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PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

Edited for the faculty of
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Editorial Notes

With the publishing of this issue of the *Journal* the Seminary completes 30 years of publication. It seems like a long time ago that Prof. Homer Hoeksema and I sat down together to discuss the start of a new journal which would represent our Seminary in the world of the ecclesiastical press. And indeed, thirty years is a long time.

The time seems even longer when one considers that the first issues of the *Journal* were published in an extremely laborious way: stencils had to be cut and the stencils had to be run off on a mimeograph machine; then the pages had to be collated and bound with a plastic binding. Time-consuming, tedious, laborious — that is the only way to describe it. Now the material can be put on a disk, the disk given to the secretary, and only the formatting needs to be done and the material run through a laser printer before the finished copy is sent off to the print shop.

The reason why I bring this up is because, after being in charge of 30 volumes, I have decided that the time has come to turn the work over to someone else. It was two years after I came to the Seminary to begin a teaching career that lasted a whole lot longer than I had originally anticipated, that the first *Journal* was published. And now that gradually my teaching responsibilities are being turned over to Prof. Russell Dykstra, the time has come to turn over these editorial responsibilities to another. Prof. Robert Decker, for many years editor of the book reviews, has consented to assume these publishing responsibilities.

A special word of thanks is in order to all of you who have been loyal supporters and readers of the *Journal*, and who have sometimes taken the time to express your appreciation for what the *Journal* contained and for the truth for which it fought. It is my hope and prayer that Prof. Decker may assume this burden with strength from on high, and that you may give him the support which you gave me.

We are continuing in this issue three series which began earlier. Prof. Engelsma, after an important historical introduction, begins in this issue the translation of Rev. Henry Danhof's fascinating pamphlet,

“The Idea of the Covenant of Grace.” Prof. Decker continues his series on and critique of cross-cultural missions. And I continue my series on common grace, dealing with the important question of the relation between God’s revelation in creation and in Scripture.

We have an extremely interesting article in this issue from Rev. Ronald Cammenga which has to do with the doctrine of the covenant, but very particularly with the covenant view of the Swiss reformer, Heinrich Bullinger.

The doctrine of the covenant has, since the time of the Reformation, been the center of controversy. This is especially true in the history of continental theology, and more especially yet, in the history of the last two centuries.

Much of the controversy has centered in the question of whether the covenant is bilateral (two-sided, a covenant made by agreement between God and man), or unilateral (one-sided, a covenant made by God alone in His sovereign grace). This whole question involves as well the question of the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant; i.e., whether the establishment, realization, and preservation of the covenant is dependent upon God alone without man fulfilling any conditions; or whether the covenant is, in its establishment and maintenance, dependent upon God and man and the fulfillment of various conditions by both God and man.

It is Cammenga’s contention that Bullinger taught a unilateral covenant, a contention which he supports with copious quotations and numerous carefully woven arguments. Since Bullinger is usually considered to be the father of covenant theology, his views are important. We urge you to read and study the article.

Be sure to read also the book reviews. They include books which discuss many important issues confronting the church today. ●

The Idea of the Covenant of Grace

**An Address Given for the General Ministers'
Conference
in Grand Rapids, Michigan
June 4, 1919**

**by
Rev. H. Danhof**

Translated by David J. Engelsma

“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God,
and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the
Friend of God.”

James 2:23

Foreword

It was not originally my intention to publish the following address, which was given for the general (Christian Reformed) ministers' conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A repeated and friendly request directed to me from more than one quarter that I would do this has caused me to change my decision. Although rather late, the address is now published without change.

I have hesitated for a long time. I thought that I should wait until someone else would have explained to us the relation of church and world from another viewpoint, in the place of Rev. Groen, who was prevented from making his contribution because of sickness. At the same time, I judged the circumstances to be unfavorable to a treatment of profound questions of principle. Our age seems to call to us, "Hold fast what you have, so that no one take your crown; one should not in these times think of any development of doctrine."

Finally, I felt that this contribution calls for thorough study of many related subjects, such as so-called common grace; the incarnation of the Word; the idea of central humanity; etc. Indeed, the idea of the covenant of grace concerns the deepest and most intimate relation between God and man. The real covenant-relation governs every other relation. For reasons really that everyone will understand, I did not dare to think even of venturing an attempt to demonstrate and develop all this in a short speech. First of all, the time for this was too limited. But also the logical train of thought demanded that I limit myself to my subject. For this reason, I held back.

Nevertheless, there was also another side to this matter. The ministers' conference insisted on publication. There is in my opinion great need for more doctrinal truth. We must develop the truth. Something is better than nothing. The study of related subjects can, if need be, wait until later. Besides, about some of the matters that I have just mentioned, I have already spoken repeatedly in public. One would

not even be able to suggest a hiding of one's own conviction. In addition, the gathering of the general ministers' conference of last year was announced in the church papers.

Finally, it ought not to be concealed that, in the meantime, a certain group are always zealously promoting a view of the relation of church and world which, in my opinion, may not be ours. The idea of the "absolute antithesis" must, in my opinion, be placed emphatically on the foreground in our world-view. We must be of the party of the living God. Also as regards practice, it is the covenant-conception that must always determine our relation to everything about us, but especially in relation to the world in a moral sense.

This covenant-idea I have tried to give in its most fundamental sense.

Let the sympathetic reader judge in how far I have succeeded.

The address appears unchanged. After careful deliberation, this seemed to me to be the most desirable.

The Lord willing, I hope to devote my powers to related subjects in the future. We must preserve that which we possess by adding to that which has been obtained.

May the Lord confirm the covenant of His friendship with us in the Beloved.

H. Danhof
Kalamazoo, MI
May, 1920

The Idea of the Covenant of Grace

The idea of the covenant of grace is not strange to our race. On the contrary, our society is almost entirely permeated with that idea. Regardless of change, man continues formally to arrange his life

according to the covenant-conception. Circumstances of minor importance, such as those of war and peace, monarchical and democratic government, revolution and development, do not change this at all. By origin, disposition, and destination, man is child of the covenant, and he shows this by his way of life.

Precisely at the present time, this comes out strongly in international politics. Hardly is the balance of the European Great Powers broken than many strive for a covenant of the nations. To be sure, that ideal does not enchant all, but the opposition does not concern the idea as such. Besides, the covenant-conception expresses no less strongly the desire for sovereignty in one's own sphere than the longing of the nations for unity. Indeed, the covenant rests on the physical and juridical unity of our race and the responsibility of the individuals. Therefore, the ideal must be found in the right connection of sovereignty in one's own sphere with a worldwide covenant of the nations.

In the social sphere, the idea of the covenant is basic.¹ The absolute individualist cannot exist there. There the hallmark of everything is organization, combination, alliance, cooperation, and system. Associations and unions of every sort stand in the way of the forceful expression of character. The power of public opinion is enormous. The minority is always wrong and, therefore, powerless. And the slanted and biased press binds together state and society, church and club, religion and morality.²

By this means, the recent war was the common property of church and state, as well in the lands of the Central Powers as in those of the Allies. Indeed, not all were silent, but there was little mention of an independent opinion of the churches. Church and state went arm in arm; Christendom and world were friendly; revelation and reason lay lovingly intermingled and intertwined. Although impotent to fill up the terrible abyss between the warring powers, the covenant-conception still governed human life on both sides of the chasm.

Even the heart joined in. Almost everywhere, the intercession of the churches took the form of a prayer for victory. Church and state

¹. The Dutch is "*schering en inslag*," literally, 'warp and woof.'

². Today, television must be added to the powerful "*tendentieuze pers*" mentioned by Danhof.

were of one mind. For even though both allied groups of nations had objections against each other's pretensions of communion with God, each still continued to make mention of it on its own behalf. This was the case also when W. H. Kerr of Great Bend, Kansas urged America to break with the idea of God, so that by doing this she would be able with more effect to stigmatize as hypocrisy the profession of the German kaiser to rule by the grace of God.

Obviously, the covenant-conception, as it lives in men's consciousness, therefore also includes faith in God and in a spiritual world. Emphatically also faith concerning a spiritual world! For it is indeed the case that the sorcerers, astrologers, and magicians have disappeared from our society, as well as the theophanies and appearances of angels of the old world. It is also true that the belief in witches, ghosts, and exorcists is perhaps less strong than in former times.³ Nevertheless, superstition still confidently seeks knowledge of and communion with the world of unseen things. Witness our modern theosophists, spiritists, fortunetellers, "Christian Scientists," and preachers of heathen religions. Also modern man feels the tug of the tie that unites and joins God and man, spirit and matter, the individual and the community.

There is still more. It is a fact that not only men such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, Daniel, Constantine the Great, William the Silent, Gustavus Adolphus, Luther, Knox, and others knew themselves to be servants of the Lord, but the same is true as well of persons like Balaam, Saul, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Korah, Socrates, Titus, and even Napoleon. All truly great spirits seem to realize somewhat that in their special positions and with their work they stand in service of the God of the covenant. History makes mention of different cases of extraordinary covenant communion with God.

Besides, human life is otherwise so full of all kinds of virtues, such as receptivity to the good, thankfulness, sympathy, assistance, devotion (to duty), self-denial, tender love, and faithful friendship, that involuntarily the question arises, whether man, obviously acting according to

³. This could be said in 1919. It cannot be said in 1997. The intriguing thing is that Danhof saw this superstition as evidence of the ineradicable reality of the idea of the covenant in man. The reference here and in what immediately follows is to the *formal* aspect of the idea of the covenant: relationship with God.

the nature of the covenant in a formal sense, does not also live according to the nature of the covenant in the material sense, insofar as he displays these virtues.

Indeed, the husband is faithful to his wife; the mother devotes herself sacrificially to her little child without complaint; the child honors his parents; the young man is ready to sacrifice his life for the fatherland; the merciful nurse bends sympathetically over the sickbed of the pitiable sufferer; and the friend is not disloyal. Do not science and art serve the true and the beautiful? Do not our hospitals and sanitariums, our asylums and homes, our courts, prisons, and judicial system prove that man strives for righteousness and virtue? Even the pet animal shows the goodness of man in its dependency and trust toward its master.

What is the ethical quality of these virtues?

The ruling opinion is that man can choose the good. He commands his own destiny and, as a result, governs the future. Concerning his actual practice of the good, the spirit of the age proclaims the excellency of humanity with increasingly louder voice. However much history may testify against him and certain weaknesses may yet cling to him, man will eventually develop right self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-control. He will banish what is evil and fittingly subject the entire realm of nature to himself.

Expectantly, therefore, the eye of hope is fixed on him. For regardless of everything that hinders him, he must rule as king. Both evolution and revolution shall pave the way to the throne for him. Everything cooperates to this end. The bond of concord must be felt. State and society, capital and labor, religion and morality need to come together on the exalted level of the common brotherhood of humanity. Then the entire, spontaneous development of our race according to the demands of each one's individual virtues and talents will be possible. With this, man's absolute rule over the kingdoms of the world will be confirmed. Criminal behavior, war, sickness, and probably also death will disappear. The prosperity⁴ of man will be great, and there will be no end to the peace of his kingdom. Something like this is man's testimony concerning himself and his future.

⁴ The Dutch is "*zaligheid*," 'salvation.' Danhof is describing salvation as it lives in the mind of the ungodly world.

Nevertheless, God judges differently. Scripture says that men are by nature haters of God. All have departed. There is no one who does good, who seeks God, not even one.⁵ In other words, the entire life of our race, apart from regeneration, in its relation to God is covenant-breaking⁶, despite the fact that it is permeated with the covenant-conception and even though it may be made serviceable to the coming of His kingdom by God Himself. Only in the renewed kernel is a beginning of God's covenant again found.⁷

According to the testimony of God, humanity is divided into grain and chaff, church and world, bride and whore, children of light and those of darkness. Only in the first does God realize His covenant in a positive sense, out of grace. This takes place, according to the lesson of Scripture, history, and experience, in the way of a dreadful struggle in the world and in the life of humanity. Despite their natural solidarity and although their life here on earth is in various ways strikingly interrelated, the children of Adam separate on account of their different spiritual relation to God, and form an antithesis along the whole line of human activity. Principally, this happens always and everywhere. This separation takes place in accordance with the nature of each dispensation and according to the differing circumstances of time, place, domain, sphere of life, and relationship.

All of this serves to keep our subject constantly and clearly in mind in our treatment of it and must as much as possible be explained.

Therefore, we do not restrict ourselves to a theological exposition of the idea of the covenant as such. After the theological exposition, we consider also the realizing of this covenant-conception. Finally, we point out the struggle caused by this. ●

(To be continued)

⁵. Romans 3:9ff.

⁶. The Dutch is "*bondsbreuk*," literally, 'breaking (or rupturing) a union.'

⁷. Danhof uses a figure to distinguish the elect, regenerated church from the reprobate, ungodly world that was a favorite of both himself and Herman Hoeksema, that of the kernel of grain as distinguished from the surrounding husk, or the wheat and the chaff. The figure, of course, is biblical.

CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS (4)

Prof. Robert D. Decker

In this article we shall expound I Corinthians 9:19-22. We are convinced that this passage has much to teach concerning cross-cultural missions. The passage speaks of the proper attitude a missionary/preacher must have towards himself, towards his work, and towards those to whom God sends him to preach the gospel. It deals with questions such as the following: 1) What is the proper motive behind missionary preaching? 2) How ought the missionary conduct himself in relation to those among whom he works? 3) What ought to be the missionary's purpose in preaching the gospel? 4) In what relationship does the missionary stand with those to whom he preaches?

The passage records the following confession of the inspired apostle Paul, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without the law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

In order to gain an understanding of what this passage teaches and how it applies to missionaries working in a cross-cultural setting, we shall have to pay attention to the context in which it appears. In the previous chapter the apostle admonishes the stronger brothers to take care lest their liberty become a stumbling block to the weaker brothers (I Cor. 8:9). In chapter nine Paul demonstrates how he himself had always acted on this principle. He was an apostle and, therefore, possessed all the rights of an apostle. He had seen Christ, i.e., the resurrected Christ had appeared to him and called him, "... to bear my (God's) name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). His divine mission as an apostle, at least among the

Corinthians, was beyond dispute. They were “his work in the Lord” and “the seal of his apostleship” (vv. 1-3). Because he was an apostle, Paul had the same right or authority to be supported and, had he chosen to marry, to have his family supported by the church as did Peter or any other apostle (vv. 4-6).¹ This right to adequate support from those to whom he preaches, the apostle proves in the following verses. The laborer is worthy of his hire is the first principle asserted (v. 7). This principle, furthermore, is taught in the Old Testament Scripture, even with application to the oxen used to tread out the corn (vv. 8-10). The apostle reasons that if they have sown spiritual things unto the Corinthians, then surely they have the right to carnal things (material support) from the people of God (v. 11). Besides, other of their teachers possessed this right (v. 12). Those who served in the temple in Old Testament times were supported by the temple (v. 13). Christ ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (v. 14).

