

## BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. Pp. xxvi + 502. \$38.00.

The title of this comprehensive volume more accurately reflects its content and argument than its subtitle. Though the subtitle might suggest that Bolt is interested in Abraham Kuyper's American public theology, his actual interest is primarily in Kuyper's articulation of a "public theology" or view of the Christian's calling in church and state. Bolt aims, by means of his exposition of Kuyper's public theology, to "show how Kuyper's thought and practice are particularly appropriate for a contemporary American evangelical public theology" (p. xx).

One of the intriguing features of Bolt's study is his novel interpretation of Kuyper. When he first set out to write the book, Bolt envisioned a rather standard exposition of a number of Kuyper's key principles—the antithesis, sphere-sovereignty, common grace. He intended to set forth Kuyper's ideas in their original historical setting, and then indicate how they might be applied in a North American context. As he undertook his project, however, he became convinced that the secret to Kuyper's influence was not so much the power of his ideas as the power of his rhetoric. Hence, a major portion of the first part of Bolt's study is an extended consideration of Kuyper from a "rhetorical and mythopoetic perspective" (p. xviii). Only after this treatment of what Bolt terms Kuyper's "Christian-historical political imagination," does he treat Kuyper's views in comparison with other European and American analysts of American culture, society and politics (e.g., Alexis de Tocqueville, Lord John Acton, Jonathan Edwards, and Walter Rauschenbusch). By means of these far-

reaching analyses of Kuyper's views in relation to others and the challenges facing the evangelical community in North America, Bolt aims to encourage a fresh and vigorous engagement with public life on the part of the Christian community today.

Bolt's study is a fascinating exploration of the power of Abraham Kuyper's imaginative rhetoric, public theology and potential fruitfulness for the challenges facing Christians in the public square in North America at the beginning of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, it is marred somewhat by a lack of thematic unity or focus. Bolt ranges so far and wide in his interpretation of Kuyper that many readers will likely become bewildered and uncertain of the connections between the various parts of his case. Furthermore, Bolt's interaction with an extraordinarily rich and extensive range of secondary studies tends to detract from the coherence of his argument. Readers, for example, who take the trouble to read his footnotes will soon find that they have lost the thread of the argument.

Nonetheless, this is a fine contribution to a growing number of books on Kuyper's theological and cultural-political legacy.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. Pp. 287. \$18.99.

As the title of this book suggests, it intends to provide the reader with an introduction to the spectrum of opinion today within the evangelical community on a variety of theological topics. Boyd and Eddy are professors of theology at Bethel College in Minneapolis. They write, accordingly, for an audience of evangelical college students in order to acquaint them with various disputed issues in contemporary discussion.

In their introduction, Boyd and Eddy provide a clear statement of what they intend to accomplish with this volume. They do not pretend to present a comprehensive statement of the full range of Christian doctrine. Their purpose is to select a range of topics within the broader field of Christian theology that are the subject of ongoing debate and diversity of position. Consequently, there are

some subjects (e.g., the doctrine of the Trinity) that are not addressed, since evangelical conviction is fairly uniform respecting them. Boyd and Eddy's approach is a "distinctly liberal arts approach," which aims "to broaden students' minds by helping them empathetically understand a variety of perspectives while training them to think critically for themselves" (p. 6). The topics treated are those that are discussed and embraced within the evangelical community. Thus, positions that fall outside the range of opinion acceptable to evangelicals (e.g., transubstantiation) are not considered.

Each of the chapters in this volume follows a clear pattern and outline. A brief introduction, "Posing the Question," introduces the reader to the question or issue that will be treated. This is followed by a section, "The Center and Its Contrast," that seeks to summarize the consensus of evangelicalism on the topic in question, as well as the range of differing views often represented. The most important sections of each chapter outlines the views representative of the spectrum of opinion among evangelicals. In each section different perspectives are defended by arguments from tradition, reason and experience. The usefulness of the volume is further enhanced by a list of readings on the topics at the close of each chapter, and the provision of a glossary and Scripture index. The eighteen chapters treat eighteen different topics, and are arranged in the order of the sequence of courses in systematic theology (beginning with a chapter on "The Inspiration Debate" and closing with a chapter on "The Hell Debate"). One unique feature of the book is an appendix that directs the reader to a website ([www.bakeracademic.com/acrossthespectrum](http://www.bakeracademic.com/acrossthespectrum)) that deals with twelve additional issues not addressed in this volume.

Judged by their stated aim and purpose, Boyd and Eddy admirably accomplish what they set out to do. Students who read this volume will find its chapters clearly written and remarkably conversant with contemporary evangelical theology. Whatever the authors' personal convictions, they present the various sides of the debates within evangelicalism in an accurate and fair-minded manner. Anyone desiring to follow the course of evangelical theology today will find this book a most helpful guide.

Despite its evident strengths, however, this book also confirms the lament of recent critics of evangelical theology such as David Wells (*No Place for Truth*), Mark Noll (*The Evangelical Mind*), and Os

Guinness (*Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*). Though the authors identify a criterion that governs and encompasses the spectrum of opinion in contemporary evangelical theology (p. 7: “evangelicals are united in their commitment to the core beliefs of historic, orthodox Christianity as expressed in the ecumenical creeds and the primacy of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice”), readers of this volume will discover that this criterion is something of a “wax nose.” The authors include, for example, a defense of a “limited foreknowledge” view of God’s omniscience (God knows some of the future, but not that part he leaves open to the choices of free agents). This is not surprising, since one of the co-authors, Gregory Boyd, is a leading proponent of the “open view” of God. They also regard “annihilationism” as one legitimate option within the range of evangelical opinion today.

Other examples of the elasticity of what the authors count as acceptable evangelical opinion could be cited. These, however, are sufficient to illustrate one troubling feature about this book and the evangelicalism it defends: there is ultimately no standard of discrimination in the Scriptures, the confessions, or the consensus of historic Christian theology, that can determine what is within the acceptable range and what is not. The real criterion of “evangelical” seems to be something like the rule: “whatever evangelicals today are prepared to tolerate.” And that, by the testimony of this volume, would seem to include a great deal more than what historically was the case.

—Cornelis P. Venema

James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. Pp. xxvi + 552. \$40.00. (cloth)

James R. Edwards teaches religion at Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington. He has studied with Eduard Schweizer and Ralph Martin, scholars who themselves have written commentaries on Mark. Having himself taught the Gospel of Mark for twenty years, Edwards offers in this volume the fruit of his interaction with the Gospel in the context of the church and the academy.

In this commentary the author blends attention to the Gospel’s historical setting, literary methods, and theological purposes (p. xiv).

The result is a stylized and readable narrative that moves crisply through the details of the text to the main features of how and why Jesus Christ is the good news (1:1). Pastors will find the commentary useful for at least two reasons. It won't distract you from the text and its point, and it will suggest avenues for developing your homiletical work. Academicians will appreciate the author's competent interaction with writers both classic and contemporary, though the purpose of the commentary dictated that most debates be presented in summary form. Putting in boldface type terms or phrases that are discussed in greater detail is a helpful technique.

The author's commitment to literary analysis is evident in the organization of the commentary. The commentary is organized into chapters, not of the Gospel, but of a thematic arrangement that follows the Gospel text. Unfortunately, since the introduction supplies no outline of the Gospel, the reader has no overview of the parts and their relationships. The Table of Contents is unreliable for this purpose, since it does not list a number of pericopes embedded within thematic units. For example, Chapter 8 of the commentary is simply entitled, "8. Removing the Veil (8:10-9:29)." Only by going to the commentary will the reader see that this section consists of 8:10-13, 8:14-21, 8:22-26, 8:27-30, 8:31-9:1, 9:2-8, 9:9-13, and 9:14-29, each a unit with its own title and sub-theme.

Given the fact that The Pillar New Testament Commentary series uses the New International Version as the translation of choice for the English text, the reader is astonished at how frequently the author criticizes or improves upon the NIV. Would not the reader have been better served with the author's own translation?

Under the editorial supervision of D. A. Carson, this commentary series offers fine contemporary exposition of Scripture; and this volume is a fine addition to the series.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001. Pp. 235. \$12.99.

With this book John Frame offers his reply to open theists and their free-will theism. Among the commendable features of this book is the irenic and even-handed spirit in which Frame addresses his open theistic opponents, coupled with a helpful re-presentation of traditional doctrinal constructs and arguments which define classical theism, showing that traditional theology is not nearly so vulnerable to the charges or caricatures that open theists have aimed against it.

Frame's book consists of fourteen chapters, wherein he defines what open theism is (its roots in antiquity and precursor in Socinianism), examines open theism's use of Scripture, challenges its claim that love (versus other divine attributes) is God's most important perfection, whereupon he next presents the key areas of debate between open theists and proponents of classical theism: the nature of God's will, the nature of human freedom, God's relation to time, the import of divine immutability, impassibility, and knowledge, with a chapter devoted to how open theism plays out in relation to other biblical doctrines, and then a brief concluding chapter.

Frame admits that there is more "give-and-take" between God and his creatures than traditional theology has depicted. But he accounts for this "mutual responsiveness, not by denying God's exhaustive sovereignty and knowledge, as in open theism, but by giving more emphasis to his temporal omnipresence." What is needed then as a corrective to classical theism is not the radical and ultimately misguided remedy of open theism; rather, the solution is to place more emphasis "on the temporal interaction between God and the world." According to Frame, this would deliver classical theism from abstractions in its doctrine of God, and render it more practical and relevant for encouraging biblical piety and obedience among believers. This corrective leaves God's sovereignty intact, without any diminishment, and believers are motivated to labor for the Lord who gives them a role in the accomplishment of his purposes.

What propels open theism along, observes Frame, is its unyielding adherence to libertarian freedom. This is the central and controlling issue. For his part, Frame finds this notion of human freedom both incoherent and unbiblical, compromising God's sovereignty and undermining what it aims to defend, namely, human responsibility before God.

Frame's book excels at trying to examine biblical materials fairly, demonstrates a grasp of the more philosophical subtleties of the classical theistic tradition, and labors to clarify the relationship between God's counsel or eternal plan and human history. Indeed God's purpose reaches its goal in the fullness of the coming of his kingdom. This book is highly recommended as a defense of classical theism, and serves as a sturdy polemic against the tenets of free-will theism. It is written in a manner that makes it accessible to a popular audience, and it is equipped with a helpful Scripture index, as well as an index of names and subjects.

—J. Mark Beach

John E. Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. Pp. x + 122. \$14.00. (cloth)

John Hare is a modern divine command theorist and a leading scholar in the field of philosophical ethics. The subtitle of his book, *moral realism, God's commands, and human autonomy*, nicely outlines the contents of this volume. What Hare is after in *God's Call* is "an account of God's authority in human morality."

In the first chapter Hare offers an informative history of the abiding debate within Anglo-American philosophy over the last century between moral realists and moral expressivists. Hare demonstrates how this debate fundamentally involves how objectivity and subjectivity are related in value judgment. This is important for Christian ethics since believers wish to affirm that value is created by God and exists apart from human recognition, while they also wish to affirm that in valuing something we are committed to it from the heart—that is, our own will and heart is expressed and manifested in moral action. Hare combines the merits of moral realism and moral expressivism, arguing that what makes something right is that God calls us to it; but in doing what is right, our own hearts and wills are fully engaged so that his will is recapitulated in our own will. Hare calls his position "prescriptive realism."

In chapter two Hare examines the divine command theory of John Duns Scotus, examining carefully the relationship that Scotus established between God's commands, human nature, and human

will. Hare argues that a Calvinist version of the divine command theory of obligation finds a defense via Scotus against natural law theory and other modern objections. Hare maintains that the Fall corrupted our natural inclinations; as a consequence our nature can no longer function as an authoritative source of guidance for right living.

Given that circumstance, coupled with the reality of God's project of redemption, divine command theory responds to three specific questions with its own distinctive answers: (1) Can morality be deduced from human nature or can a universally valid ethic be derived from the laws of nature? Divine command theory answers such queries in the *negative*. (2) Is there any source of motivation, in our moral conduct and behavior, other than the motivation to attain our own good or happiness? Divine command theory answers this question in the *affirmative*, for we can be motivated to seek, for example, God's glory even if it doesn't bring blessing to us. (3) Is God free to dispense with certain commandments and impose others? Or is there a law of nature that prohibits this as a divine prerogative? Divine command theory wants to answer this query by saying that God is free to dispense with certain commandments and impose others, if he wishes, and there is no law of nature that prohibits him from doing so. It is this last feature of divine command ethics that is most problematic.

For Hare, the divine command theory he wishes to defend is "the theory that what makes something obligatory for us is that God commands it."

Hare observes that most Christian ethicists have dismissed divine command theory in favor of natural law as the better option in response to secular ethical theories. Hare articulates and modifies Scotus's version of divine command theory. Scotus is cautious not to appeal to human reason as the arbiter of what God can and cannot will. Scotus says that the divine will is the cause of the good, and so a thing is good precisely in virtue of the fact that God wills it.

One way this can be explored is by asking why a person should be moral. In fact, why should I accept a moral demand as a demand upon me? The answer to this question will give the source of normativity. The divine command theorist says, because God wills it or because God tells me to. For Scotus, our finite end is to be co-lovers of God. But the final end is not obedience to the command;



rather, it is the kind of union of will that we call love. The end toward which Hare is headed is some kind of loving union with God. This is why Hare prefers the term “call” to “command,” for the later term is a power-relation word whereas the former term is more descriptive of a love-relation.

Hare thus urges us to consider Scotus’s doctrine of the two affections: *the affection for justice* and *the affection for advantage*. Humans have in their will these two affections. All acts of will stem from one or the other. The affection for advantage is a natural appetite, an inclination toward one’s own proper happiness or perfection. The affection for justice is the inclination toward intrinsic goods for their own sake, that is, to give each thing what is its due. There is however always a *ranking* of the two, and if the affection for advantage is first, it will become an *improper* regard for self. A person’s ability to will, that is, genuine choice, is due to the affection for justice, for if a person had only the affection for advantage, he would pursue this by nature but not by freedom. The two affections can have the same objects, even God. For union with God is indeed the proper perfection or happiness of a human agent, and so there is a natural inclination toward it. But it is not, says Scotus, a movement towards God *for God’s own sake*, but *for the sake of the agent*. Thus, after the Fall, we now have an *inordinate* affection for advantage. We now are born with a tendency to seek our own advantage *above everything else*. And the ranking of affection for advantage above affection for justice is sinful, and must be reversed.

Scotus illustrates this in his account of Lucifer’s fall. Lucifer coveted happiness immoderately (born of the affection for advantage). So Lucifer first sinned by loving something excessively as his supreme delight; he wanted happiness as good for himself, rather than loving the good as a good in itself (according to the affection for justice). Lucifer took something good by nature, his own perfection or happiness, and willed it wrongly by ranking the two affections wrongly. In fact, against this sin, if we accept that God is the end or goal to which everything is headed, it is possible to love that goal either *as one’s own goal* or *as the goal of all*.

For Hare, following Scotus, God’s commands are not arbitrary, for God’s willing is not without reason; on the contrary, God commands what he commands as a route to our final end. To be sure, there are innumerable ways God could have ordered us towards union with him, even given the nature with which we were

created. The route God has in fact chosen is binding upon us because God has chosen it. But we can still say that the route is good *because* it takes us to our final end, and is thus fitted to our nature. (This is the positive side of the supervenience relation). God's commands (or call) fit our nature. The command "do not bear false witness," for example, fits our human nature, our deep-seated desire to share life together with other humans on the basis of verbal communication (which needs to be truthful and trustworthy). This is right and makes for human flourishing. Thus, this much Scotus has in common with the deductivist natural law tradition. They differ however in the logical relations they see between human nature and the moral law.

Scotus also rejects *eudaimonism*. "Eudaimonism is the view that makes all motivation derivative from an agent's own happiness." Scotus makes the affection for justice central to obligation rather than the affection for advantage. Eudaimonism, however, is finally unacceptably self-regarding. Not that Scotus wishes to jettison the affection for advantage. In desiring heavenly bliss, beatitude, we may not desire it more than desiring or wanting God to have everything good. "What is wrong with eudaimonism is that it makes one's own happiness central." Scotus therefore calls for "the self" to vacate the throne and offer itself to God. To be sure, while there is much that is reciprocal in our relationship to God—we love God and he blesses us—we are never commanded to love God *as our selves* or *as the self*. Christ's self-emptying love for God and for us is our model. Moreover, although one might argue that the hope for happiness is not selfishness, since there is a desire for a we-self (a community of blessing), nonetheless, this is still "unacceptably self-regarding." For, as Hare argues, following Scotus, "God should be loved not merely to the extent that we have appropriated God, but also to the extent that we have not." What if God did not enter into union with us? Would we still love him? We are to love God regardless of the happiness-quotient involved in the relationship; and the same is true concerning our love for others, even our enemies. In fact, "to make happiness central is to insist on the primacy of the relation of others to the self over what those others are in themselves, independently of the self, and this is unacceptably self-regarding." Moreover, a phony or calculated self-effacement won't do either, for this is simply self-deception. "So if another person's welfare is constitutive of my happiness, but my own

happiness is central, the commitment I have to that person's welfare is always conditional on its constituting my happiness." Says Hare, such conditionality is structurally part of eudaimonism, and such conditionality falls short of Christian moral virtue, for it is unacceptably self-regarding.

Hare thus defends the idea that God's commands prescribe an objective reality that is normative apart from our prescribing it, that is, God prescribes "the divinely chosen route to our final end." Although God could have chosen a different route, since this is the route he has chosen, we are obliged to follow it if we are to reach that end. What is key for Hare is this: "God's choosing this route is what makes it the right route." Human nature in its fallenness may rebel against God's call, but human nature cannot define the parameters of divine authority. God's call is authoritative because it is *God's* call. Thus the chief motivation in heeding God's commandments isn't a regard for ourselves and what is in our best interests; rather, we obey because God has commanded us to obey. We *must* heed his will. Moreover, when we are properly motivated to obey God, we would try to do so "even if we thought it would finish us off."

In the third (and last) chapter Hare arrives at the key juncture (as he sees it) between the medieval discussion and our own times: the moral theory of Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century. According to Hare's interpretation, Kant has given us a central text that has been taken in modern moral philosophy *to refute divine command theory*. It is a text about human autonomy. Hare tries to show that Kant is not in fact arguing against the kind of divine command theory he (Hare) wants to support. Thus Hare discusses what Kant means by saying that we should recognize our duties as God's commands, and Hare defends a notion of human autonomy *as appropriation*—which is to say, we must make the moral law our own. We must bring our wills in line with the will of God. Our duties, says Kant, should be reckoned as God's commands, for God gives us these commands. These commands in turn should be seen as the route God has chosen for us to reach the destination of being co-lovers with God. Thus God's commands dictate to us but also relate to us, for they are bringing us into union with him. This means that morality is relational along this path, and so it has to be seen as involving also our autonomous submission to these commands. "Because we share a final end with God," writes Hare,

“our submission is not blind, though we may not always see how the route leads to the end.” What is crucial, however, is that our will be fully engaged in moral decision-making and living.

Thus, for Hare, autonomy does not mean independence from external authority. He weds a Kantian notion of autonomous submission to Scotus’s view of our final end. “We can be autonomous if we trust God to tell us to do what will in the end produce the highest intrinsic good, namely (as Scotus puts it) that we become co-lovers with God.” The end result is that we obey God’s commands because they are obligatory as *God’s commands*, and also because we have appropriated God’s will as our will and so we share the route or end with God.

This book is carefully argued, full of insight, and testifies that its author, professor of moral philosophy at Calvin College, is both a creative thinker and master of his field. In the continuing discussion between divine command ethicists and natural law proponents, Hare’s book (and other recent titles from his pen) are required reading.

—J. Mark Beach

David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope: Toward a Biblical Theology of Culture*. Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1999. Pp. 128. (Price unknown)

Not all Reformed people have viewed Christian involvement in culture in a positive fashion, but David Hegeman believes that one not only can, but must, relate to one’s calling within the creation both positively and in a Christian manner. This easy to read book is the outgrowth of several Sunday school classes. Hegeman has divided his book into two major parts (“A Positive Theology of Culture” and “Culture and Redemption”), followed by a postscript on “Culture and Sabbath” and an appendix that addresses Christianity and the arts. Each chapter works out a particular proposition as Hegeman builds his argument.

Hegeman’s thesis is that our calling as humans created in the image of God is to work in developing all the potentialities within creation for the glory of God. This is man’s first vocation. But because we are fallen creatures, God’s redemptive work in history is absolutely essential to restoring that image of God so that we may

properly carry out our calling for God's glory, even as redemptive history moves the human race from its first locale, the garden of God in Eden, to the everlasting locale of the redeemed, the city of God in the new creation.

