>80</sup>

For example, Amyraut asks, “What contrariety is found between these two things, God wills that all men be saved provided that (*pourvu que*) they believe, but He does not will to give to all men the grace to believe?”<sup>81</sup> Surprisingly, despite Amyraut’s exposition of the same themes that had offended his adversaries the *Defensio* was well received: “this brilliant defense of the doctrine of Calvin was generally

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79 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 168.

80 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 169.

81 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 169-70.

received with sympathy in the Reformed churches.” Even André Rivet wrote to congratulate Amyraut on his work.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, all was not well behind the scenes. Rivet, for example, complained in a private letter, “they are saying everywhere that I now approve Amyraut. To applaud him when he defends the absolute decree is not to support him when he invents the conditional decree.”<sup>83</sup> To the shock and dismay of Amyraut, the provincial synod of Poitiers refused in 1643 to admit three graduates of *L’Académie de Saumur* to the ministry. Amyraut protested in a letter to Rivet that by this move the Synod of Poitiers “seems to me to gallop at full speed towards schism.”<sup>84</sup>

Next to enter the fray was the theologian Frédéric Spanheim, who had been a member of the *Compagnie Vénérable* of the pastors of Geneva, but who had become professor of theology in Leyden in 1642. At the beginning of 1644 he published certain theses against universal grace, aimed, said Rivet, not against Amyraut, but against the theologians of Bremen. Nevertheless, Amyraut viewed his doctrines under assault by Spanheim’s work.<sup>85</sup> The professor of Leyden established three points, “particularism of the salvific will of God, restriction of the benefits of redemption to the elect alone, and the identification of the external calling with the preaching of the gospel alone.”<sup>86</sup> Amyraut, *vivement piqué* (“deeply stung”), prepared a response, which contains similar ideas to those expressed in his earlier works: “God does not cease to show Himself merciful to all because He has made man’s faith the condition for the universal extension of His pardon” and “if sinful man cannot of himself fulfill the condition, Amyraut insists again on the light that the distinction between physical and moral inability brings.”<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, “Amyraut denies that it is essential to the virtue of Christ’s sacrifice that He redeem *in fact* all those that He redeems *by right*. One must not say, some are redeemed *by right*, as well as *in fact*, but *by right* all are redeemed conditionally;

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82 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 172.

83 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 172.

84 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 174.

85 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 179.

86 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 181.

87 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 183.

they are redeemed *in fact* who have believed. It does not belong to Christ to give faith to men, who would procure for His sacrifice an effectively universal salutary virtue, because the gift of faith is the Father's affair, who acts in this domain with sovereign liberty... One must, in sum, distinguish two fruits of Christ's sacrifice: grace obtained *conditionally* for all [and] faith obtained *absolutely* for some according to a disposition that remains secret."<sup>88</sup>

Laplanche elaborates:

This distinction permits Amyraut to respond to attacks directed against his doctrine under the following form: how can it be conceived that Christ has redeemed the reprobate? Amyraut says: Christ has redeemed them in this sense, that He has merited the remission of their sins and the gift of His grace, if they believe. He has not redeemed them in this sense, that He has not effectively obtained faith for them, and while no obstacle stands any longer between them and divine justice, it remains to them but to believe, and it is uniquely their fault that they have not been redeemed.<sup>89</sup>

Amyraut, misjudging the sentiments of his former adversary, dedicated his work to André Rivet, much to the latter's irritation, and departed for the National Synod of Charenton (1644). Rivet complained in a private letter that "the assertors of universal redemption equally for all men (*également pour tous*), of universal, sufficient grace and calling, and of salvation on the condition of faith ... have powerfully worked everywhere, and sensing themselves supported in the dominant city [presumably, Paris], have spoken more boldly than ever," and warned of complaints coming to the synod.<sup>90</sup> Letters arrived at the synod from various quarters, including from Geneva, whose pastors "asked [the synod] to bar the way against the novelties of Saumur."<sup>91</sup>

Amyraut's adversaries sought two outcomes from the Synod of Charenton. First, they wanted a disciplinary rebuke against him for having transgressed the rules of the Synod of Alençon. Second, they

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88 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 184-5.

89 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 185.

90 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 186.

91 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 186.

sought the condemnation of Josué de la Place, Amyraut's colleague at Saumur, for his doctrine of original sin, the theory of mediate imputation.<sup>92</sup> Antoine Garissolles, professor of *L'Académie de Montauban*, was the president of synod. Synod judged as "very exaggerated" the charge that Amyraut had transgressed the rules of the Synod of Alençon: "judging that it would be much more valuable to bury all these complaints, which have been brought by one party or the other, in perpetual forgottenness (*oubli*), this assembly sends back Monsieur Amyraut with honor, exhorting him to acquit himself courageously and joyously of his office of pastor and professor of theology." Synod added this strong warning: "[It] formally forbids ministers and professors, under penalty of incurring all the censures of the Church, to go beyond the terms that these Canons [of Dordt] prescribe." Synod also forbade writing and discussing these "curious questions," applying the warning especially to seminarians, lest they be declared unworthy of ever being employed in the sacred ministry.<sup>93</sup>

Laplanche points out the obvious: "The synod did not approach questions of doctrine. It was content to impose rigorous silence on the controversial questions," adding that Amyraut was "not worried." Amyraut requested permission, however, to respond to works printed in foreign lands that tarnished his reputation, which the synod said that it would consider if expedient.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, Josué de la Place, Amyraut's friend, did not get off so lightly: his doctrine of the mediate imputation of Adam's sin was condemned, although synod did not name him as the advocate of the doctrine.<sup>95</sup>

### Further Quarrels and a Ceasefire of Sorts

After the Synod of Charenton Amyraut came under further attack from Spanheim in Leyden, encouraged by André Rivet, whose irritation against Amyraut had increased. Spanheim viewed the book that

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92 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 186-7.

93 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 187.

94 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 188.

95 For more information on Josué de la Place see my "The Resurrection of a French Heresy: Joshua de la Place's Denial of the Immediate Imputation of Adam's Sin to His Posterity" (<https://cprc.co.uk/articles/delaplace/>).

he was preparing against Amyraut “the war machine destined definitively to crush Saumur.”<sup>96</sup> In 1646 Spanheim dropped a mammoth tome of some 2,500 pages on Amyraut, his *Exercitationes de Gratia Universali*. Amyraut sought permission from the provincial synod of Anjou, which met in Saumur, to respond to Spanheim, which was granted to him.<sup>97</sup> However, Amyraut’s public debate with Spanheim only served to stir up further adversaries to write against the professor of Saumur: “We see, in effect, a veritable coalition against Saumur: it reunited the brothers Rivet, Spanheim, du Moulin, and Vincent. At the same time, the Swiss and the Genevans were becoming more and more suspicious of these French novelties.”<sup>98</sup> In 1648 du Moulin wrote again, although it was only to repeat the criticisms leveled against Amyraut in an earlier work. To this latter work, writes Laplanche, we have no knowledge of a reply.<sup>99</sup> Other writings appeared: a second volume by Spanheim, who died before its publication in 1649; a collection of writings published in Leyden by some of Amyraut’s critics (1648); a work by Guillaume Rivet; and a work by a layman named Georges Reveau.<sup>100</sup>

Meanwhile, in Switzerland the opposition to Saumur increased, so much so that the government of Berne forbade the *Conseil Académique of Lausanne* to send their students to Saumur.<sup>101</sup>

The quarrel between Amyraut and his detractors came to a peaceful conclusion (not that the doctrinal differences were settled, but that the various parties agreed to cease writing against one another, an epistolary ceasefire of sorts) by the intervention in 1649 of Henri-Charles de la Trémouille, the duke of Thouars and the prince of Tarente. This French nobleman in *L’Acte de Thouars* achieved what synods and influential ministers had failed to do, and he accomplished it *in two days*, ending a quarrel that had lasted for fifteen years! “Not only were all the past disputes forgotten, but obliging themselves to have recourse to the prince if they were attacked, the adversaries would suppress for

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96 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 189.

97 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 200.

98 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 211.

99 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 211, 216.

100 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 216, 217, 218,

101 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 221.

the future every cause of conflict between them.”<sup>102</sup> Laplanche warns, however, “*L’Acte de Thouars* proceeded from the need to forget and a desire for harmony, but not at all from doctrinal reconciliation.”<sup>103</sup> Du Moulin and Amyraut were restored to personal amity before the former’s death at the age of 90 years in 1658, while Vincent and the two Rivet brothers (André and Guillaume) had died in 1651, thus three more major antagonists had departed this world.<sup>104</sup>

A new dispute broke out when the pastor of Sommières in southern France, a man named Vals preached “the hypotheses of Saumur.” Luchère, the pastor of nearby Villevielle, protested Vals and the provincial synod of Bas-Languedoc in Occitanie in southern France deposed Vals in 1652 and “took general measures against the partisans of the doctrines of Saumur,” so that “no student coming from Saumur would be accepted in Bas-Languedoc to serve in the ministry, and the young theologians who resided in that town would be immediately recalled.”<sup>105</sup> Vals appealed the decisions of the provincial synod to the next national synod, while Le Faucheur protested the measures taken against the students of Saumur.<sup>106</sup> Laplanche does not relate the outcome of the appeal, except that in 1654 the synod of Montpellier in southern France again forbade the “use of [certain] expressions and the preaching of novel doctrines.”<sup>107</sup>

In 1655 David Blondel, former pastor of Roucy in northern France and who had been resident in the Netherlands since 1650, took it upon himself to publish a history of the Amyraldian controversy, explaining it in terms of “the jealousies of persons and the rivalries of academies.” He argued, “If Amyraut’s doctrine were contrary to Reformed orthodoxy, it would not have been tolerated by the synods.” A minister from Saintonge named Gauthier sought to refute Blondel by writing a different version of events less flattering to Amyraut, but the synod of Nimègue declined in 1659 to authorize its publication. Jean Daillé also wrote a voluminous apology for the brothers of Saumur,

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102 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 228.

103 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 229.

104 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 232.

105 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 238.

106 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 239.

107 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 241.

but did not intend to publish it. Nevertheless, a copy made its way to the Netherlands, where it was published in 1655.<sup>108</sup> Daillé's renewed defense of Amyraut provoked a response from, among others, Samuel de Marest and Louis de Moulin, the son of the deceased professor of Sedan.<sup>109</sup>

Once more Amyraut's case came before a national synod, this time in Loudon in 1659, five years before Amyraut's death. The provinces of La Bourgogne and Saintonge had forbidden their ministers to teach "the novel dogmas [of Saumur]," and in Saintonge the question had again been raised concerning the imposition of a "formula condemning the doctrines of Saumur."<sup>110</sup> Amyraut's ally Jean Daillé was elected president of synod. "When the question of grace came to be deliberated, complaints exploded on both sides." The Swiss wrote to the assembly, "[We] can in no wise accept the doctrines of Saumur, which [are] obviously contrary to Reformed orthodoxy." The delegates of Saintonge complained that Amyraut and Daillé had disobeyed the judgments of the Synod of Alençon, while Amyraut countered that the province of Saintonge wanted to impose a formula on their candidates condemning his doctrine. "Far from denying that this was their design, the delegates of Saintonge asked that the use of this [formula] be generalized, but this suggestion was rejected as extravagant and tyrannical."<sup>111</sup> Synod, having heard the explanations of Amyraut and Daillé, found that "they were very pure and orthodox in their sentiments..." and that neither man had written anything contrary to the decrees of earlier synods. Thus Amyraut was exonerated again:

Everything that has transpired with respect to this subject [the polemics between the various men] until this day should be buried and forgotten and Messieurs Daillé and Amyraut are exhorted to persevere in the faithful use of the talents with which God has adorned them for the advancement of His glory and the edification of His church.<sup>112</sup>

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108 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 241.

109 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 242.

110 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 245.

111 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 245.

112 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 245-6.



Daillé advised the Swiss: “Henceforth your anxiety is groundless: there is no possibility of a revival of the quarrel.”<sup>113</sup> Not everyone was satisfied, but the controversy died down because Amyraut, whose final years were marked by poor health and weariness, neglected to respond to his critics. Amyraut died on January 8, 1664, maintaining his doctrine of hypothetical universalism to the end.

## Conclusion

Unchecked by discipline, and even emboldened by the lack thereof, Amyraut continued as theological professor of Saumur. In that capacity he was able to influence a whole generation of new Reformed pastors. Thus Amyraldianism spread like a leaven through the French churches.

Twenty-one years after Amyraut’s death, on October 18, 1685, King Louis XIV declared Protestantism illegal within the kingdom of France, revoking the celebrated Edict of Nantes that had been signed in April 1598 by King Henry IV. With the stroke of a pen the French monarch ended eighty-seven years of religious toleration for the French Huguenots. With the Edict of Fontainebleau (otherwise known as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes) the king ordered the destruction of Protestant churches and schools, the expulsion of Protestant pastors, and the conversion of the Protestant people to Roman Catholicism. Sadly, Amyraldianism had so weakened the French churches that many embraced Rome rather than suffer persecution, while many of the expelled pastors brought Amyraldianism with them.

[Amyraldianism was] disastrous to French Protestantism before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes ... The French Reformed Church virtually ceased to be a witness to the doctrines of grace ... a few years later a terrible storm of persecution broke out, and scattered the French Protestants over the globe. It is not for us to call this a divine retribution or visitation in wrath, but few will deny that a deep declension had begun.<sup>114</sup>

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113 Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication*, 247.

114 George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 323-233.

Amyraldianism is so similar to Roman Catholicism *in its essential theology* that many Huguenots did not see the need to resist the pressure to return to Rome once the protections of the state were lifted. Many Reformed people might be surprised to hear that: surely Roman Catholicism and Amyraldianism are poles apart! The Reformers, however, recognized that the difference between Rome and the truth is not in externals, such as the Mass, purgatory, the pope, and the place of Mary—important matters to be sure. The essential difference between Rome and the truth is *grace*—the necessity, the nature, the extent, and the efficacy of grace. On those points, Amyraut and the Roman Catholics were in essential agreement.

Amyraut's theology was more subtle—and, therefore, more dangerous—than Arminianism. Amyraut has rightly been called “the gravedigger of the French Reformed Church.”<sup>115</sup> Amyraut dug the hole with his theology. With the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the carcass of the French Reformed Huguenot church was shoved into the grave prepared for it by the compromised theology of Saumur. ●

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115 Roger Nicole, quoting Georges Serr in *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 54 (Fall 1992), 396.

# Sunday from *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*

by H. Bouwman

Translated by Peter Vander Schaaf



## Introduction

Wherever there are Reformed Churches, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*<sup>1</sup> is regarded as one of the fundamental texts on the Church Order; but finding any biographical information on its author is difficult. I have yet to find any sources in English. I am grateful to the librarians at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary for providing two Dutch books which give some insight into the life and times of Dr. Harm Bouwman. These are: *Onder Veilige Hoede: De Theologische School Te Kampen Gedurende de Jaren 1854-1924* (*Under Safe Care: The Theological School of Kampen during the Years 1854-1924*) by Bouwman himself (published by J. H. Kok, Kampen, 1924), and *Een Monument der Afscheiding: De Theologische Hogeschool van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1854-1954* (*A Monument to the*

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1 Harm Bouwman (1863-1933). The material translated and published here is taken from vol. 2 of this work, published in Dutch by J.H. Kok (Kampen) in 1934.

*Separation: The Theological College of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands 1854-1954* by W. De Graaf (J. H. Kok, Kampen, 1955).

Harm Bouwman was born in 1863 in Uithuizen, Groningen, the third son of Jan Okke Bouwman and his wife, Cornelia Sietsema. Jan Okke and Cornelia were farmers and committed children of the Afscheiding. Cornelia passed away when Harm was only three years old and much of his nurture was provided by his grandmother. Harm showed early aptitude for reading and for books and he would read sermons to his grandmother. Perhaps as a result of reading these sermons, young Harm felt a desire to enter the ministry. Father Bouwman did not immediately give his consent. Jan Okke believed that a young man must be converted before he thought about the ministry, and he did not believe that he had yet seen evidence of that conversion in his son.<sup>2</sup> Harm's father gave his consent when the family's minister stated his conviction that Harm showed all of the necessary requisites for the pastorate. The minister even offered to tutor Harm in Latin and in Greek. A local teacher consented to give the young man instruction in French, German, and math. Unfortunately, this good start was interrupted when the pastor left.

Harm was almost eighteen in 1881 when he entered the preparatory school in Assen. In 1886, at age twenty-three, he began his studies at the Theological School of Kampen. There he attended the lectures of Herman Bavinck. During his time as a student, Bouwman took seminary courses at the Theological School in Kampen and also did academic studies in theology at the Gemeentelijke Universiteit (the City University) of Amsterdam. He completed his exams for candidacy for the ministry at the Theological School in 1891, and his doctoral studies in theology in Amsterdam in 1893. His doctoral dissertation was entitled, "The Concept of Justification in the Holy Scriptures."

Bouwman entered the ministry in 1893 when he accepted the call to the Reformed Church of Berlikum, in Friesland. In 1897 he answered the call to Hattem, in Gelderland. Bouwman served in Hattem until he accepted his appointment to the faculty of the Theological School in Kampen in 1903.

In 1892 the churches of the Afscheiding and the churches of the Doleantie joined to form one, large Reformed denomination, the Ge-

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2 W. De Graaf, *Een Monument der Afscheiding*, 247.

reformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN), or the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. One of the stipulations of this union was that the new denomination would use two different institutions for the seminary training of ministers. The congregations would call their ministers from among the graduates of the Theological School at Kampen and the theological department of the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam. The Theological School of Kampen had been the seminary of the Afscheiding churches and had been owned by those churches. The Free University had been founded under the leadership of Abraham Kuiper, and had trained ministers for the Doleantie. The Theological School of Kampen was to be owned and governed by the new denomination through a board of curators. The Free University was owned and operated by the Vereeniging voor Hooger Onderwijs (the Society for Higher Education), a school society that was made up of Reformed believers and that was independent of the denomination. The theological department of the Free University would train ministers for the Reformed Churches under a contractual agreement.<sup>3</sup>

There were leaders of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) who believed that the denomination should not control its own seminary. They believed that the organization of the Free University, with its independent school society, was more in line with Reformed church history and Reformed principles. This also meant that they believed that the Reformed Churches could do without the Theological School of Kampen. Among these theologians were two leading lights of Kampen itself, Herman Bavinck and P. Biesterveld.

However, the congregations that had come out of the Afscheiding were protective of their seminary. They insisted that Kampen was the seminary of all of the churches, of the Afscheiding and Doleantie congregations together, not the seminary of only the Afscheiding congregations. They also reminded the congregations of the Doleantie that doing away with Kampen would violate the agreement under which the denomination had been formed. Regarding the ownership of a seminary and in contrast to the churches of the Doleantie, the churches of the Afscheiding asserted that Reformed principles of church polity required the denomination to own and operate its own seminary. But there was one more point of contention. The Theological School of

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3 H. Bouwman, *Onder Veilige Hoede*, 76.

Kampen maintained that the Reformed creeds must be the foundation of seminary instruction. The Free University, following the thought of Abraham Kuyper, stated that its instruction, including that of the theological faculty, would be founded upon “Reformed principles,” not upon the Reformed creeds.

At the Synod of Arnhem in 1902 several theologians and ministers of the Reformed Churches proposed that the faculty of the Theological School of Kampen be placed under the Free University and become part of its theology department. This would end the independent existence of the Theological School of Kampen. Among the sponsors of this proposal were Bavinck and Biesterveld. The motion passed, but the minority of delegates and advisors who were opposed was large and adamant. Their objections are recorded in the minutes. This would violate the agreement of 1892 and destroy the peace of the churches.<sup>4</sup> This latter concern gave the Synod pause. The Synod of Arnhem would not rescind its decision; but it did make a decision that must be unusual in the history of Reformed synods. The Synod passed a motion that it would not apply its decision to merge the two faculties.<sup>5</sup> The Synod of Arnhem had decided to merge the Theological School into the Free University, but it would not carry that decision out. There were many in the denomination who thought that the Theological School would simply die away as its enrollment and its support dwindled.

The years 1902 and 1903 were dark times for the Theological School. Late in 1902 Bavinck and Biesterveld resigned their places at Kampen in order to take up positions at the Free University. Of Kampen’s fifty-five students, twenty-seven followed the two professors to Amsterdam. By the end of that school year ten of the remaining twenty-eight students completed their finishing exams. That left eighteen students for the beginning of the 1903 school year. Within a few months the Theological School lost two of its most well known professors and two thirds of its student body. The curators resolved to appoint two men to fill the chairs of dogmatics and of church polity; but the school’s treasurer did not believe that funds could be found to pay for those good intentions. He wrote to the curators that if they

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4 H. Bouwman, *Onder Veilige Hoede*, 90-91.

5 H. Bouwman, *Onder Veilige Hoede*, 92.

went forward with their plan to appoint two new professors, they should also accept his resignation.<sup>6</sup>

In 1903 two men had the courage to accept their appointments, H. Bouwman and A.G. Honig. The book, *Een Monumet der Afscheiding*, commemorates the first one hundred years of the school. It gives to Bouwman and Honig their own chapter, and calls them *twee moedige mannen* (“two brave men”). The two new men could not be sure that the seminary would survive. Neither Bouwman nor Honig were well known at the time and both were stepping into large shoes. However, both Bouwman and Honig brought talent, commitment, and wisdom to their new positions. Both men went on to distinguish themselves at Kampen; and both were credited for their parts in restoring the school to a secure place within the Reformed Churches. There were other ministers and consistories, particularly among the Afscheiding congregations, who rallied behind the Theological School. After a few years enrollment stabilized and then began to grow again. Talk of doing away with Kampen simply stopped.

Bouwman was appointed to teach church history and church polity. His students remembered his comprehensive knowledge of the subjects, his lucid instruction, and the effective preparation that he gave them for the ministry. They also remembered his sincere smile and his pastor’s heart. In addition to his work in the seminary, Bouwman was active in the life of his church and community. Bouwman taught at Kampen the rest of his life. In 1932 he asked the curators to grant him emeritation in the following year. He died on February 8, 1933 at age 70, just before his emeritation went into effect.

During his time at the Theological School, Bouwman wrote many articles on church history and church polity; and he also wrote books. In 1907 he published *Het Ambt der Diakenen* (*The Office of Deacon*), in 1912 *De Kerkelijke Tucht* (*Church Discipline*), and in 1924 *Onder Veilige Hoede* (*Under Safe Care*), which was the seventy-five year commemorative book of the Theological School. Volume 1 of *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* (*Reformed Church Polity*) appeared in 1928. Volume two was published in 1934 after the author’s death.

*Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* makes clear what the foundation of Reformed church polity is, what its proper application is, and what its

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6 W. De Graaf, *Een Monument der Afscheiding*, 240.

fundamental purpose is. Reformed church polity is *scriptural* church polity. It is consistent with and founded upon God's Word. The Reformed Church Order is a binding guide to the life and the wisdom of the churches as they maintain their offices, their assemblies, their worship, and their discipline. The application of the Church Order must always serve the goals of decency and good order. Reformed church polity exists to serve the well being of the churches, the salvation of its members, and most of all, the glory of its King.

The organization of *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht* is different from what North American readers who are used to their "Van Dellen and Monsma" might expect.<sup>7</sup> Bouwman did not work through the Church Order article by article. He arranged his work by topic, in a way that allows him to expound practices, principles, scriptural support, history, and practical applications at length. For example, in the "Introduction," Bouwman explains the nature of church polity and its place in the life of the church. Book 1 is entitled "The Polity of the Church in Its Historical Development." Bouwman describes the organization of the church during the apostolic and the ancient periods, the medieval decline, and the Lutheran and Calvinistic concepts of church organization. He ends Book 1 with an overview of the church polities of Reformed denominations in various countries. Book 2 is titled, "The Polity of the Church as It Must Exist According to God's Word and Be Practiced." The four parts of Book 2 are titled, "Part 1 - The Church and the Offices," "Part 2 - The Church and Her Government," "Part 3 - The Church and the Ministry of the Sacraments and Ceremonies," and "Part 4 - The Church and the Maintaining of Her Confession and the Practice of Discipline." In the Section on church offices, Bouwman treats "The Ministers of the Word" with chapters entitled, "The Necessity of the Lawful Calling," "The Election," "The Examination," "The Approbation," "The Ordination," "The Call to Another Congregation," and so forth. The chapter on Sunday appears in "Part 3 - The Church and the Ministry of the Sacraments and Ceremonies," along with a chapter on church holidays.

Bouwman begins his chapter on Sunday by explaining the nature and the origin of the Sabbath according to Scripture. He then gives

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7 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1946).



an overview of the ways in which the Christian church has observed Sunday throughout the New Testament period. He points out the differences that existed between viewpoints of the fathers of Dordrecht and of the Puritans on the concept of the Sabbath rest. He touches on the debate that took place between the Coccians and the Voetians during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries over the nature and proper observance of Sunday. He ends with practical application: What must the witness of the churches be regarding the correct observance of Sunday? And how must the churches teach their members to keep Sunday in the way that God's Word calls them to do?

The reader will notice that Bouwman's essay has value as a historical document. In his advice on practical application, he is clearly speaking to Reformed believers who live in the Netherlands during the first decades of the twentieth century. Bouwman also reflects the doctrinal conversations that were taking place during his time. He asserts that the Sabbath of Eden was a component of the covenant of works and that the Sabbath became a part of the covenant of grace with Moses at Sinai. In addition, Bouwman writes that, after the fall of Adam, "it pleased the Lord to postpone the dreadfulness of the execution of punishment and the triumph of His avenging righteousness, to put a bridle on the consuming power of sin, and to check its working, and to reveal Himself in the riches of His grace." Bouwman also believes that it is an important part of the church's understanding of the Sabbath that the rest of one day in seven is good for the natural life of man. He says that the rest of Sunday is a "precious gift for the natural life and also a blessing for [man's] spiritual life." After the Fall, the Sabbath is an expression of God's *algemeene goedheid* ("common goodness") to man. During one day of the week man may find relief for body and soul, and be reminded to lift up his gaze from the plane of this world and see that there is an eternal rest for God's people. Bouwman's language on the topic of the Sabbath's benefit for man's natural life is worth noting. *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht* was written during the 1920s, during a time in which the influence of Abraham Kuyper was at its peak. But Bouwman was a man of the Afscheiding and of Kampen. Bouwman leaves the reader to wonder whether he would go so far as to say that there is a work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of unbelieving men to restrain sin, or whether he believes that

there is a favor or grace of God toward all creatures in general. The term *gemeene gratie* ("common grace") does not appear in "Sunday."

But most importantly, the reader will find in "Sunday" the Reformed understanding of the Lord's Day. First, the fourth commandment has both ceremonial and moral components. The ceremonial elements have been fulfilled by Christ, and in its moral elements the fourth commandment continues to bind the New Testament church. Second, Sunday is indeed the New Testament Sabbath. The consecration of the first day rests on the example of the apostles and the apostolic church; and it is also required by the teaching of Scripture regarding the nature of the Sabbath and the nature of Christ's completed work. God's Word does not give an explicit rule that the New Testament church must move its Sabbath from the seventh day to the first. The church does not need that. It is because the New Testament church understands the nature of the Sabbath and the completed work of Christ that she consecrates Sunday, the first day of the week, to the worship of God. Third, Bouwman warns against the two errors into which the church has constantly fallen, namely, the libertine desecration of the Lord's Day and the legalistic multiplication of rules for Sunday. On the one hand, the church must discipline those who repeatedly and obstinately desecrate the Lord's Day. On the other hand, the multiplication of lists of what is and is not allowed on Sunday will result in making the keeping of the Lord's Day improperly external. It will make Sunday a painful burden and rob the believer of his joy in God's salvation. Therefore, the rule for Sunday is not, "What can I do without trespassing God's law?" but, "How can I most magnify the honor of God today?" Believers with different circumstances in life ought to be allowed the freedom of their own consciences in things that are indifferent. Let every believer judge his fellow Christian by a broad standard and walk himself on a narrow path. Finally, the church must use the ministry of the Word to bind upon the consciences of believers the requirements of God that are the same for all. These are, that on Sunday every believer will set aside his daily work and consecrate himself to the service of God, that every believer will diligently attend the worship services, and that every believer will delight in the Lord.

May God give us also the grace, the wisdom, and the zeal that we need for that work.