But the apostle chose not to receive this support from the church. He did this so that no one could accuse him of abusing his rights and privileges as an apostle. The gospel which he preaches is “without charge.” He preaches not for support of his earthly needs, but out of necessity. “Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel,” he confesses. God called him to preach and God laid this necessity upon him. His reward is that the gospel which he preaches is without charge. He gives offense to no man. No one can question his motives in preaching the gospel (vv. 15-18).

This was not, however, the only instance in which Paul abstained from exercising his rights as an apostle. He was all things to all men that he might gain the more (vv. 19-23). This kind of self-denial the ungodly exercises to gain a corruptible crown. Ought not the Christian do at least as much to gain the spiritual crown? Without self-denial and strenuous effort, the prize of their high calling in Christ could never be attained (vv. 24-27)!

Looking at the passage in more detail we note that the apostle begins by confessing, “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (v. 19). Paul

¹. The Greek term, *exousia*, is translated “power” in this chapter. The correct translation is “right” or “authority.”

is saying here that he is free from all men, i.e., he is under obligation to no man. He is free from the support of those to whom he preaches. No one can question his motives, and he gives offense to no one. Even though all this be true, the apostle makes himself a servant of all men. The word translated "servant" by the King James really means "slave." Paul makes himself a slave to all. A bond-servant or slave in New Testament times was in total subjection to his master. The slave lacked all the rights and privileges of the free. He had no property rights. Not even his children belonged to him. He was subject completely to the will of his master and entirely at his mercy.

When the apostle confesses that he makes himself a slave to all men, what he means is that he places himself totally in the service of the gospel. As an apostle, Paul was the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was called and qualified to be an apostle by the risen Lord Christ. Paul was completely subject to the will of God in Christ. Christ was his master! Totally dependent upon Christ was the apostle. Because this was true, Paul makes himself a slave to those to whom God calls him to preach the gospel. He is totally in the service of those to whom he preaches. The apostle literally *spent* his entire life in the service of God and his church in Christ.

This is the way it should be with every missionary and, for that matter, the way it should be for every minister of the gospel. Missionaries and preachers are slaves of God in Christ. They are lawfully called by God through His church. They are qualified by the Holy Spirit of Christ. In a real, even unique sense, the preacher's life is not his own. He belongs to God. He is subject to God's will in everything.

This certainly implies that the office of the ministry of the Word, whether pastoral or missionary, is not just another profession along with other professions such as medicine, law, or engineering. The minister is a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. His sacred commission is, "Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). What the apostle Paul commanded his spiritual son, Timothy, applies with equal force to all preachers, "Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate on these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to thyself and unto the

doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Tim. 4:13-16).

To this great sacred calling, therefore, the preacher must give his all. He must make everything in his life subservient to his calling to preach the Word of God. He must not regard the work of the ministry, whether pastoral or missionary, as a forty hour per week job. He stands in God's service twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week, for his entire life! His chief task is preaching for, "... how shall they hear without a preacher" (Rom. 10:13-15)? And preaching is hard work! To be prepared to preach, the minister must spend many, many hours per week "meditating on the things of God." He must give attendance to reading. He must wrestle with the sacred Scriptures and prayerfully expound the Word of God. Only then is he able to proclaim the gospel as it applies to the lives of God's people.

Precisely because the missionary is a slave to God he must make himself a slave to those to whom God calls him to preach. The preacher must follow the example of his Lord and Master, who took a towel and basin and knelt before his disciples and washed their dirty feet (cf. John 13:1-17). Only in this way can the missionary be truly "happy" (John 13:17). The missionary is not called to be served by those to whom he preaches. He is called to serve them. They do not exist for his sake, but he for theirs. Cheerfully, willingly, with much patience and love and long-suffering must the missionary serve his Master by serving his people. He must stand totally in the service of the church and cause of the gospel. He must conduct himself in relation to those to whom he preaches so as to make the gospel "without charge" (I Cor. 9:18). The missionary must not abuse his authority as an officebearer. This was the apostle Paul's confession. It must be that as well of every faithful missionary and preacher.

The apostle expresses his purpose in making himself a slave to all men in these terms, "... that I might gain the more." This does not mean that Paul regarded himself as the one who did the gaining or saving of those to whom he preached. Salvation is by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-10). Paul knew that he was only the instrument through whom God would save his elect in Christ.

What the apostle is saying is this: by giving no offense, and by making himself a slave to all, he gains the more. This principle certainly

applies. If Paul's motives were suspect, if his hearers imagined that he preached for money or to enhance his own reputation, or if the apostle in some way offended the brothers and sisters by his conduct, his effectiveness as a missionary would be greatly diminished, if not destroyed completely.

Let God's servants in the ministry, especially those on the mission fields, take these matters to heart. They must give no offense to their hearers. They must make themselves slaves to all to whom they preach. They must fight the terrible sin of pride and put away from themselves all selfish motives. They must give themselves wholly to the work. These are the kind of servants the Lord is pleased to use to gather His elect out of the nations to the praise of his name.

May God continue to call such men to the mission work of the church.

In verse 20 the apostle writes, "And I became to the Jews as a Jew in order that I might gain the Jews; to those under the law as under the law, [though not being myself under the law,] in order that I might gain them that are under the law" (translation mine, RDD). It ought to be noted that the clause which appears in brackets is omitted in several of the English translations, notably the King James. We have included it because it has good support in the manuscripts; i.e., the better and more reliable manuscripts include it. To this Charles Hodge adds, "The internal evidence is also in its favour. It was important for Paul to say that although acting *as* under the law, he was not under it; because it was a fundamental principle of the gospel which he preached, that believers are freed from the law. 'We are not under law, but under grace,' Romans 6:14. It was necessary, therefore, that his compliance with the Jewish law should be recognized as a matter of voluntary concession."² With this we agree. It was necessary for Paul to make this disclaimer lest the Gentile Christians be left with the wrong impression. Likewise the Jewish Christians must not misunderstand and be led to think that in some sense they were still "under the law."

It ought also be noted that the second main clause of this verse explains the first clause. The text, therefore, must be understood as follows, "And I became to the Jews, i.e., to those under the law, as a Jew,

². *Commentary on First Corinthians*, p. 164.

i.e., as under the law; though not being myself under the law; that I might gain the Jews."

By "law" the apostle does not refer to the moral law, the law of the ten commandments. The law of God in this sense obligates all men to love God with all their hearts, minds, and souls and to love the neighbor as themselves. That the Scriptures teach that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes (Rom. 10:4), no one can deny. But this does not mean that the law of God as summed in the ten commandments is abrogated or abolished. Not at all! The moral law of God never had any meaning or significance apart from Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament era it pointed Israel to their sin, their inability to serve God, and thus their inability to save themselves. The law for the Old Testament saint was the schoolmaster, the tutor, which led him to Christ in whom alone he could be saved (Gal. 3:24)!

This same law of God as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again on account of our justification (Rom. 4:25), is a summary expression of the will of God for the redeemed in Christ. The law is the standard according to which the people of God in Christ are called to live in obedience to the God of their salvation. As such, that law of God has become the guide for the Christian's life of gratitude to God for the salvation graciously given him in Christ. Precisely because he is a new creature in Christ, saved by grace through faith, the child of God is called to walk in those good works which God has before ordained that he should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10). The standard by which a work is judged to be good is the law of the ten commandments. This law of God remains in force. When Paul says, therefore, "though not being myself under the law," he does not mean that he is free from the obligation to love God and his neighbor.

By "law" the text refers to the typical civil and especially the ceremonial laws under which Israel, the typical Kingdom of God, was governed in the Old Testament era. That law included the tabernacle and later the temple and its service; the prophets, priests, and kings; the many sacrifices, the typical feasts, and the typical rites such as circumcision. Included too were the laws concerning diet, the distinction between the clean and unclean animals, the latter of which were not to be eaten by the Israelites. All of these pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

These laws were fulfilled in Christ who was once offered to bear the sins of many. The types and shadows or pictures of the Old Testament era are no longer necessary because the reality to which they pointed, viz., Christ, has come and redeemed the elect in His cross and resurrection. When Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover feast in the upper room in Jerusalem in the night of His betrayal, it was the last Passover. In its place the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper. Why? Because Christ, the Lamb without spot and blemish, to whom the Passover pointed was slain on the cross the very next day.

When Jesus accomplished redemption for His people, the veil of the temple was torn from the top to the bottom. Why? Because Christ had opened the way through His shed blood into the holiest of all, the very presence of God. Through the anointing of the Holy Spirit all of God's people are prophets speaking God's praises, priests consecrating themselves in God's service, and kings ruling over the works of God's hands. No more sacrifices need be made, because *the* sacrifice which forever frees God's people from sin and death has been made. This is what the apostle means by "law."

The Jews to whom Paul preached were under that law, which is to say, they were still observing that law. The apostle, however, was no longer under that law. But even though he was no longer under the law the apostle writes, "to the Jews became I as a Jew ... to those under the law as under the law." What does Paul mean by this? Let it first be understood what the apostle does not mean to say. He does not mean that he accommodated himself to Jewish ritual and practice by compromising the principles of the truth of the gospel either in doctrine or in walk of life! This is something the apostle never did. This is something no missionary may ever do. Consistently and faithfully, often though it meant great peril to himself, the apostle preached the whole counsel of God. Paul never shrank from that. The great themes of the apostle's preaching and teaching were always sin and grace. The record of the Book of Acts and his epistles to the churches bear abundant testimony to this. Paul did this in spite of bitter opposition, and he did it knowing full well that the gospel which he preached was to the unbelieving Jew a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. Even though it meant prison, torture, and even perhaps death in the end, the apostle never compromised the truth.

Missionaries must follow Paul's example in this regard. A gospel

of compromise and accommodation is a false gospel. Nothing is ever gained by such a gospel. The gospel must be preached. That gospel always condemns all that is of sin and evil. That gospel never comes with a “both... and,” but always with an “either ... or.” It is always either God or the devil, Christ or Belial, faith or unbelief. The gospel always preaches the name of Jesus, the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). The gospel always demands faith in the Lord Jesus and repentance toward God. The gospel always commands all men everywhere to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. It calls God’s elect in every nation under heaven to come out from among the unbelieving world and be separate. The gospel proclaims that all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It demands, therefore, that we do not love that world (I John 2:15-17). The absolute sovereignty of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and the total depravity of man outside of Christ is the message of the gospel. It brooks no compromise. This was the gospel Paul preached to the Jews. This is the gospel the church through her missionaries must preach in every nation, in every culture, wherever God in His good pleasure sends the church.³

Positively what the Paul means when he writes, “to the Jews became I as a Jew,” is that when he labored and lived among the Jews, he lived *as* a Jew. In matters indifferent (adiaphora) Paul observed Jewish custom. The apostle taught in the Jewish synagogues every time he had opportunity. Upon occasion he went to the temple in Jerusalem. Paul preached Christ out of the Old Testament Scriptures. In matters of food and drink, circumcision, etc., Paul lived as a Jew. Though he was free to eat whatever meat he wished, Paul abstained from eating that which according to Levitical law was unclean. According to Acts 16 Paul had Timothy (son of a Greek father and Jewish mother) circumcised so as to give no offense to the Jews. On the other hand, because of false brethren who insisted on the *necessity* of circumcision, the apostle refused to compel Titus to be circumcised. Over this issue Paul had to “withstand Peter to his face” (Gal. 2:11-21). In this way the apostle took great care not to offend the Jews, “his kinsmen according to the flesh.”

Paul’s purpose in conducting himself in this manner among the

³. *Canons of Dordt*, II, 5.

Jews was, "in order that I might gain the Jews, i.e., them who are under the law." The verb "gain" must be taken in the sense of "save." The apostle desires the salvation of those to whom God sends him to preach the blessed gospel.

After this example missionaries must conduct themselves. In matters indifferent, in customs not forbidden by the Word of God, they must live as those among whom they are preaching and teaching. They must give no unnecessary offense. They must do this in order that they might gain them among whom they labor.

Paul continues, "To the ones outside of the law as outside of the law, (being not outside of the law of God, but in the law of Christ) in order that I might gain them who are outside of the law" (translation mine, RDD). By "the ones outside of the law" the apostle means non-Jews, i.e., Gentiles. By "law," as noted above, the apostle does not mean the moral law, but the civil and ceremonial laws of Israel. This is why Paul hastens to add, "being not without law to God but under law to Christ." The apostle was certainly under (or, more correctly, "in") the law to Christ. Paul was no libertine or antinomian. He understood his obligation to love God and his neighbor. The apostle struggled with this every day of his life (cf. Rom. 7:18-25). As one redeemed in Christ who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, the apostle was in the law to Christ. Christ had made him free from the law of sin and death. By the grace of God in Jesus the apostle was free to love God and his neighbor. This gospel of the grace of God in Christ is what the apostle preached and lived. For the sake of the gospel of sovereign grace Paul purposed to offend no one.

When, therefore, the apostle preached and lived among the Gentiles (those outside of the civil and ceremonial laws), he was at pains not to conform to Jewish civil and ceremonial law. Paul refused to act and live as a Jew when he labored among the Gentiles. He refused as well to insist that the Gentiles conform to Jewish traditions and practices. In fact, as noted above, Paul even rebuked Peter for doing this (Gal. 2:11-21). In all matters indifferent the apostle lived as a Gentile, i.e., as a non-Jew. In all of this, however, he never compromised with the idolatry and ungodly philosophies of the heathen. These Paul condemned sharply. Not once did the apostle make concessions to the false religions of the day. Even when he found himself among the intellectual, philosophical, and religious elite in Athens, Paul did not hesitate

to point out the foolishness of their idolatry and superstition. With neither shame nor compromise the apostle preached the sovereign God who is revealed in the crucified, resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Neither would the apostle compromise with ungodly living. In his preaching, Paul always stressed the need to walk worthy of the vocation with which God has called His people. He condemned in the sharpest of terms all lying, cheating, envy, pride, murder, stealing, adultery, fornication and all uncleanness, backbiting, slander, and all manner of evil speaking, covetousness, and disobedience to parents and all in authority. Always Paul called God's people to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ had made them free. But the apostle never laid any unnecessary burdens on the Gentiles. And, as much as possible, he lived as the people with whom he labored.

