

## BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vol. 1: *Prolegomena*. Ed. John Bolt. Trans. John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003. Pp. 685, including indexes. ISBN 0-8010-2632-6 \$49.99 (cloth).

The publication of this translation of the first volume of Herman Bavinck's four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* is an event whose importance for the advancement of Reformed theology can hardly be exaggerated. Though Bavinck's dogmatics was written about one hundred years ago and reflects the state of theological discussion of an earlier period, it remains one of the most important summaries of Reformed theology ever written. However, unless students were able to read Dutch, Bavinck's dogmatics remained largely inaccessible or could only be known through Bavinck's much abbreviated work, *Our Reasonable Faith*, or second-hand through what is in many ways an English digest of Bavinck, Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*. Now students will be able to read Bavinck unabridged and profit from the immense learning and erudition that characterizes his *Reformed Dogmatics* throughout.

Several years ago the Dutch Reformed Translation Society undertook the project of publishing an English translation of Bavinck's dogmatics. Before the publication of this volume, which represents the first in what is projected to be a four-volume set (like the original), two sections of Bavinck's work were translated and published by Baker Book House as separate volumes, one on the eschatology section and one on the creation section. The publication of these earlier portions of the dogmatics served as a kind of downpayment on the whole project of which this volume is the first installment. Prior to the Dutch Reformed Translation Society's decision to undertake to translate and publish Bavinck's dogmatics, English-speaking readers were limited to a translation of the doctrine of God section of Bavinck's work (most recently

reprinted and issued by the Banner of Truth Trust). When the remaining three volumes are published in the next few years, students of Reformed theology will have access for the first time to the complete set of four volumes in the English language.

There are a number of noteworthy features of this English translation of Bavinck's dogmatics. The editor, John Bolt, provides a fine introductory essay that sketches Bavinck's life and theological contribution. In his essay, Bolt helpfully locates Bavinck in his own historical context and describes distinctive features of Bavinck's theological approach and method. The translation itself is based upon the second edition of Bavinck's dogmatics, which was originally published between 1906 and 1911. Whereas the Dutch edition was organized into twenty-two paragraphs in three chapters, the translation divides the work into seventeen chapters. Two significant editorial additions to the original are the provision of chapter subdivisions and headings, and the insertion of the editor's synopses of the content of the various chapters. The editor concisely summarizes several other editorial features of this English translation as follows: "All Bavinck's original footnotes have been retained and brought up to contemporary bibliographic standards. Additional notes added by the editor are clearly marked. All works from the nineteenth century to the present are noted with full bibliographic information given in the first note of each chapter and with subsequent references abbreviated. Classic works produced prior to the nineteenth century (the church fathers, Aquinas' *Summa*, Calvin's *Institutes*, post-Reformation Protestant and Catholic works) for which are often numerous editions are cited only by author, title, and standard notation of sections. More complete information for the original or an accessible edition for each is given in the bibliography appended at the end of this volume. Where English translations of foreign titles were available and could be consulted, they have been used rather than the original. Unless indicated in the note by direct reference to a specific translation, translations of Latin, Greek, German, and French material are those of the translator taken directly from Bavinck's original text" (p. 22).

As these comments indicate, the reader of this translation is well served by a considerable number of editorial improvements upon the Dutch edition on which it is based.

Bavinck's dogmatics follows a traditional arrangement of the topics of systematic theology. This volume, which provides an introduction to Bavinck's treatment of the traditional six *loci* of

theology (theology, anthropology, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology), is aptly subtitled *Prolegomena*. In this first volume, Bavinck introduces the distinctive method and organization of dogmatic theology within the theological encyclopedia. The bulk of the volume then addresses the subject of the *principia* of dogmatic theology. These *principia* or principles/sources of dogmatic theology are the objective revelation of God and the subjective or internal reception of revelation by way of the human response of faith.

The greatness of Bavinck's work as a dogmatic theologian, however, does not lie so much in the specific content and conclusions of his dogmatics. Though Bavinck provides a masterful summary of the broad consensus of the Reformed theological tradition on the continent of Europe, he excels as a model of the way Reformed dogmatic theology should be prosecuted. Few authors exhibit the kind of coalescence of several, indispensable characteristics of the Reformed dogmatic tradition that are exhibited in Bavinck's dogmatics. Among these characteristics, several may be distinguished.

First, Bavinck seeks to honor throughout the Reformed insistence upon the priority of Scripture and confession in dogmatics. The editors rightly retain the original title of Bavinck's work, *Reformed Dogmatics*, since Bavinck aims to base his theological conclusions upon their biblical and confessional foundations. In his method, Bavinck is neither a Biblicist nor a traditionalist. On the one hand, he seeks to honor the principle of *sola Scriptura* and derive his theological claims from the teaching of God's inscripturated special revelation. On the other hand, he does not read the Scriptures in isolation from the church and her confessional summaries of Scriptural teaching. Bavinck's approach strikes a nice balance between the primary authority of Scripture and the subordinate authority of the churches' confessions.

Second, readers of Bavinck will undoubtedly be impressed by the extraordinary reach of his learning and familiarity with the history of Christian theology. Bavinck's conversational partners in the enterprise of dogmatic theology include the church fathers, representative theologians of the various branches of the historic Christian church, and especially the more important writers in his own theological tradition. In a remarkable way, Bavinck appeals to and interacts with a wide range of theologians and theological traditions. Bavinck's dogmatics are, accordingly, not only properly

characterized as biblical and confessional; they are also *catholic* in the proper sense of that term. Bavinck is no Biblicist who has no interest in the conclusions of others, whether Catholic or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed, liberal or conservative. Nor is Bavinck a traditionalist who wishes only to repeat the findings of the past. At every step of the way, the reader will find that Bavinck is engaged in an ongoing conversation with theologians of the past as well as the present, many of whom represent views with which he sharply differs but which he nonetheless addresses with care and interest.

Third, though it may constitute something of an obstacle to the contemporary reader, Bavinck's work is marked by an evident *contemporaneity*. Not only does Bavinck address and consider the history of dogmatics, but he also writes out of the context of the theological debates and challenges of the nineteenth century. Those who are familiar with the history of dogmatics will undoubtedly understand Bavinck's considerable interest in the question of revelation in a post-Enlightenment and post-Kantian context. Because the present volume addresses the foundational issues of theological prolegomena, Bavinck exhibits throughout the course of this volume a keen interest in answering the contemporary challenges to an orthodox doctrine of revelation that any Reformed theologian faces. Rather than simply repeating the answers of the past, Bavinck offers a defense of the claims of classic Christian and Reformed theology against the background of contemporary discussion. Recognizing the serious challenge to the doctrine of revelation in Kantian philosophy, Bavinck painstakingly sets forth a case for the classic view of the Christian tradition.

And fourth, Bavinck's theology also honors the orthodox Reformed insistence that theologians, as well as church members in general, are pilgrims on the way. Some Reformed readers of Bavinck may find him at times to be too irenic or cautious in his statement of a Reformed viewpoint. This will likely be due to the modesty and reserve of Bavinck's style of presentation and argument. Before Bavinck seeks to refute the position of a philosophical or theological adversary, he ordinarily takes pains to present the position in the most fair and sympathetic manner. Not only does Bavinck not shirk the tough questions, but he painstakingly endeavours to appreciate the attractiveness of an alternative viewpoint. Though this may disturb the impatient reader who wants only to read Bavinck's refutation of an unreformed view,

it represents one of the strengths of Bavinck as a theologian. When Bavinck finally arrives at a conclusion or offers a rebuttal of an alternative viewpoint, the reader may normally assume that he has not given this alternative shortshrif nor has he avoided the complexities of the subject. In adopting this style of presentation and argument, Bavinck reflects in his theological method something of the humility that must characterize the work of any theologian who rejects a doctrine of perfectionism in any form, including a form of theological perfectionism. Conformity to Christ requires a life-long process of renewal by the Spirit as much in theology as in any area of legitimate human calling.

Readers of this review will no doubt detect in these comments something of my admiration for Bavinck's dogmatics. Though it is certainly regrettable that Bavinck's work was not translated into English until now, the adage, "better late than never," holds true in this case. With the publication of this first volume and, D.V., the publication of the remaining volumes, contemporary readers will be able to witness Reformed dogmatic theology at its best. *Tolle et lege* ("take up and read").

—Cornelis P. Venema

Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches. Halakbah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. Pp. 314, bibliography and indexes. ISBN 0-8010-2758-6 \$29.99.

The author is a fellow of Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, and a reader in New Testament studies. In this volume he gathers nine essays, seven of which have been previously published. His interest is to examine the moral logic of early Christian ethics, seeking to discover what were its binding norms, the source of their authority, and the basis for their promulgation (p. vii). The essays are arranged into three parts: Jewish law, universal or "natural" law, and public ethics.

