

Issues in

NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

by RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.

*Selected Articles on
Biblical and Systematic Theology*



WESTMINSTER
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY
EST. 1929

This book was compiled upon the occasion of Dr. Richard Gaffin's 80th birthday. The Reformed evangelical community celebrates his life and ministry.

What a gift Dr. Richard Gaffin has been to Christ's church—and now for 80 years. Thanks be to God for his faithful witness in life and in theology. We are all in his debt, and we celebrate this important milestone with him in gratitude.
—Albert Mohler

A Westminster prof, Richard Gaffin,
Exhibits the best of good staffin':
Although he is eighty
His thoughts are still weighty
And sprinkled with good-humored laughin'.
—Don Carson

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CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICS AND THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT¹

RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR.

THE question of hermeneutics (or *how* the Bible is to be interpreted) is at the center of contemporary theological debate. In fact, it does not go too far to say that today all theological discussion is, in one form or another, *hermeneutical* discussion. Particular lines of inquiry are seen to converge in a hermeneutical focus. Specific issues are considered to be reducible to a hermeneutical common denominator. In a word, the *problem* — for it is recognized to be such — the problem of hermeneutics is felt to be *the* theological problem par excellence.

As long as one continues to operate with the conventional understanding of hermeneutics, this all-consuming interest in the subject remains unintelligible or its significance is, at best, only dimly perceived. Traditionally, hermeneutics has been conceived of as a particular theological discipline, closely associated with, yet distinguished from, exegesis, as both have reference to the biblical text. To be more specific, hermeneutics and exegesis are related to each other as theory to practice. Hermeneutics is concerned with enunciating *principles* of interpretation derived, for the most part, from previously established epistemological and philological considerations, principles which, in turn, are to facilitate understanding of the text as they are applied in the concrete act of exegesis. This, for instance, is the conception of hermeneutics developed by Abraham Kuyper in the third volume of his monumental work on theological encyclopedia: hermeneutics is “*de logica der exegese.*”²

¹ A paper delivered at the conference of the Board of Trustees and the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary on October 21, 1968.

² *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, III (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1909), 90.

In marked contrast to this traditional point of view is the new grasp of the proportions and nature of the hermeneutical task which has been emerging since the appearance of Karl Barth's commentary on the book of Romans and which has become increasingly dominant since about 1950. This significant expansion of the hermeneutical horizon is seen most easily in the influential encyclopedia article on "Hermeneutik" by the German church historian, Gerhard Ebeling, which appeared in 1959.³ An excellent statement of this new orientation has been provided for the English reader by James M. Robinson in his essay, "Hermeneutic Since Barth."⁴ Guided by etymological reflection upon the three root meanings of the Greek verb which directly underlies the word "hermeneutics" and its equivalents in other modern European languages, Ebeling maintains that in his interest in explaining the text the exegete must take into consideration as well the hermeneutical significance not only of translation (from the Hebrew or Greek) but especially of the *language itself*. It is this — what Robinson refers to as the "interpretative interrelatedness" of these three aspects: language, translation, and exposition — which is held to have profound implications for the hermeneutical task and to serve as an indication of its true breadth. Hence in an effort to distinguish the more primal, foundational nature of this outlook over against the earlier, more limited conception, the leading movement in current developments refers to itself as the "new hermeneutic" (singular) in distinction from hermeneutics (plural).

It needs especially to be underscored that what is central to this viewpoint is its concern with the phenomenon of language. Nothing is more characteristic of contemporary hermeneutic than its attention to language, be it that of the text *or* the interpreter. In this connection, two emphases of a more formal character stand out: (1) The first of these is the positive and indispensable role of language in understanding. Language is not secondary to meaning. Language is not

³ Kurt Galling, ed., *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed., III (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1959), 242–262.

⁴ James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., eds., *The New Hermeneutic (New Frontiers in Theology, II)*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 1–77.

the surface distortion of a presumably deeper level of meaning. Rather, one must make his point of departure, as Robinson puts it, "the unbroken linguisticity of understanding." (2) A second stress, correlate with the first, is that *all language is itself interpretation*. The significant implication of this point, so far as the text is concerned, is that as it points to the subject matter, the language of the text is not only in need of interpretation but is already itself an initial interpretation of the subject matter. In terms of this combination of factors: the necessary correlation of language and understanding and the hermeneutically problematic character of all language, one can begin to see why the question of hermeneutics has taken on such central importance. Hermeneutics has (of necessity, as we shall see) come more and more to deal with the phenomenon of understanding itself. It has felt compelled to concern itself with the nature of understanding, how understanding is at all possible, and other related and equally crucial questions: what is meaning? what is the nature of language? what is the precise relation between language and meaning? In other words, the hermeneutical vista has been extended to include some of the most basic questions and problems that man raises and tries to answer; and these are being treated as specifically hermeneutical questions and problems. To describe the situation in a way which serves to point up the revolutionary reshaping of theology which is taking place, we may observe that the action confined formerly to the area of prolegomena to systematic theology is now taking place on a broad front which involves equally all of the theological disciplines. In a word, today theology *is* hermeneutic.

This background needs to be kept in view in any approach to the matter of hermeneutics. Such an awareness, moreover, is particularly integral to a consideration of the topic I have been asked to deal with this evening: the question of hermeneutics as it relates to the study of the New Testament. For it is primarily in the area of New Testament studies that the contemporary preoccupation with hermeneutics which dominates all of the theological disciplines has had its origin and continues to receive its stimulus and direction. Hence the scope of this paper has been kept broad deliberately. It is intended as an orientation, to provide a necessary first step

toward understanding an exceedingly complex state of affairs. First, I shall try to sketch somewhat further but still in necessarily bold strokes the origin and contours of the controlling hermeneutical outlook of our day, and then, with my special interest in the New Testament, to indicate something of the response which appears to be demanded. The discussion which follows may serve to bring out required qualifications and corrections.

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Contemporary hermeneutics is intelligible only as it is seen to have its proximate roots in the so-called "Enlightenment." That is, contemporary hermeneutics has its origin in that period (during the latter part of the seventeenth and during the eighteenth century) when the principle of human autonomy — which has always been latent in the heart of man — begins to come to consistent, well-worked-out, one may say, blatant expression. Man's reason is canonized as the final authority. The notion of an external authority of equal magnitude, be it that of Scripture or the church, is emphatically rejected. Coupled with the elimination of what has been referred to as the "God-hypothesis," is an assertion of unbounded confidence in the ability of man to penetrate the mysteries of the cosmic order. History and nature are presumed capable of a completely immanent explanation. The pointed hermeneutical significance of this Enlightenment principle of autonomy may be stated in a single sentence: "Man is his own interpreter."

The consequences of this hermeneutical outlook for the interpretation of the Bible in particular are far-reaching. Several factors need to be noted here, factors which, it should be stressed, are inextricably related: (1) The doctrine of verbal inspiration, the notion of the divinely spirated, God-breathed origin of the biblical text is abandoned along with the broader understanding of the nature of God and his activity of which this doctrine is a part. (2) A distinction begins to be made, an element of discontinuity introduced, between revelation, the Word of God, on the one hand, and the Bible, the words of men, on the other. (3) The meth-

odological inference which is inevitably drawn is that no exceptions are to be granted to the Bible when it is dealt with as a text. It is to be treated like any other document which comes down to us out of the past. Scripture like all things historical has perhaps its relative right but no more than that. The presence of errors is a necessary methodological assumption. To put the matter more formally, the Bible (like any other historical document) is held to be the proper object of that methodology which in the past two hundred years has become more and more clearly defined and universally applied, the so-called "historical-critical" method. According to this method, the task of interpretation consists not only in explaining the text but also in passing judgment on the authenticity of what is reported and the rightness of the views which are expressed. In short, the center of authority passes from the text of Scripture to the interpreter.

The awesome, truly abysmal difficulties of this position were not immediately apparent. One may say that in its initial stages the "Enlightenment" was blinded by what is recognized on all sides today to be an incredibly naive, dogmatic Rationalistic outlook. However, it did not take long for the fundamental problem to surface. Because there are so many facets to this problem, it can be given various formulations. For our purposes it may be put as follows: if all historical phenomena (the biblical text included) are exposed to the corrosive effects of time, the relativity of history; then by what reason, on what basis, do the interpreter and his interpretation escape this same relativizing erosion and decay?

It is not inaccurate to say that this is *the* question which (in one way or another) has moved virtually all theological and philosophical reflection during the past 150 years. To express it again in the plaintive words of Ernst Troeltsch: "Where in life was support to be found, if all of its contents are historically conditioned and therefore fleeting and transitory?"⁵ The nineteenth century may be seen as one long, involved but futile attempt to evade the inevitable answer.

⁵ "Wo gab es einen Halt im Leben, wenn alle seine Inhalte historisch bedingt und also historisch vergänglich sind?"; quoted by H.-G. Gadamer in *RGG*³, III, 370 (art. "Historismus").

Idealistic philosophy, in particular, gives special attention to this problem and seeks to secure the autonomous human subject by establishing that personality (or some aspect thereof) is untouched by and therefore impervious to the flow of history. The result, however, was a hopeless historicism which the periodic revival of a rancid rationalism could perhaps temporally suppress but not alleviate.

On the whole, the twentieth century has been somewhat more sober and careful. To be more precise, the movements within the orbit defined by the axis between Barth and Bultmann have shown themselves to be more sober and careful. But this sobriety does not involve in any final sense a repudiation of Enlightenment presuppositions. It by no means includes a rejection of the "historical-critical" method of biblical interpretation. On the contrary, this method is applied with increasing refinement and rigor. It is held to be a common, extra-theological motive. Acceptance of the historical-critical method is made the price of admission to the guild of theologians. It bears repeating here that the principal developments in theology during this century are not an abandonment, only a more subtle recasting, a more shaded reassertion, of the principle of autonomy. Hence the designation of these developments (or segments of them) as a "neo-orthodoxy" is a misnomer whose inappropriateness becomes increasingly apparent.

Contemporary theology does differ from that of the nineteenth century, however, in that it has given up trying to secure man against history. On the contrary, it has come to assert — and to assert emphatically — the historicness (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of human existence. This notion of historicness is a difficult and many-faceted one. It has built into it the basic structural elements of the dominant theological outlook of our day. At this point in our discussion, however, it is sufficient to note in particular that it involves the idea of the radical temporality, the transitoriness, the unmitigated relativity, of man's being.

Such an outlook is not without significant consequences for hermeneutics. The primary hermeneutical implication now is that *both* — the interpreter as well as the text — are caught up and swept along in the relativizing flow of history. No

longer is the interpreter held to survey the text in regal objectivity and presuppositionless splendor. Rather he, like the text he seeks to interpret, is limited in his outlook and restricted by his presuppositions, which are bound to give way and be replaced in another time and place. This "pre-understanding" of the interpreter, however, is absolutely essential. No interpretation can take place without it.

Hence that which gives distinguishing character to contemporary hermeneutic is its understanding of interpretation as *dialogical* in nature. Interpretation is dialogue in the most profound and fundamental sense of the word. The hermeneutical situation is understood as the interplay, the conversation, between text and interpreter, each with its definitely restricted perspective, each with its only limited validity. It is this back and forth movement which has given rise to speaking about the "hermeneutical circle." In dealing with the text, the interpreter is not a spectator in the balcony, but an actor on the stage. He too is involved in the flow of history. Consequently, not only does he interrogate and interpret the text, but the text addresses, challenges, "interprets" him (the interpreter).

The revelation or, to describe it in more explicitly hermeneutical fashion, the meaning which *occurs* in this moment of interpretative encounter between text and interpreter is the claim upon his person which the interpreter hears, acknowledges, and responds to. This encounter opens up to him the possibility of his existence which is realized in his action; existence is constituted in a free, autonomous expression of love. It is essential to grasp, then, that this claim which the interpreter hears, this staking out of possibility, is not to be explained *horizontally*; that is, it is not to be explained in terms of any causal connection between text and interpreter. To be sure, such a genetic tie exists. It is indispensable; without it interpretation, encounter, could not take place. But the meaning, the revelation, which obtains is not to be defined positively in terms of this bond. Certainly, it is not the case that revelation and meaning have to do with the communication of information or commandments which serve as the basis for my decision or course of action. On the contrary, on this dialectical construction, in which history is seen

as open-ended, the temporal process as an indeterminate, indefinitely extended flow, something out of the past (the biblical text included) or a past event as such, that is, in its character as past, has no meaning. Rather the meaning of the text is an *occurrence*, that which *takes place* in the ever-repeated and ever-varying moment of encounter with its interpreter. Strictly speaking, then, the meaning of the text is its *future*. Or, to paraphrase the way in which it has been put by one proponent of this position, "The meaning and power of a text are identical."⁶

It is in the same vein that recently the followers of Bultmann, in particular, have begun to speak of a "language event" in describing what takes place between text and interpreter. For this interaction, this dialogue, is held to be the purest exemplification, the most perfect realization, of the linguisticity or the "speaking" character of human existence, that is, authentic historical existence. In other words, man's *Geschichtlichkeit* is said now to consist precisely in his *Sprachlichkeit*; historicity has its focus in linguisticity.⁷ A favorite model used to describe the nature of this speech event, this linguisticity, is the distinction between seeing and hearing. Man in his essence is not one who sees, but one who hears. He is not one whose *concreated* task is to subdue the earth and conquer it. He is not so much one who surveys and makes definitive statements about something or someone. Language can be used in this way (as it is for instance in science), but then it is being employed superficially, inauthentically. Rather man is one who is addressed and hears, who ever speaks to and is spoken to. (Here one comes upon the deeper motive for the current stress on preaching and proclamation.) Correlative to this view of man, history is not seen primarily as

⁶ Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutic," *The New Hermeneutic*, p. 103: "Word is, taken strictly, happening word. It is not enough to inquire into its intrinsic meaning, but that must be joined up with the question of its future, of what it effects. For ultimately the questions as to the content and the power of words are identical."

⁷ Ernst Fuchs, "Was ist ein Sprachereignis?," *Zur Frage nach dem historischen Jesus (Gesammelte Aufsätze, II, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960)*, p. 429: "Deshalb ging ich dazu über, die Geschichtlichkeit der Existenz als Sprachlichkeit der Existenz aufzuweisen und den Text selbst als Helfer für dieses Bemühen in Anspruch zu nehmen."

an ordered, connected sequence of events. Rather its essence is a dynamic, interpersonal reality, fluid and open in character.

Despite the complex and shaded idiom of much of current absorption with the question of hermeneutics, the motive which drives it is not too difficult to understand. In bringing this sketch to a close, I would underscore that the intensity of this preoccupation reflects just how pressing has become the dilemma created by the rejection of the divine origin and authority of the Bible. A crisis in understanding is the price paid for autonomy, for making man the interpreter constitutive for meaning and revelation. Ours is a day when, as never before, man has become a question to himself. Man himself has become hermeneutically problematic, and his entire existence is conceived of as one great interpretative endeavor. In a world in which it is held that the only absolute is uncertainty, he searches for norms. From the aimless roll of time in which he is caught up he tries to wrest meaning. On the ever-drifting sands of historical theology he attempts the impossible task of erecting a coherent statement of faith.

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The question inevitably arises concerning the response God's people are to make as they are called to confession in this hermeneutically charged atmosphere. Or to restrict ourselves to but one aspect of this question and give it a somewhat more personal tone: what is the responsibility of the theologian? In dealing with this question here, my interest is not so much in a direct confrontation with contemporary hermeneutics. Rather against the background of the outline just given I shall try to indicate several fundamental perspectives which it appears to me must be maintained. It goes without saying that much which could be said and even needs to be said will remain unsaid.

1) Opposition to the presuppositions of the "Enlightenment" must continue to be sharply focused and unabated. To put it positively, the consideration of most profound, most fundamental hermeneutical significance is very simply this: the Bible is God's word. That this is basic is obvious, but just *how* basic does not always appear to be sufficiently grasped.

The Bible is God's word — one must say that this, strictly

speaking, is a pre-hermeneutical or, if you will, a meta-hermeneutical consideration. To be sure, the way in which this truth is brought to expression may be challenged. Whether or not the doctrine of verbal inspiration admits to a more adequate expression always remains an open question. But the conviction which is reflected in this statement: the Bible is God's Word — that conviction which arises directly and immediately out of exposure not only (perhaps not even primarily) to the "All Scripture is God-breathed" of II Timothy 3:16, but from exposure to Scripture in all its parts — that conviction may not be called in question or made hermeneutically problematic. Let me be crystal clear concerning the conviction I am talking about here. It is *not* a deeply rooted persuasion about the central message of the Bible; it is *not* a being grasped by the basic theme of Scripture, although this, to be sure, is involved. Rather it is a settled conviction, a firm belief, concerning the text *as text*. The words of the text in all their plurality and literality are the words of God. The book of Romans, these words penned in ink on the papyrus (perhaps by an amanuensis!), just as surely as Paul, indeed more properly, have God as author. Again, it is possible to challenge the propriety of these statements as far as their form is concerned. It is conceivable that they could be improved upon in terms of their intention. It could be said better. However, at the same time it needs to be recognized that in the debate over Scripture there comes a point when, if there is still a tendency to qualify the "is" in the statement "the Bible is God's Word," to introduce an element of discontinuity, no matter how slight, between "God's word" and "Bible," if there is still an inclination to shade the divine authorship of Scripture; then, most probably, the problem is not one of simply hermeneutical proportions, that is, there is not simply need for further clarification. Rather the problem has a pre-hermeneutical, a pre-functional basis. There is need for that pre-hermeneutical clarification known otherwise as the regenerating, convincing, teaching power of the Holy Spirit about which Paul writes in I Corinthians 2. Belief in the divine origin of the text, of course, saves no one. But it appears to me increasingly necessary to insist that the conviction that the words of the Bible are the

very words of God is an integral and inamissible component of saving faith.

Perhaps there are some even in this group who feel that this puts the matter too strongly. It is certainly true that in all this concentrated speaking about the text one can fall into abstraction. There is danger of losing sight of the fact that Scripture has its place and functions only as the instrument of the resurrected Christ, the life-giving Spirit. Or one can fail to recognize that God's Word is broader than the Bible, that Scripture has its origin within the larger history of God's revealing activity. It strikes me, however, that these are neither the most real nor the most pressing dangers which confront the Reformed world today. At any rate, the recognition that the Bible is God's word is the underlying consideration which directs and regulates that hermeneutical reflection which alone is appropriate to and demanded by the text. Where this direction and control are wanting, in one form or another, perhaps quite subtly, meaning and certainty begin to be sought *in spite of* the text, and a hermeneutical dilemma of crisis proportions, like the one we are witnessing today, will be the eventual and inevitable result.

2) All the hermeneutical consequences which flow from the conviction that the Bible is God's word cannot possibly be enumerated here. Central is recognition of the unity of Scripture as text, "the consent of all the parts," as the Westminster Confession (I, v) puts it, and hence the hermeneutical principle of the Reformation that Scripture is its own best interpreter. A rather obvious factor — yet one which is all too frequently overlooked, just in a time when it is in need of particular stress — is the basic understanding of the nature of language which is given. On almost all sides in contemporary discussion language is dealt with as if it were a purely human phenomenon. No attitude is more at variance with Scripture, both as a phenomenon and in terms of its teaching. According to the Bible, language is primarily, natively, antecedently divine in character. Speaking is first of all and intrinsically an activity of God. And it is in this light, with this fundamental qualification, that man's linguistic activity is viewed. Man in his linguistic function as in all else he is and does (I would say, man especially and

pointedly in his linguistic functions) is understood as the creature who is God's image. In other words, as our being has God's being as exemplar (we exist because he exists), as our knowledge is an analogue of his knowledge (we know because he knows), so our language is derived from his language. We speak because he has spoken and continues to speak.

This is a hermeneutical axiom than which there is none more basic. It provides an indispensable perspective for understanding the "hermeneutical situation" so far as the text of Scripture is concerned. The language or, more pointedly, the interpretation of God is the ground for our language, our interpretation. The former provides both the possibility and the necessity for the latter. Hence in contrast to the currently prevailing notion of dialogue between text and interpreter, one must recognize the essentially *monological* nature of this relationship. To be sure, as Professor Berkouwer is always reminding us,⁸ one must not lose sight of the element of correlation and reciprocity. We may even speak of dialogue and relativity. But now we are talking about that dialogue between creator and creature — not an endless back and forth movement, but dialogue which in all its moments has God-given direction and structure and hence in its deepest sense is monologue. We are talking about relativity, not that of a chip tossed about on the formless flow of time, but of a part in an organically unfolding process, in the coherent whole of history. It is not the case that text and interpreter call back and forth to each other interminably, each with impaired validity and as each is caught up in the sweep of an open and indeterminate history. Rather the text is that *historical* instance by which the sovereign Lord of history, the one who knows end from beginning, calls forth the interpretative response of man in the interests of accomplishing his determinate purpose and good pleasure.

3) From what has been said it becomes clear just how wrong and confusing it is, with an eye to the contemporary scene, to speak of *the* hermeneutical problem, as if all without

⁸ E. g., recently and with explicit reference to the question of hermeneutics, *De Heilige Schrift*, I (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1966), 163-167.

differentiation are entangled in the same dilemma. Those who know the text to be the voice of the great Shepherd need not and cannot assume the burden of hermeneutical difficulties created by those who refuse to listen. For the former the question of hermeneutics has a specific, definitely qualified form, a form which is not self-defeating but life-giving: What is the precise nature of the unity of the Bible? How *does* the Bible interpret itself? Or, in the classic language of the Confession (I, x), how does the Holy Spirit speak in the Scripture? One must grasp that also, one should say especially, in the area of hermeneutics the antithesis makes itself felt.

Once this basic distinction has been made, however, it is essential to stress that the question of hermeneutics, or better — and here I think we learn from current debate — the question of theological method remains a vital concern to the church. This will probably always be the case, at least until the resurrection transformation of believers becomes open, until faith turns to sight. In bringing this paper to a close, I wish to deal with one point which, it appears to me, deserves special attention in this connection, a point which lies at the heart of a methodologically responsible approach to the New Testament.

In seeking to maintain the settled and abiding character of God's word, particularly over against the activistic thought-currents of our day, it is tempting to conclude that the solution lies in recourse to some form of staticism. In other words, there is danger that, in one way or another, we begin to treat time as an enemy of God's truth and seek to secure ourselves against history. One must certainly share Professor Zuidema's recently expressed pique over the caricature that orthodoxy views the Bible as a book which has been dropped down straight out of heaven.⁹ Still, it is difficult to deny that in the orthodox tradition justice has not been done to the historical character of the Bible, either in terms of its origin or its contents. There has been and continues to be a tendency to view Scripture as a quarry of proof texts for the building of a dogmatic edifice, as a collection of moral principles for the

⁹ "Holy Scripture and Its Key," *International Reformed Bulletin*, 32-33 (Jan.-Apr., 1968), 49.

construction of a system of ethics. That is to say, there is a tendency to force the Bible into a mold, to impose upon it a unity which, to a greater or lesser degree, is foreign to it.

The Bible *is* "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." Scripture *does* teach "what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man." But the biblical revelation is and does these things only in its distinguishing character as either description or explanation, that is, interpretation of God's redemptive *activity*. Inscripturated revelation never stands by itself. It is always concerned either explicitly or implicitly with redemptive accomplishment. God's speech is invariably related to his actions. Redemption is revelation's reason for being. An unbiblical, one could say, quasi-gnostic notion is the inevitable result, when one views revelation of and by itself or as providing timeless truths, self-evident in and of themselves. Precisely in its character as *revelation* the Bible transcends itself. It points beyond itself to the history of redemption which it infallibly attests and expounds. In other words, the specific unity of Scripture is redemptive-historical in character.