And, again, Paul's purpose in conducting himself in this fashion is, "in order that I might gain them that are outside of the law" (translation mine, RDD). He preached and lived as he did because he wanted to gain the Gentiles to the cause of Christ and His church. Paul was careful not to offend the Gentiles by observing Jewish laws or customs. Certainly, "it would have greatly impeded, if not entirely prevented the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles had it been burdened with the whole weight of Jewish ceremonies and restrictions."⁴

The apostle continues, "I became weak to the weak ones in order that I might gain the weak ones" (I Cor. 9:22, translation mine, RDD). Some commentators take the term "weak ones" to mean the unconverted among both Jew and Gentile. They are "weak" in the sense that they lack the ability or strength within themselves to save themselves. While certainly it is true that all men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins and for that reason are unable to save themselves, this interpretation of the text is incorrect. It is incorrect for at least two reasons: 1) If this were the correct interpretation, it would mean that Paul became as an unconverted man to the unconverted. This would have been sinful on Paul's part and, hence, cannot have been the case. 2) This interpretation does not fit the context. In chapter eight the

⁴ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on I and II Corinthians*, p. 165, Banner of Truth edition.

apostle speaks of "the weak brother" who cannot in good conscience before God eat meat sacrificed to idols. For this "weak brother" to do so would be to sin against God. In this eighth chapter the apostle lays down some important principles: a) We all know that idols are nothing. There is only one true God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him (vv. 4-6). b) Eating meat makes us neither better nor worse before God (v. 8). c) Some of the saints do not have this knowledge. To these, eating meat sacrificed to idols is a grievous sin. These are the "weak brethren" (vv. 7-13). d) Those who are strong must walk in love over against their weak brothers. They must refrain from eating meat sacrificed to idols lest they cause the weak to stumble into sin (vv. 9-13).

Those who are weak, therefore, also here in chapter nine, are weak Christians. They are weak in the knowledge of the truth and weak in faith. To these the apostle became as weak. Paul tells us precisely in what sense he became as weak in the last verse of chapter eight, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh (sacrificed to idols, RDD) while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Once more, the meaning is that in matters indifferent, matters which do not involve any compromise either in doctrine or the Christian life, the apostle will go to any length to avoid offending those to whom he preaches. His chief concern is the progress of the gospel in the way of the salvation of the elect. Paul does not want to be a hindrance to God's cause.

Once again, Paul's purpose is, "in order that I might gain the weak ones." When the apostle speaks of gaining the weak, the meaning is to strengthen and confirm them in the faith. His purpose in becoming as weak to the weak Christians is to increase their knowledge of the true doctrine of Scripture. His desire is to make them stronger in the faith. Paul desires that the weak grow into strong, stable, mature Christians. In this way the church is strengthened and God's name is honored.

This same attitude, this same resolve, ought to characterize every faithful missionary of the gospel. The missionary must be at pains not to offend the weaker brother and in this way to cause that weaker brother to stumble in sin. A terrible sin indeed it would be if the missionary by his own sinful conduct were to turn people away from the truth and thus from the church.

In verses 22b and 23 the apostle sums the whole matter. He writes,

“... to all I have been made all things, in order that by all means I might save some. But I do all these things for the benefit of (or for the sake of) the gospel, in order that I might become participant of it with you” (translation mine, RDD). Let it be said once more, that the apostle was made all things to all men does not mean that he compromised the truth of the gospel in any way, or that he excused or ignored ungodly, disobedient living. Nor does this mean that Paul ever “diluted” the message of the gospel. Certainly the apostle *adapted* his preaching to those to whom he preached. When, for example, he preached in a Jewish synagogue he expounded the Old Testament Scriptures, showing the Jews how that Jesus of Nazareth was revealed as the Messiah in the Old Testament. To the Jews Paul preached Christ crucified, from the law and the prophets showing them that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of the types and shadows, “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). But when the apostle stood on Mars’ Hill in Athens and preached to the learned philosophers, he pointed out the foolishness of their idolatry, proceeding from the truth that God is the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe in whom “all men live and move and have their being” (Acts 17:22-31). Paul fed those who were not able to bear the strong meat of the Word the milk of the gospel.

But, let it be emphasized once more, the apostle never compromised the gospel. He was adamant in all his preaching and teaching. In the sharpest of terms and without fear Paul pointed to the sins and weaknesses of God’s people. He insisted on the sound doctrine of God’s infallible Word. Paul commanded those to whom he preached to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in the way of forsaking their idols and ungodly ways. His preaching always presented Christ crucified as the only way, truth, and life. In all matters indifferent and with all classes of people Paul was made all things.

This the apostle did “for the benefit of the gospel” (v. 23). He lived and labored and literally spent his entire life for the sake of the gospel. The cause of the gospel dominated the entire life of the apostle. No sacrifice was too great for the sake of the gospel. To these same Corinthians Paul wrote, “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths

oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice I was beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the cares of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed forevermore, knoweth that I lie not" (II Cor. 11:22-31).

Let every missionary and, for that matter, minister of the gospel take to heart this confession of the apostle! It came from the Spirit-inspired lips of one who received not a penny in salary from the churches, though he had every right to "live by the gospel" which he faithfully preached! Sometimes, perhaps often, we who are called to preach the Word are inclined to complain (the "we" is not editorial, I include myself, RDD). Our work load is too great, or so we think. We do not appreciate living in the "glass house." Our congregations expect too much from us. We have all kinds of meetings and classes to lead and teach during the week, yet the congregation expects two very good sermons Sunday after Sunday. There are sick to be visited, sorrowing saints to be comforted, weddings to perform, and funerals. Those in trouble or distress of one sort or another need the encouragement of the Word. There is other work such as writing for the church papers, serving on denominational committees, attending classis and synod, etc. All this and more are expected of us. And, in some instances at least, our salaries barely cover our needs. In the light of the example of Paul and the teaching of Scripture itself, dare we complain?

As ministers, whether serving congregations or on the mission field or teaching in the seminary, we are slaves (*douloi*) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. As slaves of Christ, who laid down His life for His sheep, we are slaves of those whom we serve. This means that our lives as ministers/missionaries are not our own. We belong to Christ and His church. Let us put away our complaining and make ourselves all things to all men for the benefit of the gospel. Let us do so even if

it means we must lay down our lives for the sake of the gospel. For many of God's faithful servants in the past this is the price they paid for the sake of the gospel. Think of the apostles, the early church fathers, Martin Luther. Think of John Calvin, who did much of his work in bed because he was too sick to be up and about. Guido de Brès was martyred because of what he wrote in the Belgic Confession. All these and more were slaves of God and His people for the gospel's sake. They were willing to stand alone for the sake of the truth of the gospel. Where would the church be today had God not raised them up? The same may be said of our own Protestant Reformed fathers: G. M. Ophoff and H. Hoeksema and the first generation of ministers: Vos *et. al.* who fought valiantly for the truth at great personal sacrifice. Shall we today complain? God forbid! Let us upon whom the Lord has laid the sacred charge, preach the Word, be slaves of God and of His church, and let us become all things to all men for the gospel's sake.

The apostle's purpose in becoming all things to all men was two fold: "that by all means I might save some" and "that I become a participant of it (the gospel) with you." This simply means the apostle would do nothing to offend those to whom he preached. His overriding concern was that God would use him to save some to whom he preached. Along with that he was concerned that he himself in the way of faithfully preaching the Word would become a partaker of the benefits of salvation with the saints.

After this manner let God's servants who are called to preach the Word in foreign lands and cultures be all things to all men. Let them be as those to whom they preach and among whom they labor. Let them give no offense, that by all means they may win some for the glory of God and His Christ. ●

Another Look at Common Grace (9) General Revelation and Common Grace

Prof. Herman Hanko

Introduction

An important aspect of the doctrine of common grace is the doctrine of the restraint of sin. That is, those who hold to common grace also maintain that the grace of God which is common to all men serves as an inward restraint of sin in the hearts of the unregenerate so that they are not as bad as they could be, and that, indeed, they are capable of doing good.

This grace which restrains sin is, according to the proponents of common grace, connected to what is called general revelation, i.e., a revelation of God in the creation by which God reveals Himself to all men graciously.

We took a long and hard look at the whole concept of general revelation in our last article,¹ and we examined many of the texts which are used to support this concept, notably the passage in Rom. 1:18ff. It was our conclusion that Scripture speaks only of a revelation which is indeed connected with grace, but is connected with saving grace and is, therefore, particular.

This position does not deny that God makes Himself known also to the unregenerate through creation, but this work of God cannot in any sense be construed as grace. It has as its purpose, "That man may be without excuse."

In connection with our discussion of these truths, we also took a look at two important articles in the Reformed confessions: Canons of

¹. Cf. our article in Vol. XXIX, Number 2, published in April, 1996.

Dordt, III & IV, Art. 4 and Confession of Faith, Art. 14. While both of these articles have also been cited as proof for the doctrine of common grace, we showed that such an assertion is impossible in the light of the very clear language which both articles employ.

One question remains to be discussed. That question we referred to at the very end of our last article. It is the question of the meaning of Art. 2 of the Confession of Faith. That article seems indeed to teach a certain general revelation and has often been appealed to as teaching precisely this doctrine. The article reads:

We know [God] by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith, Rom. 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse. Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation.

It is to this article and its implications we now turn.

The Meaning of the Article

While it is true from a certain point of view that Article 2 of the Confession of Faith speaks of “the creation, preservation and government of the universe” as “a most elegant book,” it must be remembered that the article appears in a *confession of faith*. The article is not simply talking in the abstract about certain doctrinal truths of one form or another. It is a statement about what the *believer* confesses to be the truth of the Scriptures, a truth necessary to believe for salvation; indeed a truth which the believer will continue to confess even if his confession brings upon him torture and death. It is a living confession which arises out of the very heart of the child of God.

If we keep this in mind, then we will understand as well the opening words of the article: “*We* know him by two means....” The believer, in company with his fellow saints, is telling the world how he knows God. He is not, in the first place, saying anything about how the wicked know God. He is talking about the means by which he has come to know God his Redeemer. This is, you will remember, a confession

of faith. It is a confession of faith in God through Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation. The confession of the believer here is not: "I will tell you a moment how I happened to make the acquaintance of God." Nothing of that sort at all. The whole question is: I will now, as an article of my faith in God through Jesus Christ, tell you how I have come to know God who is my Redeemer through Jesus Christ our Lord. And, as contradictory as that may seem, the believer is also saying: I *believe* that I know God from two books, because the Scriptures tell me that I know Him from two books. It is not as if I have discovered the book of creation on my own and read it with enjoyment and profit, and through reading it have come to know some things about God. Scripture tells the believer that he, as believer, can know God through the elegant book of creation.

The believer is saying, therefore, that he has come to know God as Redeemer in Jesus Christ through the means of two books. One book is "the creation, preservation and government of the universe"; the other book is "God's holy and divine Word."

The *believer* knows God by means of these two books. Up to this point nothing has been said as yet about the wicked and unbelieving. The article will have a bit to say about that too; and we will come to that in a moment. But the approach of the article is not to tell us how creation is revelation to the unbeliever; the approach of the article is to tell us how the believer comes to know his God as the God of his salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Contents of Book I

The article describes the book of creation in various interesting ways. But in every case it must be understood that the various descriptions of the book apply only to the fact that the people of God are the only ones who can make any real use of it. The book is, so to speak, for them.

It may be compared to a book which is written in the Dutch language and contains the charter, constitution, and guarantee of freedom for the Dutch people. As far as the people in the Netherlands who are able to read the book are concerned, the book is the most important book which they have as a nation. They cherish the book as they cherish their own liberty. They protect the book against everyone who would seek to alter it. They make sure that their government

adheres strictly to what the book contains. In the keeping of the book is bound up the existence of the Dutch as a nation.

But if a man from China would pick up the book, he would discard it almost as soon as he took one look between its covers. He might be able to detect that the book belongs to the people of the Netherlands, but he is a citizen of China. And, in any case, he can't read a word of it and so cannot understand one bit of what it is all about. And even if he could read a word here and there, he would say to himself: The book is of no concern to me because it has nothing to do with me at all.

So it is with the book of creation. It is a book belonging to the believer. The article very sharply claims this book of creation for the believer. So to speak, the article writes the name of the believer on the inside cover so that everyone may know that this book belongs to him.

In the second place, the contents of the book are described: "The creation, preservation and government of the universe."

Although we cannot speak of this in detail, two things especially are worth some attention.

In the first place, the book deals with two truths: the doctrine of creation, and the doctrine of providence, the latter because both preservation and government have to do with what is called providence. Especially the government of the universe includes "history," for God not only creates man, but also upholds him and governs him. All that happens in the world, both in the brute creation and in the history of mankind, is a part of that book.

In the second place, the article emphasizes the fact that the book tells of God. I must return to that in a moment, but here already this is underscored. The book says that God created the universe. To teach a form of evolutionism (whatever that form may take; even if it is a form of so-called theistic evolutionism) is to deny the book.

The book also says that God continues to give to every creature in the universe as well as the universe itself its existence and being. This is what the book says. The book speaks of the preservation of the universe. Preservation is a work of God. The book says that the creation is not independent, not existing by its own power, not continuing by virtue of inflexible laws of nature according to which things take place. The book says that Someone gives it its existence, and that Someone is God.

The book also says that God is sovereign in all the universe. The

universe is governed by someone else. It is governed in every respect and in every detail. Not only are planets and galaxies governed, but also trees and flowers. And not only are trees and flowers governed, but also salamanders and bears. And not only are salamanders and bears governed, but also men and women. They are all governed absolutely because they are all given their very life and existence by the One who governs them. And so anyone who gives a certain independency to man to decide his own way in life, or anyone who curses the notion that all that happens in the world comes from God, is a fool who cannot read the book.

Thirdly, the article emphatically states that indeed only God's people are able to read the book. It is not only the believer confessing the truth that he knows God through two books; but that believer says that even Book I is for him. It is a book which is "before *our* eyes as a most elegant book." It is a book which leads "*us* to contemplate the invisible things of God."