**Part Three - The Church and the Service of the Sacraments and Ceremonies**

**Section III. Sunday and Holidays**

**Chapter 94. Sunday**

**a. In the Scripture**

The Sabbath is an institution of God. It is not founded upon an arbitrary invention of man, but is given by the wisdom and the all-encompassing provision of the Creator at the creation, as a blessing to man. For the institution of the Sabbath the law of the Lord looks back to the creation. After the Lord had made the heaven and earth in six days, He rested on the seventh day, and blessed and sanctified that day as the Sabbath day (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:10). This seventh day was for God Himself a holy day in that He saw that His work was good and He rejoiced in His creation. The glory of His name is the ultimate goal of all His work. And just as the artist enjoys viewing the work that was designed by his creative genius and executed by his hand, so also the Lord delighted in His work of creation and, from then on, in being a God for the creation. For the rest of God is not a doing-nothing, so that after the creation He separated Himself from the creation; but He continued to provide for the creature as He continued to uphold and govern all things by His almighty and omnipresent power.

But because God rested on the seventh day, set aside this day from the other days, blessed and sanctified it, precisely this displays His will that man also celebrate the Sabbath. The life of man must portray a likeness of the life of God. As God rested from His work of creation after a work of six days, so also must man rest, after a striving of six days, after a week of work. Because man is an image bearer of God and exists by God's will, his work may not conform to himself but to God. Both his work and his rest must serve thereunto, that he enters into the rest of God and glorifies Him in His works. Thus the rest of the Sabbath is not a doing-nothing, not an empty enjoyment in the creation, but an entering into living fellowship with the Creator. The creation knows no complete idleness. Nature follows her course also on the Sabbath. The sun sends out her light and life also on the Sabbath. The earth feeds all creation from her nurturing bosom also on the Sabbath. Also on the Sabbath, the almighty power of God creates new life and gives provision. The life of man also has its demands

and duties on the Sabbath. But man may not live for the earthly on the Sabbath. Rather, he must cease to stop carrying out his earthly calling as much as possible in order to dedicate himself to the service and glorifying of his Creator.

The Sabbath belonged originally to the covenant of works, and carried within itself the prophecy that as man lived obediently in God's way, he would at some time enter the eternal Sabbath.<sup>8</sup> He was so created that he was able to be disobedient and able to fall out of that rest and fellowship with God. But what he was able to do he did not have permission to do. Punishment was threatened for transgressing God's commands, but life and salvation were promised upon the keeping of God's commands. That was held before Adam in the probationary commandment. But man fell and the command that was unto life became unto death for him. The ruler of creation was cursed, and therewith the entire creation came under the destructive power of the curse. Yet it pleased the Lord to postpone the dreadful-ness of the execution of punishment and the triumph of His avenging righteousness, to put a bridle on the consuming power of sin, and to check its working in order to reveal Himself in the riches of His grace.

Also the Sabbath remained as a fruit of His common goodness.

Certainly the Sabbath was no longer a prophecy of eternal rest for the sinner, but it remained a precious gift for natural life, and always a blessing for his spiritual life. After all, the Lord does not desire, even after the Fall, that His rational creature be born along by the restless current of this present life. He gave specific times of rest. Where work became a burden, the Sabbath became a duty, so that floundering man could catch his breath. And in the rest for his earthly life, the tense spring would relax so that its power was not broken. But in the second place, in the weekly repetition of the Sabbath, the Lord intended to remind man that his final end is not in the earth. Man must look up from the dust in order to expect all help and salvation from the Father of all mercies, and enjoy the assurance that there remains a rest for the people of God.

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8 The Protestant Reformed Churches in America have rejected the traditional view of the covenant of works. According to this view God promised Adam eternal life upon the condition of his perfect obedience in paradise, and thus Adam could merit eternal life and the bliss of heaven.

In Exodus 20:11, it is shown how the Lord, for that reason, Himself rested, blessed that day, and made that day a consecrated day. The Sabbath rest is thus a creation ordinance.<sup>9</sup> In antiquity the number seven was undoubtedly a holy number, although probably most closely connected with nature, the number of the planets and the course of the moon. We also find some indication in the Scriptures that the number seven stood connected with the division of time (Gen. 4:26; 7:1, 10; 8:10,12; 21:4: 29:27), though to what extent this is true of the weekly recurring day of rest is not clear. This is certain, that as yet no one has been able to show that a worship observance on the seventh day existed in any heathen worship. G. Lotz thought that he could deduce from that fact that there could be no talk of an original institution of the Sabbath in Paradise.<sup>10</sup> He opines, as does also Friedrich Delitzsch<sup>11</sup>, that because the Babylonians had a seven-day week that stood in connection with the lunar month, the Israelites had received the Sabbath from the Babylonians. But it is not likely that the Israelite Sabbath and the Babylonian *sabbattu* are closely related. It is true that in each of two months of the year the Babylonians celebrated five days, specifically the seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth of the month, as days of penance. But it is certain that the Sabbath celebration of Israel carried an entirely different character from the Babylonian *sabattu*. This is true for several reasons. 1. The Babylonian sabbath is a black day, an “evil day,” and no day in which to rejoice in the Lord as it was in Israel (Isa. 58:13). 2. The Israelite Sabbath is a rest day for man and animal; but there is no inkling of rest in the Babylonian sabbath. Rather, most commercial agreements were contracted on that day.<sup>12</sup> 3. The rule that kings, priests, and doctors were not allowed to perform certain activities did not exist in order to consecrate that day to God, but this day was held to be an evil

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9 Reformed theology has always identified the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, as well as such things as marriage, government, and labor. These are not results of the Fall, though all are affected by the Fall. But they are creation ordinances.

10 Wilhelm Lotz, *Quaestiones de hostoria sabbath* (J.C. Hinrichs, 1883), 105.

11 Friedrich Delitzsch, *Babel und Bibel, Erster Vortrag* (Charleston, South Carolina: Nabu Press, 2009), 29.

12 Dick Wilson, *Princeton Review* (1903), 146.

day. 4. The Babylonian sabbath was repeated on regular days during two months, the months of Elul and Marchesvan, always based on the new moon. In contrast, the Israelite Sabbath was repeated on the seventh day throughout the entire year and was founded on the fact that God created the heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. So the theory must be rejected that the Israelite Sabbath was borrowed from the ancient culture on the Tigris and Euphrates. Equally the theory of Smend must be rejected as incorrect that the Sabbath originated in Canaan, for Exodus 20 teaches clearly that the origin of the Sabbath lies in a creation ordinance.<sup>13</sup>

It is clearly the purpose of the Lord to recover the worshipful celebration of the seventh day, which had almost eroded away in Egypt, where the tenth day was held to be the rest day. That is apparent from Exodus 16:23,25,29, and 33. That the Israelites first heard just then of a Sabbath day in which one was not allowed to work cannot be the purpose of Exodus 16, where Moses answered the questions of the leaders of the congregation, "This is what the Lord has spoken; Tomorrow is rest, the holy Sabbath of the Lord," in explanation of the fact that the people had to gather a double amount of manna on the sixth day. The Sabbath was recognized as well known also in Exodus 20. The people were to remember the Sabbath and hallow it, that is, set that day apart from the other days and consecrate that day to the Lord.<sup>14</sup> After the example of God who rested after the six-day work of creation, the Sabbath is for Israel the conclusion of the six days of work. In Deuteronomy 5:15 the Lord reminds His people of their hard slavery in Egypt, and for that reason not only Israel but also the slave and the work animal are to rest on the Sabbath.

For Israel the Sabbath took on a special meaning in that the Sabbath, which originally belonged to the covenant of works, was taken up into the covenant of grace at the giving of the law at Sinai. In Exodus 31:17, it was established as a symbol of the keeping of the covenant between the Lord and His people. Israel was to subject

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13 Rudolf Smend, *Lehrbuch der Alttestamentischen Religionsgeschichte* (1893), 139; Immanuel Benzinger, *Hebräische Archäologie* (1894), 465; Paul Jensen, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* I. 150, 160.

14 Bruno Baentsch, *HandKommentar Zum Alten Testament, Exodus- Leviticus-Numeri* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 181.

herself completely to the will of God, faithfully keep the Sabbath, and in the way of obedience would experience that God would give the blessings of the covenant to His people (Deut. 6:25). Outward rest also belongs to the celebration of the Sabbath. The complete rest on the Sabbath was a condition to remain in the covenant. Forbidden were the gathering of manna (Ex. 16:22), plowing and harvesting (34:21), kindling a fire (35:3). All who did any work on the Sabbath were to be killed (34:14,15; 35:2; Num. 15:32-36). However, doing nothing was not enough in itself for the proper celebration of the Sabbath, but the ceasing from work was important in order to consecrate the day completely to the Lord. The rest of the Sabbath was thus at its basis a means for glorifying God. Israel was to be busy with holy things on the Sabbath. In addition to the daily sacrifice, a special burnt offering or thank offering was to be brought on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9), the loaves of bread were to be replaced on the Table of Showbread (Lev. 24:8), while a holy convocation was to take place wherein the people could come to the sanctuary in order to pray (Lev. 23:3,8).

Furthermore the Sabbath days were days of rejoicing. In earlier and in later times the Sabbath was called a day of joy (Hos. 2:10; Ps. 92), a day of “delight that the Lord be sanctified, who is to be honored” (Isa. 58:13). Although all ordinary work was expressly forbidden, in reading the Old Testament we do not at all get the impression that the Sabbath was considered in the circles of the pious to be a day that was painful to keep. Certainly in the demands of the law the negative side of the consecration of the Sabbath came more to the fore than the positive side; but the positive goal, the sanctification of the Lord’s Day, joy in the Lord’s service, was very clear. In any case, the later commandment regarding the sabbath journey, that one may not go farther than 2000 ell from the city gate on the Sabbath, is nothing but a rabbinical misconstruing of Exodus 16:29. It is apparent from the history of the Sunamites, who traveled from Sunem to Karmel (a distance of more than 30 kilometers) that among the believers in Israel there was no objection to traveling a large distance on the Sabbath in order to attend the gathering of believers and for hearing God’s Word.

In later years the Sabbath was widely desecrated among the people, so that it was necessary for the prophets to use punitive language (Amos 8:4-6; Hos. 2:10; Isa. 1:13,14; Jer. 17:19). Especially after

the exile, the danger was great that the Israelites would conform themselves to the heathen so that it was necessary to draw the lines of the law clearly for the straying people. That zeal for the law soon degenerated into a vain formalism and a burdensome self-torment. Men lost sight of the spiritual sense of the law. All kinds of rules, how one must conduct himself in special cases, were instituted by the scribes. In that way a ponderous case history grew up which led to a form of slavery.

Over against this self-righteous Phariseeism, which rendered God's law null and void through the institutions of men, stood the Lord Christ. He taught that God commanded nothing that was forbidden by the law of morality or of nature, and forbade nothing that was commanded by either. Instead, the reason for His coming was not to do away with the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). The fulfillment of the law meant that He showed what was the heart and purpose of the law, that the law had in Him its complete fulfillment. Jesus placed Himself under the law in order to fulfill all the demands of the law. He set Himself against the Pharisees' fearful interpretation of the Sabbath commandment, and explained that the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-38). He gave the Jews to understand how greatly the mercy of God is revealed in the establishment and maintenance of the day of rest. Man is not made for the Sabbath, for man existed before the Sabbath. Rather, man was created for the glorifying of God.

From the institution of the Sabbath in the state of righteousness, it appears that man had need of the Sabbath. The day of rest is a means for man, in setting aside his usual earthly calling, to rejoice in his work and with his work and his entire personality, in body and soul, to rest in his God who is his life and salvation. Rest is necessary for the life of man, first of all to strengthen natural life and maintain it. But it also has a higher purpose, namely to enable man more and more to consecrate himself to the God of life, to the glorifying of the Lord's name, and thereby to work out his own salvation, and to rest in fellowship with his Creator.

And finally, Christ fulfilled the law in that by His suffering and death He accomplished everything that was necessary to reconcile guilty man with God and to bring him into righteousness with God.



The perfect sacrifice has now been brought, the blood of atonement of Christ has made an end to the shedding of blood in the sanctuary, the handwriting of sin has been blotted out (Col. 2:14), the middle wall of separation is broken down (Eph. 2:14), the new testament is established in Christ's blood. And with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit the old has passed away, with the result that everything has become new.

That is not to say that the law of Israel has been abolished. The law of God remains also within the new covenant. But what has changed is the form of the covenant, the time bound, the fleshly, and the national forms through which the grace of God was revealed in the old covenant. In accordance with the new order of things in the New Testament it is clear that the life and the service of God no longer moves from the law to the rest, but from the rest to the law. Christ has fulfilled the law, acquired the atonement and the rest so that God's people live out of the salvation of Christ and carry out the law of God as an obligation of thankfulness. In connection with the outward life just as with the inward life, we begin with rest in order from there to push on to the work. And so the rest day comes at the beginning of week instead of the end of the week. The law of the Old Testament had the purpose of raising Israel up to be the people of God, so that when the law was established in Israel, the people of the old covenant should transmit the law of the Lord to the nations.

But the letter of the law, which in itself is good, cannot bring life or change the heart. The law kills. But as the Spirit of the Lord creates the new life, and makes that life into an active power, it becomes something else. Christ, who brought complete atonement through the blood of His cross, regenerates and renews the heart by His Spirit, applies His atonement to believers. And so He works that the law does not remain an authoritative and commanding power outside of us, but it is so indelibly written in the heart that it remains written in the heart into eternity as the rule of life. Then we receive the law in its full extent as the rule of gratitude. Then we serve the Lord out of love and it becomes our desire to fulfill the law. Then we stand free before the law, not because it is no longer necessary to perform the law, but because our manner of life is like that of a child who gladly does what the Father asks. In the same way, the New Testament congregation also stands in regard to the Sabbath commandment.

In connection with salvation through Christ, the New Testament teaches that the church is the true seed of Abraham, the true people of God (Rom. 9:25,26; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; 1 Peter 2:9), the true Zion and Jerusalem which is free (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22). Her spiritual sacrifice is the true worship of God (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18). What is lost from Israel is only the transitory and temporary, the outward form, but the essence remains. The church is the heir of the promise.

It stands to reason that the old dispensation, in its form, persisted for a long time. But it was legally abolished because Christ completely fulfilled the law and the prophets. This explains the practice of the apostolic church. The apostles, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, continued to live in the Jewish manner even after the ascension. Every day they went to the temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 21:26). They visited the synagogue (Acts 9:2; 15:21), but with a completely different understanding, because they believed in Christ who had fulfilled the law and brought about a complete atonement. At first the Jewish Sabbath was maintained, but immediately after the ascension the apostles not only went to the temple on the Sabbath, but they came together daily in their own gathering place in order to break bread and to praise the Lord. Among all the other days, the first day, the day of the Lord, was given the primary place. Sunday was sanctified by the resurrection of Christ and thereby became the day for the rejoicing of faith. Jesus Himself appeared in the midst of the disciples on the day of the resurrection and again eight days after that.

However, the church continued to keep the Jewish Sabbaths and ceremonies, including circumcision (Acts 18:18; 21:20; Gal. 2). She still hoped for the conversion of the Jewish people. Among the Christians in Jerusalem there were still zealots for the law. No wonder that at first the congregation in Jerusalem followed the Jewish way of life, for the Sabbath was observed by the entire nation. Paul himself determined to observe the Jewish ceremonies whenever he came to Jerusalem. But Paul behaved differently whenever he was among the heathen. Among the Jews he took part in the historical tradition, but among the Greeks he took a position above the law. He did not rebuke the Jewish Christians who wanted to keep the Sabbath (Rom. 14:5). He said that all days are alike and that the Sabbath, as a day, has no prominence above another day. But when the Galatians

exalted the seventh day above the first day and saw a principle in the keeping of the Jewish holy days, he warned them and declared that returning to the poor, first principles incurred the danger of denying Christ (Gal. 4:9,10).

When Paul says that all days are equal he is not placing the work-days on a level to which the Sabbath must be brought down. But he is teaching just the opposite, that all days are lifted up to the level of the Sabbath. The reality of all ceremonies and holy days is to be found in Christ. The apostle writes to the congregation of the Colossians, "That no one judge you in meat or drink, or in respect of holy days, or in the new moon, or the sabbaths, which are but a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:16,17). Christ is the fulfillment of the promises, but His salvation cast its shadow backward because it was already real in the Old Testament. Thus, the Passover lamb of Israel was a shadow of Christ, the true Passover lamb; and the Sabbath of the old day was a shadow of the rest of God in Jesus Christ. The church is saved and must reveal itself every day as saved and resurrected in Christ. We no longer have a Sabbath which stands next to unhallowed workdays; but we must rest every day from our sinful works and so begin the heavenly Sabbath in this life. No day, including Sunday, has an inherent worth above the other days by which it has, as a day, an entirely different character.

Is there then no difference any more? Certainly there is. In the first place, it is different because the first day of the week has been hallowed and set apart to the service of God by the resurrection of Christ. Paul says, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Cor. 16:2). Against the Sabbatarians it is noted that the Greek reads, "on the first day of the week," which expression is taken from the manner of naming the weekdays by the rabbis who numbered the days from the Sabbath: the first from the Sabbath, the second from the Sabbath, and so forth. From which it is clear that with "the first from the Sabbath" our Sunday is meant. Mention of the fact that Paul ties this giving to Sunday can hardly have any other meaning than that the congregation was accustomed to coming together on Sunday for the service of God.

In Troas the congregation came together on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), not because Paul had just arrived, for he had come

seven days before. But while nothing special is said regarding the other days, and the Sabbath or the seventh day is not even mentioned, it is noteworthy that it is deliberately stated here that the disciples gathered on the first day to break bread. In Revelation 1:10 the day of the Lord is also called a most excellent day. The expression “I was in the spirit” must not be so closely connected with the following words, “on the day of the Lord,” as if it said that he was transported into the spirit or into a visionary condition on the day of the Lord, that is, on the last day. The day of judgment is designated differently in Revelation, with the terms, “the great day of wrath” (6:17) and “the great day of the almighty God.” The interpretation that the day of the Lord in Revelation 1:10 should mean the day of judgment, as Dr. Lewis<sup>15</sup> explains, is contrary to the specifics of the [Greek] language, because it should read *eis* instead of *en*. Here nothing else is meant than the day that stands in close connection with Christ, the day on which Christ arose, Sunday<sup>16</sup>. Besides, the day of judgment is never called “the day of the Lord” in Scripture, but, “the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12,13), or, “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), or, “the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 1:13, 14), or, “the Lord’s Day” (Acts 2:20).<sup>17</sup> From this it appears that the first day of the week or Sunday was celebrated as a special holy day, dedicated to the resurrection of Christ. The congregation came together on that day in order to serve the Lord in the gathering of the believers.

It is true that there was no firm commandment of the Lord for the celebration of the first day of the week as a day of rest, neither was there a direct regulation from the apostles. But the Lord did not consider that to be necessary. He gave to the church the Spirit of freedom and of light, so that the Spirit would give her to share in the full treasure of salvation and make her conscious thereof. Neither did Jesus require of His disciples that they should break with the temple service and no longer maintain circumcision and the sacrifices. But His disciples

15 *De Zelfmoord van het Protestantisme*, 18.

16 Also later Ignatius of Magn. 9: Didache 14 and Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius IV. 23) refer to Sunday as the Lord’s Day or the day of the resurrection of Christ. Compare also Thomas Zahn, *Skizzen aus dem Leben der alten Kirche*, 180 f ;354 f.

17 See Dr. S. Greijdanus, *Commentaar op de Openbaring des Heeren aan Johannes* (Amsterdam, 1925), 28.

introduced the things of His kingdom, and guided all things in such a way that the last shimmering of the shadowy service of God gradually faded away, and the church became completely free of the casing that had enclosed the essence of the New Testament dispensation. It took place in the same way with the setting aside of the Sabbath. The Lord showed His church that the Sabbath no longer looked forward to the salvation that is to be accomplished, but that the work of salvation has been completed. The day of Christ's resurrection is the day of joyous redemption, wherein the Savior has gone into His rest. And because the church has her life in Christ, lives out of His salvation, she also takes on the day of rest in the organization of days, and Sunday is established as the beginning of the days of the week. For that reason the Apostle Paul raged so against Judaism, not only on the matter of circumcision, but also because of its holding onto the Jewish Sabbath. For that was a failure to understand the grace of Christ (Gal. 5:1,4; 6:14).

But there is more. The Lord God maintained the creation ordinance also in the New Testament, that on the seventh day man should rest from his servile labor. Thereby he would be refreshed in his body and soul, and he would especially consecrate himself to the service of God.

### **b. In History**

In the churches that came out of heathendom the celebration of Sunday was already the norm at the beginning of the second century. The Christians who came out of Judaism generally followed them, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem. They called the day of rest the Lord's Day, or as the Syrian Christians were accustomed, the first day of the week or also the eighth day. Especially after Constantine the Great, it became common to call the first day of the week Sunday. In this way, Sunday is a creation of the Christian church and called the day of the Lord, the day of Christ's resurrection, the weekly Feast of Passover, the day of joy, as was expressed in the regular prayers of the church. Constantine adopted Sunday into the law of the state. The later emperors propagated strict rules regarding rest on Sunday by the insistence of the Christian synods, while Emperor Leo I in 469 extended and sharpened the law of Constantine to forbid all work including manual labor.

In the following centuries the high regard for Sunday, that Sunday in particular is the day of the Lord, dedicated to the Lord's service, November 2020

continued to dominate, although the legalistic point of view asserted itself more and more. Although the Synod of Orleans in 538 had declared that the rules that one may not ride or travel on Sunday, prepare food, or clean the home or the body to be Jewish superstitions, at the end of the seventh century in the Spanish church even walking on Sunday was threatened with punishment. The unruly Germanic tribes had to be consecrated to the observance of the day of rest with the most stringent rules.<sup>18</sup> For a time the Sunday rest began on Saturday evening in the Frankish and in the English churches, in accordance with Canon 29 of the Synod of Laodicea, which had declared that Sunday was to be observed from one evening to the other in order to have a time of preparation for Sunday. But in later years, Sunday was reckoned from morning to evening.

The view of Thomas Aquinas regarding the rest of Sunday can essentially be accepted as correct, but the weak point in him, as with the Romish church in general, is that the basis of the observance of Sunday lies in the church.<sup>19</sup> And because the commandment of God was not bound to the peoples' souls, and the casuists made splintered distinctions between what was or was not commanded, and the clergy were given the right in certain circumstances to allow the laity freedom not to keep the commandments for Sunday and feast days, and because Sunday and the feast days were in practice set on the same level, not much came of the observance of Sunday or the consecration of Sunday in the Romish church.

Luther believed that the foundation of Sunday does not rest upon divine establishment but that the church established Sunday. The church did so, first, because nature requires a day of rest and, secondly, so that we on earth may have the opportunity to come together purposefully for the practice of worship.<sup>20</sup> This view of Luther was shared in its essence by the orthodox Lutheran theologians. The Anabaptists, Schwenkfeld, and Weigel, and other Enthusiasts went farther than Luther and completely did away with the Sabbath as a

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18 Karl J. Hefele, *Conciliengeschichte* (Charleston, South Carolina: Nabu Press, 2012), 2:605, 657, 676, 778; 3:45, 54, 93, 340, 666, 691, 720.

19 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II. 1 and 100, 5; 102, 4; 103, 3; II. 122; Franz Heiner, *Katholisches Kirchenrecht* II. 371.

20 J. Köstlin, *Luther's Theologie* I. 103; II. 284.

day of rest. The Mystics conceded that the low level of spirituality and imperfection of believers made a day for coming together of the members of the congregation necessary, but they acknowledged no other Sabbath than the spiritual Sabbath of the soul, the rest in God.

Calvin originally took the same standpoint as Luther in his view of the Sabbath. In his *Institutes* of 1536, he gave as grounds for the keeping of the Sabbath, first, in order to have a set day for the maintaining of the service of the Word, and second, so that the male servants and the maids might rest. Calvin maintained this standpoint in later editions of the *Institutes* and in the Geneva Catechism of 1545. Bullinger also expressed the same thoughts in the second Helvetic Confession. However, Calvin adopted a more purely scriptural standpoint in his Commentary on Genesis of 1554, in which he understood the conception of the Scriptures that the observance of the Sabbath rests upon divine authority contrary to the feast days that were established by human authority.<sup>21</sup> He wrote regarding Genesis 2:3,

First God rested, then He blessed this rest so that it would through all ages be holy among men; or, if you will, God then designated every seventh day for rest so that His own example should be for an enduring rule... Beyond that, it is to be noted that this institution is not for a certain age or people, but is given for the entire family of mankind.

The explanation in the Heidelberg Catechism of what the Scripture teaches as the basic principle of the observance of Sunday is not to be viewed as complete and fully developed. There is therein no word of the institution of God that requires natural rest as necessary for the welfare of man. There is no word of the purpose of the Sabbath rest, that man should understand that he was created for the service and praise of God so that he would enjoy his peace and blessedness in the service of God.

A stricter view of the observance of Sunday arose in England with the rise of the Puritans. There was a legal aspect that adhered to their view of the Sabbath. This is set down in the Westminster Catechism, which posits as a demand of the fourth commandment (Q&A 117), “The sabbath, or the Lord’s Day, is to be sanctified by a holy resting

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21 Calvin has reference to all of the feast days added to the religious calendar by the Roman Catholic Church.

all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful: and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship." The difference between the standpoint of Calvin in his exposition of Genesis 2:3 and the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19) and of the standpoint of the Puritans lies in the fact that, while Dordrecht only condemned work in so far as it disturbs the worship of that day or is in conflict with the spiritual work of the day, the Westminster Catechism regards rest from worldly work in itself as a religious exercise and forbids all unspiritual busyness. Whereas the Puritans viewed it as sinful if anyone was busy doing something on Sunday or seeking some relaxation, it was Calvin's judgment that we ought only speak of sin when something that we do on Sunday disturbs the coming together for worship, or through its material nature leads us away from the spiritual. This is a difference that comes down to the question whether the rest of the Sabbath is a means or an end.

In our country [the Netherlands], at the beginning of the Reformation, except for some local city ordinances, there existed no ecclesiastical decisions regarding the celebration of Sunday. The Synod of Dordrecht (1574, Art. 47) decided that "the classes should request of the magistrates, that on Sunday they should forbid buying, selling, drinking, working, traveling, and so forth, specifically during the preaching." The churches urged the people not to give themselves up to dance, games, and idle activities, and that they should faithfully attend the church services. On the first of February 1583, a strict ordinance was announced in Holland, Zeeland, and West Friesland, in which it was forbidden that public work should be done on Sunday, that shops and hostels be open, that markets be held, and so forth. But these decrees were very poorly observed. It was generally a sad situation with regard to the observance of Sunday in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>22</sup>

In the strife over the Sabbath that broke out in the seventeenth century between the Puritans and the more free concept of the observance

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22 Schotel, *De Openbare Eeredienst*, 199 v.; Voetius, *Disput. Select.* III *De Sabbato et Festu* A. Walaei *Opera* I. 275.



of Sunday, the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19) took an intermediate position and declared,

1. In the fourth commandment of the divine Law there is a ceremonial component and a moral component. 2. The ceremonial component was the rest of the seventh day after creation, and the strict observance of that day that was imposed upon the Jewish people in particular. 3. The moral component was that a certain and specific day was set aside for the worship service, and thereunto as much rest as was necessary for the worship service and for holy meditation thereon. 4. Because the Sabbath of the Jews has been abolished, Christians must solemnly consecrate Sunday. 5. It is certain that this day was always maintained by the apostles in the Christian church. 6. This same day must be set aside for the worship service, that men may rest from all servile work (except that required by love and present necessity) including all such recreation which hinders the worship of God.

This decision of the Synod of Dordrecht was a compromise between the concept of Calvin and that of the Puritans. Though it may not be seen as an article of a creed, it does have this significance, that the entire Synod could agree on this understanding of the New Testament day of rest. The distinction between the ceremonial and the moral components of the fourth commandment is maintained. Rest is necessary so that man can consecrate himself to the service of the Lord. The Synod did not express itself on the necessity of the every-seventh-day rest day for the sake of natural life. It only forbade work and recreation that hinders the worship of God. After the Synod of Dordrecht both viewpoints, that of the Puritans and that of the moderates, continued in a variety of nuanced form, and some did not remain free from exaggeration.

Through Cocceius the question of the Sabbath was carried into another phase. He taught that the required day of rest was temporary, for Israel alone. The Sabbath was established at the creation so that man might consecrate all of his life to God. However, Adam and the patriarchs knew nothing of the Sabbath as a day of rest. This first came with the giving of the law at Sinai. For that reason, all of the Sabbath precepts were ceremonial and not moral. Hence, every Sabbath commandment was abolished with Christ's coming so that the

true observance of the Sabbath is the dedication of one's life to God. One ought certainly rest from work on Sunday for the benefit of the coming together of the congregation, of prayer, and of holy meditation.