Recognition of the orientation of revelatory word to redemptive act or, more broadly, of the history of revelation to the history of redemption has become a theological commonplace. It was introduced into Reformed scholarship primarily and most effectively by Geerhardus Vos and has been taken up by others. It does not appear to me, however, that the *methodological* significance of this correlation has been reflected upon sufficiently. Here I can give only the briefest indication of the lines along which it would seem this reflection should proceed for the study of the New Testament.

A fundamental consideration is that interpretation of the Bible must understand itself as *interpretation of interpretation*. To be sure, in saying this one must not obscure the important differences between our interpretation and the interpretation furnished by the biblical writers. Ours is dependent upon and derived from theirs. Theirs is God-breathed and inerrant; ours is always tentative and in need of correction. *But* these differences are properly understood only as they are seen in the light of a more basic, underlying *continuity*. Both — our interpretation and the interpretation provided by Scripture —

are concerned with the same subject matter. Both are oriented to, and derived from, the history of redemption. In a word, they share a common *interpretative* interest.

This point can be made more precise and concrete as far as the writers of the New Testament are concerned. From a redemptive-historical perspective — a perspective which for the believer there is and can be none more basic — the interpreter today is in the *same situation* as was, say, the apostle Paul. Together they look back upon the climactic events of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, while together they "wait for his Son from heaven" (I Thess. 1:10). Both are concerned with explicating the same redemptive-historical tension between "already" and "not yet" in which they are caught up. In dealing with the New Testament, then, we must avoid that distorting outlook which consists, as Vos puts it, in "viewing the new revelation too much by itself, and not sufficiently as introductory and basic to the large period following."¹⁰ Rather we must see, again quoting Vos, that "we ourselves live just as much in the N.T. as did Peter and Paul and John."¹¹ I would express it somewhat more pointedly by saying that, in terms of those factors which are most basic in defining the task of interpretation, namely, the nature of the subject matter and the position of the interpreter, we must understand that our interpretation today, that is, interpretation in the context of the church, stands closer to the teaching of Paul or the preaching of Peter than the latter stand to the prophecy of Isaiah or the psalms of David.

This outlook has many implications which need to be explored further. I indicate here one which especially interests me. The proper, pointed theological concern of Christ's people is concern with history, the history which has realized their redemption. This concern begins already in the New Testament. More particularly, in a dialectically gifted, synthetically disposed thinker like Paul, the coherent normative statement for which the church strives begins to take shape. This means, then, that over its entire expanse, particularly

¹⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), p. 325.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

the areas of soteriology and eschatology, systematic theology must work hand in hand with New Testament biblical theology and be guided by it. More than has been the case heretofore, dogmatics must be controlled by biblical theology, not only in its material but also in the way it structures this material, in the questions it asks, and perhaps even in the methods it employs. Among other things, such control should help to insure that, when drawn, the "good and necessary consequence" of which the Confession speaks (I, vi) is really good and necessary.

In the days in which we find ourselves it is necessary more than ever that every believer have a sense of history — a sense of redemptive history. But it is especially demanded of the minister of the Word in whatever capacity that he understand himself in his labors as one, together with Paul, "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (I Cor. 10:11). There is need that in his methods, as in all else, everyone involved in the theological enterprise — not just the New Testament scholar — seek to make good his status, shared with the apostle, as "minister of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:6). This, it seems to me, was the approach of that prince of Reformed exegetes, Geerhardus Vos. It explains not only why he reaped such a rich harvest from Scripture but also why, in so doing, he was able to undercut heresies and errors so effectively, often before they had even entered the heads of their proponents. On the field of hermeneutical conflict as elsewhere a good offense will prove to be the best defense.

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THE USEFULNESS OF THE CROSS*

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IN commenting on I Peter 4:12, 13 and what is said there about Christian suffering, Calvin speaks of the "usefulness of the cross."¹ This usefulness, as he sees it, has two parts: (1) the refining trial God makes of our faith and (2) our becoming partakers with Christ. In this address I will reflect on what Calvin considers the "far surpassing" utility of the second aspect, what Peter and the rest of the New Testament, especially Paul, call the fellowship or participation of Christians in the sufferings and death of Christ. I propose to do this by exploring our theme (Christian suffering) within the context of the broader, perennially debated issue of biblical eschatology, particularly the eschatology of the New Testament. A subtitle to these remarks, then, could be "Eschatology and Christian Suffering."

I

Taking a very large view and surveying biblical studies as a whole over the past century, it is fair to say that few developments, if any, have had such a far-reaching impact as preoccupation with the eschatology of the New Testament writers, a preoccupation which has eventually come to dominate New Testament studies. This development has involved intense debate, but a basic consensus has emerged, and this consensus, it should be recognized, differs in certain important respects from the previously accepted understanding of eschatology (although we note in passing that so far as explicit use of the word

* An address given at Westminster Theological Seminary on April 24, 1979 at the inauguration of Dr. Gaffin as Professor of New Testament; printed here with slight modifications and the addition of footnotes.

¹ *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, trans W. B. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 307.

"eschatology" is concerned, this conventional understanding is apparently no earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century²).

In bold strokes the difference is this: According to the traditional understanding, eschatology is a topic of dogmatic (systematic) theology, limited to those "last things" associated with and dating from the second coming of Christ, including the intermediate state following death. In the newer consensus, eschatology is expanded to include the state of affairs that has already begun with the work of Christ in what the New Testament calls "the fulness of time(s)" (Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:10), "these last days" (Heb. 1:2), "at the end of the ages" (Heb. 9:26). Involved also in this more recent understanding of eschatology are basic and decisive considerations already realized in the present identity and experience of the Christian, and so too in the present life and mission of the church.

The emergence of this consensus has not been without its opponents and detractors. The complaint is heard that "eschatology" has been so overworked that it has become virtually meaningless and useless. Biblical studies, some feel, have been hypnotized by an "eschatological monotone"; everything, it seems, is eschatological, and there is nothing that is not eschatological. One recent writer is even convinced that "eschatology" is a dangerous and malevolent word; its usage, he believes, has developed like a cancer and ought to be excised from the vocabulary of biblical studies and banned without delay.³

But while we agree with another writer⁴ that "eschatology" is indeed a "slippery" word and needs to be used more carefully than is often the case (and that need is in fact a large concern of this address), still it would be monumentally retrogressive were biblical studies to abandon the expanded understanding of eschatology that has materialized in recent decades. At stake are perspectives vital to the biblical message and the full power of the gospel. Those puzzled or irritated by the prominence of "eschatology" in the vocabulary of contemporary biblical studies

² According to the evidence cited by J. Carmignac, "Les Dangers de L'eschatologie," *New Testament Studies*, 17 (1970-71): 365f.

³ Carmignac, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 383-390.

⁴ I. H. Marshall, "Slippery Words, I. Eschatology," *The Expository Times*, 89, 9 (June 1978): 264-269.

either have not yet read the New Testament carefully or, for whatever reasons, are not able to perceive what it says.

II

The biblical warrant for a broadened understanding of eschatology can be briefly indicated along several lines.

1) A global, elemental consideration, that comes from taking in the history of revelation in its organic wholeness, is the essentially unified eschatological hope of the Old Testament, a hope which, to generalize, has a single focus on the arrival of the Day of the Lord, inaugurated by the coming of the Messiah. From this perspective, the first and second comings, distinguished by us on the basis of the New Testament, are held together as two episodes or parts of *one* (eschatological) coming. The traditional viewpoint, by emphasizing as it does the *distinction* between the first and second comings, giving rise to its systematic conception of eschatology, has lost sight of this unity and the way even in the New Testament, particularly the gospels, these two comings are mixed, so intermingled that the difficulty interpretation sometimes has in distinguishing them is well known.

2) Historically, a broadened understanding of eschatology emerges with the renewed attention, beginning right at the close of the last century, to what, according to the Synoptic gospels, is obviously the central theme of the proclamation of Jesus, namely, *the Kingdom of God*.⁵ In reaction to the idealistic misunderstandings of older liberalism, interpretation of all schools has come to the conclusion, whether or not subsequently dispensing with the exegetical conclusion as a piece of outdated

⁵ The work usually credited with initiating this epoch-making turn in interpretation is especially that of Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. and ed. R. H. Hiers and D. L. Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971; German original, 1892) and also Albert Schweitzer, e.g., *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black, 1910; German original, 1906), chapters 19, 20. An overall eschatological assessment of Jesus' teaching, often overlooked but with better balance and much greater fidelity to the Gospel records, is already present in Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958; first ed., 1903).

mythology, that Jesus did not preach the actualization of a timeless, always present moral order, but the arrival now, at last, of the final rule of God in creation, present in and through his person and work. Jesus' disciples are blessed to see and hear now what the many prophets and righteous men of old longed to see and hear but did not (Matt. 13:16,17). The traditional distinction between the "kingdom of grace" and the "kingdom of glory" is revealing here. It tends to separate what belongs together, and to obscure that for Jesus it is a matter of one (eschatological) kingdom that is both present and future in its coming.

3) Another helpful example is Paul's teaching on the plainly eschatological event of the *resurrection*. The resurrection of Christ is not an isolated event of the past, but, in its full, once-for-all historicity, it is the "firstfruits," the actual beginning of the great resurrection-harvest at the end of history (I Cor. 15:20). In I Corinthians 15 Paul makes this point to assure believers of their future share in this eschatological harvest, in the resurrection of the body at Christ's return (vs. 23). But elsewhere he is no less emphatic that believers are already raised with Christ and have ascended with him (Eph. 2:5f; Col. 2:12f; 3:1); already they are "alive from the dead" (Rom. 6:13).

It is within this same eschatological framework that Paul's extensive teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit belongs (and belongs in its *entirety*). Christ exalted is the "life-giving Spirit" (I Cor. 15:45); the Spirit is the Spirit of the resurrected Christ (Rom. 8:9-11; II Cor. 3:17,18). The Spirit, with which the church has been baptized and in which all believers share, is the "firstfruits" of what will be received in the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:23); the Spirit now at work in believers is the actual "downpayment" on the eschatological inheritance to be given in its fulness at Christ's return (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The Christian life is indeed eschatological life.

But now, just as we are under the impact of those considerations, which have been recalled only in a cursory way, we pose this question: When these considerations are given their due — when they are understood, not, as too often is still the case, as figurative rhetoric or what is true "in principle," whereby the principle is virtually platonic, but as realistic

eschatology, as an eschatological realism which is decisive for the present life of the church and the present experience of believers — then, we ask, does this stress on “realized” or “inaugurated” eschatology take adequate account of the concrete and sobering realities of human affairs and every day living? Does not an emphasis on the present eschatological kingship of Christ inevitably tend toward a “theocratic triumphalism” which gravely underestimates the significance of Christ’s return and of all that is delayed until then?

These questions (and others like them) ought not to be ignored or suppressed. They point up the necessity, already intimated, for greater definition and precision in our conception of eschatology. The thesis, then, that I propose for your consideration and will try to develop as time permits is that what the New Testament teaches about suffering, especially the relation of the sufferings of Christians to the sufferings and death of Christ, provides indispensable focus and clarification, to the question of biblical eschatology.

III

Two passages, both in Paul, serve well as a point of departure. A brief examination of each of them in turn will disclose a decisive and controlling perspective, one that is, I am inclined to say, the key to understanding all other statements in the New Testament on Christian suffering.⁶

⁶ For the discussion in this section and at a number of points throughout the rest of this address, I want to acknowledge the stimulus of the following: E. Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht*, 2. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), pp. 199–203; W. Schrage, “Leid, Kreuz und Eschaton,” *Evangelische Theologie*, 34(1974): 141–175; P. Siber, *Mit Christus Leben. Eine Studie zur paulinischen Auferstehungshoffnung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1971), pp. 99–190; R. Bultmann, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther*, ed. E. Dinkler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), pp. 227–232; but especially J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 326–338, and several essays of Ernst Käsemann: “For and Against a Theology of Resurrection,” *Jesus Means Freedom*, trans. F. Clarke (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 59–84; “The Saving Significance of the Death of Jesus in Paul,” pp. 32–59 and “The Cry for Liberty in the Worship of the Church,” pp. 122–127 in *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); “Ministry and Community in the New

1) *II Corinthians 4:7-11*. In the opening verses of II Corinthians Paul sounds a note basic to the entire letter. He points out to his readers that they, together with him, share in "the sufferings of Christ" (1:5-7). The sense of this expression in verse 5, particularly the force of the genitive ("of Christ"), is amplified then by what Paul says about his own ministry beginning at 4:7. We have, Paul says, "this treasure" (that is, according to 3:18-4:6, the gospel of the experiential knowledge of the eschatological glory of God in Christ) in "earthen vessels," "clay pots" (that is, in the fragility of mortality and human weakness). Verses 8 and 9 go on to spell out something of the psycho-physical experiences involved: Paul is afflicted, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Verses 10 and 11, then, function to provide an overall assessment; they describe the situation, characterized by persecution and suffering, as a whole. It is a matter of "*always* carrying around in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body," and again, "*always* being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh."

The point to ponder here is the obvious pairing of "the dying of Jesus" and "the life of Jesus" as a comprehensive cover of Paul's existence. Negatively, they are not in view as two separate parts or sectors of his experience, as if "the life of Jesus" and "the dying of Jesus" balance off each other in a plus-minus fashion and added together make up the whole. Rather, the life of Jesus, Paul is saying, is revealed *in* the mortal flesh and *nowhere else*; the (mortal) body is the *locus* of the life of Jesus. Paul's mortality and weakness, taken over in the service of Christ, constitute the comprehensive medium

Testament," *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), pp. 84f. That Käsemann, for example, would nonetheless probably find this address as a whole quite alien to the New Testament (particularly Paul) is part of the continuing tragedy of contemporary biblical interpretation, a tragedy which is to be explained, apart from my own exegetical limitations in this instance, by the largely transpersonal, transsubjective perversity of exegesis premised on the assumed rational autonomy of the interpreter ("historical-critical method"), a methodology of which Käsemann is such an effective and, in many respects, exemplary practitioner.

through which the eschatological life of the glorified Christ comes to expression. "The dying of Jesus" is the existence-form that shapes the manifestation of his life in Paul. In the sense that suffering "the dying of Jesus" manifests the resurrection life of Jesus, Christian suffering is not merely or only suffering *for* Christ but the "sufferings *of* Christ." The essentially subjective force of the genitive (or at least a subjective nuance) must be recognized, and may not be toned down or explained away.⁷

2) Philippians 3:10 is another compelling expression of the same thought. Beginning at verse 3 of the chapter, Paul describes his boast in Christ in contrast to his former confidence in himself. He considers everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ, to gaining Christ and being found in him (vv. 7-9). Verse 10, then, tells us that this experiential knowledge of Christ, union with Christ, involves knowing "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death." This sequence is arresting. It does not read, as we might expect: suffering, death and then, resurrection. Rather, taking in verse 11, Paul knows himself to be enclosed in a circle of resurrection: he is already raised with Christ and experiences resurrection power in order that he might attain to the resurrection of the dead. Verse 10, then, fills out this circle, so to speak. The sequence here is resurrection, then suffering and death. It is crucial to see the force of the conjunction "and" in the expression, "the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings." It does not mean that "the fellowship of his sufferings" is some other, additional reality in our experience than the "power of his resurrection." Rather, the "and" *explicates*. It tells us, together with II Corinthians 4:10,11, that the power of Christ's resurrection is realized just as the fellowship of his sufferings and conformity to his death. It tells us of the forming and patterning power of the resurrection; the resurrection is a conforming energy, an energy that produces conformity to Christ's death. The impact, the impress of the resurrection in Paul's existence is the cross.

⁷ Cf. M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*, trans. J. Smith (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), p. 13.

IV

Misunderstandings can crop up at this point. I want next to take up one of them. In the theological currents that have swept over the world during the past 10–15 years, no issue has been a more intensive concern than that of suffering. Human suffering is a central theme in the theology of revolution and other liberation theologies. Suffering is both the target and means of revolutionary praxis. In particular, in the writing program of Jürgen Moltmann, the sequel to the *Theology of Hope* is *The Crucified God*, in which the principle of pain, suffering and abandonment is taken up into the very being (better, becoming) of God himself and structures relationships within the Trinity. Suffering, in Moltmann's view, is first of all, antecedently inner-trinitarian.⁸ If I read correctly, it is increasingly clear that the theology of hope is not so much that. Rather, because, for one thing, it is not directed by a more sure prophetic word, it is a theology, not of genuine hope, but of uncertain expectation, expectations predicated on what man is able to wrest of his future within the givenness of his mortality.

But this is not the hope of the New Testament. Paul does not glorify suffering as an end in itself. Nor does he absolutize suffering and death as essential to man as man (or God as God). For him, life and death are not a binary opposition that constitute the deep structure of human existence, so that to remove death from man would be to deprive him of his humanity. Rather, Paul is certain that at Christ's return we shall all be changed (I Cor. 15:51), that the mortal must put on immortality (vs. 53), and mortality be swallowed up by life (II Cor. 5:4). And he has this confidence, we may be sure, not as a lingering remnant of late Jewish apocalyptic not yet purged from his thinking, but as an integral element of his revealed gospel.

But now, with this clear, with this absolutely crucial eschatological reservation made, we must go on to appreciate that as long as believers are in the mortal body, that is, for the

⁸ *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and J. Bowden (London: S C M Press, 1974) esp. pp. 200–290; cf. the helpful analysis of R. Bauckham, "Moltmann's Eschatology of the Cross," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 30(1977): 301–311.

period between the resurrection and return of Christ, with Paul it is difficult to overemphasize the intimate correlation of life and death in the experience of the believer, the interpenetration of suffering and glory, weakness and power. For *this* period, for as long as we are in the mortal flesh and the sentence of death is written into our existence, resurrection-eschatology is eschatology of the cross, and the theology of the cross is the key signature of all theology that would be truly "practical" theology. In the life of the church, until Jesus comes, to "remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead . . . according to my gospel" (as Paul enjoins us, II Tim. 2:8) is to "know *nothing* . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (as was also Paul's determination, I Cor. 2:2). The form of Christ's resurrection power in this world is the fellowship of his sufferings as the cross-conformed sufferings of the church (Phil. 3:10). The sign of inaugurated eschatology is the cross. Suffering with Christ is a primary *eschatological* discriminant. And so, in all, the essence of Christian existence, as Paul captures it elsewhere, is: ". . . dying, and yet we live; . . . sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (I Cor. 6:9,10).

V

Romans 8:17 says that we are God's adopted children, "if in fact we suffer with him (Christ) in order that we may also be glorified with him." This clause, in its context, further clarifies the picture for us at several important and disputed points.

1) Sometimes it is argued that the sufferings mentioned in the passages looked at are the sufferings of Paul the *apostle*, specifically *apostolic* suffering which excludes the rest of the church. But a number of considerations tell against this restriction: In II Corinthians, Paul says that the whole congregation shares in his sufferings (1:7). In Philippians, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and conformity to his death are, along with righteousness by faith, essential aspects of union with Christ (3:9,10). And here in Romans 8, as we shall presently see more clearly, suffering with Christ plainly includes all believers and is inseparable from their adoption.

To be sure, Paul's sufferings are those of an apostle; they

result from the discharge of his unique apostolic calling to provide a once-for-all foundational witness to Christ. But in the sense that we are to hold fast to this infallible witness and maintain it in the world, and are to build on this foundation alone, the Church, too, is apostolic; we confess that the one, holy, catholic church is also apostolic. And that means further that we must also recognize that, until Jesus comes, the church truly has its unity, holiness and catholicity in the apostolicity of its suffering witness to Christ.⁹

2) Nor should it be thought that the comprehensive suffering of which Paul speaks holds for only a part of the church's history and is bound to give way to "better days," when the gospel will have spread and had a greater influence in the world. Rather, the present suffering of the believer continues until his future glorification. The terminus on "the sufferings of the present time" (vs. 18) is "the revelation of the sons of God" (vs. 19), that is, the adoption that takes place (at Christ's return) in the resurrection of the body (vs. 23). Until Christ returns, then, all Christian existence continues to be suffering with Christ.

3) Christian suffering, the sufferings of Christ, do not have to be sought; they are not, at least in the first place, an imperative to be obeyed. The conditional construction in Romans 8:17 is like that in verse 9: "you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you." Suffering with Christ, according to verse 17, is not a condition to be fulfilled in order to earn adoption, but a condition or circumstance given with our adoption.

One reason we have difficulty in seeing this givenness is that our understanding of "the fellowship of his sufferings" is too narrow and restricted. This is just one point that needs more attention than it can be given here. We tend to think only of persecution that follows on explicit witness to Christ, or perhaps also of intense physical suffering or economic hardships that may result from a stand taken for the gospel. Certainly the aspect of persecution should not be depreciated and is central in the New Testament — and we may well ask ourselves why it is so largely absent from the experience of most of us. But the "sufferings of Christ" are much broader. They are the Chris-

⁹ Cf. J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. M. Kohl (London: S C M Press, 1977), pp. 357–361.

tian's involvement in the "sufferings of the present time," as the time of comprehensive subjection of the entire creation to futility and frustration, to decay and pervasive, enervating weakness. They are the believer's participation in what was also, according to the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms (LC,A.48; SC,A.27) a fundamental dimension of Christ's humiliation: "Undergoing the miseries of this life," exposure to "the indignities of the world," "the infirmities of his flesh," "the temptations of Satan." Where existence in creation under the curse on sin and in the mortal body is not simply borne, be it stoically or in whatever other sinfully self-centered, rebellious way, but borne for Christ and lived in his service, there, comprehensively, is "the fellowship of his sufferings."

The *givenness* of Christian suffering needs to be stressed. This is expressed almost literally in Philippians 1:29: "it has been given to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him." Notice that Paul does not say faith is common to all Christians, while suffering is the lot of only some. He expresses instead a correlativity of faith and suffering, the intimate bond between them. The Christian life is a not only . . . but also proposition: not only believing, but also suffering.

This givenness or the *indicative* of Christian suffering can be grasped from what Paul teaches about adoption and sanctification. In Romans 8 particularly, suffering with Christ is nothing less than the present mode or condition of our adoption. Remove that suffering, Paul is saying, and you take away our very identity as God's adopted children, our being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Also the renewing work of God in the believer in its entirety, our sanctification, is at stake here. Verse 29 tells us the target of God's electing purpose in sanctification is "conformity to the image of his Son." The specific pattern of transformation is *conformation*, conformity to Christ, not as an abstraction or general embodiment of virtues and holy living, but in the historical pattern of his incarnate existence: suffering first and then glory. For the sons' conformity to the Son means suffering now, for "the present time," and the glory to be revealed at his return.

So, when, for example, in II Corinthians 3:18 Paul asserts that, as believers behold the glory of the exalted Lord-Christ, they are even now being "transformed into the same image

from glory to glory," the further explanation of this transformation "from glory to glory," its concretizing, is given in the next section and what is said there, as we have seen, about the treasure in earthen vessels and the life of Jesus manifested in the mortal body. Or, in the light of Philippians 3:10, present transformation from glory to glory is realized in "being conformed to His death." Peter confirms this when he tells us that it is just as we share the sufferings of Christ that the Holy Spirit, in his identity as the Spirit of *glory*, rests on us (I Pet. 4:13f.).

With Calvin, we must recognize that as Christ's whole life was nothing but a sort of perpetual cross, so the Christian life in its entirety, not just certain parts, is to be a continual cross (*Institutes*, 3:8:1,2). Where the church is not being conformed to Christ in suffering, it is simply not true to itself as the church; it is without glory, nor will it inherit glory. Just as the Spirit of glory came upon Jesus at his Jordan-baptism opening up before him the way of suffering obedience that led to the cross, so the same Holy Spirit, with which the church was baptized at Pentecost, points it to the path of suffering. The Pentecostal Spirit is as well the Spirit of suffering, although this tends to be "the spiritual gift no one is talking about."¹⁰ It was, in fact, not only to James and John but, through them, to the whole church that Jesus said, "You will drink of the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (Mark 10:39). Until he comes again, the concrete form of the Christian's fellowship with Christ is the cross. It is not only to some but all his disciples that Jesus says: "a servant is not greater than his master" (John 15:20), and again: "if *anyone* would come after me, he must . . . take up his cross *daily* and follow me" (Luke 9:23). And we might add this in passing to get at our concern from another angle: we should not think that for Jesus' disciples taking up their cross is a burden somehow in addition to keeping his commandments, or one other commandment among the rest. Rather, cross-bearing is the comprehensive configuration of obedience to Christ.¹¹

¹⁰ Adapting the title of an article on suffering by L. Samuel, "The Spiritual Gift No One Is Talking About," *Christianity Today*, 21 (Jan. 21, 1977): 10-12.