In the fourth place, it is an elegant book. It appears as if the article really means, by this use of the word "elegant," to point us particularly to the book's purpose, namely, to lead us to contemplate God. But the book is elegant in its own right. It is true that the curse is on the creation. And that curse is of such a kind that the creation is far less beautiful than the creation was during the time of Paradise I. It is also true that the creation today is as nothing in comparison with what it will be in Paradise II. And it is certainly true that there are many ugly things in the book: lions killing and eating baby gazelles; people beating baby seals over the head to slaughter them for their fur; floods and earthquakes leaving devastation in their wake; barren deserts and impenetrable jungles where poisonous snakes lurk; weed-infested fields where no crops will grow. But in spite of all these ugly blotches on the book, which are there because of God's curse, the book is still elegant. In fact, it is so elegant that one who takes the time to read the book cannot help but wonder at times: "If this creation is so beautiful that it is breath-taking, how can the new earth be even yet more beautiful?" Can anything surpass the glory of today's sunset? Can the tremulous quiet of an early morning broken only by the far-off call of the whippoorwill be surpassed anywhere? Can the trees find more beautiful garments than the coat of many colors which they wear in an autumn in Maine? Can anything fix one's attention by its elegance more power-

fully than that multitude of places where sea and land meet? It is an elegant book!

Finally, that book serves a purpose. That purpose is to lead us “to contemplate the invisible things of God.” Notice once again that the article speaks emphatically of the book leading *us* to contemplate God. But let that be. The book leads us to contemplate *God*. Augustine has a moving and eloquent passage in his *Confessions* which speaks of this. I refer to what he writes in X, vi, 8 & 9.² Augustine begins paragraph 8 with the words: “Not with doubting, but with assured consciousness, do I love Thee, Lord. Thou hast stricken my heart with Thy word, and I loved Thee. Yea also *heaven, and earth, and all that therein is*, behold, on every side they bid me love Thee....” But then, after some of the most beautiful words in his entire work, Augustine goes on to say:

And what is this? I asked the earth, and it answered me, “I am not He;” and whatsoever are in it, confessed the same. I asked the sea and the deeps, and the living creeping things, and they answered, “We are not thy God, seek above us.” I asked the moving air; and the whole air with his inhabitants answered, “Anaximenes³ was deceived, I am not God.” I asked the heavens, sun, moon, stars, “Nor (say they) are we the God whom thou seekest.” And I replied unto all the things which encompass the door of my flesh; “Ye have told me of my God, that ye are not He; tell me something of Him.” And they cried out with a loud voice, “He made us.”

It is indeed as Augustine says it is. To read the book of creation is to be led to God! And there in His book is to be found those great truths concerning Him who has formed all things and governs all things by His power.

Can the Wicked Read This Book?

Someone may argue that the article which we have been discussing refers as well to the wicked. It does not speak of the fact that only the believer reads this book, but specifically states that the book is able

² I quote from a translation by Dr. E. B. Pusey, from “Everyman’s Library”; E. P. Dutton and Co, Inc. the publisher. It is a 1950 edition.

³ An ancient Greek philosopher who held that air was ultimate reality.

to be read by the wicked as well. The statement in the article is a reference to Romans 1:20: "All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse."

The argument is that if this elegant book is sufficient to leave all men without excuse, then it certainly is capable of being read by all men. It is inescapably true that all men must appear in the judgment to give account of what they did in the flesh. And when the wicked who have not the Scriptures must give an account of the reason why they did not serve God, they will never be able to say, "We did not know Him. We did not know there was a God. We did not know He had to be served. We did not know how to serve Him." That will not serve as an excuse because these things are present in the book, even, perhaps in large print. And they are able to read that book.

Now we do not, nor ever have, denied this. Paul is too clear in Romans I even to think about denying it. But that is, after all, not the point. The question is: Is that book revelation to the wicked? And as revelation, is that book grace for the wicked? Neither the article nor the whole of Scripture so much as breathes a word about that. By no stretch of the imagination can that ever be said of Book I.

It is as if the article makes the statement concerning the unbelieving incidentally. It is really an after-thought. Not that the Confession is not sure about this truth. It certainly is. It is an important truth in its own right. But the fact is that Article 2 is really saying: "Creation is a most elegant book in which God's people are able to see God's handiwork and by which book they are led to contemplate the great truths of God Himself. And, oh, by the way, that same book is open to the unbeliever to read — even though he is barely able to make out the words. And God insists that he read it too, for by reading it he becomes without excuse before God."

This is the elegant book of creation.

The Book of Scripture

But the same article speaks of another book, the book of Scripture. Concerning that book it states: "Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation."

It might be objected that the article says very little about Book II,

the Holy Scriptures, especially in comparison with the rather detailed description of Book I. But it must be remembered that Book II is really the book in which the Confession is interested. It does not have much to say in this article about Book II because it devotes no less than five additional articles to a discussion of the Scriptures.

It is not within the scope of our purpose to discuss this book of the Scriptures in this article. The only question which concerns us is the relation between these two books. Are they two separate books lying side by side, both speaking of God, but dealing with different aspects of God's truth? Are they both necessary to read to get a clear picture of who God is? Are they essentially and fundamentally unrelated to each other — except that both deal ultimately with the same subject?

The answer to this question must be emphatically, No! It is true that Article 2 of the Confession of Faith does not enter into the relation between these two books, but that is probably because the Confession is really interested in Book II and refers to Book I only incidentally.

Nevertheless, it is important that we understand the relation between the two books for all that.

The Relation Between the Two Books

In order to understand the relation between the two books, it must first of all be understood that no man of himself is able to read the book of creation easily. When God created the universe, the entire creation was a sparkling, clear, beautiful book, unmarred, pristine, gloriously illustrated. That book was given to man who was endowed with powers beyond anything we can understand. He had, of course, such spiritual powers as stem from the fact that he was God's image bearer. But he possessed also physical and psychological powers which enabled him to read and understand the book of creation with ease. And always through it all He was led to God.

But sin spoiled that completely. And it spoiled that for two reasons.

For one thing, the book itself was marred. The curse came into the creation because of sin, and with the curse came death. The book was extremely difficult to read because it shouted loudly of God's anger against sin and His hatred of all that is evil. It was as if the book was doused in water for eight days and became warped and faded. Various pages were torn out. The print was so faded as to become almost

invisible. The pages were tattered and torn. The binding was broken and it was impossible to keep all the pages together.

All of that would have been bad enough, but the situation is worse. Man became spiritually blind. He is so blind that he is unable to see spiritual things.⁴ This spiritual blindness involves the terrible consequences of sin. Man lost most of his physical and psychical powers of which we retains only a few remnants.⁵ But worse, man became totally depraved. That is, he completely lost the image of God which he bore. The result was that man becomes an enemy of God who hates God, goes about to destroy Him and steal this creation from Him, and does all in his power to drive God out of His own universe. This spiritual blindness makes it almost impossible for man to read the book.

From a certain point of view it is not surprising that wicked man reads the book and discovers that the book teaches evolutionism. The book is tattered and water-blotted. And he squints and peers at this book, barely able to make out the letters. And sections are even missing. The result is that he finds it easy to make the book say something which the book does not say at all, and has never said.

But it must be remembered that this blindness is willful disobedience. He does not want to see God in the book, and, in fact, will do everything to prove that God is not there. That spiritual blindness makes him think that he sees a world of 10 or 12 billion years old which came about through evolutionary processes. The book never said that, but he wants the book to say what he can use to deny God, and so he sees things in the book which are the figment of his own imagination. The interesting and silly part of it all is that he is so adamant about it that he tells people who can read the book that they are fools, and he even tries to kill these people because he is so determined to read what he wants in the book.

But that is the situation.

Nevertheless, in spite of himself, he can make out just enough

⁴ 1 Cor. 2:14: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

⁵ Cf. our last article on this subject for a discussion of what is meant by these "remnants," as they are referred to in our Confession.

from the book to realize that all his mis-readings are really wrong. It makes no difference now whether he is an “atheistic” biologist in the University of Southern California or whether he is a professing Christian in a Bible School. He can make out enough to see that the book says two things: God alone is God; and, God alone must be served. Those two things he can see. But that is exactly what he hates. And so, although he can make that much out (chiefly because God shoves his nose so deeply into the book that he can’t help but see it — “God hath showed it unto him...,” Rom. 1:19), he “holds the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18), and claims that the world had its origin in a “big bang” and that man came from a monkey. It is all rather silly to claim to find such preposterous things in the book, but it is the silliness of unbelief for which a man goes to hell.

It must be understood that this is all that a man can see apart from salvation through grace in Jesus Christ. There is no common grace which gives him better eyesight. There is no “revelation” by which he truly experiences God’s favor and love and begins to long for God and seek after greater truth. The picture I have drawn is all that can be said. That is the way it is, according to Scripture and the confessions.

You must see this man clearly, for it is a self-portrait. He sits bowed over this book, and he not only thinks that he is able to read it with ease, but he finds these preposterous and utterly silly notions and passes them off as what he finds in the book. He lifts his head from the book, looks as wise as an owl, assumes a know-it-all air, pontificates about his great skills in reading the book, and pronounces that the book says that the creation started with a big bang. If it were not so horribly evil, you would pat the man on the back, and suggest indulgently that he get a pair of glasses before he claims certainty of what the book says. But you have to be careful because he is fierce, and he will turn on you in fury if you suggest he is mis-reading the book — a fury which clearly demonstrates that deep down he knows full well that he is deliberately perverting what the book says.

It is here that Scripture enters in.

As we all know, Calvin has an astonishingly apt figure to describe what the relation between Book I and Book II really is.

There is a passage in Calvin’s *Institutes* which deals with this subject. It is the well-known passage in I, vi, 1 in which Calvin talks about the need of the Scriptures to understand God’s speech in creation.

He too uses the figure of a book and speaks of the Scriptures as "eyeglasses" which enable us to read the elegant book of creation. The pertinent passage reads:

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in their minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly. God therefore bestows a gift of singular value, when, for the instruction of the Church, he employs not dumb teachers merely, but opens his own sacred mouth; when he not only proclaims that some God must be worshipped, but at the same time declares that He is the God to whom worship is due; when he not only teaches his elect to have respect to God, but manifests himself as the God to whom this respect should be paid.

We ought to notice a few things about this passage.

In the first place, Calvin alters the figure somewhat. He does not only speak of Scripture as a book, but he changes the figure to refer to Scripture as a pair of eyeglasses.

In the second place, the book of creation is really impossible to read without these eyeglasses. They are indispensable for reading the book. This fact is important because it is denied by those who try to make a case for theistic evolution. They speak of two books which God wrote: the book of creation and the book of Scripture. They then set these two books side by side and talk as if both are equally clear, both are equally easy to read, both are necessary to learn the whole truth. And so both have to be harmonized.

Yet, I am not stating the case exactly correctly. They really teach that the book of creation is easier to read than the book of Scripture. Or, to use Calvin's figure: the book of Scripture can scarcely be read, but the book of creation is the pair of eyeglasses which enable us to read Scripture.

They do this because they teach that while Scripture seems to teach creation, the universe itself teaches evolutionism. And so, accepting evolutionism, we must reinterpret Scripture in the light of creation.

But let us not forget that they are turning the whole truth upside down because they do not want to admit that they are blind and in need of eyeglasses. They, and this is their sin, insist that their vision is clear and unclouded without the aid of Scripture. They can see the book of which Calvin says that they can scarcely make out two consecutive words. Their sin is that they will not confess their sin. Their great blindness is that they will not admit they are blind. And this sin is committed to protect their own sense of worth and value apart from grace, their own tremendous powers of mind to uncover all the secrets locked away in creation, and to set themselves over against God with their human wisdom.

The atheist does it without apology. The theistic evolutionist does it under the guise of Christianity.

In the second place, Calvin is saying here that the gift of the spectacles of scripture is given only to God's people. He makes a point of that. "God therefore bestows a gift of singular value, when, for the instruction of the *Church*...." "... When he not only teaches his *elect* to have respect to God...."

What Calvin means, as he goes on later to explain, is this. To be able to put on the spectacles is possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Or, if I may put it a bit differently, the Holy Spirit gives us the spectacles, and the Holy Spirit enables us to put them on. This is true because only one in whom the Holy Spirit works by His grace can *want* the Scriptures; can believe that they are the eyeglasses he needs; can truly desire to know God who is his Savior and Redeemer.

Thus the only way in which to read the book of creation (and providence) is in the light of Scripture. Everything which we discover in creation must be interpreted by Scripture. If something in creation seems to contradict Scripture, then we do not rush to Scripture to see if we can twist and distort Scripture to make it agree with the findings of science; but we recognize the fact that the book of creation is almost impossible to read. We recognize that we are reading a book that is tattered and torn, blotted and faded, and thus we are obviously reading it wrong. We admit that we are nearly blind. It is quite necessary to put on our glasses and look at creation again through these marvelous glasses.

But let it be remembered that these marvelous glasses will make it clear to us that the book of creation also speaks of Christ and

redemption through Him. The glasses enable us to see that creation was in six days of 24 hours because it was the “stage” formed by God on which to enact the drama of sin and redemption through Christ. With the glasses we will be able to see that the lion is a picture of “the Lion of Judah’s tribe”; that the sun tells us of Him who is the “Sun of righteousness who arises with healing in His wings”; that the morning star announcing so gloriously the dawn points to the “light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in our hearts.” Indeed, with these glasses we can see not only our own resurrection in the seed of corn put in the earth, but a creation which “groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,” for the creation also “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

Then the book of creation really does become an “elegant book” which leads us to contemplate the invisible things of God. For His works in creation are the same as His works in salvation. All shall be saved in Jesus Christ, so that Christ may be Lord of all.

And that saved creation is planned by God, from the very beginning of His work in forming the worlds, to be, in its glorified state, the inheritance of the elect.

The believer claims also Book I as his own. ●

Bullinger's Covenant Conception: Bilateral or Unilateral?

Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga

The doctrine of the covenant has occupied a large place in the development of the Reformed faith both on the continent and in England. The impetus for this development is to be credited largely to the Swiss reformers, especially Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). He, more than any before him, gave attention to the doctrine of the covenant and its place in the whole of theology. Bullinger is the first theologian in the history of the church to write an entire treatise devoted to the doctrine of the covenant. His *De Testamento Seu Foedere Dei Unico Et Aeterno* (*The One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God*, here after referred to as *The Covenant*) was published in Zurich in 1534. Concerning this work David Poole writes:

De Testamento did not inaugurate Reformed covenant theology; it was essentially an extension of Zwingli's main thesis. It remains, however, the first thematically developed sketch of the covenant idea.¹

Early on, the press of circumstances forced consideration of the covenant upon the Swiss reformers. It was especially the threat of the Anabaptists that became the occasion for renewed interest in the doctrine of the covenant. For Bullinger too this was the case. Much of what Bullinger has to say regarding the covenant can be found in his polemics against the Anabaptists.