Regarding Jesus' attitude toward the law, the synoptic Gospels show little trace that Jesus overturned or contravened the Torah itself. Rather, his ethical teachings participated in the contemporary Jewish legal and moral debates, and fit within the spectrum of mainstream first-century Jewish opinion. This is illustrated (in chapters 2 and 3) by the "insertion clause" found in Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce (Matt. 5:32, 19:9), and by Jesus' instruction

to a would-be disciple to “let the dead bury their own dead” (Matt. 8:22, Luke 9:62), a maxim originally set within the context of Nazirite symbolism. Part One concludes with an essay on the Paul-Peter confrontation in Antioch mentioned in Galatians 2, assessing James’ motivation in sending emissaries to Antioch as reflecting his concern for the renewal of the twelve tribes within the Promised Land.

The chapters comprising Part Two examine the tensions between theory and practice in carrying out the Gentile mission. How should the Gentile Christians relate with Jewish Christians in terms of Torah-obedience? Part of the solution was the recovery of the universal dimension of the Torah, found in the Noachide moral tradition embedded in those commandments governing Jewish treatment of non-Jews. Especially Luke and Paul articulated the substance of Christian moral teaching in terms of these Noachide commandments, so that the Jewish law for Gentiles, integrated with Christology, came to serve as one of the pillars for Christian ethics.

Once Christian moral instruction had come to include these universal principles pre-dating the Torah and embedded within it, early Christians were in a position to participate in public moral conversation within their ancient Greco-Roman context. Undergirding this conversation was an apologetic that explained the church as neither Jew nor Gentile, but as Christian. The author evaluates contributions of Aristides and the *Epistle to Diognetus* as samples of early Christian public moral discourse.

Bockmuehl’s premise is clear: “Ironically, it seems to have been precisely the application of Jewish law to the Gentile mission that allowed Christianity to blossom into a faith for the world, with a clear and distinctive yet truly universal ethic” (p. xv). This collection of essays supplies ample material, including discussion of early rabbinic and Christian sources, for equipping the discerning reader to participate in the lively conversation about the transition—morally as well as theologically—from Israel to the church, from Old Testament to New Testament.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

George W. Braswell, Jr., *What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000. Pp. xiv + 183. ISBN 0-8054-1829-6 \$9.95.

One of the most discussed topics in the closing years of the twentieth century was the soaring population of the world. At the dawn of the new millennium, our planet is now the home of more than six billion people. An equally important phenomenon has been the migration to the Western countries of a great number of people from what used to be known as the mission fields of Asia and Africa. This fact demands our attention since some of our neighbors are followers of one of the major world religions. Lately, Muslims have become quite visible in our metropolitan areas due to a great influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Furthermore, they have gained quite a few converts, especially among African Americans. It won't be too long before they overtake the Jewish population and become the second largest religious community in the USA. While there is no dearth of literature in English on Islam, most of such works are written by secular authors who naturally have no interest in missions to Muslims.

This is why the appearance of this latest book of George W. Braswell, Jr. on Islam and Muslims is such a welcome event. In 1996, he published a similar work, *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power*. The author is Professor of Missions and World Religions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In the fourteen chapters of his book, Dr. Braswell treats the following topics: The Muslims Are Coming!; Muhammad: Prophet, Ruler, Commander in Chief; Believe Correctly, for the Quran Says So; Living the Good Life: How to Get to Heaven; A Whirlwind Beginning: A Global Expansion; Are All Muslims Alike? Unity And Diversity; Sitting at Table with Muslims; Muslims and Some Big Issues; The Clash of Two Giants: Christianity and Islam; Islam's View of Jesus and Christians; Christian Responses to Muslim Denials; Jesus and Muhammad; The Christians Are Coming!; Muslims in the United States.

It is no exaggeration to say that the scope of this book is encyclopedic. Everything you need to know about Islam and Muslims is right here at your fingertip. The "You" in the title of the book is obviously the American Christian who values his or her faith as based on the Holy Scriptures, and who needs help to

properly engage in missions. In this age of globalization, Muslims and other followers of world religions have become our new neighbors. We have a golden opportunity to meet Muslims and share with them the authentic good news. But it is not an easy task, for unlike the followers of other religions, Muslims have come to reside among us accompanied by a religious and cultural baggage that is thoroughly antithetical to the Christian faith and life.

I totally agree with Braswell when he writes: “Christian witness to Muslims is based not only on understanding as much as possible about Muslim belief and practice but also on one’s own preparation in Scripture and prayer” (p. 7).

There are other quotable gems. Professor Braswell contrasts the different “mandates” of Christianity and Islam in these words: “What does the future hold for relations between Christianity and Islam? That is uncertain, but one thing is clear: both religions have a message and a mandate. Christianity has a mandate to go into all the world and preach the gospel, a gospel of salvation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Islam has a mandate to practice jihad and to bring the non-Muslim world under the rule of Allah and the injunctions of the Quran” (p.8).

Another statement dealing with religious liberty and freedom of religion deserves a full quotation.

“On one hand the Quran asserts, ‘Let there be no compulsion in religion’ (2:256). On the other hand it states, ‘If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him, and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost’ (3:85).

“Islam has a history of ill treatment and at times death to those who leave it. The Quran speaks harshly of apostasy; an apostate will face the wrath of God in the hereafter (47:25-28). Islamic law (sharia) often demanded the punishment of death for apostasy from Islam. Many traditions say of those who change their religion from Islam, ‘Let them be killed.’

“Christians have been placed in great danger in missionary efforts toward Muslims. Any convert from Islam to Christianity has also faced even greater risk. Thus, freedom of religion has not been a positive matter within Islam. Some Muslim nations prohibit missionary activity, restrict the religious freedom of minority religions, and place great obstacles in church building and growth.

“The overarching worldview of Islam is that of Islam against the world. The world must be converted to Islam, or brought under



its domination. . . . The Muslim view has been ‘once a Muslim always a Muslim,’ thus the harsh treatment for apostasy. As Islam grows and multiplies in non-Muslim populations, it faces issues of separation of religion and state and religious liberty for all peoples” (p. 121).

While I have great appreciation for this book, I found certain mistakes that should be corrected in a future edition. They fall under two categories: some are in the area of transliteration of Arabic words, while others are important factual errors.

On page 10, the author, in referring to the controversies among Christian churches in the days of Muhammad (sixth and seventh centuries), wrote: “Also, within the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Orthodox Christians had theological differences with the Roman Catholic papacy in Rome. There were disputes over the doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ. These disputes were later to influence Muhammad and his understanding of Christianity.”

There is no doubt that the disputes among Christian churches before the days of Muhammad may have contributed to his misunderstanding of Christianity. However, these theological controversies beginning with Nicea in A.D. 325, and culminating at Chalcedon in A.D. 451, were not disputes between Rome and Constantinople. The controversies centered on the natures and wills of Jesus Christ. They occurred within Eastern Christianity and gave rise to the Monophysite and Nestorian churches. The final rupture between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism did not take place until A.D. 1053, four centuries after the rise of Islam!

On page 46, the author deals again with the divisions among Christians at the time of the rise of Islam. But he describes these controversies as having occurred between Rome and Constantinople. “Christianity was engaged in internal struggles between the Roman Catholic Church headquartered in Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church headquartered in Constantinople.” But as I remarked in the previous paragraph, actually the theological and ecclesiastical divisions at that time occurred within the territory of Eastern Christianity. The great schism between East and West did not take place until early in the second millennium.

The real tragedy of Eastern Christianity is that the Orthodox party used the arm of the state to persecute the Monophysites in Egypt and the Nestorians in Mesopotamia. It was the followers of these non-Chalcedonian persecuted churches that mistakenly welcomed the Arab-Muslim armies, imagining that they were their

liberators. Later on, they discovered to their dismay that the Muslim conquerors had imposed on them the harsh rules of the so-called “Protected” or “Dhimmi” status.

A similar confusion between Rome and Constantinople is found on page 95, in the fourth paragraph. Instead of reading it as “the Church of Rome,” it should read “the Church of Constantinople.”

On page 32, when transliterating the Arabic words of THE GREAT CREED OF ISLAM, an important word is omitted. The Arabic version “of the confession (shahada) of Muslims” is rendered: “*Ilaha illa Allah. Muhammad rasul Allah.*” The first Arabic word “La” of the confession is omitted. Without it (a negative particle), the confession is meaningless. Usually, this brief Islamic credo is prefaced by the Arabic words: “*Asb-hadu anna,*” i.e., I bear witness. The complete Muslim confession states: “*La Ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah.*” (“I bear witness that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God”).