One may wonder why this book was written, given the fact that this topic has been addressed before. Indeed the author provides a list of suggested readings (p. 123; it is curious that nothing of Abraham Kuyper is cited.). Nevertheless, this book is a popularly written and welcome addition to a significant body of literature that spells out how redemption (re-creation) is not antithetical to man's place in the creation as its covenant head.

One particular discussion was somewhat troublesome. On pages 42ff., the author notes the Hebrew plays on the words *ish/ishshah* and *adam/adamah*. He then draws the conclusion that as the husband is to his wife, so man is to the ground, i.e., man is "married" to the earth. But this is to say far too much on such a basis. Hegeman's argument can stand well enough without this linguistic cleverness.

Whatever other slight differences a reader may have with Hegeman's discussion at particular points, his overall thesis stands. The book concludes with helpful Scripture and subject/author indices. Recommended.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002. Pp. 249. \$19.99. (cloth)

Michael Horton is well known in the world of Reformed and evangelical writers, stemming from his previous books on matters theological, his editorial work in the magazine *Modern Reformation*, and his leadership as president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. He currently serves as associate professor of historical theology and apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

In addressing himself to the subject of worship, Dr. Horton has grouped this book's twelve chapters into three main areas. Part one is entitled "Faith Comes by Hearing": the Ministry of the Word"; Part two is "Signs and Seals of the Covenant: the Ministry of

Baptism and the Lord's Supper"; and Part three deals with "Our Reasonable Service: Getting Involved in the Drama."

The author knows full well that to enter into the area of worship is to enter a minefield. But Horton treads on this territory with great skill, seeking to find a way that steers clear of the traditional versus contemporary polarities in the so-called "worship wars." Horton is convinced that "God has given us the greatest show on earth, a drama full of intrigue that is not only interesting but actually brings us up onto the stage, writing us into the script as actors in the ongoing production" (p. 16). It is the metaphor of *drama* that Horton utilizes at several points in his discussion of worship.

According to Horton, both sides in the worship debate need to rethink what they are doing and why. Thus as he critiques many of the current fads in evangelical worship, his book is not an argument for "older is better." He also notes that some in the contemporary worship ("seeker" style) churches are beginning to rethink their own approach, while those in traditional approaches are likewise rethinking why they do what they do.

Central to worship that is genuinely biblical—and therefore central to this book's thesis—is the drama of redemptive-history spelled out by God in the flow of the historical narrative of the Bible itself. God is the focus of the history recorded in Scripture, and therefore he is the "object" of worship. His transcendence is not absence. Nonetheless, the sense of God's transcendence is largely lost in much modern worship, which Horton characterizes as superficial, sensational, and stimulus-oriented. Thus many people's lives are like Hollywood scripts: without point, self-written dramas that need to be rewritten according to the drama that God has written in redemptive history (pp. 34ff.).

Horton brings to bear a Reformed theological orientation that is traditional and classical in shape. The sovereignty of God's grace and mercy is not an abstraction; indeed it has a very concrete bearing on the kind of worship (in general) and preaching (in particular) that must be found in serious Christian churches. If such grace is lost or covered over, then the logic of works-righteousness takes over, which tries to climb up to God. Mysticism, merit, and speculation are the avenues people employ in attempts to rise up to him, to attain and manipulate him.

Horton, however, not only accents that the message of redemption is redemption by grace alone but he argues that the medium that carries the message, its presentation, must fit the message. One *hears* it. Horton quotes Paul Ricoeur approvingly: “To meditate on the commandments wins out over venerating idols” (p. 40). Horton adds, “The history of idolatry is largely the history of visual consumerism” (p. 40).

According to Horton, a “protean style dominates contemporary religion as well as every other enterprise these days” (p. 50). Proteus was the deity of Greek myth who had the ability to change his shape and form at will. Horton draws a modern analogy: postmodern people seek to reinvent themselves as well. When it comes to worship, such protean people are somewhat annoyed that God is not prepared to cater to their new tastes. The “self” is a constructed identity (p. 52), constructed in communities and their narratives.

This fact gives people a sense of meaning and purpose. Worship should be that which constructs such selves. Narratives and stories construct particular identities. The two grand narratives that construct and constitute mankind is the one “in Adam” and the other one “in Christ” (p. 53). In the gospel of God’s eternal and electing love, sinners in Adam are re-scripted to take part in a different drama, that of Christ.

Yet Horton warns against “pietistic individualism” (p. 56). “God does not get incorporated into our play but we into his” (p. 57). Thus the author sounds a warning, one that is particularly timely in a North American context, driven as it is by individualism and personal narcissism.

The book calls believers back to a healthy respect for the divinely authorized means of grace: preaching the Word of God and proper use of the sacraments. “What we desperately need to hear in our day of teeming methods and techniques for ‘inducing’ revival is that the Holy Spirit does not work apart from the ordinary means that he has established in his freedom” (p. 63). American pragmatism has largely triumphed in the methods employed by churches. All around us we hear: If it works in getting people to make some kind of religious commitment, that is all that matters!

God’s Word comes as a two-edged sword of his law and gospel, by which he slays us in righteous judgment but also makes alive. Yet there must not be any reductionism allowed of freezing texts into categories of either “law” or “gospel.” For the Bible is “not simply a

book of objective, timeless propositions but a means of encounter with the Triune God,” says Horton (p. 66).

God works through preaching. The sermon is the event of proclamation by which God effects his will in the hearts and lives of the hearers. So important is the sermon then that both preacher and listener will properly prepare for this event.

Horton is careful to warn against two ways of preaching the law of God, both of which must be avoided. The one focuses on judgment, particularly on hell as a place, when in fact hell is the active presence of divine wrath. One should fear an angry Person rather a bad place, Horton notes. The other misuse of the law in preaching is a “sentimentalized law proclaimed as gospel,” which is disastrous (p. 76). Offending God’s holiness is left out of the picture in this preaching.

The author relates how the *administration* of the covenant is broader than election itself. Thus Horton keeps before the reader both the decretal aspects of God’s sovereign grace as well as the historical dimension of its administration. The latter serves the former without the two collapsing into each other. Horton also steers the reader between a sacramental understanding that creates a gap between the sacraments and saving grace, on the one hand, and seeing the sacraments acting automatically, thus leading to a dead formalism, on the other. Against these errors, Horton says that the sacraments, “like the preached Word, are not opposed to grace but are in fact the very means of grace” (p. 105).

Horton is very much aware that he is addressing an ecclesiastical situation that is strongly influenced by American individualism. Thus Scripture can speak regarding matters that it assumes the (original) readers understood. “God works with generations, not simply with individuals” (p. 106). So the gospel promises can be addressed to the children of believers, and there can be household baptisms in the New Testament era.

He brings the “already – not yet” construction of redemptive history to bear on preaching as well. Similarly, the “kingdom of grace” and “kingdom of glory” distinction has implications for preaching. Horton seeks to steer a careful course between the over-realized eschatological (triumphalistic) perspective and the under-realized (defeatist and pessimistic) viewpoint, between a “program of works-righteousness,” on the one hand, and antinomianism, on the other (p. 132). Thus the issue in “worship war” debates is not



between “traditional” versus “contemporary,” but rather between the effect of over-realized and under-realized eschatologies. Does Horton lose his own balance here? If he does, he makes a recovery by the end of chapter eight when he acknowledges that our worship services are (or should be) a faint beginning of the eternal worship and everlasting feasting of the consummate age. There are glimmers of the kingdom of glory impinging even now on the Christian church, existing at one level in the “not yet” of this current age. Horton might have developed this discussion much further.

In the area of worship formalities, Horton notes that liturgical structure is like a trellis that allows “wandering hearts to weave their prayers up to God in a manner that delights him” (p. 146). Worship leaders in general and pastors in particular are thus reined in so that the congregations do not become the subjects (victims?) of the leaders’ vicissitudes but engage in the recognized worshipping tradition of the Christian church.

Horton argues for *intentionality* in worship: let pastors and congregations know why they do what they do in corporate worship. Here is the heart of his thesis, and it is most welcome. Rather than cave into what the large mega-church down the road is doing with great “success,” let churches that claim the high road in theology also let that theology impinge directly upon the liturgy of worship each Lord’s day. Horton thus provides a survey of the several elements of a Reformed worship service. He argues for weekly celebration of Holy Communion (pp. 158ff.). To the concern that frequent (i.e., weekly) celebration would detract from that sacrament’s special nature, Horton claims that it is “already special because God has promised to accompany its lawful administration with the reality that is promised—Christ and all his benefits, by the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit” (p. 159). Christians should not divide over the question of frequency, but frequency “does seem to demand attention.”

The author also argues that style matters, since the person to be worshiped is God himself. Says Horton, “God’s *weightiness* (that’s what ‘glory’ means in Hebrew) is sacrificed to the trite mediocrity that has come to characterize a world dominated by advertising and a church that tries to imitate it” (p. 164). The trivial drives the market, and pastors and churches are not immune to this trend, a trend that must be resisted (cf. p. 169). The deeper question is always: “whether we regard the service primarily in terms of God’s

action and our response or in terms of our action and God's passive appreciation."

Believers must be vigilant, for we live in a society that is caught up in "the Buzz," that interminable stream of stimulation that may please our senses but fails to nourish our souls. Modern advertising of course caters to the Buzz and largely contributes to its maintenance. However, when the Buzz finds a place in the worship of the Christian church, the result is not true worship of the sovereign God, who has taken us into his own gracious drama. Rather, says Horton, the result comes to be the "worship experience" itself, wherein the worshipping (?) consumer is satisfied with stimulation of the senses. An important element in turning to a more biblical direction is recovery of the Lord's day as the God-ordained day for rest and worship (chapter eleven). Horton's comments on reclaiming the Sabbath as a day for genuine escape from the Buzz are especially helpful.

In chapter twelve Horton addresses the question of evangelism and reaching the "seeker." He wonders whether the (so-called) "seeker" might not be better termed a "tourist" (p. 212), for many of them have no intention of committing themselves to a church. There is an emerging younger generation, however, and many among them are seeking substance and roots in both theology and worship. This means that intentional churches, rooting their preaching and liturgy in God's biblical drama, have something that the genuine "seeker" wants to find.

Horton's book on worship, with its focus on preaching as a means of grace, is obviously enough not a preaching manual. Nor is it a manual on how to conduct a worship service. Rather it argues for theologically-driven worship, a God-centered worship, that is more compelling because the focus is on God.

Readers will find that this book is well written, easily accessible to lay persons and pastors alike. It is recommended to stimulate in Reformed and evangelical churches a renewed confidence in the confessional theology they are rooted in, as they bring such theology to bear on worship. Indeed, Horton rightly pleads for intentionality in making the drama of Sunday worship match appropriately the drama of God's grace in history. It is to be regretted that the book lacks subject and Scripture indices, and footnotes would have been preferred over endnotes.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

Fred H. Klooster, *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Volume One: Lord's Days 1-19 (Q & A's 1-52), Volume Two: Lord's Days 20-52 (Q & A's 53-129) and Appendixes. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources published by CRC Publications, 2001. Pp. 1272. \$99.95. (cloth)

During his many years of teaching systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Dr. Klooster taught an elective on the Heidelberg Catechism and exhibited a special interest in the history, background and distinctives of this well-known catechism. The fruit of this interest and labor is evident in the publication of this substantial, two-volume commentary.

Among the features of Klooster's commentary are: the use of both the German text and English translation of the Catechism; a careful exposition and commentary on each of the questions and answers; doctrinal summaries on important and disputed points; attention to the historical background to the Catechism's formulations; useful applications and pointers for students and preachers of the Catechism; a selected bibliography; and a general index. The strength of the commentary evidently lies in Klooster's intimate acquaintance with the history of doctrine, and the sixteenth-century context within which the Catechism was written and produced.

Though Klooster's commentary is a little imbalanced in terms of the distribution of the material—881 pages are devoted to Lord's Days 1-31, 268 pages to Lord's Days 32-52 of the Catechism—it is a worthy contribution to the study of the Heidelberg Catechism. It fills a void in the literature, since there is nothing comparable to it in the English language. Though it comes at a rather hefty price, these volumes are worth the price and ought to find a place on the shelf of any student and preacher of the Catechism. As a former student of professor Klooster, who gratefully remembers his careful instruction in and love for Reformed doctrine, I am delighted that he was able to complete these volumes in his retirement.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Abraham Kuyper, *Particular Grace: A Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation*. Translated by Marvin Kamps. Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001. Pp. xx + 356. \$29.95.

Abraham Kuyper is well known as a reformer of the church in the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century, the organizer of a Christian political party, and the articulate exponent of a Calvinist world and life view. However, he is not as well known, nor as highly regarded, as a theologian. Where his theological contributions are known, they are often regarded as rather traditional, even scholastic in character, and of little importance to the history and development of Reformed theology.

Perhaps the publication of this volume, which is an English translation from the Dutch work *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, will serve to enhance Kuyper's reputation as a Reformed theologian of the first rank. Originally published as a lengthy series of articles in the Dutch periodical *De Heraut*, this volume provides a sturdy and compelling restatement of the biblical and Reformed doctrine of God's particular grace toward the elect in Christ. Against the trend in his own day, even within the ostensibly Reformed churches of the Netherlands, Kuyper presents a powerful biblical, confessional and historical case for the teaching that God's grace is not universal (though ineffectual in the lives of all those who resist it) but particular. The salvation of elect sinners, Kuyper argues, finds its roots in eternity, is perfectly accomplished in history by the person and work of Christ, and is effectually applied through the gospel by the Holy Spirit. Salvation is, from first to last and in all of its many parts, the sovereign accomplishment of the Triune God.

No doubt readers of this volume will not always agree with all of Kuyper's exegetical and historical arguments. Reformed believers, however, will surely be impressed with the power of Kuyper's language and argument, the breadth of his acquaintance with past and contemporary discussion, and the cumulative weight of his case. They will also find Kuyper's book, despite its setting within a particular historical context at the end of the nineteenth century in the Netherlands, surprisingly fresh and pointed. Many contemporary denials of particular grace are anticipated by Kuyper's arguments. Exponents of the teaching of general grace and other

forms of universalism will find their biblical and theological arguments deftly refuted by Kuyper.

Translator Marvin Kamps and the Reformed Free Publishing Association are to be commended for producing this important work. Not only does Kamps provide an excellent, readable translation of Kuyper's complicated prose, but the volume is also handsomely bound and strengthened with translator's notes that acquaint the reader with historical circumstances and figures important to understanding Kuyper's writing. One can only hope that this will mark the beginning of a renewed interest in Kuyper's theological writings, and perhaps even the translation of some of his more important works. Highly recommended!

—Cornelis P. Venema

Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*. Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, edited by Richard M. Muller. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001. Pp. 331. \$24.99.

One of the significant debates regarding the history and development of Reformed theology focuses upon the question of the continuity between earlier, sixteenth-century and later, post-Reformation theological formulations. Due to the influence of Barth's reading of Calvin and sixteenth-century Reformed theology, many interpreters of the Reformed tradition argue for a substantial discontinuity between the theology of Calvin, for example, and the later theology of the Calvinists ("Calvin against the Calvinists"). Many representatives of this point of view maintain that Calvin's earlier Christocentric theology was recast by a "scholastic" Reformed theology whose principal theme was God's sovereign decree of election. In the process of recasting Calvin's theology, scholastic Reformed theology altered the form and content of Reformed theology. Furthermore, among students of the Reformed tradition, some have followed the lead of Perry Miller, Leonard Trinterud and others (most notably, J. Wayne Baker) in treating the development of the covenant in Reformed theology as an attempt to mute the severity of Calvin's "decretal" theology. Not only do

these interpreters detect a significant discontinuity between earlier and later Reformed theology, but they also posit a disjunction within the Reformed tradition between theologians who emphasize the divine decrees and others (especially the Rhinelanders, Zwingli and Bullinger, and their Puritan epigoni) who emphasize the doctrine of the covenant. In this reading of the history of Reformed theology, Calvin is not viewed as having a genuine doctrine of the covenants, since his theology was formed in terms of his emphasis upon the pre-temporal decree(s) of God.

Peter A. Lillback's study of Calvin's role in the development of covenant theology is framed by this debate over the interpretation of the development of Reformed theology. Originally written as his doctoral dissertation at Westminster Theological Seminary, his book represents a substantial and long-overdue consideration of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant. By means of his carefully-researched and thorough reading of Calvin's view in the context of the sixteenth century, Lillback persuasively argues against the thesis of discontinuity between Calvin and the Calvinists, and the alleged disjunction between Calvin's doctrines of election and covenant. For these reasons, Lillback's work makes a significant contribution to a resolution of the debates regarding the development of Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In so doing, he also lends considerable support to Richard Muller's claim that later developments within Reformed scholastic theology were in substantial continuity with Reformed theology in its earlier, sixteenth-century expression.

Lillback's study begins with an opening chapter that details the conflicting interpretations of Calvin's use of the doctrine of the covenant. Weaving his way through a large body of secondary literature, he suggests that these interpretations fall into four broad categories. Some interpreters maintain that Calvin has no doctrine of the covenant, and that other themes are central to his theological position. Others suggest that Calvin develops an "incomplete form of covenant theology," one that employs the doctrine of covenant at particular points (e.g., the debate regarding the baptism of infants) but does not employ the doctrine as a central theme. Another group of interpreters, who follow the lead of Miller and Trinterud, claim that Calvin's doctrine of God's decree militates against any doctrine of conditional covenant. In this interpretation, there is a significant theological difference between the Reformed

tradition as it was influenced by Calvin and Geneva, and the tradition as it was influenced by Zwingli, Bullinger and the Rhineland theologians. The last group of interpreters, which includes Lillback himself, argues that Calvin developed “an extensive if incomplete” covenant theology. According to these interpreters, though Calvin may not have developed the doctrine of the covenant to the full extent of later “federal theology” (as represented in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms), the essential components of this theology are present, even if at points only in germinal form.

After this important introductory chapter, Lillback divides his study into two major parts. The first part provides a relatively brief survey of the genesis of covenant theology in the late medieval and reformation contexts. The second part, which constitutes the bulk of Lillback’s study, details what Lillback terms the “genius” of Calvin’s covenant theology.

In his survey of the genesis of covenant theology, Lillback makes several important points. One of them concerns Augustine’s view of the covenant or *pactum* between God and his people. Contrary to the interpretation of J. Wayne Baker, who insists that Augustine’s view was a “testamentary” or unconditional covenant doctrine, Lillback shows how Augustine’s definition clearly includes a “bilateral” or “conditional” aspect. When God graciously establishes a relationship between himself and his people, he enters into a mutual agreement that obligates both parties to the covenant. Lillback also provides a helpful distinction between two approaches to the covenant that emerge in the late medieval period. Among Augustinian theologians, the covenant, though mutually binding, is based upon the priority of God’s grace and excludes any idea of human works as “meriting” God’s favor. Among some nominalist theologians, however, the covenant idea emphasizes the priority of the human will in preparing for and cooperating with God’s grace. In this formulation of the doctrine of the covenant, when sinners do what they can to prepare themselves for God’s grace, they initially merit God’s grace with a “congruent merit” (that is, God covenants to “accept” and graciously give them more than strict justice deserves) and subsequently merit God’s favor with a “condign merit” (that is, God grants them the reward that their works, prompted by his grace in them, justly deserve).

Perhaps the most important and controversial claim that Lillback makes in the first part of his study relates to the differences he discerns between the Reformed view of the covenant and Luther's law-gospel distinction. According to Lillback, Luther's emphasis upon the doctrine of justification compelled him to treat the old covenant as a "covenant of law" that was substantially at odds with the gospel of free justification through the work of Christ. Rather than viewing the Old and New Testaments as in substantial agreement, Luther contrasted the Old as a covenant of law, which required perfect obedience as the condition for life in communion with God, and the New as a gracious communication of free justification on account of the work of Christ. Luther was, accordingly, suspicious of Reformed theologians who emphasized the continuity of the covenants, fearing that this would confuse the gospel with the law and reintroduce the idea of merit. Contrary to this disjunction between the law and the gospel, the Zürich and Strasbourg reformations, which were first to give expression to a more fully developed covenant idea, emphasized the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. In the development of the covenant idea among the Reformed, the themes of God's sovereign grace in election and his mutual binding of himself with his people (believers and their children) were equally emphasized. Unlike Luther, who sharply separated faith and good works in order to maintain the law-gospel distinction, the covenant idea enabled Reformed theologians to discuss works "in the context of justification" (p. 125).

In the second part of his study, which Lillback entitles "The Genius of Calvin's Covenant Thought," Lillback makes a case for regarding Calvin as a significant exponent of covenant theology. Though Calvin does not fully develop the doctrine of the covenant to the extent that would be true of the "federal theology" of the seventeenth century, the covenant idea is certainly a major and recurring theme in his thought. Lillback maintains, therefore, that all the components of the later, more fully developed federal theology, including a prelapsarian "covenant of works," are either present or anticipated in embryonic form in Calvin's writings.