As the doctrine of the covenant developed, one of the key issues that divided covenant theologians concerned the nature of the covenant itself. Was the covenant to be construed as a bilateral covenant or a

¹ David N.J. Poole, *The History of the Covenant Concept From the Bible to Johannes Cloppenburg* (San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. 106.

unilateral covenant? In my judgment, this remains today *the* issue in covenant theology. The difference between these two views may be summarized as follows:

BILATERAL

1. Pact/agreement/contract mutually entered into.
2. Conditional

UNILATERAL

1. Bond of friendship sovereignly established.
2. Unconditional.

In recent years an attempt has been made to demonstrate that from the beginning there were two distinct covenant conceptions among the Swiss reformers. On the one hand, there was Calvin and the Genevan school of thought. Governed by a rigorous predestinarianism, Calvin taught a unilateral covenant. But in distinction from Calvin, the Zurich reformers, Zwingli and especially Bullinger, taught a bilateral covenant.

This disjunction between the covenant conception of Calvin and Zwingli/Bullinger was first proposed by Leonard J. Trinterud in an article entitled "The Origins of Puritanism," published in the March 1951 issue of *Church History*.

In the Rhineland, prior to the beginnings of Calvin's work, reformation movements had begun which were dependent upon, but distinct from, the movement begun by Luther. The principal centers for this Rhineland reformation were Zurich, Basel, and Strassburg. As early as 1525 the Basel reformer Oecolampadius, in a commentary on Isaiah, had put forth the view that the eternal covenant of God with man was the law of love. This law was written on man's heart at creation, and was only expounded by the written law of the Bible. To be blessed of God man must keep this covenant by obeying this law. Here the entire law-contract structure is seen.²

It is Trinterud's thesis that the Puritan view of the covenant as contractual is to be traced to the Rhineland reformers' teaching of a bilateral covenant.

More recently, others have championed Trinterud's basic premise. It is the contention of J. Wayne Baker and Charles S. McCoy that

² Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origin of Puritanism," *Church History*, vol. 20 (1951), pp. 40, 41.

Heinrich Bullinger is the father of the bilateral covenant conception. The "federal tradition," as they refer to the bilateral covenant view, "...finds its beginning in Bullinger's work."³ In fact, Baker views this as Bullinger's unique theological contribution.

Bullinger ... posted a conditional covenant, which included the idea of testament. This distinction between the Calvinistic theology of testament and Bullinger's notion of conditional covenant is crucial in understanding Bullinger and his influence on the early Reformed tradition.⁴

But is this an accurate portrayal of Bullinger's theology of covenant? Not all have been convinced. Lyle Bierma in an article published in the *Westminster Theological Journal* entitled "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" concludes:

That Zurich and Geneva were not in agreement on all points of doctrine and ecclesiastical practice is not to be denied, but these disagreements cannot be traced to fundamentally different views of the covenant. What scholars from Trinterud to Baker have failed to realize is that *all* the sixteenth-century Reformed covenant theologians — Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Olevianus, Musculus, Ursinus, Perkins, etc. — recognized both a unilateral and a bilateral dimension to the covenant of grace within the context of a monergistic soteriology. The tension that Baker found in Bullinger's theology between salvation by grace alone and a conditional or bilateral covenant of grace is present throughout early Reformed soteriology.⁵

It is Bierma's contention, then, that the view that Bullinger taught a bilateral covenant is mistaken because there are elements in Bullinger's

³ Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 9.

⁴ J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980). Prologue, p. xxii.

⁵ Lyle Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" *Westminster Theological Journal*, 45 (1983), pp. 320, 321.

writings that support both a bilateral and a unilateral covenant conception.

In this paper I will go farther. It is my contention that the view that Bullinger is the father of the bilateral covenant is, at best, a misreading of Bullinger, and, at worst, a sad distortion of Bullinger's theology. It is my contention that Bullinger stands solidly in the unilateral covenant tradition.

Bullinger's Alleged Bilateral Covenant View

In an article published in the April 1974 issue of the *Sixteenth Century Journal*, entitled "Heinrich Bullinger and the Idea of Usury," Baker asserted Bullinger's bilateral covenant view.

In *De Testamento*, Bullinger built the concept of a bilateral, contractual covenant between God and man. The covenant was first explicitly formulated between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:1-4), at which time the conditions of the covenant were clearly stated: God would be all-sufficient, and man in return would walk before God in purity and perfection of life.⁶

Subsequently, Baker developed his thesis concerning Bullinger's bilateral covenant conception in his book, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*. He writes:

Bullinger's idea of the covenant differed, however, from Luther's and Calvin's. His was a mutual or bilateral covenant, while theirs was a unilateral testament.... Bullinger, on the other hand (that is, in distinction from Luther and Calvin, RC), used both terms *foedus* and *testamentum*, to refer to a mutual pact or covenant. Although *testamentum* also carried the meaning of last testament and promise for Bullinger, God's agreement with man included not only God's promises but also certain conditions that man was obligated to meet.⁷

It is Baker's contention that Bullinger's teaching of a bilateral covenant represents his advance over Zwingli. Although building on

⁶ J. Wayne Baker, "Heinrich Bullinger and the Idea of Usury," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 5 (April, 1974), p. 67.

⁷ Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, Prologue, pp. xxi, xxii.

Zwingli, it was especially in his insistence on a bilateral covenant that Bullinger outstripped his predecessor in Zurich.

... Bullinger strongly affirmed the bilateral nature of the covenant, the mutual responsibilities of God and man in this contract. Zwingli's lack of clarity is in contrast with Bullinger's explicit assertion of a conditional covenant.⁸

And again:

Zwingli's tentative statements about the conditional nature of the covenant are hardly comparable to Bullinger's assertions of a bilateral covenant in *De testamento*.⁹

Summarizing his position, Baker writes:

The vital Reformation doctrines of *sola fide* and *sola gratia* found two different modes of expression within early Reformed circles. The most prevalent was the Augustinian idea of testament, linked with an affirmation of double predestination, which found its classic statement in the writings of Calvin. The other Reformed tradition, existing alongside the more heavily predestinarian Calvinist tradition, was Bullinger's notion of conditional covenant.¹⁰

Baker's assertion concerning Bullinger's bilateral covenant conception is reiterated in his *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition*, co-authored by Charles S. McCoy.

⁸ Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 15.

⁹ Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 18. (Although Baker is representative of those who hold to the position that there is disparity between the covenant conception of the reformers of Geneva and the reformers of Zurich, there are those whose position is that there is actually also disagreement between the reformers of Zurich themselves, that is, between Zwingli and Bullinger. This is the position of Robert Letham in his *Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dordt*. Following quotations will give indication of this.)

¹⁰ Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 26.

As theological teaching developed in the era of the Reformation, three distinctive ways emerged to express the Protestant doctrine of salvation by grace alone (*sola fide* and *sola gratia*). The first was Luther's distinction between law and gospel, along with his emphasis on the bondage of the will and passive righteousness. The second was Calvin's doctrine of double predestination and election, which carefully protected both *sola fide* and *sola gratia* and tended to preclude any concept of a conditional or bilateral covenant. The third way was Bullinger's federal pattern, with the notion of a bilateral covenant as the vehicle through which God worked with the human race in history.¹¹

Baker and McCoy go on to express the opinion that:

While the federal perspective tended to blunt the rational, logical thrust of high Calvinism, some seventeenth-century federal theologians felt uncomfortable with the idea that the covenant of grace was totally unconditional. They returned to Bullinger's earlier perspective and restored the conditional element in the covenant of grace. Among them were Johannes Cocceius and Moise Amyraut as well as the federal theologians in England and New England who developed the idea of preparation.¹²

Although drawing back from the more extreme position of Baker and McCoy, Douglas Stouts in his Ph.D. dissertation presented to King's College, Cambridge, entitled *The Origins and Early Development of the Reformed Idea of the Covenant*, also concludes that Bullinger held to a bilateral, conditional covenant. He credits Bullinger for having

... brought together the two sides of the covenant — which Zwingli had asserted, but never attempted to reconcile — and united them within the rubric of a single covenant with conditions that had to be fulfilled by God, on the one hand, and man, on the other....¹³

¹¹. McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead*, p. 23.

¹². McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead*, p. 26.

¹³. Douglas Andrew Stoute, *The Origins and Early Development of the Reformed Idea of the Covenant*, (Ph.D. dissertation, King's College, Cambridge, 1979), p. 136.

According to Stoute, although Bullinger "... was always careful to emphasize its (i.e., the covenant's, RC) essentially gracious character..." he was nevertheless "... willing to speak of the covenant as though it were a bilateral agreement between God and man...."¹⁴ Stoute's conclusion is:

To the ordered mind, then, Bullinger's handling of the conditional nature of the covenant within the framework of a predestinarian theology leaves much to be desired. In the years to come Reformed theologians would continue to grapple with the problem, but theirs was an impossible task and, in the final analysis, they would leave themselves open to the charge of having introduced pelagianism into Reformed theology through the back door. But they cannot be held solely to blame; the seeds of this development were sown by the Fathers of the Reformed tradition (including Bullinger, RC).¹⁵

Robert Letham is another who advances the position that Bullinger held to a bilateral covenant conception. Although he demurs from those who contend that Bullinger's view of the covenant was influenced by a repudiation of double predestination, it being Letham's view that Bullinger clearly held to double predestination, he nevertheless is in agreement with those who identify Bullinger's covenant conception as bilateral. Commenting on the placement of Bullinger's discussion of the covenant in *The Decades*, Letham writes:

The covenant is discussed midway through the third decade on the law. This at once alerts us to the possibility that it is again seen in conditional terms with an accent on our obligations to fulfill the conditions prescribed. That covenant is not located in a section on election or the grace of God would argue against an unconditional or testamentary foundation.¹⁶

¹⁴. Stoute, *Origins and Early Development*, p. 154.

¹⁵. Stoute, *Origins and Early Development*, p. 156.

¹⁶. Robert W.A. Letham, *Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dordt*, 2 volumes (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, Faculty of Divinity, February 1979), p. 62.

A bit later in the same work, Letham holds forth this same conviction.

Firmer though his thinking on election becomes in his mature thought, Bullinger finds it difficult entirely to extricate himself from his earlier contractual and conditional formulations of God's grace. While never a covenant theologian in the full technical sense (covenant was only once the key structuring concept of his theology), the suggestions he makes in his treatment of that subject betray a sympathy with a basically bilateral schema which is at heart inimical to an identification of faith and assurance.¹⁷

It is my contention that the portrayal of Bullinger's covenant conception as bilateral is not accurate. I am convinced that an overall consideration of Bullinger's theology instead supports the notion that Bullinger held a unilateral covenant.

Bullinger's Description of the Covenant

In his description of and references to the covenant scattered throughout his published works, Bullinger often speaks of the covenant in distinctively unilateral terms. By this I mean that Bullinger uses language that expresses the thinking that the covenant is established sovereignly by God. Man does not and man is not able to cooperate with God in the establishment of the covenant.

In *The Covenant* (1534), Bullinger writes:

The ineffable mercy and divine grace of the eternal God are proven, first, in that God offers this covenant *not in any way because of the merits of humans* but rather out of the sheer goodness which is God's nature. I do not know whether humans are capable either of conceiving this mystery fully or conveying how praiseworthy it is. For what greater deed than this has even been heard of in the world, that the eternal power and majesty, the immortal all-knowing God, the creator of the universe, in whom all things subsist, by whom all things exist, and through whom all things are preserved, *joined himself in covenant with miserable mortals corrupted by sin. This indisputably is the origin of our religion*

¹⁷. Letham, *Saving Faith*, p. 75.

*and its primary point: we are saved solely through the goodness and mercy of God.*¹⁸

In *Der Alt Glaub (The Old Faith)* (1538), Bullinger speaks of God's renewing of the covenant with Noah.

Noe also was he, with whom God first renewed the covenant made with Adam. For it is but one covenant only; even the foresaid promise and end, *made by God unto Adam*. Howbeit, the same covenant was afterward at certain times renewed by reason of certain occasions. Here might Noe have thought that all the world and all men should utterly have been undone; forasmuch as the Lord said, "I am determined to destroy all flesh." Therefore immediately he addeth moreover, and saith: "But with thee will I set up my covenant," that is to say: "*Whatsoever pertaineth to my covenant, and what I have promised Adam already, the same will I surely and constantly make good....*"¹⁹

While identifying circumcision and baptism, Bullinger writes in *The Decades* (1549) that both of these are signs of God's covenant, who "... by his Spirit cuts from us whatsoever things do hinder the mutual league and amity betwixt God and us; *He also doth give and increase in us both hope and charity in faith, so that we may be knit and joined to God in life everlasting.*"²⁰

Bullinger's *Summa Christenlicher Religion* (1556), later translated into English as *Common Places of the Christian Religion*, contains several significant references to the covenant.

¹⁸. Heinrich Bullinger, *The One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God (De Testamento seu Foedere Dei Unico et Aeterno)*, translated by Charles McCoy and J. Wayne Baker and included as Part Two of their *Fountainhead of Federalism*, pp. 104, 105. (Note: All underlining in this and in following quotations is my own, RC.)

¹⁹. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Old Faith (Der Alt Gloub)*, translated by Myles Coverdale in 1547 and reprinted by the Parker Society in *Writings and Translations of Myles Coverdale*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1844), pp. 32, 33.

²⁰. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades* (ed. Thomas Harding, 4 vols.; Cambridge: The University Press, 1849-52) vol. 3, p. 174.

In Book 2, chapter viii, Bullinger introduces the doctrine of the covenant.

Therefore forasmuch as man through God's help is now freed and delivered from everlasting damnation, from sin, and bondage of the devil, God challengeth him unto himself and straightly bindeth him, that all his life afterward he serve and worship God alone, look unto him, trust in him, obey his will, and have nothing to do with the devil, and all his kingdom, and that if it so come to pass, that he do err and fall, that therefore he be not without hope of pardon, but that trusting unto God his bountifulness, he repent, and stand unto his mercy, and follow God.