On page 37, the Arabic name for “the Feast of Sacrifice” is “*Id al-Adha,*” and not “*Id Adhan,*” as printed. The latter spelling may be due to Dr. Braswell’s great acquaintance with the Persian language that transliterates the Arabic original words differently.

On page 91, the name of the radical Muslim leader should be transliterated, “*Qutb,*” and not “*Qubt.*” *Qubt* is the Arabic spelling for a *Copt*, a Christian from Egypt.

On page 97, there is a great confusion regarding the exact identity of the Muslim rulers who persecuted Western Christian pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, thus paving the way for the Crusades in 1096. The author relates the following episode. “In 1076 a Muslim Turkish emir who took control of Jerusalem under the authority of the Ottoman Empire placed extreme difficulties upon Christian pilgrims.” Actually, the first time the Ottoman Turks appeared on the horizon of world history was around 1280. The Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, thus bringing to an end the Byzantine Empire. It was not until 1516 that they began the conquest of the Middle East, and obtained control over Jerusalem. The “*Muslim Turkish emir*” belonged to the Seljuk Turks, who had wielded power in the Middle East centuries before the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

These suggested corrections are not meant at all to detract from the great value of this work. Braswell’s *What You Need to Know about Islam & Muslims* has many excellent and helpful features. Any

serious student of Islam will be greatly enriched by owning this book.

— Rev. Bassam M. Madany

Gordon H. Clark, *What is Saving Faith?* Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004. Pp. 193. ISBN 0-940931-65-6. \$12.95.

As Simon Gathercole noted in a recent issue of *Modern Reformation*, the nature of saving faith is a significant factor in the current debates about justification. Given that we are justified by faith alone, one may rightly ask, what precisely is the nature of that faith? In this respect, then, the republication of Gordon Clark's treatment of the subject is noteworthy. There are actually two works being published under this title: *Faith and Saving Faith* (first published by Trinity in 1983) and *The Johannine Logos* (first published in 1972). While the two works address concerns particular to each, they both treat the nature of saving faith and both come to a unified position. Saving faith, as Clark asserts time and again, consists in intellectual assent to the propositions of Scripture, most particularly to the propositions that define the way of salvation (pp. 82-88).

Clark clearly believes that elements have been added to the definition of faith by many Protestants that unfortunately compromise its character. If any of the fruits of faith are imported into the conception of faith itself, Clark argues, then the notion that true saving faith is that which looks away from itself to its object is lost. Clark fears that even many evangelical and Reformed have not been clear on this point. In response to such concerns, Clark seeks in this work to recapture an understanding of faith that is free of any admixture of works, a faith that itself is not saving but that assents to the proposition of the gospel that Christ alone saves.

We can appreciate Clark's emphasis on the object of our faith—Christ and his work—as that alone which saves. There are a number of other things that we can appreciate in this work. Clark insists that there is no divorce between the written and living Word (p. 143), that the head/heart dichotomy is false (pp. 61-2), and that even many evangelicals have bought into the evacuation of intellectual content from truth, regarding truth simply as “encounter” (p. 125). Thus he offers a necessary critique of and corrective to romanticism, neo-orthodoxy, existentialism and

various forms of post-modernism which argue that truth is personal and not propositional.

The question remains, however, whether Clark adequately defines faith and whether his definition is consistent with how it has been defined in the Reformed tradition. The Reformers claimed to grasp the scriptural witness concerning the nature of saving faith over against the centuries of doctrinal accretions of Rome. On this score, Clark's position, that faith is assent to a proposition, falls short of a full, biblical definition. The historic Reformed position agrees that faith involves knowledge (unlike implicit faith) and assent (true belief). But true saving faith is more than these. True saving faith has at its heart *trust*, an complete reliance upon and resting in the person and work of the Savior. To confess this is not to add works to our faith; rather, it is to understand the nature of faith as a divine gift, for the sovereign Lord grants faith to his own dear children.

In his Foreword, John W. Robbins seeks to set Clark's examination of faith in a historic context. Robbins argues that "long before the Neo-orthodox theologians thought of saying that faith is an encounter with a divine Person rather than assent to a proposition, preachers who ought to have known better taught that faith is trust in a person, not belief in a creed" (p. 9). To be sure, classic liberalism sloganeered that Christianity is about a relationship with a person and not belief in a creedal statement. It also sloganeered that true Christianity involved the heart and not the head, being more "caught" than "taught." To say, in fact, that Christians are those who relate to a person rather than those who believe in a proposition (or set of propositions) is the quintessential post-modernist error. For one cannot know a person without believing true propositions about that person. If in earlier times the propositional was stressed at the expense of the personal, it is now the case in our post-modern era that the personal has eclipsed the propositional.

Robbins is right to argue that "'trust in a person' is a meaningless phrase unless it means assenting to certain propositions about a person" (p. 9)—the kinds of propositions that we find in the Bible and in the creeds and confessions of the church. Where Robbins is wrong is that he questions whether "having a 'personal relationship' with Christ . . . means something more than assenting to true propositions about Jesus?" If so, Robbins wonders, "what is that something more" (p. 10)? This is a

curious question, finding resonance in what follows from Clark. For example, Clark wonders what a term to describe faith (as one finds in the Westminster Larger Catechism), like “*resting or reliance*” means. He seems to intellectualize faith entirely; and he rejects the idea that faith has any mysterious element—call it trust, reliance, confidence, and the like—which the Holy Spirit must impart as the *sine qua non* of faith. Yet Clark admits that “not all cases of assent, even assent to Biblical propositions, are saving faith” (p. 88). But, why not? What is it that makes some cases of assent to biblical propositions saving faith and other instances not saving faith? Isn’t it a trust in Christ, resting in him alone, that is vital to saving faith? If Clark wishes to fold that into his definition of assent, which he seems as times to do, then I have no great quarrel with him (pp. 150-51). However, he more often he seems to define assent in an entirely intellectual way.

The classic Reformed answer to Robbins’ and Clark’s question has been that the “something more” of saving faith, versus merely “assenting to true propositions about Jesus,” is “whole-souled trust and reliance in Jesus.” The Westminster Larger Catechism puts it this way: “Justifying faith is a saving grace . . . whereby he [a sinner] not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness” (WLC 72). Whatever “receiveth and resteth upon Christ” means, it is clearly something in addition to bare assent, which assent is explicitly denied as being the “only” thing of which justifying faith consists. This is the same definition of faith given in the Westminster Confession of Faith (XI:1-2; XIV:2), though acceptance of Christ alone is added to receiving and resting upon him alone. Clark regards the addition of these requirements to assent in the Westminster Confession of Faith to be “unfortunate” (p. 40). One begins at this point to wonder how Clark is repristinating a Reformed definition of faith when he takes issue with Westminster’s definition of faith, and, in varying degrees, the definitions of John Calvin, Thomas Manton, John Owen, Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, J. H. Bavinck, and Louis Berkhof, *inter alia*. Given his, oftentimes, trenchant critique of leading Reformed theologians, writers who have extensively treated the subject, it becomes difficult to see how Clark is defending, as he claims to be doing, a Reformed view of faith.

As noted above, no small part of the justification controversy now troubling the church involves the definition of saving faith.

The Reformed confessions are quite careful to distinguish faith and works. For instance, while noting that works always accompany saving faith, the Belgic Confession states that faith itself involves a looking away from all that is one's own in order to receive and rest upon Christ alone (cf. Belgic Confession, Articles XXII-XXIV). Saving faith, then, involves believing the truth as set forth in the Scriptures, particularly about sin and its remedy in our Savior, and entrusting oneself entirely to Christ, allowing no dichotomy between the propositions of Scripture and the person of Christ, between the written Word of God and the incarnate Word of God.

Robbins and Clark claim to be upholding the classic Reformed position over against all who would introduce works, law-keeping, and obedience into the act of faith, in which the believing subject relies wholly on Christ, the object of faith, and nothing in himself. Thus they are right to distinguish faith from all that invariably accompanies it—differentiating between faith and its fruits. But Clark is clearly not within the Reformed tradition in defining faith itself as knowledge and assent alone. Doubtless, he believed that such a definition would preserve the integrity of faith and keep it from being mixed with works. The irony is that the position Clark articulates in his book reduces faith to an intellectual exercise and does not properly distinguish between saving faith and the faith of demons, for even demons assent to the truth; that is why they tremble. Although Clark attempts to distinguish saving faith from the faith of demons, arguing that demonic faith is simple monotheism, in my estimation others have successfully argued that demonic faith involves more than mere monotheism, though it clearly does not involve trust (p. 153).