After a chapter in which Lillback illustrates the pervasiveness of the idea of covenant in Calvin's writings, he takes up the question of Calvin's view of continuity or discontinuity in the history of the covenant. Following the lead of the Rhineland Reformers,



particularly Bullinger, Calvin viewed the covenant as substantially one throughout its administration. The covenant of grace is one and eternal, though it is variously administered in the course of the progressive revelation of God to his people. According to Lillback, Calvin distinguished between the “law” in the general sense of the covenant of grace in its Old Testament administration, and the “law” in the specific sense of its strict demands and sanctions. Though the “law” in the general sense is fully compatible with the “gospel,” in the narrower sense of the law (Moses’ “peculiar office”) there is a profound difference between it and the gospel. By itself the law exposes human sinfulness and its consequence in the way of condemnation and death. However, when the law is viewed within the context of the promise of forgiveness through Christ and the Spirit’s work in renewing God’s people in righteousness, there is, according to Calvin, no fundamental conflict between the law and the gospel.

One of the claims often made regarding Calvin’s covenant idea is that he does not allow for a “mutual” covenant. However, Lillback adduces considerable evidence in Calvin’s writings that he, no less than the Rhineland Reformers, taught a doctrine of the covenant that allowed for the stipulation of conditions. From God’s point of view, the covenant is “unconditional,” since he not only initiates but also secures the reception of covenant blessings for his people in Christ. From his people’s point of view, the covenant is “conditional,” since it requires faith and obedience on the part of those with whom God covenants.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of Lillback’s treatment of Calvin’s covenant thought is his claim that Calvin, by means of the covenant, was able to give greater place to the necessity of good works in the salvation of God’s people. The covenant of grace, according to Calvin, provides believers a “twofold benefit” through the work of Christ: the benefit of free justification and the benefit of regeneration or renewal in righteousness by the work of the Spirit (N.B., Calvin uses the language of “regeneration” often as a synonym for “sanctification” or “repentance”). These benefits, though distinct, are simultaneously and invariably granted to all persons who are united with Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. By means of this insistence upon the double benefit of the covenant of grace, Calvin was able, Lillback argues, to avoid Luther’s radical disjunction of

law and gospel. For Calvin, not only are believers obligated to keep the law of God by the working of the Spirit of sanctification, but their good works are also “graciously accepted” and acknowledged by God.

Lillback describes the differences between Luther and Calvin at this point in sharp terms: “Luther’s understanding of justification by faith alone had no room for inherent righteousness, while Calvin’s view required it as an inseparable but subordinate righteousness. The resulting difference is due to Luther’s law/gospel hermeneutic versus Calvin’s letter—spirit hermeneutic” (p. 192). Contrary to Luther’s rejection of the necessity of good works and obedience to the law of God for salvation, Calvin insisted upon the inseparability of justification and sanctification. Calvin was even able, on account of this inseparability, to speak of a “second justification” that has reference to the believer’s good works. Indeed, in his articulation of a doctrine of “second justification,” Calvin utilized the scholastic idea of God’s “acceptance,” on the basis of his covenant promise and obligation, of the good works of believers. Though believers do not “merit” anything from God in this second justification, they do receive a gracious reward for works that have genuine value and significance to God. By this teaching Calvin was able to occupy “middle ground between the merit system of medieval Schoolmen and the law/gospel hermeneutic of the Lutheran system” (p. 205).

In the concluding chapters of his study, Lillback takes up several controversial questions relating to Calvin’s covenant thought. He argues, for example, that Calvin, far from opposing election to covenant, held the two doctrines in close proximity. Even though Calvin admitted that not all those with whom God covenanted were elect in terms of what he called God’s “secret election,” he nonetheless stressed the genuineness of the covenant’s promises and obligations as the means whereby God secures the salvation of his people. Far from identifying covenant with election, and on that account rejecting the idea of covenant sanctions for disobedient covenant breakers, Calvin insisted that the covenant’s administration includes the possibility of hypocrisy and covenant-breaking, which require the covenant sanctions of discipline and even excommunication. That Calvin acknowledges this clearly indicates that he did not view the covenant strictly from the standpoint of the doctrine of election, thereby diminishing its conditions and corresponding blessings or sanctions. In an

important chapter on the covenant of works, Lillback also argues that Calvin taught a kind of inchoate pre-fall covenant “that in various regards adumbrates that of the Federalists” (p. 304).

There is much to commend in this study of Lillback. As I indicated earlier, Lillback is the first to provide a truly comprehensive study of Calvin’s covenant thought. He fills a void in the literature by means of this work, and does so in a way that properly locates the question of Calvin’s view in relation both to its medieval antecedents and later developments within the Reformed tradition. Lillback’s reading in Calvin’s writings is obviously extensive and the case he makes for viewing Calvin as a covenant theologian in his own right is compelling. Interpreters of Calvin who would pit Calvin against the Calvinists, or Calvin against the Rhinelanders on the doctrine of the covenant, will face a formidable, perhaps unassailable, obstacle in Lillback’s study.

There are, however, two issues that Lillback’s study fails to address adequately. As Lillback himself admits, his study does not provide a very fulsome account of the early origins of covenant theology. The evidence he adduces for the use of the idea of covenant in late medieval society and church is rather slim and not clearly linked to the development of covenant theology by Reformed theologians, including Calvin, of the sixteenth century.

A much bigger question in my mind, however, relates to the way Lillback sharply contrasts Luther and Calvin on the doctrine of justification. One of the major themes of Lillback’s study is that there is a wide divergence between Luther’s law/gospel hermeneutic and Calvin’s covenant hermeneutic. This divergence accounts, he maintains, for Calvin’s ability to stress the mutuality and conditionality of the covenant between God and his people. Calvin, for example, was able to bring the law into the “context” of his doctrine of justification because he insisted upon the inseparability of justification and sanctification, the two benefits of the covenant. According to Lillback, Calvin’s covenant theology links up at this point with the scholastic tradition of the late medieval period by means of his rehabilitation of the doctrine of God’s “acceptance” or “justification” of the believer’s good works. Though Calvin nowhere countenanced the idea of “merit” in his covenant theology, he did insist upon the necessity of good works, and of a “subordinate” and “inherent” righteousness as an indispensable and

instrumental cause of salvation. In this respect Calvin did not fully agree with Luther's articulation of the doctrine of justification.

Even though Lillback rightly detects some real differences of emphasis between Luther and Calvin, he seriously overstates the differences between them on the doctrine of justification. No doubt Calvin differed from Luther in positing a more positive role for the law of God as a rule of gratitude for the Christian. Moreover, whereas Luther primarily focused upon the doctrine of justification, Calvin shows greater balance by emphasizing as well the necessary and indispensable place of sanctification as the second part of the "double grace" of God in Christ. Lillback also correctly observes the far more positive way that Calvin relates the Old and New Testaments, which are regarded as two formally distinct administrations of one covenant of grace, in contrast to Luther's tendency to treat the Old Testament as an administration of "law" in the narrow sense as opposed to the "gospel."

However, in making his case for a distinction between Luther and Calvin, Lillback misrepresents Luther's position. Reading Lillback's account of Luther's view, one gets the impression that Luther did not have a doctrine of sanctification or stress at all the necessity of good works as an inevitable fruit of a living faith. Lillback's presentation gives the distinct impression that Luther was "antinomian" in his formulation of the doctrine of justification, because he excluded altogether works performed in obedience to the law from his doctrine of justification. The fact is, however, that Calvin was every bit as emphatic as Luther about the distinction between law and gospel, *when the question concerned the ground or basis for the believer's justification*. Several times in his study, Lillback misreads Calvin's understanding of the "double grace" of God by arguing that the unbreakable link between justification and sanctification allowed Calvin to bring the law into the "context" of justification (e.g. pp. 124, 125, 185-93, 205). Calvin's point, however, is not that the law or works performed in obedience to the law *have anything to do with our justification*. Rather, his point is simply that the faith that alone justifies is never an alone faith; it is a faith granted to believers by the Spirit of sanctification who always renews those in whom he dwells. Calvin, no less sharply than Luther, insisted upon a clear *distinction* between free justification apart from works and sanctification by the working of the Holy Spirit. Lillback's language confusingly suggests that, by linking justification and sanctification,

Calvin introduced the believer's works into the context of justification in a manner somehow distinguishable from Luther's doctrine of justification.

Perhaps as the author of a dissertation that principally deals with Calvin's understanding of the relation between justification and sanctification, I am especially sensitive to this point. But Lillback's lack of precision and care, when treating the way Calvin speaks of the law in relation to justification, is also evident in the way he interprets Calvin's doctrine of a "double" or "second justification." Lillback argues that, by means of this doctrine, Calvin was able to steer a middle course between Roman Catholic and Lutheran views of justification. Indeed, Calvin's idea of God graciously rewarding the good (though imperfect) works of believers is regarded as an example of the way Calvin rejects Luther's law/gospel disjunction. In this way, Lillback suggests, Calvin was able by his covenant doctrine to emphasize the necessity of good works in connection with or in the context of the believer's justification.

In my judgment, this is a misreading of Calvin's understanding of a "second" justification. It is no doubt true that Calvin spoke of a second justification, which involves God's fatherly acceptance of the good works that his Spirit works in the believer. But this second justification did not in any way, according to Calvin, change the substance of the doctrine of free justification by introducing a "subordinate righteousness" as part of the context for the believer's justification. It is only on the basis of the believer's prior and fundamental acceptance before God, which is itself exclusively founded upon the righteousness of Christ, that his works can find any acceptance with God. Far from compromising the gratuity of God's justifying grace, Calvin's doctrine of a second justification taught that even those good works that the Spirit of Christ effects in the believer are acceptable to God only on the ground of his free acceptance of *our persons* in Christ. Calvin's repeated insistence upon the necessary distinction between justification and sanctification served to make the same point Luther insisted upon: that the believer's good works, however perfect or imperfect, contribute nothing to his justification before God.

It is unfortunate that Lillback's otherwise fine and outstanding work is marred by this kind of exaggerated presentation of the differences between Luther and Calvin on the doctrine of justification. Particularly at a time in history when the doctrine of

justification is so little understood or properly prized, it is critical to recognize that on this subject Luther and Calvin were in hearty agreement.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. Pp. xvi + 271. \$28.00. (cloth)

Douglas J. Moo teaches New Testament and administers the doctoral program in theological studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. This is his second commentary on James (his earlier one appeared in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary series).

This commentary is balanced and thorough in its discussion of exegetical points, yet without being overcome or distracted by the details of the debates. The style of writing makes the exposition quite accessible to non-specialists.

We sampled the commentary at three points (1:2-8; 2:14-26; 5:13-18) to get a sense of the author's approach. Very appealing is his frequent structural analysis of the text, his alertness to features like chiasm, grammatical and lexical nuances, and Old Testament allusions. Though the commentary series is committed to using the New International Version as the English text of choice, Moo regularly compares various English translations and paraphrases en route to assessing textual meaning. At points he even analyzes alternatives for punctuating the Greek text. The word studies are appropriate and helpful (e.g., *teleios* in 1:4, *haplōs*, 1:5; *proseuchomai*, 5:13; *astheneō*, 5:14; *aleiphō*, 5:14), because these discussions often distinguish and capture for the reader the essential meaning of a phrase or sentence.

James 2:14-26 is arguably among the most significant and debated sections of the epistle. In the commentary introduction, the author prepares the way for his later exposition with an essay on "Faith, Works, and Justification" (pp. 37-43), where he sets out the issues and the alternative positions. Moo offers a cautiously sympathetic assessment of what has come to be known as "covenantal nomism," a view that, with two important—though debatable—adjustments (namely, second Temple Judaism was more

“legalistic” and synergistic than covenantal nomism would suggest), can nonetheless be seen as an accurate and helpful picture of Jewish soteriology in the NT period. The author rightly suggests that there is no contradiction between Paul and James, since they are addressing quite different circumstances. Paul was faced with opponents who insisted on the performance of certain works as a condition for fellowship with God and his people. James, by contrast, opposed those who were dismissing the importance of obedience in the Christian life. “Works, claims Paul, have no role in getting us into relationship with God. Works, insists James, do have a role in securing God’s vindication in the judgment. Paul strikes at legalism; James at quietism” (p. 43).

The Table of Contents can serve well as an outline of the entire epistle, since all the exegetical units and sub-units are explicitly identified there.

We commend the author, editor, and publisher for this attractive volume in a growing and reputable series. We encourage church librarians and pastors to give this series, and this particular volume, a serious look.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace*. The Stob Lectures 2000. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. Pp. x + 101. \$14.00. (cloth)

One of the continuing and unfinished debates within the Calvinist tradition, particularly the Dutch Calvinist tradition influenced by the writings of Abraham Kuyper, is the subject of common grace. On the one hand, critics of the doctrine of common grace argue that it invariably blurs the lines of the antithesis between the church and the world and inevitably leads to unholy compromise. On the other, defenders of the doctrine insist that it provides an explanation why the world, even under the divine curse and broken through human sin, does not go as badly as anticipated. Among defenders of the doctrine, it is often argued that common grace provides a basis for Christian engagement with human culture and the public square, without falling prey to an anabaptist policy of “world flight.”

In this study Richard J. Mouw tackles this debate and attempts to offer a balanced, cautious affirmation of common grace. The chapters of the book are revisions of Mouw's 2000 Stob Lectures at Calvin College and Seminary. One chapter, which addresses the relation between the infra- and supra-lapsarian debate and the doctrine of common grace, appeared earlier as an article in the *Calvin Theological Journal*. While sensitive to the concerns of critics of the doctrine, Mouw makes a case for a wider view of the reach of God's grace and working that explains the relative good evident in the lives and works of those who may not be recipients of God's saving grace in Christ.

In Chapter One, "Thinking about Commonness," Mouw acknowledges that many Christians and mainline churches have been too quick to find common ground with contemporary culture. Critics of the doctrine of common grace have correctly sounded the alarm, when they insist that there is a sharp line of division between the world of faith and the world of unbelief, a line of division that runs through the various facets of human life in God's world. If a ground for "commonness" is to be found, therefore, Reformed believers need to look for it not so much in the "natural law" tradition but in the common grace teaching of historic Calvinism.

After a chapter in which he recognizes the legitimacy of some of the criticisms of common grace ("Lessons from the 'Labadists'"), Mouw offers a restatement of the doctrine in a chapter that bears the title, "He Shines in All That's Fair." While recognizing that the idea of common grace is elusive and difficult to explain, Mouw insists that we may not deny the presence and working of God beyond the boundaries of the believing community. The challenge, as he summarizes it, is: "How do we take with utmost seriousness the need to be clear about the lines between belief and unbelief, between those who live within the boundaries of saving grace and those who do not, while at the same time maintaining an openness to—even an active appreciation for—all that is good and beautiful and true that takes place outside of those boundaries?" (pp. 32-33). If God is glorified through and takes delight in the non-human creation, which Mouw takes to be irrefutable, then there is no reason to believe that he cannot be glorified through and take delight in "various *human* states of affairs, even when they are displayed in the lives of non-elect human beings" (p. 35, emphasis Mouw's). God's purposes are not exhaustively redemptive,



according to Mouw, but include a favor toward and delight in the affairs of his creatures that exceed the boundaries of redemption. For example, Mouw affirms that God delights in the beauty of the creation, affirms the relatively moral actions of non-elect persons, and empathizes with the joys and sorrows of his image-bearers. In these respects God's purposes and interests exceed the boundaries of his more particular redemptive purpose for his elect people.

Perhaps the most intriguing chapter in this little book is Chapter Four, "'Infra'- Versus 'Supra-.'" In this chapter Mouw explores the implications for the doctrine of common grace of the historic dispute regarding the order or sequence of the various facets of God's decree. The "infra-lapsarian" view holds that God's decree to create all things precedes his decree to permit the fall and to provide salvation for his own through Christ. The "supra-lapsarian" view holds that God's decree to elect his people in Christ precedes his decree to create the world and permit the fall into sin. After disposing of the traditional objections to this debate regarding the order of the facets of God's decree, Mouw offers the suggestion that the debate may have significance for our understanding of the complexity and diversity of God's dealings with his creatures. Infralapsarianism, for example, allows us to see that God's purposes in creation logically precede and are distinguishable from his purposes in redemption. By placing God's purpose to create before his purpose to redeem, infralapsarianism allows us to see how God may have ancillary and penultimate purposes that serve his glory in creation that are not wholly and exclusively directed to his principal and ultimate purposes in redemption. In Mouw's words, "If God cannot operate with more than one 'ruling passion,' then it would indeed be folly for Christians to attempt to do so; but if God is committed both to the election of individuals to eternal life and to a distinguishable program of providential dealings with the broader creation, then it is quite fitting for us to feature a similar multiplicity in our own theologies" (p. 68).

In the concluding chapters of this stimulating study, Mouw explores some of the implications of a common grace doctrine for the calling of believers in the public square and in human affairs generally. In a cautious and modest way, he encourages a circumspect engagement with the world, one that avoids the grandiose claims of some who would easily "transform culture" in

Christ's name and the overly-anxious fears of others who would rather withdraw from such engagement than risk accommodation.

Though Mouw's study is a relatively small book, it is a richly textured and carefully balanced treatment of the doctrine of common grace. Rather than remaining content with the arguments of past debates, Mouw provides a fresh and stimulating analysis of the stakes in this debate and a possible way forward. Those who participate in the ongoing debate regarding common grace should include this study on their required reading list.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xii + 308. Paperback edition, 2002. \$20.00.

Richard Muller is well known for his studies in the history of doctrine, particularly the history of Reformed doctrine from the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation until its crystallization among the Reformed orthodox of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not only has he produced a number of substantial volumes of post-Reformation Reformed dogmatics, but he has also become the leading advocate of an approach to Reformed orthodoxy that argues the *continuity* between the sixteenth-century Reformation and later interpreters. Contrary to the popular opinion, which stems among other things from the influence of Barth and the Barthians upon Reformation studies, that orthodox Reformed theology recast and thereby *deformed* Reformed theology, Muller argues that Reformed scholastic theology is substantially in harmony with the earlier Reformed tradition. Though the *form* of later Reformed orthodox theology may differ from that of Calvin and certain earlier Reformers, the *theological substance* is largely continuous. The thesis expressed by the phrase, "Calvin against the Calvinists" (Basil Hall), therefore, represents a significant misreading of the post-Reformation history of doctrine.

Though Muller has written on the subject of Calvin and his theology in earlier writings, this impressive volume represents his first book-length treatment and interpretation of Calvin's thought within the context of the history of doctrine. Several of the chapters

were previously published in scholarly journals, though they are presented here in revised form. This may account at times for the repetitiveness of some of Muller's arguments, but it does not detract from the overall unity of the book and the coherence of its central arguments.

In an introductory chapter, Muller sets forth the primary thesis of his interpretation of Calvin. As the title of this volume indicates, Muller maintains that many interpreters of Calvin's theology have accommodated his writings to their own historical context and theological interests. Whereas the older literature on Calvin's theology looked for a "central dogma," which constituted the governing principle of all of Calvin's theological writings (predestination usually being the dogma of choice), twentieth-century Calvin studies have been dominated by neo-orthodoxy. The dominance of this neo-orthodox Calvin scholarship only illustrates an approach to which Muller takes exception: reading Calvin in the light of "contemporary theological grids—whether Barthian, Schleiermachian, or 'rhetorical'—as indices or heuristic guides to Calvin's world of thought" (p. 188). Muller endeavors in his studies of Calvin's theology to present, in contrast to these earlier accommodations of Calvin's theology, an "unaccommodated Calvin." Rather than interpreting Calvin in the context of later theological grids, Muller wants to present Calvin "in context," that is, within the historical setting of the Christian theological tradition of which he was a preeminent interpreter during the sixteenth-century Reformation.

After this introductory chapter, which sets forth Muller's principal argument regarding the need to overcome modern accommodations of Calvin's thought, Muller provides a series of studies in Calvin's theology that are subsumed under two divisions. The first division or section treats a variety of perspectives upon Calvin's text, and the second treats a number of questions relating to the order and structure of Calvin's teaching, as well as the relation between his theological life's work, the *Institutes*, and his exegetical work and commentaries.

Several themes recur throughout Muller's study. Muller argues, for example, that the *Institutes* of Calvin ought not to be read in isolation from his commentaries, which provide a far richer and more comprehensive statement of Calvin's theological views. Interpreters of Calvin's theology who rely almost exclusively upon

the *Institutes*, therefore, often fail to appreciate properly the relation between Calvin's exegetical labors and writings, and their companion in his "handbook," the *Institutes*. Those who argue, for example, for a certain understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant or the attributes of God solely upon the basis of a reading of the *Institutes* will likely misread and misinterpret Calvin.

Muller also weighs in on the debate regarding the structure of Calvin's *Institutes*, a subject that has often perplexed students of Calvin's and occasioned a vigorous debate in the 1950s between Edward A. Dowey, Jr. and T. H. L. Parker. Muller maintains that neither Dowey, who emphasized the twofold knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, nor Parker, who emphasized the role of the Apostles' Creed, recognized adequately the influence of a traditional catechetical ordering of teaching upon the *Institutes*, as well as the order of Melancthon's *Loci Communes* and the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans.