This view of Cocceius gave occasion for a great strife in which some Voetians defended the Puritan view and in which all kinds of minute distinctions were made as to what was and was not forbidden on Sunday. At the same time, many Coccians placed freedom so much in the foreground that the people took occasion from that to desecrate horribly the Lord's Day.<sup>23</sup> Ordinances were issued against the profanation of the Lord's Day and renewed repeatedly at the request of the church, but the result of this effort was bitterly disappointing. The strict ordinances were rigorously enforced for a while, but then soon relaxed so that they gradually became dead letters. The earnest admonitions of faithful preachers such as B. Smytegelt, W. á Brakel, A. Franken, Tuinman, and others could no more restore the proper observance of Sunday than could the decisions of the ecclesiastical assemblies. Gradually, the influence of the church began to decline. The world overcame the church. In the eighteenth century, Rationalism took hold of souls and thereby the path was opened to revolution. The National Assembly of 1796 abolished the official position of the church and nullified all the laws and resolutions that had their origins in the old system of the union of church and state, including the laws against the desecration of Sunday.

After the restoration of order, the Christian religion was restored to its public role. On March 1, 1815 a new law regarding Sunday was introduced, formulated on the model of the French law of August 4, 1798. This is still in force, but is in urgent need of revision.

### **c. At Present**

The underlying principle of the fourth commandment is not to be sought in the general rule that we must dedicate ourselves completely and unconditionally to the service of God, for that is the summary of the entire law of God and is expressed specifically in the first commandment. But the foundation of the fourth commandment is to be sought herein, that God demands of us our time, the entire course of

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23 Jacobus Koelman (Christophorus Eubulus), *De Pointen van Nodige Reformatie* (Abr. Van Laaren en Will. de Wilde, 1678).

our lives, and especially that we dedicate His day to Him. Time is the prerequisite of our ongoing existence. And now God demands of man that he, on one day out of the seven weekdays, should consider himself to be released from his earthly tasks, so that he would not only be strengthened in his body, and not be consumed in conflict, but also so that he, released from his work, could dedicate all of his attention to the Lord and begin the heavenly Sabbath on earth.

The seventh day was given in the wisdom of God as a gift to struggling humanity. Natural life has need of a day of rest, and the magistrate, as God's servant, must guard the maintenance of this ordinance so that man may enjoy as much rest as possible on the Sabbath. In this way, he is able to cultivate the bonds of family and of friendship, and especially so that the congregation of the Lord can rejoice in holy fellowship with God, in the prospect of the eternal Sabbath, in her calling on earth, and carry on with courage in the midst of suffering and pain.

The rest of Sunday and the consecration of Sunday is necessary for the entire life of the people. All the more are the blessings of the rest of Sunday recognized by those who cannot be numbered among the believers of the church;<sup>24</sup> while more recently governments have also, with the cooperation of various circles within the population, promoted the rest of Sunday as much as possible. This Sunday rest must be pressed into the service of the consecration of Sunday. Sunday is not a day for us, and not simply a vacation day for man, but a day for the Lord, which must be sanctified unto Him. On this day we are to serve the Lord with the understanding and the heart, with the will and with all our abilities. The center of the observance of this day is the worship service of the church, that diligent coming to the congregation of God. Thereunto must the rest of Sunday serve. Thereunto must the consciences of the people be developed. And the church must constantly apply her influence so that the people may better understand the blessings of the teaching regarding the rest of Sunday and of the consecration of Sunday, and so that the government

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24 So spoken with emphasis, among others, at the First National Congress for Sunday Rest, held 1901 in Den Haag, Prof. Dr. C. A. Pekelharing, Dr. W. P. Ruysch, and Prof. Dr. Hector Treub spoke in favor of Sunday rest, with a view to the health of body and soul.

may take measures that all sections of the population can better enjoy these blessings.

Thus, the rest of Sunday is not a goal but a means. This rest may not be understood legalistically, in the sense that all men ought to be bound to specific formal rules, and that value should be assigned to doing nothing in and of itself. Then Sunday would become a painful day and not at all useful to the elevation of life and to the honor of God. Then the essence of the service of God would be placed in something external. The rest must always remain a means to a higher end. According to the view of the church, on Sunday man must rest from all his servile labor, from what in the Middle Ages was called *opera servile*, that is, the work that is necessary to maintain life. The work of the usual, daily calling, in the life of business, in the life of the market or the exchange, at the desk and in the office, in matters of buying and selling, in addition to all work in the public sphere, should come to a standstill.

Naturally, not all work can stand still on Sunday. Life in creation goes on full steam ahead. Our life has need of nutrition and care. These include all works of necessity that flow out of the essence of natural life. Also in the public sphere, for the maintaining of order, for safety and travel, much must be done as part of the responsibility of government. For that reason Christians may also, without burden on their consciences, work in government service, in the provision for public transportation, the maintaining of order and law, for the lighting, and so forth. And, whenever the government itself sees to it that not more than the most necessary things are done by their workers, they can themselves take part in the beneficial rest and in the proper celebration of the Sabbath. But also in the life of the church there is work to do. The preacher, the one who cares for the poor, the janitor, and so forth, must work. There must be light in the buildings and on the street, and there must be provisions for safety. In special cases, when people cannot walk the entire distance to attend the services, there can be no lawful objection to making use of means of transportation. Also works of love and of mercy may and must be done.

The service of the Word must prepare the congregation for the proper celebration of Sunday. May the church teach the congregation,

so that she faithfully keeps the Sabbath and binds to her heart the blessing that God gives in the way of obedience. Certainly the church must also punish those who desecrate the Sabbath. But she does not lose sight of who, according to God's Word, must be considered to be Sabbath desecrators. Desecrators of the Sabbath are those who publicly and willfully violate the Lord's Day. This does not come from lack of insight or misunderstanding, but from a lack of love for God and for His service. And because, according to God's Word, the object of discipline is the brother or sister who stubbornly resists admonitions, the church enters into discipline whenever it appears that someone does not honor the command of God, willfully breaks the Sabbath, and does not listen to admonitions.

Thus the church binds the heart of the congregation to what God requires of us, but guards itself against setting up a series of precepts of what is and is not forbidden. In things indifferent she leaves each one free to decide according to his own conscience. However, this Christian freedom may not degenerate into licentiousness. In this Christians must stand carefully before God and before their fellow Christians. Never may the rule be, "How far can I go without coming into conflict with God's law?" But rather, "How can I most magnify the honor of God in my actions?" The more carefully a Christian lives before God, the more he will feel the need to cease from all unnecessary work and to dedicate himself to meditation and the service of the Lord.

The communion of the saints also belongs to the Christian life. Believers must also think about the edification of the fellow Christian. That is the demand of Christian love. The confession that "each must willingly and with joy use his gifts for the good and the salvation of the other members" also means that one may not offend a brother or a sister by an outlook on life that is all too free.<sup>25</sup> That is not to say that you must give place to formalism or to that which is legalistic. On the contrary, you must, with Paul, resist those who want to place you on a wrong foundation. It is not saintly but sin to offend with an all-too-free manner of life brothers and sisters who live carefully and godly. Especially in days in which the attraction of the world works so strongly, the church may well bind consciences to the demands of the Lord also in the observance of Sunday. The people who are weak

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<sup>25</sup> Heid. Cat., LD 21, Q&A 55.

in the celebration of the Lord's Day run the danger of losing sight of the proper worship of the Lord.

This has to do with the exercise of faith, with a judgment of the conscience that is pure and a walk that is close to God. And may those who live carefully before God be willing to judge their fellow Christians according to a broad standard, and themselves seek to walk before God on a narrow path. The Lord's Day must in practice also remain a day in which Christians rejoice in God and in His good gifts. Each Christian may enjoy that blessing in the circle in which he moves and in the circumstances of life in which he must live. Someone who spends his week comfortably at home is in that respect in a much different circumstance from the one who can almost never be comfortably with his own family during the weekdays. Someone who must do hard physical labor during the weekdays has somewhat different needs than a comfortable, middle-class person. Those who are only home on Sundays can have a double enjoyment of family life. But for all Christians what God requires of us on Sunday remains the same, that is to rest from servile labor in order to dedicate oneself to the service of the Lord, in order to come together with the congregation in the house of the Lord and to delight in the Lord. ●

# Southern Presbyterian Pastoral Distinctions

C. N. Willborn

In the spring edition of this journal we introduced representative Presbyterian leaders from the nineteenth-century southern part of the United States. In that essay we addressed some of the theological distinctives and contributions of those men. In this fall edition we shall set forth what might be called a pastoral life or pastoral theology of illustrative Southern Presbyterians from the same period.

The nineteenth century saw no small amount of effort devoted to the doctrine of the church and the attending pastoral labors for the bride of Christ. In Scotland we had both academic and popular works on the church by men such as James Bannerman, Douglas Bannerman, and William Cunningham.<sup>1</sup> Here in the United States a number of works flowed from the pens of Presbyterian scholars as well.<sup>2</sup> Alongside these general works on ecclesiology came a number of works related to the pastor and his labors in the church. Authors would include such notables as Thomas Murphy, William Swan Plumer, and W. G. T. Shedd in the United States and Patrick Fairbairn in Scotland. Aside from these monographs, a plethora of men wrote in journals for the church and academy.

We could follow the writings of a recognized Southern pastor and professor at two institutions, William Plumer, and find plenty that reflected the actual work of countless ministers in the United States,

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1 James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 2 vols (1869), Douglas Bannerman, *The Scriptural Doctrine of the Church* (1887); William Cunningham, *Discussions on Church Principles* (1863).

2 Charles Hodge, *Church Polity* (1878; repr., Seoul, NY: Westminster Publishing House, 2001); John Mason, *Essays on the Church of God* (1832; repr., Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2005); Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God* (1858; repr., Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education, 2009); Thomas Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (1892; repr., Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2005).

including the southern portion of our country. We could also survey the pastoral labors of Charles Colcock Jones among the poor and needy slaves in the low country of Georgia.<sup>3</sup> However, in this paper we shall simply provide a pastoral theology from the life of one notable Southerner, John L. Girardeau. You are familiar with Girardeau from our previous reflections on his theological contributions. In addition to tracing his pastoral gifts, I will intersperse other contributions from his regional contemporaries.

First, Girardeau's pastoral ministry spanned almost three decades. His pastorates were both rural and urban. His congregations were integrated, with a large number of the memberships of each of his churches being slaves and free blacks from the low country of South Carolina. His move into Charleston in 1855 brought him to a mission work directed particularly to the slaves of Charleston. He preached weekly to crowds of 500 plus on Anson Street in a mission founded in 1846. This mission work flowed from the concern of many of Charleston's Christian leaders, but particularly that of Thomas Smyth and John Bailey Adger. Smyth was the long-time pastor of Second Presbyterian Church and internationally recognized. Adger was Smyth's brother-in-law and had returned from mission labors in Armenia. Under these men and the elders of Second Church, Adger began the work in the lecture hall of the church on Society Street. By 1850 the work had outgrown the lecture hall and a new building seating 500 was built, financed by citizens of Charleston, in 1850. James Henley Thornwell traveled down from Columbia to preach the dedicatory sermon for this new work now located in the midst of a fine suburban residential neighborhood of Charleston. After Girardeau arrived to take up the work in early 1855, God's blessings soon became abundantly evident. With growth continuing spiritually and numerically, the Lord multiplied the blessings in 1858 through a means of grace-centered revival. Anson Street Mission would serve His pleasure to be the epicenter of the revival in Charleston; a revival that began in New York City in the prayer meetings of Reformed churches.<sup>4</sup>

3 See William Swan Plumer, *Hints and Helps in Pastoral Theology* (1874; repr., Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2003); Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* (Savannah, GA: Thomas Purse, 1842).

4 Sources for the revival of 1857-59 see *The New York Pulpit in the Revival of 1858* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman & Co., 1858); Kathryn Teresa



In 1859 a new building was built that seated 1,500. He preached to packed houses twice each Lord's Day. As an aside, the new building was located on Calhoun Street near Meeting Street. That was then and is now a most prominent location in the Holy City, as it was and is called today. He would remain the pastor of Zion Presbyterian Church until 1875, when federal and societal pressures brought about organic separation and segregation of the black and white memberships in the Presbyterian Church United States (The Southern Presbyterian Church). It is of note that Girardeau and numerous others in the Southern Presbyterian Church opposed the segregation movement at that time. One can only surmise what might be different today had Girardeau and those of like mind prevailed.

It is significant to note for our purposes in this paper that Girardeau put together a thorough-going handbook for pastoral labors, which involved elders, deacons, and overseers. The overseers were black men, members of the church, who were given responsibility to care for the "classes" to which they were assigned. The "classes" were groups of fifty (50) slave members living in various parts of town. These overseers would give regular reports on the spiritual and physical welfare of their assigned shepherding group. The elders and deacons would then act or delegate as they thought best for the members in need. The principle was taken from Jethro's instruction to Moses (Ex. 18) and Jesus' directive to the disciples to divide the crowds into groups of fifty and one hundred (Mark 6:40; Luke 9:12ff).<sup>5</sup> If one of the flock or a neighbor were found sick, steps were taken to attend to them. This work was much like the work of Thomas Chalmers in both Glasgow and Edinburg as he plied his pastoral theology within the parish or neighborhoods of those industrial cities.

Girardeau was known to the community as well as his elders, deacons and overseers. He was loved by the masses of Charleston. In or around 1860, a young black man of Charleston was invited to attend

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Long, *The Revival of 1857-58* (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1998); J. Edwin Orr, *The Event of the Century* (repr.; Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1989).

5 For the practical outworking of this "proportioned" ministry, see C. N. Willborn, "The Gospel Work in the Diaconate: 'A Ministry Proportioned in Number'" *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal*, 10 (2014).

Zion by one of the older black members. The youngster replied, “But your pastor is white, isn’t he?” To that the older black man, a slave in the community, responded: “Yas, he face is white, but he heart is black.”

To help our present readers understand how great was the affection between the pastor, a white man, and his flock—made up of both free and enslaved blacks, as well as white members—we insert here a copy of a letter that was mailed to Girardeau upon the conclusion of the Civil War. It was written by men who had formerly been slaves and were recently emancipated from their previous labors. Their letter was mailed from war-ravaged Charleston to the northeastern part of South Carolina. We have transcribed from the original handwritten letter, maintaining authenticity of the spelling.

Charleston So Ca. July 27, 1865  
To Revd. J. L. Gerrardeau,  
Revd Sir & Pastor,

We the undersigned members of Zion Presbyterian Church embrace this opportunity as one among the many good ones we have enjoyed in the past and in doing so you have our best wishishs for you health & that of you loving family, hoping all are enjoying that blessings of good health and realizing that fulfillment of god words [:] those that put their truss in him shall never want. The past relations we have enjoyed together for many years as pastor and people are still in its bud in our every heart therefore we would well come you still as our pastor. Pastor we have been long praying for peace that we have together prayed for time and agamen [again]. God in his grate merceys have sent it. The war has ended as god would have it. The civilize world well come it and the race of mankind ever rejoices over it. Masters are not very agreeable now at the church as in the past. The Acon [read “Achan” of the OT] is still in the camp striveing. If the peoples would only agree upon forming new relations we have no will to do so until you are herd from. Now in writing our purpose to inform you that you past congregation will be the same in future and till death provide. Past relations with you are considered the same and on you part a complyance to the new order of things seat forth

by the general government of the United States of America and that of the Presbyterian churches of the same.

Reply is earnestly solicited By those who now would renew there wishishs for you will fair.

Yours Revd Sir and Pastor  
Messrs. Paul Trescoat  
Wm. Price  
J[acky] Morrison  
A. G. Wend  
H. R. Spencer  
S[amuel] Robertson  
B. Wilkerson  
S. Dawkins  
Thomas Savage  
Wm. Williams

An honest reading of this letter confirms the love that existed between these men, as representatives of Zion Presbyterian Church, and their pastor.<sup>6</sup> Although many wanted Girardeau to take up the position vacated at the Columbia Seminary upon Thornwell's death in 1862, he was spiritually wed to his flock in Charleston. Rather than take up the chair of Polemics and Dogmatics, he returned to his beloved flock to reestablish their church, ordaining in 1869 to the office of elder several of the very men who wrote him. The church would continue to grow until his departure in 1875. As part of this restructuring of the work, Girardeau established Sabbath Schools in four "parishes" previously established around Charleston. During those ten years following the war, numerous "scholars" would pass through his schools, learning to read and write, but most importantly, learning the Bible and the gospel of God's grace. In 1875, when he was forced to sever relations with them, his schools counted some 500 students.

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6 A copy of this letter in its original appearance was given to the Avery Research Center of the College of Charleston by this author. Researchers can find it most readily at that institution. See the manuscript collection, Zion-Olivet United Presbyterian Church records, 1854–1991 (bulk 1960–1980) [AMN 1030].

This is perhaps a good place to insert a note about another prominent Southern Presbyterian minister, Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Also from the low country of South Carolina, Palmer was from a prominent family. His uncle was a well known and highly respected Congregational minister by the same name as his nephew. Palmer would study in New England, sparring in debate society with Henry Ward Beecher as a student at Amhurst College. After pastorates at First Presbyterian Church in Savannah and First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, he moved to First Presbyterian of New Orleans in 1856. He remained there until his death in May 1902. He was renowned for his preaching, but his pastoral commitment and heart can best be seen in his unflinching commitment to the poor and sick of New Orleans. During several outbreaks of malaria, Palmer went house-to-house in New Orleans and visited the houses marked by the black sign in the window. He went all the while believing the disease was communicable. Only later would we learn it was not a communicable disease. Because of this self-sacrificial pastoral labor, he would earn the respect of the citizens of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana. His life-long care and love for the citizens of New Orleans, in addition to his parishioners, would earn him numerous accolades from civic leaders and religious leaders in all sectors of the community.

Mercy ministry was not the lone area where these men spent considerable efforts. This brings us back to considering Girardeau and his labors on behalf of the soul of his parishioners. Girardeau also, and obviously, engaged his elders in the spiritual ministry of the church—particularly the teaching of the people. They held weekly catechetical classes for the membership—black and white members alike. The Westminster Catechisms were used as the basis of the training. Here is what we read from one of his “scholars,” Louisa Cheves Stoney: “Dr. Girardeau ... considered [WSC 31] the most difficult and important.”<sup>7</sup> The question and answer is, “What is effectual calling? Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit [2 Tim. 1:8, 9; Eph. 1:18–20], whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery [Acts 2:37], enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ [Acts 26:18],

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7 Thomas Smyth, *Autobiographical Notes, Letters and Reflections*, Louisa Cheves Stoney, ed. (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans, Cogswell Company, 1914), 198.

and renewing our wills [Ezek. 11:19; 36:26,27], he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel [John 6:44, 45; Phil. 2:13; Deut. 30:6; Eph. 2:5].” On a pastoral note, Mrs. Stoney concluded this note by saying,

Dr. Girardeau ... a preacher whose sermons were never too long and can never be forgotten by the throngs of people that hung on his words. His tender kindness to the children was great; dignity forgotten, he would play games and tell B’Rabbit stories, which he could do to perfection. But the children had to earn the pleasure by reciting a question from the Shorter Catechism.<sup>8</sup>

The black scholars (as students were called back then) were similarly taught, but often using a catechism Girardeau composed for those who were not as well educated. *A Catechism for the Oral Instructions of Coloured Persons who are Inquirers Concerning Religion or Candidates for Admission into the Church* was published in 1860. Along with questions, similar to those of a children’s catechism, he interspersed hymns and Psalms to help with the memorization and learning of the doctrines. Here is an example taken from his catechism:

Additional Lesson III.

The Law of God.

Q. Has God given us a Law?

A. Yes; God has given us a Law....

Q. Can you keep the Law so as to be justified and saved?

A. No; I cannot keep the Law so as to be justified and saved.

Q. Can the Law ever justify the sinner?

A. No; the Law can never justify the sinner.

Q. How alone can you be justified and saved?

A. I can alone be justified and saved, by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. But are you not bound to obey the Law as a rule of life and conduct?

A. Yes; I am bound to obey the Law as a rule of life and conduct?

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8 Thomas Smyth, *Autobiographical Notes, Letters and Reflections*, Louisa Cheves Stoney, ed. (Charleston, SC: Walker, Evans, Cogswell Company, 1914), 198.

Q. Whose strength alone will enable you to obey the Law?

A. Christ's strength alone will enable me to obey the Law.

Q. How can you get Christ's strength?

A. I can get Christ's strength by prayer.

Let us sing——

C. M.

[Rochester.]

“Oh that the Lord would guide my ways

To keep his statutes still!

Oh that my God would grant me grace

To know and do His will!

Make me to walk in Thy commands,

'Tis a delightful road;

Nor let my head, nor heart, nor hands,

Offend against my God.”<sup>9</sup>

His model was so successful, a loud minority of Charlestonians became convinced that he was breaking state law by teaching slaves to read and write. He was breaking the spirit of the law, but not the letter. This emphasis on catechism, with the Psalms and hymns added, proved to enhance the worship of this segment of the congregation. For one thing, they were able to sing those very Psalms and hymns with gusto in the context of corporate worship although a number of them could not read.

Their growing knowledge of the teaching of the Scriptures also provided them with greater ability to engage the preaching of the Word from their pastor. (This would have been true in a number of sectors of the South where others utilized the same approach.) Examples include James Smylie (1780-1853) in Mississippi, Charles Stillman (1819-95) in Alabama, and C. C. Jones and his successors in Georgia.

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9 John L. Girardeau, *A Catechism for the Oral Instruction of Coloured Persons who are Inquirers concerning Religion, Candidates for Admission into the Church* (Charleston: Printed by Evans & Cogswell, 180), 24, 25–26. The song is the eleventh part of Psalm 119, first and last stanzas, as printed by the PCUSA. Cf. *Psalms and Hymns, adapted to Public Worship* (1830; Philadelphia: Published for the General Assembly by Solomon Allen, 1833), 210–211.

Smylie was the first Presbyterian minister to settle permanently in Mississippi and served as a pastor and evangelist in the southwest sector of Mississippi. He too produced a very useful catechism designed for the illiterate and slaves of his region. He established a number of “preaching stations” that would later become particular churches to serve the inhabitants of that part of “The Magnolia State.”

Like Smylie, Charles Stillman was sent to the “west” from South Carolina. After a brief time at Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, he was sent by the presbytery to Alabama. After brief stints with churches, he settled in Tuscaloosa at the Presbyterian Church. His ministry was a wide ranging one, which prepared him for the post-war needs but especially for the freedmen. In 1875, The Presbyterian Church in the United States (not PCUSA) approved the establishment of a theological institute for the ministerial preparation of black freedmen. Stillman began the work in the fall of 1876 at the Tuscaloosa Institute. It later was named for its founder and guide for seventeen years—Stillman Institute (now Stillman College).

A final example of preacher-teacher leaders for the slaves was Charles Colcock Jones. A noted scholar and visionary for the education, evangelization, and discipling of slaves into Christ’s church, Jones produced a number of chapels-of-ease for the slaves on plantations. He produced a widely used catechism, a biblical theology of the Old Testament, and a book of pastoral theology (see footnote #3 above). In 1845 he was invited to “the Holy City,” where he led a meeting of civic and religious leaders to greater usefulness in providing religious and personal care for the souls of slaves. The meetings influenced many throughout the South and was captured in *Proceedings of the meeting in Charleston, S.C., May 13-15, 1845, on the Religious Instruction of the Negroes, together with the report of the Committee, and the Address to the Public* (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1845).

This brings us back to our primary subject, John Girardeau, and the last aspect of pastoral care I wish to address, and that is preaching. A number of men were known for their pulpit prowess. Benjamin M. Palmer (1818–1902) is best known for his preaching ministry at First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC (1843–55) and First Presbyterian Church, New Orleans, LA (1856–1902). James Henley Thornwell, of whom we have spoken already, was also known for his sermons,

which were described as “logic in ignition.” In addition to Thornwell’s renowned academic career at Southern Carolina College (now University of South Carolina) as a philosopher and rhetorician, he pastored three churches, including First Presbyterian Church in Columbia after Palmer’s departure. But, of most special note among the Southern Stalwarts, as Douglas Kelly has labeled them, was John L. Girardeau.<sup>10</sup>

Here is a sample of Girardeau’s pulpit power taken from his sermon based on Psalm 23, “Christ’s Pastoral Presence with His Dying People”:

It is true that the believer must die; but in dying he is privileged to suffer with his Master, that he may rise and reign with him. It is true that the believer must die; but death now constitutes part of a wholesome discipline which prepares him for glory; it is a process by which he is purged from dross, casts off the slough of corruption, and is purified for his admission into the holy presence of God and the sanctified communion of saints. It is true that he must walk through the dark valley; but the Conqueror of Death descends into it by his side, illuminates its darkness by the radiance of his presence, protects him from the assaults of a now powerless foe, and bearing in his hands the keys of death and the invisible world, peacefully dismisses the departing saint from sin to holiness, and from the stormy trials of earth to the joy and peace of an everlasting rest.

Once again from this masterpiece:

The Sufferer, who, for us, expired on the cross of Calvary, endured a species of death which was as singular as it was comprehensive and exhaustive. In body, he suffered the keen and protracted tortures of crucifixion; and in spirit, reviled by foes, deserted by friends and abandoned of God, he descended alone into the valley of the death-shade, which was not only veiled in impenetrable gloom, but swept by the tempests of avenging wrath. Furnished with such an experience, the Good Shepherd ministers with exquisite sympathy at the couch of the dying believer. He knows his doubts, his apprehensions, his fears;

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10 For Kelly’s treatment of the preaching ministries of Daniel Baker, John L. Girardeau, B.M. Palmer, and James H. Thornwell see Douglas Kelly, *Preachers with Power* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993).



and, moved by a compassion which naught but a common suffering could produce, he makes all the bed under the expiring saint, smooths his last pillow, and “wipes his latest tear away.”<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps no sermon was ever preached more often upon request within the Southern United States than Girardeau’s “The Last Judgment.” Here I quote from the conclusion:

The judicial process ends; the books are closed, the Judge rises, and the Supreme Court of the world adjourns. The separate destinies of human beings are now evolved. Collected around the person of their glorious Lord, the jubilant saints begin their triumphal march to the portals of their heavenly home. Onward they sweep in majestic array, hallelujahs are bursting from every lip, and as they come in view of the shining gates, hark! They sing: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in!” And, again, as in the ascension from Olivet of the victor of sin, death and hell, the challenge of angelic sentries is shouted from the battlements of heaven: “Who is the King of glory?” And then the response is rolled back in thunder from ten thousand times ten thousand voices: “The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, the Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in!”

...Then rising and waving their palms of victory in the morning air of an endless day, with a sound like the noise of many waters, or the voice of mighty thunderings,—hark, they chant again: “Glory and honor and power, and might and dominion, and wisdom and thanksgiving and blessing be unto Him that sits upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever!” Redemption is completed, and the pauseless chorus of everlasting praise begins.

...Would that we could say this is all: this is the glorious destiny of an unsevered and unmutated race! But from the left hand of the judgment-bar a funeral procession of lost human beings, in the train of devils, slowly and reluctantly wend their way to the frowning gates

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11 *Southern Presbyterian Pulpit* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1896), 80, 82.

of hell. They defile through those gloomy portals over which despair reads the fatal legend: “Those who enter here leave hope behind.” The irrefragable bolts of the eternal jail are shot by penal justice behind them; and between them and a lost and irrecoverable paradise yawn the terrific jaws of an uncrossable chasm—a gulf wide, deep, and dark as starless midnight, save as the profound abyss is gilded by some mocking rays that may straggle into it from a far distant and inaccessible glory.<sup>12</sup>

So ends the most famous of nineteenth-century Southern sermons preached by the “Spurgeon of America.”

I could move to Thornwell or certainly Benjamin Morgan Palmer for more examples of powerful and effectual preaching that marked the Southern landscape, but time is our enemy.<sup>13</sup>

### Conclusion

These men were powerful in the pulpit. They were pastoral in their tender mercies to the poor, needy, and sick. Their contributions to theology and its teaching continue to have abiding relevance. Time and anachronistic history have not treated them well, but they deserve better. Men of clay feet? Yes. Like you and me. Men of God? By all means. As men of God, true to the Scriptures, let us imitate them in their holiness and pastoral care. Let us never forget that they were pastors first and yet preachers second to none. Like Thomas Chalmers of Scotland, the leading men of the Southern Presbyterian landscape were not singularly focused. They preached and they preached well. But they also spent time in the homes of the people to whom they preached. Perhaps that is why they preached so well. Yes, they were gifted supernaturally by the Lord and empowered by the eternal Spirit, but they also preached well because they loved much. They loved much the men, women, boys, and girls to whom they preached. But they did not spent time only in the homes of their parishioners. They were public figures. They were known within the community, not by their dress, but by their public presence and public witness.