And *this is that covenant* which in Holy Scriptures God is said to have made with mankind, which first was begun with Abraham, put in writing by Moses and lastly established and confirmed by Christ.²¹

In the same book and chapter, Bullinger later says:

And we are bound unto God, and joined in league *through his free mercy* (as hath been said) by faith. Therefore the covenant of God and true religion are all one. And all they are religious, which being federates joined in league with God, do cleave unto his Word and honor and serve him despising all other things.²²

In characteristically unilateral language, Bullinger also refers to God's covenant in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), in Chapter XX, "Of Holy Baptism."

For to be baptized in the name of Christ is *to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance, of the sons of God....* Baptism, therefore, does call to mind and keep in remembrance the great benefit of God performed to mankind. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, does freely purge us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him does adopt us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant *does*

²¹. Heinrich Bullinger, *Common Places of the Christian Religion* (*Summa Christenlicher Religion*), translated by John Stockwood, Book 2, Chapter 7.

²². Bullinger, *Common Places*, Book 2, Chapter 7.

join us to himself, and does enrich us with divers gifts, that we might live a new life.²³

Examples could be multiplied. But I believe the point is established that when Bullinger referred to the essence of the covenant, he referred to it in consistently unilateral language.

Bullinger's Understanding of the "Conditions" of the Covenant

The most compelling argument for the position that Bullinger taught a bilateral covenant is the fact that he often speaks of the *conditions* of the covenant. For Bullinger the covenant is in some sense a conditional covenant.

Commenting on Genesis 7:1-14, Bullinger writes in *The Covenant*:

These are the words of the covenant, not written down verbatim but brought together and united in a summary. If you examine these words carefully, you will see that God has acted according to human custom at every point. First, the passage explains who bound themselves together, namely, God and the descendants of Abraham. Second, the text states *the conditions* under which they bound themselves together, specifically that God wished to be the God of the descendants of Abraham and that the descendants of Abraham ought to walk uprightly before God.²⁴

A bit later in the same work, Bullinger writes:

Now we come to the *conditions of the covenant*. Those who are connected by covenants are joined together by certain regulations, so that each of the parties might know its duty, namely, what responsibilities the primary party might have toward the other, and what in return the primary party might expect from the other.²⁵

²³. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, "The Second Helvetic Confession," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 889, 890.

²⁴. Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 104.

²⁵. Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 108.

Bullinger is at pains to emphasize the calling of those who stand in a covenant relationship to God.

The other part of the covenant, as we have said, explains what God in turn demands from us and what sort of people we should be, which the Lord no less diligently and clearly has placed before our eyes in Christ. He prescribed in the *conditions of the covenant*: “Walk before me and be upright.”²⁶

In speaking of the inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant, Bullinger says:

In the meantime, however, their offspring, that is, their children, have by no means been excluded from the covenant. They are excluded, however, if having reached the age of reason they neglect the *conditions of the covenant*.²⁷

In a passage in which he underscores the spiritual nature of the blessings of the covenant, Bullinger concludes:

From all these promises we are able to gain a full understanding that this God is the highest good, that he is our God, that he is all-sufficient, that he has made a covenant with us, and that the promises and *conditions* offered in that covenant are not only material but also spiritual.²⁸

About the Old Testament saints, with application to the New Testament people of God, Bullinger writes in *The Decades* concerning the enjoyment of the benefits of the covenant:

... the blessing and partaking of all good things pertaineth to the circumcised, *if* they abide faithful to the Lord God entered into covenant with men.²⁹

²⁶ Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 116.

²⁷ Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 106.

²⁸ Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 110.

²⁹ Bullinger, *The Decades*, vol. 4, p. 321.

Is not Bullinger's insistence on the conditions of the covenant proof positive that Bullinger held to a bilateral covenant conception? Is not a conditional covenant necessarily a bilateral covenant?

Letham equates the two.

His (Bullinger's, RC) full-scale work on the covenant discloses a position noticeably different from that of Zwingli and Oecolampadius, since he defines it in a conditional and bilateral sense.³⁰

And again:

In general, whereas Zwingli stresses election and thinks of covenant as unilateral and unconditional Bullinger almost ignores election and defines covenant as bilateral and conditional.³¹

But is "conditional" necessarily "bilateral"? My answer to this question is, "No." At least in Bullinger's case, the conditions of the covenant are not to be understood in terms of a bilateral covenant.

The critical issue concerns what Bullinger meant by "conditions" of the covenant. Did he mean by condition a prerequisite to the covenant fulfilled by man, or did he mean a stipulation imposed by God on man in the covenant? Did he mean by condition that there was something that man must do in order to be received by God into the covenant, or did he mean by condition the responsibility towards God that the members of the covenant have? Did he mean by condition the human contribution to the establishment of the covenant, or did he underscore the God-given and God-ordained way in which the covenant is realized and maintained?

The answer in every case, I am convinced, is the latter and not the former. By the conditions of the covenant, Bullinger did not intend to teach that man is an equal partner to God, with whom he cooperates in establishing the covenant. But Bullinger intended to teach what our Reformed "Baptism Form" calls our "part" in the covenant."

... namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our

³⁰. Letham, *Saving Faith*, p. 54.

³¹. Letham, *Saving Faith*, p. 55.

souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.³²

Bullinger's conception of the covenant is not that man's place in the covenant and enjoyment of the covenant blessings depends on his initiative. The covenant is not conditional in the sense that although God does all He can to establish the covenant, it remains in the power of the sinner whether or not he will be included in the covenant. Faith and obedience, for Bullinger, are not conditions *unto* the covenant, but the response both demanded of God and worked by God in His covenant people.

In a passage already cited from *The Decades* Bullinger writes:

... the Spirit cuts from us whatsoever things do hinder the mutual league [covenant] and amity betwixt God and us; *He also doth give and increase in us both hope and charity in faith*, so that we may be knit and joined to God in everlasting life.³³

Bullinger was an avowed enemy of free will. Concerning fallen man, he states in the Second Helvetic Confession, that "... his will, which before was free, is now become a servile will."³⁴ He goes on: "Therefore man, not as yet regenerate, has no free will to good, no strength to perform that which is good."³⁵ Consistent with his rejection of free will, Bullinger insisted that faith is a gift of God. "And this faith is a mere gift of God, because God alone of his power does give it to his elect, according to measure; and that when, to whom and how much he will."³⁶ Thus, "... good works (which are good indeed) proceed from

³². "Form for the Administration of Baptism," *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 85.

³³. Bullinger, *The Decades*, vol. 3, p. 174.

³⁴. Schaff, "The Second Helvetic Confession," vol. 3, p. 845.

³⁵. Schaff, "The Second Helvetic Confession," vol. 3, p. 845.

³⁶. Schaff, "The Second Helvetic Confession," vol. 3, p. 865.

a living faith by the Holy Spirit....”³⁷ And “... the works which we do are accepted and allowed of God through faith; because they who do them please God by faith in Christ, and also the works themselves are done by the grace of God through his holy Spirit.”³⁸

Baker's assessment of Zwingli's position would seem to apply with equal validity to Bullinger:

For Zwingli the fulfillment of the human obligation was not a condition in the literal sense — it demonstrated the prior faith that was a gift to the elect.³⁹

It is because he embraces this understanding of Bullinger's covenant conditions that Poole writes:

Although human response to God's covenant is required, the covenant as advocated by Bullinger is anything but bilateral in character.⁴⁰

Bierma is right in his conclusion:

For Bullinger, therefore, as for Zwingli, the benefits of God's covenant grace do not ultimately depend on faith and obedience; they include faith and obedience.⁴¹

Bullinger's View of Predestination and its Impact on His Covenant Conception

One of the arguments often put forth in support of the contention that Bullinger taught a bilateral covenant is that Bullinger was not a

³⁷. Schaff, “The Second Helvetic Confession,” vol. 3, p. 865.

³⁸. Schaff, “The Second Helvetic Confession,” vol. 3, p. 867.

³⁹. Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 16.

⁴⁰. Poole, *History Covenant Concept*, p. 115.

⁴¹. Bierma, “Two Traditions?” p. 313.

rigorous predestinarian. Baker and McCoy are fond of referring to Bullinger's view as "a moderate single predestination."⁴²

Baker writes in his book, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*:

Predestination was the second important matter of disagreement in Reformed Protestantism, and it was closely related to the issue of testament and covenant. The key Reformation principles of justification by faith alone through grace alone seemed endangered by the idea of a bilateral covenant. The Protestant logic appeared to be on the side of a theology of testament [unilateral covenant]. Calvin's theology of testament within the confines of double predestination clearly avoided any weakening of the distinctive Protestant doctrine of justification. For Calvin, predestination implemented *sola fide* and protected *sola gratia*. Bullinger, while not avoiding the issue, did not attempt to solve the tensions, which he thought were also found in Scripture, between conditional covenant and *sola gratia*. For Bullinger, the covenant was the exclusive vehicle through which God worked in history with His people. Bullinger held to a conditional covenant on the one hand and to *sola gratia* encased within a carefully stated doctrine of single predestination on the other hand. He interpreted both *sola fide* and *sola gratia* in covenantal terms, without falling into the semi-Pelagian stance that logic might have seemed to demand.⁴³

In their *Fountainhead of Federalism*, Baker and McCoy write concerning Bullinger:

He held to a doctrine of single predestination. His approach may seem at times to verge on universalism, but he always took care to guard God's free grace. He dealt with election within the context of the covenant that God had made with the entire human race. Having accepted the covenant sign of baptism, humans obligated themselves to fulfill the covenant conditions of faith and love. If they met the conditions, they belonged to the elect. Bullinger stayed carefully on this practical, historical level; he was content to leave unresolved the inherent tension between his

⁴² Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 29. (Note: This is but one instance of the frequent use of this term in this book and in *Fountainhead*.)

⁴³ Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, Prologue, pp. xxii, xxiii.

understanding of the biblical teachings of a single predestination and the universal atonement within the context of the covenant.⁴⁴

Baker and McCoy go on to assert that "Bullinger did not so much as mention predestination in *The Covenant*."⁴⁵

David Weir in his *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* also takes the position that Bullinger not only held to a mild predestination but even repudiated reprobation.

During the period 1550-60 these matters (of predestination and providence, RC) were also causing problems in Zurich, England, and Scotland. The Zurich controversy culminated in 1560 with Heinrich Bullinger's rejection of the double decree of predestination (i.e., double predestination).⁴⁶

Is this an accurate presentation of Bullinger's view of predestination? I am convinced that it is not.

It is one thing to say that Bullinger's view of predestination was a more moderate view than that of Calvin. It is quite another thing to hold that Bullinger's view differed essentially from that of Calvin. It is one thing to say that Bullinger expressed concern over some of Calvin's statements regarding reprobation. It is quite another thing to hold that Bullinger repudiated reprobation and taught a "single predestination." It is one thing to say that Bullinger was concerned in his teaching of predestination that God not be made the author of sin and that human responsibility be preserved. It is quite another thing to hold that in order to avoid making God the author of sin and in order to maintain human responsibility Bullinger rejected the doctrine of double predestination.

Let Bullinger speak for himself. In *The Decades* he writes:

⁴⁴. McCoy and Baker, *Fountain head*, p. 25.

⁴⁵. McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead*, p. 25.

⁴⁶. David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 80.

And the predestination of God is the eternal decree of God, whereby he hath ordained either to save or destroy men; a most certain end of life and death being appointed unto them. Whereupon also it is elsewhere called a fore-appointment.⁴⁷

Again:

Furthermore, God by his eternal and unchangeable counsel hath fore-appointed who are to be saved, and who are to be condemned.⁴⁸

And again:

Therefore, if you ask me whether you have been elected to live or predestined to death, that is, whether you are of the number of those to be damned or to be saved, I respond simply from the evangelical and apostolic Scripture: if you have fellowship with Christ, you have been predestined to life and you are of the number of the elect; but if you are estranged from Christ, however strong you might appear to be in virtues, you have been predestined to death or foreknown, as they say, to condemnation.⁴⁹

Bullinger had considerable correspondence with the English minister Bartholomew Traheron regarding the doctrine of predestination. In their correspondence, Bullinger is at pains to avoid the blasphemy of making God the author of sin. Does his resolve to avoid this danger cause him to draw back from affirming double predestination? Not at all.

Predestination, preordination or predetermination is that arrangement of God by which He appointed all things to a definite goal, but especially man as the lord of all things, and this by His holy and just plan, judgment or decree. Now also the election of God is from eternity, by which He indeed *elected some to life and others to death*. There is no other reason for election and predestination except the good and just will of God

⁴⁷. Bullinger, *The Decades*, vol. 3, p. 185.

⁴⁸. Bullinger, *The Decades*, vol. 3, p. 186.

⁴⁹. Bullinger, *The Decades*, vol. 3, p. 187.

saving the elect without cause but damning and rejecting the reprobate with cause.⁵⁰

Baker's response to this statement by Bullinger of his view of predestination seems only to indicate his own prejudice against the doctrine of double predestination: "Although this bare definition might be seen as an affirmation of double predestination, Bullinger clearly did not mean it as such."⁵¹

One wonders whether this same prejudice does not explain Baker's rash judgment that Bullinger does not so much as mention predestination in *The Covenant*. Not only can it be argued that Bullinger's view of predestination overarches all that he says in *The Covenant*, but he does in fact refer explicitly to predestination. At one point he asks the rhetorical question:

Now is it probable that the most merciful God acted less favorably and more harshly toward our children after he sent the Savior than he acted toward those children whom he had *chosen* as his possession before Christ had been sent?⁵²

And although not his own words, it is plain that Bullinger is in agreement with Oecolampadius when he takes the following quotation from him.

Moreover, Johannes Oecolampadius, in his published commentary on Jeremiah, explains it almost in the same way: "Before God, that eternal covenant which is arranged differently according to the diversity of the times is one. And also in relation to the inner human realities, it always has been one and will remain one ... as it is in (God's) eternal predestination...."⁵³

⁵⁰. Taken from Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 37.

⁵¹. Baker, *Bullinger and Covenant*, p. 37.

⁵². Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 108.

⁵³. Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 127, 128.

Even though he shares the idea that Bullinger held to a bilateral covenant, Letham at least is to be credited with scholarly honesty in affirming that Bullinger held to double predestination. In reference to *The Decades*, Letham writes that "A clear doctrine of double predestination is unfolded."⁵⁴ And in reference to "The Second Helvetic Confession" he states:

... election occupies a much more prominent and significant place than hitherto, providing further evidence that Bullinger's appreciation of election had grown in his more mature thought. Double predestination is clearly taught.⁵⁵

Although it may be true, therefore, that Bullinger held to a more moderate view of predestination, it is not true that he held to a single predestination. And since it is not true that Bullinger held to a single predestination, neither can it be argued that on the basis of a teaching of single predestination Bullinger held to a bilateral rather than a unilateral covenant.