One of the more interesting arguments of Muller's study, which illustrates his more general thesis regarding the unfortunate influence of neo-orthodoxy's reading of Calvin, is his claim that Calvin's "method and disposition" were not radically contrary to the "scholastic" theological tradition before and after him. By means of a careful analysis of the way Calvin's *Institutes* were handled by late-sixteenth-century editors (in terms of structure and marginal notes, for example), Muller persuasively argues that Calvin is far more congenial to the scholastic theological tradition than many of his twentieth-century editors would suggest.

There are many other themes and features of this rich and extraordinarily learned treatment of Calvin's theology that might be mentioned. Muller, for example, devotes a chapter to debunking the imaginative and psycho-analytic reading of Calvin's biography by William Bouwsma in his *Portrait of Calvin*. The themes I have mentioned, however, are illustrative of the provocative and fresh reading of Calvin offered in this volume. Muller's extraordinary acquaintance with the literature, original and secondary (his bibliography runs thirty-two pages in fine print and lists all of the important sixteenth-century and subsequent editions of Calvin's works), coupled with his resolution to wrest Calvin's theology from the grasp of those interpreters who would accommodate him to alien interests, make this study a must read for any serious student of Calvin's theology in its sixteenth-century context.

As a would-be student of Calvin and author of a dissertation on one significant feature of his theology, however, I would offer one word of caution regarding Muller's work. As an historian of doctrine, Muller sets the standards of historical research so high that one wonders whether students of Calvin will not be reluctant to engage his theology in a less historically rigorous manner. Or, to put the point a little differently, it would be an unfortunate consequence of Muller's work, were students of Calvin's theology unwilling to address his theological significance for a contemporary articulation of the Christian faith for fear of a failure to read Calvin in context.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*. Foreword by Samuel T. Logan Jr. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001. Pp. 247. \$13.99.

Jonathan Edwards, Perry Miller famously opined, “was the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene.” Whether or not this is true, scholars and popular writers have, for the last several decades, acted as if it were. Works on Edwards abound. The number of doctoral dissertations, scholarly monographs, and more popular treatments of Edwards and his writings produced in the last forty years are staggering. Edwards has gone from being the reviled fire-and-brimstone preacher of “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (which was for years all that was known of Edwards, being included in every high-school and college anthology of American literature), to a brilliant thinker and writer, conversant with the latest philosophy of his day. Edwards has not, of course, changed; the way that scholars view him has, evolving from something approaching contempt in past years to admiration in more recent days (if begrudging at times). This is not to say that Edwards has no detractors. Nor do all who write on Edwards properly understand him. But good quality work on Jonathan Edwards has become something of a cottage industry.

One would not expect the flood of works on Edwards to diminish anytime soon. The year 2003 is, in fact, the 300th anniversary of Edwards's birth (October 5, 1703) and this should witness, if anything, more works on Edwards than ever. In addition

to all that has been written on Edwards and the various anthologies that have been made of some of Edwards's writings, Yale University Press is in the process of publishing, in definitive, well-edited and footnoted editions, Edwards's corpus. Of the approximately 1400 sermons of Edwards that we have in manuscripts, the vast majority is in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, along with most of his other manuscripts. Beginning in 1957 (under the general editorship of Perry Miller), Yale published Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*. The latest volume in the series (v. 19) is *Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738*, with a total projection of 27 volumes. Yale University Press has also issued *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (1995) and *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (1999) to help guide the more casual reader through the vast amount of material.

Where is the non-specialist to begin his study of Edwards, with so many writings on him and with the issuance of the Yale volumes? Stephen J. Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of his Life and Thought* is, I believe, an excellent place to start one's study of this pivotal theologian. To anyone familiar with the breadth of literature on Edwards, such a recommendation constitutes high praise. Start with Nichols and let his book lead you into Edwards's writings themselves. Although in Part 1 this volume provides an historical introduction to Jonathan Edwards, its strength is the orientation in Parts 2-4 to Edwards's writings on revival and church life, to his writings on theology and philosophy; and to his sermons. Let the general reader be daunted no more; rather, this helpful and insightful work ought to encourage us to "sit a spell" with Edwards.

What's the big deal about Edwards anyway? Why should we take time to investigate this eighteenth-century preacher, some times called "the last of the Puritans"? The answer resides in seeing that Edwards addressed with biblical fidelity, depth, and clarity many issues that remain with us to this day. Nichols points out (pp. 71-86) that in his very first published sermon, "God Glorified in the Work of Redemption," Edwards made a biblical defense of the sovereignty of God in the saving of helpless sinners over against every claim that would in any measure make salvation dependent upon man. This issue is still with us and every generation must fight the battle against every form of self-aggrandizement in which people seek something whereby to commend themselves to God. In fact, it was while Edwards vigorously preached on human inability

that revival broke out in 1735 in Northampton, in which three hundred were added to the church in six months. What a contrast that this and the rest of the First Great Awakening forms to the Second Great Awakening in its Finney-stage a hundred years later. The First Great Awakening stressed human inability and God's sovereignty, while the Second Great Awakening ultimately came to stress human ability and God's being bound by man's "free-will decision."

Nichols does a very good job in setting forth in a brief span Edwards's writing on revival and the church, elucidating not only his early works on revival but also his great work on *Religious Affections* (1746) and Edwards's defense of his communion position (1749), a stance that ultimately led to Edwards's dismissal by his congregation in 1750. Nichols is neither unaware of the historical circumstances of Edwards's writings nor does he fail to mention them. One might wonder, though, whether Nichols properly takes the historical circumstances involved in the composition of Edwards's sermons/treatises into account. For instance, both *Religious Affections* and Edwards's communion treatise, *An Humble Inquiry*, are written against a particular backdrop that undoubtedly affected the tone and the approach of the works. Bluntly, the circumstances of the times suggest that Edwards had certain axes to grind, and this did not fail to leave a mark on these works.

*Religious Affections* is the last in a series of sermons/works of Edwards in which he analyzed Awakening phenomena with an eye to instructing the hearer/reader to self-examination: the goal of such works is ostensibly to help the hearer/reader discover whether or not they possess the distinguishing marks of true Christians. It is important, I believe, not to treat these analyses of the Awakening in the abstract, as if every church member today should be encouraged to such particularly Edwardsian close self-examination to see whether he or she bears the "distinguishing marks" of a work of the Spirit of God. To be sure, while we live in an age in which many Christians lack all introspection whatsoever and could use the encouragement to be more introspective, the end of such introspection should be a fuller and deeper sight of ourselves and of the grace that is greater than our sin. If the end of such self-knowledge is to determine whether we are truly Christian, this tends, in my pastoral experience, to the promotion of hypocrisy and

an unwillingness to acknowledge how bad we really are, lest we conclude ourselves not to be Christians.

True Christians who take an honest look at themselves will quickly despair of themselves, which, in and of itself, is a good thing because it will turn them from all forms of self-reliance and self-righteousness to recognizing their profound need for Christ and his righteousness. Church members today need to remember that Edwards was writing in a context in which not only was he seeking to discomfort those who trusted their experience rather than Christ, but he was also writing in a context in which town and church were identified and in which there was no requirement of a profession of faith to come to the Table of the Lord and commune. Solomon Stoddard, Edwards's grandfather and pastoral predecessor, had extended the implications of the "Half-Way Covenant" (emerging from the Synod of 1662) to communion, teaching not only that those who had been baptized but had not professed faith might have their children baptized, but that it was not necessary to profess faith to come to the Lord's Table, that the Lord's Supper was a "converting ordinance." Stoddard's communion position made it that much more urgent for Edwards to preach and write in a way that would clearly distinguish between true and false professors, because there was no such distinction made in the service of communion. And since the church would be "established" for another full century in Massachusetts (even after independence Massachusetts maintained established congregationalism for almost sixty years), town and church were identified in a way that is not true today; and this situation made Edwards even more zealous to encourage all members of the church to examine themselves very closely for the distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God.

What I am getting at here is that in some of these writings on revivals and the church, Edwards was seeking to undeceive many in Northampton who might have regarded themselves as true Christians but whom Edwards had serious questions about (and I do not doubt that some did suffer salvific self-deception). That Edwards had concerns and even differences with his congregation can be seen not only from his ultimate dismissal from his Northampton charge, but also in his handling of the "bad book" affair of 1744 and the struggle and tensions he had with certain members of his congregation, some of whom were relatives. I believe that there is evidence (external to Nichols's material) that



internecine congregational struggles may have made Edwards more exacting in his spiritual standards than might otherwise have been the case, though some scholars have conjectured that he wrote and preached as he did because his temperament was a strict and demanding one. Nichols does not seem to take, one might say, these psychological and sociological factors into account as to how they might have influenced, particularly, Edwards's revivalist and ecclesiastical writings.

All of this emphasis on "How do I know if I'm a Christian?" raises a question with which Calvinists have often struggled. While we should examine ourselves, see our sin and repent, to what degree do we look to ourselves and our experience for assurance? Do we not look to Christ primarily for assurance? Are we not better off, as Bonar said, if we take ten looks at Christ for every one look that we take at ourselves? I believe that there are many other things in Edwards's writings that balance this out, particularly his frequent preaching on the glories of heaven and the beauty of God (see Nichols on Edwards's sermons, especially pp. 205-232). And in *Charity and its Fruits*, Edwards, as regards self-examination, taught that love to God and neighbor are the chief signs of true religion (as he did in the third section of *Affections* to a degree). Edwards also intended the masterwork of his life to be his brilliant *History of the Work of Redemption*. Though that work was never what he hoped that it might be, I think we see something of the best of Edwards in the Christ-centered focus of that work. This may counter the tendency in the works on the revival to a careful and close examination of one's religious experience. Remembering the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the revivalist/ecclesiastical writings, as noted above, will undoubtedly yield the most useful reading of Edwards.

Nonetheless, I believe that Nichols's book is, in many ways, an excellent work, though tending toward the hagiographic at points and not seeming to take into account the work of modern scholarship, which has raised valid concerns about Edwards's shortcomings as a pastor. Again, these shortcomings I believe affected particularly Edwards's work on revivals and the church. It does no one any good to have a plastic saint. Edwards was a child of his time, as are we all, and that this is the case needs to be acknowledged and taken into account in our historical interpretation of him.

It is interesting that in the section on “Writings on Theology and Philosophy,” Nichols does not give more than a passing mention to Edwards’s work on original sin (1758), which has been highly controversial among Calvinists—with some claiming that Edwards’s teaching on original sin to be orthodox and others claiming that it planted the seeds that developed into the New Divinity which ultimately denied total depravity and inability. Nichols does, however, give a good and thorough treatment to Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will*, probably his greatest work. There has been some conjecture that Edwards’s distinction between natural and moral ability also contributed to the errors of the New Divinity regarding the will. I believe that Edwards’s application of this distinction, though, reveals, as does his work on the *Nature of True Virtue* as well as other scientific/philosophical writings, that he was something of a theological genius and that Miller’s assessment—that Edwards was the greatest American philosopher/theologian—is in many respects warranted. Nichols’s book highlights this greatness and is perhaps the best introduction to Edwards’s writings available for the general reader.

—Alan D. Strange

Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson, editors. *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*. Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2002. Pp. xiii + 270. (Price unknown)

All students of confessional Calvinism should be grateful for the publication of these historical writings by the late Charles G. Dennison, Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The writings in this volume consist of articles, lectures, and General Assembly reports delivered by Dennison in his capacity as historian. Three of the articles, in fact, that form the heart of the section entitled “History” were originally delivered as lectures at Mid-America Reformed Seminary and previously published in the pages of this *Journal* (“Tragedy, Hope, and Ambivalence in the History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936-1962,” in three parts, Fall 1992, Spring 1993, Fall 1993).

For anyone interested in the history of the OPC and the role that it has played in the broader church, this book is must reading.

The OPC was formed on June 11, 1936 in that cauldron of events that included the re-organization of Princeton Theological Seminary and the formation of Westminster Theological Seminary; the controversy in the Foreign Mission Board of the PCUSA and the founding of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions; and the deposition of Machen and others who stood for constitutional Presbyterianism and against the Modernists and Auburn Affirmationists. Machen, stalwart champion of biblical Christianity against liberalism, said at the founding of the OPC, “At last we have a true Presbyterian church.” This would imply that the OPC is the spiritual successor to the modernist-dominated PCUSA. But this does not mean that the OPC would enjoy the kind of cultural influence, if not to say hegemony, to which American Presbyterianism had earlier been accustomed. In fact, the OPC would, even as Machen had, suffer disenfranchisement.

What Dennison makes of this cultural marginalization—is it an unhappy consequence of orthodoxy in a faithless age or a necessary concomitant of the “spirituality of the church”?—is what makes these writings so valuable. Dennison, in true Van Tilian fashion, is no mere reporter of “brute facts.” He understood that fact and interpretation are inseparable. One may disagree with Dennison’s interpretation of history at this or that point but one will never be bored in these pages by a dull, lifeless recounting of trivia. Dennison’s writing sparkles and is a delight to read. He is often provocative and insightful, never prosaic or jejune. This work is highly recommended.

—Alan D. Strange

Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2001. Pp. xiv + 202. \$16.99.

In 1994, Clark Pinnock with four other scholars published *The Openness of God*, the volume that first generated the controversy among evangelicals on open theism, which presents a vision of God who is fully engaged in the human predicament and responsive to human decisions, compassionately suffering according to his love, and therefore a God who is not unchangingly aloof from human affairs but wholly involved in and subject to change as he relates to

humans in the exercise of their history-producing freedom. With this book *Most Moved Mover* Pinnock offers his reply to the many critics of open theism, setting forth clarifying arguments and again attacking what he brands as the classical, deterministic, and even despotic view of God that has been so much a part of the tradition of Christianity.

Pinnock's title is an obvious play on words, wishing to offer up a vision of God (which he passionately maintains is the biblical portrait of God) in sharp contrast to Aristotle's God as the Unmoved Mover. The God of Greek thought has poisoned our Christian heritage and spoiled a right understanding and *experience* of God. This God of Greek invention, says Pinnock, in contrast to the biblical vision, is an invulnerable God, altogether transcendent, unchangeable, all-controlling, metaphysically immobile, and emotionally detached from human suffering, being impassible—a God that Dallas Willard describes as “an unblinking cosmic stare” and Walter Kasper says is known as “a solitary narcissistic being, who suffers from his own completeness.” As a dominating and aloof patriarch, this God seems to be altogether responsible for human sin and human suffering. This God humiliates and diminishes human beings. Indeed, Pinnock reminds his readers that the primary sin of the Bible is not atheism but idolatry.

Against idolatrous notions of God, Pinnock portrays God as a triune community who seeks relationships of love with his human creatures, for he has given them genuine (that is, libertarian) freedom for this very purpose. Pinnock believes that God took “an enormous risk” in granting such freedom to people and so opened himself up to the pain of human sin and unbelief. But God was willing to take that risk and, given the reality of human rebellion, he labors in the power of his love to bring forth the joy of reconciliation, should straying human beings decide to return to him. In fact, “according to the openness model,” says Pinnock, “God in grace sovereignly granted humans significant freedom to cooperate with or to work against God's will for their lives and to enter into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with himself.” What is curious about this statement, particularly in the context of the whole of Pinnock's argument, is that human freedom is seen as the result of divine grace. (It is not clear that the Fall can significantly affect this freedom.) One wonders whether Pinnock would wish, at this point, to distinguish his view from that of Pelagius, who

identified grace with free will itself, it being part of a person's ability as created and fallen. Perhaps not! For Pinnock views open theism as a more radical and consistent version of Arminianism, being an outworking of free-will theism and offering greater coherence than the mild modification of classical theism found in Wesley and Arminius. In fact, Pinnock believes that the future of open theism is dependent upon the reception it finally receives from traditional (less consistent) Arminians. Having heard from many Calvinistic evangelicals who are extremely hostile to this theistic paradigm, Pinnock awaits how the wider Arminian wing of evangelicalism will respond. If it takes sides with the Calvinistic critics, "there is little future for the open view in evangelicalism." Pinnock is to be commended for this honest, if not particularly insightful, admission.

Pinnock's book is a four-part project. Chapter one presents the scriptural foundations for open theism. Chapter two explores how the pagan inheritance of Greek thought might be overcome. "The Metaphysics of Love" is the title of chapter three; and chapter four is called "The Existential Fit." Pinnock says that these four chapters examine successively the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience, with Scripture functioning as the primary norm for theology. However, Pinnock is not so naïve as to think that one's view of biblical revelation does not have hermeneutical implications. "The Bible," asserts Pinnock, "does not speak with a single voice; there is dialogue between the different voices. . . . [I]t is important to remember that the Bible is a complex work by many authors whose views may vary and that the text is open to various plausible interpretations." This means that, of course, there will be counter biblical testimony against both open theism and classical theism. But Pinnock sees the narrative of Scripture as clearly tilting the scales on the side of the open view of God.

Whereas tradition must be respected, it is always subject to new insights gained through the prayerful and fresh wrestling with Scripture. Indeed, we can have traditions that are unbiblical and utterly pagan. We must forsake our "mental idols" and worship the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Pinnock defends open theism against numerous critics and argues for a conception of God as *personal, loving, communal, changeably faithful, intimately near, sovereign in his lordship, an agent in time, and wisely resourceful*. Meanwhile Pinnock does not wish to succumb to critics of a different ilk, namely, those of process theism, who make an overweening appeal to reason in their

theological formulations. Nonetheless, Pinnock is concerned that we make right use of reason in the doing of theology, for he wants nothing to do with an irrational or incoherent theology, as is the case with classical theism. Traditional theism abounds with a laundry list of conundrums and logical absurdities, in Pinnock's view. As he writes in one place, "It astonishes me that people can defend the 'glory' of God so vehemently when that glory includes God's sovereign authorship of every rape and murder, his closing down the future to any meaningful creaturely contribution, and his holding people accountable for deeds he predestinated them to do and they could not but do." Leaving aside at this point whether Pinnock fairly portrays classical theism, this quote illustrates what he sees as the sort of incoherence that is rife in the classical model. Pinnock wishes to avoid such irrational puzzles at all costs. Theology must be understandable and not contradictory; consequently, Pinnock wishes to make appropriate use of philosophy—ancient and modern—for theology, employing helpful philosophical categories and distinctions and repudiating worldviews foreign to divine revelation which dominate and corrupt theology.

Lastly Pinnock is concerned that our conception of God fit with our day-to-day existential reality and experience—that is, that it adequately address the demands of life. For example, there is the deep human intuition that human choices are not predetermined and that history is not closed off from other possibilities. Pinnock sets such intuitions in bold opposition to notions of necessity and a future that is eternally set in stone, being foreordained by God. In fact, argues Pinnock, we live life in precisely the way of open theism: namely, that God is responsive to our choices, that we as free human creatures are constantly presented with genuine choices and that our decisions shape history and that life might be radically different if we had made choices different than the ones we made, that life is experienced as a dynamic of human decisions and proposals. In short, our experience confirms the truth and reality of open theism, according to Pinnock. This theistic model affirms human beings in such a way that their lives really matter, friendship with God is rendered genuine, freedom is authentic, love functions as persuasive and personal, growth in grace and discipleship require human exertion and struggle, and perseverance, prayer, and divine guidance are an open dynamic of human/divine interrelationship.

Moreover, says Pinnock, the open view of God more effectively addresses the problem of evil, delivering God from being the author of sin. God does not will evil, neither does he bring good out of evil in every case. On the contrary, God is a fellow-sufferer in human suffering. God's sovereignty does not entail the idea of omnicausality, his power is not all-determinative, and his will is not irresistible. God does not have control of all things, for human freedom is beyond his control. However, he calls us to join him in the battle against evil—an enemy that shall be overcome.

Thus Pinnock believes that open theism is biblical, coherent, and adequate for the realities of human life. It encourages us to become co-laborers with God and to take up the cause of his redemptive project.

Obviously I have presented only a brief sketch of Pinnock's arguments. Readers are encouraged to read the book for themselves. Pinnock's fundamental aim in writing this book is the hope that open theism might be accepted as a valid option for evangelicals. But something different is needed if Calvinistic evangelicals are to perceive that plea as sincere and well-motivated: specifically, open theists like Pinnock will have to represent fairly and accurately what classical theists actually teach and believe—something absent in Pinnock's book, or at least obscured by unfair charges that classical theism simply follows the Greek schema.