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12 John L. Girardeau, *Sermons* (Wentworth Press, 2019), 38.

13 See Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *Sermons of Rev. B. M. Palmer* (repr.; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2002).

Finally, it must be noted that they preached well and loved much because, no doubt, they prayed much. B. M. Palmer produced a marvelous volume entitled *The Theology of Prayer*.<sup>14</sup> Girardeau preached a series of sermons on the topic of prayer soon after returning to the war-torn city of Charleston. Many in his integrated congregation were forlorn by the seeming ineffectiveness of their prayers leading up to and during the war. In a four-part exposition of various biblical texts, he set forth a theology of prayer to help them understand the purpose and efficiency of prayer. Plumer, of course, set forth the essential nature of prayer for the minister in his *Hints and Helps in Pastoral Theology* (1874). These men understood and believed as Calvin believed when he said, “The chief exercise of faith is prayer.” Pastoral life begins with a legitimate God-wrought saving faith, in the only saving object, the incarnate, eternal Son of God, which leads to prayerful communion with God according to the scriptural pattern, which in turn produces both powerful love for God and for His people, and ends in powerful preaching of the perfect, inerrant Word of God.

It is the aim of this article that we find the same power in our ministries—from the study, to the homes, to the pulpit—that these men enjoyed from our most High Sovereign. Sinners? Yes, they were. So are we! But take heart that God uses sinners to do His great deeds. ●

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14 Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *The Theology of Prayer* (1894, repr.; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1980).

# John Owen and the Salt of the Covenant of Grace

Brian L. Huizinga

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The English Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) is commonly called “The Prince of the Puritans,” and has been admired with such descriptions as “the Calvin of England” and “the greatest British Theologian of all time.”<sup>2</sup> Owen was also a *covenant* theologian — his understanding of God’s dealings with humanity finds its supreme articulation through the notion of covenant.<sup>3</sup> Owen is *admired* as a covenant theologian. He is identified as one of the codifiers of the important federal movement within Reformed theology, synthesizing the various elements of covenantal thought developed in the preceding Reformed tradition.<sup>4</sup>

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1 The impetus for this research and writing was, in part, David J. Engelsma’s observation regarding Protestant Reformed readership, “The English Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) is not as well known by us as he ought to be.” See Engelsma’s book review of “Communion with God,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 50, no. 1 (2016): 131. I concur with Engelsma’s assessment. Some of us in the Protestant Reformed Churches have read Owen. Many are simply unaware of Owen as he stands outside of our tradition. Others who are aware of him may be hesitant to read him, either because of his reputation for possessing complexity of thought and expression, or because he was a Puritan and the Puritan tradition produced a sickly doctrine of assurance. Whatever the case may be, he who takes to reading John Owen will be richly rewarded.

2 For these descriptions and others given throughout history, see Peter Toon, *God’s Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Great Britain: The Paternoster Press, 1971), 173.

3 Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 98.

4 William J. van Asselt, “Covenant Theology as Relational Theology: The Contributions of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) and John Owen (1616-1683) to a Living Reformed Theology,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, eds. Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones (London: Routledge, 2012), 65.

Studies of Owen's covenant theology tend to focus on his view of the *pactum salutis*,<sup>5</sup> the covenant of works,<sup>6</sup> the Mosaic administration of the covenant,<sup>7</sup> or a general overview of his understanding of the covenant of grace.<sup>8</sup> This essay will present John Owen's conception of the covenant of grace as an unchangeable covenant in which the elect are forever secure. Almost nothing is written to disclose, explain, and laud Owen's emphasis on the unconditional nature of God's covenant of grace, as well as Owen's insistence that saving participation in the covenant, the promise of the covenant, and all bestowals of grace in the covenant are limited to the elect and the elect alone. Regrettably, Owen's conception of a covenant of sovereign, particular grace is, for the most part, kept buried in his massive corpus of theological writings.<sup>9</sup>

Our goal is to investigate how Owen's vigorous and lifelong opposition to the theology of Arminianism influenced his articulation of the gracious and abiding character of God's covenant. Arminianism teaches a conditional salvation that ultimately depends upon the will of man rather than the will of God.<sup>10</sup> It is precisely at the point of

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5 Laurence R. O'Donnell III, "The Holy Spirit's Role in John Owen's 'Covenant of the Mediator' Formulation: A Case Study in Reformed Orthodox Formulations of the Pactum Salutis," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 4, no. 1 (Jan 2012): 91-115; also, van Asselt, "Cocceius and Owen" in *Ashgate Research*, 65-84.

6 Trueman, *John Owen*, 71-6.

7 Michael Brown, "The Covenant of Works Revived: John Owen on Republication in the Mosaic Covenant," in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 151-161; also, Mark Jones, "The Minority Report: John Owen on Sinai," in Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 293-303.

8 Kelly M. Kopic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 97-104.

9 For an exception see, David Wai-Sing Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen" (published dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998). Wong argues that Owen's covenant theology not only harmonizes with the theology of John Calvin but is "built upon Calvin's basic motifs of predestination, God's sovereign grace, man's total depravity, and sanctification," (p. 10).

10 For the official doctrinal positions of the Arminians in the "Five Points of the Remonstrants" and the "Opinions of the Remonstrants," see Peter Y. November 2020

the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints that the entire system of Arminianism becomes to its Calvinist opponent like John Owen, both a noxiously God-dishonoring theological offense and a terrifying distortion of the gospel. For, the end result of Arminian conditionalism is the teaching that it is possible for a sinner to be taken into the covenant of God for the enjoyment of all the blessings of salvation in Christ, yet still fall away and perish everlastingly in hell. Conditional salvation is losable salvation. Over against the Arminian denial of the perseverance of the saints, John Owen wrote a massive refutation entitled *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* (1654; hereafter: *Perseverance*).<sup>11</sup> In this treatise, Owen defends the truth of the perseverance of the saints by developing the concept of what he calls the "unchangeableness" of God's covenant of grace. The immutable God keeps His covenant and is faithful to His promise; therefore, the saints are preserved in grace and persevere to the end in faith and holiness.

In this essay we will examine Owen's *Perseverance*, and also consult three of his other works that expound the doctrine of the covenant of grace: his first published work, *A Display of Arminianism* (1642; hereafter: *A Display*),<sup>12</sup> what is arguably his most well-known and highly celebrated work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647; hereafter: *Death of Death*),<sup>13</sup> and his greatest work of biblical exposition, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (4 volumes, 1668-1684; hereafter: *Hebrews*).<sup>14</sup> Relying upon these sources, we will

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De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 207-9, 221-29. For the official response of the Reformed churches in the Canons of Dordt, see Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 581-97.

11 John Owen, "The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850-53; repr., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), XI:1-666.

12 John Owen "A Display of Arminianism," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850-53; repr., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), X:1-137.

13 John Owen, "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ," in *Works*, X:139-433.

14 John Owen, "An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1854-55; repr., Edinburgh: The

demonstrate that John Owen emphasizes the unconditional nature of the covenant of grace that God sovereignly establishes and maintains with His elect people. In this unchangeable covenant rooted in God's unchanging love and established upon His unchanging promises, all of God's elect people are forever secure and have the personal assurance of their security. John Owen calls attention to the fact that some refer to this unchangeable character of the covenant as "the very salt of the covenant of grace."

## II. The Theological Context: Polemics against Arminianism

It was not Romanism but Arminianism (and Socinianism) that posed the greatest threat to orthodoxy in Owen's day. Arminianism originated in the teaching of Jacob Arminius in Holland, was advanced and codified by his successors known as the Remonstrants, and was subsequently condemned by the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619). In both number and influence, the proponents of Arminianism grew in England due to a couple of factors. First, the doctrinal decisions of Dordt were brought back to England by the English delegates that attended the synod, and after those decisions made their entrance they "acted as something of a catalyst in English theology, stimulating the bringing into the open of doctrinal tensions that had simmered just below the surface."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the decisions of Dordt had repercussions in England by stirring up and bringing to the foreground pre-existing partiality toward the major tenants of Arminianism. Secondly, Arminian theology began making strong headway in England with the appointment of a supporter of Arminianism, William Laud, as the Chancellor of Oxford in 1630, and as the archbishop of Canterbury in 1633.<sup>16</sup> Laud exerted a tremendous influence in England; consequently, the teaching, preaching and catechizing throughout the churches

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Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), XXII:1-593.

15 Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), 16.

16 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 6-7. See also, Trueman, *John Owen*, 27-29; and Robert Oliver "John Owen (1616-1683): His Life and Times," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed., Robert Oliver (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 13-4.

increasingly attributed to man, through the exercise of his ‘free will,’ some part of his salvation.<sup>17</sup>

John Owen devoted much of his life to combatting Arminianism. Already as a university student he began to read widely and he carefully studied the growth of the Arminian doctrine in Holland.<sup>18</sup> At twenty-six years of age, Owen published his first work, *A Display*, in which he demonstrated the knowledge attained through his earlier scholarly engagements. He interacted with direct quotations from Arminius and his successor Episcopius,<sup>19</sup> the Acts of the Synod of Dordt,<sup>20</sup> and the Remonstrants.<sup>21</sup> He opened his polemical treatise against Arminianism by expressing his grave concern:

Who would have thought that our church would ever have given entertainment to these Belgic semi-Pelagians, who have cast dirt upon the faces and raked up the ashes of all those great and pious souls whom God magnified, in using as his instruments to reform his church; to the least of which the whole troop of Arminians shall never make themselves equal, though they swell till they break?<sup>22</sup>

The Arminians insisted that they were faithful brethren who merely had an alternative way of expressing the truth of the gospel. Owen strongly disagreed and wrote to the magistrates, “Neither let any deceive your wisdoms by affirming that they are differences of an inferior nature that are at this day agitated between the Arminians and the orthodox divines of the reformed church.”<sup>23</sup> He contended that the Arminians in England were “hewing at the very root of Christianity.”<sup>24</sup> Turning his attention to his fellow Christians in England, Owen described what he saw as a most dire situation, “[N]ever were so many prodigious errors introduced into a church, with so high a

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17 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 7.

18 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 6.

19 See, for example, Owen “A Display,” in *Works*, X:16.

20 See, for example, Owen “A Display,” in *Works*, X:125.

21 See, for example, Owen “A Display,” in *Works*, X:117.

22 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:6.

23 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:7.

24 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:7.



hand and so little opposition, as these into ours, since the nation of Christians was known in the world.”<sup>25</sup>

In *A Display*, Owen repeatedly excoriated Arminianism as a “pestilent heresy.”<sup>26</sup> He called the doctrine of resistible grace “an expression of spiritual pride above all that ever the devil attempted in heaven,”<sup>27</sup> and about the doctrine of a conditional promise of God, he wrote, “I know not what the most malicious devil in hell (if they have degrees of malice) can invent more suited to weaken the faith of men, as to the accomplishment of God’s promise, than by affirming that it doth not depend upon his truth and faithfulness, but solely on their good behavior....”<sup>28</sup>

Five years later, in 1647, Owen published *The Death of Death* as a polemic against the Arminian doctrine of the atonement. About this work, Stanley Gower, a member of the Westminster Assembly, commented, “The reverend and learned author of this book hath received strength from God (like another Samson) to pull down this rotten house upon the head of those Philistines who would uphold it.”<sup>29</sup>

Other of Owen’s treatises also targeted Arminianism. The young Owen was a studied and fierce opponent of Arminianism. He would develop in his theological insights and face new political and religious challenges over the course of his life. However, the substance of his doctrinal positions addressing the errors of Arminianism would undergo no change, nor would he ever wane in his vigorous anti-Arminian polemics.<sup>30</sup>

Already in his first publication, Owen identified what he believed to be the fundamental issue that occasioned so much contention between Arminianism and the Reformed faith: “the head and sum of all the controversies between them and us” is the question “Is salvation to be ascribed unto ourselves rather than God?”<sup>31</sup> Does God save? Or does man save himself? To put the issue differently, Is salvation

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25 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:8.

26 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:62, 96.

27 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:44.

28 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:405.

29 See “Two Attestations” in Owen “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:147.

30 Carl R. Trueman, “John Owen as Theologian,” in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, 55.

31 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:6.

to be attributed to the will of God in His sovereign, eternal decree of election, or is salvation to be attributed to the (free) will of man? Peter Toon argues, “Owen quickly perceived that the central point at issue was the doctrine of predestination.”<sup>32</sup> Owen claimed that the goal of Arminianism was “to overthrow predestination and thereby demolish the rock of our salvation” and in so doing “mount up to heaven their idol of free will.”<sup>33</sup>

The controversy could also be understood in terms of conditionality. Is salvation conditioned upon the will of man so that salvation depends upon the will and work of man? Is election conditional so that God eternally chooses a sinner *if* that sinner first chooses to exercise his own native, inbred power of free will and believe in Christ offered in the gospel? Is Christ’s sacrificial death conditional so that His atonement becomes effectual *if* the sinner chooses to exercise his own native, inbred power of free will, and accept Christ’s sacrifice? Is the work of the Holy Spirit resistible so that the Spirit only applies the salvation earned by Christ *if* the sinner consents and opens his heart? Is the final salvation of the believer conditioned upon his persevering in a state of grace so that *if* he fails to hold fast he will lose his salvation, but *if* he maintains himself in faith and godliness he will enter the gates of heaven? Or does salvation depend exclusively upon the sovereign and particular grace of God who unconditionally chooses His elect people in Christ before the foundation of the world, gives Jesus Christ to accomplish effectually their redemption by obtaining for them all the benefits of salvation, and sheds forth the Holy Spirit to apply irresistibly to the hearts of the spiritually dead, elect sinners the salvation obtained by Christ?

The Canons of Dordt condemned as Pelagian heresy the conditionality of Arminianism and established the doctrines of sovereign grace as the truth of the Reformed faith. The Canons became a touchstone of truth for Owen.<sup>34</sup> Thus, he consistently taught that God’s grace was *particular* (for the elect alone) and *sovereign* in bringing all the elect to saving faith and everlasting glory by His own unfailing power.

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32 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 8.

33 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:53.

34 Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 31.

It is impossible to understand rightly Owen's doctrine of the covenant of grace without reckoning with the theological and polemical context. His covenant theology was developed in the midst of heated battles with Arminian contestants and it stands over against and as the fruit of his opposition to conditional theology.

### III. A Brief Overview of Owen's Treatise on the Perseverance of the Saints

#### A. Owen's Adversary

John Goodwin (c. 1594-1665) was one of Owen's primary theological foes. Goodwin was a graduate of Queens' College, Cambridge and "an Arminian in creed."<sup>35</sup> In 1651 he published *Redemption Redeemed*, in order to set forth the Arminian conception of the redemption of Christ and the perseverance of the saints. Having already refuted the Arminian doctrine of universal redemption in *Death of Death*, Owen responded to Goodwin in 1654 with his refutation, *Perseverance*. Owen was contending against a formidable opponent in Goodwin. He has been described as "no weak fanatic," and his treatise, *Redemption Redeemed*, has been called "a monument of literary diligence and ability."<sup>36</sup>

#### B. Owen's Aim

With this treatise Owen aimed to reach the common people of England by presenting the doctrines he asserted and the errors he opposed in a simple, straightforward manner and on the basis of Scripture so that his readers could grasp the truth and embrace the comfort of it. In his epistle dedicatory he informed the scholars at Oxford that his discourse omits regular syllogistical proceedings, scholastic argumentation, and philosophical terms unknown to the unlearned because the issues he takes up must be and are the concern of the common people of Christianity. Arminianism was alive in the halls of academia, but what provoked Owen to bitter lamentation was the fact that "Arminianism is crept into the bodies of sundry congregations."<sup>37</sup>

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35 See Prefatory Note in Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works* XI:2.

36 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:3.

37 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:16.

### C. Owen's Approach

Owen's subject is the doctrine known as "the perseverance of the saints." He understands this truth to be the continuance of God's elect people in the holiness they receive from God and the favor they have with God, being justified by His grace, through the blood of Christ.<sup>38</sup> However, Owen approaches this doctrine as a covenantal concept. He understands the perseverance of the saints in faith and holiness as their perseverance *in God's covenant*, and the preservation of the saints as God's keeping of them *in His covenant*.

Owen includes a chapter entitled "The Argument from the Covenant of Grace," in which he demonstrates how the immutability of God's love for believers in the covenant ensures their everlasting preservation. In addition to one chapter explicitly addressing the covenant, the entire treatise explains the doctrine of the saints' perseverance from the viewpoint of the covenant. Thus, for example, chapter five, entitled "Argument from the Promises of God," explicates the promises given to believers "in and through Christ in a covenant of grace."<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere Owen calls the perseverance of the saints "the great truth of the gospel and grace of the covenant."<sup>40</sup> In his opening dedication Owen states that his purpose for writing on the perseverance of the saints is that the civil magistrate and all believers may, "enjoy that peace and consolation which is in believing that the eternal love of God is immutable, that He is faithful in His promises, *that His covenant, ratified in the death of His Son, is unchangeable....*"<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Owen opens the body of his treatise by expressing his agreement with others who call the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints "the very salt of the covenant of grace."

The truth which I have proposed to handle, and whose defense I have undertaken in the ensuing discourse, is commonly called THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS, a doctrine whereof nothing ordinary, low, or common, is spoken by any that have engaged into the consideration of it. To some it is the *very salt of the covenant of*

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38 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:99.

39 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:225.

40 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:87.

41 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:5-6. Italics added.

*grace*...which seals up all the mercy and grace of the new covenant with the unchangeableness and faithfulness of God.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV. The Unconditional Nature of the Covenant of Grace

##### A. The Idea of God's Covenant

When Owen unfolds the concept of the new covenant found in Hebrews 8:6, he first considers the idea of a covenant and defines it as a compact between two sides. Both sides mutually enter into it and agree to the laws concerning obedience and disobedience, the rewards, and the punishment.<sup>43</sup> He continues the same thought in his explanation of Hebrews 8:10, but makes a noticeable shift. He writes, "A covenant properly is a compact or agreement on certain terms mutually stipulated by two or more parties...but in the description of the covenant here annexed there is no mention of any condition on the part of man, of any terms of obedience prescribed unto him, but the whole consists in free, gratuitous promises."<sup>44</sup> As Owen moves away from a consideration of a covenant in the abstract and hones in on the scriptural presentation of the nature of God's covenant of grace, he departs from the idea that God's covenant is a compact mutually entered into and agreed upon. He defines the covenant as a free promise. When he explains the concept of "testament" in Hebrews 8:8, and analyzes *berith*, the Old Testament Hebrew word for covenant, he instructs:

For if we take 'covenant' in a strict and proper sense, it hath indeed no place between God and man. For a covenant, strictly taken, ought to proceed on equal terms, and a proportionate consideration of things on both sides; but the covenant of God is founded on grace, and consists essentially in a free, undeserved promise. And therefore *berith* 'a covenant' is never spoken between God and man, but on the part of God it consists in a free promise, or a testament.<sup>45</sup>

In various places in *Perseverance*, Owen makes yet another slight shift in his definition of the covenant of grace. As he presents his in-

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42 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:77-8. Italics added.

43 Owen "Hebrews," in *Works*, XXII:55-60.

44 Owen, "Hebrews," in *Works*, XXII:134.

45 Owen, "Hebrews," in *Works*, XXII:111.

terpretation of many different biblical passages, and especially as he handles the rich marriage language of Hosea 2, Owen does not define the covenant as a compact or even as a promise, but as a bond of love. There is for Owen no better illustration of God's covenant of grace than the bond of marriage. He writes in explanation of Hosea 2:19-20, "The relation whereinto God here expreseth that He will and doth take His people is one of the most near and eminent which He affordeth to them, a conjugal relation, — He is and will be their husband; which is as high an expression of the covenant betwixt God and His saints as any that is or can be used."<sup>46</sup> He adds, "God's betrothing of believers is His actual taking them into a marriage covenant with Himself, to deal with them in the tenderness, faithfulness, and protection of a husband. So He is often pleased to call Himself in reference to His church."<sup>47</sup> As Owen explains the language of Scripture, there is nothing cold or abstract about his conception of the covenant. To belong to God's covenant is not to be a party with Him in some cold business-like arrangement, but rather to enjoy a warm and rich relationship of love through Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace "inwraps the unchangeable love and favor of God towards those who are taken into the bond thereof."<sup>48</sup> Understanding God's covenant as essentially God's relationship with His people, Owen sees this covenant all throughout Scripture, even when there is no explicit mention of it. For example, in the promise of Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," Owen explains, "so these words, 'I will not forsake them,' mean 'I will continue my presence with them, a God in covenant.'"<sup>49</sup>

## **B. The Unconditional Nature of God's Covenant**

In his defense of the truth of the perseverance of the saints, Owen exposes as inimical to the Word of God the conditionality espoused by Goodwin, and then for hundreds of pages he underscores and unfolds the truth of the unconditional nature of God's covenant. The covenant and promise of God are not conditional. The establishment of the relationship of love between God and His people does not depend upon man but upon God. Neither does the continued preservation

46 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:273.

47 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:280.

48 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:205.

49 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:255.

of believers in the covenant relationship depend upon their fulfilling of conditions. The whole covenant depends upon God fulfilling His promises; therefore, the covenant is a covenant of pure grace and the saints' place in God's covenant is unchangeably secure.

In rejecting the conditionality of Arminianism, Owen defines conditional promises as promises "depending on some things in the persons themselves to whom they are made, upon whose change or alteration they also may be frustrated, and not receive their accomplishment."<sup>50</sup> A condition is anything man must do in order for God's will regarding him to be completed. If man does not perform the condition, then not only does he forfeit intended blessings, but God's will is frustrated. According to Owen, the Arminian thesis propounded by Goodwin is that "the purposes and decrees of God are, as to their respective executions, suspended on conditions in men."<sup>51</sup> Arminian theologians reject what Owen calls absolute promises of God.<sup>52</sup> Instead, the Arminians contend, "Nay, there is not one such promise in all the book of God; they are conditional, for the enjoyment of the good things whereof believers stand all their days upon their good behavior."<sup>53</sup> Owen's entire refutation centers on his rejection of the proposition that God's covenant promises are suspended on conditions in men. Thus, Owen sets out to prove:

That the determining purposes or decrees of God's will concerning any thing or things by Him to be done or effected do not depend, as to their accomplishment, on any conditions that may be supposed in or about the things themselves whereof they are, and therefore are unchangeable....<sup>54</sup>

Representative of Owen's rejection of the Arminian conditionality taught by John Goodwin are his explanatory remarks on Romans 11:25-27. He writes in defense of the unconditional covenant,

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50 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:226.

51 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:161-2.

52 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:317.

53 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:107.

54 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:144.

Whereas there are two special spiritual promises here expressed, one of conversion, the other of perseverance, I desire to know on what condition their accomplishment is suspended? On what condition will God write His law in their hearts? [At this point, Owen lets the Arminian answer his question, hence the quotation marks. Then follows his reply. The same is true of the second quotation.] ‘On condition they hear Him and obey Him, suffer His mercies and kindness to work kindly on them.’ That is, on condition His law be in their hearts, He will write it there! Thanks yet for that! On what condition doth God promise that they shall abide with Him forever? ‘Why, on the condition they depart not from Him.’ Very good! To what end doth God promise that which He will not effect, but only on condition that there is no need for Him so to do!<sup>55</sup>

Owen repudiates conditional promises because they cast, “the greatest reproach of mutability, impotency, and breach of word upon the Most Holy, that is possible for any man to do.”<sup>56</sup>

In defense of the truth of the perseverance of the saints, Owen teaches that there are no conditions for man to fulfill in order to enter into or remain in God’s covenant, for God is the only undertaker upon whom the entirety of the covenant depends through time and eternity. “When two enter into covenant and agreement, no one can undertake that that covenant shall be firm and stable if it equally depend upon both.”<sup>57</sup> But in the covenant of grace,

God himself hath undertaken the whole, both for His continuing with us and our continuing with Him. Now, He is one, God is one, and there is not another, that they should fail and disannul this agreement. Though there be sundry persons in covenant, yet there is but one undertaker on all hands, and that is God Himself. It doth not depend upon the will of another, but of Him only who is faithful, who cannot lie, who cannot deceive, who will make all His engagements good to the utmost...Blessed be His name that He hath not laid the foundation of a covenant in the blood of His dear Son, laid out the riches of His wisdom, grace, and power about it, and then left it to us and our frail

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55 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:217.

56 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:216.

57 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:210.



will to carry it on, that it should be in our power to make void the great work of His mercy!<sup>58</sup>

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is nothing other than one very significant implication of the truth that God in His power and grace unconditionally establishes and maintains the covenant relationship. God has undertaken to be a God unto us, but He has also undertaken that we shall abide as His people.<sup>59</sup> God's unconditional covenant is sure. It does not depend upon the faith, faithfulness, repentance, or obedience of the believer. It depends upon the power, goodness, grace, righteousness, faithfulness, wisdom, unchangeableness, providence and sovereignty of God.<sup>60</sup> Referring to Jeremiah 31:32 and 32:40, Owen argues,

That the intendment of God in this promise, and the administration of this covenant, with means and power mentioned therein, is the abiding of His saints with Him, or rather, primarily and principally, His abiding with them, notwithstanding all such interveniences as He will not powerfully prevent from ever interposing to the disturbance of that communion He taketh them into. 'I will,' saith He, 'make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good.'<sup>61</sup>

The covenant is communion with God, and God takes it upon Himself to ensure that this communion is everlasting. Exactly because the covenant of grace is an everlasting covenant, the God who undertakes to be our God will be our God *forever*.

### C. The Arminian Objections Answered

#### 1. As to Faith

Throughout his treatise, *Perseverance*, Owen responds to a host of objections from Goodwin. First, Goodwin insists that the covenant is conditional because it is two-sided and depends for its continuance

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58 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:210.

59 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:206.

60 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:161-2.

61 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:220.

upon the activity of both parties. Writes Goodwin: “the expression of a ‘covenant’ plainly shows it to be conditional; for a covenant is not but upon the mutual stipulation of parties.”<sup>62</sup> What is the condition man must perform and upon which the covenant depends? Owen answers, “Some call it a *not resisting* of this redemption offered to them; some, a *yielding* to the invitation of the gospel; some, in plain terms *faith*.”<sup>63</sup> Owen explains the Arminian understanding of faith as a condition:

Others again fixing themselves on the necessity of obedience, and the concurrence of actual faith to the completing of justification in the soul of the sinner, with a no less dangerous reflection upon the truth, do suspend the efficacy of the death of Christ upon our believing, ‘which gives life, and vigor and virtue unto it,’ as they say, ‘and is the sole originally discriminating cause of all the benefits we receive thereby. Without the antecedent accomplishment of that condition in us, or our actual believing, it is not’ say they, ‘nor will be, useful.’<sup>64</sup>

In *Death of Death*, he elaborates: “Now Christ hath purchased, by His death for all, all good things, not absolutely, but upon condition; and until that condition come to be fulfilled, unless they perform what is required, they have neither part nor portion, right unto, nor possession of them.”<sup>65</sup> There is something man must do to make the death of Christ effectual for him, and man finds the power to perform this duty within himself. The duty is faith.

Arminian theologians are provoked by the denial of faith as a condition, and argue:

There is nothing more vain, nothing more foolish...than to attribute our regeneration and faith unto the death of Christ; for if Christ may be said to have merited for us faith and regeneration, then faith cannot be a condition whose performance God should require at the hands of sinners under the pain of eternal damnation.... If faith be the effect of the merit of Christ, it cannot be our duty.<sup>66</sup>

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62 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:218.

63 Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:234.

64 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:302.

65 Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:234.

66 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:101.

Furthermore, upon man's activity of faith God suspends His bestowal of continued blessings. For example, Psalm 125:1 teaches, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed but abideth forever." Arminianism teaches that God promises He will make His covenant people as steadfast as mount Zion, but that promise depends upon His people doing something. If they do not do it, the promise fails. They must believe and their act of believing determines whether or not they will be made steadfast.<sup>67</sup>

Owen presents a defense of the Reformed doctrine of faith. First, he refutes the Arminian explanation of the relation between the death of Christ and faith. He regards the death of Christ to be very significant for the covenant because Christ is the Mediator of the covenant and for His sake all the mercies of the covenant are made out to them who are taken into the bond of it.<sup>68</sup> In the crucified Savior God hath set "all the promises of the covenant, that not one of them should be broken, disannulled, frustrated, or come short of an accomplishment."<sup>69</sup> Owen also regards faith to be very significant because it is the instrument through which believers receive and enjoy the blessings of God in His covenant.<sup>70</sup> It is God's appointed way to salvation.<sup>71</sup> Owen writes, "[F]aith and belief are necessary, not to add anything to complete the procurement of forgiveness of sins, any or all, but only to the actual receiving of it, when, upon the account of the death of Christ, it pleaseth God, in the promise of the gospel, to hold it out and impart it unto the soul, thereby completing covenant-justification."<sup>72</sup> However, Owen denies the Arminian explanation of the relation between the cross and faith. In *A Display*, he even laments, "O Christ! That any pretending to profess Thy holy name should thus slight the precious work of Thy death and passion!"<sup>73</sup> The efficacy of Christ's sacrifice does not depend upon our faith, for faith is not a condition. Faith is a gift earned by Christ and given for His sake. For "Christ did not die for any upon

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67 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:266.