Richard Muller seems justified in discrediting those who attempt to prove polarity between Bullinger and Calvin on the issue of predestination as holding to

an alternative view which seeks unsuccessfully to pose Bullinger's duopleuric definition against the predestinarian theology of Geneva....⁵⁶

Muller's assessment is:

Whereas Bullinger, more than Calvin, seems to stress the mutual character of covenant and the necessity for obedience in covenant, this stress is not an indication of widely divergent patterns in Reformed theology. Bullinger nowhere intends to disrupt the basic monergism of

⁵⁴. Letham, *Saving Faith*, p. 61.

⁵⁵. Letham, *Saving Faith*, p. 72.

⁵⁶. Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1986), p. 197.

the Reformed system. Later Reformed writers were able to utilize both the monopleuric and the duopleuric definition within a single system as representative of the two poles of Christian life, salvation by grace and human responsibility. Duopleuric language describes not man's entrance into covenant but his life under the covenant ... his (Bullinger's, RC) view of covenant does not conflict with the *sola gratia* of the decree. Synergism is definitely rejected when Bullinger defines justification as given *gratia* by the grace of Christ to faith and then defines faith, the condition of justification and the source from which all good works flow, as the gift of God.⁵⁷

Two Further Considerations

There are two further considerations that lend support to the idea that Bullinger held not a bilateral but a unilateral covenant.

The first of these considerations is that Bullinger frequently referred to the covenant in terms of the family. In *The Common Places*, Book 8, chapter 5, in regard to baptism, Bullinger writes:

To be baptized into the name of (the) Lord is to be written and received into the covenant of God, and because that we are the sons of God, by grace and adoption to have this name given to us, that afterward we may be and be named the sons of God.⁵⁸

Again:

Wherefore they which have been baptized, and whoever are baptized do now receive the sign of the covenant and sons of God....⁵⁹

Concerning baptism, Bullinger writes in the Second Helvetic Confession:

For to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and

⁵⁷. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 41.

⁵⁸. Bullinger, *Common Places*, p. 197.

⁵⁹. Bullinger, *Common Places*, p. 198.

received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance, of the sons of God....⁶⁰

That Bullinger refers to the covenant in terms of the family argues in favor of his holding to a unilateral covenant view. Although every child has the calling to love and honor his parents, no child cooperates in any way to make himself a part of his family. It is not *because* he loves and honors his parents that he is taken into the family. His activity is not at all a factor in determining that he shall be a member of his family, or that so-and-so shall be his parents. So it is in the covenant and family of God.

A second compelling consideration in favor of understanding Bullinger to teach a unilateral covenant is the fact of his insistence on the inclusion of children in the covenant. In words that are strikingly similar to the Reformed "Baptism Form," Bullinger writes in *The Common Places*:

Because that the children of Christians are *in the covenant*, and Christ also is the Savior of infants; and when as the promise of forgiveness of sins (as the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament do witness) in which they are born, doth also pertain unto them, doubtless baptism is not to be denied them, being the sign of the covenant and sacrament of our purification and renewing, as in another place we have more at large declared.⁶¹

In *The Covenant*, Bullinger asks:

Who are the seed of Abraham? And indeed one may easily get in trouble here unless one proceeds on the royal highway. For those people who consider only the conditions of the covenant and in fact disregard the grace and promise of God exclude infants from the covenant. It is true that children not only do not observe the terms of the covenant but also do not even understand those terms.⁶²

⁶⁰. Schaff, "The Second Helvetic Confession," vol. 3, p. 889.

⁶¹. Bullinger, *Common Places*, p. 199.

⁶². Bullinger, *The Covenant*, p. 106.

If children, as children, are included in God's covenant, the covenant must be unilateral and cannot be bilateral. It is clearly Bullinger's position that the children of believers are included in the covenant of God.

Conclusion

The issue of a bilateral versus a unilateral covenant is only an application of the age-old question of the relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. How do these two relate to each other in regard to the establishment of the covenant?

The question is not: Does man work? But the question is: Does man work in order to bring about the covenant, or does he work because he is in the covenant? The question is not: Does man have obligations? But the question is: Does man carry out his obligations in order to be included in the covenant, or does he carry out those obligations within the covenant and out of thankfulness to the covenant God? The question is not: Does man have a duty to fulfill? But the question is: Does man fulfill his duty as a condition to inclusion in the covenant, or does he fulfill his duty because he is a member of God's covenant?

Bullinger's position seems clear enough. I believe that an honest evaluation of Bullinger's writings yields the conclusion that the great reformer of Zurich held not a bilateral but a unilateral covenant conception. ●

Book Reviews

God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love, by Donald G. Bloesch. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995. 329 pp. \$24.99 (cloth). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The Reformed theologian will read Donald Bloesch's projected seven-volume set of dogmatics with pleasure and profit. Bloesch, who describes his stance as "centrist evangelical," intends to develop an evangelical theology that interacts with contemporary thought without altogether breaking with the theology of the Reformation and the theology of the early, post-apostolic church. Indeed, it is both a strength and a weakness of the book that Bloesch devotes so much space to quoting, referring to, and positioning himself in relation to contemporary theologians. The strength is that the reader learns much about the present theological scene and the theologians on this scene. The weakness is that there is not enough positive development of the main topics of theology. Bloesch's treatment, e.g., of predestination, from every point of view a fundamental part of one's doctrine of God, is woefully scanty. In only four and a half pages, Bloesch deals with

"God as Elector and Persuader" (pp. 69-73), although there is the stray reference to predestination elsewhere.

This is the third volume of the projected seven-volume set. The first was theological prolegomena, *A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology*. The second was Bloesch's doctrine of Scripture, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation*. Both were reviewed in this journal (April, 1994, pp. 69, 70; April, 1996, pp. 72-75). The third volume is devoted to theology proper, the doctrine of God. In his preface, the author states that he regards "this particular volume ... as perhaps the most important in this series" (p. 13).

Following an introduction in which Bloesch sets his theology in the contemporary scene, the book treats God's being; God's self-revelation; God's attributes; and the doctrine of the Trinity. In two concluding chapters, Bloesch critiques both "the biblical-classical synthesis" and "the biblical-modern synthesis." He is critical of both these syntheses (about the former, one should say *alleged* synthesis). In a brief epilogue, he opts

for a "biblical-prophetic" theology: "I am not interested in returning to an earlier age, nor am I mesmerized by the present age" (p. 261).

There is pointed criticism of contemporary errors, including the feminism that refuses to call God "He"; the panentheistic notion that God needs the creation; and the dissolving of God's holiness into love. In opposition to a strong current in modern theology, Bloesch defends God's simplicity. He is right to relate simplicity inseparably to God's spirituality: "To affirm God's spirituality is also to affirm his simplicity" (p. 90). Bloesch declines to minimize the perfection of holiness in relation to divine love. "Holiness together with love is the quintessential attribute of God" (p. 139). In keeping with his method, Bloesch treats these two attributes together, "Holiness & Love."

There is a succinct, incisive analysis of the difference between the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit and the Reformation doctrine of grace (pp. 224-28).

Nevertheless, the Reformed theologian must vigorously dissent from important elements of Bloesch's theology. To read the work with pleasure and profit is by no means to read it with assent.

There is no place in Bloesch's doctrine of an almighty God for

predestination. Bloesch dismisses Reformed orthodoxy on this truth as "causal determinism" (p. 58). His brief treatment of election is long enough for him to declare, without a shred of biblical evidence, that "God's predestination is not an irreversible decree made and completed outside time but an electing grace that is realized in time" (p. 72; cf. the remark on Romans 9:13 on pp. 141, 142).

The denial of predestination as an eternal decree involves Bloesch in other grievous errors. God's omnipotence is compromised by the affirmation that God willingly makes Himself dependent on men, so that they cooperate with Him in carrying out His plan. This requires the loss of immutability. God "can change himself." He does, in fact, change himself in reaction to our "response to his gracious initiative" (p. 95). Bloesch is a representative of the powerful movement in modern theology that strips God of such attributes as omnipotence and immutability by having Him Himself voluntarily surrender these attributes, supposedly in the interests of His grace. The result is still, however, that God is not truly almighty and that He is changeable. Since He is His attributes, the result is still, in reality, that He is no longer God. The only difference from the older error is that

God has voluntarily "ungodded" Himself.

Acknowledging that the alternative would be the "double predestination" of the "older theology," Bloesch opts for universalism: all will be saved in the end. Divine wrath is only the chastising of sinners in love.

To which the question must be put, "What then of hell?"

The wrath of God is merely provisional, not eternal.

To which the question must be put, "What then of hell?"

Divine love overcomes wrath for everyone, for Christ died for all.

To which the question must be put, "What then of hell?"

"Hell is not the final word." The reason, according to Bloesch, in a strange phrase, is that there will be "the penetration of hell by divine grace" (pp. 142-145).

Bloesch's doctrine of the Trinity is also heretical. Clearly betraying his Barthian affinities, Bloesch defends the Sabellian, or modalistic, conception: one person manifesting Himself in three modes of being.

The persons of the Holy Trinity connote agencies of relation rather than separate personalities. God in his essence is one, but the way he interacts within himself is threefold. In the

Godhead there is one being but three modes of existence. There is one person but three agencies of relationship (p. 185).

He attacks the classic doctrine as confessed in the Athanasian and Reformation creeds: "To assert that there are three independent persons interacting with one another is to fall into the heresy of tritheism" (p. 185). "Independent" is a pejorative, misleading term. No orthodox theologian ever supposed that the persons are "independent." Similar is Bloesch's comment in footnote 96 on page 300, where he repudiates the Trinity "as three separate (*sic*) persons or three distinct personalities."

Bloesch is a disciple of the neo-orthodox theologians, Barth and Brunner. His doctrine of Scripture is not faith's acceptance of an inspired book (see my review of volume two). And he is far too open to the modern theological trends which, in part, he criticizes.

Startling is Bloesch's denunciation, on the opening page, of Reformed theologian Herman Hoeksema: "A work of this kind will necessarily have a polemical thrust. I sternly oppose those who would make God culpable for human misery (such as Herman Hoeksema...)." From Donald Bloesch, who remarkably maintains his equanimity when dealing

with even the most outrageous of heresies, this is severe condemnation indeed. Wherever did he read that Hoeksema made "God culpable for human misery": There is no quotation from or reference to any of Hoeksema's works in the book. It is apparent that Bloesch knows Hoeksema only through

James Daane's *The Freedom of God*. To hold up Hoeksema for condemnation on this basis is unfair. Daane was an avowed critic of Hoeksema. Nor was he a friend of the (decretal) theology of the Canons of Dordt which he, like Hoeksema, was bound by a vow to uphold. ♦

Who We Are: Our Dignity as Human, by Paul K. Jewett with Marguerite Shuster. Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1996. Pp. xiv+487. \$32 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is the second volume of the Fuller Seminary theologian's systematic theology. The first volume on theology proper was *God, Creation, & Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1991). A sub-title identifies both volumes as "A Neo-Evangelical Theology."

Jewett died before he could complete volume two. A former student of his, Marguerite Shuster, completed the book. Her hand is clearly evident in certain places. At one point there is a reference to the English translation of Charlotte von Kirschbaum's book on women. This did not appear until 1996. Jewett died in 1991. Shuster also intersperses the text with her

sermons, evidently to demonstrate that and how the doctrine is to be preached.

The book covers only part of anthropology, the creation of man, or, to use Jewett's deliberately chosen term, "humankind." Most of the book is devoted to "humankind's" creation in the image of God. This is the dignity in the title. In connection with the image, Jewett treats at length the relation of male and female, sex, marriage, divorce, remarriage, single life, and homosexuality. This runs to more than 200 pages of the 470 pages of text. The last 120 pages deal with the current "ecological crisis" under the rubric, "The Dominion of Humankind."

Glaringly apparent is the imbalance of this dogmatical work. Doctrine, more specifically the knowledge of God, takes very much a back seat to consideration

of the social problems that are high on the world's agenda at present. This is a work on racism, sexual problems, and ecology. The image of God is brought in to solve the problems.

Jewett was learned. He knew the material. Quotations from philosophers and poets are apt and interesting. He retained enough evangelical theology to be helpful here and there. Some of the exposition of man's creation as male and female and, with this, of marriage is provocative and useful.

But the "neo-" in his "neo-evangelical theology" has virtually destroyed the "-evangelical theology," that is, the gospel.

Really, it is frightening.

As Jewett's "humankind," rigorous use of the feminine pronoun (it is never "the theologian, *he*," but always "the theologian, *she*"), and inclusion of the sermons of a female minister warn, feminism has abolished the biblical teaching of the calling of the wife in marriage. She is not to be submissive to her husband as one under his authority; no marriage form should require the bride to obey.

Jewett justifies abortion "in the early stages of pregnancy" of all unborn children for any reason whatever. By "early stages," he means from conception to six or seven months. Until then, the un-

born child is not a human. The sole judge of the morality of the act is the woman's conscience. At the same time, Jewett is opposed to capital punishment.

Divorce and remarriage are permitted in the church for any reason. Otherwise we become "legalistic."

Although he acknowledges that Scripture is plainly and wholly against it and although he himself is obviously unhappy with it, the Fuller theologian suggests that the church might accept "committed same-sex relationships," although it cannot bless them. Jewett makes the comparison with the unlawful divorces that he has just approved and that, of course, the neo-evangelical churches are approving as well. The conclusion of the treatment of homosexuality is a question — no declaration, but a *question*:

When we defined marriage as a unique relationship between a man and a woman, should we have added, "or, on occasion, between a man and a man, or between a woman and woman?" Is there a real possibility here that we have somehow missed? (p. 350)

What explains this?

Two things. Two things that are true of neo-evangelicalism in North America in general. Jewett

is representative of neo-evangelicalism.

The first is Jewett's unbelief concerning the Holy Scriptures. Genesis 1-11 is not historical, but "primal history," a "story ... in parabolic form." Eden was no real garden, but "a biblical allegory." The neo-evangelical theologian dismisses the idea that there ever was a "first human pair," Adam and Eve. He accepts the whole evolutionary theory of origins over billions of years, including humankind's biological descent from the beasts. That descent from animals rules out that man was made in God's image, Jewett does not stop to notice.