Indeed, at this point a few observations are in order. Pinnock, along with other advocates of open theism, are fond of bringing against the proponents of classical theism the charge of introducing the poison of Hellenism into the biblical conception of God, infecting it in particular with Aristotle's idea of the Unmoved Mover. Apparently this is a charge that cannot be escaped, no matter how different classical theism proves to be over against Aristotle's Unmoved entity. One is tempted to use one of Pinnock's own tactics to escape this indictment: that is, in being accused of holding to a Socinian notion of God, Pinnock replies to this accusation by saying since he holds to the doctrine of the Trinity (and Socinus didn't), the charge is rather wide of the mark. It seems fair to say the since classical theists confess God as Triune (and Aristotle didn't), the charge of Hellenism is likewise rather wide of the mark.

But classical theists can do better than that. In fact, open theists have shown themselves to be intellectually lazy in the way they

throw around the allegation that Greek thinking has corrupted the Christian conception of God. Even a minimal amount of research shows us that Aristotle's Unmoved Mover is unlike the God of classical theism in radical and irreconcilable ways. For example, not only is the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle not Triune, this Being (if it is a being) is not personal. This entity is also not the *first* mover, as if motion could be followed back to a *moment* when motion began. Nor is the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle a *creator* in any sense like the Creator of classical Christian theology. This entity is not an *efficient* cause, as though it exerted a power or expressed a *will*. It becomes an efficient cause only in the sense of being desired or serving as the goal of things. There is no will in this entity at all. Likewise, Aristotle did not conceive of the Unmoved Mover as *thinking about* or *prescribing purposes for* the world. For Aristotle the Unmoved Mover is not so much a being as a way of explaining the reality of motion in a universe of motion. The Unmoved Mover is the eternal principle of motion, such that the world has always been in motion, in eternal process. Thus there is no creation in time. For Aristotle, the Unmoved Mover is not an object of worship but an intellectual or scientific explanation of motion and change in the universe, the *final* cause toward which substances are moving as their natural end. The "God" of Aristotle, this Unmoved Mover, brings intelligible order to the world. Thus the Unmoved Mover serves as a kind of god in Aristotle's metaphysics, but unlike the traditional gods of the Greeks and unlike the God of classic Christian theism, this entity is altogether impersonal. Everything moves toward it, and so it is immanent in all things; nonetheless, it has absolutely no thought of other beings or things, for it contemplates only itself, is entirely self-centered and perfectly happy in its individual self-centeredness, and is personal only in a philosophical sense, having intellect. People neither have nor attempt to have personal interaction with this being. In fact, Aristotle says that it is foolish to attempt friendship with God, for God is incapable of returning love and we could not in any case be said to love God (that is, the Unmoved Mover).

All of this shows that the easy and flippant identification that is made by open theists like Pinnock between classical theism and Greek thinking bespeaks sloppy scholarship at best and borders on dishonesty at worst. It is absurd to treat Greek conceptions of God as monolithic, something open theists repeatedly do. In fact, open



theism itself is perhaps open to the charge of succumbing to Greek ideas about deity.

For the ancient Greeks the divine powers or deities were regarded as beings that resembled human beings except that they were immortal and had greater abilities. The chief deity in the Greek pantheon was Zeus (the “sky-god”), who in the *Iliad* is named the “father” of people and of gods. He is humankind’s protector and ruler. In the Greek theism of the ancient world, the gods are altogether human-like, with the same virtues and vices, but possess superior power and ability, being immortal. Zeus, with the other Olympian deities, powerful as he is, is not always able to accomplish his will, but he (like the other deities) can be intimately involved in human affairs, and isn’t exempt from suffering the results of his own actions and the actions of others. In fact, according to the Greek mythic scheme, Zeus resolves and sets about to destroy all humankind upon the earth with a flood, except a single couple manages to escape on an ark. Humanity was reconstituted when the surviving couple, Deukalion and his wife Pyrrha, cast stones that turned into men and women.

This and like mythology long abided among the Greeks. In fact, the numerous images and tributes to the classical deities, even an altar inscribed “To the unknown god,” provided the apostle Paul with an avenue for addressing the Athenians as very religious people unto whom he proceeded to present the gospel (Acts 17:16, 22-23).

We see then that the broadside against classical theism, that it is infected with Hellenistic ideas and such, simply won’t do. A similar (and perhaps less unfair) broadside could be directed toward open theists, that they worship a God who is like the God or gods that the Greeks served, that the Greeks *actually worshiped*, a God who is vulnerable and changeable and incapable (at least some of the time) of helping them in their heartbreaking need, a God who is ever-present in times of trouble but not always an ever present *help* in troubled times, for he is not always able to do anything about the trouble they are in or their loved ones are in. As the ancient Greeks could not be sure if the gods would help them, open theists leave believers hanging in bewilderment: how are they supposed to know when God is *able* to answer their prayers? Or would responding in conformity to their prayers for help mean God would violate someone else’s freedom, with the consequence that their problems

remain irresolvable, for now anyway? Such a depiction of God is as foreign to Scripture as the Greek pantheon.

Open theism, including Pinnock's most recent project in this book, fails precisely at the level of human experience and the struggle of faith in the rough-and-tumble of life. To pray to the God of open theism, saying "Thy will be done," must now be offered with provisos: provided God *can* do his will at this particular time, and provided his will wouldn't interfere with anyone else's free exercise of their own will. Open theism indeed "opens" a realm within the created order over which God has no genuine control—in fact it is the glory of open theism: human freedom. Consequently, in the wreckage of human life, the *problem of evil* pivots around a God-who-gambles with human lives.

It is to be hoped that even sympathetic readers of this book will be saddened that Pinnock, who repeatedly pleas for fairness in theological advertising (especially when depicting the views of others), frequently caricatures classical theism, even as he does not shy away from using high-octane and inflammatory rhetoric (a trait he points out and laments in his critics). For in Pinnock's depiction, the God of classical theism is an idol, a human invention, not the God of biblical revelation. Obviously enough, those who worship this Triune God, who love and adore him, who delight in him and pray to him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are to be most pitied.

If Pinnock is wrong, however—and I think he is woefully wrong—then his pity is misplaced. But all is not lost, and we are far from hopeless, for classical theists believe that God is a God of pity, who is able to change the minds and hearts of classical and open theists alike, irresistibly and gloriously able, according to his overflowing grace.

—J. Mark Beach

Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen*. Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, edited by Richard M. Muller. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. Pp. 215. \$19.99.

This work represents one of the few serious studies in historical theology on the work of John Owen. Students of Owen have often had to rest content with popular treatments of this pinnacle figure

in seventeenth-century Puritan theology. Such studies are usually geared for pastors and interested laymen, with the intent of rechristening the past. The net effect is that the Puritans, Owen serving as a towering personage, are treated as heroes of the faith who are then read and interpreted apart from their historical context and apart from their theological predecessors—except for the occasional comparison with Calvin, as if Calvin (as important as he is) alone defines the Reformed tradition.

Rehnman, who is a visiting scholar at Exeter College, Oxford University (his Ph.D. is also from Oxford), presents us not only with a study of high academic caliber, but also with an analysis that teaches us much about Owen the theologian, who drew deeply from the history of doctrine and the wider Christian theological tradition, including patristic, medieval, and renaissance writers. Owen was also, not surprisingly, conversant with his own Reformed theological heritage. As to theological method, or what is usually called *prolegomena*, Owen was a well-grounded voice who accurately represents the Reformed consensus on this locus in late Reformed orthodoxy.

Rehnman focuses particularly upon Owen's *Theologoumena pantodapa* (1661), which is his chief contribution to theological prolegomena, dealing with the origin, nature, and progress of the knowledge of God. The recent translation of this work, under the anachronistic title *Biblical Theology* (1994), is unfortunately of such inferior quality that it cannot be used as a reliable source of Owen's thought. Thus Rehnman rightly labors with the original Latin text. Rehnman also makes use of *The Reason of Faith* (1677) and *Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Word of God* (1678), both of which form part of Owen's *Pneumatologia or The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*.

Rehnman's book, which is a noteworthy piece of historical theology, serves (in effect) to show *via Owen* how the Reformed orthodox conceived of theology as a concept, its meaning, possibility, and divisions. It likewise addresses (again, *via Owen*) the orthodox conception of natural and supernatural knowledge of God (a topic that generated more heat than light in the century recently past), and the nature of theology—that is, the object, causes, and ends of theology, the genus of theology, and what it means that theology is a mixed *theoretica-practica* discipline. In treating Owen's prolegomena, Rehnman also takes up the question of the

relationship between faith and reason, and what the use and abuse of reason in the discipline of theology involves. Here Owen fails to develop the use of reason in any positive ways (unlike other Reformed thinkers). Rehnman further demonstrates that Owen's treatment of belief and evidence follows in the path of standard Reformed theology, wherein the question of authority or the rule of faith in theological discourse is carefully examined, and the role of the Holy Spirit in grounding faith is shown to be altogether pivotal and decisive, for believers trust in Scripture as the Word of God, says Owen, "*solely* on the evidence that the Spirit of God, in and by the Scripture itself, gives unto us that it was given by immediate inspiration from God. . . ." The chasm between faith and unbelief then is unbridgeable except by the Holy Spirit, for there is a foundational difference between those who depend on a knowledge of the truth from Scripture alone, resting on nothing in themselves, and those who depend on a light of their own.

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of Rehnman's study is how Owen conceived of the organization of theology, which Rehnman presents as "A Federal Model." In other words, in organizing or structuring theology, Owen sought to conform it as much as possible to the nature and order of divine revelation. This led him to steer away from the *loci*-method and to organize theology according to the history of revelation, though it appears that in practice Owen did not abandon the *loci*-method as evidenced by his works *The Doctrine of the Trinity* and *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*. Thus Owen seems *formally* to reject the topical arrangement of theology, but in his own work cannot avoid doing so, for obvious pedagogical reasons. Nonetheless, Owen's expressed preference is that theology should follow the order of Scripture as much as possible, and this is reflected in his lectures on prolegomena.

In wishing to accent the history of revelation over the systematization of revelation, Owen discovered that this fit well with the federal theology that was codified by J. Cocceius, John Ball, H. Witsius and other Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century. This is reflected in Owen's *Theologoumena*. Especially noteworthy is Owen's view of the organic and progressive growth of divine revelation, for he views redemptive history—which is a history of the covenant—and the revelation that is part of it, as revolving around the three principles of faith in the Mediator,

obedience to the moral law, and adherence to divinely appointed worship.

Rehnman's work is to be commended for its careful consideration of the primary sources and concern to place Owen within his immediately British but also wider Reformed theological context. The book demonstrates that on matters of prolegomena this famed Puritan reflects in many ways the consensus of Reformed thinking in the latter part of the seventeenth century. All of which leads to further acclamation for the book, for in doing the above mentioned things well, Rehnman paints a portrait of Owen that is seldom seen, even by his contemporary admirers, namely, that he was a theologian not only of exceptional caliber and high Reformed pedigree, but also a man who was self-consciously catholic in spirit and outlook, simultaneously scholastic in method and concerned to follow the contours of redemptive history.

Lastly, since Rehnman appears to have no particular theological axe to grind in this monograph, his work bears the marks of sane scholarship without attempting to bend Owen's thought to serve some contemporary theological battle. In setting forth the theological methodology of John Owen, Rehnman has labored to give readers an accurate (versus a skewed) analysis of that project.

—J. Mark Beach

Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001. Pp. x + 110. \$8.99.

In this popular presentation of his views, Norman Shepherd makes a case for an approach to salvation and evangelism that is shaped by the biblical doctrine of the covenant. Due to the importance of the subject and the controversial nature of Shepherd's reformulation of the Reformed view of the covenant, this study will be of particular interest to the Reformed community. Shepherd, who taught systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1963-82, attempts to make his case for a covenant view that resolves some troublesome and unresolved problems of more traditional formulations. Since his covenant view was the occasion of a controversy that led to Shepherd's dismissal

from the faculty at Westminster in 1982, this volume, which basically restates the position Shepherd was advocating already in the 1970s, merits special attention and careful evaluation.

The study is divided into two major parts. Part 1, "Covenant Light on the Way of Salvation," addresses the question of the nature of the covenant and the way it opens up a helpful view of the long-standing problem of the relation between "faith and works, or grace and merit" (p. viii). The material in this part of Shepherd's study was originally delivered as the Robinson Lectures at Erskine Theological Seminary in Due West, South Carolina, in 1999. Part 2, "Covenant Light on Evangelism," considers the significance of a biblical view of the covenant for a biblical and Reformed approach to evangelism. The material in this part is a revised form of lectures originally presented at a conference in 1975 and subsequently published in *The New Testament Student and Theology* (ed., John H. Skilton [Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976]).

If it is often true that the way a question is posed has much to do with the answer provided, this is particularly true for the way Shepherd poses the question he aims to address in the first part of his study. After noting that we live in a period of history that presents a special challenge "to maintain a clear testimony against unbelief, immorality, and social disintegration" (p. 3), Shepherd suggests that this challenge is aggravated by a long-standing and unresolved problem stemming from the time of the Reformation. Though Reformed believers may be profoundly grateful for Luther and the Reformers' emphasis upon the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, they have nonetheless inherited from the Reformation some "unresolved questions." Recent debates within the evangelical community regarding such matters as "lordship salvation" (does salvation include acknowledging Christ as Lord as well as Savior?) and "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" illustrate that the problems of *antinomianism* and *legalism* have not found satisfactory resolution. Whereas some Protestants emphasize justification through faith alone and thereby diminish the gospel call to repentance (for fear of legalism), others, as in the Roman Catholic tradition, emphasize the necessity of good works and thereby introduce a new legalism. This continuing problem of antinomianism or legalism is the "legacy of the Reformation on the downside" (p. 8), according to Shepherd. It raises the question that only the biblical doctrine of covenant satisfactorily answers—"how

do you preach grace without being antinomian? . . . [H]ow do you preach *repentance* without calling into question salvation by grace apart from works?" (pp. 8-9).

In the first part of his study, Shepherd surveys the biblical accounts of the covenant of grace in its distinct Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Covenant administrations. According to Shepherd, all forms of God's covenant with human beings, whether before or after the fall, involve "a divinely established relationship of union and communion between God and his people in the bonds of mutual love and faithfulness" (p. 12). Though this covenant relationship is founded upon and initiated by God's grace, the promises of God's grace toward his people are always accompanied by obligations or demands. Thus, promise and demand are two, closely related components or parts of any covenant between God and his people.

Consistent with this general understanding of the covenant relationship, Shepherd argues that it is incorrect to identify the covenant with Abraham as an "unconditional" covenant. Those who view the Abrahamic covenant, for example, as a "model for the method of gospel grace," contrasting it with the Mosaic covenant as a "legalistic covenant, in which you are saved by keeping [the] republished covenant of works perfectly" (p. 14), misunderstand both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. No less than the Mosaic covenant, the Abrahamic is conditional upon its distinctive requirements. Among the conditions of the Abrahamic covenant, Shepherd identifies the following: the requirement of circumcision, the obligation of faith, the crediting of Abraham's "living and obedient faith" as righteousness, and the command to walk before the Lord and to be blameless. These conditions or obligations of the Abrahamic covenant, moreover, are clearly demonstrated in two ways: first, due to Israel's unbelief and disobedience, she failed to receive all that the covenant promised; and second, only through the "covenantal righteousness of Jesus Christ" were the promises of the covenant fulfilled. Jesus Christ fulfilled the covenant obligations by means of his "living, active and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross" (p. 19). The faith (or better, faithfulness) of Christ was, Shepherd maintains, "credited to him as righteousness" and becomes thereby the "guarantee" of blessing for "his followers" who are obligated to "be faithful in order to *inherit* the blessing" (p. 19; Shepherd's emphasis).

Shepherd summarizes what we may learn from the Abrahamic covenant as follows: “In the Abrahamic covenant, there are promises and obligations. The blessings of the covenant are the gifts of God’s free grace, and they are received by way of a living and active faith. Salvation is by grace through faith. By *grace* and through *faith!* Those are the two parts of the covenant” (p. 22).

A pivotal leg in Shepherd’s argument and reformulation of the doctrine of the covenant is provided in his exposition of the Mosaic covenant. In Shepherd’s view, this covenant conforms in its essential parts to the same pattern exhibited in the Abrahamic covenant: God’s grace and promise establish the covenant relationship, but the promises are only enjoyed in the way of covenant faithfulness or obedience to the covenant’s obligations. However, in the history of Reformed covenant theology, the Mosaic covenant has often been misinterpreted as a covenant of works that republishes the pre-fall covenant with humankind in Adam. Citing Charles Hodge as an example of this interpretation, Shepherd identifies the “basic principle” operative in this covenant view as a “works/merit” principle. The Mosaic covenant is regarded as a legal one, which requires perfect obedience to its demands and, upon the condition of such obedience, promises blessing as its merited reward. Just as God promised Adam life upon condition of perfect obedience, the Mosaic covenant, though it functions within the broader framework of the covenant of grace formally established with Abraham, has a legal cast. In this understanding, the Mosaic covenant promises its merited reward “as a matter of simple justice” (p. 26).

The burden of Shepherd’s treatment of the Mosaic covenant is to demonstrate that it follows the same pattern evident in the Abrahamic covenant. Though he does not explicitly reject the whole concept of a pre-fall covenant of works, Shepherd’s argument shows that he regards the concept as a fundamental misstatement of the covenant relationship. The obedience required in the Mosaic covenant is “not the obedience of merit, but the obedience of faith. It is the fullness of faith. Obedience is simply faithfulness to the Lord; it is the righteousness of faith (compare Rom. 9:32)” (p. 39). In his fatherly love and covenantal favor, the Lord graciously covenants with Moses and the children of Israel. This covenant relationship is not merited, nor does its continuance depend upon meritorious good works. However, even as Abraham



was obliged to live obediently before the Lord, so Moses and the children of Israel were obliged to keep his commandments. Thus, when the apostle Paul in Romans 10:5-6 and Galatians 3:12 speaks of the law in contrast to faith, he is using an *ad hominem* argument against the Judaizers in their misuse of the Mosaic covenant. When the law says, for example, that those who do what the law requires will live (compare Lev. 18:5), it is not enunciating a works/merit principle, as the Judaizers claimed, but the covenantal principle of enjoying the blessings of God's favor in the way of faithfulness. Neither the Abrahamic nor the Mosaic covenants ever contrasts as opposing principles grace and merit, or faith and works. "In both covenants," says Shepherd, "there are promises, and these promises are received by a living and active faith" (p. 40).

The remainder of the first part of Shepherd's study outlines the distinctive features of the new covenant in Christ, by comparison to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, and draws conclusions for the problems of antinomianism and legalism. Consistent with his main thesis regarding the covenant, Shepherd insists that the new covenant consists of two parts, promises of grace and obligations. The grace of God in Jesus Christ places believers under the obligations of faith and repentance. Believers "must become obedient, as he [Christ] was obedient" (p. 48). Furthermore, believers who believe and repent are obligated to persevere in doing the will of God. This is the only way whereby they will receive "what has been promised as a gift of sovereign grace" (p. 49). Failure to meet these covenant conditions can only result, as was the case under the covenant in its previous administrations, in coming under the curse and judgment of God. Though the conditions of the covenant are not "meritorious conditions," it remains the case that only a "living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life" (p. 50).

However, Shepherd also notes significant differences between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Christ. The Mosaic covenant has been abrogated in several respects. The elaborate rituals for temple worship are no longer binding. The sacrifices of the old covenant, which typified the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of his people, are no longer needed. Furthermore, the observance of the Mosaic law cannot save any one. Shepherd argues that this is not due to the inability of anyone to "keep the law perfectly as a covenant of works. Rather, observing the law cannot save a person

because the Mosaic system is no longer operative” (p. 56). Despite these differences between the old and new covenants, and despite these senses in which the new abrogates the old, all of the covenants, according to Shepherd, are “revelations of salvation by grace through faith” (p. 57). What is new in the new covenant is “not the principle of grace, but the person and work of Jesus Christ” who enables his people “to become the covenant keepers that God intended [them] to be from the beginning” (p. 57).

Shepherd concludes the first part of his study by returning to what he terms the unresolved legacy of the Reformation. The solution to the twin errors of antinomianism and legalism, as well perhaps as the divide between the Reformation and Roman Catholicism, lies in a wholesale rejection of the idea of merit. Both Reformed and Roman Catholic views of salvation have historically allowed the idea of merit to pervert the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Roman Catholics, on the one hand, teach that the believer who cooperates with God’s grace can merit further grace. However, Protestants, who repudiate the idea of the meritorious good works of believers, still retain the idea of merit in connection with the saving work of Christ. Christ alone, by way of his perfect obedience to the law (active and passive), obtains or merits eternal life for his people. This Protestant understanding of merit has the unfortunate consequence, according to Shepherd, of encouraging the idea that an emphasis upon sanctification or the necessity of good works represents “a threat to salvation by grace” (p. 62). Once the whole notion of works (whether Christ’s or the believer’s) meriting salvation is repudiated, however, we can stress the conditional character of the covenant. The blessings of salvation are granted by God’s grace by way of the covenantal obligations of faith, repentance and obedience. A covenantal understanding of the gospel, accordingly, solves the problem of traditional Protestantism’s embarrassment with passages like Galatians 5:6 and James 2:24.