68 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:308.

69 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:210.

70 Owen, "A Display," in *Works*, X:95.

71 Owen, "Death of Death," in *Works*, X:243.

72 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:302.

73 Owen, "A Display," in *Works*, X:96.

condition, *if they do believe*; but He died for all God's elect, *that they should believe*, and believing have eternal life."<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, Owen refutes the Arminian explanation of the relationship between continued enjoyment of divine blessings in the covenant and the activity of faith. Our act of believing is not the condition to be performed in order to gain entrance into the covenant, but neither is it the condition upon which the ongoing reception of God's promised grace in the covenant depends. Responding to the Arminian interpretation of Psalm 125:1, Owen argues:

What, I pray, is the condition on which this promise doth depend? 'It is,' they say who oppose us in this, 'if they continue trusting in Him.' That is, if they be not removed; for to trust in Him is not to be removed: if, then, they be not removed, they shall not be removed!' And this is the mind of the Holy Ghost? Notwithstanding all the rhetoric in the world, this promise will stand, for the consolation of them that believe, as the mountains about Jerusalem, that shall never be removed.<sup>75</sup>

He explains, "Though men are not completely *stated* in the covenant before their own believing, which [men] bring in what on their part is stipulated, yet the covenant and grace of it lays hold of them before, even to bestow faith on them, or they would never believe; for faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God."<sup>76</sup>

That God commands faith does not make it a condition. Consciously, continuing in the tradition of Augustine, Owen teaches that what God commands, God gives:

Neither will that at all assist which is affirmed, namely, 'That in all covenants, - and His promise holdeth out a covenant, - there must be a condition on both sides:' for, we willingly grant that in His covenant of grace God doth promise something to us, and requireth something of us, and that these two have mutual dependence one upon another;

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74 Owen, "Death of Death," in *Works*, X:235.

75 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:266.

76 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:308. See also Owen, "A Display," in *Works*, X:123 where he appeals to Mt. 13:11, John 6:29, 44, Eph. 1:3, 18-20, 2:8, Phil. 1:29, and Heb. 12:2 to demonstrate that Scripture teaches faith is a gift.

but we also affirm that in the very covenant itself God hath graciously promised to work effectually in us those things which He requireth of us, and that herein it mainly differeth from the covenant of works, which He hath abolished. But such a covenant as wherein God should promise to be a God unto us upon a condition by us and in our own strength we acknowledge not, nor can, whilst our hearts have any sense of the love of the Father, the blood of the Son, or the grace of the Holy Spirit, the fountains thereof.<sup>77</sup>

## 2. As to Carelessness

Goodwin and the Arminians defend conditional promises on the ground that absolute promises necessarily lead to disobedience. Sovereign grace breeds licentiousness. If believers are fully persuaded that they will persevere because God's grace will never fail them, then they will lead careless and profane lives. The certainty of preservation destroys any possibility of or motivation for a holy life. Goodwin states, "A persuasion of the certain continuance of the love of God to any one is a ready way to make them careless, negligent, and to give up themselves to all manner of abominations."<sup>78</sup> Goodwin alleges that an absolute promise of security is evil: "It is a promising unto men, and that with height of assurance, under what looseness or vile practices soever, exemption and freedom from punishment."<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Goodwin asserts that the possibility of falling away and perishing everlastingly is what truly encourages piety: "That doctrine which is according to godliness, and whose natural and proper tendency is to promote godliness in the hearts and lives of men, is evangelical, and of unquestionable comportance with the truth; such is the doctrine which teacheth the possibility of the saints' declining, both totally and finally."<sup>80</sup> Indeed, conditional salvation is losable salvation.

Owen offers a fourfold response in defense of God's grace. First, he contends that it is impossible that regenerated believers, who have assurance of their everlasting salvation, become careless:

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77 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:270.

78 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:391.

79 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:99.

80 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:407.

But what vipers, snakes, and adders do such men suppose the saints of God to be, that their new nature, their heavenly principles (for what the flesh in them is prone unto we now consider not), should conclude that it is good to sin 'that grace may abound;' that because God 'loves them with an everlasting love,' therefore they will hate Him with perpetual hatred.... What is in the inner man, what is in the new creature, what is in the nature of any grace wherewith they are endowed, that is apt or inclinable to make such hellish conclusions?<sup>81</sup>

Owen agrees that the natural corruption within believers is apt to draw the conclusion "Because God will certainly abide with us forever, therefore let us walk carelessly, and do Him all the despite we can," but true faith, even the meanest and weakest faith in the whole world, will look on such a conclusion as a blast from the bottomless pit.<sup>82</sup>

Secondly, Owen teaches that those who persist in a wicked life may have no assurance that they are true covenant members who have salvation and will be preserved unto final glory. To charge the Reformed faith with teaching otherwise is slanderous. Owen responds to Goodwin, "We neither suspend the certainty of reward upon our actions in the sense intimated, neither do we say that it is assured to men whether they act or no."<sup>83</sup> Regarding the believer's enjoyment of the assurance of future glory, Owen explains that faith and obedience are appointed and commanded

not as conditions of the grace and love of God to them to whom the promises are made, as though they should depend on anything of their uncertain accomplishment, as hath been declared, but only as the means and ways which God hath appointed for men to use and walk in unto those ends, and which He hath absolutely promised to work in them and to continue to them.<sup>84</sup>

Faith and obedience are not conditions of the grace and love of God, but promised gifts of His grace and love, and exercised in such a manner that faith is the *means* God appointed for men to *use* and

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81 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:391.

82 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:272.

83 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:412.

84 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:413.

obedience is the *way* God appointed in which believers do *walk* while enjoying the Spirit's assurance.

Thirdly, the assurance of perseverance produces godliness. What can be more effectual to promote or advance the fear, honor, and reverence of God, than the assurance of His Spirit to continue to preserve the soul in those ways which are well pleasing unto Him?<sup>85</sup> The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is full of exceeding effectual motives and provocations unto gospel obedience because it takes away all perplexing fears that hinder obedience and it puts on believers the obligation to perfect holiness in the fear of God.<sup>86</sup>

Fourthly, Owen teaches that godliness is not a condition for preservation in the covenant, but a sure fruit of the promise and bond of the covenant.

Walking with God in uprightness and sincerity is the proper fruit in us of His promise to be our all-sufficient God in covenant; as Jer. 31:33, our becoming the 'people of God' in walking with Him in all ways of obedience is the effect of His promise 'to be our God, and to write His law in our hearts,' not only because by the grace of the promise we are brought into a state of acceptance, and made the people of God, but also upon the account of the engagement that is put upon us by the gracious promise to live unto Him; whence in the close it is affirmed 'we shall be His people.'<sup>87</sup>

God's children fall into sin, sometimes grievously. However, the sure promise of God makes it impossible that true believers ever continue in an unholy life and remain impenitent. God has promised to make His people fruitful in the covenant. So far from promoting carelessness then, the certainty of preservation actually promotes holiness in the lives of God's covenant people so that they want to walk close with their God.<sup>88</sup>

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85 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:413.

86 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:388-90.

87 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:402.

88 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:271.

### 3. As to Exhortations

Mr. Goodwin argues that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints makes void the usefulness of exhortations and threats in preaching.<sup>89</sup> If the threats of God in Scripture are real threats, then it must be possible for one who was once in a state of grace to fall away and perish if he does not persevere in faith and godliness. The exhortations and threats in Scripture imply a conditional salvation that depends upon the saints' continuance in faithfulness. God promises to keep His people but He also threatens that if any go astray, they will be destroyed. Sometimes the purpose of God is frustrated, as those to whom He gives His grace resist His will and walk in disobedience. Upon them God pours out His wrath and thereby demonstrates that perseverance is conditional.

To this, Owen responds,

That the eternal purposes of God concerning the works of His grace, are to be measured by the rule and analogy of His temporal threatenings, is an assertion striking at the very root of the covenant of grace, and efficacy of the mediation of the Lord Jesus, yea, at the very being of divine perfections of the nature of God Himself.<sup>90</sup>

Exhortations and warnings in Scripture do not imply the possibility of falling away. Rather, "they are means to stir up, quicken, and increase those graces in the exercise whereof the saints according to the purpose and promise of God, do persevere."<sup>91</sup>

### 4. As to Free Will

John Owen is convinced that what drives the Arminian doctrine of conditionality and all of the objections to sovereign grace is the "stout idol" of the doctrine of free will. Arminianism denies that the will of fallen man is bound in sin and inclined toward all evil. There is still some moral good left in the will so that man can, apart from grace, choose for or against God. The Remonstrants in Holland contended that after the fall man "did not lose (as they speak at the

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89 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:430-1.

90 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:168.

91 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:439.



synod) the power of performing that obedience which is required in the new covenant.”<sup>92</sup> Possessing a free will, natural man is capable of hearing the gospel, making a decision to accept Jesus Christ, and then actually committing himself unto Christ in faith. Exercising his free will to perform the condition of faith, man makes himself to differ from another: “What matter is it that a man should make himself differ from others? There is nothing truer, he who yieldeth faith to God commanding him, maketh himself differ from him who will not have faith when he commandeth.”<sup>93</sup> Free will not only enables man to cooperate with grace and make it effectual, but it is a double power whereby man can also resist God’s grace and make it ineffectual.<sup>94</sup> Owen makes reference to Arminius, who taught, “All unregenerate men have by virtue of their free will, a power of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the offered grace of God, of contemning the counsel of God concerning themselves, or refusing the gospel of grace, of not opening the heart to him that knocketh.”<sup>95</sup>

The entire notion of conditionality is undergirded by the doctrine of free will. Man has the power within himself to choose what is good; therefore, man has the power to perform the condition upon which the covenant promises of God are suspended. What Arminians find most disagreeable in the teaching of a sovereign, unconditional covenant of grace is that it has no place for human free will.

Of free will, Owen writes, “Our next task is to take a view of the idol himself, of this great deity of free-will.”<sup>96</sup> In defense of the sovereign, irresistible saving grace of God, Owen refutes the notion of free will by demonstrating that man is by nature dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3), that corrupt nature is not only an impotency but an enmity to anything spiritually good (1 Cor. 2:14, Rom. 8:7), and that natural man can do nothing good (Jer. 13:23, Heb. 11:6, Eph. 2:8, John 15:5).<sup>97</sup> Finally,

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92 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:123-4.

93 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:124.

94 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:130-3.

95 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:117.

96 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:114.

97 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:126-9.

Owen condemns free will as that “which is more gross Pelagianism than Pelagius himself would ever justify.”<sup>98</sup>

#### E. What About “Conditions?”

In the service of the sovereign grace of God in an unconditional covenant, Owen strongly repudiates the conditional theology of Arminianism with its teaching that faith, repentance, and obedience are conditions. Nevertheless, we must account for Owen’s use of the term “condition,” which appears in all four of his works we have consulted. For example, he writes:

Christ hath purchased remission of sins and eternal life for us, to be enjoyed on our believing, upon the condition of faith. But faith itself, which is the condition of them, on whose performance they are bestowed, that He hath procured for us absolutely, on no condition at all; for what condition soever can be proposed, on which the Lord should bestow faith, I shall afterward show in vain, and to run into a circle.<sup>99</sup>

Clearly, by his use of the term “condition,” Owen does not intend to teach that faith is an activity that man performs of his own strength or something by which he meritoriously procures the favor of God, so that what avails is not the promise, power and grace of God but the worthiness of the sinner’s own activity.

By “condition,” when used broadly to refer to any activity of the believer, Owen means nothing more than *requirement* or *duty*. He explains in his comments on Heb. 8:6:

I do not say the covenant of grace is absolutely without conditions, if by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requireth of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises thereof are not in the first place *remunerative* of our obedience in the covenant, but *efficaciously assumptive* of us into covenant, and establishing or confirming in the covenant.<sup>100</sup>

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98 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:126.

99 Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:223-4. See also, Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:235; “Perseverance” in *Works*, XI:218; “A Display,” in *Works*, X:93.

100 Owen, “Hebrews,” in *Works*, XXII:68-9.

The “conditions” of the covenant then, are all the duties God requires. They are not something upon which entrance or continuance in the covenant depend. Rather, they are the necessary responses of the believer who dwells with God in His covenant and receives strength to obey by virtue of that covenant. Owen refers to the activities of believing, repenting and obeying as “conditions” because they are *required* of God.

Owen also calls *faith* a “condition” in order to indicate that there is an *order* that God has established for the reception of blessings. Faith is a necessary means or instrument of salvation. As an activity, faith is required antecedent to the reception of additional promised bestowals of grace. For example, without believing, one will not have the pardon of sins. Although believing precedes pardon, pardon is not earned or merited by faith but is graciously granted by means of faith—faith itself being a gift. Owen instructs,

For although faith be required in order of nature antecedently unto our actual receiving of the pardon of sin, yet is that faith itself wrought in us by the grace of the promise, and so its precedency unto pardon respects only the order that God had appointed in the communication of the benefits of the covenant, and intends not that the pardon of sin is the reward of our faith.<sup>101</sup>

Later in *Hebrews* he adds:

Though there are no conditions properly so called of the whole grace of the covenant, yet there are conditions in the covenant, taking that term, in a large sense, for that which by the order of divine constitution precedeth some other things, and hath an influence into their existence; for God requireth many things of them whom He actually takes into covenant, and makes partakers of the promises and benefits of it.<sup>102</sup>

Enlightening for an understanding of the thinking of other theologians on this subject are Owen’s explanatory remarks on Hebrews 8:10-12:

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101 Owen, “Hebrews,” in *Works*, XXII:69.

102 Owen, “Hebrews,” in *Works*, XXII:137

It is evident that the first grace of the covenant, or God's putting His law in our hearts, can depend on no condition on our part. For whatever is antecedent thereunto, being only a work or act of corrupted nature, can be no condition whereon the dispensation of spiritual grace is superadded. And this is the great ground of *them who absolutely deny the covenant of grace to be conditional*; namely, that the first grace is absolutely promised, whereon and its exercise the whole of it doth depend.<sup>103</sup>

Owen was well aware of the fact that some theologians of his day absolutely denied the covenant of grace to be conditional. Since the Arminian doctrine of conditional salvation was condemned by the Synod of Dordt, the propriety of speaking of conditions was contestable. As for Owen himself, while he unhesitatingly denounces conditional theology, he is willing to use the term "condition." He writes,

Unto a full and complete interest in all the promises of the covenant, faith on our part, from which evangelical repentance is inseparable, is required. But whereas these also are wrought in us by virtue of that promise and grace of the covenant which are absolute, it is a mere strife about words to contend whether they may be called conditions or no. Let it be granted on the one hand, that we cannot have an actual participation of the relative grace of this covenant in adoption and justification, without faith or believing; and on the other, that this faith is wrought in us, given unto us, bestowed upon us, by that grace of the covenant which depends on no condition in us as unto its discriminating administration, and I shall not concern myself what men will call it.<sup>104</sup>

Any debate over whether or not some activity that God requires of us in the covenant should be designated a "condition" Owen regards as an unimportant terminological dispute. Certainly the condemnation he heaped upon Arminianism, he would not heap upon the theology of those who are committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace in an unconditional covenant while still employing the term "condition." Owen is more concerned with the doctrinal substance intended by the term than the term itself.

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103 Owen, "Hebrews," in *Works*, XXII:137. Italics added.

104 Owen, "Hebrews," in *Works*, XXII:137

It should be noted, however, that over time and through the purifying fires of more controversy, God would change the church's thinking regarding the term "condition." The Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) sums up Reformed orthodoxy's evaluation of the usage of the term "condition" subsequent to Owen, "In the beginning Reformed theologians spoke freely of 'the conditions' of the covenant. But after the nature of the covenant of grace had been more carefully considered and had to be defended against [Roman] Catholics, Lutherans, and Remonstrants, many of them took exception to the term and avoided it."<sup>105</sup> This is certainly true of Herman Hoeksema, who in a heated controversy over a conditional covenant with a conditional promise wrote,

Do you not see, reader, that this road of conditions is a very slippery path, and that there is abundant reason to be "vuurbang" for this Pelagian and Arminian term?.... Let us, therefore reject this Pelagian heresy, together with the term that is used to express it. But, you say, how then about the responsibility of man? Do we not need the term condition to denote that man is a responsible creature? Do we not make man "a stock and block" by laying all emphasis on the truth of election and sovereign grace? My answer is decidedly: "No!"<sup>106</sup>

## V. The Covenant and Eternal Election

The truth that the covenant of grace does not depend upon the will and work of man in performing conditions, but is established

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105 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 229.

106 Herman Hoeksema, "As to Conditions," in *The Standard Bearer*, (Dec. 15, 1949), 125. Prof. Klaas Schilder of the Liberated churches in the Netherlands wrote that some men were *vuurbang* ("afraid as of fire") of the term condition. Hoeksema responded, "Well, I belong to them. And I dare say I am in good company. The fathers of Dordt also were "vuurbang" of the term, witness the fact that they never used it for the positive exposition of the Reformed truth, although they were well acquainted with the term, but always mentioned it as an Arminian term expressing an Arminian idea. And why, pray, should we play with fire?" See, *Standard Bearer*, (November 15, 1949), 77.

and maintained by the grace of God is a truth rooted in the doctrine of God's eternal decree of election. As Owen saw, already in his youth, the fundamental difference between the Reformed faith and Arminianism is predestination. Throughout his treatise, *Perseverance*, Owen repeatedly teaches the doctrine of election in order to answer Goodwin's objections to sovereign grace. Ultimately, in the Arminian conception, everything depends upon the will of the sinner, who is capable of resisting divine grace. The efficacy of the death of Jesus, the fulfillment of covenant promises, the inception of a sinner into the state of grace, and the continuance of the believer in the fellowship of God depends upon the will of man. As emphatically as Owen denounces a covenant of conditional promises, he necessarily defends and promotes a covenant in which membership and blessings are controlled by election as the living decree of the covenant God. It is not the will of man but the sovereign, unchanging, gracious will of God that governs membership in the covenant and the bestowal of every measure of grace. This is why the covenant is sure and the saints are secure. The truth of the perseverance of the saints in the covenant of God is the fruit — the glorious and comforting fruit — of God's electing grace.

#### A. Arminian Objections

Goodwin follows a line of argumentation that leads him to the conclusion that it is not sovereign grace but free will that determines covenant membership and continuance in the state of grace. First, in the nation of Old Testament Israel and in the church of Christ today, God's covenant promises are not given to some but to all. God's love and favor are not extended to some, but to all. Goodwin writes, "the promise is made to the body of the people, and not to the saints and believers among them, and respects as well the unfaithful as the believers in that nation."<sup>107</sup> When, for example, God promised betrothal to the nation of Israel through His prophet Hosea, the promise was made unto the entire body and nation of the Jews.<sup>108</sup>

Second, according to Arminianism, it is an undeniable fact that not all in Israel are actually preserved unto everlasting salvation in

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107 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:213-4.

108 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:274.

heavenly glory. Many fall away and perish. Goodwin appeals to the history of the Babylonian captivity in which God punished many Israelites with temporal and everlasting punishments for their unbelief and rebellion.<sup>109</sup> Throughout the history of the church many apostatize.

Third, if all are the objects of God's love, and all receive His gracious promises, then what explains the fact that only some are saved, while others fall away? The Arminian answer is found in free will. Only some exercise their free will and perform the condition upon which promised blessings are suspended. Others resist God's grace and overthrow it in their pride so that God's promises to them fail. Man makes the difference. This raises the question: who actually are the objects of God's grace and promises?

### **B. Election Defended**

In *Perseverance*, Owen repeatedly responds to Goodwin by demonstrating that participation in the covenant is governed by election. In *A Display*, he devotes an entire chapter to exposing the Arminian corruption of predestination and then he sets forth the biblical truth of divine election as God's eternal, unconditional choice of some people unto faith and everlasting salvation in Christ.

First of all, in countering the Arminian heresy with the biblical and Reformed doctrine of predestination, Owen taught that election is the fountain of all grace. He wrote, "But all our faith, our obedience, repentance, good works, are the effects of election, flowing from it as their proper fountain, erected on it as the foundation of this spiritual building."<sup>110</sup> Owen was borrowing the familiar language of the Canons of Dordt, which calls election "the fountain of every saving good."<sup>111</sup>

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109 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:216.

110 Owen, "A Display," in *Works*, X:65. See also, Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:151.

111 Schaff, *Creeds*, 583. Canons, Head 1, Article 9: "This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the pre-requisite, cause or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to that of the apostle: "He hath chosen us (not because we were, but) that we should be

In teaching election as the fountain of all grace, Owen makes plain that when he speaks of faith, repentance or obedience as “conditions,” he does not mean it in the Arminian sense, otherwise, God’s will in election is overthrown in favor of man’s will.

Secondly, Owen taught that the exclusive objects of the saving good that flows out of the eternal, electing will and love of God are only those eternally appointed to salvation — the elect. The covenant of grace is established only with the elect. The covenant is not made “with all, for ‘all men have not faith’ — it is ‘of the elect of God’ therefore, it is not made with all, nor is the compass thereof to be extended beyond the remnant that are according to election.”<sup>112</sup> The covenant is not universal but particular: “Yea, that first distinction between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is enough to overthrow the pretended universality of the covenant of grace; for who dares affirm that God entered into a covenant of grace with the seed of the serpent?”<sup>113</sup> Accordingly, Christ died only for the elect: “The proper counsel and intention of God in sending His Son into the world to die was, that thereby He might confirm and ratify the new covenant to His elect, and purchase for them all the good things which are contained in the tenure of that covenant.”<sup>114</sup>

Thirdly, the promises of God are only ever extended to the elect: “This, then, is inwrapped in this promise of the covenant unto the elect, with whom it is established. God will be a God unto them forever, and that to bless them with all the blessings which He communicates in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised seed.”<sup>115</sup> The Arminian Goodwin insists that the promise was given to all, and in many cases it failed; therefore, Owen responds in defense of election and sovereign grace:

But I refer you to a learned author, who hath long since assoiled this difficulty, and taught us to distinguish between a Jew *en to phanero* [outwardly] and a Jew *en to krupto* [inwardly], of Israel according to

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holy, and without blame, before him in love,” Ephesians 1:4.”

112 Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:237.

113 Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, X:238.

114 Owen, “A Display,” in *Works*, X:90.

115 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:206-7.



‘the flesh’ and according to ‘the promise.’ He hath also taught us that ‘they are not all Israel that are of Israel,’ Rom. 2:28-29, 9:6-7. And upon that account it is that the word of this promise doth not fail, though all ‘of Israel’ do not enjoy the fruit of it; — not that it is conditional, but that it was not at all made unto them, as to the spiritual part of it, to whom it was not wholly fulfilled. And chap. 11:7 he tells you that it was ‘the election’ to whom these promises were made, and they obtained the fruit of them, neither doth that appendix of promises pointed to look any other way.<sup>116</sup>

Not one of God’s covenant promises failed at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Owen repeatedly returns to the words of Paul in Romans 9:6, “they are not all Israel which are of Israel” to prove that not every Israelite, head for head, was the object of the gracious promises of God’s covenant. Many in Israel were carnal seed. They never received the promise. God condemned and punished them for their sin, exactly as He warned He would do. Although the true Israelites were by nature no more holy or deserving than the carnal element in the nation, God made and always fulfilled His promise to them. Those belonging to true, elect Israel were also taken into captivity. They lost their external prosperity and suffered from the chastening hand of God; nevertheless, the promise of God’s favor and saving preservation was always fulfilled to them. Of that promise of grace Owen wrote, “it is granted that as to the spiritual part of the covenant of grace, it was at all times fulfilled to them.”<sup>117</sup>

Fourth, Owen explains how the doctrine of election necessitates making a distinction between the external administration of the covenant and the effectual dispensation of it. Elect and reprobate alike belong to the external covenant community or what is called the church visible. However, only the elect, that is, the members of the church invisible, truly belong to the covenant and receive the gracious promises of God. Owen states,

Though the external administration of the covenant was given to Abraham and his carnal seed, yet the effectual dispensation of the

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116 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:212-3.

117 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:215.

grace of the covenant is peculiar to them only who are children of the promise, the remnant of Abraham according to election, with all that in all nations were to be blessed in him and in his seed, Christ Jesus.<sup>118</sup>

God's effectual saving grace in Jesus Christ, manifested in all the covenant promises and blessings, is particular; it is not intended for all those who live under the historical administration of the covenant. Regarding God's dealings with the Jews in the Old Testament, Scripture teaches

a difference and distinction, in and of that people (for 'they are not all Israel that are of Israel,' Rom. 9:4-8), the whole lump and body of them being the people of God in respect of separation from the rest of the world and dedication to His worship and external profession, yet a remnant only, a hidden remnant, being His people upon the account of eternal designation and actual acceptance into love and favor in Jesus Christ.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, Owen acknowledges that it is certainly true, both according to the infallible Scriptures and the observation of true believers in the covenant community, that many apostatize from the faith. However, they are not elect, and for all their outward profession and participation in the ordinances of worship over many years, they never truly belonged to the covenant. Appealing to 1 John 2:19, Owen explains that those who apostatize prove by their departure that they were but hypocrites.<sup>120</sup> The reality of apostasy does not undermine the truth of the perseverance of the saints or shake the believer's confidence, because those who apostatize were never truly saints; they did not have the faith of God's elect and Christ did not live in them.<sup>121</sup>

## VI. The Comfort of the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints

Owen's stated purpose in defending the truth of the perseverance of the saints in God's unchangeable covenant of grace is the pastoral

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118 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:206.

119 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:133.

120 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:80.

121 Owen, "Perseverance," in *Works*, XI:90.

purpose of comfort. Owen found Arminian conditionality subtly creeping into the congregations and threatening the confession and comfort of the church. The task to which he sets himself in refuting the heresy of John Goodwin is, “to safeguard the consolation of the weakest believers, and to encourage them to hold fast their confidence, so well established, against the assaults of all adversaries, Satan or Arminians.”<sup>122</sup>

How desperately God’s covenant people feel their need for encouragement and comfort. Satan is a relentless tempter. Sin, including the sin within, is so deceptive and alluring, exerting such a powerful influence. The oppressors are so full of fury. Faith so quickly grows dim. Every believer feels the threat of apostasy and being drawn away of his or her own lusts. No believer is faithful in keeping the covenant, in trusting God’s will, in giving the obedience God requires. By the multitude of their daily transgressions the children of God make themselves worthy of the wrath of God and the punishment of eternal abandonment. The saint whom God preserves confesses,

I am for the present in some good state and condition; but were not the angels so, that are now devils in hell? Were not they in a far better and more excellent state than I am? And yet they are now shut up under chains of everlasting darkness to the judgment of the great day. Adam in paradise had no lust within him to tempt and seduce him, no world under the curse to entangle and provoke him, and yet...he became like the beasts that perish.... What hope is there left to me, in whom there ‘dwelleth no good thing, who am sold under’ the power of ‘sin,’ and encompassed with a world of temptations, that I should endure unto the end?<sup>123</sup>

There is no comfort and assurance in conditionality. Conditional salvation is losable salvation. “Now,” writes Owen, commenting on God’s promise never to fail or forsake His people in Joshua 1:5, “what one drop of consolation can a poor, drooping, tempted soul, squeeze out of such promises as depend wholly and solely upon anything within themselves?”<sup>124</sup>

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122 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:211.

123 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:389.

124 Owen, “Perseverance,” in *Works*, XI:238-9.

Owen, “the Prince of the Puritans,” warmly articulated and vigorously defended a lovely doctrine of assurance, which he expressed through the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and grounded in the unconditional covenant of God.<sup>125</sup> God, who chooses His people in everlasting and unchangeable love, promises, “I will betroth thee to myself in faithfulness.” For Jesus’ sake He will continue to be a faithful husband to His people forever, undertaking also that they by the power of the Spirit continue to be faithful to Him. True comfort is knowing that the covenant does not depend upon us and our faithfulness, but upon the ever-faithful God who for the everlasting glory of His own name shall fulfill all His promises so that His people persevere in faith and holiness. God not only preserves His people, but gives them assurance of His preservation so that they can have sweet consolation.