After a few pages of dealing with the nature of faith broadly conceived, what Clark calls “generic faith” and “secular belief,” he proceeds to address the “Roman Catholic views” of faith. He does this before proceeding to a several page examination of the “biblical data.” Clark argues that prior to the fourth century the church had no clear view of faith. While it is true that reflective analysis of the act of faith itself awaited Augustine and his successors, earlier church fathers were quite concerned with the content of faith, for obvious reasons. This is to say, belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the apostolic proclamation of his person and work, accompanied by the exhortation to repent and believe, was crucial for the early church. That men and women wholeheartedly believed the gospel message, not least that of the

martyrs, is scarcely debatable as one reads the history of the early church. These were men and women who embraced the faith with all their being, entrusting themselves to their Lord, even unto death. Meanwhile, it is to be observed that Augustine gave us the simple definition of faith that Clark favors: “To believe [to have or exercise faith] is to think with assent.” This definition was essentially codified at the Second Council of Orange (529) and not significantly addressed again by a council until Trent (1545-63).

Clark moves quickly from agreeing with Augustine’s definition of faith to taking issue with several features of Aquinas’s view, namely that the object of faith is a person, not a proposition, and that our knowledge is not univocal or equivocal but analogical. However, he agrees with Thomas’s statement that “faith is an act of the intellect, under the command or direction of the will,” particularly “if it is detached from Thomistic empiricism and incorporated into Augustinian philosophy” (p. 32). Clark also disagrees with Newman and others regarding the nature of saving faith—and rightly so. In the midst of all this he has a helpful discussion of implicit faith—the notion, developed by Rome, that the laity by and large generally believe the church implicitly, while her magisterium must believe explicitly for the church—the church being weak and ignorant, unable to exercise explicit faith. Clark properly criticizes this and notes the sound Reformed opposition to it (as in Calvin and the WCF).

What is puzzling, if not to say inexplicable, is Clark’s failure to point out that neither Augustine nor Aquinas believed that faith, as they defined it (as “assent to an understood proposition,” p. 28), was saving. From Augustine on, theologians came to elucidate various aspects of faith, not only *fides implicita* and *fides explicita* (implicit and explicit faith, as noted above), but *fides acquisita* (faith acquired through natural means), *fides infusa* (faith acquired through supernatural infusion into the soul), *fides demonum* (merely historical objective faith, such as the demons could exercise), and, most importantly for our consideration, *fides informis* and *fides formata* (unformed faith and formed faith). Unformed faith, for Augustine, Aquinas, and the other medievalists, was intellectual assent. The definition, then, of faith that Clark so admires in Augustine and Aquinas was to those great theologians as yet *unformed* faith, to which *caritas* (love) must be added in order for it to be active, formed, saving faith.

It is important to understand the concepts of formed and unformed faith, and how it was precisely this distinction, along with the required addition of love which transformed unformed faith into formed faith, which came under fire in the Reformation. Susan Schreiner is helpful in elucidating what the medievalists meant by these two terms: “The distinction between formed and unformed faith rested on a crucial distinction, made by medieval theologians, between the justice of Christ and the justice of God. The justice of Christ was granted in baptism and renewed in the sacrament of penance. This grace both pardoned past sin and gradually transformed sinners so that they might become pleasing to God. The Christian was a *viator* (“pilgrim”) traveling from the justice of Christ toward the final justice of God. Only by cooperating with grace could the Christian do the meritorious works that enabled him to stand before God. To meet the demands of God’s final justice, the justice of Christ had to be completed by the righteousness of the believer. In medieval discussions this completion took place whether through the ontological elevation of the individual into a state of grace or through the acceptance of human deeds beyond their intrinsic worth [congruent merit]. In any event, only faith formed by love could justify the sinner” (*Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, v. 2, p. 90).

Luther and the Reformers who followed him decisively rejected this approach. They taught justification by faith alone. But it was not a faith that was merely assenting, as Augustine had defined unformed faith. In fact, Clark as much agrees that the Reformers and their followers have generally not defined faith as assent alone, but he seems unaware that Augustine, who did define faith as assent, did not regard such (unformed) faith as saving, for it was lacking and needed to be completed. Faith, as it came to be reconceived by the Reformers, did not conform to the traditional categories inasmuch as “they believed the traditional emphasis on love” as a necessary part of formed faith “led to the doctrine of [congruent] merit that had completely undermined the free grace of the gospel. As Luther so pithily stated [referring to the medievalists] ‘where they speak of love, we speak of faith.’” All of the Reformers defined faith as involving not simply assent, but also *fiducia* (trust), which was seen to be the heart of saving faith.

Though Clark takes issue with almost every major Reformed theologian, the presentation he offers of their views proves to be



invaluable, for he demonstrates the rich development of the doctrine of saving faith beyond the skeletal features of *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia*. Nonetheless, Clark never seems to grasp why the Reformers redefined faith in the way they did, and how they set this definition in opposition to the earlier concepts of unformed and formed faith. While there were differences among Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli on the precise nature of faith and its fruits (Calvin seeing a two-fold grace of God, bringing about forensic justification upon the initial exercise of faith and inner renewal on the continuing exercise of faith, all based on union with Christ), each and all of the Reformers agreed that the faith that alone justified, looking away from itself to the merits and mediation of Christ, was never alone; rather, it was ever accompanied by all saving graces. Faith was a trust in Christ that issued forth in obedience.

One might reason that Clark, as a good Presbyterian, most certainly agreed that faith included *fiducia*, as well as *notitia* and *assensus*. Strangely, he didn't. He quotes Calvin, asserting that Rome defined faith as "assent with which any despiser of God may receive as true whatever is delivered by Scripture" (p. 38). Clark responds: "Now, maybe some brash schoolman or stupid monk said this. . . ." Clark here criticizes Calvin for rejecting exactly what Rome had regarded as faith, albeit unformed faith. Calvin is critical of Rome both for her teaching of implicit faith and of unformed faith. Calvin, with Luther, sees faith as the instrument that appropriates salvation. Thus he rejects the older notion that faith is bare assent, to which love, that is to say, acts of obedience, must be added so that faith passes from being unformed to formed, from not sufficient to be saving to saving. Calvin sees a sure confidence in, a resting on and trusting in Christ as constitutive of saving faith. It is the element of trust that makes knowledge and belief into saving faith, wherein one's hope and trust rests in Christ alone. Clark is so concerned that some fruit of faith be smuggled into the definition of the essence of faith, he is unable to shake the fear that Calvin and other Reformed theologians compromised, albeit unwittingly, the very definition of the doctrine of saving faith.

Robbins and Clark consistently oppose irrationalism and the denuding of saving faith by those who would strip it of its intellectual content. For their opposition to this anti-intellectualism, they are to be applauded. But is the alternative to the anti-intellectualism of our age a renewed intellectualism, or is the right

response to romanticism a return to rationalism? While it is true that one cannot have knowledge of and belief in a person—that is, one cannot know God savingly, as required by John 17:3, for instance—without knowing and believing propositions about that person, we must ask whether such knowing and believing is enough when it comes to saving faith? May one not have what Jonathan Edwards called “purely theoretical speculative knowledge” about Christ and his Word and yet not have truly received and rested upon Christ? I do not know a Reformer or Puritan who in the whole of his teaching would maintain that such a bare assent to the facts of the gospel is to be equated with saving faith in Christ. Clark agrees that we ought not to pit the personal and propositional against each other in terms of the truth. Our goal is to know the truth, which consists of propositions, to be sure, but knowing the truth also involves a personal, intimate knowledge of him who is the truth incarnate (John 14:6).

Christ himself is the Truth that sets us free (John 8). In Jesus, the personal and the propositional come together, since Jesus is himself the embodiment of truth. This is the remarkable teaching of Christianity. There is no truth with a capital “T” that exists outside of God. There are no absolutes outside of God to which God himself must conform. God *is* the absolute; and thus God is truth. The only man who ever lived who was truth incarnate was our Lord Jesus Christ, because he was no mere man but God and man in one person. That truth is personal and not abstract, like Plato and other Greeks thought, is made evident by the incarnation. The earth shattering proclamation that the Word became flesh (John 1:14), thus revealing the inseparability of the personal and the propositional, does not seem fully to impact Clark. Even in his work on the Gospel according to John, Clark never properly comes to terms with the reality that one may know and believe certain propositions about Christ without entrusting oneself to the person of Christ. He dismisses talk about there being any real difference between belief about Christ and trust in Christ, as well as the commonplace assertion that one can know and believe, yet fail to entrust oneself to Christ and so fail thereby to have a true personal relationship with Christ (pp. 75-77). He distains and dismisses all such talk as mystical nonsense. Even as monumental an intellect as B. B. Warfield, who is often more accused of rationalism than mysticism, is quite clear that there is a

mystery to saving faith that goes beyond mere assent, involving that mysterious work of the Spirit in us (John 3).