In the second part of his study, Shepherd offers a solution to the problem of a Reformed approach to evangelism. What we need, he argues, is a “covenant-evangelism” approach rather than an “election-evangelism” or “regeneration-evangelism” approach. Because Reformed people have typically approached the subject of evangelism from the perspective of divine election, they have often faced crippling practical obstacles to an effective and rigorous

approach to evangelizing the lost. Since the doctrine of election emphasizes the particularity of God's love and grace, the pastor is faced with the insoluble difficulty of knowing to whom the good news is addressed. If lost sinners are approached as a mixed company of elect and non-elect sinners, only some of whom are graciously addressed in the gospel, then how can a pastor confidently extend the gospel's promise to all? In addition to this difficulty, the Reformed pastor is also uncomfortable with the gospel's demands of repentance and obedience. Too much emphasis upon what the gospel requires will lead, Shepherd fears, to a new legalism or undermine the gospel of grace alone. And, if these practical difficulties were not enough, the Reformed pastor is also shackled by the problem of the assurance of salvation. If we do not know who are elect and non-elect, how can we obtain any real certainty regarding God's electing grace toward us in Christ?

Shepherd presents his case for a covenant-evangelism approach in three stages. In the first stage of his argument, he begins with an exposition of the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28. In the second stage he turns to the subject of the relation between covenant and election. And in the third stage he concludes with a chapter on the subject of covenant and regeneration. The heart of this second part of his study is his insistence that we approach sinners in terms of the doctrine of the covenant, rather than in terms of the doctrine of election.

After showing that the Great Commission is thoroughly covenantal in its nature and assumptions (fulfilling the promise to Abraham, calling all to meet the covenant conditions of faith and obedience, administered by means of Word and sacrament), Shepherd seeks to illustrate how the covenant solves some of the long-standing problems of Reformed evangelism. Rather than approaching people in the "third-person" ("God saves the elect by grace alone, though we do not know whether you or I are elect"), the pastor who speaks covenantally is able to extend the gospel promise without embarrassment to all covenant breakers in Adam. Just as the prophets and apostles viewed election from the perspective of covenant, so should the gospel preacher (p. 83). This enables the pastor to address people, not "as a mixed multitude of elect and reprobate, with a view toward separating them," but as a company of lost sinners to whom he opens up the promise of "covenant life in union and communion with God" (p. 84). Viewed

covenantally, the gospel may be addressed “to everyone on the basis of John 3:16, ‘Christ died to save you’” (pp. 84-85). The covenantal gospel, furthermore, grants assurance by focusing upon the covenant promise rather than upon the inscrutable, secret things of God’s decree. It allows the preacher, at the same time, the freedom to stress the covenant’s obligations without fear of legalism, since the promise is always realized in the way of covenant faithfulness. The categories, in this kind of an approach, are no longer elect or non-elect persons. The only kinds of persons with which the pastor deals are covenant keepers and covenant breakers.

According to Shepherd, this covenant approach helps to explain the language of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 1. It also helps to explain why baptism, not regeneration, is “the moment when we see the transition from death to life and a person is saved” (p. 94). When Paul speaks of believers as elect in Christ in Ephesians, he is not speaking in terms of God’s eternal decree of election. Rather, he is speaking of the covenantal status of believers (and their children) in Ephesus, some of whom may prove to be non-elect should they fail to persevere in faith. Contrary to an approach that focuses upon regeneration, which inevitably leads to the practice of dividing the covenant community into two classes, the regenerate and the non-regenerate (who can ultimately be known only to God), covenant evangelism deals with sinners in terms of the covenant and its administration. Because baptism signifies and seals visibly the believer’s fellowship and incorporation into Christ, it must serve as the point of departure for determining whether a person is elect in Christ.

Shepherd is convinced that this kind of covenant-evangelism approach will have a liberating and enlivening effect in Reformed churches. If a Reformed pastor, he claims, consciously orients his evangelistic methodology to the doctrine of the covenant rather than election, “he can and ought to expect permanent vitality in the steady expansion of the church of Christ” (p. 82).

I have taken the trouble to provide this brief sketch or overview of Shepherd’s argument in order to provide a basis for the following evaluation. Though Shepherd’s study is relatively brief and written in an easy-to-read style, it constitutes, as I indicated at the outset, a rather substantial reformulation of Reformed covenant theology. Since the implications of his reformulation are far-reaching and possibly destructive of a consensus within the Reformed churches

today, my evaluation will be somewhat more comprehensive than is ordinarily the case in a book review.

Shepherd's study has several evident strengths. The book is clearly written and makes a good case for recognizing the unity of the covenant of grace in its various historical administrations. Shepherd's general description of the covenant as a divinely-initiated relationship of union and communion between God and his people is unobjectionable and fairly traditional. In his brief survey of the administration of the covenant of grace in its Abrahamic, Mosaic and New Testament forms, Shepherd properly insists upon the mutuality and conditionality of the covenant relationship. When the Lord enters into a communion or covenant with his people, this covenant stipulates or obligates its members to live together in the bonds of mutual fidelity and love. There are, accordingly, senses in which the covenant of grace is both unconditional in its initiation and conditional in its administration. In his treatment of the Mosaic covenant, Shepherd rightly opposes any view that would interpret it exclusively as a kind of "covenant of law," neglecting thereby to recognize the priority of God's grace and promise in this administration of the covenant as well as others. Whatever the peculiar features of the Mosaic covenant, Shepherd correctly maintains its continuity with the formal establishment of the covenant with Abraham and its subsequent fulfillment in Christ.

Since the covenant, according to Shepherd, invariably includes the elements of God's gracious promises, stipulations of obedience, and sanctions for disobedience or unfaithfulness, it provides a framework for understanding how God's sovereign grace does not diminish but undergirds human responsibility. When the doctrine of salvation is viewed exclusively in terms of God's sovereign and unconditional electing grace, and not in terms of the covenant in history, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to accommodate the Scriptural emphasis upon human responsibility in the context of gracious privilege. In this way the error of antinomianism can be resisted, since the privileges of God's gracious covenant serve not to diminish but rather to establish the responsibilities of the covenant relationship. Shepherd effectively makes these points throughout his study.

In his treatment of the relation between covenant and evangelism, Shepherd also offers a number of helpful observations regarding the benefits of a covenantal approach. In his exposition

of the Great Commission, he rightly observes that it can only be understood against the background of God's promise to Abraham. The promise of blessing for all the families of the earth is now being fulfilled through the discipling of the nations. This promise of blessing and salvation, moreover, does not aim simply to save sinners from condemnation and death. Rather, it aims to gather the nations in order that God's kingdom may come, and that the peoples serve the Lord in truth and faithfulness. Evangelism, therefore, is not merely a matter of "snatching a few brands from the burning," but includes the goal of preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. On the basis of this covenantal emphasis, Shepherd also resists the temptation to draw an inappropriate line between the nurture of covenant members and the evangelistic seeking out of non-covenant members in order to bring them into the fellowship of the church. The same covenantal gospel is preached to all, and it is preached with the same goal in view.

Perhaps the primary emphasis of Shepherd's advocacy of a covenant-evangelism approach is that the gospel preacher should not approach sinners from the perspective of God's decree of election and reprobation. When this is the case, and the primary focus of interest is upon the regeneration (or non-regeneration) of covenant members, insoluble problems arise for the evangelistic task of the church. Since no one knows precisely who is elect and who is non-elect, the gospel promise may not be generally extended to all recipients of the gospel (for fear that non-elect persons be improperly addressed). Furthermore, since no one knows the "secret things" of God's electing or non-electing counsel, the gospel may not be communicated in a way that assures its recipients of God's promise and faithfulness. Anxiety about the assurance of salvation often follows and believers become preoccupied with looking for evidences of regeneration, which then become the basis for a confidence about one's salvation. Because the electing grace of God in Christ is unconditional, evangelism that is oriented to the decree of election also suffers, according to Shepherd, from an inordinate fear of emphasizing the gospel's conditions of faith and obedience. However, when we approach people in terms of the covenant with its promises and obligations, we can simultaneously herald the good news of God's grace in Christ and the corresponding summons to new obedience. Shepherd's main point

regarding covenant evangelism, therefore, is the helpful reminder that we should approach lost sinners with the gospel of God's covenant grace in Christ, making judgments respecting people in terms of the covenant's administration (through Word and sacrament) rather than curiously inquiring into the secret things of God.

Despite these evident strengths of Shepherd's study, there are also a number of deeply troublesome features to his book that I do not believe can be ignored or minimized. Since a full discussion of each of these features would extend this review beyond its proper limits, I will restrict myself to a series of critical observations, each of which could undoubtedly be developed at much greater length.

First, we have noted that Shepherd's study is presented as a helpful resolution of some allegedly "unresolved questions that are really the legacy of the Protestant Reformation" (p. 4). Chief among these problems is a failure to relate properly faith and works, a failure that is especially evident in the unresolved questions of antinomianism and legalism. Shepherd presents his study, accordingly, as something of a creative contribution to problems inherent in the traditional formulations of Reformed theology going as far back as the sixteenth century. By any standard, this is a rather tall order and daunting task. It is rather perplexing, therefore, to read Shepherd's study and discover that he cites almost no authors in the course of his study. On one occasion he quotes an unnamed and unreferenced source (p. 13). On another occasion he quotes Charles Hodge on the subject of the covenant of works to illustrate what is wrong with some of the traditional formulations of Reformed theology (p. 25). The historic confessions of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches likewise receive little or no attention. Perhaps these omissions may be excused by noting that Shepherd's study is a published version of occasional addresses, and that he makes no claim to offer a complete or systematic presentation of his views. However true such points may be, Shepherd's bold claims for the advantages of his formulations, as contrasted with (unnamed and unidentified) formulators of traditional Reformed theology, would seem to place a greater burden of proof upon his shoulders. That burden includes, minimally, a significant amount of interaction with the exegetical, confessional and theological tradition known as "Reformed."

Readers of this little volume, however, will find such interaction notably lacking.

Second, in making a case for the unity of the covenant of grace throughout the history of its various administrations, Shepherd treats the covenant relationship between God and his people *as largely identical at every point, including its administration before and after the fall into sin*. In all of God's dealings with human beings, whether before or after the historic fall into sin, the covenant relationship consists of a graciously established bond of union and communion between God and his people. This covenant relationship is born of God's free grace, stipulates faith and obedience, and threatens with sanctions those who fail to fulfill its obligations.

This flattening out or virtual identifying of the pre- and post-fall covenants has unavoidable and mischievous implications for our understanding of the way of salvation. For example, one implication of Shepherd's argument is that the way of salvation, whether for Adam or Christ or any believer, is always one and the same—the way of covenant-keeping faithfulness. Thus, one of the ironies of his formulation of the covenant at this point is that, though Shepherd introduces grace into the covenant relationship before the fall into sin in a way that parallels the priority of grace in the post-fall covenant, he also treats the stipulation of obedience for believers in the covenant of grace as though it were merely a reiteration of the pre-fall obligation of obedience. Salvation is by grace through faith(fulness), before as well as after the fall. God's promise secures or guarantees the believer's covenant inheritance. However, that inheritance can only be received by way of the believer's covenant keeping (p. 19).

Third, though this *flattening* of the covenant relationship throughout the course of history, before and after the fall, may have a superficial appeal, it has huge implications for the way we interpret the respective "work" of Adam and Christ, the second Adam. Shepherd makes clear that he rejects the traditional Reformed doctrine of a pre-lapsarian "covenant of works" that promised Adam life "upon condition of perfect obedience" (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. VII.ii). To say that Adam's acceptance before God justly demanded his performance of an obligation of obedience, is, Shepherd argues, tantamount to treating the covenant relationship as though it were a contractual one, on analogy of an employer to an employee, rather than a familial one,



on analogy of a father to a son (p. 39). We should recognize that God always treats human beings on the basis of his sovereign grace and promise. Just as children never “merit” their father’s favor by their good works, so human beings never “merit” God’s favor by their obedience to the covenant’s obligations. However, life in covenant with God, though not “merited,” is nonetheless obtained only by way of the obedience of faith. This means that what God required of Adam, he requires of Abraham and all believers, including Christ.

Lest this interpretation of Shepherd’s view be regarded as a misreading of his position, it should be noted that Shepherd explicitly draws a parallel between what God obliges Abraham, Christ, and all believers to do as a necessary condition for their salvation. In his description of Christ’s saving work, Shepherd uses the same language that he earlier used to describe Abraham’s faith: “His [Christ’s] was a living, active, and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross. *This faith was credited to him as righteousness*” (p. 19, emphasis mine). By this language Shepherd treats Christ as though he were little more than a model believer whose obedient faith constituted the ground for his acceptance with God in the same way that Abraham’s (and any believer’s) obedient faith constituted the basis for his acceptance with God. In his zeal to identify the covenant relationship between God and man in its pre- and post-fall administrations, Shepherd leaves little room to describe Christ’s work as Mediator of the covenant in a way that honors the uniqueness, perfection and sufficiency of Christ’s accomplishment for the salvation of his people.

Fourth, these features of Shepherd’s reformulation of the doctrine of the covenant raise questions regarding his understanding of the doctrine of justification. Though Shepherd studiously avoids any explicit formulation of the doctrine of justification in this study, the trajectory of his position clearly points in the direction of a revision of the historic Reformation position. Just as Adam was obliged to meet the conditions of the covenant that God graciously established with him, so believers are obliged to meet the conditions of the covenant of grace in order to inherit eternal life. Just as Christ was obliged to live in covenantal loyalty and faithfulness to God, Shepherd maintains, “so his followers must be faithful in order to *inherit* the blessing” (p. 19). As we have noted, Shepherd is even willing to speak of Christ’s obedient faith being “credited to

him as righteousness” in a manner parallel to the way Abraham’s (and every believer’s) obedient faith is credited to him for righteousness.

But this kind of parallel between Christ’s faith and ours would mean that the believer’s inheritance in the covenant of grace *finally depends upon his following Christ’s example*. Salvation and blessing are the (non-meritorious, though earned?) reward of the covenant for those who keep the covenant’s conditions and stipulations. Missing from Shepherd’s discussion at this juncture are several key features of the historic Reformed view of salvation. Shepherd does not make it clear, for example, that the believer can only obtain eternal life upon the basis of the perfect obedience, satisfaction and righteousness of Christ alone received by faith alone (compare the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Days 23 & 24). Nor does he make it clear (indeed, on page 62 he seems to deny it) that the believer’s imperfect obedience, which Christ by his Spirit graciously works in him, adds nothing to the work of Christ in respect to his standing before God and right to eternal life. Rather, Shepherd argues that the traditional Reformed view, which insists that the (sinfully imperfect) good works of believers provide no basis for their acceptance before God, fails to do justice to the genuine obedience of believers (p. 62). By this argument he fails to appreciate the classic Reformed conviction that Christ’s work as Mediator of the covenant of grace constitutes the only ground for the believer’s justification (and sanctification!) before God.

Fifth, the ambiguity in Shepherd’s formulations (the reader will look in vain in this book for a clear, express statement of the doctrine of justification by grace alone *through faith alone*) is undoubtedly related to his antipathy for the idea of merit. For Shepherd the biggest obstacle to a resolution of the differences between Reformed and Roman Catholic views of salvation is the employment of the language of merit. In Roman Catholicism the believer’s works are said to “merit” further grace and salvation. According to Shepherd, this undermines the truth of God’s gracious initiative in the covenant of grace and misunderstands the way God rewards the obedient faith of his covenant people. Though obedient faith is necessary in order for the believer to inherit the covenant’s blessings, this obedience is prompted and enabled by God’s grace in Christ. However, Reformed theology has also, according to Shepherd, wrongly employed the idea of “merit”

in its doctrine of salvation. In the traditional Reformed view, Christ's active and passive obedience are represented as the *just basis* for the believer's acceptance by God. Because Christ fulfilled the obligations of perfect obedience on behalf of his people, their justification and inheritance of eternal life are justly "merited" by the work of Christ. Shepherd insists, however, that we need to eliminate every idea of merit from our understanding of salvation. Only then will we be in a position to acknowledge the indispensable role of non-meritorious works as an instrumental means for the believer's obtaining of his inheritance.

The problem with Shepherd's wholesale repudiation of the idea of "merit" in our understanding of salvation, however, is that it has detrimental implications for other aspects of the traditional Reformed view of salvation. As we have already noted, it requires a thorough revision of the classic Reformed view of the covenant of works. However, it also would seem to require a revision of the classic Reformed view of Christ's saving work as Mediator of the covenant of grace. The Reformed confessions describe the work of Christ as *a remedy for fallen sinners in Adam*. The only kind of Mediator who can save covenant-breakers in Adam is One who fulfills all the obligations and liabilities of the law on behalf of his people, and thereby obtains and "merits" for them eternal life. Christ's obedience is understood in terms of *God's truth and justice*, as a *satisfaction of God's justice and a maintenance of the truth of his Word* ("in the day you eat you shall surely die . . ."). Christ's perfect obedience, satisfaction and righteousness are regarded as the sole and sufficient ground for restoring fallen sinners to full communion with God. Moreover, the Reformed confessions, when they speak of the believer's works and necessary obedience, make clear that the believer's sanctification, as much as his justification, is a gracious working of Christ by his Spirit. The whole of salvation and every covenant blessing is graciously *and justly* procured for believers through the perfect mediation of Jesus Christ.

Shepherd fails to show how this traditional Reformed view of Christ's saving work, which requires the elements of Christ's merit and satisfaction of the demands of God's justice revealed in his law, represents a significant problem. Specifically, he fails to demonstrate how this view undermines the necessity or genuineness of a believer's good works. To say that Christ's work "merits" for believers their inheritance in the covenant is only to say that his

covenant faithfulness (and substitutionary endurance of the covenant's sanction) is the exclusive ground for this inheritance. But this in no way compromises the obvious truth, which classic Reformed theology also emphasized, that believers are obligated by God's grace to walk worthily of the gospel. The Reformed use of the language of "merit" in respect to the work of Christ was always employed to magnify the perfection of Christ's work in satisfying for the sins of his people. Unlike Shepherd, who seems to think grace and justice, fatherly mercy and judicial satisfaction, are at odds, the Reformed view always insisted upon and assumed their harmony. The covenant is an expression of God's fatherly favor, to be sure. But it is also a relationship that God justly administers.

And sixth, though Shepherd offers some helpful observations in his apology for covenant evangelism, his treatment of the relation between covenant and election also raises some troubling questions. To put it somewhat simplistically, Shepherd seems to want to view election exclusively through the lens of the covenant of grace in its historical administration. Since we cannot know the "secret things" of God's eternal decree, we should preach the gospel solely in terms of the promises, obligations and sanctions of the covenant of grace. In this approach, we should regard all baptized members of the covenant as "elect in Christ." However, this election, which Shepherd maintains can be directly known through the promise signified and sealed in baptism, may be lost, should the baptized person fail to persevere in the way of obedient faith. Shepherd rejects traditional distinctions that Reformed theologians have used to distinguish between the covenant of grace in its administration and the particular election of some, though not all, covenant members. If we say that some members of the covenant of grace in its administration are non-elect, then we imperil the assurance of salvation by raising doubts as to the truth of God's covenant promise.

Remarkably, because Shepherd is unwilling to distinguish between those with whom God covenants in a broader sense (covenant in its administration) and those with whom God covenants in a narrower sense (covenant in its fruition), he ends up with what sounds suspiciously like a *conditional election* doctrine. Covenant members are elect in Christ *so long as* they persevere in faithfulness. However, should they become unfaithful, they may become subject to covenant discipline and lose their election. But

this is not the end of the mischief that his approach creates for our understanding of the doctrine of election. For example, Shepherd maintains that the Reformed preacher is authorized by the doctrine of the covenant to address all with the message that Christ died for them, even though some so addressed may choose not to believe and obey the gospel (p. 85). Does this mean that persons for whom Christ died, because they fail to persevere in the way of obedient faith, do not receive the covenant's blessings? In Shepherd's formulation of the covenant's significance for our understanding of election, notes such as these are sounded that can hardly be harmonized with those found in the Canons of Dort, a classic expression of important doctrines of the Reformed faith. For Shepherd, election, covenantally viewed, is corporate and conditional. Perseverance in the way of obedient faith determines whether baptized persons are elect or not, even though God may have earlier declared them elect. Christ's atoning death is preached as a death for all sinners whom the gospel addresses. What Warfield called the main point of Calvinism, the irresistible working of God's Spirit in the regeneration of lost sinners, is made to be little or no part of what evangelists should emphasize in their preaching.