## **VII. Owen’s Significance for Today For Reformed and Presbyterian Churches**

One of the most deadly assaults leveled against the doctrines of grace within Reformed and Presbyterian churches since the Synod of Dordt is the heretical theology known as the Federal Vision. As the name “Federal” indicates, this heresy concerns the covenant. The Federal Vision teaches a conditional covenant in which God

has decreed that some of those whom He has chosen to bring into a covenant relationship with Him will enjoy that relationship only for a time. God truly brings those people into His covenant, into union with Christ.... They experience His love, but that covenant relationship

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125 For an evaluation and rejection of the Puritan doctrine of assurance as articulated by other Puritans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see David J. Engelsma, “The Gift of Assurance: The Spirit of Christ and Assurance of Salvation,” in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 42, no. 2 (2009): 3-46. Many of the leading Puritans taught that ordinarily the believer is not sealed with the Spirit of assurance until many years after his conversion so that it is common for a believer to have saving faith but no assurance. For a good description of Owen’s doctrine of the covenant and assurance, and how Owen is an exception to this sickly Puritan doctrine of many leading Puritans, see Wong, “Covenant Theology” 301-311.

is conditional. It calls for repentance and faith and new obedience. God's choice was not conditional, but life in the covenant is.<sup>126</sup>

Teaching a conditional covenant, the Federal Vision necessarily denies the preservation of the saints and teaches that covenant members who enjoyed saving union and communion with Christ can apostatize in unfaithfulness and fall away everlastingly:

They will be cut off from the covenant with God. They will lose the blessings of His grace and mercy and will be destroyed like the ungodly (only their condemnation will be greater since they despised the grace of God and have done despite to the Spirit of grace – which was really and truly given to them in Christ).<sup>127</sup>

The Federal Vision is essentially the old Arminianism condemned by the Synod of Dort and taught by Goodwin during Owen's day in England, only this heresy is very explicitly a *covenant* heresy. Never in the centuries after Owen's life and ministry was his covenant theology more desperately needed than in the beginning of the twenty-first century when the covenant heresy of the Federal Vision appeared and began to work its way through Reformed and Presbyterian churches like a mighty troop of savage Philistines. Owen provides the church today with the answer to and the safeguard against the Federal Vision. His theology can address it for what it really is—a covenant heresy that denies the gospel by teaching a grace of God wider in scope than election, and therefore, an ineffectual grace that fails in many instances because the recipients of such grace stiff-arm God by refusing to fulfill the condition upon which the grace depends. If Owen is so highly regarded everywhere in conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles as one of the greatest theologians of the church, indeed, “the Calvin of England” and “the greatest British theologian of all time,” then where has been and is the loud proclamation of his doctrine of

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126 John Barach, “Covenant and Election,” in Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds. *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004), 36-7.

127 Steve Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” in Calvin Beisner, ed. *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 265.

an unconditional covenant established with the elect alone? Where the covenant theology of John Owen is known, taught, embraced and defended, there is Owen himself again, like an old Samson in the church, pulling down the Philistine house of the Federal Vision for the glory of God and the consolation of the saints.

### **For the Protestant Reformed Churches**

The significance of John Owen for the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) is that his covenant theology powerfully confirms their contention that their doctrine of the covenant is the doctrine of confessional Reformed orthodoxy. The PRC teach an unconditional covenant with the elect. As they have proven, this doctrine, unpopular though it may be today, is by no means novel or an aberration in Reformed orthodoxy, but the only doctrine of the covenant that maintains, in line with the Synod of Dordt, the absolute sovereignty of God's grace in salvation over against Arminian conditionality.<sup>128</sup> The PRC have argued and demonstrated in their Declaration of Principles,<sup>129</sup> that their covenant doctrine is the doctrine of Dordt, the doctrine of the Reformed confessions, the genuinely Reformed doctrine of the covenant.

In the "Calvin of England" the PRC find powerful support for their contention. Although John Owen was a Puritan of England, he was a faithful student of Dordt's theology of sovereign grace and a sworn foe of the Arminianism condemned by Dordt. John Owen consciously developed his understanding of the covenant in harmony with the doctrines of grace elucidated in the Canons of Dordt, and the fruit of his study was the articulation and defense of a doctrine of an unconditional covenant with the elect, even as the PRC confess today.

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128 See Ronald L. Cammenga, "God of Friendship: Herman Hoeksema's Unconditional Covenant Conception" (published thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2014), and David J. Engelsma, *Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011).

129 See "Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches" in *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 412-31.

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### VIII. Conclusion

For the churches of England, and especially the common people, John Owen taught and wrote on the unchangeableness of God's covenant, which is "the very salt of the covenant of grace." Salt preserves. It keeps. What keeps the saints in God's covenant is God's unchangeableness, and what keeps sweet consolation in the hearts of the covenant members is the truth that God's eternal covenantal love for them is steadfast and unchangeable.

Salt also seasons. Assurance of preservation is to the taste of the members of God's covenant most delightful. Of course! What is covenant fellowship with God, and what is union with Christ, and what is life in the Holy Spirit, and what is a walk in faith and holiness if it is all only temporary and losable? To be assured of everlasting preservation is indeed the very salt of the covenant of grace.

The Arminian theology of conditional salvation has no savor. It also spoils. It eats at the truth of the covenant and the hearts of believers like a canker. Owen saw the destruction of this invasive teaching in England. For the glory of God and the welfare of the church, Owen defended the truth of an unconditional covenant of grace that God sovereignly establishes and maintains with His elect people so that His people are forever secure. The knowledge of this security is the very salt of the covenant of grace. ●

## Book Reviews

*The Covenant of Grace*, by John Colquhoun. Don Kistler, ed. Orlando, FL: Northampton Press, 2020. Pp. xxiv + 520. \$35.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1732155046. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

I doubt that I have read a single volume (as opposed to a multi-volume set) on the covenant in English as thorough and profound as this one. In addition, it is for the most part, and that part of essential importance, sound. That in the author's treatment of the covenant of grace, which is of essential importance is his repeated, strong, obviously heartfelt insistence that the covenant of grace is unconditional and that it is precisely this that makes the covenant a covenant of grace.

Faith is not a condition of the covenant, but the means of receiving the covenant and its benefits. This means is the gracious gift of God to His elect. "The covenant of grace is absolute, and not properly conditional to the spiritual seed of Christ" (41). "Reader, the moment you rely on your faith as the ground of your title to the blessings of grace, you, for yourself turn the covenant of grace into a covenant of works. Grace is no longer grace to you" (421).

Colquhoun contends, rightly,

that God has made the covenant with Jesus Christ and, thus, with the elect:

The eternal Father chose Him [Jesus Christ] to be the federal Head and Representative of those whom He should, according to His sovereign pleasure, select to be the objects of redeeming love and the vessels of saving mercy. He proposed to Him to become a public Representative, with whom He might enter into a covenant for the redemption of them upon whom He should pitch, and whom He should enroll in the book of life in order that they might have a Covenant-head who should be both God and man in one person (Ephesians 1:22) (52).

What sets the book apart and makes it valuable is its setting of the whole of the Christian religion within the framework of the covenant. All of Christianity is covenantal. The covenant is not an aspect of the Christian faith, but the Christian faith is covenant.



For example, the book explains, in rich, biblical detail, Christ's three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king as covenantal. It demonstrates that the covenant governs providence. There is instruction concerning the covenant of grace by a detailed contrasting of it with the covenant with Adam in Paradise.

Among the considerations of the covenant of grace that are not often found in other treatments of the covenant is careful explanation of why God began the history of salvation with the comparatively lesser form of the covenant in the Old Testament. Intriguing is Colquhoun's development of the truth of Christ as the "goel/redeemer." The account of Christ's suffering as the "Surety" of His people is moving. The demand of the Surety for accomplishing the righteousness of His people was three-fold: a sinless nature; sinless lifelong obedience; and sinless suffering. In our contemporary doctrinal environment, the second of these aspects of the righteousness of Christ is especially important. "It is requisite therefore that he have, in addition to the former [that is, to the righteousness of "satisfactory sufferings and death"], a righteousness comprising perfect conformity of

nature and of life to the perceptive part of the law" (134).

Even though Colquhoun does not give nearly enough attention to the inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant—and this is a definite weakness of the book—what he does say in defense of the personal entrance and "instatement" of infants in the covenant already in their infancy is convincing (364).

There is a wealth of penetrating and rich interpretation and application of Scripture, including, for example, how, according to Romans 7, sin uses the law to increase itself in the believer.

The author enlivens his doctrinal instruction by lively, lovely phrasing. "Saving faith is the echo of the quickened soul to the word of grace that brings salvation" (377). Contending that even the best of the good works of the child of God are polluted by sin so that, not only can they not be meritorious or part of our righteousness with God, but also they cannot be accepted by God as holy deeds of thankfulness as they are in themselves, Colquhoun expresses a humbling truth by the loveliest of figures:

Their prayers offered up in faith, though smelling strong of the remains of corruption,

yet, being by the great Intercessor perfumed with the incense of His infinite merit, are accepted in heaven and have gracious answers returned to them (Revelation 8:3)" (311).

"Perfumed with the incense of His infinite merit."

John Colquhoun (1748-1827) was a Scottish Presbyterian, who spent his entire ministry of some 40 years as pastor of St. John's Church in South Leith, Scotland.

The book, published originally in 1818, is not without its serious weaknesses. Although vigorously denying that the covenant is conditional to us, the book insists that the covenant was conditional for Christ. This simply means for Colquhoun that Christ had to earn the establishment of the covenant with the elect by His obedience. Christ merited the covenant and its blessings for the elect church. But this way of describing the work of the covenant Head, that is, as fulfilling the conditions of the covenant, rests upon viewing the covenant as a contract between God the Father and the Son in human flesh. The origin of the covenant was what approximated a bargain between the Father and the Son in eternity, in which bargain the Holy Ghost

also played a subsidiary role. Further development of the doctrine of the covenant would be needed, so that the origin of the covenant of grace would be located in the appointment of the Son in human flesh to carry out the will of the triune God, not as a bargaining partner, but as the willing servant of Jehovah. Thus, Reformed theology would move away from all notions of the covenant as a "contract." This development of covenant theology would take place in Dutch Reformed theology, especially in the work of Herman Bavinck and Herman Hoeksema.

Colquhoun himself is not certain that the nature of the covenant is that of being a "contract." More than once, he refers to it as a bond of fellowship with God.

The second, more serious weakness is Colquhoun's doctrine that God offers the covenant to all humans by virtue of Christ's being a universal Savior, so that all humans have a "warrant" to believe. Although he never uses the term itself, the author, a disciple of the Marrow Men, strongly suggests that God "well-meaningly" offers the covenant and its salvation to all humans, that is, out of a (would be) saving love for all and with the sincere desire for the salvation of all.

Colquhoun himself indicates that his doctrine of the offer of the covenant implies a universal atonement: “Jesus Christ then is...the Savior of the world; and if He is so, and you are one of that world of mankind, is He not therefore by office, your Savior, yours in right to trust in Him” (393).

Basic to Colquhoun’s, and many others’ (especially in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition), conception of the offer is that all humans have a “warrant” to believe on Christ. This notion, which is basic to their doctrine of the offer, ought to be carefully reexamined. If “warrant” means a right, does the reprobate ungodly have a “right” to believe in Jesus? He has a duty, or calling, but does he have a “right”? Did not Christ have to earn for the elect the “right” to believe? Is not faith a gift earned for the elect by Christ? Does not the Canons of Dordt

confess that Christ “purchased” faith for the elect by His death, so that the elect and the elect only have a “right” to believe? If faith had to be purchased for the elect by Christ, is it not clearly implied that they did not have a warrant to believe in and of themselves? Since all the blessings of salvation are included in faith, does not the assertion (of Colquhoun and others) that all sinners have a “warrant,” or right, to faith imply that they have also a right to all the blessings of salvation?

All contemporary disciples of the Marrow Men, and others, ought to face these questions.

To do as much justice to Colquhoun’s doctrine of the covenant as possible, his view of the divine offer of it to all plainly conflicts with his repeated affirmation that God establishes His covenant with the elect and that this establishment is by grace alone. ●

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*A New Day of Small Beginnings*, by Pierre Courthial, tr. Matthew S. Miller. Tallahassee, Florida: Zurich Publishing Foundation, 2018. Pp. li + 363. \$30.00 (hardcover). ISBN-13 : 978-0984378531. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

The book is a bibliophile’s delight. The dust jacket features Paul Robert’s painting, “Justice Lifts the Nations,” which portrays

that all genuine justice, whether in church or state, depends on the law of God. The title of the book and the author’s name on the hard

cover in gold are impressive. The volume itself is heavy. The pages are glossy. The book will adorn one's shelf.

The author was the noted French Reformed theologian, Pierre Courthial. Courthial studied under the equally notable August Lecerf. There is, as almost always, a Dutch connection. In order to read Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, Schilder, and Ridderbos, Courthial learned the Dutch language. Courthial's long ministry was pastoral, except for the last eleven years. In 1973, he helped to found the Protestant seminary in Aix-en-Provence, undoubtedly at least in part because of the advanced apostasy of all the Protestant seminaries in France. Courthial taught in the seminary he helped to found until his retirement in 1984. He died in 2009.

*A New Day* is one of two books that Courthial authored. He began writing the book at the age of 80 and completed it two years later. The book is the ripe fruit of the Reformed theologian's study of theology over his entire life, beginning already prior to his pastoral ministry. Courthial, who had a pronounced ecumenical proclivity, read widely, not only in Luther and the Reformed

theologians, but also in the church fathers, the Roman Catholic theologians, and Eastern Orthodoxy.

The content of the volume does not disappoint. It is a survey of the whole of the history of the church from Genesis 3:15 to the second coming of Christ as the development and realization of God's one covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. The author himself describes his work as "a covenantal synthesis." All the Old Testament covenants were essentially one. Specifically, the Sinaitic covenant was a "renewal" of the covenant of grace. The Bible as a whole is the "Treaty of the Covenant of Grace" (63).

The covenant is a relationship of love: "The mystery of the covenant is a mystery of love." The Song of Solomon is the outstanding book of the Bible on the covenant and its life. Covenant salvation is gracious. "We do not have in God a *lifeguard*, someone *rescuing us*, helping us toward salvation, but a Savior who definitively saves—who, in His love, alone has the power to save" (188). The source of salvation, for Courthial, is election.

The outstanding benefit of covenant salvation is justification, and justification is by faith alone, apart from the law. In justifica-

tion, the sinner receives the active obedience of Christ as well as the passive obedience. Justification is “forensic,” “imputed” righteousness, and the gift of an “alien” righteousness.

The justification of the impious, of the sinner—“by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous”—is a judicial, legal act of the God of all power and love. In order to effect a change *in* man (but before the least change in him has taken place) God changes the condition, the standing, of man in relation to His law, which is holy, just, and good. This act of grace, unmerited by man, is solely and fully merited by the perfect and once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, “truly God” and made “truly man” “for us and for our salvation” (191).

A large section of the book consists of a thorough, profound, uncompromising defense of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture against corruptions and compromises of this fundamental truth in churches that are “sick with humanism.”

The fascinating structure of the book is its threefold division

of the church’s history. There is the ancient order, from creation to Christ; the turning of the ages, from Jesus Christ to the end of the apostolic era (which for Courthial was AD 70); and, finally, the new order of the world, from the apostles to the return of Christ. This last era includes a number of distinct “epochs,” which Courthial explains in learned detail, so that the book is a fresh, instructive, if brief, course in church history. Our present epoch is that of “the church sick with humanism.” The sickness has a number of symptoms, including the Renaissance; the Enlightenment; and the historical-critical method. Courthial’s incisive analysis of the evils in modern church history that have brought the churches to their present miserable condition is superb.

The last “epoch” of the present period of the history of the church—the present “epoch”—will be, in Courthial’s words, the defeat of humanism by the law of God: “Humanism Defeated by the Law of God” (251). Here the “theonomy” of Christian Reconstruction fulfills the purpose of God with all of church history.

This is the grievous fault of the impressive work. Courthial was enamored of the false doctrine of Christian Reconstruction.

The different churches—Rome, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism—will unite in their common confession of God’s law. By their zealous teaching of the law, including something of the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, although not excluding the gospel, history will yet see the conversion to Christ, whether inward and genuine or merely outward, of a majority of citizens of all nations. There will take place a “Christianizing” of the nations. This coming age will be the chief “new day” of the title of the book. Courthial prophesies the “widespread reign of ‘Christendom’” (302).

In order to accomplish this “Christianizing” of the world, the churches must develop the one main doctrine it has failed to develop so far in her history: the doctrine of the law, as the foundation and power of the life of the nations.

Throughout the book, important exegesis serves this post-millennial dream of Christian

Reconstruction: the book of Revelation dates from before AD 70; Matthew 24 and Luke 21 were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; the Bible’s “last times” were the apostolic era; the beast of Revelation 13 was, in full reality, Caesar Nero; and the like.

The doctrine of a common grace of God in most of the Dutch theologians whom Courthial learned to read in their own language, to which doctrine Courthial refers repeatedly, contributed to Courthial’s dream of a “Christianized” world. Common grace is the attractive maid servant of all postmillennial-type theologies, which in the end Courthial’s is.

Courthial is right: a new day is coming, and it will come out of small beginnings of the kingdom of Christ in history. But the new day will dawn with the appearing of Christ in His resurrection body on this world’s last day. Until that day, the kingdom of Christ in history is only small, if victorious, beginnings. ●

*Common Grace in Kuyper, Schilder, and Calvin: Exposition, Comparison, and Evaluation*, by Jochem Douma, tr. Albert H. Oosterhoff, ed. William Helder. Hamilton, ON, Canada: Lucerna CRTS Publications, 2017. Pp. xvi + 429. \$22.95 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-0995065925. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

The importance of this book for all Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical theologians in general, and for the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in particular, is difficult to exaggerate. It is the examination by a thorough and honest Reformed scholar of the doctrine of common grace in the theology of Abraham Kuyper, of Klaas Schilder, and of John Calvin. The first is beyond all doubt or contradiction the father of the theory of common grace, not only in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, but also widely among all who call themselves evangelical. The last is well-nigh universally judged by contemporary advocates of common grace to have been the fountain from which Kuyper drew, so that anyone who disagrees with Kuyper is, *ipso facto*, banished from the camp of Calvinism into the outer darkness of Anabaptism. As for Schilder, he is thought to have been in basic agreement on common grace with Kuyper. In view of the influence of the Reformed Churches in

the Netherlands (Liberated), in which churches Schilder was the leading theologian, with many Reformed churches worldwide, Schilder's supposed adherence to the doctrine of common grace lends support to the defense of the doctrine by conservative Reformed churches in all the world.

Douma, a theologian in the "Liberated" Reformed Churches, is sharply critical of Kuyper's doctrine of common grace. He demonstrates that in the latter part of his ministry, Schilder rejected Kuyper's theory of common grace. And he denies that Calvin taught the common grace of Kuyper and his disciples, that is, the common grace that is ardently professed and vehemently defended as a fundamental element of the gospel by almost all Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical churches, not only in North America, but also in all the world.

The common grace of Abraham Kuyper was cultural. It was not the Arminian common grace of a "well-meant offer of

salvation,” but a grace of God that nullifies the reality of total depravity in unregenerated sinners, retains some ability for the doing of good in reprobate unbelievers, and enables the ungodly, who are outside of Jesus Christ and without the sanctifying work of the Spirit of Christ, to perform good works, works that are pleasing to God. Kuyper’s common grace has the purpose, for Kuyper, of the “Christianizing” of society and of the world: in Kuyper “glowed the powerful ideal of a re-Christianized European culture” (50). This dream gave birth to the Free University of Amsterdam, which today itself stands in need of being “Christianized.” Kuyper’s common grace has proved to be a dismal failure in the very institution created to Christianize all of Europe, if not the world.

In Kuyper’s theology, common grace is the power that must produce and govern the believer’s life in the world, as particular grace empowers the life of the Christian at church and in worship.

Douma makes the fascinating observation that, in her own way, Pietje Baltus was responsible for Kuyper’s common grace. This old woman, whom God used for the conversion of Kuyper, was a

mystic. She left the impression on Kuyper that the grace of salvation is exclusively a matter of mystical union with God, of the worship of the church, and of prayer. For Pietje, particular grace was completely other-worldly. Coming to recognize that the Christian life consists also of distinctive activity in the world, in all spheres of earthly life, Kuyper conceived another grace than the particular grace of salvation for this purpose: common grace.

Notable also is the difficulty that Kuyper himself had to distinguish common, cultural grace from particular, saving grace, no matter how strongly Kuyper insisted that they are two different graces. Particular grace and common grace have “one root” according to Kuyper. This root is Christ. The common origin of the two graces “lies in *Christ*” (emphasis evidently Kuyper’s). Fatally for any separation of common grace from particular grace, Kuyper appealed to Colossians 1, where Christ is the one who reconciles all things to God by the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:13-22) (68, 69). It was inevitable that the Christian Reformed Church, as also most Reformed churches today, would develop Kuyper’s common grace into a



quite un-particular saving grace in the “well-meant offer.”

It is of special interest to the PRC that the popular charge against them of Anabaptism on account of their rejection of common grace has its source in Kuyper. Contending vigorously on behalf of his doctrine of common grace as the power of a Christian life in society, Kuyper blackened all opponents of his common grace with the charge of being world-fleeing Anabaptists. This is a logical fallacy known as “poisoning the wells.” It is also the sin known as bearing false witness. Kuyper refused to recognize that particular grace could be, and in fact *is*, the mighty power of the Christian life in all its spheres. The saving grace of the Spirit of Jesus Christ is not only the power of worship. It is also the power of work and play, that is, the power of Christian culture. Particular grace is very much also “*this-worldly*.”

Of Klaas Schilder, we learn that his thinking on cultural common grace underwent significant change in the course of his ministry. In the beginning, Schilder uncritically accepted the common grace of the influential Kuyper. In the last part of his career, Schilder rejected the common grace of

Kuyper, finding the impetus and power of the Christian, cultural life in Jesus Christ. Humanity’s cultural life is not entirely a matter of the grace of God. In accordance with God’s predestination, which Schilder emphasized, the cultural life of mankind comes under God’s wrath as well as under His grace.

Douma acknowledges that in his coming to reject common grace, Schilder was influenced by Herman Hoeksema, but Douma denies that this accounts in full for Schilder’s change in theological thought. Schilder’s repudiation of common grace was the development of his own basic theological thinking.

Although Calvin occasionally spoke of a “general grace,” never of a “common grace,” he did not have the cultural common grace of Abraham Kuyper and his followers in view whatsoever. What Calvin had in mind was gifts of God to the “great jurists, philosophers, rhetoricians, medical doctors, mathematicians, and poets,” gifts that benefit the children of God on their pilgrim journey to heaven. Calvin did not at all refer to a grace that is “a foundation upon which Gentiles and Christians stand together.” Douma is amazed “that after read-

ing *Inst[itutes]* III, 6-10, one can possibly call Calvin the founder of common grace” (312, 313).

At the end, Douma adds his own warning against the “Christianizing” purpose of a common grace of God: “Lofty plans for the conquest of the world (of culture) for Christ will result in the conquest of Christians by the world” (389).

The book is an outstanding example of scholarship. Douma has read widely and deeply in the primary, and in many of the secondary, sources. His analysis of his subject is perceptive and honest. The quotations are apt, instructive, and authoritative. His subject is weighty.

One criticism may be permitted. The book does not take Herman Hoeksema into the purview of its subject. One theolo-

gian after Kuyper has made it his life’s task thoroughly to examine cultural common grace in light of Scripture and the Reformed creeds, with full knowledge of Kuyper’s doctrine. One theologian has rejected the theory clearly, unequivocally, and totally. No examination of common grace can afford to ignore Hoeksema.

Perhaps, a thorough examination of Hoeksema’s rejection of the cultural common grace of Kuyper and of the Christian Reformed Church in its three points of common grace of 1924, in light of his theology of the Christian life by the power of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and on the order of Douma’s study of Kuyper, Schilder and Calvin, awaits a Protestant Reformed scholar. ●

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*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 Martyn McGeown]

*Unfolding Covenant History* is an ongoing series of books that plans to cover the history of God’s covenant in the Old Testament. Therefore, it is not a verse-by-verse or even chapter-by-chapter

study of the Old Testament Scriptures. The reviewer should also mention that he is not reviewing the completed book, but an unpublished manuscript provided to him by the publisher. Therefore,

page numbers are not included in this review.

An explanation of the series' name is in order.

*History.* While the books do interact with the non-historical parts of the Old Testament, the poetical books and the prophets, for example, the main focus is on the historical narrative of the Old Testament. As a case in point, this sixth volume focuses on First and Second Samuel and part of First Kings (through chapter eleven, the death of Solomon). The previous volumes, the first four by the late Homer C. Hoeksema, and the fifth by Prof. David Engelsma, covered Genesis through Ruth, dealing almost exclusively with the historical narratives.

*Covenant.* The approach to the narrative is thematic, with the overarching theme the covenant of God. Engelsma is concerned to show how the covenant is manifested in God's dealings with Israel, and especially in His dealings with Israel's first three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon.

*Unfolding.* Engelsma is concerned to demonstrate how the covenant of God develops in this history. There is one everlasting covenant of grace, not a separate covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David, for

example. Nevertheless, that one everlasting covenant of grace, like a delightful rose, unfolds to reveal the beauty within. There is development, therefore, in every new historical manifestation of the covenant.

The focus in this sixth volume is on the relationship between the covenant and the kingdom. The covenant has—must have—a king. Ultimately, the king is Jesus Christ, but other kings appear in the historical development of the covenant, so that God's people are prepared for King Jesus. The disastrous reign of reprobate Saul shows the people their need for a king “after God's heart.” The godly reign of David reveals a warrior king. The temple-builder Solomon typifies the church-building, peace-giving, perfectly wise Jesus. In addition, King David and King Solomon, the pinnacle of kingship in the old dispensation, show by their moral failures that they are mere types; therefore, they must not be mistaken for the true Messiah. Engelsma writes, “One man, and one man only, resisted the temptation to presume on God's exaltation of him and to indulge himself in seizing a fame and pleasure that were not his to enjoy, at least at the time.” Throughout the book,

Engelsma urges the reader to look beyond David and Solomon and to embrace by faith the true King, Jesus Christ.

Engelsma explains the relationship between the covenant and the kingdom already in the introduction. “Kingdom is the order or structure of the life of the covenant, and covenantal communion is the purpose and nature of the kingdom of God in Christ over the people... For the people of God ... their life is fellowship in submission or obedient communion. God is to them their friendly king or their royal friend.” This is a fascinating insight. In the covenant God is the Friend of His people, for the covenant *is* friendship. But God the Friend is not a friend of equals: He is the sovereign, almighty, holy Friend. We are His friends, His friend-servants, called to obey Him out of love to Him and as an expression of our friendship. Thus He is also the King ruling over all things in awesome majesty. Kingdom and covenant are not antithetical concepts, but they are in perfect harmony. Again, Engelsma explains the relationship, “The proper response to kingship is awe and, in this awe, obedience. The response to covenant is love and, in this love, a drawing near to the

savior.” What a beautiful, rich, and eminently practical concept of the life of the child of God in relation to his King-Friend!

Since God is our King-Friend, He requires obedience. A friend might turn a blind eye to sin (although if he is a godly friend, he ought not), but our King requires obedience. Jehovah the King is holy. Israel must never be in any doubt of that. Therefore, when Israel walks in sin, which she does repeatedly in this history, she must be chastised in order to bring her to repentance, for only as we walk in the light does God commune with us. Anything less, insists Engelsma, is antinomianism, which Engelsma consistently condemns in this volume. For example, in 1 Samuel 4 Israel presumes upon God’s favor by seeking deliverance in battle *without repentance*, trusting in the Ark of the Covenant as a mere talisman. Engelsma writes, “Israel’s trust in the ark for salvation was the evil of antinomianism. This is the sin of rejecting the law of God as the authoritative guide of the thankful life of the redeemed. Antinomianism supposes that God will save even though the sinner goes on impenitently in his sin.” Israel forfeits the Ark of the Covenant when Jehovah delivers it—deliv-

ers *Himself*, in a sense—into the hands of the Philistines in 1 Samuel 5: “God’s intimate covenantal fellowship with his sinful people means the endurance of shame for him. He himself is sovereign in taking this shame upon himself. No one, whether Philistia or the devil, brings shame upon him apart from his will.” Engelsma explains God’s gracious motivation in so doing: “The judgment upon Israel of the loss of the ark, however severe it may have been, intended and accomplished the repentance of Israel... Following the judgment at Aphek, there was a definite, widespread, and steadily developing movement of repentance in Israel. The movement culminated in Israel’s repentance and their doing the works worthy of repentance.”