Perhaps one of the most telling features of the book is a theme that repeatedly recurs, most pointedly in an excursus on pp. 55-62 entitled, "Interlude on the Head and Heart." Here Clark really tips his hand. To be sure, he rightly recognizes that head and heart are not to be pitted against each other; he vigorously asserts that heart is not lacking in intellection. Clark is reductionistic in the opposite direction from those who would exclude head from heart: he instead identifies mind (or head) and heart. Commenting on Psalm 4:4 ("Meditate in your heart upon your bed and be still"), Clark writes, "Here intellection is commanded and emotions are explicitly forbidden. Meditation is a strictly intellectual activity. It requires quiet and stillness. Emotion hinders, distorts, or almost eradicates thinking" (p. 57). This is a far cry from B. B. Warfield's excellent lengthy piece, "The Emotional Life of our Lord." Warfield takes pains to demonstrate how Christ in his humanity had a full and godly emotional life. Our Lord was no rationalist "unable to be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." Warfield also has an able treatment in that same article of how Christ, though fully human as well as fully divine, is properly impassible in his deity yet entering into our suffering and experiencing the full range of godly emotions. Clark's view, pertaining to what it means that God is immutable and impassible, tends toward a rather static view of God. Faith, I would argue, is more dynamic—and mysterious—than Clark would allow.

Statements like, "sanctification is basically an intellectual process" (p. 131), and a host of related statements reveal Clark as something of an ivory tower intellectual and not someone who has dealt extensively with the common man (cf. p. 142). Though one may not agree with all that Manton (pp. 152-158) and Tozer (pp. 133-140) said about faith, they nonetheless grasped and emphasized some things that Clark misses. Furthermore, Clark's attempt to enlist Machen in his reductionistic intellectualism falls flat when one understands that Machen's concern in his own treatment of faith was the stripping of knowledge from faith and not the adding of trust to faith (pp. 86-87).

In all that he treats, Clark sounds the same note again and again: faith is believing and that means "assent to propositions." Anything added to this definition of saving faith, as far as Clark is concerned, is incomprehensible and irrational. In both the work on

saving faith and on John's gospel, Clark continues to the end to puzzle over what *f̄ducia* (trust) may mean as the completing element of saving faith. His wonderment remains a puzzle to me.

—Alan D. Strange

James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*. Christianity in the Making. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. xvii + 1019. ISBN 0-8028-3931-2 \$55.00 (cloth).

This hefty tome is the first installment of a three-volume history of the beginnings of Christianity (A.D. 27-150). The focus of this initial volume is on the meaning of Jesus for the Christian faith.

Christianity began with the historical Jesus. So, in Part One, "Faith and the Historical Jesus," we receive a substantive account of the so-called "quests for the historical Jesus." What access do we have to the facts pertaining to this Jesus? What kind of history do the Gospels provide? What was the role of faith in the origins of these writings? Dunn maps out this dynamic force-field where history (historiography), hermeneutics, and faith meet.

The description of this encounter forms the heart of Dunn's contribution in this volume. It is nothing less than a methodological proposal for reformulating our understanding of the nature and origin of the Gospel materials.

Twentieth-century scholarship has viewed the Gospels primarily as *literary documents*, and therefore has sought to identify layers of textual redaction which must be peeled away to get to the real and original Jesus.

This approach, however, tends to ignore the nature and function of *oral tradition*, especially as the processes of forming oral tradition furnish evidence of a past remembered through numerous retellings, or "performances," of the story of Jesus' life and work. Invoking a metaphor from music rather than literature to explain his approach, Dunn understands the synoptic tradition "as the repertoire of the early churches when they recalled the Jesus who had called their first leaders and predecessors to discipleship and celebrated again the powerful impact of his life and teaching" (p. 249). On the basis of this method, Dunn proceeds to construct a portrayal of *the remembered Jesus*, and of the impact made by his words and deeds upon the first disciples as that impact was

translated into oral tradition, passed down in oral performance, and finally written down in the Gospels.

Past questers, functioning with a literary paradigm, have overlooked the likelihood that variations between the synoptic Gospels arose from usage, from the church's varied-but-lively interaction with the remembered Jesus. Dunn speaks of "performative variations of the tradition," of "the stories and teachings [of Jesus] which were performed in the earliest disciple/church gatherings and which gave these gatherings their identity and rationale" (pp. 328-329). Variety among the Gospels is explicable if, in duplicate or parallel versions of the same story, we may distinguish between the story's core and its details. We thereby discover that the church's concern to remember Jesus comes to expression in the key, shared elements, while the dynamic vitality of the tradition is expressed in the variations. Differences between the synoptic versions of the Lord's Prayer, for example, can be accounted for best in terms of liturgical usage and development. "In oral transmission a tradition is performed, not edited. And as we have seen, performance includes both elements of stability and elements of variability—stability of subject and theme, of key details or core exchanges, variability in the supporting details and the particular emphases to be drawn out" (p. 249). This notion of *performance* permits an immediacy of interaction with a living theme, even when it gets embroidered in various retellings.

Dunn's approach—and this is its boldest advertisement—will satisfy neither those whose view demands the historicity of every detail and word of the text, nor those who find in the text nothing but the faith of the early church. These approaches have proven inadequate, according to Dunn. He proposes a third way. "If the Synoptic tradition does not give us direct access to Jesus himself, neither does it leave us simply in the faith of the first-century Christian churches stopped well short of that goal. What it gives us rather is *the remembered Jesus*—Jesus not simply as they chose to remember him, but also as the impact of his words and deeds shaped their memories and still reverberated in their gatherings" (p. 328). What is recoverable to modern Bible readers is not *the past as such*, but always and only *the remembered past*. All we have to go on is the shared memory of Jesus, now in a written form that fixes what up to that point had been a series of story performances (oral retellings). The "Jesus of history" is available to us only as the remembered Jesus.

What, then, supplies the data about the remembered Jesus? The four chapters of Part Two analyze the sources (namely, Mark, Q, Matthew and Luke, the *Gospel of Thomas*, John, other Gospels), oral tradition, and the historical context of the remembered Jesus. This analysis is needed in order to “re-envision the historical realities behind the Gospels and attempt to get back in some sense from the Gospels to Jesus” (p. 140).

In discussing the sources of the Jesus tradition, Dunn pauses to assess the potential significance of Q for a study of Jesus’ message and mission. The author reminds us that although it is held by a majority of NT scholars, Q is merely a hypothesis (actually, several hypotheses, including a Q-document, a Q-community, and a Q-redaction). Dunn then offers the puzzling conclusion that “[g]iven the imponderable uncertainties about Q itself, the questions of the date, place, and reasons for its composition may be too much a matter of *obscurum per obscurius*. The only real clarity is that Matthew and Luke used the document Q . . .” (p. 159). Such an assertion of clarity seems more a concession to reigning orthodoxy on Dunn’s part than a conclusion arising from careful historiography. Similarly puzzling is his conclusion that the use, for evaluating the authentic Jesus tradition, of the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* is to be determined, finally, in terms of the dating of this document and of the synoptic tradition. The latter is “undoubtedly early,” and any attempt to date the *Gospel of Thomas* as equally early “implies a theory of tradition history too much in terms of literary strata/editions rather than of oral retellings/performances” (p. 165). Why dating the *Gospel of Thomas* as early as the synoptic Gospels betrays a faulty theory of literary redaction is unclear. Why does this same disqualification not apply to an “undoubtedly early” dating of the synoptic tradition?

Before turning, in Parts Three, Four, and Five, to a presentation of the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus as remembered by others, Dunn clearly summarizes his thesis and method on pages 335-336. In brief, “the Jesus remembered [by eyewitnesses] *is* Jesus, or as close as we will ever be able to reach back to him” (p. 335). The rest of the book devotes attention to the characteristic themes in the Jesus tradition. Not literary dependence, but variegated narrative performances (oral retellings), explains the continuities and discontinuities among the Gospels. Acknowledging the difficulty of providing proof positive of his thesis, Dunn asks the reader “that the same judgment of plausibility which convinces most scholars of the priority of Mark and the existence of Q be exercised in relation

to Synoptic texts where literary dependence is less obvious and is at least arguably less plausible” (p. 336).

This seems a good point at which to offer several concluding observations in service to those inclined to pick up Dunn’s book.

James Dunn is clearly seeking a way beyond the impasses to which scholars have been brought by the quests for the historical Jesus. His dialogue with the various schools of historical criticism is both patient and fair. He also interacts at several points with the work of his contemporary NT colleague, N. T. Wright, whose multi-volume series, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, investigates many of the same issues.