¹¹ Cf. A. de Quervain, *Die Heiligung*, 2. ed. (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946), p. 161.

But now in all this it is absolutely essential, really *everything* depends on recognizing that the reality of Christian suffering is (and I know no better word) *eschatological*. It is so "natural" for us to associate suffering only with eschatological delay and to view it only in the light of what we do not yet have in Christ. But when this happens we have lost sight of the critical factor, that in the New Testament Christian suffering is always seen within the context of the coming of the kingdom of God in power and as a manifestation of the resurrection-life of Jesus. Only with this proviso, this *eschatological* proviso, is Christian suffering the fellowship of Christ's suffering.

Right at this point, then, we can appreciate just one of the decisive differences between the historical sufferings of Jesus and Christian suffering. For Christ, there was no fellowship in suffering, only the blind insensitivity of the disciples all the way and that awful climax of isolation and being forsaken by God and abandoned to his wrath on the cross (Matt. 27:46). For believers, in suffering there is participation in the life and power of their Savior, a participation which is seriously misunderstood as long as it is merely seen as compensating and offsetting particular times of hardship and suffering. Theirs is a fellowship in which his power is made perfect, not alongside of or beyond, but *in* their weakness (II Cor. 12:9,10). His limitless power is manifested through the medium of their pervasive and extreme weakness. This is why two things often associated with Christian suffering in the New Testament are comfort and joy (*e.g.*, II Cor. 1:3-7; 7:4; Phil. 2:17,18; Col. 1:24; I Thess. 1:6; Jam. 1:2; II Pet. 4:13).

VI

We may now look briefly at Colossians 1:24, where Paul says: "I rejoice in my sufferings for you and in my flesh I fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, that is, the church." Certainly the vital, Spiritual union between the glorified Christ and believers is an explanatory presupposition of this striking and much debated statement.¹² However,

¹² Particularly useful for its careful survey of the history of interpretation is J. Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi noch mangelt* (Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1956).

"the afflictions of Christ" are not what (the exalted) Christ, as a "corporate person," presently suffers through the church.¹³ Nor are they the sufferings of the church viewed as Christ's because of the union between them,¹⁴ or because Paul here adapts the Jewish notion of the end-time messianic woes, which the people of God endure for the Messiah's sake and to usher in his coming.¹⁵ Rather, we agree with those exegetes who hold that the afflictions in view are the past, historical sufferings of Christ himself (in his humiliation).¹⁶ But how in this sense is there something lacking in the afflictions of Christ? Hardly that Christ's atoning sacrifice was deficient and needs to be supplemented or that the reconciliation is incomplete. Apart from other considerations, the whole point of Colossians especially is the uniqueness and all-sufficiency of Christ and his work, and in verses 20-22 Paul has just said that Christ has made peace by the blood of his cross and that by his death he has now reconciled the church.

It is one thing, particularly, in the context of Reformation polemics, to say what Paul does not mean. But that still leaves

¹³ E.g., R. Yates, "A Note on Colossians 1:24," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 42(1970): 91f.; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 215f.; A. Oepke, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 4(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967): 1098.

¹⁴ The view of Augustine, Luther and many older commentators (cf. Kramer, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-183); more recently, e.g., H. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 51.

¹⁵ E.g., E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 70; R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), p. 70; R. J. Bauckham, "Colossians 1:24 Again," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 47(1975): 169f. That the conception of the messianic woes provides a more general background to the eschatological suffering in view in verse 24 may very well be the case.

¹⁶ E.g., J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1879]), pp. 165f.; E. Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, und die Kolosser und an Philemon* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), p. 78; E. Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946), pp. 130f.; H. Ridderbos, *Aan de Kolossenzen* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1960), pp. 156-159; W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary. Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), pp. 86f.

the question, what *does* Paul mean? How when he has just said that all the fulness dwells in Christ (vs. 19), can he go on to speak of "filling up" what is lacking in his afflictions? The answer would appear to lie in what Paul says elsewhere about our sharing in Christ's sufferings and the fellowship of his sufferings. The critical factor here is the special, unique and ultimately unfathomable solidarity between Christ and the church. This union is such that not only can the sufferings of believers be viewed as Christ's and as being conformed to his death, but also the personal, past-historical sufferings of Christ and the present afflictions of the church are seen together as constituting one whole. Again, certainly not in the sense that the sufferings of the church have some additive atoning, reconciling value. But there are aspects other than soteriological from which the church's sufferings can be bracketed with the suffering of Christ himself. These aspects we may designate apostolic or missiological, having to do with the gospel-mission in the world of the church together with its Head.

With Professor Murray, we must say, in reference to this verse, that, together with the sufferings of Christ, in their suffering believers "are regarded as filling up the total quota of sufferings requisite to the consummation of redemption and the glorification of the whole body of Christ."¹⁷ Without construing this "total quota" into the doubtful view that the suffering of each Christian hastens the Parousia by mechanically reducing a fixed quantity of sufferings still outstanding, still this verse points us to consider that an important aspect of the rationale for delay between the resurrection and return of Christ is the necessary role of suffering for the gospel and its advance appointed to the church. Also, I would suggest in passing and as a matter for further discussion, that what Paul says here has a definite bearing on the much-debated issue of the nature of the covenant and the role of Christ as covenant mediator and the last Adam. The suggestion, at least, is that the Spirit-worked suffering obedience of the church, which is the fruit of self-abandoning faith that rests in and lives out of its covenant head, is, together with his own obedience, as Murray puts it, integral and necessary to attaining the full possession of the eschatological inheritance.

¹⁷ J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959): 299.

VII

In bringing these remarks to a close, I want to broaden them in two directions:

1) In making the emphasis I have so far, it is of course essential to maintain balance within a larger context. Some may be uneasy that I have spoken in the way I have, with Calvin, of the "usefulness of the cross" and that so much has been said about the cross but so little about the Atonement. I want to remove any uncertainty there may be in this respect. In the tradition of historic Christian theology, especially since Anselm, the cross and the Atonement have been virtually synonymous. Again and again, in every generation (and ours is no exception), it has been truly crucial to stress the exclusive significance of the cross of Christ, that his sufferings and death have an atoning, reconciling efficacy that is true of none other. I would not want anything I have said this morning to leave the impression that I do not share this concern fully.

But my particular concern today is to remind that it is after all a matter of *balance*. Too much of church history, in considering the significance of the cross, has gotten trapped in a false dilemma, the dilemma between Atonement (Christ as Mediator) and conformity (Christ as example).¹⁸ The requisite balance is nowhere more decisively and effectively struck than in I Peter 2:21–25. Christ suffered, Peter says, "for you," and in back of that "for you" lies all the atoning uniqueness and exclusive justifying efficacy of that suffering. Again, Peter tells us, "Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the cross" and "by his wounds you have been healed," and at that, not as if he were one sheep among the rest, but as he was and is the Shepherd and Overseer of the sheep who were going astray. At the same time, however, Peter is intent on showing that a purpose, a particular utility of Christ's sufferings and death is that "we might die to sin and live for righteousness" and to "leave you an example for you to follow in his footsteps." And those footsteps lead, as Paul tells us, into "the fellowship of his sufferings" and "being conformed to his death" (Phil. 3:10).

Galatians 6:14, if I read it correctly, is instructive at this point. There Paul declares: "May I never boast except in the

¹⁸ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, trans. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), pp. 135ff., esp. 158–160.

cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." While the Atonement is certainly in Paul's mind here (vv. 12,13), that is not prominent in the verses that follow. Rather, what explicates this boast in the cross is the fact, as he continues in verse 14, that through the cross the world has been crucified to Paul and Paul to the world, the fact further, according to verse 15, that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, human status or performance of any kind, mean anything, but that what counts is a new creation, a new creation, verse 16 goes on to tell us, that is realized in and among those who walk according to its rule. This new creation-rule, in turn, means finally, verse 17 — and this is the final note of the epistle before the closing benediction — that Paul bears in his body the brand-marks, the stigmata of Jesus. Paul's "boast" in the cross of Jesus is the gracious patterning of his life and ministry by that cross.

Risking a generalization that has all manner of significant exceptions, it does seem fair to say that the churches of the Reformation have shown a much better grasp of the "for us" of Christ's cross and the gospel than they have of the "with him" of that gospel, particularly *suffering* with him. The question we must continue to put to ourselves is this — and certainly we will hardly be so blind as to suppose that for the church in today's world this is anything less than a most searching and urgent question: do we really understand the exclusive efficacy of Christ's death, if we do not also grasp its inclusive aspect? For the New Testament the efficacy of the Atonement has not been applied where it does not issue in "the fellowship of his sufferings" and "conformity to his death." Really, we should say that the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is an inseparable benefit of the Atonement. Putting our question another way, when with the Westminster Shorter Catechism (A.34), we teach that "adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God," will our catechising, including that of our lives, make clear, as Paul does, not only in Romans 8:17 but by the entire course of his ministry, that until Christ returns, the comprehensive mode of our enjoying all these privileges of adopted sons is suffering with him? There are few truths which the church down through its history has been more inclined to evade; there are few truths which the church can less afford to evade.

2) I want also to address for a moment the traditional evangelical debates on eschatology and the question of the millenium.

I do so with a continuing sense of the complexity of the issues, recognizing the plausible appeal to Scripture that each position can make and the need for all sides to do greater justice to the whole of Scripture. My plea here is simply this: for a greater recognition of what we have tried to show to be the defining, delineating role of Christian suffering in biblical eschatology, and that this perspective be given its due in our discussions.

Looking in one direction, we must agree that New Testament eschatology is most assuredly an eschatology of victory, and of victory presently being realized. But, any outlook that fails to see that for the church, between the resurrection and return of Christ and *until* that return, the eschatology of victory is an eschatology of suffering, any outlook that otherwise tends to remove the dimension of suffering from the present *triumph* of the church, distorts the gospel and confuses the (apostolic) mission of the church in the world. The church does indeed carry the eschatological victory of Jesus into the world, but only as it takes up the cross after him. Its glory, always veiled, is revealed in its suffering with him. Until Jesus comes, his resurrection glory in the church is a matter of strength made perfect in suffering. The "golden age" is the age of power perfected in weakness.

But now, doesn't this outlook betray a pessimism that virtually turns away from creation and our calling in it? Doesn't it surrender or at least undermine the ideal, so precious to the Reformed faith, of the whole of life to God's glory and of a gospel that addresses the whole man? To this we reply with Abraham Kuyper that we will not yield one square inch of the crown rights of our King Jesus over the whole creation,¹⁹ and we will insist that the gospel offers the present reality of eschatological life in Christ, present renewal and transformation of the believer in his entirety, according to the inner man, with the redirection and reintegration of human life in all its aspects. And we will have much more to say as to the cosmic scope of redemption and the awesome breadth of the gospel of the kingdom. But, at the same time we must also insist with Paul in Romans 8 (vv. 18ff.) on *this* cosmic truth: that the whole creation *groans*, that there is not one square inch of creation which is not now groaning in anxious longing for the revelation of

¹⁹ I am not able to document this statement, which I have repeatedly seen (or heard) attributed to Kuyper. Presumably it is somewhere in his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*.

the sons of God. And in the meantime, until that revelation at Jesus' coming, these adopted sons, under the power of the Spirit (vs. 23), also groan, not in isolation from creation or by withdrawing from everyday life and responsibilities, but they groan *with* creation; they groan out of their deep, concreated solidarity with the rest of creation. They groan by entering fully and with hope for the entire creation (vv. 20,24f.) into the realities of daily living and cultural involvement, knowing all along that for the present time these are all subject to futility and decay, knowing full well too, even though it so often proves elusive and difficult to maintain, the *balance* to which they are called, that peculiarly balanced life-style demanded of them because as Paul puts it elsewhere, paraphrasing him slightly: "the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who do in fact have wives should be as if they had none; those who do mourn, as if they did not mourn; those who do rejoice, as if they did not rejoice; those who do buy, as if they did not possess; and those who are in fact to use the things of the world, as if they did not make full use of them. For this world in its present form is passing away" (I Cor. 7:29-31). And Paul has no more ultimate word on this situation than to say: "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory to be revealed to us" (vs. 18).

Only in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings will the church avoid the extremes of a quasi-theocratic utopianism, on the one hand, and a millennial escapism and narrowing of the gospel, on the other. For this reason, too, that we stay free of these extremes with their inevitable tendency to various forms of ideological and even practical bondage, it has been given to us, "not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29).

All told, we may sum up in paraphrase of the eschatological vision captured in Psalm 84 (vv. 5-7):²⁰

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee, in whose heart
are thy ways;
Who going through the vale of misery use it for a well,
and the pools are filled with water;
They will go from strength to strength.
This, too, is the usefulness of the cross.

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²⁰ Paraphrase by Martin Shaw, *Sing We Merrily Unto God Our Strength* (London: Novello & Co., 1932).

THE HOLY SPIRIT*

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I

TWENTY years ago, when I was a seminary student, there was a slogan to the effect that the Holy Spirit was "the forgotten member of the Trinity." Today, no one at all aware of more recent developments in the church and theology, will be able to say anything like that. The past 15-20 years have witnessed an unprecedented quickening of intense and widespread interest in the work of the Holy Spirit. While this interest has begun to show signs of levelling off over the past several years, it is still safe to say that at present no issue more preoccupies the church throughout the world than that of the Holy Spirit and his work.

This remarkable turn of events is largely bound up with the emergence and rapid spread of the charismatic movement. The phenomenal growth of this movement has no easy or single explanation, but certainly it can not be understood, at least in the West, apart from larger cultural and subcultural developments in recent decades. Among these, in particular, are a growing disillusionment with our society as a whole and its apparent direction (or lack thereof), and an awareness that things like industrialization, technology and material affluence, on which such high hopes have been set, tend by themselves to disappoint and depersonalize rather than to satisfy basic human needs and aspirations. Another factor is the "new irrationalism" of the West with its preoccupation with various Eastern religions and other forms of mysticism, in the quest for personal wholeness and experience with genuine emotional depth.

* An address, printed here with slight revisions, given at the National Presbyterian and Reformed Congress, meeting at Grove City College, Grove City, Pennsylvania, on July 17, 1979.

These trends betray a deep hunger which the Gospel alone can satisfy and it would be tragic for the church to neglect them. But they also intensify the demand to "test the spirits." Accordingly, both within and outside the charismatic movement, there is a growing concern to counter the *antitheological* bias that has so often surfaced down through church history when the work of the Holy Spirit is under consideration. Efforts are under way to redress this *doctrinal* neglect of the Holy Spirit, so that now it can no longer be said that pneumatology is the neglected field of systematic theology. Across a broad front, contemporary theology has moved from a christological period (under the dominance of Karl Barth) into a pneumatological period. Apparently this is where it will remain for some time.

Where is and where ought the Reformed community to be in this situation? It is fair to say, I believe, that most of us see ourselves on the outside looking in. The charismatic movement has largely caught us by surprise, leaving many of us perplexed or perhaps some of us antagonized. It has not had any real impact on our church life and Christian experience. No doubt some degree of isolation here is necessary. The totalitarian character of our allegiance to Scripture, and our conviction that the Bible is not simply a stimulus but the norm for Christian experience, makes a certain amount of isolation almost inevitable. No doubt, too, most of our critiques of the charismatic movement are accurate and need to be made. But it would be regrettable indeed if in this era of renewed and intensified interest in the work of the Holy Spirit, we of the Reformed community were to remain fixed on what sets us apart and only able to see the errors of our fellow Christians in the charismatic movement. These contemporary developments contain a massive challenge, the positive challenge to search ourselves. What ought to be our expectations for the work of the Spirit in *our own* lives and in the congregations to which many of us minister? Where are we involved, perhaps unwittingly, in grieving or quenching the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19)? How can we as Reformed Christians function more adequately as ministers of the new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit (II Cor. 3:6)? These are the kinds of questions that ought to focus our concern.

II

It seems to me that a constructive searching of ourselves does well to begin by recalling our heritage. That is indispensable for getting our bearing and maintaining our balance in the present. B. B. Warfield, for one, has taken the position that Calvin is "preeminently the theologian of the Holy Spirit."¹ This may seem a surprising assessment and is certainly not the popular view of Calvin. But, as Warfield points out, Calvin's distinctive contribution is not, for instance, the doctrines of God's sovereignty or of election and double predestination. These he simply took over from Augustine and others. Rather, his teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit is, Warfield writes, "probably Calvin's greatest contribution to theological science. In his hands for the first time in the history of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit comes to its rights."² Calvin's *Institutes*, Warfield only slightly overstates, is "just a treatise on the work of God the Holy Spirit in making God savingly known to sinful man, and bringing sinful man into holy communion with God."³ The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, by which we are brought to a saving conviction of the divine origin and truth of Scripture (I. vii), is a particular doctrine the church owes to Calvin. And under the term "regeneration" he discusses at length (II. iii-x) the whole process by which the Spirit subjectively renews the sinner.

The progression of the argument in Book III of the *Institutes* is particularly significant. There Calvin discusses the application of salvation in the experience of the individual sinner. With the rest of the Reformation he is clear that justification by faith "is the main hinge on which religion turns" (xi.i). But for Calvin justification has a broader and deeper setting. That foundation, the opening and orienting chapter of Book III tells us, is "the secret working of the Spirit." Without that "secret working," that "secret energy of the Spirit," Christ

¹ "John Calvin the Theologian," *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), p. 484, cf. p. 487.

² *Ibid.*, p. 487; cf. "On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 1, ed. J. E. Meeter (Nutley, New Jersey): Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), pp. 213f.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 486.

remains outside us and all he has done for our salvation remains useless and is of no value to us. "To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectively unites us to himself" (i:1). This Spirit-worked union gives a share in all Christ's saving benefits. Without it we have nothing, neither justification, nor sanctification, nor anything else. The application of redemption in its entirety is suspended on the work of the Holy Spirit in sovereignly uniting sinners to the exalted Christ.

Calvin saw too the *comprehensive* scope of the Spirit's activity, in creation as well as redemption. The overall development of the *Institutes* reflects the insight, too often minimized or even denied, that the various saving activities of the Spirit are not apart from or in opposition to creation. Redemption is the vindication of God the *creator*. The new creation in the Spirit is the restoration and consummation of creation; it includes the renewal of the entire life of the creature made in God's image. In Calvin's statements on the Holy Spirit there is also a recognition of what we have subsequently come to refer to as "common grace."

We can leave it to others to judge in detail just how adequately and faithfully subsequent generations of the Reformed tradition have maintained this heritage from Calvin. But certainly we are not wrong in saying that the work of the Holy Spirit has been a constant and even distinctive concern. Unlike other traditions, the Reformed tradition has not been content to rest in faith as kind of an ultimate fact in salvation. Genuine Calvinism is bound to probe deeper and ask the question, "Where does this faith by which I am saved come from?" "What is its origin?" And the answer found, the Reformed resting point, is the sovereign and gracious working of the Holy Spirit and in faith as a free gift of God alone. Especially with the emergence of its doctrine of regeneration in the classic, narrower sense, subsequent to the Synod of Dordt, the Reformed tradition has insisted that the entire soteriological process is rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Various aspects of the Spirit's activity in the believer were a dominant, at times consuming preoccupation of the Puritans in particular (*e.g.*, John Owen's monumental *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 1674). More recently, toward the

close of the last century, Abraham Kuyper wrote one of the comparatively few comprehensive treatments to date on the work of the Holy Spirit. Another important work from about the same time is that of George Smeaton (*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 1882). Warfield, then, was hardly being facetious or irrelevant when he replied to those in his day who found the *Westminster Confession* deficient because it lacks a chapter devoted specifically to "the Holy Spirit and His Work," that it already has *nine* chapters on that topic.⁴ (I take it Warfield was referring to chapters 10–18, which deal with the application of redemption.)

It would be very wrong, then, in the present circumstances of revived interest in the Holy Spirit, if we as Reformed Christians were only able to see ourselves as disadvantaged or impoverished. This is not to deny that we can learn something from the charismatic movement and other Christians outside our tradition. We certainly can. But it would be monumentally ungrateful if we were to overlook or depreciate our Reformed heritage, just in the things of the Spirit of God. Nor is it patronizing on our part to point out that the charismatic movement has flourished especially in those denominations and parts of the church where this rich heritage has never taken hold, or where in recent generations it has even been repudiated and abandoned.

But this still leaves us with the challenge, posed by contemporary developments and now, as we have seen, intensified by our own tradition: How adequately and effectively will the Reformed community today be a manifestation of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit?

To try to give an ultimate answer to this question would be presumptuous. The Spirit, scripture reminds us, is like the wind that blows where it wills (John 3:8; cf. I Cor. 12:11). He is finally incalculable and mysterious in his working; his ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:36). We need always to remember this and, especially where the work of the Holy Spirit is concerned, to guard against lapsing into various kinds of intellectualism and the undue logicizing to which theology is so prone.

⁴ "On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," p. 205.

At the same time, however, we must not be more modest than Scripture. This, too, is a vital part of our Reformed heritage: *spiritus cum verbo*, the Spirit working with the Word, and "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (*West. Conf.*, I, x). Where do we get the (practical) notion we sometimes have that Scripture is a dead letter? Not from our Reformed fathers. The Bible is the living voice of the Holy Spirit *today*. This is the structure or pattern of working which the Spirit has set for himself in his sovereign freedom. We may have this confidence, then, that as we are conformed to this order, as we hear and obey this Word and no other, the voice of the Spirit, we will be blessed and used by the Spirit, and we will not be found resisting or quenching him.

I move on, then, to offer some biblical fundamentals for today concerning the Holy Spirit. My concern is especially with considerations needing to be emphasized, as I see it, within the contemporary situation. Even with this narrower focus, I am aware how partial my remarks will be and therefore unsatisfying to some. Still I hope to be saying things that ought to be said first. I do so, I might add, with the increasing conviction how much we need in our own day a work on the Holy Spirit on the magnitude of those of Owen and Kuyper.

III

Even a superficial glance at the New Testament with a concordance in hand discloses an unmistakable pattern. The high percentage of references to the Holy Spirit (approximately 80%) are found in just over half of the New Testament — in Acts, the epistles and Revelation. There are only a relative handful of references in the gospels.

More significant is the nature of this distribution of references. In the gospels, so far as the present work of the Spirit is concerned, the accent is on Jesus and his activity. For the disciples, the Spirit is a matter of *promise*, a still *future* gift. In Acts and the epistles, however, emphasis is on the *present* reality of the Spirit as he is active in the church and at work in believers. This pattern raises a key question: what explains this difference, this decisive transition for the disciples? The answer, of course, is Pentecost, what is variously described as

the baptism of (in, with) the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 11:16), or the outpouring (Acts 2:17,18,33; 10:45), or gift (Acts 2:38; 10:45; 11:17; 15:8), of the Spirit.

The New Testament, then, provides a dramatic, historical perspective that is basic to understanding the work of the Holy Spirit. It is fair to say that everything in the New Testament about the Spirit's work looks forward or traces back to Pentecost; everything pivots on Pentecost, along with the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, with which Pentecost is closely associated as a single complex of events. (Acts 2:32,33 make this association clear.) Accordingly, a basic question is what really happened at Pentecost. What is the significance of the baptism (gift) of the Holy Spirit?