It should also be noted that there is an interesting irony to Shepherd's reformulation of the relation between election and covenant. Because he wants to view election strictly from the vantage point of the covenant in its historical administration, Shepherd is unable to fulfill his own promise that this approach enhances the believer's assurance of election. He has no answer for the question: if I can lose my election through covenant unfaithfulness, then why is the promise of my election in baptism so reassuring? Furthermore, by calling into question the way the apostle Paul speaks in Romans 9 (not all covenant members are "children of the promise" in the same sense, since God, according to his "purpose of election" chooses to save one and not the other), Shepherd cannot but leave the impression that the believer's election, perseverance, and inheritance of eternal life depend upon his faithful performance of the covenant's obligations.

Each of these problems in Shepherd's study deserves further elaboration. They illustrate, however, that there are substantial problems in his reformulations of the Reformed view of salvation, and of covenant and election. Readers of this book need to be aware of these problems and resist the temptation to endorse

unwittingly formulations whose implications raise more serious problems than those allegedly inherent in more traditional views.

The solution, for example, to the supposed problem of faith and works is not to confuse justification and sanctification, or to stress the believer's obligations of obedience as indispensable to the inheritance of blessing. Rather, the solution lies in a careful presentation of the riches of God's grace toward us in the Person of our Mediator. Christ, as Calvin often remarked, is given to us by God for righteousness and sanctification. In Christ, and in Christ alone, God provides every spiritual or covenantal blessing, whether it be the blessing of acceptance with him, on account of the righteousness of Christ, or the blessing of renewal in holiness, on account of the Spirit of Christ at work in us. The legacy of the Reformation is not an unresolved problem of antinomianism or legalism. The legacy of the Reformation is, rather, nicely put in Q. & A. 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "Since, then, we are delivered from our misery by grace alone, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we yet do good works? Because Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, *also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image. . .*" The "call of grace," according to this legacy, is itself enveloped within the "gift of grace."

—Cornelis P. Venema

R. C. Sproul Jr, *Tearing Down Strongholds and Defending the Truth*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002. Pp. 200. \$11.99.

Professors are fond of pointing out how many of our problems arise from false dichotomies. People tend to absolutize some aspect of reality to the neglect of others and get a lopsided picture. A good example of a false dichotomy that has bedeviled us is the question of truth: is truth propositional or is it personal? It has been the error of the modernist to declare truth to be propositional (to the exclusion of the personal) and it has been the error of the post-modernist to declare truth to be personal (to the exclusion of the propositional). Such assertions, however, that truth is propositional to the exclusion of it being personal and that truth is personal to the exclusion of it being propositional present us with, quite frankly, a false dichotomy.

Truth, in fact, is both propositional and personal. Truth is propositional because it can be expressed in predicates that are capable of being cognitively grasped by the use of *right* reason. Truth is also personal because God himself is Truth, Jesus revealing himself to us as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And these two are inseparably linked: to know the truth in any ultimate sense, we must know him who is Truth, and we do not know him who is Truth apart from grasping the propositions set forth about him in his word. To put it another way, we do not speak of absolute truth in abstraction from him who is the absolute; and we do not know him who is the absolute apart from truth expressed in propositions.

R. C. Sproul, Jr., in his recent book, *Tearing Down Strongholds and Defending the Truth*, is concerned, as his title would suggest, with demolishing all that would pretend to be the truth and with defending that which is the truth. It does seem at times, though, that Sproul tends to see truth rather lopsidedly as propositional and he ends up defending propositional truth abstracted from its proper rooting in the person of the Absolute, the God of Scripture. This is not to say that there is not much in this book of value. There is. The chief value of Sproul’s book lies in its internal critique of various pretenses to truth, exposing them for the lie that they are. He surveys positivism, naturalism, behaviorism, existentialism, pragmatism, skepticism, relativism, nihilism, and solipsism, *inter alia*, and finds each of them wanting. Basically, he shows how each of them is internally incoherent and inconsistent and ultimately how that each of them can be reduced to irrationalism and, consequentially, nonsense. Thus he renders valuable assistance in the task to which we are called, the task of “pulling down strongholds [and] casting down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Even in his critique of all the systems of unbelief, however, Sproul tends only to emphasize how that naturalism or pragmatism, for example, is wrong, and not also how unbelief involves the grasping of certain truths to the exclusion of others, thus distorting the truth as a whole. To put it another way, when examining various systems of unbelief he seems only to have in view the antithesis and not common grace: he sees how unbelief is wrong but does not point out how unbelief distorts the truth and how even the small degree of truth that unbelievers hold onto demonstrates that they

are in the image of God. A better approach to unbelief, I would suggest, would both point out the internal inconsistencies and, at the same time, point out such truth as is expressed, pressing the unbeliever to give account for the degree of truth that he does grasp (though at times he does make a good “borrowed capital” argument, pp. 121-22). Indeed, antitheism (which is a good way of describing all the unbelief that Sproul confronts in his volume) presupposes theism: Sproul needs consistently to follow through on this crucial insight. That is to say, without presupposing the God of the Bible, you cannot affirm anything, even the small degree of truth that unbelief grasps, albeit in a distorted fashion. While there are encouraging hints of this in Sproul, there tends to be a taking away with one hand what he gives with the other.

There is a real irony here because Sproul wishes to charge presuppositionalists with being the ones who sell short the ability of the unbeliever to grasp any truth whatsoever. This is a common (and somewhat tiresome) misunderstanding of Cornelius Van Til and others like him who teach that in principle the unbeliever knows nothing rightly. All that Van Til and company mean in asserting that the unbeliever in principle has no true knowledge is that if the unbeliever lived in complete consistency in his unbelief, he could know, say, or do nothing. And this is true because unbelief is an utter dead end. Unbelief is rejection of God (personal) and his Word (propositional); it is a rejection of the truth that lands one in utter nihilism and solipsism. Sproul well demonstrates how such is self-refuting: to assert irrationalism, for example, is to refute it because the precondition for intelligibility of that statement (and it is intelligible) is rationality.

Let me say, as a sidebar, that Sproul’s refutation of unbelief consistently involves a reduction of the system in question to nonsense. While all systems of unbelief do reduce to nonsense, much of Sproul’s demonstration of this is heavy-handed and needlessly repetitive. Such a barrage tends to be ultimately lacking in persuasiveness to an unbeliever because limited to the internal critique and an emphasis on antithesis (being thus guilty, in other words, of the very thing that Van Tilians are supposed to represent). It helps, frankly, not to treat a pragmatist, for example, with disrespect when exposing the irrationality of his system. Give him what you can, i.e., acknowledge that we care about what works (we know, of course, that, finally, only the truth works), and show him



that even the truth that he knows he can give no account for. This is why we need an explicit approach that takes into account both common grace and antithesis.

Sproul does seem to take a page from the presuppositionalist approach to apologetics when he turns from his internal critique of unbelief to set forth that which is necessary for true knowledge. What is it then that Sproul sees as the absolute and indispensable precondition for the intelligibility of all things, including the knowledge of what is real, how we know what is real, ethics, science, etc.? Sproul says that we can know nothing apart from presupposing self-consciousness (pp. 131-42); the laws of logic (particularly the law of non-contradiction, pp. 143-153); the basic reliability of our senses (pp. 155-164); and the meaningfulness and intelligibility of language (or rationality, pp. 165-175). What Sproul means in affirming these things as presuppositions is that one does not prove these things; rather, these things must be true in order to prove anything at all. One does not, for example, prove the law of non-contradiction by empirical method. Instead one assumes the validity of the law of non-contradiction (akin to a “given” in geometry) as a *sine qua non*: without it there is no intelligibility to an empirical approach whatsoever.

Inasmuch as Sproul recognizes that there are preconditions to intelligibility, he embraces a transcendental approach. He is right in doing so and should be commended. But here’s where he goes wrong: Sproul asserts that one does not presuppose God and his Word but that one uses the presuppositions of self-consciousness, logic, reliability of senses, and rationality to prove God and his Word. This is a serious error because the thinking self, the law of non-contradiction, the validity of empirical observation, etc., cannot account for themselves. I do not dispute that there are other presuppositions given with God. But they cannot be understood apart from their being given with God. Sproul seems to think, for example, that Descartes’ anthropocentric *cogito ergo sum* is persuasive in and of itself. We do indeed presuppose the thinking self, but only *along with* and logically *subsequent to* presupposing God. No one can account for the thinking self apart from the God in whose image we are made, a God who, as three-in-one, explains for us by the resolution of the one-and-many dilemma, how it is that we can have a variety of thinking selves and yet have any meaningful communication whatsoever. But we cannot, as Bertrand Russell

realized, account for the thinking self on its own terms, because we cannot account for the “I”, which involves a number of other unproveable assumptions. When empiricism as well tries to stand on its own two feet, it ends up in the radical skepticism of David Hume, and rightly so, because it cannot account for itself. What I am saying here is that we cannot allow people to affirm these undemonstrable presuppositions and at the same time deny God. Deny God and you make nonsense of these presuppositions. Only the ontological Trinity, the God of the Old and New Testaments, can account for the world in which we live.

Sproul affirms that while God may be the beginning of our being, he is not the beginning of our knowing. We do not, and cannot, start with him. Sproul asserts that we must start with ourselves, for then we can move “from our initial nonnegotiables [like self-consciousness, logic, rationality, etc.] to the existence of God” (p. 138). Sproul here makes the mistake common to many apologists that ontology and epistemology can be separated. Ontology and epistemology can and are to be distinguished, but they cannot be separated. It is not the case, contrary to common assumptions, that we arrive at our ontology by the employment of our epistemology. We do not derive our epistemology out of thin air, apply it, and on the basis of our independently-derived epistemology adopt a complementary ontology.

To illustrate simply, Plato’s epistemology involves, more or less, a “stop and think” rationalistic methodology over against Aristotle’s epistemology, which involves a, more or less, “look and see” empirical method. Why does Plato employ the method that he does and Aristotle the method he does? Because Plato believed that ontologically what is most real is not the visible but the unseen world of nonmaterial Forms or Ideas, which reality is to be grasped rationally, by thinking. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the form of a thing inheres in matter, in particular instantiations of the thing, and is thus to be discovered empirically by observation. Neither Plato nor Aristotle, however, arrived at their respective ontologies by the employment of their particular epistemologies. Plato is not a realist (or idealist) simply because his epistemology demands such. Rather his epistemology is shaped by his ontological assumptions: he believes in form abstracted from matter and thus he does not believe that by an observation of matter one can arrive at the truth in any absolute sense.

Some might retort that epistemology still comes first because both Plato and Aristotle have these beliefs, these convictions, about what is real and how they know what is real. That is to say, some seem to confuse our having presuppositions with epistemology as a discipline, which is to confuse what we know or believe with our theory of how we know or believe. We know what we do because of our ontology, whether or not we acknowledge that. In our epistemology we express *how* it is that we know what we know, *how* it is that we know what is real. In our ontology, we express *what* we believe reality ultimately is. Everything in philosophy is not to be reduced to epistemology so that there is no ontology or ethics or aesthetics. All this is to say that our theory of knowing (epistemology) and our theory of being (ontology) are necessarily implicated in each other and tied up together. To be sure, we must know first in some sense (or we have no knowledge). But this does not give the kind of priority to epistemology that Sproul argues that it does: our knowing is rooted in our being and we know what we do because we are in the image of a personal God who reveals himself in propositional truth.

Finally, with his modified presuppositionalism, Sproul seeks to rehabilitate the cosmological proofs for God's existence. Van Tilians believe that evidence has a genuine place within a worldview but not in the battle between worldviews. We can make no appeal to neutrality. To be sure, we can speak of evidence for God, the resurrection, the veracity of Scripture, but always and only while challenging the presuppositions of unbelief. We should not just challenge unbelievers, as does Sproul, with the truth that they are, even in denying God, implicitly affirming the laws of logic, the reliability of the senses, the meaningfulness of language, etc., but we should challenge unbelievers that even in affirming all of these things they are also affirming the God who is there. The real proof of the existence of God is the impossibility of the contrary, which is to say that without the three persons of the blessed, holy, and undivided Trinity you can prove, or know, nothing at all (thus unbelievers pursue knowledge on borrowed capital from God). Without the ontological Trinity, you cannot ultimately give an epistemically and ontologically consistent account of anything in this one-and-many universe of which we're a part. Sproul needs to see, following Bavinck, that while proofs of various sorts may strengthen faith, something more radical and foundational is needed

to confront and challenge unbelief. Meanwhile that radical challenge must be carried on in a gracious manner, so that the propositional is seen at every point to be rooted in the personal.

—Alan D. Strange

Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)*. Studies in the History of Christian Thought, edited by Robert J. Bast. Translated by Raymond A. Blacketer. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001. Pp. xiv + 361. \$95.00. (cloth)

For students of the history of Reformed theology, this volume by Willem J. van Asselt, Associate Professor in the history of Reformed Theology at Utrecht University, offers the best single source in English on the federal theology of Johannes Cocceius. In the introductory chapter of this handsome book, van Asselt defines federal theology and offers a brief sketch of Cocceius's life. This is followed by a four-part topical division, comprising fourteen chapters, with three appendices attached. Part One "The Sources of Knowledge" explores two of the chief writings in Cocceius's massive corpus, surveying the *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (1648), which is a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of the covenants, and the *Summa Theologiae ex Scripturis repetita* (1665), a book that basically falls within the genre of Reformed dogmatics. Of key interest here is van Asselt's argument that Cocceius successfully wedded salvation history to the loci method. Thus Cocceius was a theologian who was very concerned to follow the texture of redemptive history, but who also recognized the possibility of addressing this concern without discarding the legitimate role of dogmatic theology and the loci method associated with it. Cocceius was a renowned biblical exegete, whose biblical studies led him to formulate a theory of the covenant, which described all of human history around the structure of consecutive *foedera*. In this first section, van Asselt proceeds to examine the sources of knowledge in Cocceius's theology, his treatment of issues surrounding philosophy and theology, and doctrine of Scripture, with an important discussion of Cocceius's hermeneutic. Van Asselt observes that Scripture, biblical interpretation, proclamation, and doctrine are, for Cocceius, intimately related to one another; for as

the *'sermo Christi'* each of these is prophetic in nature, and so each is relevant by definition.

Part Two "The Doctrine of God" treats Cocceius's understanding of traditional "theology proper." Van Asselt's concern is to show how the pneumatological factor in Cocceius's theology plays a prominent role, something previous scholarship on Cocceius's thought has wholly missed, for in this way Cocceius could show how redemptive history is on its way to the eschaton. The Spirit, as it were, "blazes a trail through time on the way to the Kingdom." This is important for understanding how divine election is related to the covenant and how God's decree stands in relation to salvation history. Thus we find chapters on "The Structure of the Doctrine of God"; "The Arguments for the Existence of God"; "The Attributes of God"; and "The Doctrine of the Trinity."

Part Three, "God in Relation to History," which extends to almost one hundred pages, takes up Cocceius's teaching on the doctrine of the decrees, the eternal pact or *pactum salutis* (an explicitly Cocceian contribution to Reformed theology), the doctrine of the covenants (that is, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace), and Cocceius's controversial theory on the abrogations of the covenant of works. What is noteworthy in this discussion is how Cocceius relates the doctrine of the divine decrees to the *Pactum Salutis*, *Testamentum*, and the *Foedus Gratiae*. Cocceius seeks to avoid swallowing up history into the divine decree or allowing God's activity to be reduced to earthly history. He affirms the covenant of works, for peace and friendship with God are not automatic features of the divine/human relationship by virtue of the creation. Friendship with God is always a gift of his goodness, not a "right" that human creatures claim so that they may make demands upon the Creator. Thus in both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace the goal is fellowship with God, the former in the way of divine goodness and the latter in the way of divine grace. Cocceius's disputed and controversial doctrine of abrogations (the gradual setting aside of the covenant of works in five stages), contrasts significantly with the received and predominate Reformed position, and van Asselt sets Cocceius's views in sharp relief by contrasting them with Cocceius's great Dutch contemporary, Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676). Again, the pneumatological framework, specifically in the work of sanctification, plays a large role in defining Cocceius's doctrine.

The final section, Part Four “Reconstruction and Evaluation,” presents van Asselt’s conclusions in light of his research and meticulous reading of Cocceius’s writings. In short, van Asselt argues that pneumatology serves as the comprehensive framework in which the crucial events of redemptive history and the covenantal features of that history come together and form a cohesive package in God’s saving activity. Precisely because of the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of salvation, God’s action in human history cannot be reduced to a single idea. Indeed, according to van Asselt, Cocceius avoids making either the horizontal or the vertical aspects in the divine work of redemption absolute.

There are also three appendices: “The Origins of Federal Theology”; “The Auction Catalogue of Cocceius’ Library”; “Impact of Cocceius’ Federal Theology.”

Shy of the original sources, this book is easily the best single source on Cocceius’s thought, since all of his works remain in Latin except for some few Dutch translations (including a modern one co-translated by van Asselt). As van Asselt ably points out, Cocceius was first and foremost an exegetical theologian, being extremely well versed in the oriental languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic), proficient in rabbinic literature, and an expert philologist. Cocceius put his considerable skills to work in writing commentaries on every single book of the Bible, besides numerous other writings. His *Opera Omnia* fill ten large folio volumes. Van Asselt’s book aids in exploding the abiding myth about the Reformed orthodox (scholastics), namely, that they were not interested in or well schooled in biblical exegesis. The opposite is actually the case. Sadly, since most of their writings are in Latin (untranslated) a huge part of the Reformed tradition lies buried in the past! This volume is a welcome and reliable source on one of the theological giants of that tradition.

—J. Mark Beach

Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. Pp. xii + 526. \$35.00. (cloth)

“What should I do?” is the first and the last question of Christian ethics, according to Allen Verhey. His book seeks both to deepen and to focus this question in several important ways.

One of those ways is found in the book’s title: *Remembering Jesus*. The moral question: “What should I do?” is sharpened by another question: “What would *Jesus* do?” Interestingly, Holland, Michigan, is not only the home of Hope College, where Dr. Verhey is the Blekkink Professor of Religion and chair of the religion department. It is also the birthplace of the cottage industry that spawned “WWJD?” bracelets, T-shirts, and bumper stickers. These “accessories” memorialize the line central to Charles Sheldon’s *In His Steps*.

Now, the relevance of “WWJD?” for Christian ethics lies not simply in *doing* what Jesus did. For a host of reasons, that is not altogether possible. What is relevant, however, is *remembering* what Jesus did (and does), for such memory forms the church’s identity, informs her moral deliberation, and generates her moral character. In Verhey’s narrative, the question: “What should I do?” quickly becomes: “What should *we* do?” The answer to that *ecclesial* question is given with our identity as Jesus-followers, and with our history of following Jesus.

Very briefly, here is the book’s outline. It is organized into five parts. Part One provides Verhey’s prolegomena, a description of the early church as a community of moral discourse, deliberation, and discernment (ch. 1); of the continuing church as a continuing community of moral discourse, deliberation, and discernment (ch. 2); and of the challenge to integrate Scripture, the church’s understanding and use of Scripture, and the demands of the moral life (ch. 3).

The ethical theory described in Part One is applied, in Parts Two – Five, to selected issues in medical ethics, sexual ethics, economic ethics, and political ethics. Each of these parts opens with a chapter describing the modern context within which the church is called to moral discernment. The church’s modern response is to be shaped by her memory of Jesus and by the early church’s memory of Jesus in connection with these issues. This twofold remembering is both goal and fruit of the church’s reading of Scripture, of prayer, of the church’s liturgy, and of the church’s moral deliberation. Such Scripture-fed, Spirit-empowered memory yields a continuing

tradition of moral discernment. To issues in medical ethics, the Christian community will respond with a continuing tradition of care for the suffering. Questions of sexual ethics are answered by the church's continuing tradition of good sex. Vexing dilemmas in economic ethics, confronting the church that lives today in the world of Adam Smith, will be addressed from a continuing tradition of justice and generosity. In her political ethics, the church that remembers Jesus, and remembers the early church's memory of Jesus, will seek to continue a theocratic tradition of pursuing the rule of God in this world.

So, then, the essential question of Christian ethics, "What should I do?" can be answered only within a shared story, a narrative of communal moral history. The church is a moral community whose tale reaches back to Paradise, whose character-forming narrative is embodied in Jesus, and whose shared moral vision is rooted in the overarching, universal, harmonizing story of Scripture. Perhaps the best answer to the essential moral question, "What should I do?"—perhaps the answer with clearest prescriptive force—is: *Remember*.

At this point, we may observe that the *kind* of ethics Verhey is recommending, with his emphasis on the ecclesial dimension of Christian ethics, and on the relation between story and virtue, belongs to what has come to be known as narrative ethics. His recommendation shows clear dependence on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, and James Gustafson. It may be called a Reformed version of narrative ethics. This school emphasizes the function of stories in creating and sustaining moral community, in shaping virtue and cultivating moral vision. In reality, it is not so much we who shape history as it is history that shapes us. Such emphases offer fresh analysis of the relation between the individual and the community, of the church's role as a moral community, of the meaning of human freedom, and of the nature of virtuous character. These emphases are generally wholesome and fruitful.