Jewett openly criticizes the apostle's teaching on women in the church in I Timothy 2. He has the scholar's honesty (which some Reformed theologians lack) to acknowledge that I Timothy 2 "defies hermeneutical ingenuity" (p. 157). There is nothing for those determined to ordain women to do but to declare the apostle of Christ mistaken. Jewett takes the same approach in setting aside the call for the wife's submission and reverence in Ephesians 5.

Whereas Jesus prohibited divorce and remarriage, Paul contradicted his master in I Corinthians 7. The implication, gladly drawn, is that "one cannot apparently deduce from Scripture

the grounds of divorce in a tidy and orderly way" (p. 283). Scripture, far from ordering the behavior of humankind in this fundamental area, is wide open to whatever any husband or wife desires.

The second explanation of such a theology, devoid of both gospel and law, is found in Jewett's own description of his theology as a "contextualized orthodoxy" (p. 291). The important word is "contextualized." This is a theology that deliberately opens itself up to the influence of the (un-godly) world. This is a theology shaped by culture. The world outside of Christ decides the important issues: racism; feminism; sexual "freedom"; ecology. The world determines how these issues shall be viewed and judged. Neo-evangelical theology is the compliant handmaid (I moderate my expression here) of culture. It is the theological arm of the world in the church.

It is not orthodoxy. It cannot be. Only a theology formed exclusively by the Word of God, sacred Scripture, can be orthodox. Only a theology that not only ignores the thinking of the world but also takes its stand from the outset resolutely to oppose the thinking of the world can be orthodox. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7).

Dr. Jewett is wrong in the

book's main theme. the image of God. He identifies the image as "my freedom to be who I am, the power of self-determination." The more complete definition is:

The image is the human spirit (soul) imprinted by the Creator with those endowments that enable us to transcend the world of lesser creatures and live our lives in a unique I-thou relationship with God and neighbor (p. 62).

The implication is that whatever fall might have taken place, all humans retain the image. This is the alleged "dignity" of all. This is the dignity of every human altogether apart from the cross and regenerating Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Jewett rejects the Reformed doctrine that the image was man's original righteousness. He also rejects the Reformed doctrine of the loss of the image in the fall of Adam and fallen man's very undignified condition of total depravity.

He does take note of the different gospel of the Reformers, Luther and Calvin. "Luther was so opposed to the semi-Pelagianism in Roman Catholic thought that he often spoke of the sinner as having lost the image altogether" (p. 58). This is the old evangelicalism, the gospel of God's dignity, fallen man's ignominy, and the glory of elect, redeemed men and women in whom the image has been restored in Christ. ♦

Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill, by Curt D. Daniel. Privately published, 1983. Pp. xii-912. \$60.00 (hard cover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This massive work, huge in size and bristling with footnotes, is the author's doctoral dissertation at the University of Edinburgh. It examines the theological error of hyper-Calvinism, particularly in the teaching of the 18th century Calvinistic Baptist, John Gill. Al-

though Daniel concentrates on Gill, he includes in his study other English theologians associated with Gill, e.g., Brine and Hussey, as well as some contemporary theologians whom Daniel regards as hyper-Calvinists, notably Arthur Pink and Herman Hoeksema.

In his scholarly attempt to determine exactly what the error of hyper-Calvinism consists of, Daniel considers the views of Gill and the others on the sovereignty of God; predestination; the cov-

enant; justification; faith; "the free offer question"; the atonement; law; and grace. A brief history of hyper-Calvinism serves as an introduction.

It is Daniel's contention that there has been, and still is, a hyper-Calvinistic heresy that has bedeviled genuine Calvinism, that is, the gospel of grace. The heart of this error is its rejection of the "offer" of the gospel to all who hear the preaching. With this denial goes a minimizing of the responsibility of man.

Hyper-Calvinism is that school of Supralapsarian "Five Point" Calvinism which so stresses the sovereignty of God by over-emphasizing the secret over the revealed will and eternity over time, that it minimizes the responsibility of Man, notably with respect to the denial of the word "offer" in relation to the preaching of the Gospel of a finished and limited atonement, thus undermining the universal duty of sinners to believe savingly with the assurance that the Lord Jesus Christ died for them, with the result that presumption is overly warned of, introspection is overly encouraged, and a view of sanctification akin to doctrinal Antinomianism is often approached. This (definition) could be summarized even fur-

ther: it is the rejection of the word "offer" in connection with evangelism for supposedly Calvinistic reasons (p. 767).

Daniel shows that there was in Gill and in the tradition of English Calvinism that he represents a definite hesitation, if not an express refusal, to call the unconverted sinner to believe on Jesus Christ with true (saving) faith. Daniel says that he was not able to find in Gill "the invitation 'Come to Christ' to the unconverted." Gill restricted this call to "sensible sinners" (pp. 455, 456). Daniel quotes Gill as teaching that the unconverted are obliged merely to believe certain facts about Jesus Christ, e.g., that He is the Son of God. They are not obliged to believe in Him as Savior. Nor are unbelievers who hear the gospel but remain unbelieving condemned for not believing with true (saving) faith.

In his *The Cause of God and Truth*, Gill wrote: "I do not find that any such are exhorted to believe in Christ for salvation; but as sensible of it" (that is, of their state and condition as sinners, by regeneration — DJE; cited on p. 477; see also pp. 461, 462). Daniel concludes that hyper-Calvinism denies that unbelievers "have the responsibility to believe savingly in Christ, for that belongs to those

who have been regenerated" (p. 648).

The reason why hyper-Calvinism denies that the unbeliever is called to believe is its fear that this would compromise Calvinism. To call a reprobate unbeliever for whom Christ did not die to believe in Jesus Christ would compromise the doctrines of election and limited atonement. To call *any* unbeliever to believe would suggest that an unbeliever has the *ability* to believe, thus overthrowing the doctrine of total depravity. Hyper-Calvinism does not understand that God's call, or command, to the reprobate sinner sincerely to repent and truly to believe expresses neither God's purpose nor the sinner's ability, but only the sinner's duty in light of the revelation made in the gospel.

This answer to hyper-Calvinism's basic error, however, is not Daniel's. Daniel responds to hyper-Calvinism along entirely different lines.

Valuable as Daniel's study of this important aspect of the development and struggle of Calvinism is, it suffers from two grave faults. These faults both skew the analysis of the controversy and render false the proposed resolution for a pure Calvinism.

The first is that Daniel does not distinguish "offer" as the promiscuous preaching of Christ as

Savior with its command to all hearers to repent and believe on Jesus for salvation from "offer" as the declaration to all hearers that God loves them. Christ died for them, and God is now giving them the chance to be saved by believing. This distinction is both biblical and confessionally Reformed. "Offer" as promiscuous preaching with a summons to all to believe in Christ is the external call of the gospel as taught in Matthew 22:1-14 and in the Canons, II/5. "Offer" as a declaration of universal love and atonement dependent on the sinner's will is the Arminian heresy that the Reformed and Presbyterian churches condemned at Dordt and Westminster on the basis of the apostle's doctrine in Romans 9:16.

By failing to make this fundamental distinction, Daniel labels all who deny the "offer" as hyper-Calvinists, regardless what specific doctrine of the offer they have in mind. The result is that those whose rejection of the "offer" consists of a denial of universal love dependent on the will of the sinner are tarred with Daniel's broad brush of hyper-Calvinism, even though they preach to all and call all to believe in Jesus Christ.

The second fault is gross. Daniel argues that genuine Calvinism is the doctrine of a saving love of God and a death of Jesus

Christ for all without exception. On this basis, the proper "offer" is, in fact, the "bold declaration" to all who hear the gospel, "God loves you, Christ died for you, and now God pleads with you to believe so that you may be saved" (p. 459). Accompanying this offer is "a sufficient common grace" that enables all to accept the offer, if only they will (pp. 161, 162).

It is Daniel's basic thesis that hyper-Calvinism began to develop when, after Calvin, the Reformed faith adopted limited atonement. This jeopardized the offer. What is necessary for the warding off of hyper-Calvinism is the embrace of universal atonement. This involves repudiating the decree of reprobation.

This is the remedy for hyper-Calvinism! This exotic mixture of Arminianism and Amyraldianism, Daniel calls, with a kind of fetching modesty, "Low Calvinism." It is, indeed, low — very low. It is abased and debased "Calvinism." The glory of salvation in this gospel belongs to the sinner. Using his "sufficient common grace" rightly, he not only saves himself by accepting the offer but also makes the death of Christ atoning and the love of God successful.

There is an important warning here. Those professing Calvinists who insist on an "offer" expressing God's love for all and

desire to save all cannot escape universal atonement. When universal atonement is adopted, the eternal, double decree of predestination is rejected.

Running through the work are Daniel's interaction with and criticism of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). He lumps them with the English Baptist hyper-Calvinists, regardless of the protest of the PRC. The Protestant Reformed reader who lacks time and inclination to read the entire work might want to read Chapter VIII, "The Free Offer Question" (pp. 364-495).

In the course of his critique of the teaching of the PRC on the offer, Daniel takes the occasion sharply to criticize this reviewer for my charge, in my *Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel*, that the English hyper-Calvinists restricted the preaching of the gospel to the regenerated elect (p. 452). But he does not comment on the quotation from Hussey that I adduced in support of the charge. Then, only a few pages later Daniel asserts that the hyper-Calvinists invited only sensible sinners to Christ and "tend to preach only Law to unbelievers and only Gospel ... to believers" (pp. 494, 495). If I say it, it is "deplorable misunderstanding"; if Daniel says it, it is the basis of a Ph.D.

Fact is, at the end Daniel

comes down in his description of the essence of hyper-Calvinism exactly where I had come down earlier. The error of hyper-Calvinism is the rejection of the external call of the gospel to all who hear the gospel, with the weakening, or denial, of responsibility that is implied.

As for Daniel's challenge to the PRC to show where their denial of the "well-meant offer" differs from the English hyper-Calvinists' rejection of the external call of the gospel, the differences are important and clear. First, the PRC preach the gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior to all indiscriminately, regardless whether they are converted believers or unconverted unbelievers. They do not, as Hussey advocated, preach Christ as priestly Savior to believers, but Christ as threatening King to unbelievers.

Second, the PRC call, or command, or summon, every sinner to believe in Christ for salvation with true (saving) faith, warning all that those who do not believe will be held guilty by God for this worst of all sins. The PRC do not hesitate, or refuse, to give the imperative to all and sundry, "Come to Christ."

Third, the PRC do not let people think that they can long for salvation and desire to believe, perhaps their life long, and still perish (see p. 359).

In these important matters, the PRC suppose that they are only confessing the historic, creedal Reformed faith.

Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill must be ordered from the author. The address is: 2456 Devonshire Rd., Springfield, IL 62703. ♦

The Question of Woman: The Collected Writings of Charlotte von Kirschbaum. Tr. John Shepherd. Ed. and with an Introduction by Eleanor Jackson. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1996. x+202 pages. \$16 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

Those who read Eberhard Busch's biography of Karl Barth, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters*

and Autobiographical Texts, had to wonder about the relationship between Barth and his assistant and secretary, Charlotte von Kirschbaum. The young woman moved into the Barth home, spent the summer months alone with Barth in a chalet in the countryside, and was his sole traveling companion on various lecture tours. Busch acknowledged that the relationship between Barth and

von Kirschbaum brought “unspeakably deep suffering” into the Barth home, estranged some of his children, and inflicted shame and grief on Barth’s hardworking, faithful wife, Nelly.

In the long introduction to this collection of von Kirschbaum’s writings, the editor, who is sympathetic to von Kirschbaum and her relationship to Barth, admits that there was a “romantic involvement” of the married Barth with the “strikingly beautiful” von Kirschbaum.

Such was the open intimacy between Barth and his assistant that officials of the World Council of Churches were offended by Barth’s living arrangements with von Kirschbaum at the meeting of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948.

There are two astounding aspects to the open, illicit relationship between the renowned theologian and his co-worker. The first is that Barth’s wife tolerated the relationship to the point that she was willing to share Barth’s arms with von Kirschbaum on the occasion of a public ceremony honoring Barth on his seventieth birthday and that she had von Kirschbaum buried with herself in the Barth grave as Barth desired.

The second is the silence of the neo-orthodox and evangelical scholars who are disciples of Barth. Why does none speak out in con-

demnation of career-long, unrepented adultery? Does theological fame blot out gross violation of the seventh commandment? A church that exercised the discipline required by Christ would have deposed Barth from office and excommunicated him, and von Kirschbaum, from the kingdom of heaven on the ground of gross public sin.

If the first section of *The Question of Woman* is a testimony to a scandalous life, the second section propounds erroneous doctrine. In five chapters, von Kirschbaum sets forth the significance and place of the woman in the church in the light of Scripture. Chapter one examines the woman’s place in marriage in light especially of Ephesians 5. Chapter two discusses Christ’s redemption of the woman with specific application to marriage, although single life is also considered. Chapter three deals with the issue of the ordination of women as preachers. Chapter four investigates the biblical teaching about Mary, the mother of Jesus. The excursus attached to this chapter is a comprehensive description of the Roman Catholic dogmas of Mary. Chapter five is mainly a critique of the existentialist thought on woman of Simone de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*. An appendix returns to the

issue of the ordination of women to the preaching office in the church.

von Kirschbaum argues that gifted women should be permitted to be preachers and rulers in the church. Basic to this position is her rejection of "any concept of office" in the New Testament. As for the opposition to women's teaching and ruling in I Timothy 2, this is explained away as a reaction to "a particular tendency toward arrogance on the part of the women at Ephesus." Opponents of women preachers are dismissed as guilty of "a legalistic use of isolated passages" and of "all too human 'prejudices'."

This is not to suggest that there is nothing worthwhile in von Kirschbaum's treatment of the "question of woman." As her collaboration with Barth indicates, she was an able theologian. Her description of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary is helpful, and her analysis of this heresy is penetrating.

von Kirschbaum is by no means the most radical of feminists. Indeed, she shames present feminists in the Reformed churches. She readily recognizes that headship in Ephesians 5 is "a position of superiority" to which "governing" belongs. She also acknowledges that the submission of Ephesians 5 is due, not to sin, but to God's ordering of creation.

Marriage, she contends convincingly, is a "bond" that in its essence is "indestructible and therefore indissoluble." She has good, even profound, things to say about the marriage of a man and a woman. Barth too has a moving description of marriage in the *Church Dogmatics*.

This strikes an orthodox Reformed Christian as exceedingly odd, in view of their own continuing subversion of Barth's marriage in life and deed.

No doubt, a neo-orthodox theology of paradox results in an equally paradoxical "Christian" life. ●