Our first inclination is to answer this question in terms of ourselves and to look for the primary significance of Pentecost in individual Christian experience. This tendency is surely borne out by contemporary developments, where, for example, the basic understanding of Pentecost that many have is that it is the model for a post-conversion, "second blessing" experience of the Spirit's power to be sought by all believers. But this or any other assessment of Pentecost primarily in terms of the believer's personal experience is wrong, because it virtually short-circuits a decisive element in New Testament teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit and so distorts the whole.

Even more basic than Pentecost and its relation to the Christian life is the tie between Pentecost and the person and work of *Christ*. Jesus himself points to this tie in Acts 1:5, where the impending day of Pentecost is indicated to be the fulfillment of the prophecy which climaxed the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:16): "He [*i.e.*, Jesus, the Christ, *cf.* vs. 15] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Pentecost, then, is evidently the work of Christ. In fact, Pentecost consummates his once-for-all accomplishment of our redemption. From one perspective, it is even fair to say that the earthly ministry of Jesus in its entirety consists in securing and then communicating to the church at Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit. This needs to be explored further.

The vital bond between the Spirit and Christ as incarnate lies along two strands of biblical witness which intertwine and condition each other. One line, so to speak, runs from the

Spirit to Christ, whereby Christ is the recipient or bearer of the Spirit. The direction of the other line is from Christ to the Spirit; here Christ is the sender or giver of the Spirit. Generally the second line has been better recognized than the first, but neither is really understood apart from the other.

How these two strands relate to each other can be seen from the basic thread of the narrative in the gospels and Acts. According to the gospels, Jesus, in terms of his genuine humanity, is a man of the Spirit. Luke especially draws attention to this: his conception is by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:35); by plain implication, the Spirit is with him from childhood (2:40; cf. 1:80; 2:52); the Spirit comes upon him at his baptism (3:22), and consequently the entire course of his public ministry is impelled by the Spirit (4:1,14; 10:21; Acts 10:38). Jesus, as John the Baptist testifies, is given the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).

At the same time, John's climactic prophecy concerning the future ministry of Jesus marks him out as the *giver* of the Spirit (Matt. 3:11,12; Mark 1:7,8; Luke 3:16,17). At least two ramifications of this promised baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, fulfilled at Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5), are plain from the context in Luke 3 and ought not to be overlooked. For one, John's declaration is intended to answer (vs. 16) the basic question of the crowd whether he might possibly be the Christ (vs. 15). As such, meeting this question on the basic level it was asked, John's response is a virtual one sentence summary of his own ministry in comparison with that of the "coming one," Jesus, a comparison under the common denominator of baptism: "I baptize you with water, but . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John's role is provisional and preparatory, his call to repentance is anticipatory (cf. vs. 4; 7:27f.); therefore his ministry in its *entirety* is set under the *sign* of water baptism. In contrast, Jesus is the fulfillment; therefore his ministry taken as a *whole* centers in the *reality* of baptism with Holy Spirit and fire. Secondly, verse 17 ("His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire") plainly shows that the fire of the Messiah's baptism is destructive, or at least includes a destructive aspect (cf. vs. 9), and further that this baptizing activity

as a whole involves nothing less than the final judgment with its dual outcome of salvation or destruction. Messianic Spirit-and-fire baptism is of a piece with God's great discriminating activity at the end of history, of cleansing the world-threshing floor or, to vary the biblical metaphor slightly, harvesting the world-field (*cf.* Matt. 13:36-43). To sum up here, Pentecost, as the goal of Christ's earthly ministry, has end-time, eschatological significance.

But the messianic baptism prophesied, contrary apparently even to John's expectations (Luke 7:18ff.), does not take place immediately. Rather Luke and the other Synoptic evangelists are concerned to show that a period intervenes, based on Jesus' own submission to John's water baptism *and*, correlative with that, his own reception of the Spirit (Luke 3:21,22; note that all three gospels have an almost identical structure, *cf.* Matt. 3:13-17 and Mark 1:9-11, in which the account of Jesus' baptism also follows directly on John's prophecy). In one word, the evangelists are concerned to show that the content of the *gospel* intervenes between John's prophecy and its Pentecost fulfillment. For the Spirit-and-fire baptism, eventually realized at Pentecost, to be one of blessing rather than destruction for the Messiah's people, for the Spirit to come upon them not as a consuming fire but as a recreating wind, then the Messiah himself must first become identified with them as their representative sin bearer (the point of Jesus' being baptized by John, which explains John's recoil, *cf.* Matt. 3:14) *and*, at the same time, be endowed with the Spirit, in order, by his obedience to death on the cross, to bear away the wrath and condemnation of God their sins deserve. Pointedly, if they are to receive the Spirit as a gift and blessing, then he must receive the Spirit for the task of removing the curse on them.

This close integration of John's ministry (baptism), Jesus' ministry based on his own reception of the Spirit, and Jesus as the giver of the Spirit is very sharply focused in John 1:33. Identifying Jesus in his role as "the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (vs. 29), the Baptist says that he would not have known him (as such) "except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize

with the Holy Spirit'." This is the (*gospel*) explanation of the two strands mentioned above relating the Spirit and Jesus.

It bears emphasizing now, that it is the *exalted* Christ, Christ as resurrected and ascended, who gives the Spirit. This is plain, for instance, from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14ff.). The pivot of much said on that occasion is found in verses 32 and 33. Having just dwelt on the resurrection (vss. 24-31) as God's response to the wicked men who crucified him (vs. 23), Peter summarizes by saying: "God has raised up this Jesus, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit (*i.e.*, the promised Holy Spirit), he has poured out what you both see and hear." Here the outpouring (baptism) of the Spirit is closely connected with and conditioned on the climactic events of Christ's work, especially his resurrection and ascension. Further, the broader context of Luke-Acts, including the tie, already noted, between John's water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism, suggests an instructive parallel between Jesus' own baptism by John and Pentecost: At the Jordan, the Spirit was given to Jesus, by the Father (Luke 3:22), as endowment for the messianic task before him, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of the church; in contrast, at Pentecost, the Spirit, was received by Jesus, from the Father, now as reward for the redemptive work finished and behind him, and was given by him to the church as the (promised) gift (of the Father). (The fully trinitarian involvement in Pentecost is apparent.)

Two related points in these verses may be mentioned briefly, without our being able to discuss them adequately here. (1) The Spirit poured out at Pentecost is "the promise . . . from the Father," "*the* promise of the Father" (1:4; Luke 24:49). Thus, this outpouring is seen to be the essence of the fulfillment of the primal promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:2,3) and awaited under the entire old covenant (vs. 39; *cf.* esp. Gal. 3:14). This points up again the central place of Pentecost among the objectives contemplated in Christ's work of redemption. (2) There is, then, the strong suggestion here that Pentecost is a once-for-all, epochal event, on the order of the resur-

rection and ascension, with which it is so intimately related. Pentecost is *not* the first in an indefinitely continuing series of similar events, nor is it the model of an experience for believers regardless of time or place.

Paul's commentary in this connection, frequently overlooked, is I Corinthians 15:45: "The last Adam became life-giving Spirit" (*cf.* II Cor. 3:17). In my judgment, exegesis of this passage, in the Reformed tradition rooted in the work of Geerhardus Vos⁵, has shown convincingly that "spirit" in this statement refers to the Holy Spirit and that the "becoming" has in view what took place at the resurrection or, more broadly, the exaltation of Christ. Here, then, in this remarkable assertion, Paul not only points to Christ as the giver of the Spirit, but in so doing he *identifies* them in some respect, dating from the resurrection. While from the context the life-giving activity in view primarily pertains too the future, bodily resurrection of the believer at Christ's return, at the same time who Christ *now* is and what he *presently* does as resurrected is also surely in view.

To discover trinitarian confusion or a denial of the personal distinction between Christ and the Spirit at this point in Paul is to create a problem that is not there. Eternal, innertrinitarian relationships are outside his purview here. He is not thinking in terms of Christ's essential deity (which he plainly affirms elsewhere, Phil. 2:6; *cf.* Rom. 9:5), but of what Christ experienced in his genuine humanity. His perspective is *historical*. He is speaking about what Christ *became* in his identity as the last *Adam*, the second *man* (vs. 47). The oneness or unity in view is economic or functional, eschatological. Paul's point is that by virtue of his glorification, Christ, as last Adam and second man, has come into such permanent and complete possession of the Spirit that the two are equated in their *activity*. The two are seen as one, as they have been *made* one in the eschatological *work* of giving life to the church. The great Dutch re-

⁵ *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), pp. 166-169; "Eschatology and the Spirit in Paul," *Biblical and Theological Studies* by the members of the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), pp. 231-234; *cf.* R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), pp. 78-92, 96f.

formed theologian Herman Bavinck wrote that "this taking possession of the Holy Spirit by Christ is so absolute" . . . that "the Holy Spirit has become entirely the property of Christ, and was, so to speak, absorbed into Christ or assimilated by him."⁶

This teaching of Paul ties in with and explains what Jesus himself had to say to his disciples in John 14–16, when he promised the coming of the Spirit as Counselor or Advocate. In particular, at 14:12ff. the point is made that the giving of the Spirit by the Father is both conditioned on Jesus' *going* to the Father (vs. 12) in his glorification, and is at the same time the *coming* of Jesus himself (vs. 18: "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you"). The coming of the Spirit, following the ascension, is the coming of Jesus. Jesus' further promise of his presence and coming in the verses that follow (vss. 19–23) is similarly to be understood of the Spirit's coming (rather than as referring either to the brief period of his post-resurrection appearances or the second coming).

We have been asking after the significance of Pentecost. A basic factor emerging from our discussion, one that controls both the christology and the pneumatology of the New Testament, is the thorough *integration*, the complete *correspondence*, the total *congruence*, there is in the church and the experience or believers between the work of the exalted Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. We may say not only that at Pentecost Christ pours out on the church the gift of the Spirit, but also that Pentecost is the coming to the church of Christ himself as the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit of Pentecost is the resurrection life of Jesus, the life of the exalted Christ, effective in the church.

The Spirit's work, then, is not some addendum to the work of Christ. It is not some more or less independent sphere of activity that goes beyond or supplements what Christ has done. As John 16:13,14 make unmistakably plain, the Spirit has no program of his own; as the "other Counselor" (14:16; cf. 16:7), he has no other function than to glorify *Christ* and minister the things of *Christ*. In his ministry the Spirit is "self-

⁶ *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 387.

effacing." The Spirit's work is not a "bonus" added to the basic salvation secured by Christ. *This* is the "full" gospel, and it is the only gospel.

The coming of the Spirit brings to light not only that Christ *has* lived and *has* done something but that he, as the source of eschatological life, *now* lives and is at work in the church. By and in the Spirit Christ reveals himself as present. The Spirit is the powerfully open secret, the revealed mystery, of Christ's abiding presence in the church. So, for example, the familiar words of Christ at the close of the Great Commission: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20) are not to be understood only in terms of Christ's omnipresence by virtue of his divine nature, but also and primarily in terms of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. The "I" who speaks here is the life-giving Spirit, the glorified Son of Man, about to come at Pentecost and be present in the church through the power of the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit is nothing less than the gift to the church of Christ himself, the glorified Christ who has become what he is by virtue of his sufferings, death and exaltation. In this sense, the giving of the Spirit is the crowning achievement of Christ's work. Pentecost is his coming in exaltation to the church in the power of the Spirit. It completes the one-for-all accomplishment of our salvation. Without it, that work that climaxes in Christ's death and resurrection would be, strictly speaking, unfinished, incomplete.

IV

Once we have grasped something of the bond between the Holy Spirit and Christ, we have a foundation for understanding the Spirit's work in the church and individual Christian experience. Actually, in discussing Pentecost in relation to Christ we have already found it not only natural but necessary to make repeated mention of the church. This happens, of course, because Christ's work is never private, merely for himself, but always messianic, for and in the interests of the church. The life-giving gift (reward) of the Spirit, which he received from the Father in his exaltation, he received, "not for his own private use" (Calvin, *Institutes*, III:1:1), but that he might

share it with us, his people. The Holy Spirit is the central blessing of the kingdom which, too, it is the Father's sovereign good pleasure to give to Jesus' disciples (*cf.* Luke 11:13 with 12:32). Here we will only be able to reflect briefly on several aspects of our sharing in this great kingdom gift.

1. *Old covenant, new covenant and the work of the Spirit.*

One much agitated question concerns the differences in the Spirit's activity between the old and new covenants. Reformed doctrine has never settled for pat answers to this question, in terms of a sharp disjunction, say, between an external working of the Spirit under the old covenant and an internal working under the new. Admittedly, explicit Old Testament references to the Spirit's work in individuals are sparse, but to structure the difference between old and new by the distinction between theocratic endowment and personal indwelling (the Spirit "on" and "in"), is not only unconvincing but wrong. Both factors interweave, for example, in David's prayer: "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). The surrounding verses reflect an intense concern about sin, repentance, forgiveness and salvation, a concern obviously flowing from the deepest recesses of his person. More is at stake in David's plea than the loss of his theocratic prerogatives and powers. Also, the faith of Abraham, the model for all believers, both old and new covenant (Rom. 4; Gal. 3), can only have its origin in the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit. Further, the piety and prayers of the Psalms while not the average experience in Israel, were still a model and norm for their day, and are essentially continuous with the new covenant experience of the Spirit's sovereign work of inner renewal and personal transformation.

Yet, the writer of Hebrews says of old covenant believers that "none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (11:39, 40). What does this "something better" of the new covenant (*cf.* 7:22; 8:6) entail for the experience of those presently under its gracious administration, particularly for their experience of the Holy Spirit? Taken as a whole the New Testament seems to indicate one fundamental and decisive difference between old and new covenant believers. That is the Spirit-worked *union* New Testament

believers have with the *exalted* Christ, the life-giving Spirit, the Christ who is what he is, because he has suffered and entered into his glory. The covenantal communion with God enjoyed by Abraham and the other old covenant faithful was an anticipatory and provisional fellowship; it lacked the finality and eschatological permanence of our union with (the glorified) Christ, which is the ground and medium of our experiencing all the other blessings of redemption.

The corporate or ecclesiological dimension of this union needs to be stressed. Pentecost, as often pointed out, is the birthday of the church as the new covenant people of God and the body of Christ. In particular, the Spirit poured out at Pentecost constitutes the church as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), as the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells (II Cor. 3:16). Believers are living stones who *together* make up a great Spiritual house (I Pet. 2:5). Within this temple-house, their relationship of dependence on Christ, the cornerstone, may not be confused with, but at the same time it may not be separated from their relationship of dependence and responsibility toward each other.

But what further, *in detail*, are the experiential implications of the difference between the old and new covenants, created by union with Christ? Here Scripture is elusive. In fact, I am inclined to say that we are on the wrong track if we are looking for Scripture to sanction a specific pattern or routine of experiences in the inner life of the believer. Joy in the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52; I Thess. 1:6; cf. Gal. 5:22), for instance, is something more, and different, than a particular psychic state or emotional response. The Bible is just not interested in the question of individual religious experience, at least in the way we are inclined to be preoccupied with it. What the New Testament does disclose of the experiential newness of Pentecost largely results as it accents the broader concerns about Christ and the church already discussed. The individual repercussions of the Spirit's working are in the background so that spelling them out will probably always contain a problematic element. But along these broader lines the difference between old and new covenants is clear and bears emphasizing.

a) Christ has become life-giving Spirit. The Spirit is now present and at work in believers as a result of the actually

finished work of Christ. The Spirit is present not, as previously under the old covenant, proleptically, "ahead of time," in terms only of promise; but he is "properly" present, "in due season," on the basis of the actual fulfillment, apart from which the promise is ultimately null and void. This is the sense of the puzzling comment of the Evangelist in John 7:39: "For the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." On the one side, this statement should not be toned down to say in effect that the Spirit is now more fully present, present to a greater degree, than under the old covenant; it expresses absolutely what formerly was not and now is the case: the Spirit is present as the Spirit of the glorified Christ. On the other hand, it should not be so abstractly absolutized that it contradicts the undeniable indications of the Spirit's activity in the Old Testament.

b) The Spirit now present is the *universal* Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the new covenant community, now no longer restricted to Israel, now expanded to include both Israel and the nations, Gentiles as well as Jews. In contrast to the old covenant order the Spirit is now poured out on all "flesh" (Acts 2:17). The Spirit is the "blessing of Abraham" now, at last, come to the Gentiles (Gal. 3:14), the Spirit of the kingdom taken away from old, unrepentant Israel and given to a nation (the new Israel) producing its fruits (Matt. 21:43). This unprecedented world-wide dominion of the Spirit (Christ, the life-giving Spirit) dates from Pentecost. It cannot be stressed too emphatically, then, that the Spirit of Pentecost is the Spirit of *mission*. Missions is of the essence of the New Testament church (*e.g.*, Matt. 28:19, 20; Luke 24:47, 48; Acts 1:8); where the church is no longer a witnessing church, whether in the immediate, local or world-wide context, it has lost contact with its Pentecostal roots. *This* is the inestimable privilege, the great experiential blessing, of New Testament believers, that they have been given the responsibility and power to witness to the saving, new creation lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole of life throughout the entire creation.

2. *The gift and gifts of the Spirit.* Especially in view of contemporary differences in viewpoint, it is important to distinguish clearly within the overall working of the Spirit in the church between the gift (singular) and gifts (plural) of the

Spirit. "With one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body, . . . we were all made to drink of one Spirit," Paul says (I Cor. 12:13). All believers, without exception, share in the gift of the Spirit by virtue of their union with Christ and, correlatively, their incorporation into his body, the church, which he (permanently) baptized with the Spirit at Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit is present in the church on the principle of "universal donation." On the other hand, the gifts (plural) of the Spirit are workings of the Spirit variously distributed within the church. No one gift (in this sense) is intended for every believer. The gifts of the Spirit are given on the principle of "differential distribution." This seems clear, for instance, from the rhetorical questions posed by Paul at the close of I Corinthians 12 (vss. 29,30): all are not apostles, all are not prophets, . . . all do not speak in tongues, *etc.* This is ultimately so, it should be stressed, by divine design (the one body with diverse parts), and not because of lack of faith or the failure to seek a particular gift.

The significance of this distinction can be seen from another angle. The gift of the Spirit, in which all believers share, is an essential aspect of salvation in Christ (*cf.* Acts 2:38; 11:18, where it is associated with repentance unto life). It is an actual foretaste of the eternal life of the future. It is an *eschatological* gift. Paul uses two figures that are especially well-chosen to make this point. The Spirit already at work in all believers is the "firstfruits" in the enduring harvest of renewal to be completed in the resurrection of the body at Christ's return (Rom. 8:23). Again, the gift of the Spirit is the actual "deposit," the "first installment," the "downpayment" on the final inheritance to be received in its fullness when Christ returns (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14). In distinction, the gifts (plural) of the Spirit, variously distributed in the church, are *provisional* and *subeschatological*. This is clearly one of Paul's points in I Corinthians 13:8ff.: prophecy and tongues, among other gifts, have a provisional, limited function and so are temporary, destined to pass away (vss. 8, 9), while those works of the Spirit like faith, hope and love endure (vs. 13).

Of a number of implications that could be drawn here, just two may be mentioned very quickly. a) All believers, not just some, are "spiritual." We need to be both grateful and chal-

lenged by this. An "unspiritual" or "carnal" Christian is a contradiction in terms. This is precisely Paul's point in I Corinthians 3:1-4: the jealousy and strife present among the Corinthians (vs. 3) are not rationalized as "low level" or "second class" Christian behavior. They are the work of the "flesh" (cf. Rom 13:13,14; Gal. 5:20); that means they are unrelieved opposition to the Spirit of God and in fundamental conflict with the Corinthian's identity in Christ (cf. the verses just preceding, 2:14,15; also Rom. 8:5-8; Gal. 5:16,17). b) The gifts (plural) of the Spirit are not "means of grace" in the sense of those provisions of God — Scripture, the sacraments and prayer — which are intended for all believers and are indispensable for personal sanctification and growth in grace. No one gift (*e.g.*, tongues) is necessary for the worship and witness God desires in each one of his people. True spirituality is not dependent on the reception or exercise of any one particular gift. This is one of the basic points of the "hymn to love," I Corinthians 13, within the overall thrust of chapters 12-14. In giving gifts to his church God does not put some of his people at a disadvantage in relation to others with reference to "the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

3. *Walking in the Spirit.* We have been stressing that all in the church, without exception and from the time they are united to Christ, share in the gift of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis, however, ought not to be taken as suggesting that the Spirit's work in the believer is essentially a matter of what is in the past and so something to be presumed on or rested in as taking place automatically. Some such attitude neglects crucial aspects of New Testament teaching on the work of the Spirit and thus seriously distorts the whole. There is nothing passé about the work of the Spirit. That his work is to be a present, ongoing concern of the Christian life can be seen from those places where *believers* are *commanded* concerning the Spirit. Negatively, they are not to "grieve" (Eph. 4:30) or "quench" (I Thess. 5:19) the Spirit. Positively, they are to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18); they are to "walk in (by) the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16,25; cf. Rom. 8:4).

Paul provides an instructive perspective on the continuing activity of the Spirit in the church in the one passage in the New Testament where believers are commanded to be filled with the

Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The verses that immediately follow (19–21) are dependent syntactically on this command and so indicate what is characteristic of the Spirit's filling work. Paul then goes on to elaborate at some length on the element of mutual subjection, in particular, by spelling out its implications for marriage, the family, and work (5:22–6:9). From this it is plain that the filling or fullness of the Spirit is not, at least primarily, a matter of unusual or enrapturing experiences, but is the reality of the Spirit's working in the basic relationships and responsibilities of everyday living. Being filled with the Spirit means marriages that really work and are not poisoned by suspicion and bitterness, homes where parents, children, brothers and sisters actually enjoy being with each other, free from jealousy, resentment and constant tension, and job situations that are not oppressive and depersonalizing, but meaningful and truly rewarding. The Spirit is the power of a new creation, reclaiming and transforming nothing less than the whole of our creaturely life. By the same token, the mark of a genuinely Spirit-filled Christian is that that Christian is not preoccupied with some past experience, no matter how memorable, but with what the Spirit is presently doing in his or her life and with what even greater filling the future may bring.

Two extremes falsify New Testament doctrine concerning the Spirit's work in the believer. On the one side is the view, widely current today, that the real, proper work of the Spirit is distinct from conversion and usually subsequent to it, and that only those believers who have had this additional, empowering experience of the Spirit are able to witness effectively and lead consistent Christian lives. On the other side is the practical tendency to view the Spirit as little more than a presupposition of the Christian life. The Spirit's regenerating work is seen as critically important at the beginning of the Christian life, for producing faith, but after that he virtually vanishes from Christian experience. This latter extreme is the one that has most often plagued the Reformed tradition, and it creates an experiential vacuum that errors like the other, "second blessing" extreme seek to fill. The answer to both is union with Christ, the life-giving Spirit, a union which from beginning to end, from our regeneration to our final glorification is (to be) a dynamic, transforming union.

"If we live in (by) the Spirit, let us also walk in (by) the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Perhaps no other single statement better captures the whole of our experience of the Holy Spirit than this. The overall structure here is that which we find throughout the New Testament, especially in Paul, for the Christian life in its entirety: expressed grammatically, the Spirit is both an indicative and an imperative in our experience. But always such that the imperative is grounded in the indicative, the command concerning the Spirit rooted in the reality of our having received the gift of the Spirit. And never the one without the other: the indicative without the imperative results in the inaction of mysticism and quietism; the imperative without the indicative produces a legalistic and moralistic striving that denies the gospel.