Nevertheless, Engelsma is careful to explain God’s *requirement* of repentance of His people within the covenant without thereby making repentance a *condition* in the covenant. Repentance is a requirement. Repentance is necessary. But repentance is *not* a condition. *Unfolding Covenant History* unfolds the *unconditional* covenant, a covenant conceived, maintained, and preserved by God alone. Commenting on 1 Samuel 7 Engelsma writes, “The

way to this complete deliverance was Israel’s repentance. It is significant that repentance occurred before the completion of Israel’s deliverance from the Philistines. There was no repentance during the judgeship of Samson. Repentance was necessary for complete deliverance.” Does that make repentance a condition or complete deliverance conditioned on repentance? Engelsma denies it: “This necessity was not, even as it is not today, the condition required of Israel to render herself worthy of deliverance. The worthiness of Israel to be delivered was the sacrifice of the lamb that Samuel ‘offered ... for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord’ (1 Sam. 7:9). Rather, the necessity of repentance was the necessity of the way in which it pleases God to deliver His people. Indeed, it is always the necessity of an aspect of the God-worked deliverance itself. Bringing His people to repentance is an aspect—and not the least—of the deliverance.” After Israel foolishly and wickedly demands a king Samuel confronts the people in 1 Samuel 12. God chastises His people by destroying their harvest, whereupon the people repent in the fear of God, and then Samuel proclaims the comfort of the gospel of God’s

“merciful faithfulness.” Engelsma remarks, “Completing the salvation order of misery (repentance), mercy (forgiveness), and holiness of life, Samuel then calls Israel to reverence and to obey God in the covenant... To the exhortation to serve the Lord, the prophet adds a sharp warning.” Engelsma explains the necessity of the warning from the Canons of Dordt: “Grace is conferred by means of admonitions.”

That God requires obedience is something that Saul, Israel’s first king, never learned. Saul is set forth in Scripture as a warning of one who is in the sphere of the covenant (a member—even a prominent member—of the nation of Israel), but who is not personally a friend of God. Saul is reprobate in the sphere of the covenant. He is the people’s choice, but not God’s choice. God’s choice, waiting in the wings while Saul’s tragic reign implodes, is David, who is a type of the great King Jesus. Saul is revealed as reprobate through his disobedience, in which disobedience Saul develops and is hardened. “The disobedience rises out of and reveals a heart that is not set on doing the will of Jehovah, because it does not love Jehovah nor seek his glory in Israel.” Saul

is “the outstanding reprobate in the Old Testament especially with reference to office.” “When God would give no help, Saul sought deliverance from the devil.”

David, although far from perfect, is the antithesis of ungodly Saul. David is one of the most delightful saints in the Old Testament, and (perhaps even because) he is a type of the Lord Jesus. Engelsma develops the godly character of David, giving glory to God whose grace worked in David, and beautifully describes the typology behind the “man after God’s own heart.” David, unlike Saul, is personally elect. That makes all the difference. “David’s name indicates that he has been chosen in divine love.” “David has a godly heart, but he has such a heart only because the Lord gave him the godly heart, according to divine election—election unto salvation. Jehovah has appointed David unto salvation in the eternal decree of election, and the Spirit qualifies David to live the life of holiness unto the Lord.” David has many other qualities by God’s grace: zeal, wisdom, humility, obedience, eloquence, compassion, and courage. David was also prepared for his position as king. Outstanding in David’s preparation was the persecution

that he patiently endured. “Jehovah disciplined and trained David ... David was a type of Jesus Christ in a striking, unmistakable manner.” “David learned by his suffering. He learned obedience to God ... David learned to trust God.” “David’s patience is remarkable. Again he waits for God to exalt him, with endurance under extreme provocation. He takes no action to seize the throne.” Patience, humility, trust—these are lessons that wicked Saul, who persecuted David, never learned.

God exalted David to a very high position. From that dizzying height David fell, miserably, lamentably, but not finally. The account of David’s sin with Bathsheba and the consequent chastisement is sobering. Engelsma expounds the history, doing full justice to the seriousness of the sin, the bitterness of the chastisement, the depth of the repentance, and the richness of God’s grace. Such adultery, writes Engelsma, “brings down upon the adulterer the fierce anger and heaviest judgment of God, even though the transgressor is the beloved David, the man after God’s own heart, the outstanding type in the Old Testament of the Messiah.” “God made the rest of

David’s life miserable, bitterly, almost unendurably miserable.” In this connection, Engelsma explains the difference between punishment and chastisement. “[Punishment] is the just wrath of God inflicting upon the sinner the wages of his sin, which is death, thus destroying him in time and in eternity. In punishment the sinner pays the debt he owes to the justice of God. [Chastisement] is anger of God that is tempered with mercy. It inflicts painful suffering not as payment, but as the means to impress upon the sinner the seriousness of his wrongdoing; to sanctify him regarding the specific lust and possible future committing of the transgression; and to draw him to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Punishment is damning. Chastisement is saving.”

God saved David by bringing him to repentance. God wrought repentance in David. God forgave David. “Jehovah brought David to repentance by his word through the prophet Nathan. There must be repentance! There is no pardon except in the way of repentance. God prepared David for the word of rebuke, ‘Thou art the man,’ that brought David to repentance by the working of the Spirit that for almost a year made

David miserable on account of his sin ... But the word worked repentance including the required confession of sin." Was David's repentance necessary: could David have known and experienced God's grace if he had continued his walk in impenitence? Engelsma answers emphatically in the negative: "David could know and experience God's forgiveness only in the way of his repentance and confession." And David is not an isolated, obscure example from the Old Testament with no relevance to the modern Christian who is not under the law, but under grace: "This history is the gospel of the mercy of God toward all his sinful children, which mercy includes chastisement as well as forgiveness." Although freely pardoned, David does not escape the consequences of his sin. "Jehovah," writes Engelsma, "does not scourge David lightly, even though he loves David greatly. Indeed, his love for David is the reason why he chastises David severely." That painful chastisement consisted in a sword in David's family so that David saw his sin mirrored in the sinful conduct of his children. As a result of David's great transgression David's kingship was in decline for the rest of his life. And

yet, although the outcome was personally tragic for David, there is no defeat. "David's sin was no defeat of the kingdom of God, for by means of the sin Jehovah showed that David was merely the typical Messiah, not the reality. The type failed miserably and that in the sphere that is essential to the covenant, namely holiness, justice, the humble obedience to Jehovah, the honoring of Jehovah's name. The hope of the Old Testament saints, accordingly, is directed to David's seed, that 'holy thing' (Luke 1:35), who would do the will of Jehovah even when Jehovah is pouring out the vials of his wrath upon him. David fell so that Christ Jesus would stand alone, prominently."

Saul was the people's disastrous choice. David was the man after God's own heart. Solomon was the philosopher-king where a philosopher is a "lover of wisdom." Wisdom characterized Solomon, and peace and prosperity characterized his reign. Explaining the typology of Solomon Engelsma writes, "It must not be overlooked that the full type of Christ and his reign is David *and* Solomon. David is the battling king who lays the groundwork for the kingdom of peace. The necessary way to peace is war."



Solomon enjoyed peace through the subjugation of his foes, so that they brought tribute to him. “The calling of the church in history [is] to guard spiritual peace with the fortifications of creeds, polemics, and discipline.” Solomon’s crowning work was his construction of the temple of Jehovah, which was really God’s “gracious work.” God appointed the site. God gave the blueprint. God put it into David’s and then into Solomon’s heart to prepare such a glorious structure to be His house among His people. The reality, however, is not a grandiose cathedral in the New Testament age, but the church, the people of God. “The truly massive and beautiful fulfillment of Solomon’s temple can be, and often is, found in a shabby, wooden, ramshackle building, in which only a handful of believers and their children worship in spirit and in truth.”

Solomon, too, like David before him fell lamentably into sin. What a warning to us today: even the most prominent member of the church is prone to many temptations and falls. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Solomon, than whom no wiser man except Jesus ever lived; Solomon who built and dedicated

the temple; Solomon who was given riches and honour; fell. Solomon fell despite the warning that he received from God after the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 9:3-9). God’s people, even Solomon the wise, need warnings. Engelsma explains: “The covenant of grace includes both an unconditional promise (which is repetition, since grace means unconditional) and a solemn warning regarding disobedience. The unconditional promise does not rule out the warning, and the warning does not compromise the unconditional promise. This is truth with which the church of the New Testament struggles to this very day, supposing that doing justice to the warning implies a conditional covenant promise and that confession of the unconditional promise rules out or weakens the warning. The unconditional promise realizes itself in the elect in Jesus Christ by means of the warning.”

Solomon’s sin was idolatry, connected to his other sin, the taking of many wives. Solomon’s sin, writes Engelsma was “religious syncretism” and “conformity to the world. Upon Solomon in his sin, God brings severe judgment. God rends the kingdom from Solomon, which

rending occurs in the days of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and which rending is tempered with mercy, for not the whole kingdom but only part is rent from Solomon. "Unlike his father David, Solomon did not die in peace, but with his kingdom under attack and coming apart." Nevertheless, although disaster came upon the kingdom and upon Solomon personally, Solomon knew the forgiveness of God in the way of repentance, as the book of Ecclesiastes abundantly testifies.

*Unfolding Covenant History,*

volume six, is a fascinating account of the lives of Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon. It includes sound exegesis, sober typology, penetrating applications, and is Christ-centered throughout. In every chapter, we are led from the types in their weaknesses and sins to the reality, even to the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross where alone we find our salvation. This book comes highly recommended. Readers are also encouraged to devour the other volumes in this superb series. ●

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*Invitation to Church History: World*, by John D. Hannah. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2018. Pp. 586. \$47.99 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-0825427756. *Invitation to Church History: American*, by John D. Hannah. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2019. Pp. 462. \$49.99 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-0825443855. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper]

Kregel's "Invitation to Theological Studies Series" contains volumes devoted to biblical preaching, biblical theology, Bible interpretation, Christian ethics, the Hebrew language, and world missions, as well as church history. Each volume in the series is a textbook-style overview of the subject.

John Hannah authored the two volumes that introduce church history. Hannah has been professor of historical theology

at Dallas Theological Seminary since 1972. He has also authored the *Kregel Pictorial Guide to Church History* and books containing charts of church history.

Both volumes under review get high marks for being comprehensive overviews of church history. They get even higher ratings for being a biblical and Christian approach to church history. They get lower, mixed reviews for how well they might serve as textbooks.

### Comprehensive Overviews

Hannah divides his *World* volume into five parts: ancient (33-600), medieval (600-1500), Reformation and early modern (1500-1650), Enlightenment and late modern (1650-1900), and postmodern (1900-present). His *American* volume contains four parts: colonial (1600-1770), national (1770-1880), modern (1880-1960), and postmodern (1960-present).

The dedication, preface, and introduction of both books are substantially the same; they treat the benefits of studying church history, the structure of history, the meaning of history (God's glory), and the divisions of church history. The introduction to the *American* volume includes additional comments that are relevant to American church history. Both end with a postscript (different in each volume) and epilogue (identical). Complete glossary of terms and indices conclude each volume.

History is history, and Hannah records the salient points of church history. The reader who is intimately acquainted with church history will seldom learn something new from Hannah, but will always be reviewing the fundamental points of history.

Hannah serves the reader well by quoting from or summarizing the chief writings of notable men in history. This reviewer particularly appreciated, in both books, his coverage of the rise of liberalism (*American*, chapter 9; *World*, chapters 11, 12) and the postmodern era in which we are living (*American*, chapters 11, 12; *World*, chapters 13, 14).

When it comes to aspects of Reformed church history, Hannah is not always accurate. He gives 1581 as the date when the Heidelberg Catechism became a confessional standard of the Dutch Reformed churches (*World*, 326), but the Synod of Emden (1571) addressed the matter provisionally, and the Synod of Dordrecht (1574) finally. Another confessional standard is officially known as the "Canons of Dordt," rather than the "Articles" of Dordt (*World*, 330). A notable distinction between Lutherans and Reformed does not regard "things in difference" (*World*, 322), but "things indifferent." Hannah also leaves the reader with the impression that the regulative principle regards any matter not commanded or prohibited in Scripture, and does not mention that it is limited to *worship*.

Because Hannah's goal is to present the salient facts briefly, his analysis of an event is also brief—often only one or two sentences. At times, the reader desires more explanation of Hannah's evaluation. A reader can expect any historian to present history accurately; it is the historian's evaluation of history that provides points of discussion and disagreement.

In the main, however, Hannah's evaluation is correct, for his approach to church history is biblical and Christian.

#### **A Biblical and Christian Approach to Church History**

Hannah presents the history of Christ's church, and the history of Christ working in and in behalf of His church. The prologue of both volumes consists of quoting Isaiah 40:12-26, Romans 1:18-32, and Hebrews 2:1-10, and his epilogue of quoting John 1:4, Colossians 1:13, and Revelation 21:1-6. In his introduction, he calls church history "the story of Christ" and "the story of the body of Christ." Hannah views Christ as the center of history and the end of history, and states that God's glory is the meaning of history.

As Hannah proceeds with his narrative of church history, this starting point stays in the

background. Throughout most of these volumes, he does not explicitly interpret any event in light of Christ's work and God's glory. Only late in both books, when he evaluates the rise and effects of liberalism, modernism, and postmodernism, does Hannah again indicate that he is giving a Christian evaluation. His Christian evaluation is to dismiss liberalism and modernism in every form, and to confess that truth is found in the revelation of God.

Both of Hannah's postscripts present a final analysis of history from a Christian perspective. Hannah indicates that history will end with Christ's second coming, at which time the kingdom of God will come in all its fulness.

Hannah's biblical and Christian approach is emphatically a *conservative* approach: "The presuppositional assumptions of this study are those of the conservative church," (*World*, 9). That this work is biblical and Christian in its foundation, and conservative in its outlook, recommends the work to Christians today. Dallas Theological Seminary, where Hannah teaches, is known to be a defender and promoter of premillennialism. However, this book does not advocate a premillennial view of church history.

For its conservative, biblical, Christian approach to history, I recommend the book highly.

It is time for Christian historians to reevaluate one view that has become trite and is exegetically indefensible. Referring to Galatians 4:4-5, Hannah writes: "Scholars who have pondered the phrase, 'the fullness of time,' have explained its meaning by speaking to the historical context of the advent of Christ . . ." (*World*, 51). Indeed scholars have done so, one after another, so that one simply assumes "the fullness of time" refers to the fact that Rome ruled, peace prevailed, good roads had been constructed, and historically the time was ideal for Christ to be born.

To be clear, I am not pushing back on the idea that God prepared for the spread of Christianity in these ways; I am pushing back on the idea that this is the meaning of Galatians 4:4. Reading this text in its literary context, one finds that the apostle is teaching that God's purpose with the old covenant and law was finished, and that God had unfolded His redemptive program to the point that Christ must now come. Certainly this does not exhaust the meaning of Galatians 4:4. My point, however, is that it is *eise-*

*gesis*, not *exegesis*, to refer the phrase "the fullness of time" to the historical context of Christ's birth; the context of the statement does not allow this meaning. It is time for Christian historians who know the principles of *exegesis* to recognize this, and stop using the phrase as they do.

### A Textbook?

Although Hannah does not explicitly claim that he intends these books to serve as textbooks, the books have the appearance of textbooks. Each chapter opens by stating its objectives clearly. Terms which need further explanation appear in boldface, and the glossary of terms at the end of each chapter explains them. Each section (not chapter) concludes with a list of works suggested for future reading. The books include pictures, charts, figures, timelines, and other aids. For these reasons, the books would make good textbooks.

But at what level? Not high school level: the style, and some of the vocabulary, and some of the assumptions regarding what the reader already knows, rules this out. High-school students need a simpler overview. By contrast, the books are too short and too much of an "introduction" to be used for a postgraduate course

text, such as a seminary level church history course. Perhaps they would be suitable for a college course, in which the goal is to survey all of American church history, or all of Christian history since the time of the apostles, in a one-semester course.

The books are beautiful in their visual presentation of the material and sound in their content. Their greatest weakness is that they are poorly edited. They contain *many* misspellings and grammatical errors, an occasional run-on sentence, and an occasional unintelligible sentence (every word is an English word, but the English-speaking reader is hard-pressed to make sense of the way the words are put together). Long sentences with subordinate clauses do not always contain

commas in appropriate places, so that the reader must read the sentence several times to figure out its meaning. The antecedents of pronouns are not always clearly indicated. These problematic sentences are not more than three percent of all sentences; but they are certainly more frequent than in most books that major publishers produce today. This poor editing reflects less on Hannah and more on Kregel Publications. If ever a second edition of these books is produced, these ought to be corrected.

This reviewer would not use these books for textbooks. But they are concise overviews of world and American church history, from a conservative Christian viewpoint. That makes them worth reading. ●

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*Grace Worth Fighting For: Recapturing the Vision of God's Grace in the Canons of Dort*, by Daniel R. Hyde. Lincoln, NE: Davenant Trust, 2019. Pp. x + 421. \$24.95 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1949716924. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

The book is a thorough commentary on the Canons of Dort. The introduction provides an interesting, informative account of the history leading up to and surrounding the synod that drew up and adopted the Canons. Hyde is at pains to ground the doctrine

of the Canons in the theology of the early, and even medieval, church. He especially often refers to, and quotes, Augustine in connection with the article of the Canons under consideration. Surprising is Hyde's repeated effort to demonstrate the concurrence

of Dordt with Aquinas, of all authorities. Instructive is Hyde's quotation of the annotations, or comments on Scripture passages, in the Bible that Dordt authorized.

Although sound, and learned, with regard to the teaching of many of the articles, the commentary leaves something important to be desired. That something can be expressed by the judgment that the commentary is as sound as can be given by an adherent to the Christian Reformed Church's and United Reformed Churches' doctrine of common grace, especially the theory of a well-meant offer of salvation. Although (as a minor wonder) Hyde, a theologian in the United Reformed Churches, never explicitly proposes and launches a defense of the theory of common grace, the doctrine nevertheless seriously weakens and mars his explanation of the creed that more than any other condemns the heresy of Arminianism, and, therefore, also the well-meant offer, and defends the Reformed confession of the gospel of sovereign grace. At every crucial point in the commentary, the well-meant offer affects adversely, if it does not control, the explanation.

This is a fatal fault in a commentary on the Canons. This compromising of the doctrine

spoils the understanding of the Reformed faith of the many who undoubtedly will read the commentary as an authoritative exposition of the Reformed faith. In addition, it simply weakens the force of the single most powerful weapon in the Reformed arsenal in the life-and-death warfare of the Reformed faith, that is, Christian orthodoxy, with the Arminian heresy.

As was inevitable, the compromise begins already in Head One on predestination. Into the Canons' confession of particular, sovereign love, for the elect and for the elect only, Hyde injects his notion of an inefficacious love of God for all humans without exception: "God loves the world of fallen humanity" (61). Hyde thinks to redeem this contradiction of Head One of the Canons by quickly adding, "but most specially, God loves his peculiar people whom he takes out of the world." But his appeal to John 3:16 in support of his assertion that God loves "the world of humanity," which text teaches a saving love in the Son of God, commits Hyde to a doctrine of a (would-be) saving love in Jesus Christ for all humans without exception (60).

Recognizing his fatal compromise of Dordt's doctrine of

the love of God for the elect alone, *in an explanation of the very head of doctrine that contends for particular love*, Hyde becomes defensive: “This love for...humanity is not sufficiently expressed by Reformed believers today out of fear of sounding ‘Arminian’” (60). The truth is that among Reformed churches today, this supposed love of God for all humanity, on the basis of John 3:16, reigns virtually supreme. Almost none has any fear whatever of sounding Arminian by the embrace of a universal, would-be saving love of God for all humans. It is as rare as the proverbial “hen’s tooth” to find a church or a theologian that denies a love of God for all humans without exception, *on the basis of John 3:16*, which passage in fact teaches the saving love of God in Jesus Christ.

As is always the case with treatments of the Reformed doctrine of predestination that are fearful of the doctrine, if not offended by it, Hyde’s weakness regarding this fundamental truth of Scripture comes to the fore in his explanation of the Canons’ confession of reprobation (Canons, 1.15). Hyde begins his explanation by casting doubt on the confession of a “double predesti-

nation” (109). He further thinks to weaken Dordt’s confession by referring to many, differing opinions about reprobation on the part of different Reformed theologians. This, of course, is completely beside the point. The issue is not whether Berkhof and Hoeksema differed in their theology in their understanding of the decree of reprobation. The issue is Dordt’s official doctrine for all Reformed churches and theologians.

Hyde gives no clear definition of reprobation in light of Canons, 1.15. He offers no ringing defense of the doctrine. His discussion of the doctrine indicates that he is embarrassed by the Canons’ strong confession of reprobation. When he does describe the truth of reprobation, he errs grievously. Again and again, he describes reprobation as God’s leaving sinners in their unbelief and other sins. The closest that Hyde comes to defining reprobation, in the section headed “Reprobation Defined,” is his statement, “those not elected he ‘passively’ left in their sins” (110). If one, like the Canons, views reprobation as a divine bypassing of some particular persons in the decree of election, he must still understand reprobation as the eternal



*decree* bypassing some. That Hyde deliberately refuses to define reprobation as the divine, eternal decree ordaining some to damnation is evident from what he immediately adds: “he then actively decreed their ultimate condemnation because of their sin” (110). Reprobation now is a decree to condemn some sinners, “because of their sin.” Nothing is left of the offensive doctrine of Canons, 1.15: a decree ordaining some to damnation, which decree is not on account of their sins, but on account of the sovereign freedom of God. According to Romans 9:18, “whom he will he hardeneth.” I very much doubt whether James Arminius would have objected to Hyde’s “definition” and compromising explanation of reprobation.

Reinforcing this view of reprobation, *supposedly as taught by Canons, 1:15*, Hyde writes: “We speak of God passively and indirectly withholding grace in his passing by others. Only then do we speak of Him actively giving those in sin the condemnation they deserve” (113). Hyde finds it impossible to describe, much less to define, reprobation as the “divine, eternal, and *unconditional* decree appointing some particular persons to eternal dam-

nation, whether now the decree “passively” passes some by, or actively “ordains” some. Reprobation is not *on account of*, that is, *conditioned by*, sin. Before he was born and had done any evil, Esau was reprobated by God (Rom. 9:10-13). Condemnation is on account of sin; reprobation is on account of the sovereign freedom of God.

Election and reprobation are one decree. If reprobation is conditional, so also is election conditional. If election is conditional, it is not gracious. And if election is not gracious, nothing of salvation is gracious. For election is the source of all salvation: “Election is the fountain of every saving good” (Canons, 1.9).

Because reprobation is one decree with election, there can be no falsifying or weakening of reprobation without a falsifying or weakening also of election. By this time, the history of theological development ought to have warned Reformed churches of this ironclad law of apostasy.

The same compromise of predestination appears in Hyde’s exposition of the second head of the Canons, regarding definite, particular, limited atonement. Almost at once, in explanation of Canons, 2.3—an article on

the atonement of Christ—Hyde declares that “God’s ‘will/desire’” for the salvation of sinners applies to “every human person” (175). In keeping with this will of God for the salvation of all humans, according to Hyde, Canons, 2.8—the main article on the atonement

does not deny a love of God for the nonelect at least in some sense, a general sense in which Christ is Redeemer of the world, nor did it deny a “complex-intention” view in which Christ died for the elect while also making the nonelect “redeemable” (195).

This, on the article in the Canons that not only does not say a word that either expresses or implies either a love of God for the reprobate in any sense whatever or the death of Christ for the reprobate in any sense whatever, but rather limits the atonement of Christ to the “elect” and to the elect “only”!

Contrary to Hyde’s compromising of Canons, 2.8—the main article on the atonement, there is no love in Canons, 2.8 for the “nonelect” (Hyde’s favorite name for the reprobate) in any sense whatever; in the context of Hyde’s assertion of a love of God for the reprobate in the cross of

Christ, there is no general sense in which Christ is the Redeemer of the world; and there is no “complex-intention” view (whatever this non-theological, philosophical, confusing phrase may mean) taught by Canons, 2.8 in which Christ’s death made the reprobate “redeemable.”

Concerning this last, that is, the reprobates’ being “redeemable,” are they then also “predestinationable?” Are they also “conversionable?” Are they also “preservationable?” And is this nonsense, the only purpose of which is to placate Arminians, if not to bring the Reformed faith into some kind of agreement with the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement, making it less offensive to these deniers of the cross of Christ, *the confession of Canons, 2.8?*

As is to be expected, Hyde’s weakness with regard to predestination, and then with regard to the atonement, has its effect also on the doctrine of the call of the gospel and the conversion of elect sinners in Heads 3/4 of the Canons. Hyde rejects the explanation of Canons, 3/4.8, that “God does not intend or will the salvation of the reprobate” (254). The implication is Hyde’s defense of the doctrine that God

does intend or will the salvation of the reprobate. Hyde extends the saving promise of eternal life to all who hear the gospel, disregarding that Canons, 3/4.8 restricts the promise “to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him.” “As many as shall come to Him” is restrictive of the promise. If God promises eternal life to all who hear the gospel, one of two things is true. Either the promise is inefficacious, or it is conditional. In either case, the implication is that the conversion and salvation of the sinner depend on the will of the sinner. And this, in fact, is exactly the heresy on account of which the Synod of Dordt assembled.

Closely connected with these compromises of the fundamental doctrines of Dordt is the failure of the book to live up to its title. The title promises a book that “fights” for the Dordtian doctrines. What kind of warfare can be expected from an author who begins by judging Arminius as a “humble and godly man who did not seek controversy” (15). Hyde carefully, but clearly, suggests that Arminius was “just as godly as the heroes we praise” (16). *Mirabile dictu*, we are told that Arminius desired peace. If this is, indeed, the case, those who troubled

God’s Israel in the great conflict of 1618/1619 must have been the delegates to the Synod of Dordt.

In keeping with his estimation of “godly” Arminius, Hyde informs us that his—Hyde’s—polemics is an engagement with “our Arminian friends” (349). Hyde’s avowed religious friendship with the Arminians explains his otherwise puzzling tactics throughout the book. Invariably, either in the course of his treatment of the doctrines of the Canons or even at the very beginning of the treatment, Hyde is at pains to assert the oneness in important respects of Arminianism and the Calvinism of the Canons. This tactic, which is revelatory concerning Hyde’s theology, as also his notion of “fighting,” is especially prominent at the opening of his consideration of the Arminian doctrine of the falling away of the saints—their “fifth point” of doctrine. “As with all the original Remonstrant articles we’ve seen before, the Reformed agree in many things in this fifth point” (299).

Regardless how craftily the Arminians couched their denial of God’s preservation of His saints, they believed and taught the falling away of saints—the possibility and reality that those

who once were born again and saved fall away from Christ and perish everlastingly. Dordt knew this. Hyde knows this. Good polemics, the “fighting” that is required for the defense of the gospel, does not begin by affirming agreement between Arminianism and Calvinism, but by asserting fundamental difference, even though Arminianism attempted to disguise its heresy, as heresy always does.

The same reprehensible lack of a genuine “fighting” spirit is evident in Hyde’s refusal to condemn Luther’s and Lutheranism’s false doctrine of a falling away of saints. Luther’s grievous error was due to his erroneous doctrine of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. As was basically his doctrine of the Supper, Luther taught a saving work of God in the administration of the sacrament of baptism in everyone to whom the sacrament was administered. As an instance of great men erring greatly, Luther taught the regeneration of every baptized person by the application of the water of baptism. The sign of the sacrament has an inherently saving effect upon all who receive the sign. It regenerates. This implies the falling away of some who were regenerated at

baptism. Rather than to condemn this false doctrine and sharply to distinguish the Reformed doctrine from it, as does the Canons (which would mean restricting the grace of the sacrament to the elect infants), Hyde concludes that “the differences between Lutheran and Reformed...are more verbal than substantive” (307, 308).

The introduction to the commentary is dismissive of the fundamental importance of the Canons and its doctrines. As becomes increasingly popular in our day, Hyde is at pains to contend that the Reformed faith is far more than the five points of the Canons, which is true. Thus, however, the importance of the five points of grace in the Canons is diminished. What Hyde ought to have emphasized, especially in a commentary on the Canons, is that without the five points there is neither a Reformed, nor a Christian, faith. The Reformed faith is not *only* the five points; but it is not *less*, or *other*, than the five points. And as the doctrine of salvation, the five points are *especially* the Reformed faith.

Daniel R. Hyde’s commentary on one of the most polemical of all the Christian church’s creeds leaves much to be desired regarding all-out, no-holds-

barred, to-the-death *fighting*. Since the Arminian heresy is *the* threat to the gospel in our day, as it was in 1618/1619 and since Arminianism in its various forms *is* committed to total warfare with the Reformed faith, this weakness

is serious, indeed, fatal.