In the end, however, one suspects that Dunn’s thesis and method result in the same impasses as those of the theories of literary dependence that emerged from the twentieth-century quests of the historical Jesus. Regrettably, what Dunn means by “memory” is quite vague, and what he understands in this context by “shared memory” is unclear. How did memory function? How does collective or shared memory function differently than individual memory? At many points, the remembered Jesus seems to be none else than the *interpreted* Jesus. If considerations regarding the processes of oral tradition cannot permit the historical judgment that “Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead,” but permit only the conclusion, “Jesus is remembered to have raised Lazarus from the dead,” what is the message of the text that modern preachers must preach?

When the historical character and authenticity of the Gospels are in view, the ultimate test case, of course, is the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The payoff of Dunn’s approach appears perhaps more clearly here than anywhere else. The author argues that Jesus’ resurrection cannot be identified as a datum, a fact that has come down to us. The only datum we have is the *report* of an empty tomb and of subsequent encounters with Jesus. The conclusion “Jesus has been raised from the dead” is an interpretation of the data. “Christians have continued to affirm the resurrection of Jesus, as I do,” writes Dunn, “not because they know what it means. Rather, they do so because, like the affirmation of Jesus as God’s Son, ‘the resurrection of Jesus’ has proved the most satisfactory and enduring of a variety of options, all of them inadequate in one degree or other as human speech, to sum up the impact made by Jesus, the Christian perception of his significance” (p. 879).

Of course, we do well to remember that the Gospels do indeed communicate interpreted facts, which means: under divine inspiration the Gospel writers were *preaching* this Jesus, and the significance of his person and work. They had come to believe in him and to be transformed by his Spirit. But interpreted facts are still facts. In Dunn's view, however, the Gospels furnish us not with facts, but merely with the interpretation, impact, and significance of these inaccessible facts. Judged in terms of the self-presentation of the Gospels and the testimony of Scripture about itself, it is difficult to escape the impression that Dunn has reached—albeit along a different route—a destination identical to that reached by twentieth-century quests of the historical Jesus. For them, the Jesus of history was finally not as significant as the Christ of faith. Is Jesus remembered any more authentic?

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

David J. Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard J. Mouw's He Shines in All That's Fair*. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003. Pp. xii + 100. ISBN 0-916206-81-5. Price unknown.

The history of the Protestant Reformed Churches is bound up with the subject of common grace, particularly the “three points” on common grace that were adopted by the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. It is not surprising, therefore, that in this small volume David J. Engelsma, professor of dogmatics and Old Testament studies at the Protestant Reformed Seminary and editor of the *Standard Bearer*, revisits this subject. Originally published as a lengthy series of review articles, this volume strongly rebuts Richard J. Mouw's defense of the doctrine of common grace. For Engelsma, Mouw's recent defense of common grace provides an opportunity to revisit the debates of the past and to offer a ringing endorsement of the Protestant Reformed Churches' insistence that the doctrine of common grace represents a serious departure from historic Calvinism. Mouw's endorsement of the doctrine of common grace, Engelsma argues, illustrates the way the Christian Reformed Church and other Reformed communions have accommodated the distinctive Reformed doctrine of particular grace and sovereign election.

After a brief preface in which Engelsma praises Mouw for his “fresh study” of the doctrine of common grace, Engelsma begins



his review with a summary of Mouw's position and argument. Noting that Mouw's interest is in "that aspect of common grace that consists of a non-saving love of God for the reprobate wicked in this life" (p. 2), Engelsma views Mouw's position as a reaffirmation of the three points of 1924, but one that intends to give the Dutch Reformed debates about common grace "broader ecumenical exposure" (p. 3, the expression is Mouw's). What distinguishes Mouw's contribution from past debates is the greater civility and care that he exhibits in treating the position of Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches. Engelsma notes appreciatively, for example, that Mouw criticizes those who fail to appreciate the Protestant Reformed objection that the doctrine of common grace inevitably encourages accommodation to the world. He is pleased to note that Mouw repudiates the use of the epithet, "anaBaptist," to caricature the Protestant Reformed position as one that advocates a policy of flight from involvement in worldly affairs. Mouw's defense of the doctrine of common grace displays a more sensitive and civil tone than the language of earlier proponents of common grace. Nonetheless, Mouw does affirm the principal claim of common grace proponents, namely, "that God has a non-saving love for all humans" and that he "blesses all humans with many gifts, including a gracious work of the Holy Spirit with them that restrains their depravity and produces a certain goodness in them and in their works" (p. 7).

The bulk of Engelsma's book consists of a series of arguments against Mouw's case for a doctrine of common grace. Among the most important arguments that Engelsma adduces are the following: first, the absence of any biblical or confessional basis for the doctrine of common grace; second, the unwarranted claim that the ungodly are capable of performing "non-saving" but nonetheless "good" deeds; third, the incoherence of a position that advocates "empathy" toward the non-elect, even though God hates them and wills their condemnation in hell; fourth, the confusion in common grace theology of God's grace with his providence; fifth, the incoherence of Mouw's claim that an "infra-lapsarian" view of God's decree allows for a positive, non-redemptive purpose of God in respect to creation and humans; sixth, the failure to connect God's supposed non-redemptive purposes in history with his redemptive purposes in Christ; and seventh, the undesirable consequences of the doctrine of common grace. A cursory glance at this list of objections to the doctrine of common grace indicates

that Engelsma regards Mouw's book as an occasion to reconsider many of the older debates regarding the doctrine and to prove irrefutably that it is a thoroughly unreformed and dangerous teaching.

Though I have a number of reservations and objections to the way Engelsma prosecutes his case, his study does present a fairly comprehensive restatement of the traditional Protestant Reformed position. For those who wish to become more acquainted with that position and its supporting arguments, Engelsma's study will serve well as a clear and forceful presentation. Because Engelsma assumes some acquaintance with the history of the discussion of common grace within the Dutch Reformed community, however, readers who are unfamiliar with this history may not always be able to follow the thread of his arguments or understand the allusions to features of this history.

Since I have not provided anything more than a listing of Engelsma's arguments against the doctrine of common grace, I will not attempt in this review to interact with them in any substantial way. Readers of Engelsma's review of Mouw's book will have to determine for themselves whether Engelsma's arguments are cogent and persuasive. I do wish to comment, however, on the style and manner of Engelsma's study, since he intends it to be a book that addresses the "unconverted" on the subject of common grace. While recognizing that many of his readers will be hostile to his position, Engelsma clearly states in his preface that he wishes to gain a "hearing" on this important doctrine (p. xii). He also commends Mouw's civility in handling this controversial subject. Despite his desire to speak to the "unconverted" on this issue and his commendation of Mouw's civility in handling it, Engelsma's study will not likely gain the kind of hearing that he seeks. Though it may confirm the "converted" in their opinions about the doctrine of common grace, the way Engelsma writes and argues his position will prove unpersuasive to many readers.

To illustrate what I mean by the style and manner of Engelsma's study, I will mention only two examples. Engelsma opens his critical evaluation of Mouw's position by noting that he appeals to only one biblical text (Luke 6:35) and to a few isolated references in the Reformed confessions. Even though Engelsma acknowledges that Calvin taught a relatively modest doctrine of common grace, his thesis is that the doctrine has no support whatsoever in the Scriptures and that it necessarily compromises

key elements of a Reformed theology of election. Whether this thesis is true or not, he does not provide the reader with the kind of evidence that would support it. To do so, he would have to acknowledge and consider many other biblical texts that proponents have cited in support of the doctrine of common grace. He would also have to show that, because a particular doctrine is not expressly or fulsomely affirmed in the Reformed confessions, it is on that account positively unreformed to hold it. The point of these observations is that Engelsma charges Mouw and all proponents of any form of common grace teaching with holding an unbiblical and anti-Reformed teaching. He does not simply ask for the freedom to promote the Protestant Reformed repudiation of the doctrine of common grace. Rather, he invites his reader to share his judgment that all proponents of common grace teaching are, wittingly or unwittingly, advocates of an Arminian denial of key elements of the historic Reformed faith. The evidence provided for these strong assertions is simply inadequate to the task.

The second illustration of Engelsma's style and manner of argument is the frequent use of caricature. Despite his plea for civility on the part of critics of the Protestant Reformed denial of common grace, Engelsma hardly exhibits civility when he ascribes positions to proponents of common grace that most would explicitly deny. For example, when proponents of a doctrine of common grace speak of the ungodly performing relative or "non-saving" good deeds, Engelsma insists on interpreting this to mean that they are regarded to have "pleased" God in some absolute sense. Even though he admits, for example, that some deeds of the ungodly are better than others (p. 38), more egregiously wicked deeds, he leaves the reader with the impression that common grace proponents are saying something else, namely, that in the strictest sense of the term the ungodly perform "good" deeds. Moreover, in an especially unfortunate "Afterword" at the close of his last chapter, Engelsma cites a recent incident at Calvin College as an example of the consequences of common grace. According to Engelsma's account, Calvin College "sponsored a concert by notorious lesbians" (p. 98) and defenders of this sponsorship justified it by appealing to God's common grace in music. Whether or not the incident is accurately reported by Engelsma, his use of it is not uncharacteristic of the way he argues his case. Without showing any necessary connection between a doctrine of common

grace and this particular incident, Engelsma employs what can only be described as a kind of “debater’s trick”—guilt-by-association.