The pattern of indicative and imperative also provides the scope for us to appreciate the deep harmony in the Christian life between the Spirit of God and the *law* of God. Where the law functions to cut off and expose every effort of the sinner to justify himself, where the law condemns, the liberating ministry of the Spirit stands in the sharpest contrast (Rom. 8:1-3; II Cor. 3:6ff.). But where the Spirit functions to bring life and freedom in Christ, there the content of the law and obedience to it make up the very substance of that freedom (*e.g.*, Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5). This emphasis on the positive place of the law in the life of the believer is a long-standing Reformed distinctive, and is needed in our own day more than ever, particularly when it comes to a proper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We began by noting the renewed interest of our times in the work of the Holy Spirit, including the emergence of the charismatic movement. It would be a tragic loss, however — and the church would be missing a great opportunity — if this interest were to be expended on the differences between charismatic and noncharismatic Christians, real and important as those differences are. The task before the church today, both urgent and promising, is to demonstrate unambiguously, in practice as well as proclamation, that at its *core* the gospel concerns not only the free and full remission of sin, but the reality of a new creation and eschatological life already present in Christ, the present renewal and transformation of the believer in his entirety, ac-

according to the inner man (II Cor. 4:16), and the redirection and reintegration of human life in all its aspects.

The gospel is also the good news concerning the exalted Christ, the life-giving Spirit. Where this awesome and glorious truth is not really grasped, the church will be uncertain of itself and ineffective in serving its Lord. With this gospel it is more than equal to its mission in the world. In the power of Pentecost the church will live eloquently in hope of the glory to be revealed (Rom. 18-25), confident in its expectation of a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (II Peter 3:13).

SOME EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON 1 COR 2:6-16

RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR.

IN *Jerusalem and Athens* G. C. Berkouwer expressed disappointment over Van Til's criticism of his views. He had expected that "*exegesis of Holy Scripture would play a decisive role.*" Instead, not only did Van Til misunderstand him, he believed, but "of far greater consequence" was "the total lack of biblical reflection and the absence of a *reply* to all the exegetical questions."¹ In a brief response Van Til conceded Berkouwer's point. His critique of Berkouwer's theology "should have had much more exegesis in it than it has. This is a defect."² He then went on to generalize, "The lack of detailed scriptural exegesis is a lack in all of my writings. I have no excuse for this."³

This interchange highlights a frequent perception (and charge): Van Til talks repeatedly about "the Christ of the Scriptures"; his uncompromising concern is to let "the self-attesting Christ of Scripture" speak. Yet his writings provide precious little, if any, argumentation based on a careful treatment of key biblical passages; his approach is assertive and dogmatizing, rather than exegetical.

We might wonder whether Van Til was not too hard on himself and perhaps conceded too much to his critics. And have his critics read him as carefully as they might? For, more than might appear at a first glance, he was well read in the commentaries of Dutch Calvinism like the Bottenberg series, conversant with the exegetical work of his colleague John Murray, and not only knowledgeable in but thoroughly committed to the kind of biblical theology fathered by his Princeton Seminary professor and friend, Geerhardus Vos. A reflective reading of Van Til shows a mind (and heart) thoroughly permeated by Scripture; issues of its interpretation substantially shaped his thinking, if not his style of presentation.

Still, there is substance to criticism like that of Berkouwer. Van Til did not make the biblical basis for the characteristic emphases in his thought as clear as he might have; that basis needs to be made more explicit. What follows here is the effort to show some of the exegetical support for several key emphases in his epistemology.

¹ G. C. Berkouwer, in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (ed. E. R. Geehan; Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971) 200, his italics. In view primarily is Van Til's *The Sovereignty of Grace: An Appraisal of G. C. Berkouwer's View of Dordt* (n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969).

² *Ibid.*, 203. "I wish I could have given better exegetical justification for this position than I have" (p. 204).

³ *Ibid.*

I

"It can be rightly said that Paul does nothing but explain the eschatological reality which in Christ's teachings is called the Kingdom." This perceptive observation of Herman Ridderbos⁴ is certainly applicable to 1 Cor 2:6-16. Here, if anywhere, Paul is the interpreter of Jesus; this passage is a virtual commentary on teaching preserved in Matt 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22.⁵

The different placing of this unit in each Gospel raises questions that we may pass over here. Most likely Luke gives us the right chronology by connecting it directly with the return of the seventy[-two] ("at that same hour," ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ, v. 21; cf. v. 17). Matthew's indefinite temporal indicator, "at that time" (ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ, v. 25), probably reflects his less chronologically oriented concern at this point.

In terms of internal structure and wording the two accounts are virtually identical. The only noteworthy variation, beyond the time indicators just noted, is also found in the introductory clauses. Matthew's prosaic "Jesus answered and said" (v. 25) contrasts with Luke's "he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit⁶ and said." The latter (which might also be rendered, "jubilant in the Holy Spirit") accents the intensity of Jesus' involvement and the climactic nature of the words that follow. We are at a high point in Jesus' earthly ministry.

This passage is often cited in discussing the deity of Christ—for what it discloses about his unique identity as the Son of God and his equality in being with the Father; particularly in the past 100 years or so it has been focal in debates about the messianic self-consciousness of Jesus. Here, however, our primary interest is not in the person of Christ—the issue of his essential deity—but in what he says about the activity of Father and Son and the content of that action.⁷

1. *The Activity of Revelation: The Sola of Revelation*

In v. 21 "you have hidden" stands in stark contrast with "you have revealed" (cf. "chooses to reveal," v. 22). This contrast clearly points up the sense of this primary word for *revelation* (ἀποκαλύπτω) in the NT. What

⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 48-49. This statement strikes me as especially helpful for appreciating the overall doctrinal or didactic unity of the NT in its historically differentiated diversity.

⁵ We proceed here on the premise that, with traditioning and the redactional activity of the respective evangelists duly taken into account, this material provides us with a reliable record of what Jesus said. Authenticity is argued (on historical-critical grounds), e.g., by R. Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer. Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelium-Überlieferung* (WUNT 2/7; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981) 220-21, 330, 335-37, 344-45, 434, 478.

⁶ Even if τῷ ἁγίῳ is not the original reading, a reference to the [Holy] Spirit is most likely.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the verse references are to Luke's account.

is revealed is otherwise hidden, a disclosure of the previously veiled. Revelation is making known what heretofore has been unknown, kept a secret; in that sense it may be said to be an "open secret."

Further, what is revealed remains hidden from "the wise and the intelligent" (σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν; the latter word may also be rendered "learned," "having understanding"). What is revealed, then, is beyond all human capacity and competence, whether rational or intuitive; it is inaccessible to human potential in its highest actualizations. In other words, Jesus asserts the absolute, exclusive necessity of revelation.

There is nothing here to suggest, in fact everything is decisively against, the notion that revelation is an alternate, and therefore essentially dispensable, means of communicating what could also be arrived at by the use of reason or some other human capacity. Nor is there even the slightest indication that the problem necessitating revelation is moral but not intellectual. The categories in view are cognitive; those "having understanding" are those as such, with respect to revelation, who do not and cannot *understand*.

The exclusive necessity of revelation is reinforced by the "infants," "little children" (νηπίους) as the recipients of revelation, in counterpoint to the "wise and intelligent." This reference is explicated by what Jesus teaches elsewhere: the necessity of repenting and becoming like a little child for entering the kingdom of heaven and of becoming humble like a child to be great in the kingdom (Matt 18:3-4), the necessity of receiving the kingdom like a little child in order to enter it (Mark 10:15).

In other words, Jesus speaks of the need for *faith*. Just as revelation is necessary because it does not result from human accomplishment or intellectual achievement, so the necessary condition in its recipients is faith, the receptive humility that stems from faith alone; the necessity of revelation involves the necessity of faith. In this sense there is an unbreakable correlation between (the reception of) revelation and faith.

The necessity of revelation appears from the side of the recipients, as we have seen, in their absolute dependence. But, further, the revealer is under no outside compulsion to reveal; no claim arising from the (potential) recipients necessitates revelation. Rather, the act of revealing is free, sovereign, of entirely uncoerced divine initiative; it is a matter of the Father's εὐδοκία, his "good pleasure," "purpose," "choice" (cf. Eph 1:5, 9). Correlatively, the Son does not merely reveal but "*chooses* to reveal" (v. 22; cf. what is said about the gratuitous disclosure of "the mysteries of the kingdom," Matt 13:11/Luke 8:10). Both Father and Son are sovereign in revelation, and that sovereignty is unrestricted, unqualified by anything outside themselves.

2. *The Content of Revelation: The Tota of Revelation*

The scope of what is revealed is designated here as "these things" (ταῦτα, v. 21) and "all things" (πάντα, v. 22). The word ταῦτα has no

explicit grammatical antecedent, either within the passage or the preceding verses. That suggests a looser, more general reference, back to the "things" (miracles) done by Jesus in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15). Additionally, Luke brackets the passage, on the one side (vv. 17-20), with what he intends his readers to understand as the eschatological overthrow of Satan and his rule, which Jesus perceives as having taken place in the mission of the 72. On the other side (vv. 23-24), Jesus speaks of the new realities of fulfillment experienced by the disciples ("what you see . . . what you hear"), in contrast to the old order (the "many prophets and kings").

All told, from these indications in the immediate context and within the overall framework provided by the Synoptic Gospels, we are on sound footing in saying that "these things" are, in other words, the things of the kingdom of God/heaven (cf. in the immediate context, Matt 11:11-13; Luke 10:9).

With that sort of summation the wider ramifications of this passage begin to emerge. According to the Synoptics, the kingdom of God is at once the central and all-encompassing theme of the proclamation of Jesus during his earthly ministry. As such it is not limited in scope or confined to some restricted sector or dimension of concerns. Rather, the kingdom is eschatological reality, comprehensively considered. It embodies the consummation of God's covenant—the realization of the ages-long hopes of his people, the fulfillment of the sweeping promises made to them (cf., again, 10:24). More specifically, the kingdom is a matter of the eschatological lordship of God in Jesus, the Christ, presently being realized in his arrival and to be consummated fully at his return.⁸

Consequently, "these things," as the content of revelation, are to be considered comprehensively. They are in fact "all things" (v. 22), that is, all that has its origin in the unique fellowship of knowledge between Father and Son, and is purposed by them for revelation in and by the Son (v. 22). Or, as already noted, "these things" are all that is revealed and brought to realization in the coming of the kingdom.

It might appear that this kingdom-qualification somehow limits the scope of "all things." But, to the contrary according to the NT, there is nothing in the entire creation that is irrelevant to the kingdom; absolutely nothing falls outside the eschatological rule of Christ. Availing ourselves of some Pauline commentary at this point, the reality of the kingdom is the reality of God having "placed all things under his [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church"; it is the reality, already underway, of "bringing all things, things in heaven and things on earth,

⁸ Many helpful treatments of Jesus' kingdom proclamation have appeared throughout this century. Among those of book-length some of the older ones are still the best. See H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), and the much earlier classic of G. Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God* (1903; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958).

under Christ as head" (Eph 1:22, 10).⁹ The kingdom of God is totalitarian, in the most ultimate sense we can know and experience. It is not a partial or part-time allegiance, involving only some of our efforts or just one sector of our experience, or merely a part of our knowledge.

The implications of Jesus' words, in context, are entirely decisive; their momentousness, though often missed, is inescapable. There is no area or dimension of human knowledge that lies outside the scope of the revelation in view in these verses, or for which that revelation is irrelevant. Any epistemological endeavor true to these verses recognizes its absolute, exclusive dependence on such revelation. To be truly "wise and learned" in the creation, one must become a "little child" and receive the revelation of God in Christ. Involved here is the epistemological ultimacy of the Creator-creature distinction, the unconditional dependence upon God of the creature made in his image, for knowing as well as being.

In sum: according to Jesus, revelation is the exclusive and comprehensive *principium* (foundation and norm) for human knowledge. In terms of classical Reformation predicates, revelation involves both a *sola* and a *tota*.

II

1. *Introductory Comments on 1 Cor 2:6-16*

As already noted, it is difficult not to see 1 Cor 2:6-16, within and including its immediate context, especially 1:26-28, as a commentary on the Matthew/Luke passage. At any rate, whatever may have been in Paul's mind as he wrote, the connection between the two is close; common themes, as we will see, tie them together.

Within the first main part of the letter (1:10-4:21),¹⁰ the section from 1:18 to 3:23 has a high order of importance in the Pauline corpus as a whole. To counter the disastrous misconception of the gospel at Corinth, which had resulted in sharp divisions within the church and an entrenched party spirit (1:10-17), Paul highlights the true nature of the division the gospel creates by drawing attention to some fundamentals of his apostolic ministry and message.

Within this passage a key word, perhaps the most prominent, is wisdom (σοφία). As we move to the end of chap. 1 and on into chap. 2, two points, among others, come to the fore.

⁹ The NIV's rendering of εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν in v. 10a, "to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment," is unfortunate because it masks that the "heading up" of all things in Christ (v. 10b) has already begun (cf. Gal 4:4).

¹⁰ We may leave to the side here the question of the basic "outline" of 1 Corinthians. More than one proposal is defensible, and no one ought to be pressed; see the various commentaries and volumes on special introduction.

(1) A clash, a sharp, unrelieved antithesis, exists between "the wisdom of God" (1:21) and the wisdom of unbelief. What has been effected by God in the cross of Christ is the transvaluation of wisdom, in fact its counter-valuation as measured by the standards of "the world," "this age" (1:20), which is constituted by unbelief and sinful rebellion. In terms of the rhetorically balanced antithetical parallelism of 1:26–28, foolishness and weakness in the eyes of the world are wisdom and power before God; conversely, what the world judges to be wise and powerful, God considers to be foolish and weak. Echoes of the contrast between the "wise and learned" and the "little children" in Matt 11:25/Luke 10:21 are unmistakable.

(2) The wisdom of God is not ultimately cognitive nor merely intellectual. Though a body of doctrinal knowledge is certainly integral to that wisdom (e.g., Rom 6:17; 2 Tim 1:13), and it would be quite perverse to deny that fact,¹¹ its controlling point of reference is Christ, who is himself "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:24; cf. Col 2:3). Hence, the resolve "to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:2). Christ, in his death and resurrection, is Paul's ultimate epistemic commitment.¹²

2. *The Background of 1 Cor 2:6–16*

Worth noting is the recent, salutary turn in the interpretation of 2:6–16 within the historical-critical tradition. With the rise of the history-of-religions approach toward the close of the last century the view emerged and eventually became more or less standard, especially in German scholarship, that this passage reflects the basic outlook of the Hellenistic mystery religions of Paul's day. Following Wilhelm Bousset, Rudolf Bultmann proved especially influential in his *Sachkritik* of 2:6ff.: Paul has betrayed himself by a disastrous accommodation to the thought-world of gnosticism; the cross-based concept of "wisdom" in 1:18–26 may not be made the basis for interpreting the mystery-concept of "wisdom" in 2:6ff., because the two are not merely at odds but fundamentally irreconcilable.

More recent exegesis, however, has questioned this assessment. The consensus forming in the past couple of decades is that 2:6–16 has its background in the merging of wisdom and apocalyptic traditions, primarily within Hellenistic Judaism, which Paul interprets Christologically, in the

¹¹ Suffice it here to say that Kantian/post-Kantian polarizings of rational and personal knowledge, of whatever variety—modern or postmodern—are foreign to Paul.

¹² Care must be taken not to read a narrow, one-sided theology of the cross out of (or into) 2:2. It has to be connected with equally sweeping and aphoristic assertions like 2 Tim 2:8: "Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead, . . . according to my gospel." On balance, the center of Paul's gospel ("of first importance") is Christ's death and resurrection in their significance as the fulfillment of Scripture (1 Cor 15:3–4), entailing ultimately the soteriological-eschatological renewal of nothing less than the entire creation (2 Cor 5:17).

light of the cross and resurrection. According to this view, 2:6-16 expand on and do not contradict "the word of the cross" in 1:18ff. It is now widely accepted, and so need not be argued here, that the passage is a direct, even essential, continuation of the previous argumentation with its basic antithetical theme.¹³ So far as the internal flow of the passage is concerned, Stuhlmacher's proposal is persuasive: vv. 6a and 6b set the direction so that, in chiasmic sequence, vv. 7-9 expand on 6b, vv. 10-16 on 6a; in this way 2:6-16 enlarge on 1:18-25 especially.¹⁴

3. *God's Wisdom as Eschatological (2:6-9)*¹⁵

The antithesis created by the wisdom/foolishness of gospel preaching is nothing less than eschatological in its dimensions. That sweep, intimated already in chap. 1 in references to "the disputant of this age" (v. 20) and "the wisdom of the [= this; cf. 3:19] world" (vv. 20-21), is accented beginning in 2:6: the wisdom spoken to believers, identified as the τέλειοι,¹⁶ is "not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away," along with this world-age in its entirety (cf. 7:31).

The background here, of course, is the contrast between the two aeons, coined within intertestamental Judaism and taken up by Paul and other NT writers—a comprehensive conceptual framework that, as it encompasses the whole of history from creation to consummation, accents its eschatological τέλος.¹⁷ The plain implication, then, of vv. 6, 7 and 9 (whatever

¹³ This brief overview is largely based on the survey of P. Stuhlmacher, "The Hermeneutical Significance of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16," in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987) 330-32; see also, e.g., the discussion of the passage in F. Lang, *Die Briefe an die Korinther* (NTD 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 38-48, and W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT 8/1; Zürich: Benziger, 1991) 242-45, 268-69; cf., among English-language treatments, the similar stance of G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 99-101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁵ Among the considerable secondary literature pertinent to this section I mention esp. W. D. Dennison, *Paul's Two-Age Construction and Apologetics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985) esp. pp. 55-85, a work with the same emphases as this section.

¹⁶ The rendering of this word with "mature" in most recent translations, though apparently supported by Paul's usage of the word elsewhere (e.g., 14:20; Phil 3:15), blunts and relativizes Paul's eschatological point here, better captured by "perfect," "complete." At any rate, in view is not their (relative) subjective spiritual and moral condition. Rather, the thought is along the lines of the definitive sanctification "in Christ" affirmed of the whole church in 1:2. Related to that, the τέλειοι are not just some in the church in distinction from the rest—an in-group of gnostic-like initiates—but all believers as such: those, as Paul has just said (v. 5), whose "faith rest[s] not on men's wisdom, but on God's power." Beyond the commentaries, see esp. the excellent discussion of P. J. Du Plessis, *TEAEIOΣ: The Idea of Perfection in the New Testament* (Kampen: Kok, 1959) 178-85, 204-5, 242-43.

¹⁷ Among the best discussions of this commonly recognized state of affairs is still G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 1-41.

the source of the supporting citation in the latter)¹⁸ is that "God's wisdom" (v. 7), granted to believers, is of the aeon to come, the new and final age; it is, in a word, eschatological wisdom.¹⁹

Verse 8, which expands on the negative point of v. 6b, is to be read in that light: "... which [God's mystery-wisdom] none of the rulers of this age understood, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." While "the rulers of this age" may have in view primarily those directly responsible for the crucifixion (cf. the specific mention of Herod and Pontius Pilate in Acts 4:27), there is surely a broader association with the wise, powerful, and well-born (εὐγενεῖς) in 1:26-28 (cf. 1:20).²⁰ The rulers of this age are representative; in them we see the most impressive achievements of the present world-order, measured by the standards of human rebellion and unbelief; within the creation, as presently subject to the curse on sin (cf. Rom 8:18-22), they exemplify the most that it has to offer and is capable of attaining.

All the more striking, then, is Paul's disqualification of the rulers of this age, in the face of the age-to-come, eschatological wisdom of the gospel. Moreover, the specific terms of this disqualification are clear: they do not *understand* the gospel; their failure is not only moral but epistemological (a point we will see made even more emphatically in v. 14). Coming to light in this passage, therefore, is the epistemological difference between believers and unbelievers, a difference of the most radical and far-reaching sort, in that—it does not go too far to say—believers and unbelievers belong to two different worlds; they exist in not only separate but antithetical "universes of discourse."

Such rhetoric is subject to distortion and must be qualified—as Paul in fact does. In the period until Christ's return, the two aeons overlap,²¹ so that in terms of psycho-physical makeup ("in the body," as "outer man," e.g., 2 Cor 4:10, 16) believers continue to exist in the present, sinful aeon (in that respect their resurrection is still a future hope; see esp. 1 Cor 15:35ff.). Until then they must not suppose (as Paul's opponents at Corinth apparently did) that they are beyond or can override the eschatological *Vorbehalt* of 1 Cor 13:12 ("now we see but a poor reflection").

But such reservations, along with the anthropological complexities undeniably involved, must not obscure that at the core of their being

¹⁸ See, e.g., Fee, *First Corinthians*, 108f.

¹⁹ Despite what might be the surface impression from the language employed ("wisdom in a mystery," "hidden"), v. 7 is not a lapse into the thought-world of gnosticism. If anything, Paul uses (proto-)gnostic terminology here and elsewhere (e.g., the ψυχικός-πνευματικός distinction in vv. 13-14) to make a decidedly antignostic point; cf. Rom 16:25-26; Col 1:26. On Paul's redemptive-historical, eschatological understanding of μυστήριον, see esp. H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1975) 46-49.

²⁰ For a brief but, in my judgment, incisive and convincing refutation of the view that the "rulers" are demonic powers, see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 103-4; cf. J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 2.254.

²¹ See, e.g., Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 36-41, including the diagrams in n. 45.

("heart," as "inner man," e.g., Rom 2:29; 2 Cor 4:16) believers are "alive from the dead" (Rom 6:13) and so, as already raised with Christ (Eph 2:5-6; Col 2:13; 3:1), are presently within the eschatological "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). More particularly, such qualifications as are necessary must not be used to tone down the unrelieved antithesis between "the wisdom of God" and "the wisdom of the world" in this passage, nor to soften the nothing less than aeonic clash between them. Again, fundamentally believers and unbelievers are in two different worlds.

With the gospel (and its implications) as the point of reference, there is no point of contact epistemologically between believers and unbelievers, however understood—whether by empirical observation or by rational reflection and speculation ("Jews require signs, Greeks seek wisdom," 1:22—the exclusion intended is universal). The notion of such a common ground or capacity, rational or otherwise, that can be used to build toward the gospel, or otherwise prepare and dispose unbelievers to accept its truth, is not only not present in this passage; it is alien to it, jarringly so.

Clear enough here already, in other terms, is what v. 10a states ("but God has revealed it to us"): God's wisdom is revelation and is as such (as in the Matt 11/Luke 10 passage) not merely an alternative track, another, second way of arriving at knowledge that human beings are otherwise quite capable of achieving on their own. God's wisdom-revelation, focused in the cross of Christ, is beyond the human competence and capacity to grasp and determine, whatever the means—reason, intuition, observation, or feeling.

4. *The Activity of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-16)*

Seen as commentary on Matt 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22, these verses advance our understanding in a significant respect. The Gospels pericope speaks of the activity of Father and Son. Here there is an added emphasis on the activity of the Holy Spirit. All told, the trinitarian character of revelation emerges.

Verses 10b-16 are fairly seen in large part as expanding on "through the Spirit" in v. 10a, which picks up on "in the demonstration of the Spirit and power" in v. 4 (the first explicit reference to the Spirit in the letter). There already the Spirit's activity is set in opposition to this-age, human wisdom (v. 5).

This emphasis on the Spirit, it needs to be appreciated, does not move us beyond but continues and even reinforces the eschatological dimension of the argument. Paul's overall conception of the work of the Holy Spirit is decidedly eschatological.²² That may be seen, briefly, from the metaphors

²² This has become widely recognized in this century; see, e.g., G. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 803-26, and G. Vos' 1912 essay, well ahead of its time, "The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of Spirit," reprinted in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings*

he uses for the Spirit at work in believers: "deposit" on our eschatological inheritance and the resurrection body (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14), "first-fruits" toward the resurrection body (Rom 8:23). Also, the adjective "spiritual" (having reference to the work of the Spirit) is the single, comprehensive designation not only of the resurrection body (1 Cor 15:44) but the entire eschatological order (v. 46). For Paul, in short, inherent in the soteriological activity of the Spirit are "the powers of the age to come" (as the writer of Hebrews says, 6:5).