Perhaps, Hyde has exhausted himself by his ongoing, all-out, no-holds-barred, to-the-death tilting at the windmill of hyper-Calvinism. ●

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*The Theology of the Huguenot Refuge: From the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes to the Edict of Versailles*, ed. Martin I. Klauber. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020. Pp 334. \$25.00 (soft-cover). ISBN-13: 978-1601787606. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper]

This book is the sequel to RHB's 2014 publication *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, also edited by Martin Klauber. The spring 2015 issue of the *PRTJ* contained a favorable review of that volume.

The general subject of both books is the same: the history and theology of the French Reformed churches. The 2014 volume brought the reader through 1598, when the French king Henry IV proclaimed toleration to the Reformed churches in the Edict of Nantes. The 2020 volume brings the reader through the next two centuries. Notable moments include the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685 (included as Appendix A), which revoked the Edict of Nantes, and the Edict of Versailles

in 1787 (Appendix B), which again provided for tolerance. Each of these edicts had a significant effect on the history of the French Reformed Churches.

### History

The book demonstrates how God preserved His church in France during these years. It also highlights in what perils she was preserved—perils from persecutors, perils from self-proclaimed and unordained prophets and prophetesses, perils from Nicodemites (people who secretly confessed the Reformed faith, but publicly allied with Rome), and perils from Reformed believers who resorted to guerrilla warfare against Roman Catholics and the government. Much of the history is sad, and makes the believer long for heaven, where we will

neither be persecuted nor respond to persecution sinfully.

This historical scene is painted in the first five chapters. In the first chapter, Jeannine Olson surveys the history of the French Reformed churches from 1598 to the present. Olson's comments about the relationship of the Reformed and Lutheran churches in Roman Catholic France are worth noting: the Lutherans were largely ignored, while the Reformed were sorely oppressed.

The next four chapters delve into specific aspects of the history of the French Reformed believers. As a result of the intense persecution, many Huguenots left France. Jane McKee (chapter two) follows them to other European countries, as well as the Americas and East Indies, with special focus on the Huguenots in Dublin. Their presence in these countries was both bane and boon: some of the Huguenots needed public welfare, but many of them were skilled tradesmen or professionals. Unsurprisingly, these "outsiders" were not always well received in the countries to which they moved.

Chapter three focuses on the War of the Camisards, a sad moment in the history of French Protestantism. In the first decade

of the 1700s, Protestant peasants engaged in guerrilla warfare against the French government and against Roman Catholics. The guerrilla leaders claimed to receive visions and revelations from God to kill priests, burn churches, and return vengeance to those who had persecuted Protestants. What made Protestants act so vengefully? W. Gregory Monahan finds the explanation in the zeal of Reformed peasants who knew the Scriptures but were not well trained in a sound understanding of them, in large part because Reformed pastors had been effectively removed from France.

These peasants formed the seed out of which the "Churches of the Desert" grew. The term refers to French Reformed believers who, when the Reformed faith was again outlawed in 1685, met outdoors, but secretly, in the arid wilderness regions of Southern France. Pauline Duley-Haour covers this century of Reformed history in chapter four.

In chapter five, Marjan Blok discusses the Edict of Versailles, the factors that led up to it, and its implications. While the Edict called for religious tolerance, the basis for this call was not a spiritual or theological reformation,

but was the pluralistic worldview of the Enlightenment. The Edict was a political and philosophical statement, rather than a religious one. It assumed that Roman Catholicism was still the favored religion, but tolerated others, not only the Reformed.

These chapters bring to light aspects of French Reformed history that are not easily or quickly found in other English sources. Broad overviews of the history can be found elsewhere, but many of the details of this history are supported by references to works in French. The more detailed treatment of the history of this era is fresh and timely.

### Theology

Part two of the book is entitled “Theology and Theologians in the French Reformed Churches in Diaspora.” Each of its eight chapters overviews one man’s life and work, and shows how it was significant for the French Reformed church in his day. The eight men are presented in chronological order. Pierre Jurieu was born in 1637, and Antoine Court, the last of the eight, died in 1760; thus their lives and labors span 120 years.

That these men are unfamiliar to us is a reason why the editor chose to feature them: “the

goal of this volume is to present fresh interpretations of prominent theologians who are not too well known to contemporary audiences” (4). One reason these are not well known is the paucity of scholarship regarding the French Reformed churches during this era.

Another reason is that these men addressed issues that were specific to the French churches of that era, rather than common to Reformed churches everywhere. The French Reformed theologians treated in the first volume addressed doctrines that other Reformed theologians in other countries were also addressing. The men included in this volume address “eschatological concerns, the problem of Nicodemism, and more political matters, such as the degree of allegiance owed to a king who had legally outlawed the Reformed faith in France” (1). They are less relevant to us today. But less relevant does not mean unimportant.

The first man, Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713), “was probably the most prolific writer of the dispersed Huguenot pastors after the Revocation” (117). Martin Klauber, author of chapter six, focuses on Jurieu’s interpretation of his times and predictions regarding

the future. Jurieu interpreted passages in Revelation as being fulfilled in his day, viewed the antichrist as already reigning (in the papacy), and predicted the overthrow of antichrist in 1689. Jurieu is, in fact, a warning to Reformed exegetes, and a reminder not to let polemics and personal opinions drive one's exegesis.

Two others, David Martin (1639-1721; chapter seven) and Jacques Abbadie (1654-1727; chapter ten) were apologists, defending Christianity in an age (the Enlightenment era) in which many attacked it. Martin also wrote an apologetic work regarding the existence of God, arguing that natural man can use his reason to conclude that God exists, but that such reason cannot lead man to the knowledge of God as savior. Read Martin's writings with eyes wide open: Martin was influenced by Cartesian thinking.

Abbadie's apologetical works were combined with his works on political theory. He advocated for governments that allowed their subjects freedom of conscience, and defending William III as King of England.

Another advocate of political theory was Claude Brousson (1647-1698), the subject of chapter eight. The lawyer and preach-

er defended the right to worship and practice the Reformed faith when the French government issued edicts prohibiting such. He wrote many letters to French government officials, defending the rights of the Huguenots and the principle that God is to be obeyed above men. In exile, he met often with representatives of the Dutch government to enlist their aid for the Huguenots. However, we must condemn Brousson's defense of the right of citizens to use arms to resist its government.

Several men are known for their pastoral letters (written from the Netherlands to the believers in France) or their consoling sermons. Jacques Basnage (1653-1723) pastored a church in France for nine years, and French refugee churches in the Netherlands for the rest of his life. In chapter nine, Martin Klauber examines Basnage's pastoral letters that he sent back to his previous flock in France, encouraging them to leave the country in order to avoid pressure to revert to Roman Catholicism. Chapter 11 introduces us to Daniel de Superville (1657-1728), also known for his printed sermons and letters by which he meant to console the oppressed. And in the final chapter, Otto H. Selles examines the first sermon



of Antoine Court (1695-1760), on Hebrews 10:25. The sermon encouraged the Huguenots to faithfulness to the Reformed faith, as well as to continue assembling for worship rather than neglecting the practice. The reader is treated to a full translation of the sermon (264-282).

Only the twelfth chapter treats a man's theology in the narrower sense of the word. There Michael A. G. Haykin introduces us to Jacques Saurin (1677-1730) and his treatment of the love of God. That Saurin was not orthodox in this area comes out, for in one sermon "Saurin argued against reprobation from the fact that God's love for sinners was such that He desired all to be saved, and His decrees do not force anyone to sin," so that those who are eternally condemned "have only themselves to blame" (250).

### Conclusion

As a whole, the book is a

valuable addition to existing scholarship of the French Reformed believers. This is particularly true of the history that is expressed in the first five chapters.

This reviewer is left with the impression that we have not suffered greatly from not knowing about seven of the eight theologians featured in the book. Certainly they were significant in their day, and certainly we benefit from knowing as much about church history in every era and area as we can. But, in distinction from the theologians covered in the previous volume, these seven did not contribute anything fundamental and lasting to the cause of the Reformed faith.

The exception is the sermon of Antoine Court. Its call to the church to maintain its public worship in the face of persecution, and to see public worship as all the more urgent in such circumstances is both instructive and relevant. If it was necessary then, it is necessary still today. ●

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*Compel Them to Come In: Calvinism and the Free Offer of the Gospel*, by Donald Macleod. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2020. Pp. 155. \$15.99 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1527105249. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

Donald Macleod's defense of the "offer" is self-defeating. It in-

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tends to be a refutation of the false doctrine of hyper-Calvinism. In

fact, it promotes hyper-Calvinism as much as, if not more than, any explicit defense of hyper-Calvinism ever launched.

It cannot escape notice that the doctrinal error of hyper-Calvinism must be an epidemic in the circles in which Macleod moves. In recent times, out of these circles there has been a veritable flood of books, articles, and speeches that contend with this evil.

In a way, the response of Macleod and others to the hyper-Calvinism that is rampant among them is something of an encouragement to one who regards the doctrines of sovereign grace as the gospel. So widespread and dominant must Calvinism be in Macleod's circles that it—Calvinism—has spun off, wrongly, a significant exaggeration of Calvinism—a “hy-per-version.” In the circles in which I move, the Dutch Reformed churches in North America, one must search with the fabled candle to find a Calvinist, much less a *hyper*-Calvinist. The vast majority are “*hy-po*”-Calvinists, many by virtue of binding ecclesiastical decisions.

Nevertheless, hyper-Calvinism is a serious departure from genuine, orthodox Calvinism. Lest anyone regard this review

of Macleod's book as a failure to take seriously the error of hyper-Calvinism, I permit myself to call attention to the fact that I wrote a book in 1980 exposing and condemning hyper-Calvinism as false doctrine long before it became fashionable in Calvinist circles to trot out hyper-Calvinism as the main threat to the biblical gospel of grace.

In the very briefest and most unsatisfactory of descriptions, Macleod identifies the doctrine as one that refuses to extend the call of the gospel to all who come under the preaching of the gospel. The description is unsatisfactory in that it views what Reformed theology calls the “external call of the gospel” as God's well-meant offer of salvation to all hearers, with the sincere desire, or gracious will, on the part of God to save all who hear, those who perish as well as those who evidently distinguish themselves by accepting the offer. In addition, Macleod leaves the distinct impression that he judges all to be hyper-Calvinists who do not issue this offer, with sufficient passion, in all ecclesiastical gatherings, the assembly of the instituted congregation as well as the mission field.

The valid purpose of the book is to expose hyper-Calvinism's

refusal to call all to salvation as an error, and to admonish all Calvinists to issue the call, which Macleod significantly insists on referring to as an “offer,” to all in the audience, specifically, unbelievers. The book brings forward the grounds for this promiscuous call/“offer” in light of the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism. Apart now from Macleod’s understanding of the call as a well-meant offer, his purpose is legitimate and, apparently, in his circles necessary.

But his refutation of hyper-Calvinism consists of a corruption of the Calvinist, biblical gospel of particular, sovereign grace. Macleod’s “offer” to all, supposedly the Calvinist alternative to hyper-Calvinism, is the expression of a sincere desire of God to save all without exception. This “offer” originates in a saving, but inefficacious, love of God in Jesus Christ for all humans, those who accept this love and are saved, as well as those who perish despite this love of God for them.

Macleod grounds his “offer” to all in God’s love for the world, as supposedly taught in Titus 3:4. Since the love of God in this text is “the love of God our Savior,” the “universalism of the divine call has deep theological roots” in

a (would be) saving love of God in Jesus Christ. Lest any mistake the love of God for sinners expressed in Macleod’s “offer” as something other than the saving love of God in Jesus Christ, Macleod identifies this love as that of Matthew 11:28 (Jesus’ “compassion” for lost sinners) and that of Luke 19:41 (Jesus’ weeping over Jerusalem’s children). In preaching the “offer” of his gospel, Macleod assures “everyone who hears...that, precisely because they belong to the world [consisting of every human without exception—DJE], this love is for them. It is incarnate in Christ, and in Him it says, ‘Come’” (p. 38). With appeal to II Peter 3:9, ignoring that the text restricts the saving will of God to the elect (“longsuffering to *us-ward*”), Macleod declares that “he [God] desires all men to be saved” (74).

A theology of a universal love of God in Christ for sinners, with “deep theological roots” in God’s eternal will, necessarily implies that the saving effect of this love, with its roots in the very will of God, does not depend upon the love itself, or upon the gracious will of God, but upon the will, or decision, of sinners. This explains why Macleod can recommend the ministry of Billy Graham (pp. 43,

44) and is constrained to insist that God blesses the Arminian “gospel”. Macleod instances the ministry of John Wesley (who blasphemed the gospel of grace and damned Calvinism) as God’s blessing of “the preaching of Arminians” (p. 68).

Compromise of predestination necessarily entails the weakening, and eventually the denial, of the truth of limited, particular, atonement. As one sworn to uphold the Westminster Standards, Macleod struggles to maintain the doctrine in light of his universal will of God for the salvation of sinners. In the end, he fails, as fail must all who teach the well-meant offer of salvation. Every human has a “right” to the atonement of the cross. “[Christ] was Mediator for the human race...and every human had a right to avail themselves of His services as Prophet, Priest and King.” In the context of Macleod’s argument, his appeal to I John 2:2 as teaching that “He was the expiation and propitiation for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2), and every man and woman had the right to come to His cross confessing their sins and seeking forgiveness through His blood,” means that Christ died for every man and woman (pp. 63, 64).

Macleod is not only passionate on behalf of this “offer.” He is beside himself. “No doctrine is more important than the free offer” (p. 90). Election, the atoning work of Christ, regeneration by the Holy Ghost, justification by faith alone—all are of secondary importance in comparison with the doctrine of the free offer. And the doctrine of the free offer that Macleod has in mind, let it not be forgotten, is a saving love of God in Christ for all humans without exception, and His will to save all. To deny the free offer of Donald Macleod is “heresy” (p. 90).

This charge of “heresy” is significant. Once upon a time, the well-meant offer inveigled its way into the Reformed churches with the plea that it be tolerated alongside the doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace: the efficacious call. Once accepted in the Reformed churches, it now drives out the truth with the charge of “heresy.” Macleod’s offer and the doctrine of the particular, sovereignly gracious, efficacious call of the gospel cannot coexist. On this, Macleod and this reviewer are in agreement.

Carried away with his offer, Macleod goes on to make the exalted claim that “the free offer lies at its [Calvinism’s] very heart”

(pp. 90, 91). Macleod's offer is not merely important. It lies at Calvinism's very heart. "At the *heart*"! "The *very heart*"! God now sends the advocates of the Arminian offer in the Reformed churches a strong delusion.

This perversion of every tenet of genuine, creedal Calvinism, from predestination to irresistible grace, is supposed to be the defense of Calvinism's promiscuous call of the gospel against hyper-Calvinism. On the altar of his precious "offer," Macleod sacrifices Calvinism. One can imagine the response to this defense of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel, including the serious call to all and sundry, by hyper-Calvinists: "If this is the Calvinist basis of the promiscuous call, we want no part of Calvinism." Thus, the book is self-defeating. By its heretical explanation of the promiscuous call as a well-meant offer, it confirms the hyper-Calvinist in his error.

Truth to tell, the error of Macleod is worse than that of hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism still has a gospel to preach. It refuses to preach it to all to whom God wills it to come. But it preaches the gospel of (sovereign) grace. Macleod and all those worthies who praise his book to

the skies, with nary a word in condemnation of his compromise of the gospel of grace (in three and a half pages at the beginning of the book), have let the gospel slip between their "free-offer" fingers. A grace for all humans, a grace that fails, a grace that depends for its efficacy on sinners, is not the grace of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. It is not the truth about the call of the gospel taught by Jesus: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44).

Genuine, creedal Calvinism cries down a plague on both the house of hyper-Calvinism and the house of Macleod and his allies. It holds Christ crucified and risen in all the riches of his person and work before all the audience. It declares the guilt, and exposure to divine judgment, of every man and woman. It seriously calls all humans to whom God sends the church and her ministers to repent and believe. It issues this call with passion. It proclaims to all the particular promise that everyone who believes shall be saved (which is radically different from issuing a conditional promise to all: the proclamation comes to all; the promise is for those who repent and believe). To everyone in the audience, quite regardless

whether he is regenerated or unregenerated, it issues the call, as from God himself, with passion, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." The call is attended by the promise, "Everyone who believes shall be saved." Genuine Calvinism then calls everyone who does believe into the fellowship of a true church. This is the plague (and a plague it is) on the house of hyper-Calvinism.

The plague on the house of Macleod and all who defend his "free offer" is that the same Calvinism that urgently calls all to believe proclaims that God wills to save some only; that Christ died for these predestinated, and for them only; and that the loving, gracious call of the gospel, rooted in election, is irresistible, so that it efficaciously brings to faith and repentance every sinner whom God calls in love for that sinner and with a sincere desire to save that sinner. This is the gospel of Calvinism. This is the gospel that is preached on the mission field, as well as to the instituted congregation (cf. the evangelism of Jesus in John 6).

Probably, an aspect of the plague on the house of Donald Macleod that is worth noting is that it is not necessary that the unconverted sinner be assured of

the love of God for him prior to his believing. Indeed, this is not possible. What the unconverted sinner must know is his great need as a guilty sinner; Jesus as the Savior from this guilt; faith in Jesus as the only way of salvation; the divine summons to repent and believe; and the certainty that everyone who comes to Jesus by faith will be received and forgiven. One does not know the love of God for him personally *before* believing, but only *by* believing. Faith in Jesus Christ is the assurance of salvation in the love of God. One does not believe because he knows that God loves him; one knows that God loves him by believing. This is necessary to note because it is the thinking of Macleod that the evangelist must begin by assuring his unbelieving audience of the love of God for them.

The passionate, urgent, external call of the gospel does not conflict with genuine Calvinism. It does not defend itself by compromising Calvinism. Rather, the external call realizes God's purpose of election and the redemption of the cross. God works through the external call to all to accomplish the salvation of the elect. And He also accomplishes His purpose to harden the others,

the reprobate (a word I do not recall coming across in *Compel Them to Come in* more than once, and that only in passing, and the truth of which has no place whatever in Macleod's theology of the

offer). "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Romans 9:18). This text is the death-knell upon Macleod's theology of the offer. ●

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*All that God Cares About: Common Grace and Divine Delight*, by Richard J. Mouw. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020. Pp. x + 165. \$21.90 (softcover.) ISBN-13: 978-1587434754. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

### Introduction

In this new book, Reformed theologian Richard J. Mouw pursues the defense of a common grace of God that he began in 2001 with the publication of his book, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001). In the new book, as he did also in his preceding work, Mouw very much takes into account the rejection of the theory of common grace by the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). This, as well as his significant development of the theory of common grace, makes the book of great interest, if not of importance, to all thinking members of the PRC.

Indicating the importance of his subject to the former professor at Calvin College (now, University) and now retired president of

Fuller Theological Seminary is that he addresses the book, not only to Reformed and Presbyterian Christians, but also to all evangelicals.

That aspect of common grace that is the concern of the book, as it was also the concern of his earlier book, is a favor of God towards and a power of God working good in the ungodly that enables them to perform good works, with which works God is pleased, in the sphere of culture. By culture, Mouw means, roughly, everyday life and especially the sphere of the arts and sciences, what we may call "high culture"—poetry, literature, music, sculpture, and the like. Mouw mentions such unbelievers as Hemingway, Emerson, and the painter, Picasso, the last of whom ought to have been omitted on strictly artistic

grounds. There is even a reference to the exploits of a baseball team, the Los Angeles Dodgers (where a reference to the Chicago Cubs would have been less outrageous).

There are noble activities in history that are performed by the ungodly and there are impressive and useful (and, apparently, entertaining) accomplishments done by the wicked. The explanation, according to Dr. Mouw, very much influenced by the theology of Abraham Kuyper, is a common grace of God.

Mouw's concern, therefore, is not that aspect of the theory of common grace that is its most grievous error, namely, a well-meant offer, which is the teaching of universal, resistible, *saving* grace. Mouw's interest is "cultural" grace. It is that aspect of the theory of common grace that occupied the Christian Reformed Church in all three of its three points of common grace with the exception of its confession of the well-meant offer in the first point. The subject of the book, therefore, is that aspect of common grace that is not the greatest concern of the PRC and to which the PRC have not paid the greatest attention in their polemic against that theory. One benefit of the book

to the PRC will be the impetus to a more thorough examination of cultural common grace and a more carefully stated objection to it.

### **An Important Distinction**

There is an important distinction between the work of the ungodly as the activity itself of the ungodly and the product of that activity. If the Dutch painter, Jacob van Ruisdael, was an unbeliever (which I do not know), his activity of painting the marvelous skyscape, *The Storm*, was sin on his part. This is not the eccentric judgment of the PRC. This is the creedal judgment of the Reformed confession in Q&A 91 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The only work, *in the sense of activity*, that is good is one that proceeds from a true faith, one that is done according to the law of God, and one that is done to the glory of God. As formerly a Reformed man, Dr. Mouw knows this and once subscribed it.

With this, the Presbyterian creed, the Westminster Confession of Faith, is in full agreement, in chapter 16, section 7, and Dr. Mouw, now a Presbyterian, is bound by it. All deeds of the unregenerate "are therefore sinful, and cannot please God." God has no delight in the acts, or deeds, or



doings of Ernest Hemingway, or of Picasso (especially not those of Picasso), or of the Los Angeles Dodgers. On the contrary, He abominates them.

But this does not put the deeds themselves, that is, the products of the working of ungodly men and women off-limits to the Reformed Christian as though the painting itself, or the musical piece, or the poem were sinful. Sin, no more than grace, is not in things. Whereas the activity of the unbeliever, van Ruisdael (if he was an unbeliever), was sinful, inasmuch as he did not paint to the glory of God, the painting itself is lovely, and a Reformed believer may stand admiring it in the Louvre for a good half an hour, only then to move on to the *Mona Lisa*, and may wish that there were copies that could be hung in one's home and study.

This distinction between deed as the activity of the unbeliever and deed as the product of the activity is one that must be clear in the minds of all those who consider the theory of cultural common grace. It is a distinction that the opponents of the PRC ought to keep in mind. In their rejection of cultural common grace, the PRC are not world-fleeing Anabaptists. They are not grunting primitives.

It is a distinction that the PRC themselves must keep in mind. Condemning all the working of the unbeliever as sinful, we do not despise and reject the cultural products themselves: van Ruisdael's painting; Beethoven's *9<sup>th</sup> Symphony*; Housman's poems (I choose him deliberately); the preservation of a society of liberty by a few courageous statesmen, for example, Winston Churchill, and the like. Mouw's book should serve to the end that this important distinction lives in the theological minds of all Reformed and, it could be hoped, evangelical Christians.

#### Grace or Providence

The explanation of these lovely, instructive, rousing accomplishments of the ungodly is fundamental in the controversy over common grace that Mouw carries on. For Mouw and his numerous cohorts, the explanation is a common grace of God. The explanation is *grace*. For the PRC and their spiritual allies (may their tribe increase), the explanation is creation and providence. God created the human race with many (cultural) abilities. In the Fall, humans lost most of these abilities. Some few remain. By the working of providence, which is God's upholding and governing of

the human race, various humans retain and develop certain of these gifts and abilities. The explanation is *providence*.

This aspect of the controversy over common grace also is not the odd thinking of the PRC, which other Reformed thinkers may dismiss out-of-hand. It is the creedal Reformed theology of the Canons of Dordt in Heads 3/4, Article 4. There remain in fallen mankind “glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge...of natural things,” for example, how to paint *The Storm*. Mouw refers to this first part of the article of the Canons of Dordt. But he overlooked the last part of the article. There the Canons concludes, decisively with regard to the controversy over cultural common grace: “This light, such as it is [note this ‘such as it is’: the Reformed faith does not get overly excited about van Ruisdael and Beethoven, much less over Picasso, or even about the entirety of high culture...], man in various ways renders wholly polluted and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.”

Not the PRC, but the Reformed creed rules common grace out of the realm of the culture of

ungodly man and society.

### **Common Grace and the PRC**

Of special interest to the Protestant Reformed reader is Mouw’s reference to the PRC and their theologians with regard to the issue of cultural common grace. In addition to the references, he states their position honestly as the concern for the antithesis. He frankly states that he takes Herman Hoeksema “seriously.” An honest man, as many of the foes of the PRC are not, either by ignoring the PRC altogether in their discussion of common grace (I predict that the men of the United Reformed Churches will be able to review Mouw’s book without any mention of the PRC) or by misrepresenting them as Anabaptists (which slander Mouw expressly repudiates), Mouw acknowledges the real threat to common grace of worldliness. He instances the example of Dr. Quirinus Breen, whom the common grace of the Christian Reformed Church of 1924 carried away into the world. Mouw is frank that the sorry history of Breen “does serve as a significant reminder to me personally about what can happen when the neo-Calvinist theology of common grace comes to be disconnected from the doctrine of the antithesis.” He tells

us that he deliberately reads the Protestant Reformed men in order to maintain the antithesis in his own thinking.

Of great importance with regard to Mouw's development of the theory of common grace is his finding this grace in what he describes as God's drawing near to all humans in the covenant. Now common grace is rooted in the covenant. Mouw has the covenant right—God's closeness, or fellowship. But does he not perceive that this makes common grace a saving grace? God's covenant is established with Christ and humans who are in Christ (Gal. 3). Determined as one may be to distinguish common grace from saving grace, grace is grace,

and grace is divine delight in Christ, in those who are washed in His blood, and in the works that are done to glorify God. Cultural common grace cannot avoid taking form as universal saving grace.

The controversy over common grace continues, develops, and sharpens.

The PRC continue to have a high calling with regard to this controversy, which, contrary to the thinking of some, is far from dead.

Dr. Mouw is not reviving a moribund issue. He is bringing a doctrinal and ethical reality that is thriving in the darkness into the light. ●

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*Backdrop for a Glorious Gospel: The Covenant of Works According to William Strong*, by Thomas Parr. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020. Pp. xiv + 236. \$25.00 (softcover). ISBN-13: 978-1601787712. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

The intriguing subject of the book is the relation of the Sinaitic, or Mosaic, covenant, on the one hand with the covenant with Adam in Paradise prior to the Fall, and, on the other hand with the covenant of grace. This subject is explored at length by a prominent Puritan, William Strong, by means of the presentation and analysis of

the contemporary disciple of the Puritans, Thomas Parr.

In addition to learning the covenant theology of Strong, the reader catches glimpses of the theology of any number of other notable Puritans on the covenant.

After leaving the reader wondering for several chapters whether Strong regarded the

Mosaic covenant as a renewal of what Strong regarded as the “covenant of works” with Adam, in chapter 8 the book makes clear that Strong, unlike many other Puritans, viewed the Sinaitic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace. “The Mosaic covenant is an administration of the covenant of grace, and in Strong’s view, an appendix to the gracious Abrahamic covenant” (p. 162). Nevertheless, the broken Adamic covenant is still in vogue as a “lethal” covenant of works for the unregenerate.

Contrary to the thinking of some modern promoters of the theology of the Puritans, the Sinaitic covenant was neither a renewal of the covenant with Adam nor a third kind of covenant with the supposed covenant of works with Adam and the covenant of grace.

In addition to the introduction to Puritan thinking on the covenant, the book sheds light on various important aspects of Reformed theology as taught by a Puritan regarded as an outstanding representative of that theological school. For Strong, all the “blessings” of the wicked are in reality “curses”; Christ fulfilled all the demands of the

law, by His so-called positive obedience, as well as by His passive obedience; fallen man has lost the image of God in its entirety; and, most importantly, all of theology is to be viewed and set forth “covenantally.”

Strong...has integrated covenant beyond broad rubrics; he has correlated it very tightly with everything. He has, so to speak, threaded covenant into his discussion so that it is part of the warp and woof of his theology (p. 216).

Sound Reformed theology takes issue with Strong and his expositor regarding several Puritan assumptions: that Romans 7 describes Paul as an unregenerated man; that entrance into the covenant of grace is conditional; that the covenant with Adam was a covenant of works in the sense that by his obedience Adam would have merited, or obtained in any way, the eternal life won by Jesus Christ; and that there is a “prevenient grace.”

For the student of the Puritan doctrine of the covenant, this is definitely one of the works to consult. ●

### **Contributors for this issue are:**

***Ronald L. Cammenga***, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

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

***Brian L. Huizinga***, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

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

***Martyn McGeown***, pastor-elect of Providence Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

***Peter Vander Schaaf***, an elder at Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and a member of the Board of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society.

***C. N. Willborn***, senior pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Oak Ridge, TN and adjunct professor of Church History in Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Taylors, SC.