Examples of this kind of style and manner in Engelsma’s study could easily be multiplied. The unfortunate consequence is that an important subject for debate becomes an occasion, despite Engelsma’s claim to the contrary, to preach to the “converted” and to aggravate needlessly the “unconverted.”

—Cornelis P. Venema

Lawrence W. Farris, *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry*. The Alban Institute, 2000. Pp. xi + 89. ISBN: 1-5669-9228-1 Price unknown.

This book is more of a study of sociology than theology. Yet for those who serve as pastors in rural areas *Dynamics of Small Town Ministry* offers interesting and helpful insights.

The Bible doesn’t say that a pastor should buy groceries and other goods in the small town where he lives versus driving a few miles to trade in a larger community. Yet there’s some wisdom in doing at least some business locally, since small town merchants often feel betrayed or neglected if a local pastor doesn’t do business with them. The unspoken rule is that if the pastor shops locally, his salary (paid by members of the community) will stay in the community where it will benefit the community.

What’s a small town like? The following statements offered by Farris are more than stereotypical. They’re largely true! A small town has to have a Main Street. It has at least one restaurant or café where the same people have coffee every morning. Just about everyone waves at you when they meet you. There’s not much to see, but what you hear about everyone else makes up for it. Small town people love their high schools and their high school sports. Plus, you can write out a check and never be asked to show your I.D.

Yet there are several types of small towns: river towns, railroad towns, mill towns, market towns, company towns, cow towns, coal towns, college towns. But more important than the industrial or geographical features of small towns are population trends and expectations for the future. A small town with declining population has different needs than a small town whose population is steady or growing. To put it another way, people in small towns need the same gospel—the same message which calls sinners to repent and be saved. But as groups of people, they need different kinds of

pastoral care depending on whether their communities are waxing or waning.

A wise small town pastor will try to learn the history of his community. He'll try to figure out which families have contributed leaders and vision. He'll try to understand what, if any, defining moments (like surviving a tornado or a flood) have cemented the community's identity. And since much of a community's history is unwritten, the best way to learn it is to listen to its elderly residents.

What role is a small town pastor expected to fill? Farris describes the pastor as being a trusted outsider. In communities where everyone knows everything about each other, the pastor represents an outsider with whom secret hurts may be shared in confidence. If the pastor breaks confidentiality, he fails to fill this role, and his effectiveness in ministry will be compromised. But the pastor must not hold himself aloof. Though an outsider, he should take an interest in community events. Perhaps this is an application of the principle of becoming "all things to all men."

Since most pastors who serve in small towns are trained in seminaries based in urban areas, this book provides helpful reading for anyone called to pastor in a rural setting.

—Roger Sparks  
Pastor in "small town" Iowa

D. G. Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. Pp. 263. ISBN 0-8010-2615-6 \$24.99.

Cyprian of Carthage in the third century affirmed that "he who does not have the Church as his Mother, does not have God as his Father." John Calvin did not take this to be an ancient "Romish" error but a proper understanding of God's Word. He heartily reaffirmed Cyprian's dictum as an important part of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, especially over against any Anabaptistic attacks on the institution of the church. In his helpful and ably argued work, D. G. Hart joins forces with Cyprian, Calvin, and all who have a high view of Christ's church. Hart calls for the recovery of a lively sense that the church serves as the nurturing mother of those who are sons and daughters of the Father.

All of the sixteen chapters (save one) of Hart's book have been previously published. Naturally, this makes for some overlap and repetition among chapters and contributes to some gaps and slight

transitional problems. These are minor, however, and the insights and arguments contained within all these chapters overbalance any such stylistic deficiencies and make the book well worth reading. We very much need a balanced recovery of a liturgical Presbyterianism within our day, and though I will later criticize Hart for what I see as some lack of balance, on the whole he makes a good case for liturgical recovery.

In his Introduction, Hart delineates three main approaches taken by Calvinists in seeking to glorify God. The first we might call the doctrinal approach; the second, the Reformed world-and-life-view approach; and the third, the experimental Calvinism approach. In the doctrinal camp, Hart places, for example, Ligonier Ministries, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, the Westminster Seminaries, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He regards world-and-life-view supporters as spanning a spectrum running from theonomists on the right to various CRC types on the left. He sees experimental Calvinism as embodied in the Banner of Truth Trust, the New Life Presbyterian Churches (OPC and PCA) “and wherever the Puritan era is remembered as a golden age of Calvinist history” (p. 11). To be sure, this is painting with a rather broad brush, given the rather widely disparate nature of views held within any one of the enumerated groups. Theonomists and Dooyeweerdians differ widely, for instance, as do some Puritan sympathizers and New Life “sonship” advocates. Nonetheless, Hart is trying to understand certain tendencies and approaches taken by Calvinists in which task some sort of generalization is inevitable.

Hart, as one might anticipate, has differences with each of these three approaches and seeks instead to “make the case for . . . a fourth sector” (p. 12). He calls the approach for which he vies “liturgicalism.” “[B]y liturgicalism, I mean an understanding of Calvinism that is firmly rooted in the ministry of the church in her gathering for worship.” Hart expands further: “Liturgicalism is not simply concerned with the content or order of worship services; it involves the life of the visible church through her officers, ordinances, and public worship. Rather than making correct beliefs, sanctified endeavor, or emotional intensity the crucial piece of the Christian life, Reformed liturgicalism recognizes, as Calvin did, the importance of worship, the means of grace, and participation in the body of Christ for the gathering of new believers and the sustenance of mature saints. In fact, an implicit claim of this book is that any effort to understand Reformed doctrine, worldview, or

piety in isolation from the corporate church and public worship is inherently flawed. So essential to the Christian walk are the means of grace and the ministry of the church, ordinances that transpire chiefly during public worship, that to engage in theological or cultural reflection or to pursue Christian devotion apart from the reality of belonging to the church and partaking of her ordinances is to commit a form of religious reductionism” (p. 12).

One might rightly infer, then, that Hart is not arguing that the first three approaches (doctrinal, worldview, and experimental Calvinism) do not have something significant to offer, but that they tend to absolutize their approaches and thereby miss something needed that is all properly integrated in and rightly held as a part of a Reformed liturgical approach. One might, I say, given the above extended quote, infer that in his fourth approach Hart has the three previous approaches in play in some measure. I would argue that we ought to have the key elements of the three approaches fully in play. But it is not clear, as Hart develops his arguments for the fourth approach throughout this work, that he always properly appreciates the contributions of the first three. One can more readily see what Hart thinks to be the negative aspects of, for example, worldview Calvinism or experimental Calvinism, and little of the real contribution that each of those approaches brings to the table. I think that the most helpful approach is one that calls for a vigorous Reformed liturgicalism properly informed by the many valuable contributions of doctrinal, worldview, and experimental Calvinism.

These immediately preceding observations notwithstanding, I think that Hart makes many good arguments for the recovery of Reformed liturgicalism. He rightly criticizes modern evangelicalism for the thin-gruel that it often serves up in its shallow praise and worship choruses devoid of substantive theological reflection and “sermons” that sound more like corporate executive confidence-building pep talks than sound expositions of God’s Word (see especially pp. 69-103). Many have come to regard the traditional elements of historic Reformed worship—the creed, the responsive readings, the psalms and hymns, the law, the confession, the assurance of pardon, the Lord’s prayer, etc.—as cold, dead, and formal. The dialogic principle has been overthrown by chattiness and a thirst for entertainment. Hart is right to argue for the recovery of Reformed, biblical worship.

And yet, in all this, I would argue that we Reformed have something to learn even from those who oppose liturgical

Presbyterianism. We have something to learn, for example, from Arminians and charismatics who, though wrong, point us by their particular emphases to some real problems that have developed over time in Reformed worship. For instance, it is routinely acknowledged among thoughtful Reformed students that the Arminian innovation known as the “altar call” has become its own sacrament in evangelical churches. As a response to what has gone forward in the ministry of the Word, one might well argue that in our keen need to respond to the preached Word, some evangelicals have replaced the Lord’s Supper with the altar call. At least such evangelicals have some response to the preached word, inadequate and misguided as that is.