Verses 10-16 bring out the comprehensive role of the Spirit in revelation. He initiates both the giving and receiving of revelation; he is both knower and communicator. Verses 10-11 address the former. The Spirit functions in revelation because he has the requisite investigative competence. He (alone) has the capacity for the comprehensive probing and searching (ἐραυνᾷ) adequate to "all things," including "even the deep things of God." He is an omniscient investigator.

Verse 11 offers a supporting argument from analogy, involving a word-play on πνεῦμα—argument from the lesser to the greater, from our experience to the issue at hand. "The spirit of man which is within him" is an anthropological use of πνεῦμα—one of the terms Paul uses for the inner side of human personality, referring to self-consciousness and self-awareness, the self as knowing and willing.²³

The basic point of v. 11 is to compare the unique self-knowledge of God to the unique knowledge each of us has of ourselves. Just as no one knows me, with my concerns ("the things of man"), as I know myself, from the inside out, so no one knows God, with his concerns ("the things of God"—referring here primarily to his wisdom revealed in Christ), as he does. Specifically, the Spirit of God is viewed here as the principle of self-knowledge in God. (This is for the sake of the analogy with the human πνεῦμα and with a view to the stress on the Spirit's activity in the immediate context, not to exclude Father and Son from this self-knowledge.) Verse 11 also shows that the Spirit's searching and probing (v. 10) is not permanently without resolution. It is not some sort of open-ended divine search without end. As a "discovering" it is simultaneously a possession.

Consequently, the Spirit is not only the principle of knowledge in God but also (vv. 12-13) the principle and means for communicating that knowledge. The Spirit now comes into view as given to and indwelling believers ("we have received . . ."), specifically so that they may understand "the things freely given to us by God." The latter has a comprehensive reference; they are "the things of God" (v. 12) determined for revelation, God's eschatological gospel-wisdom centered in Christ's cross

of Geerhardus Vos (ed. R. B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980) 91-125; see also Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 162-66.

²³ See Ridderbos, *Paul*, 117ff., esp. 120-21.

and resurrection (vv. 2, 6-9), or, in terms of Matthew 11/Luke 10, "these things" of the kingdom of God.

"The spirit of the world" only occurs here in Paul (and the rest of the NT). Despite what might be an initial impression, the reference is almost surely not to Satan as "the God of this age" (2 Cor 4:4) or to some other spiritual being. Rather, it is coined to sharpen the antithesis to the Spirit and his eschatological activity. The phrase captures the world, as humanity in rebellion against God (cf. 1:20, 21, 27, 28; 2:6b, 8), with the attitudes and standards that characterize it as a whole. It seems close to the *φρόνημα* ("mind-set," "disposition," "attitude") of the flesh set in opposition to that of the Spirit in Rom 8:6. As we speak of "the spirit of the times" or "the spirit" that controls a culture, so here Paul speaks in effect, sweepingly, of "the spirit of this world-age." This serves to point up, once again, the inability of sinful humanity, the constitutional incompetence of sinners in themselves to attain to a true knowledge of God, and so the absolute necessity of the revelation through the Spirit in view.

Verse 13 expands on the Spirit's revelatory role as that involves the apostle. "We," inclusive of all believers in vv. 10 and 12, now distinguishes Paul from them (as in vv. 6, 7).²⁴ His speaking is a function of the Spirit's controlling activity; his words are not human, this-age wisdom but gospel-wisdom, "taught by the Spirit." The participial clause at the end, whatever its exact meaning,²⁵ accents this didactic activity of the Spirit.²⁶

Verses 14-16 focus on the response to revelation—the believer's Spirit-worked reception of the apostle's Spirit-taught words. In so doing they put that response in the most fundamental possible perspective. Here—again and in emphatic, antithetic fashion—emerge the twin factors of exclusiveness and comprehensiveness, the *sola* and *tota* of revelation. Only two responses are possible: acceptance or rejection; there is no middle ground, not even a temporizing third alternative.²⁷ This unrelieved state of affairs is

²⁴ Although, by implication, other apostles—and even all believers, when they faithfully communicate apostolic teaching—are in view.

²⁵ For the exegetical issues involved, see, e.g., Fee, *First Corinthians*, 114-15.

²⁶ It is hardly correct to argue that throughout this passage Paul's dominant interest is the Spirit's activity, through him, in producing Scripture (as does W. C. Kaiser, "A Neglected Text in Bibliology Discussions: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16," *WTJ* 43 [1981] 301-19; see the pertinent rejoinder of Fee, *First Corinthians*, 112-13 n. 63). At the same time, however, there are important implications for the doctrine of inspiration in v. 13—on the justified assumption that it applies to what the apostle writes as well as to what he says. Striking here, particularly with a view to ongoing debate about the doctrine of Scripture, is that the specific *content* of Paul's message is *not* directly in view. Rather, it is considered in a purely *formal* fashion, and then not merely as resulting from a revelatory encounter or in terms of underlying ideas or promptings but as a *plurality of words*. The *words* of Paul, as such and ultimately considered, are not of human origin but inculcated by the Spirit.

²⁷ Contrary to the persistent, widespread misreading of 3:1, where Paul tells Corinthian believers ("brothers") that he must address them not as *πνευματικοίς* but as *σαρκίνους*, and of v. 3, where he calls them *σαρκικοί*. In 3:1-3 Paul is not seeking to rationalize or even concede as normal a two-level distinction between spiritual and carnal Christians. Whatever

captured by the contrast between ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος and ὁπνευματικός—again, a distinction that, without exception, covers every hearer.

The former, as Paul's only other pairing of these Greek adjectives (15:44, 46) makes clearer, is "living ψυχή" (15:45a), that is, everyone who bears the image of the first Adam (v. 49a), who now, since the Fall (Rom 5:12ff.), is under the control of sin with its enervating and corrupting consequences (15:42–43; cf. vv. 21–22). As such this person is devoid of the Spirit ("the man without the Spirit," NIV) and so "does not accept the things of God's Spirit." In fact, "to him," that is, in terms of the standards of this age to which he is committed, God's wisdom-revelation is (demonstrable) "foolishness" (cf. 1:27).

What Paul goes on to say about this person must not be overlooked: "he cannot understand them." It is not simply that such persons will not or refuse to accept what they right well know to be true. No, they won't because they can't. Expressed here is a total cognitive inability, an incapacity that exists "because they [the things of the Spirit] are spiritually discerned," that is, they are properly appraised and assessed only through the Spirit's activity. Here, again, is the unbridgeable epistemological gulf between this age and the age to come, the yawning, nothing less than eschatological chasm between belief and unbelief. Calvin's pungent comment on 1:20 comes to mind: faced with God's revelation, the unbeliever is like an ass at a concert.²⁸

With this negative description the positive side of the picture is already coming into view. Revelation is understood only where the Spirit provides the requisite discernment. Unmistakably, so far as the granting and receiving of God's wisdom are concerned, we are shut up within the closed circle of the Spirit's working.

Verse 15 makes that explicit. "The one who is spiritual" is such because indwelt, renewed, enlightened, directed by the Holy Spirit.²⁹ Such persons,

slight semantic difference there may be between the two adjectives used on the one side of the contrast, both may be translated "fleshly" and are parallel to ψυχικός in 2:14. ("Here ψυχή approaches the second meaning of σάρξ, namely flesh as existence turned away from God," according to J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek* [Kampen: Kok, 1992] 323.) The specific reason that Paul must write as he does is because of the presence of "jealousy and quarreling" (ζήλος καὶ ἐρις)—a combination (in reverse sequence) that occurs elsewhere in Paul only in describing "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19), in sharp opposition (vv. 16–17) to "the fruit of the Spirit" (vv. 22–23), and "the works of darkness," in conflict with "the weapons of light" (Rom 13:12–13). The point of the imagery in vv. 1c–2, then, is not that in their immature behavior the Corinthians, regrettably but as must be expected, are acting like young, low-level Christians, but that they are not acting like Christians at all. Their behavior is the flat antithesis of Christian conduct; the figurative language points to abnormal, deformed development and likely carries the nuance "infantile," "puerile"—in that sense, "childish." Sin is sin wherever it is found, even in God's people.

²⁸ "... atque asinus ineptus est ad symphoniam" (John Calvin, *Opera quae supersunt omnia* [Brunsvigae: C. A. Schwetschke, 1863–98] 49.325).

²⁹ By now the long-standing effort ought to have been put to rest to enlist this passage in support of an anthropological trichotomy (with πνευματικός here referring to the human

believers, are transformed by the Spirit so that they are enabled to do what *ψυχικός άνθρωπος* cannot. They are granted the Spirit-worked capacity for appraisal and discernment so that, however imperfectly and even inadequately (13:12), they can truly understand God's revelation and know it for what it is. In other words, the believer is taken up into the "closed circle" of the Spirit's activity.

Along with the exclusiveness of the Spirit's activity, the comprehensiveness of that activity, the *total* of revelation, also comes out in v. 15. The discernment produced by the Spirit contemplates *πάντα*, "all things." This echoes *πάντα* as the object of the Spirit's searching activity in v. 10. Both, in turn, pick up on the *πάντα* in Matt 11:27/Luke 10:22, discussed above with its implications.

Paul's point is not that *ὁ πνευματικός*, by the Spirit, transcends every human limitation and so shares in God's exhaustive self-knowledge. Nor is he suggesting that believers have expert, encyclopedic knowledge in every area of human investigation—as if they know all there is to know about God, self, and the universe. Becoming a Christian does not make one some sort of super "renaissance man."

At the same time, however, we must not tone down this passage or domesticate Paul's *πάντα*. His point is hardly that revelation is restricted in its relevance to only a part of life, or, following Kant, that it concerns only the moral-religious dimension of human experience. Rather, God's eschatological wisdom, focused in Christ's cross and resurrection, is still in view here and elaborates Jesus' sweeping kingdom vision in Matthew 11/Luke 10. Such wisdom, Paul is saying, has a bearing on, in fact is essential for, a true knowledge of everything there is to know about God, ourselves, and the world.

The sense of this Spirit-worked assessment of *πάντα*—the full, comprehensive proportions involved—is further pointed up by the use of Isa 40:13 in v. 16. The reference to the nonderivative "mind of the Lord," God as ultimate knower, brings into view as well a context (vv. 12–31) that, in the Scripture at Paul's disposal, is difficult to match for rhetorical sweep and power as a description of God's sovereign, all-inclusive control of everything that transpires in the universe.

To that Paul adds, as the concluding note of the passage, "But we have the mind of Christ." To have "the Spirit who is from God" (v. 12), without overlooking the consequences and qualifications already made in vv. 13–15, is to have "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9) and so, too, the *νοῦς* of Christ,³⁰—the exalted Christ, "in whom" as "the mystery of God" now revealed in the church, "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2–3). This link in comprehensive scope between the

πνεῦμα come to its revived ascendancy); see J. Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977) 2.23–33, esp. 23–29.

³⁰ On this interchange of *πνεῦμα* and *νοῦς*, note that the Hebrew of Isa 40:13 has "רוח of the Lord." The LXX reads *νοῦν κυρίου* (but in other ways the citation differs; the citation in Rom 11:34 varies from both the Hebrew and the LXX, as well as 1 Cor 2:16); see E. E. Ellis,

nonderivative knowledge of God and the Spirit-derived, Christ-centered wisdom of the gospel emerges yet again in the rhetorical flourish with which the larger section closes: "For πάντα are yours, . . . πάντα are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (3:21-23).

A controlling viewpoint in this passage—a theistic, fully trinitarian point—is that the saving revelation of God in Christ, taught by the Holy Spirit, is the indispensable key to rightly understanding God himself, and, with that understanding, literally everything (πάντα) in his creation. Right knowledge is saving knowledge. Anything else, every other knowledge—no matter how operationally effective or functionally productive—is essentially misunderstanding.

A final comment, on v. 15b (note, again, how sweeping the assertion is): "he [i.e., the one who is spiritual] is subject to appraisal [i.e., judgment]³¹ by no one." Obviously, this is not an assertion of (fideistic) autonomy or individualistic independence. Rather, in context, Paul is affirming that the believer submits to no ultimate authority—other than to the Spirit of God working with the revelation of God, and to authority legitimately deriving from that unbreakable bond between Word and Spirit (to say it with the Reformation). Here again, in other terms, is the reality of enclosure within the sovereign circle of the Spirit's activity. For Paul, this "bondage" to the Spirit is in fact the only real freedom and integrity, intellectual or otherwise, a human being can know (cf. Rom 6:15-22).

III

1 Cor 1:17-3:22/4:21 is a significant apostolic *apologia*. In it come to expression specific convictions decisive for the matrix of thought that shapes Paul's teaching as a whole and in every aspect; nowhere in the Pauline corpus are his basic concerns more on the line than here. This is the thought-matrix that captured Dr. Van Til. These basic concerns were his, too. No passage of Scripture, especially the closed circle of the Spirit's work in 2:10-16, has had a more determinative impact on his life and thought. In his time, in a singular and most resolute fashion, he contended for this and related truth.³²

In his life-long efforts, radiating an evident love for Christ and his church, he challenged two fronts primarily: (1) the mainstream of modern and contemporary theology, flowing from the Enlightenment with its commitment to rational autonomy and "historical-critical" *Sachkritik* of

Paul's Use of the Old Testament (1957; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 12 n. 10, 20 n. 5, 151, 174f.

³¹ Paul's use of ἀνακρίνω, with its semantic possibilities, in vv. 14-15 is difficult, if not impossible, to capture in English translation.

³² There are numerous places throughout his writings where Van Til sets out his basic concerns; perhaps the best brief statement, coming toward the close of his career, is "My Credo," in *Jerusalem and Athens*, 3-21.

Scripture;³³ and (2) coming closer to home, the conventional apologetics of Christian orthodoxy committed to the notion of a rationally-grounded natural theology, its essential tenets held in common by believer and unbeliever alike and serving as an adequate basis for convincing unbelievers of the distinctive truths of Christianity. These fronts, in light of the epistemological considerations from Scripture brought out above, prompt several further observations.

1. *The Gospel and Human Wisdom*

Virtually from its beginning the church has wrestled with the implications of this passage for determining the relationship of the gospel to non-Christian knowledge and reasoning.³⁴ Consequently, there is a long line of efforts (e.g., as early as Clement of Alexandria, Aquinas and the medieval synthesis, Kant in the modern era) to define the scope of what Paul says here in order to make room for the more or less peaceful (Schrage: "schiedlich-friedlich") coexistence of Christian and non-Christian wisdom. Repeatedly, especially beginning with the Enlightenment, attempts have been made to accommodate the exercise of human reason as in some sense autonomous.³⁵

³³ That is, criticism of its subject matter (*Sache*)—in the sense of the right/mandate to decide, if deemed warranted, that the Bible is wrong, in error. Stuhlmacher's very helpful article (see above, n. 13) is marred in this respect. He begins his brief conclusion (342f.) with the emphatic assertion, "Theological *Sachkritik* must remain silent with regard to this passage [1 Cor 2:6-16]." What he goes on to say, however, about a circumscribed role for "the historical critical method" as "a special human talent that may be put to the service of faith," is confusing at best. Everything here depends on how "critical" is understood. If in view is "scholarly seriousness and gifts [applied] to the clarification of the linguistic form of Paul's letters and the biblical books in general," who would object? But he continues: it is "both dangerous and wrong to abandon critical thought and judgment in interpreting Scripture and deciding matters of faith in general" (with a parenthetical reference to 1 Pet 3:15), which means that "[t]heological thinking must proceed from the gospel. As such it must be—and continue to be—critical in the light of its subject matter." Now, it appears, *Sachkritik* of Scripture may in fact be necessary at points (just for the sake of the gospel!). Such *Sachkritik*, however, standing in judgment on Scripture, can only be a function of rational autonomy, and, if our passage teaches us anything, human autonomy (wisdom κατὰ σάφκα) resists all attenuation; by its very nature it seeks to control everything (and certainly cannot be enlisted in the service of faith, at least not faith in the Christ of Scripture as God's inspired word). So far as "Paul's letters and the biblical books in general" are concerned (in their original text form as well as content, cf. 2:13), *Sachkritik* admitted at one point means, in principle, that it cannot be excluded at any point. At any rate (though Stuhlmacher would likely disagree), such *Sachkritik* is not what the Reformers had in mind when they vigorously affirmed the external clarity of Scripture (to which he appeals, cf. pp. 328f.).

³⁴ Schrage (*Korinther*, 269f.) provides a brief survey; the entire section, "Auslegungs- und Wirkungsgeschichte" (pp. 269-78), repays careful reading and reflection.

³⁵ There is no reason to suppose that the rise of postmodernism will diminish occasions for such accommodations. So far as I can see, while postmodern epistemology may have abandoned the Enlightenment pretense to the neutrality of reason, it is, if anything, even more resolutely committed to human autonomy—rational or otherwise.

All such efforts, however, run aground on the immovable rock of Paul's unqualified πάντα. Every attempt to read our passage in partial terms or to restrict its scope by categorical distinctions, of whatever kind, clashes with the sweeping totality of Paul's vision. The antithesis in view leaves no room for an amicable division of territory or a neutral terrain. The wisdom of God is eschatological; it opposes *all* the wisdom of this age, *all* human wisdom κατὰ σάρκα.³⁶

Especially popular but damaging has been the notion that the passage is limited to the "religious" sphere, as if Paul's concern is "spiritual" truth in distinction from other kinds ("secular"), which are beyond his purview. The pernicious consequences of this view are nowhere more palpable than in its highly influential Kantian version.³⁷ The noumenal-phenomenal disjunction supposedly functions to circumscribe (pure) reason and limit its autonomous exercise, thus making room for faith and its free exercise. But the effect, as Western culture of the past 200 years makes all too evident, has been exactly the opposite. Increasingly, faith, especially faith in Christ and the Scriptures, has been marginalized and banished into irrelevance. The lesson is plain: give "secular" (= autonomous) reason an inch and it will not rest content until it controls everything (which, by the way, simply demonstrates the truth of our passage). Or, as Paul might warn the church, "all things are yours . . . or nothing is yours."

2. *The Unbeliever's Knowledge*

Still, the nettlesome question of the knowledge of the unbeliever remains, a particularly controversial one between Van Til and his critics (although it strikes me that this has always been much more of an issue for the latter). Van Til is charged with being unclear: most often he roundly denies that unbelievers have any true knowledge, but then sometimes he suggests that they do know.³⁸

³⁶ In an otherwise fine and penetrating treatment of our passage, D. A. Carson is at best misleading in saying, "But Paul is not addressing general questions of epistemology. He is not even addressing how one comes to a knowledge of what some specific passage of Scripture really means" (*The Cross and Christian Ministry* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993] 64). Certainly, as Carson immediately adds, "His focus is the fundamental message of the crucified Messiah." But present as well are profound and essential considerations for any sound epistemology—considerations, for instance, that exclude, as Carson himself does, an "ostensibly neutral epistemology" (p. 65).

³⁷ As a measure of how convoluted and even inverted the history of interpretation can become, J. H. Jung-Stilling, a contemporary of Kant, believed Kant's philosophy to be a confirmation of Paul; the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he held, is a virtual commentary on 1 Cor 2:14 (cited in Schrage, *Korinther*, 271 n. 288)!

³⁸ See, e.g., Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 24–28; *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* ([Philadelphia:] Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969) 43ff.; cf. J. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987) 49–61.

Without being able here to enter into this debate in any full way nor wanting to suggest either that Van Til has had the last word and could not have expressed himself better, I do propose that what he says about the unbeliever's knowledge, far from betraying a vitiating flaw in his thinking, points up a singular and important strength. Van Til, following Paul and the Reformers, does not deny the (resourceful and valuable) know-how unbelievers can display (building highways, brushing their teeth, writing textbooks on logic, etc., often better than believers). But, following Scripture with Calvin, and even more consistently than the latter, Van Til captures the ambiguity of the Bible's, especially Paul's, assessment of the unbeliever's knowledge.

The "problem" begins with Scripture itself. In describing how and what the unbeliever knows, it does so in a deliberately ambiguous, paradoxical, "dialectical" fashion, precisely and necessarily in order to make a crucial point unambiguously and powerfully plain. According to Rom 1:18ff.—a passage Van Til is sometimes charged with downplaying or treating one-sidedly—unbelievers both know and are ignorant; they understand and do not understand, and they do so in the same *cognitive* moment. The knowledge of God (of "his eternal power and divine nature," v. 20, that is, who he is as the true and living God), is (a) clearly revealed in and around them, (b) made evident to them, and (c) understood by them (vv. 19-20). But this truth is suppressed (or repressed, v. 18) such that their *thinking* is futile and their *uncomprehending* hearts darkened (v. 21). As presumably wise (cf. "wise and understanding," Luke 10:21; "wise κατὰ σάρκα," 1 Cor 1:26) they are in fact foolish (the point made in 1 Cor 1:20ff.).³⁹ What they believe is God's truth exchanged for a lie (v. 25), and their *minds* are corrupted, worthless (ἄδόκιμος, v. 28).⁴⁰

The categories in vv. 21ff., no less than in vv. 18-20, are cognitive or contain a cognitive element. It is gratuitous to maintain that vv. 18-20 describe an (adequate) intellectual knowledge while in vv. 21ff. the knowledge in view is defective only in a more than intellectual respect (that is, it is not intimate or saving knowledge).⁴¹ Where is the exegetical basis for this disjunction between cognitive and more than cognitive knowledge? The knowledge of v. 21 is disqualified from a cognitive (as well as more than cognitive) angle; the intellectual aspect may not be suppressed (no pun on v. 18 intended!). That knowledge is a matter of "thoughts," "reasonings"

³⁹ Rom 1:22 and 1 Cor 1:20 are the only two uses of μωροί in Paul.

⁴⁰ It is important to keep in mind that, while every human being without exception is in its purview, this passage does not describe the actual experience of every unbeliever, particularly at the level of conscious psychology. Paul paints in bold, sweeping strokes, capturing the collective human condition as a result of the fall, the universality of solidarity in sin and its consequences.

⁴¹ As do the authors (R. C. Sproul, J. Gerstner, A. Lindsley) of *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); there are more exegetical options to consider than they pose (p. 49f.).

(διαλογισμοῖς) that are "futile," "worthless." The heart is "foolish," that is, literally "without understanding" (ἄσύνετος), lacking comprehension.

The full impact of "their foolish heart was darkened" (v. 21) must not be missed. "Heart" brings the individual into view as a totality, considered from the center, the self as a whole, with all its capacities, purposefully directed, especially as a religious being (to or away from God).⁴² "Heart" captures the self in its integrity or, we may say, unbelievers in their "broken wholeness." The heart, Paul says, is "without understanding"—not just one aspect of the unbeliever but every function; and the attendant circumstance is darkness—total darkness, cognitive and otherwise.

For Paul, it is not a matter of the primacy of the intellect but of the heart. His point here is hardly that the basic problem is one of (refusing) acknowledgement but not of understanding, of the will rather than the intellect, moral instead of philosophical. Distinctions like intellect, will, and emotions have their place, but they are always and ultimately functions of the heart, directed either toward or against God. "The heart *only* has its reasons" (to modify Pascal); all reasoning is reasoning from the heart.

Elsewhere, in Eph 4:17–18,⁴³ Paul is equally, if not more, forceful; cognitive language is emphatic. The sinful rebellion and moral insensitivity of unbelievers involves "the futility of their mind" (νοῦς) and their "darkened understanding" (διάνοια; the echoes of Rom 1:21 are multiple). This (at the very least, in part) expressly cognitive inability results from their deeply-rooted "ignorance" (ἄγνοια), rooted in "the hardness of their heart."

All told, what Paul ascribes to unbelievers is "knowledgeable ignorance," "uncomprehending understanding." The unbeliever both knows and does not know, and there are no categories for neatly distinguishing the one from the other. This "dialectical" dilemma of the unbeliever is the genius of Paul's teaching.