At the heart of Verhey's version of narrative ethics lies his view of how Scripture should be used in moral argument. In earlier writings he has explained his hermeneutic, positing a supposed correspondence between the two natures of Christ, on the one hand, and the divine-human character of the Bible on the other hand. This Christological formulation of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) is



applied to biblical hermeneutics, such that the divine and the human in Scripture relate to one another without confusion or separation. In fact, the interaction within Scripture between the divine and the human may be seen as paradigmatic for Christian ethics. Within Scripture the church encounters development of moral vision amid diversity of moral prescriptions. The Bible presents a mixture of revelation and tradition, examples of moral conversation leading to moral discernment.

Crucial to the church's moral discernment is not Scripture's authority as such, but the church's use of Scripture for moral authorization. It could be said that the Scripture's authority is experienced only in the context of ecclesial authorizations for particular moral choices. Here as in his other writings, Verhey is drawing from writers like Walter Rauschenbusch (one of his "heroes of faith"), Stephen Toulmin (*The Uses of Argument*), and Henry David Aiken ("Level of Moral Discourse," *Reason and Conduct*). He applies their analyses to the variety of authorization processes in moral reasoning, in order to identify the level of moral discussion at which Scripture most properly functions.

Several problems confront the modern church in using the Bible in moral discourse. The first is the Bible's silence. According to Verhey, Scripture doesn't deal with many contemporary moral issues that Christians face. The second problem is the Bible's strangeness, by which Verhey means that when Christians come to Scripture, "they confront quaint and strange worlds of sickness, embarrassingly patriarchal cultures, alien economic orders, and quite different political realities and assumptions" (p. 51). Third, Scripture presents us with diversity of voices concerning moral issues, illustrated in the Bible's teaching about divorce (Moses permitted it, Mark's Jesus denounced it, whereas Matthew's Jesus allows exceptions, as does Paul). Admittedly, the readers of Scripture bring their own problems to the Bible, especially their unfamiliarity with Scripture and their unwillingness to be formed by Scripture.

So the central issue is not whether to use the Bible in moral discourse, but how to use the Bible properly. Behind "WWJD?" lies this deeper question: "*How do we know what Jesus would do?*" The answer is found within the complex interaction between the modern church and the ancient text. And this explains the author's subtitle: *Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life*.

The church's use of Scripture varies according to the stage of moral activity. If we distinguish between moral discourse, moral deliberation, and moral discernment, Scripture plays a role in the stage of deliberation. Here, the church engages in giving and receiving reasons for moral conclusions. These reasons proceed from a variety of legitimate sources, including reason, experience, science, even "natural" morality. Scripture is one of many sources of moral authorization. Verhey warns, "We may not use the slogan *sola scriptura* to silence other voices and other sources, to discount the experience of oppression or natural science or 'natural' morality" (pp. 72-73). True, these other sources must all be interpreted in the light of Scripture, but that belongs to the next stage, called "moral discernment."

Throughout the book, Verhey repeatedly expresses an aversion to a "timeless code" or "timeless rules" that might be invoked to end the church's conversation about a moral issue. To evaluate a particular moral problem by quoting the Bible is inadequate. Biblical rules that we might regard as normative should be regarded as such not because they have the status of biblical rules, but because they have been validated by the church's experiences and discernment. "*The point is this: that appeals to Scripture at the deliberative level remain subject to the communal process of discernment, just as subject as appeals to the wide variety of other sources. . . . Every judgment and every reason given in deliberation — even when they involve the citation of Scripture — are to be tested and qualified by a communal discernment of the shape and style of life 'worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27)*" (p. 73; italics original). The mere fact that one can cite a Bible prescription or prohibition is by itself insufficient for the justification of a contemporary judgment or rule (p. 74). The church is called to function as a community of discernment by testing rules "by their [the rules'] creative fidelity to the whole story, by their [the rules'] ability to nurture and sustain a contemporary 'performance' not of a little piece of the canon but of Scripture as a whole. Indeed, the rules within Scripture are finally normative for the church less as rules than as part of the whole story" (p. 74).

Many a book on ethics has been evaluated in terms of its treatment of the "hard cases." Though hard cases make for bad law, they do serve as useful tests of legal—or in this case, ethical—theory. Perhaps Verhey's discussion of homosexuality can serve to illustrate clearly how his ethical theory operates in practice.

In Part Three of the book, Verhey devotes several chapters to sexual ethics and to the church's calling to continue living the Scripture's tradition of good sex. At the close of this section, he discusses "Homosexuality and Good Sex" (pp. 232-240). He begins with the embarrassed acknowledgement that although Scripture itself treats homosexuality almost as a footnote, contemporary ecclesiastical discussions require the church to engage in extensive moral discourse about this issue.

However, when it comes to using Scripture in our moral deliberation here, we face the problem of Scripture's silence, according to Verhey, since Jesus says nothing about homosexual behavior and the Bible is silent about what we have come to call "sexual orientation." Verhey does acknowledge that Scripture contains texts that consider homosexual behavior as sexual immorality (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). But that acknowledgement only provokes the question: How must the Christian community use these texts in ecclesial moral discernment relating to homosexuality?

Regarding Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, we must not use these verses as though they were a timeless moral code, but rather remember that they are part of the "Holiness Code," which contains "some curious regulations, regulations that Christians no longer take to be instructive for their choices" (p. 232).

We interrupt at this point to observe that this claim seems to be an example of *petitio principii*. Surely Verhey needs to prove, rather than simply to assume, the claim that Christians *should not* take these and neighboring Old Testament texts to be instructive for their moral choices? Granted that many Christians no longer find these regulations instructive for Christian ethics today; but *should they*? When is the alleged "silence of Scripture" really a silence *imposed* upon Scripture *by the reader*? Moreover, throughout his book Verhey has been insisting that the issue is not *whether* Scripture—including Old Testament texts—is to be used in moral argument, but *how* it is instructive for our morality. Why does he seem to abandon his own enterprise, at this point?

For Verhey, these Old Testament prohibitions against homosexuality do serve a limited function; they provide the foundation for the Jewish tradition that rejected homosexual behavior as a form of Gentile immorality. Moreover, the lists of vices found in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10, which refer

to *arsenokoitai* (NRSV: “sodomites”) show Paul’s indebtedness to the Jewish tradition concerning homosexual behavior as a form of sexual immorality.

The Christian tradition, by contrast, did not isolate this prohibition for emphasis, according to Verhey. “There is nothing in the New Testament or in remembrance to warrant applying this vision prejudicially and oppressively to single out homosexual behavior as especially worthy of condemnation or to shun and stigmatize homosexual persons” (p. 233).

Again we interrupt to ask: Without *singling out* homosexual behavior as *especially* worthy of condemnation, may we nevertheless on the basis of Scripture say that homosexual behavior is worthy of condemnation, ever, at all? Is there anything in the New Testament to warrant declaring any homosexual behavior sinful?

The author observes that Romans 1:26-27 belongs to an argument familiar to the Roman Jewish Christians as the accepted explanation of Gentile immorality. Paul is here echoing the Jewish traditional condemnation of Gentile neighbors, using it in fact to set up his Jewish Christian readers to see their own haughtiness toward Gentile Christians. Paul is rejecting the kind of Bible reading that is satisfied with interpreting and applying Scripture over-against others rather than over-against oneself. It does seem clear that Paul shares the Jewish tradition’s aversion to homosexual behavior. But the homosexual behaviors to which he objects may be understood as those “which are freely chosen by people for whom heterosexual relations were ‘natural’ and which are motivated by insatiable lust,” an interpretation put forward by Victor Paul Furnish (p. 236).

Paul is not objecting, then, to every kind of homosexual behavior, but only to the kind that is freely chosen by “natural” heterosexuals who are motivated by lust. This understanding provides the key to interpreting the apostle’s use of the word “natural”:

When Paul describes homosexual acts as “against nature” (*para physin*; Rom. 1:26), he cannot mean that such acts violate a heterosexual orientation which is ‘natural’ to and normative for human beings, or that such acts violate a heterosexual orientation which is “given” by nature to human beings (rather than chosen by them). As has just been observed, the now common and important concept of sexual orientation was unknown to Paul and his contemporaries (pp. 236-237).

In other words, because “exchanging” natural for unnatural relations suggests a choice, and since by virtue of sexual orientation some homosexual behaviors are not freely chosen, then those homosexual behaviors proceeding from sexual orientation do not fall under the condemnation of Romans 1:26-27.

Paul, like other writers of his day, simply assumed that people could control not only their sexual appetites but also the “orientation” of their appetites, ordering those appetites into conformity with the dictates of reason or the laws of nature or the story of creation. . . . Homosexual behaviors were evidently understood by Paul — as they were by Dio Chrysostom (and others) — as prompted by an insatiable lust, the sort of lust which drives a man first to visit female prostitutes and then, in search of something more exotic, to seduce other men. There is clearly no concept of sexual orientation at work here. It may be an anachronism to import a notion of sexual orientation into the first century and into our reading of Paul, but it requires no anachronism to suggest that Paul refers here to homosexual behaviors freely chosen by people whose appetites for sexual pleasure was once but is no longer sated by heterosexual relationships (p. 237).

But why is it *not* anachronistic to *restrict* the range of Paul’s reference by appealing to descriptions and definitions supplied by the American Psychological Association? Didn’t Paul know about original sin and its devastatingly tragic consequences for sexual orientation *and* behavior?

Moreover, with what consistency is it asserted, on the one hand, that Paul knew nothing of the concept of sexual orientation and, on the other hand, that Paul simply assumed people could control the orientation of their sexual appetites?

Today we are called to read these texts, argues Verhey, in a community that includes homosexuals and heterosexuals. Indeed, the story of our creation as male and female suggests a moral preference for the “one flesh” union of a man and a woman. However, given the reality of fallen creatureliness, we can nurture the creational preference for heterosexuality while at the same time we argue that

intercourse (whether heterosexual or homosexual) within the context of a relationship of commitment and continuity is better

than promiscuity and infidelity. . . . [E]ven in a fallen world — and in a fallen sexuality — fidelity and mutuality can be a mark of God’s good future. If we allow divorce in a world like this one for the sake of protecting marriage and marriage partners, and if we allow remarriage after divorce, then we must also consider allowing homosexual relationships for the sake of protecting fidelity and mutuality and the homosexual partners. It does not make divorce a good or homosexual behavior a good (p. 239).

But the Reformed Christian community has understood Scripture itself to permit divorce in response to spousal infidelity or desertion, an understanding that has received confessional expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith (24.6). The source and authorization for this permission is Scripture alone.

The fundamental challenge presented by *Remembering Jesus* is its configuration of the relationship between experience and revelation, between reason and faith, and between science and Christianity. It appears that revelation is refracted through the lens of experience, faith through the lens of reason, and the Christian religion through the “findings” of science. *Only what penetrates these lenses is thought to be normative for the church today.* And since these lenses are continually being reground and always polished anew, one must wonder whether the only constant throughout history is not Scripture, but the church’s use of it. *Remembering Jesus* offers us far more than a qualification of the Reformational *sola scriptura*. It proposes a fundamental reconfiguration of *sola scriptura*.

The author’s integration of personal and social ethics in terms of the ecclesial dimension of Christian ethics is a most welcome and useful feature of his work.

Two questions remain, which may suggest areas for further reflection and development.

First, in connection with the narratives supplied by the Christian community, we need to ask: Which one? The ecclesiastical community is so divided, with the result that the narratives being passed on about Jesus, God, and the Christian life are often therefore contradictory. Is the Anabaptist narrative normative? The Roman Catholic? The Greek Orthodox? The Reformed?

The second question is similar, but more basic: To which narrative must we ultimately submit, the narrative of the church, or the narrative of Scripture? Are they the same? Here, again, we could use greater clarity regarding the content and function of *sola scriptura*.

The alleged variety of voices in Scripture appears to validate a similar variety of ecclesial narratives today. Amid these varieties, the goal seems to be that we discern the transcendent “word of God” in Scripture, and the unifying, universally transcending norms embedded within the catholic church’s narrative. If it is the church that identifies and formulates those transcendent realities, is not the authority of Scripture finally mediated through the church?

The author’s aversion to normative ethics in favor of narrative or virtue ethics is unfortunate. The dilemma disappears when we consider both obligation and virtue in terms of their biblical meaning. The Bible’s story is not without norms, and in the Bible, norms do not exist apart from the biblical narrative. The preamble to the Ten Commandments shows this most clearly: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2) supplies the context for the subsequent precepts. In Scripture there is no norm without narrative, and no narrative without norm. Law and gospel belong together. So we need not choose for a narrative ethic against an ethic of obligation. We needn’t opt for an ethic of virtue rather than an ethic of duty, since it is unlikely that narrative shapes character apart from moral stipulations.

Finally, it is worth pondering whether the very formulation of Verhey’s “first and last question” of Christian ethics is ultimately and methodologically misleading. Is the question “What should I (we) do?” the proper question? Would not the philosophical-hermeneutical problems he seeks to resolve be construed more helpfully if the first and last question of Christian ethics were understood to be “What does God require?” For this formulation, we have rather incontestable warrant from both Scripture (Deut. 10:12; Micah 6:8) and ecclesiastical Confessions (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 2, QA 4; Lord’s Days 34-44; Westminster Confession of Faith, 19.7; Westminster Larger Catechism, QA 5, 92, 104-147). The effect would be to emphasize the priority of divine revelation to human experience as the source of both authority and authorization. Virtuous character belongs to what God requires, so we need not choose for an ethic of obligation to the exclusion of an ethic of character.

*Remembering Jesus* is an expansion of lectures presented more than a decade ago at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Some of the material in this book has been published earlier, in altered

version. Throughout recent years, a number of Reformed ethicists have interacted with Dr. Verhey's material, offering significant suggestions for consideration. For example, back in 1997, Laurens W. Bilkes published an assessment of the hermeneutic of Verhey and others, entitled *Theological Ethics and Holy Scripture: The Use of Scripture in the Works of James M. Gustafson, R. Paul Ramsey, and Allen D. Verhey* (Heerenveen: J. J. Groen en Zoon). It is curious that in his 2002 publication, Verhey has ignored the analysis and recommendations of Bilkes and others.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave—Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001. Pp. xviii + 298. \$15.99.

Theology makes a difference! That is the basic point of this book. According to Edward Welch, professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and a counselor at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation in Glenside, Pennsylvania, theology forms the infrastructure of our lives. The implications of this are startling, even in the case of addictions, for “the basic theology for addictions is that the root problem goes deeper than our genetic makeup.” Welch argues that addictions finally constitute a kind of idolatry, and so, at bottom, are a disorder of worship. Will we worship ourselves, serving and feeding our own desires, or will we worship God, who is the true and only genuine source of proper human fulfillment?

From this theological perspective, Welch believes that the problem of addictions can be addressed from a much wider biblical framework. Rather than pointing to a few texts that warn us concerning the evils of drunkenness and the like, the question of worship and idolatry lies at the heart of every form of human existence and goes to the heart-problem of every human being. Thus, contrary to what many people think, Scripture actually proves itself to be a much richer source for challenging addicts in their addictions and for prescribing the remedy bringing deliverance from them.

Welch realizes that his thesis is radical. In fact, he believes that a Christ-centered perspective on addictions should be nothing less than revolutionary. This means that Welch refuses to follow the



secular analysis of addiction and the categories for defining what it is. “Words like *disease*, *treatment*, and even *addiction* convey the idea that these problems have their ultimate cause in the body rather than the soul—a commonly accepted view that is at odds with clear biblical teaching,” says Welch. His book thus seeks to unveil the multiple layers of error that plague our thinking about persons who are defined as addicts and our ways of helping them.

Welch divides his book into two parts: Part one comes under the theme of “Thinking Theologically.” Welch argues that many people who struggle with addiction have no practical theology—that is, they fail to see how their own theological convictions and assumptions actually apply to the temptations of addiction and the desires that drive it. For example, the cross of Christ is viewed as aiming at heaven and the life to come, not at earth and the life we now live; salvation addresses the ultimate needs of sinners, not immediate ones. Similarly, the confession that “Jesus is Lord” is not practically applied to our problematic circumstances and maladies. Addicts are ruled by their own desires, and though they may sing that “Jesus shall reign,” their own appetites are master. Thus there is a profound disconnect between one’s theology and his or her behavior.

Welch maintains, however, that Scripture is sufficient to address the believer’s battle with addiction, which can include both addictive substances and desires, such as alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, caffeine, as well as TV, pornography, lying, shoplifting, weightlifting, overeating, gambling, sex, sports, and work. Welch observes: “What unites these and most other activities or substances described as addictions is that they deliver a bodily experience.” Moreover, most addictions produce an immediate physical effect (unlike, say, vitamins). But why do people (inordinately) desire things that bring harm unto them? The answer strikes at the core of our humanness and fallenness, says Welch.

Part two of this book explores “Essential Theological Themes” relevant to the problem of human addiction. Here Welch explores such issues as: Speaking the Truth in Love; Respecting, Listening, and Inviting; Fearing the Lord; Turning from Lies; Saying ‘No’; Staying Violent; and Being Part of the Body.

It should be noted that Welch’s book is written both for those who wish to overcome their addictions and for those who are attempting to help persons with addictions. Thus each chapter

concludes with a set of questions for reflection—questions under the headings “As You Face Your Own Addiction” and “As You Help Someone Else.” These questions, to a certain degree, offer something of a synopsis of each chapter as well.

Welch’s book will no doubt be controverted and opposed by those who believe that there is a larger physical and/or genetic dimension to addiction than Welch acknowledges. At bottom, however, for Welch, the key issue in dispute is not whether a powerful physical role is manifested in addiction or whether people are given to physical susceptibilities; indeed, the physical dimension of addiction is undeniable. Rather, Welch believes that we need a biblical reorientation about how we view addiction, and in doing so we discover that the heart plays the decisive role in human behavior, for it constitutes the core of our personhood where our sinful tendencies are unfalteringly evident. In short, addictions have a spiritual core.

Welch is to be commended for his passionate plea to listen to Scripture anew on the perplexing and heart-wrenching problem that addiction is—a problem that afflicts many people’s lives. Even if one should finally disagree with his conclusions, it seems that Welch deserves a tip-of-the hat for his insightful theological exploration of this issue and the corrective he offers to a one-sided, wholly non-theological perspective on human addictions.

—J. Mark Beach

James R. White, *Dangerous Airwaves: Harold Camping Refuted and Christ’s Church Defended*. Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2002. Pp. 144. (Price unknown).

James R. White has a solid reputation as a refuter of heresy of various stripes. In this book, he takes on Harold Camping, founder of Family Radio, a lay speaker/teacher who in earlier years encouraged listeners to Family Radio to affiliate with biblical Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Not anymore. Camping now urges no one to associate with any church, teaching instead that the “church-age” has ended. Camping has apparently arrived at such a conclusion by the application of an allegorical hermeneutic that has led him into increasingly wild, numerological and bizarre eschatological speculations.

In the last year or two, Camping's method of interpreting the Bible has prompted him to assert that the church as a visible organization is passé and that, consequently, the officers and ordinances of the church no longer possess validity. This leaves us in an ecclesiological no-man's-land of "fellowships of believers," a situation perfectly suited to our current anarchic churchly landscape. White exposes Camping's biblical methodology, showing that he characteristically wrenches words out of context and that he reads the Scriptures through the lens of an approach not taken from Scripture but imposed upon Scripture. Camping claims that he is not following tradition, confessions, or anything but the "Bible alone." Perhaps the greatest strength of this book is White's exposé of this claim: Camping has adopted an approach to biblical interpretation which is highly idiosyncratic and singular, coming up with things from the text that no other competent exegetes have ever found there and then loudly proclaiming that he is following the "Bible alone," even as have other heresiarchs who have denied cardinal doctrines of the faith.

Camping, however, as White points out again and again, does not follow the Scriptures at all. Instead he concocts fanciful interpretations out of a fevered imagination that he claims to be a "spiritual" approach but that is more akin to a kind of gnosticism. Camping typically asserts that (x) means (y) and then proceeds forward with more and more assertions, alleging logical connections, while the thinking Christian is still contesting his ground assertion that (x) means (y). The book is replete with examples of Camping's eisegesis—a fascinating, if more minor, one being Camping's assertion that "causing people to fall backward to the ground is equivalent to calling down fire from heaven" (for the full context of this discussion, see pp. 80-83). To put it another way, Camping's alleged exegesis of passages that purport to demonstrate the end of the church-age are nothing more than a seemingly endless series of *non sequiturs*. Camping, in his attack on the church, is like a man who would pretend to praise me while slandering my wife. I am not pleased with someone who would commend me and condemn my wife. Much more so, our Lord Jesus Christ is not pleased by one who would profess to love and serve him and who would at the same time vilify his precious bride, the Church. White ably refutes the illogicality of this radio celebrity—who has, sadly, in

rejecting the church, apostatized, as one who “went out from us” (1 John 2:19).

—Alan D. Strange

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