However capable of being better formulated, this analysis—to anticipate the objection—is not to be dismissed as self-contradictory nonsense. Unbelievers do know—they know God—and, within the parameters of unbelief, there are *no* categories or distinctions in terms of which that is *not* true; they know completely, that is, they know from the heart. But this knowledge in its actual possession is always confused, inevitably unstable. To use Paul's language, it is in every respect "futile"; it can serve no useful, constructive epistemological purpose—either in understanding God or, in that light (or better, that darkness), ourselves and the rest of the creation. Specifically—and surely Paul would spare the church and have it never forget—such knowledge is not sound and adequate as a point of contact for bringing unbelievers a step closer to accepting the truth of the gospel.

⁴² On Paul's use of "heart" (καρδιά), see Ridderbos, *Paul*, 119f.

⁴³ Not even cited in *Classical Apologetics*, even in a context where we might most expect it (p. 49).

Perhaps a helpful parallel to the unbeliever's knowledge is what we find in discussing the effects of the fall on the image of God. Is the unbeliever still the *imago*? Yes and no. Established distinctions for addressing the difference (e.g., broader and narrower senses, natural and moral, structural and functional) all leave something to be desired. The unbeliever is/has the image of God, and *that* truth—image-bearing but sin-blinded need, deeply rooted and ineradicable in unbelievers—provides the point of contact, the capacity for being addressed by the gospel and, through the faith-creating, resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, for recognizing and accepting its truth, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). But, apart from that working of the Spirit, being the image in no way alleviates or extenuates human sinfulness; being the image is the presupposition for being a sinner. The unbeliever remains the image of God, entirely, but only "in a negative mode."⁴⁴ Every single capacity enjoyed as an image-bearer is engaged in rebellion against God.

In this respect, common grace, with its restraining effects, is not to be overlooked or minimized, and certainly deserves more attention than I give it here.⁴⁵ Contrary to a frequent misconception, however, the maintenance of the divine image is not simply an unmitigated benefit of common grace; the image (however exactly it is to be defined) makes human sin, *human* sin.⁴⁶ Common grace does moderate the consequences of the antithesis between belief and unbelief, but not the antithesis itself—a crucial distinction; common grace and the antithesis do not function in inverse proportion to each other. Common grace may make unbelievers (genuinely) "nicer" but does not reduce their enmity toward God one whit (Rom 8:7). Common grace renders our present life in the world tolerable, even enjoyable, but does not bring unbelievers even one step closer to the new creation. Common grace—unlike special, gospel grace—is of "this age"; it is not eschatological.

After all the many words on this issue, Calvin's word-picture is difficult to improve on:⁴⁷ Unbelievers are like travelers on a pitch-black, moonless night, after a momentary lightning flash. For an instant the terrain around them has been illumined far and wide, but before they can take even one step, they are plunged back into darkness and left groping about aimlessly.

⁴⁴ Van Genderen and Velema, *Dogmatiek*, 308, 332; the entire treatment of the image of God in chap. 8 (pp. 292-352) is most penetrating. (The early appearance of an English translation of this book is greatly to be desired.)

⁴⁵ See esp. the various writings of Van Til published together in *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

⁴⁶ "The higher is our conception of man in his intrinsic essence, the greater must be the gravity of his offense in rebellion and enmity against God. . . . Man conceived of as in the image of God, so far from toning down the doctrine of total depravity, points rather to its gravity, intensity, and irreversibility." "It may seem paradoxical, but the higher our view of man's nature, the more aggravated becomes the depravity that characterizes man as fallen" (J. Murray, *Collected Writings* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977] 2.38-39, 45-46).

⁴⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. F. L. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 1.277 [2.2.18].

That is the situation of unbelievers, to vary the figure slightly: frozen perpetually in the split second after the firing of a flash attachment in a dark-room—with a blurred and fading, still indelible impression of everything just illumined and yet now no longer seeing anything—knowing and yet not knowing. This too, I take it, is the basic, controlling point that Van Til, in his day, was concerned to make about the knowledge of the unbeliever.

3. *Paul and Natural Theology*

The unbelievers in view in Rom 1:18ff. are those in view in 1 Cor 1:18ff.; though considered from different perspectives, they are not two distinct groups. Paul's scope in both passages is universal; the general considerations of each apply, collectively, to all unbelievers; the two passages supplement and reinforce each other. Paul would not have us be in any doubt: those under the impact of God's general revelation (Rom 1:19-20)—in all of its necessity, authority, sufficiency, and clarity⁴⁸—are those who, just as an expression of their rebellious struggle against the unrelenting, inescapable pressure of that revelation, "require signs . . . and . . . seek wisdom" (1 Cor 1:22). All such efforts are κατὰ σάρκα; the apostle goes on to disqualify and oppose them for what they are: the inevitable truth-suppression (cf. Rom 1:18) of "this age," attempts that will never be able to conclude that the gospel of Christ—and any epistemological considerations truly conducive to the truth of the gospel—are anything but a "stumbling block," (provable, verifiable) "foolishness" (v. 23).

Among the dissenting critiques of Van Til's epistemology and apologetics, one of the more recent, and most massive, is *Classical Apologetics*.⁴⁹ At the heart of its proposal for "A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith" is an extensive defense of natural theology, based primarily, so far as Scripture is involved, on an appeal to Rom 1:18ff.

Remarkably, the authors virtually ignore 1 Cor 2:6-16.⁵⁰ In chap. 9 ("The Spirit, the Word, and the Church"), there is a passing reference to v. 9 (as well as similar references to the Matthew 11/Luke 10 passage, pp. 162f., 167); on pp. 170-72, vv. 9-13 are quoted and discussed briefly for their bearing on the doctrine of Scripture.⁵¹ Elsewhere, where we might most expect it (or the Gospels pericope) to be treated,⁵² there is nothing, not even a parenthetical reference. Most remarkably, v. 14 (the inability of the

⁴⁸ See Van Til's masterful treatment of general revelation, "Nature and Scripture," in *The Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Guardian, 1946) 255-93, esp. 261-75.

⁴⁹ Full bibliographic details are above, n. 41.

⁵⁰ Unless I have missed it and need to be corrected (the book has no Scripture index).

⁵¹ "This passage may well be the best in all of Scripture for putting together the revelation of God, the inspiration of God, and the illumination of God" (*Classical Apologetics*, 171). This, while certainly true, narrows the scope of the passage; see above, n. 26.

⁵² Chap. 4, "The Biblical Evidence Confirming Natural Theology" (where Rom 1:18ff. is discussed in some detail); chap. 13, "The Noetic Influence of Sin"; chap. 16, "The Self-Attesting God"; chap. 17, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit."

unbeliever to understand) and the antithesis in vv. 14-15 are not even mentioned, much less addressed.⁵³

It may be a fair criticism of this article that more attention could have been given to Rom 1:18ff. But it will hardly do, in trying to make a case for natural theology, simply to bypass 1 Cor 2:6-16. Apparently the authors of *Classical Apologetics* consider the passage irrelevant. Then they at least need to show us how that is so: for example, how the epistemological gulf between belief and unbelief is really something less than eschatological, or how the cognitive inability of unbelievers in v. 14 does not exclude the rational competence to arrive at a sound natural theology, or how the "all things" of v. 15 must be circumscribed and does not include the truths of such a theology. That demand does not seem "unreasonable."

In fact, however, 1 Cor 2:6-16 (1:18-3:23) is the death blow to all natural theology.⁵⁴ There is no knowledge of God resident in unbelievers or accessible to them that reduces the eschatological void that separates them from a saving knowledge of God. It is sad not to have recognized that, especially in the light of developments in theology and the church since the Reformation.

The prevailing reading of that history today—namely, that seventeenth-century Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy is an abandonment of the Reformation that prepares the way for the Enlightenment and then Liberalism (until all has been made better by Karl Barth *cum suis*)—is a gross distortion.⁵⁵ It does, however, contain a significant germ of truth. The increasing preoccupation of orthodox dogmatics with natural theology, particularly after Descartes, worked to undermine that orthodoxy and aided the rise of the very rationalism it was opposing. The tension is there, for instance, in Francis Turretin on the role of reason in theology.⁵⁶ And the outcome—a

⁵³ This omission is all the more perplexing in authors who are committed Reformed theologians, men whom we otherwise rightly honor for their outstanding contributions in effectively communicating important truths of the Reformed tradition in our time.

⁵⁴ "... above all every natural theology, wherever it sees the divine *remoto spiritu Christi* [apart from the Spirit of Christ] resident in man or the world, has difficulty in coping with 1 Cor 2" (Schrage, *Korinther*, 272f.).

⁵⁵ See esp. the important work of Richard Muller in rehabilitating the Reformed "scholastics" and redressing the distortions of this currently widespread paradigm by showing the deep and cordial continuity, despite all the differences in method, between the theology of the Reformers and the seventeenth century. See esp. his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1, Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), including the primary sources and secondary literature cited throughout.

⁵⁶ E.g., in topic 1, question 8 of his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (trans. G. M. Giger; ed. J. T. Dennison, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992) 1.23-28. This discussion, in continuity with the Reformers, is for the most part a helpful treatment of the ministerial role of reason in theology ("an instrument of faith," section 7, p. 25). Toward the end, however, he speaks of the use of arguments, both theological (based on Scripture) and philosophical, in the effort to see atheists "converted" (*converti*), "so that by the principles of reason the prejudices against the Christian religion drawn from corrupt reason may be removed" (section 23, p. 28); cf. his not always clear comments on natural theology in question 3, pp. 6-9 ("natural theology" seems at points to be equivalent to general revelation).

permanent lesson that we miss to our theological peril—is the startling swiftness with which in the span of a single generation at the Academy in Geneva, from Turretin father to son, Reformed orthodoxy was virtually displaced and rendered impotent in the face of a frank rationalism, bordering on Socinianism, that was quick to follow.⁵⁷ By now, too, we should have learned: natural theology may have a place in Roman Catholic and Arminian theologies—with their semi-Pelagian anthropologies and qualified optimism about the unbeliever's capacity to know God—but not in a theology that would be Reformed.⁵⁸

The knowledge of God that unbelievers have does not serve to silence their rebellion or otherwise dispose them to accept the truth of the gospel. That, too, is the *σκάνδαλον* of the cross (1 Cor 1:23). And that, as much as any, is the scandalizing truth that Van Til, following Paul, labored to hold before the church, perhaps with unprecedented tenacity and rigor in the history of theology. May those efforts not be lost or go unheeded. May that truth not prove to be a stumbling block to us and generations of the church yet to come.⁵⁹

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⁵⁷ See the informative account of M. I. Klauber, "Jean-Alphonse Turretini and the Abrogation of the Formula Consensus in Geneva," *WTJ* 53 (1991) 325–38, and, more extensively, his *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671–1737) and Enlightened Orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1994), esp. 143–92.

⁵⁸ See in this respect the perceptive discussion of van Genderen and Velema, *Dogmatiek*, 126–33; cf. Schrage, *Korinther*, 273 n. 302 on Vatican I's grounding of a *duplex ordo cognitionis* on Rom 1:20, on the one hand, 1 Cor 2:7–8, 10, on the other. All such "two-order" knowledge constructions can only be maintained at the expense or compromise of what these passages actually teach.

⁵⁹ Despite the overall impression this article may leave, I have no desire to escalate but would like to see reduced and clarified as much as possible the conflict in apologetics between "evidentialists" and "presuppositionalists" (this designating nomenclature itself is already a source of some confusion). Yes, there may be a certain amount of talking by each other and mutual misunderstanding, especially where the debate takes place on a common Reformed commitment (no, Van Til has not spoken the final word). But I am convinced that genuine rapprochement can take place only where there is a common appreciation of those biblical considerations drawn from Reformed anthropology and soteriology that control Van Til's epistemology and apologetics—considerations, as I see it, that are much less clearly present, even eclipsed, in the "classical" approach.

INAUGURAL LECTURES

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

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If it is fair to view Geerhardus Vos as the father of Reformed biblical theology, then we are now at a point several generations later where we can begin assessing something of the lasting impact of that theology, particularly within Reformed churches.¹ The following reflections, no more than partial, are an effort at such an assessment.

Among pastors, teachers, and others more or less conversant with the biblical-theological work of Vos, my perception is that a fairly sharp difference of opinion presently exists. On the one side are those enthusiastic about biblical theology (or redemptive-historical interpretation of Scripture) and who see themselves in their own work as building on the insights of Vos and others, such as Meredith Kline and Herman Ridderbos. Others, however, question the value of biblical theology, if they have not already concluded that it has introduced novelties detrimental to the well-being of the church. Still others are at various points in between these clashing outlooks, often wondering what to think.

While I would certainly include myself among the first group just mentioned, the "enthusiasts," some of the reservations voiced by the second deserve to be taken seriously. One among these is the concern that biblical theology, despite its avowed intention to serve systematic theology, is in fact undermining doctrinal stability by diminishing interest and confidence in the formulations of classic Reformed theology. This is seen to have the further deleterious effect of weakening cordial commitment to the Reformed confessions and so, inevitably, of impairing their proper functioning, so necessary for the church's well-being.

This concern, if substantiated, would certainly be cause for alarm. In my view, however, it is largely misplaced. In fact, as I hope to help show here, a deep compatibility exists between the Westminster Standards and biblical theology.

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¹ Vos (1862-1949) was Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1893 until his retirement in 1932.

While my comments have these Standards primarily in view, they are largely applicable as well, I take it, to other Reformed confessions, like the Three Forms of Unity, although I make no effort to show that here.

I

I begin with two observations of a more general sort pertaining to the often alleged or perceived novelty of biblical theology. Without for a moment wanting to slight the epoch-making value of Vos's work, for which my admiration continues undiminished, we misunderstand him if we fail to recognize his continuity with those who came before him. Contrary to the impression occasionally left by some, it is not as if the church were stumbling about in interpretive darkness until he burst onto the scene, lightening-like, toward the close of the nineteenth century. In fact, already in the second century in the first great struggle for its existence, the battle with Gnosticism, the church had impressed upon it indelibly the controlling insight, as much as any, of biblical theology, namely, that salvation resides ultimately not in who God is or what he has said, but in what he has done in history, once for all, in Christ. Virtually from its beginning on and more or less consistently, the church has been incipiently biblical-theological.

Narrowing the scope to Reformed theology, Vos himself has observed:

. . . it has from the beginning shown itself possessed of a true historic sense in the apprehension of the progressive character of the deliverance of truth. Its doctrine of the covenants on its historical side represents the first attempt at constructing a history of revelation and may be justly considered the precursor of what is at present called biblical theology.²

This provides a particularly clear indication, present frequently throughout his work, of the substantive continuity he saw between his own work and earlier Reformed theology and so how those who build on that work ought to view theirs, as well as what they (and others) should expect of it by way of continuity with the past. The Reformed confessions, and the theological framework they entail, particularly thinking on the covenant, far from being hostile, are quite hospitable toward—in fact they anticipate—giving greater, more methodologically self-conscious attention to the redemptive-historical substance of Scripture.

The preceding paragraph raises at least two questions. First, is Vos right? Or does his work, despite his intention, perhaps set in motion factors of which he was unaware but which we at a distance are now able to see are in tension or even conflict with Reformed theology and its confessions? Second, if he is right, are there perhaps, nonetheless, elements in that theology and its confessions at odds with their own underlying covenant-historical disposition? With these and attendant issues on the horizon, I will consider, as a test case, the role of the *ordo salutis* in the Westminster Standards.

² *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (ed. R. B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001 [1980]), 232.

II

In his magisterial book on Paul's theology, Herman Ridderbos observes repeatedly and on a variety of topics, sometimes explicitly, more often implicitly, that the apostle's interest is primarily the history of salvation (*historia salutis*), not the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*).³ This distinction, its formulation apparently original with Ridderbos,⁴ signals not only what Paul's controlling concern is, redemptive-historical, but also what it is not. Why the negative as well as the positive? In large part because of his perception, expressed already in the opening pages, that increasingly since the Reformation preponderant interest within Lutheran and Reformed theology and church life has shifted to the personal appropriation of salvation, to questions of *ordo salutis*, and so moved away from where it was for Luther and Calvin, like Paul and following him, on salvation as revealed once for all in Christ's death and resurrection (*historia salutis*).⁵

This perception has validity, as long as what is *primarily* the case is in view, both for Paul and the Reformation tradition. As he proceeds, however, Ridderbos tends to leave the impression on a variety of topics that Paul has little or no interest in issues of *ordo salutis*. This has the effect, as I will try to show, of unnecessarily widening the difference between Paul and Calvin, on the one hand, and subsequent Reformed theology, on the other.

At this juncture it may be helpful to make a clarifying comment about the expression *ordo salutis*, at least as I am using it here. It can have two distinct senses, one broader, the other more specific. The latter, more technical sense is the more common and has in view the logical and/or causal, or even temporal "order" or sequence of various discrete saving acts and benefits, as unfolded within the actual life of the individual sinner.⁶ It may also be used, however, without having yet settled on a particular "order" or even that there is one in the sense just indicated, to refer, more generally, to the ongoing application of

³ H. N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), e.g., pp. 14, 45, 63, 91, 177 n. 53, 205-6, 211, 214ff., 221-22, 268, 365, 378, 404.

⁴ I have not found it earlier than in his 1957 essay, "The Redemptive-Historical Character of Paul's Preaching," in *When the Time Had Fully Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 48, 49. It is apparently not present in pertinent discussions in Herman Bavinck, Vos, or G. C. Berkouwer, although Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979/1930), ch. 2 ("The Interaction Between Eschatology and Soteriology"), clearly anticipates it.

⁵ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 14.

⁶ The first occurrence of *ordo salutis*, apparently, is in this sense, in the 18th century within emerging pietism from where it is taken over and eventually becomes widely current in both Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy. A precursor is present already at the time of the Reformation in Bullinger, who speaks of the *dispensatio salutis* ["dispensing" or "administering of salvation"]. While that expression does not take hold, the basic area that Bullinger (and later *ordo salutis* thinking) has in view, the application of salvation, is a major concern for other reformers, like Luther and Calvin, as well as subsequent Reformation orthodoxy, and increasingly in the period after the Synod of Dort, Reformed theology focuses on the "ordo" aspect. The reference to Bullinger is cited by G. C. Berkouwer, *Geloof en rechtvaardiging* (Kampen: Kok, 1949), p. 24 [omitted from the E.T. *Faith and Justification* (trans. L. B. Smedes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 26]; cf. O. Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics* (trans. D. L. Guder; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 2:336-38; and W. H. Velema, *Wet en evangelie* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), 125-28.

salvation, in distinction from its once-for-all accomplishment. Understood in this sense, the *historia salutis/ordo salutis* distinction reformulates the classic Reformed distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, but in a way that accents the redemptive-historical nature of the accomplishment (impetration) and so the need to keep that in view in discussing issues of application (individual appropriation).

It is important not to confuse or otherwise equivocate on these two senses of *ordo salutis*. The narrower concept is subject to the criticism of tending in effect, in some instances more than others, to focus on *ordo* at the expense of *salutis*, of being so preoccupied with various acts of application in their logical/causal and even temporal sequence and interconnections that salvation itself, in its wholeness, becomes eclipsed, of so concentrating on the benefits of Christ's work in their variety and mutual relations, that he, in his person and work, recedes into the background. However, in making such criticisms, particularly from a redemptive-historical perspective, we must avoid the opposite extreme of depreciating all *ordo salutis* issues as unnecessary or even inappropriate. In fact, it is not putting it too strongly, the integrity of the gospel itself stands or falls with the *ordo salutis* in the broader sense, equivalent to the application of salvation (*applicatio salutis*) and distinct from its accomplishment.

That necessity can be highlighted by briefly noting Karl Barth's rejection of the notion of *ordo salutis*.⁷ This dismissal, perhaps the most resolute and sweeping to date, turns on his idea of *Geschichte* ("historicity" or "historicness"), involving the undivided contemporaneity of salvation as a single event, the radical simultaneity of all its aspects (in this sense often termed "the Christ-event"). Such a notion plainly leaves no place for the distinction between accomplishment and application, for a salvation in history, finished 2000 years ago and as such having its own integrity, yet distinct from its ongoing appropriation in history. Accordingly, Barth rejects any notion of *ordo salutis*, maintaining that it leads inevitably to psychological distortions of Christian existence.

Furthermore, as Barth's idea of *Geschichte* leaves no room for the accomplishment/application distinction and so for any *ordo salutis* notion, it involves a radical recasting of the work of Christ. For one, it excludes as well a temporal distinction or sequence between the two states of Christ; Barth denies their historical before and after, that in history Christ's exaltation followed his humiliation.⁸ He sees, quite rightly, that the distinction between accomplishment and application is given with the historical sequence of humiliation followed by exaltation. To affirm or deny the latter is to affirm or deny the former; they stand or fall together.

Barth's view, it should be clear, involves a radical departure from biblical revelation, one that strikes at the very heart of the gospel. If Christ's state of exaltation is not separate from and subsequent to his state of humiliation, if his being

⁷ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 502-3; IV/3 (1962), 505-6.

⁸ *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, 502. Correlatively and most radically, he denies as well the historicity of the fall, in the sense of the historical sequence of creation (a time of original beatitude at the beginning of human history where sin was not yet present) and fall.

"highly exalted" and "given the name above every name" did not follow, temporally, his "obedience unto death" (Phil 2:8-9), that is, if it is not the case that the incarnate Christ was for a time in the past, in history, actually exposed to God's just wrath on the sins of his people, but now, subsequently and permanently, for all eternity future, is no longer under God's wrath but restored to his favor under conditions of eschatological life, then, as Van Til tirelessly pointed out in critiquing Barth's theology, "there is no transition from wrath to grace in history."⁹ But if there is no transition from wrath to grace in history, then there is no gospel and we are, as the apostle says, in the most pitiable condition of still being "in our sins" (1 Cor 15:17-19). The gospel, the salvation of sinners, stands or falls with the historical before and after of Christ's humiliation and exaltation.

Accordingly, with that before and after, with the historical distinction between these two states, is given the irreducible distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, between *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*, where neither one may be allowed to diminish or eclipse the other. No matter how much we may wish to be preoccupied with the redemptive-historical dimensions of the gospel as being cosmic, corporate, socio-political (I write with an eye to the current evangelical absorption, too often insufficiently critical in my judgment, with the work of some associated with the New Perspective on Paul), the question of application, of the *ordo salutis* in the more general sense, may not be suppressed or otherwise evaded: How does the then and there of Christ's transition from wrath to favor relate to the here and now of the sinner's transition from wrath to grace? How do Christ's death and resurrection, then and there, benefit sinners, here and now? What are those benefits and what is the pattern (*ordo*) in which they are communicated to sinners?

III

From Barth I turn to Calvin and for two closely related reasons. In an especially instructive and edifying way, unparalleled in the Reformed tradition as far as I have seen, he shows the absolute necessity of *ordo salutis* concerns and at the

⁹ "The present writer is of the opinion that, for all its verbal similarity to historic Protestantism, Barth's theology is, in effect, a denial of it. There is, he believes, in Barth's view no 'transition from wrath to grace' in history. This was the writer's opinion in 1946 when he published *The New Modernism*. A careful consideration of Barth's more recent writings has only established him more firmly in this conviction" (C. Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962], vii). A search of the phrase "transition from wrath to grace" in *The Works of Cornelius Van Til* (CD-ROM; New York: Labels Army Co., 1997) indicates 74 occurrences in 59 different books and articles; almost all refer to its denial, and of these the large majority have in view Barth's theology, either explicitly or implicitly. The phrase itself (as pointed out to me by Robert Strimple) is taken over from G. C. Berkouwer's similar, though more muted criticism; see his *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 257 ("... the transition in history from wrath to grace is obscured"), 380 ("... there is no real place for a transition from creation to the fall and, in the fallen world, from wrath to grace"); cf. also 234-36, 370.

same time has led the way in pointing to an *ordo salutis* faithful to the *historia salutis*, to an appropriation of salvation that honors the redemptive-historical structure and substance of Scripture.¹⁰

Book 3 of the *Institutes* is titled, "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow." This title plainly shows that Calvin understands himself to be concerned throughout with the application of salvation ("the grace of Christ"), its "benefits" and consequent "effects" (in their irreducible plurality and diversity, as he will go on to show). All told, his concern is "the way" (Latin: not *ordo*, but *modus*, "mode," "manner," "method"), in which "we" (believers) "receive" this grace, in which this salvation is appropriated by "us." With this concern restated in the opening words of 3.1.1, the very next sentence reads: "First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us."¹¹

In my opinion, on the matter at hand no more important words have been written than these. Incisively and in a fundamental way, they address both the *necessity* and *nature* of application, the basic concerns of an *ordo salutis*. So far as necessity is concerned, to put it somewhat provocatively, Calvin is saying something like, "the redemptive-historical Christ, at least the Christ of redemptive history as often conceived, is not enough"; in fact, he says, this Christ is "useless and of no value to us"!

Certainly this Christ, his death and resurrection, including his ascension and Pentecost, as the culmination of redemptive history, are the heart-core of the gospel. They are "of first importance," as Paul says (1 Cor 15:3); he and other New Testament writers make that abundantly clear. That centrality is not at issue here. But to punctuate the gospel, particularly its proclamation, with a full stop after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension (allowing for his future return) does not do the gospel full justice as "the power of God unto salvation," and as it involves "the revelation of the righteousness of God" (Rom 1:16-17). In fact, as Calvin intimates, such a parsing of the gospel misses an integral component, something absolutely essential.

¹⁰ C. Graafland, "Heeft Calvijn een bepaalde orde des heils geleerd?" in *Verbi Divini Minister* (ed. J. van Oort; Amsterdam: ton Bolland, 1983), 109-27, concludes: "... so strongly did Calvin put Christ and faith as the work of the Holy Spirit at the center that a particular order or sequence in the application of salvation remains subordinate to that emphasis. In that sense Calvin's theology is not to be termed an *ordo salutis* theology, and he would have never been able to summarize his theology, as W. Perkins did his, under the title, 'the golden chain of salvation'" (p. 127) ["... Calvijn zo sterk Christus en het geloof als werk van de Heilige Geest in het centrum heeft gesteld, dat een bepaalde orde of volgorde in de applicatie van het heil duidelijk daaraan ondergeschikt blijft. Calvijns theologie is in die zin geen heilsordelijke theologie te noemen en hij zou, zoals b.v. W. Perkins, zijn theologie nooit hebben kunnen samenvatten onder de titel: 'de gouden keten des heils'"].

¹¹ J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. T. McNeill; trans. F. L. Battles; 2 vols.; LCC; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:537.

Or as later Reformed theology affirmed aphoristically: "Without application, redemption is not redemption."¹² Herman Bavinck makes a sweeping and quite striking observation to put the importance of application in proper perspective. Taking in the entire activity of God in history, he says, there are just three great *initiating* works: the creation of the world, the incarnation of the Word, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.¹³ In other words, seen in a most basic profile, the work of the triune God consists in creation, and, given the fall, redemption accomplished/*historia salutis* and redemption applied/*ordo salutis*.

Subsequently, in the course of his lengthy treatment of the *ordo salutis* as a topic, Bavinck makes another statement worth weighing: "In his state of exaltation there still remains much for Christ to do."¹⁴ This statement is surely faithful to Scripture (e.g., Rom 8:33-34; Heb 7:25, 8:1-2) and the Reformed confessions (e.g., *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 23-26; *Larger Catechism*, 42-45, 52-55; *Belgic Confession*, 26; *Heidelberg Catechism*, 46-47, 49-51). We may ask, however, whether, with its implications, it has been developed in those confessions as it might, or functioned in the theology and life of the church as it should. All told, the "it is finished" of the cross is true, preciously true; it points to the end of his humiliation and, together with his resurrection, to remission of sin and entitlement to eschatological life as definitively achieved and secured. But it is only *relatively* true, relative to the "much," as Bavinck says, that it remains for the exalted Christ to do.

It should be apparent, then, that Christ is not only active in redemption accomplished but also in redemption applied; the one just as much as the other is his work. In fact, from the perspective of his present exaltation the distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, between *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*, begins to blur. The way it is often put, that accomplishment is Christ's task, application the Holy Spirit's, is helpful but can also be misleading. The latter, no less than the former, is Christ-centered.

The question, then, is not only, as I put it earlier, how the once-for-all "there and then" of Christ's work relates to the "here and now" of my/the church's present life, but also, how the "there and now" of his (present) activity relates to the "here and now" of my life, or, given that the ascended Christ indwells the church by his Spirit, that, in fact, he is also present with the church as "the life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor 15:45),¹⁵ how does the "*here and now*" of his activity relate to the "*here and now*" of my life?

¹² "Dempta applicatione, redemptio non est redemptio"; quoted in H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Kok, 1976), 3:520.

¹³ Bavinck, *Dogmatiek*, 3:494.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:571; cf. 3:573.

¹⁵ I take it that careful exegesis has settled that the reference here is to the Holy Spirit. See, building on Vos, Ridderbos, and John Murray among others, my "'Life-Giving Spirit': Probing the Center of Paul's Pneumatology," *JETS* 41 (1998): 573-89, esp. 575-82, and *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978; repr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* [2d ed.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987]), 85-87. See also, e.g., 2 Cor 3:17; Rom 8:9-10; 1 Cor 6:17.

The second sentence of Book 3 of the *Institutes*, quoted above, not only highlights the necessity of *ordo salutis* concerns but also their essence. The pivotal, absolutely crucial consideration, the heart of the matter, put negatively as Calvin does here, is that Christ not remain "outside us" (*extra nos*), that we not be "separated from him" (*ab eo*). Or, expressed positively, as he presently does, that "we grow into one body [*in unum*] with him." Here Calvin has in view the union that exists between Christ and the believer, referred to repeatedly and in a variety of ways throughout Book 3 and elsewhere in his writings. This union is the reality he sees to be central and most decisive in the application of redemption.

It is essential to be clear about this union, about its nature and scope, especially since it is easy to equivocate on or otherwise overlook irreducible distinctions, or to make wrong distinctions, in discussing union with Christ. Expressed categorically, the union of which Calvin speaks here is neither "predestinarian," in the sense of election in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4-5), nor "redemptive-historical," being contemplated in him and represented by him in his work, as the last Adam, in "the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4). Rather, in view is union, he immediately specifies, as it is "obtained by faith" (*fide*), union as it does not exist apart from or prior to faith but is given with, in fact is inseparable from faith; as it has been categorized, union that is "spiritual" and "mystical."

This mention of faith, and the key role accorded to it, prompts Calvin, still within this opening section (3.1.1), to touch on what would become a central question in subsequent discussions about the *ordo salutis*, namely the origin of faith, giving rise eventually in Reformed theology to the doctrine of regeneration in a narrower sense. We observe, so Calvin, "that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel." Why? Not because of some differentiating factor on our side. The answer is not to be found by looking into ourselves or contemplating the mystery of human freedom and willing. Rather, consistent with his uniform teaching elsewhere about the total inability of the will due to sin, we must "climb higher" and consider "the secret energy of the Spirit" (*arcana Spiritus efficacia*). Faith is Spirit-worked, sovereignly and efficaciously.

The union Calvin has in view is forged by the Spirit's working faith in us, a faith that "puts on" Christ (citing Gal 3:27), that embraces Christ as he is offered to faith in the gospel. Faith is the bond of that union seen from our side. "To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."

This, in a nutshell, is Calvin's *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by (Spirit-worked) faith; being and continuing to be united with Christ by faith, faith that, through the power of the Spirit, "embraces Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 31). This "ordo" is at once simple as well as profound and comprehensive, because on matters of application it keeps the focus squarely on Christ—on Christ specifically as crucified and resurrected, on Christ who is what he now is as he has suffered and is now glorified. It does not lose sight of the various "benefits" and "effects" of salvation (see the title of

Book 3), in all of their multiplicity, but recognizes, as he goes on to show, that these have their place only within union with this presently exalted Christ, as they are its specific outworkings, its inseparable as well as mutually irreducible manifestations. It is an "ordo," I take it, that captures, better than other proposals, the essence of "the great eschatological *ordo salutis*"¹⁶ taught in the New Testament, especially by the apostle Paul.

IV

Subsequent, post-Reformation theology, in this regard, represents something of a shading of Calvin. We must be on guard against overstating this as a criticism. Certainly, in the area of application important advances took place in developing specific doctrines of grace, for instance, the doctrine of regeneration in the aftermath of the emergence of Arminianism. But a prevailing tendency down to the present has been to be preoccupied with the various benefits of Christ's work, and their interrelations—logical, causal, and sometimes even temporal,¹⁷ *ordo* in this sense—so that while Christ himself is certainly there, the danger is that he fades, more or less, into the background, and where to put union with Christ—spiritual, mystical union—in the *ordo salutis* remains something of a conundrum. Ironically, the better the biblical doctrine is understood—union as an all-encompassing reality that resists being correlated as one benefit among others, like a link in a chain—the more clearly this conundrum surfaces. This is the case particularly within the Reformed tradition.¹⁸ Lutheran theology senses no problem here, since union is put after justification, as one of its attendant benefits, an "effect" or "fruit" or "result" of justification.¹⁹

Where, then, do the Westminster Standards fall within this assessment of post-Reformation developments? Three observations are in order. First, in distinction from positions no doubt held by a number of the framers, the Standards themselves do not spell out a particular *ordo salutis* (of causally concatenated acts

¹⁶ Adapting the language of Ridderbos, *Paul*, 200.

¹⁷ A glaring instance, not unknown among some Reformed teachers and pastors, is to maintain that a person, as a grown child or adult, may be regenerate for some time, before becoming a believer. John Murray's trenchant classroom comment on this (as I recall it): biblically considered, the notion of a regenerate unbeliever is a "monstrosity"!

¹⁸ Two instances where the problem is palpable but not really addressed or resolved are A. A. Hodge, "The *Ordo Salutis*: or, Relation in the Order of Nature of Holy Character and Divine Favor," *The Princeton Review* 54 (1878): 304-21; and, more recently, J. Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955). Murray is clear that union with Christ "is in itself a very broad and embracive subject" (p. 201) and "underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and its application" (p. 205). But how, in application specifically, ("spiritual," "mystical") union is related to other aspects in the *ordo* he maintains is not made clear.

¹⁹ So, e.g., J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934), 320, 381; F. A. O. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (4 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1951, 1953), 2:410, 2:434 n. 65, 3:8 n. 9, 3:398; see also the survey volume of H. Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (3d rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 481ff. (note, though, the observation of Hollaz concerning the respect in which mystical union "logically precedes justification," 481), 407-9, and the table of contents, 11.

or works of God). Within the bounds of what they do teach, an explicitly articulated *ordo salutis* is left an open question. The Standards do not foreclose that issue for those who subscribe to them.²⁰

Second, such indications as the Standards do contain point to a position close to Calvin's. That can be seen most easily from two parallel sections of the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.²¹ At question and answer 58 the *Larger Catechism* begins to take up "the application" of "the benefits which Christ hath procured." Following questions dealing primarily with the visible church/invisible church (the elect) distinction and the "special privileges" of the former (59-64), question 65 asks about the "special benefits" of the latter, with the answer: "The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory." This answer structures the basic flow all the way through question and answer 90: union with Christ (66-68); communion in grace with Christ (69-81); communion in glory with Christ (82-90). Within the scope of the application of redemption to the elect, then, union and communion with Christ are seen as most basic, encompassing all other benefits.

Answer 66 describes this union as being "joined to Christ," and specifies that the union in view is effected "spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably." The next two answers also refer to this union, as the goal of effectual calling, as being "draw[n] . . . to Jesus Christ" (67) and "truly com[ing] to Jesus Christ" (68). Then we come to answer 69, which, in addressing "the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ," speaks of "their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, *manifests their union with him*" (emphasis added).

So far as I can see, answer 69 is the most forthright assertion in the Westminster Standards on *ordo salutis* issues as usually discussed, and what is noteworthy is that union with Christ is clearly not put in series with the other benefits mentioned, like one link in a chain. Rather, those benefits "manifest" being united with Christ; that is, the former are functions or aspects of the latter.

Shorter Catechism questions and answers 29-32 are to the same effect, though less clearly. Answer 29 brings into view "the effectual application" of redemption. Answer 30 is properly read as expressing the essence of that application:

²⁰ Sequencing such as "... effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; . . . justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation" and "... effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved . . ." (*Confession of Faith* 3:6), as well as "... called, justified, sanctified, and glorified" (8:1), no doubt reflects the *ordo* adopted by many, perhaps all, of the Divines. But that *ordo* is not being confessed as such; 3:6 is in the chapter dealing with the divine decree and 8:1 in the chapter on the mediatorial person and work of Christ. Nor are there instances of similar extensive sequencing present in those chapters that deal with the application of redemption. (I am indebted to Robert Strimple for drawing my attention to the phrasing in 3:6.) Some semblance of an *ordo* might also seem to be implied by the sequence of pertinent chapters in the Confession and questions and answers in the Catechisms, but a comparison of the three documents also reveals differences in ordering. The Standards do not stipulate, at least as a matter of confession, a single, uniform sequence of benefits in the application of redemption.

²¹ I make no claim for a complete survey of the Standards here, although I hope not to have overlooked anything important or counterindicative.

taking place in effectual calling, it is the Spirit's "working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ." Answer 31 reinforces that the union in view ("to embrace Jesus Christ") is the goal of effectual calling.

Question and answer 32 enumerate the present benefits of redemption applied, but are silent about union with Christ. This omission is somewhat surprising and unlike the parallel in *Larger Catechism* 69. In light of the latter as well as their own immediate context, a better wording might have been: Question: "What benefits do they that are *united to Christ* partake of in this life?" Answer: "They that are *united to Christ* do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which . . ." (changed wording in italics).²²

We may conclude, then, that in the Westminster Standards the heart of the application of salvation, underlying all further consideration of *ordo salutis* questions, is being united to Christ by Spirit-worked faith, a union providing for multiple other benefits, without any one benefit either being confused with or existing separately from the others. This is essentially Calvin's "*ordo salutis*," though not as clearly elaborated as one might wish.

Third, in the light of these observations, I offer for further reflection and testing the following thesis on the overall relationship between biblical theology and the Westminster Standards. The predominant concern of biblical theology, as it has in fact developed, has been the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation; for the Standards, the predominating concern is its ongoing application. Both, biblical theology and the Standards, share both concerns, accomplishment and application, but with different emphases. In terms of the *historia salutis*/*ordo salutis* distinction, the former is biblical theology's major focus, the latter, its minor focus; for the Standards these foci are reversed. Both, biblical theology and the Standards, have the same dual or elliptical concern but with differing accents. These respective accents need not be seen as mutually exclusive; they are not antagonistic but complementary. At least for the large area of soteriology, of the salvation revealed in Christ in both its once-for-all accomplishment and its ongoing application, there is no good reason why biblical theology cannot work compatibly within the theological framework of the Standards, to enrich that framework and at points perhaps improve its formulations without fear of undermining it. The same may be said, as far as I can see, of the other areas covered in the Standards.

V

Calvin's approach to *ordo salutis* issues, provided for as well, as we have just seen, in the Westminster Standards, has multiple strengths. Here I highlight two that emerge as he deals with the application of redemption in Book 3 of the

²² LC 69 and SC 32 also differ in perspective: in the former, justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever other blessings, all "manifest" union with Christ, while in the latter these other "several benefits" are said to "either accompany or flow from" justification, adoption, and sanctification (cf. SC, Q. 36). Both perspectives are true, but that of the LC is more basic and controlling.

Institutes, both chosen for their bearing on the doctrine of justification and its biblically faithful maintenance today.

First, the basic flow of Book 3 is instructive. Chapter 1, as already noted, introduces union with Christ by Spirit-created faith; chapter 2 further treats faith (its "definition" and "properties"); chapters 3–10 take up "regeneration by faith" and the Christian life ("regeneration" used here in a broader sense, equivalent to sanctification in subsequent theology); chapters 11–18 then focus on justification by faith (followed by chapters on Christian freedom, prayer, election, and the final resurrection). What is remarkable here is the "ordo" (!): Calvin discusses the change that takes place within the sinner, our ongoing inner renewal and personal transformation, *before* the definitive change effected in the sinner's legal status, our forensic standing *coram Deo*. He addresses the removal of the corrupting slavery of sin before considering the abolition of the guilt it incurs. All told, he treats sanctification, at length, before justification. Such an approach contrasts conspicuously with subsequent Reformed and Lutheran theology, where justification always (without exception?) precedes sanctification.

Why does Calvin proceed as he does? More importantly, what enables him to take this approach without compromising or minimizing the Reformation doctrine of justification, but rather, in taking it, to provide one of the classic discussions of that doctrine? One can only admire what Calvin has achieved in structuring the first 18 chapters of Book 3 as he did. Here is a truly impressive theological coup.

The constantly echoing charge from Rome at that time (and ever since) is that the Protestant doctrine of justification, of a graciously imputed righteousness received by faith alone, ministers spiritual slothfulness and indifference to holy living. In responding to this charge, subsequent Reformed and Lutheran theology, concerned at the same time to safeguard the priority of justification to sanctification, especially against Rome's reversal in suspending justification on an ongoing process of sanctification, has asserted, more or less adequately, that justifying faith is never alone in the person justified; as the alone instrument of justification it is a working, obedient faith, in the sense that it is "ever accompanied with all other saving graces" (*Westminster Confession* 11:2).

Calvin's approach is different. He counters Rome's charge, masterfully and, in my opinion, much more effectively, by dwelling at great length (133 pages) on the nature of faith, particularly its inherent disposition and concern for holiness, distinct from the issue of justification and before beginning to discuss justification. He concerns himself extensively with sanctification and faith in its sanctified expressions, largely bypassing justification and without having yet said virtually anything about the role of faith in justification. He has taken this approach, he says in a transitional passage right at the beginning of chapter 11 (the first on justification), because "It was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God." Calvin destroys Rome's charge by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without

particular reference to justification, a concern for Godliness that is not to be understood only as a consequence of justification.

Calvin proceeds as he does, and is *free* to do so, because for him the relative "ordo" or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically. Rather, what has controlling soteriological importance is the priority to both of (spiritual, "existential," faith-) union with Christ.²³ This bond is such that it provides both justification and sanctification ("a double grace"), as each is distinct and essential. Because of this union both, being reckoned righteous and being renewed in righteousness, are given without confusion, yet also without separation.

To illustrate Calvin uses a metaphor that seems hard to improve on (3.11.6): Christ, our righteousness, is the Sun, justification, its light, sanctification, its heat. The Sun is at once the source of both, so that light and heat are inseparable. But only light illumines and only heat warms, not the reverse; both are always present, without the one becoming the other. Or as he puts it elsewhere, Christ "cannot be divided into pieces."²⁴

There is no partial union with Christ, no sharing in only some of his benefits. If believers do not have the whole Christ, they have no Christ; unless they share in all of his benefits they share in none of them. Justification and sanctification are inseparable not because God has decided that subsequent to forgiving sinners and extrinsic to that forgiveness, he will also renew them. Rather, they are inseparable because of who Christ is and the nature of our union with him. Calvin calls justification "the main hinge on which religion turns,"²⁵ but clearly it is that for him only as that hinge is firmly anchored, and religion pivots, within the believer's union with Christ.²⁶

Second, prominent in Protestant, especially Lutheran, development of the doctrine of justification is the notion of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as an "alien" righteousness; the righteousness that justifies is apart from us, it is not our own but Christ's, not of our own doing but his. At issue here is the concern, not only understandable but necessary, not to confuse Christ's righteousness, as the sole ground for justification, with anything that takes place within the sinner, the concern not to obscure that justifying righteousness is perfect and complete, apart from anything the believer does, in what Christ has

²³ "Let us sum these ['benefits of God'] up. Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, [justification and sanctification]" (*Institutes*, 1:725 [3.11.1]).

²⁴ *Institutes*, 1:798 (3.16.1); elsewhere, most notably perhaps in his opening comments on Romans 6, he speaks of those who "shamefully rend Christ asunder" (*perperam . . . Christum discerpere*), when "they imagine that gratuitous righteousness is given by him, apart from newness of life" (*Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* [trans. J. Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], 217; my thanks to Mark Garcia for pointing me to this and other places in Calvin where this expression occurs).

²⁵ *Institutes*, 1:726 (3.11.1).

²⁶ For a recent treatment on union with Christ and justification in Calvin, reaching similar conclusions, see C. B. Carpenter, "A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification," *WTJ* 64 (2002): 363-86, esp. 371-84.

done, once for all, in his finished work. In that sense, to speak of “alien righteousness” is surely defensible.

At the same time, we should recognize, a definite liability attaches to this expression. “Alien” suggests what is remote, at a distance; it can easily leave the impression of an isolated imputative act, without a clear relationship to Christ and the other aspects of salvation. In this regard, I have the impression that some Reformed thinking on justification centers on a line, focused on the individual sinner, that moves from my eternal election to its realization and documentation in history by my faith, produced by regeneration, that receives justification. On this view Christ and his work are surely essential but recede into the background, along with other aspects of salvation.

A different tone is heard in Calvin. In expressing himself on justification, including imputation, he always, explicitly or implicitly, relates it to union with Christ. Perhaps his most pointed statement on imputation in this regard is the following:

Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our heart—in short, that *mystical union*—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. *We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him.* For this reason, we glory that we have *fellowship of righteousness* with him.²⁷

Here there is no mingling of Christ’s righteousness with some presumed righteousness of our own. But, at the same time, that righteousness, as imputed, is, in an absolutely crucial sense, anything but “alien.”

Such remarkable and compelling words, I dare say, could only be written by someone with the *ordo salutis* intimated in *Institutes*, 3.1.1, and who has also incisively anticipated subsequent insights into the redemptive-historical substance of Scripture and the gospel, particularly the soteriology of the apostle Paul. These words are no less timely today, when, perhaps as never before, the notion of imputed righteousness is either misunderstood or rejected.²⁸ Only as we maintain imputation as a facet of what Calvin calls our “fellowship of righteousness” (*iustitiae societatem*) with Christ, as an integral aspect of our union with Christ crucified and exalted, will we do so in a fashion that is more compelling and fully cogent biblically.

²⁷ *Institutes*, 1:737 (3.1.1.10), emphasis added. Note that this statement occurs in a context where he is intent on refuting Oslander’s view that justifying righteousness consists of the believer’s “essential righteousness.” In other words, the root of that serious error, a false understanding of union, does not lead Calvin to tone down on his own understanding of union in relation to justification but rather to assert that union most emphatically.

²⁸ E.g., the recent sweeping rejection of R. H. Gundry, “Why I Didn’t Endorse ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration’ . . . even though I wasn’t asked to,” *Books & Culture*, (January/February 2001): 6-9; see the helpful response of J. Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002).

As added value, doing that will provide a much more effective response to the persisting misunderstanding of Roman Catholics and others that the Reformation doctrine of justification renders sanctification unnecessary. It will also help the heirs of the Reformation to keep clear to themselves something they have not always or uniformly appreciated, namely how integral, no less essential than justification, to the salvation accomplished and applied in Christ sanctification is, involving as it does the pursuit of that "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

In fact, from Rom 8:29-30, to take but one instance briefly, it is fair to say that in our salvation our sanctification is strategically more ultimate than our justification. For there sanctification, seen as culminating in our glorification, is the goal aimed at, all told, in our predestination. Further, sanctification, in view as our being "conformed to the image of his Son," contemplates and effects the even more ultimate end, "that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." Such is the stake the exalted Son has in sanctification—we may stress, the personally involved, intimately engaged stake: his own ever-accruing glory in the midst of that brotherhood comprising those, freely justified, who are being conformed to his image.

That all-surpassing glory, as much as anything, ought to be the constant and controlling preoccupation of the church in all matters of *ordo salutis*.