Many Reformed and Presbyterian have no sacramental response (maybe a hymn or offering), certainly no rich means of grace on a regular basis as is provided for us in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The desire of church members in charismatic circles for “words of knowledge” and other forms of divine communication in worship is the expression of an itch that used to be scratched by preaching. But it cannot be a preaching and a communing that is unintelligible, soporific, and disconnected to the lives of the congregants. Much of the difficulty, then, in Reformed churches (the low view of the church and of public worship) is of our own making: a low view of the public administration of the means of grace has yielded worship services in which parishioners have little awareness of God’s presence, of being seated in heavenly places, and of lives hidden with Christ in God.

All of this is to say that we all, Reformed included, need to be sensitive to the factors that led to some of what we have today. One does not get to the tent meeting revivals, Azusa Street revival, and the myriad forms of evangelical worship without a declension in solid biblical preaching and vital communing at the Table. To be sure, people are sinful and want their ears tickled: they want to be entertained. But in arguing that sermons, for instance, should not be viewed merely as “therapy,” we must be careful not to over-argue our point (p. 82). Sermons should, in no small measure, involve spiritual therapy, rightly understood and lovingly administered; and they should be saturated with doctrinal, worldview, and experimental concerns as appropriate to the text and times, being a living proclamation of the once-for-all gospel to all then and there.

So we need a liturgical recovery that engages the whole person—that is, a liturgical recovery that does this as richly as



doctrinal Calvinism engages the mind, experimental Calvinism engages the affections, and worldview Calvinism engages the life. Otherwise, such a liturgical recovery is likely to devolve into the mere formalism that often characterized orthodoxy when it was challenged by pietism centuries ago. We need a recovery that does not overshoot the mark, neither adopting an ecclesiology that swallows up soteriology, nor embracing a soteriology that eclipses ecclesiology. We need ecclesiology and soteriology (as well as each of the other *loci*) strenuously maintained. At his best, I hear something of this in Hart. But in other moments I hear him calling for a liturgicalism that does not look like the kind of robust worship that I believe reflects the totality of who we are as image bearers (cf. pp. 117-126). Sometimes Hart really tips his hand and lets the reader know the kind of worship for which he longs.

For instance, Hart argues that Reformed worship should be reverent. And rightly so. But what does he mean by this? “A helpful way of understanding reverence,” he writes, “may be to think of the ethos of a funeral service for professing Christians” (p. 76). Now, he qualifies this statement in ways that make it better than it might sound if that statement is taken in isolation. Yet, that he chose that image (a funeral service) to depict reverence in worship is telling. Someone may argue that the solemnity of a funeral might appropriately be a *part* of worship. But to define the worship itself by such is slicing things too thin and taking what might be one aspect of worship and making it controlling. There are rather serious consequences, in my opinion, in allowing the worship service to be shaped by the ethos of the funeral service, not the least being the entire shape and tone that that would give to the worship service.

That Hart is slicing things a bit too thin is also seen, I believe, in his treatment of certain features of historic American Presbyterianism. Hart argues that not only should confessional Presbyterians identify with the Old School (who were doctrinally and ecclesiastically faithful), but that those who would desire liturgical recovery should be Old Side as well (pp. 203-208). A brief reprise of these issues may prove helpful. The Old School/New School split in the Presbyterian Church occurred in 1837 and involved Old School rejection of various theological errors (particularly as manifested in the New Divinity, whose practitioners claimed to be following Jonathan Edwards) as well as ecclesiastical practices (such as many who were cooperating with the

Congregationalists and supporting extra-ecclesiastical mission and tract societies). Princeton became and remained the bastion of Old Schoolism in the North until the 1920s, but always gave qualified support to at least some aspects of the New Side.

The New Side/Old Side division occurred a century earlier than the New School/Old School division, lasting from 1741-1758. To be sure, supporters of the Great Awakening like Gilbert Tennent had contributed to this division, as Hart notes, by a fiery sermon that Tennent preached warning of the dangers of an “unconverted ministry” (p. 204). Hart fails to note that Tennent repented for the censoriousness of this sermon and that his repentance was a key part of the restoration of the Old Side and the New Side in 1758. The New Side not only supported the Awakening (with some significant qualifications) and wanted greater freedom in the mechanisms for training men for the ministry, but believed that personal examination of a man’s piety was an important part of his examination for the gospel ministry. The Old Side originally opposed such presbyterial examination of a candidate’s religious experience and the Old Side also insisted on a university education—rather difficult in the Middle Colonies where there was none available, leading to the Log Colleges and then Princeton. The two sides reunited, at least in part, because the New Side confessed its harshness and the Old Side agreed to have men examined on life as well as doctrine.

Obviously, much more could be said about this, but the reason I choose to emphasize this is that Hart’s call for us to be Old Side as well as Old School is at variance with the position of Old Princeton which had, I believe, a good balance between doctrinal Calvinism (think of Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*), experimental Calvinism (think of Hodge’s *Piety and the Princeton Theologians*), and worldview Calvinism (think of Kuyper’s *Lectures on Calvinism* delivered at Princeton as part of the Stone Lectures). It is true, I think, that Princeton was deficient in some of the elements of liturgical Calvinism. I join those who would criticize Warfield’s assertion that a vigorous view of grace, communicated through the sacraments to worthy receivers, is tantamount to sacerdotalism. Likewise, Hodge did not have a fully Calvinian view of the Lord’s Supper and many Old Schoolers had a deficient view of baptism. That notwithstanding, I do not believe that the remedy is to reject the concerns of the New Side at the time of the Great Awakening, namely that the people of God needed a true regenerating work of

the Spirit in their hearts (though not needing extraordinary manifestations of that work). Samuel Davies and other New Side men of his character demonstrated that among some of the Old Side there was a moribund Calvinism that led to a rather static, ossified expression of the faith. Rather than dismiss the New Side and its concerns *in toto* we are much better served by learning what in the way of a needed spirituality that New Side men brought to the table. In other words, let us learn what we can from a robust experimental Calvinism that might rightly be a part of a liturgical Calvinism.

Similarly, aspects of Hart's doctrine of the spirituality of the church, I believe, do not comport well with that doctrine as enunciated at Old Princeton (see pp. 51-65). Hodge certainly believed in the spirituality of the church—and by that he meant that the church was a spiritual organism that manifested itself in a visible organization to whom the Lord of the church gave oracles, ordinances, and officers. Hart's position seems closer at points to Thornwell's, whose doctrine, particularly in his defense of slavery, appeared novel to Hodge, as a muzzle on the prophetic voice of the church. I heartily agree that the church is a spiritual institution having the power of the keys over against those of the sword (the state) or the rod (the family). This shapes the whole of her approach: her power is ministerial and declarative, not magisterial and legislative; it is a moral and suasive power, not a legal and coercive power. This being said, even as the minister should properly concern himself in his exposition of the Word with exhorting his hearers to vital godliness and lively affections (experimental Calvinism), his preaching should not lack a concern for every sphere of life, including the exhortation to the Christian to his duties as a businessman, a worker, a citizen, etc. (worldview Calvinism). We do need to uphold the true spirituality of the church. We do not, however, need a doctrine of the spirituality of the church that seems to glory in its cultural irrelevance. The church is entirely relevant to the culture because God's Word is always relevant to the culture; one of the tasks of preaching is to show its relevance (not to "make it relevant"; it already is). Much of this may be done in the way of doctrinal Calvinism in which the sound preaching of doctrine exposes sin, holds forth the Savior, and invites us to renewal in him in the whole of our lives. One cannot conceive of anything that is more needed, and thus is more relevant to all, than such a full-orbed ministration of the Word of God.

Hart's call for a recovery of liturgical Calvinism is much appreciated and gravely needed. Even better would be the recovery of a liturgical Calvinism in which doctrinal, worldview, and experimental Calvinism, as Hart has helpfully styled them, take their place in a properly balanced way, expressed through a rich, dignified, and warmly engaging liturgy. This book calls us back to recapture something that even the Princeton tradition did not fully appreciate. And it does so with style, wit, and charm. It also does so with conviction and forcefulness. And for those reasons apart from any others it is valuable. It would be even better, in my estimation, if we would recover the Princeton tradition *and* a vigorous liturgicalism. Surely this would be joy unspeakable and full of glory.

—Alan D. Strange

Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. Pp. xiii + 167. ISBN 1-84227-155-5 \$17.99.

Though titles of books can be misleading, the title of this work by Stephen R. Holmes, lecturer in Christian Doctrine at King's College, London, accurately conveys its contents. On the one hand, Holmes presents a strong and intriguing case for "the place of tradition in theology." The primary thesis of Holmes' study is that contemporary theology impoverishes itself when it fails to give appropriate attention to the history of theological reflection within the community of Christ's church. On the other hand, Holmes includes several chapters that offer case-studies in the work of particular Christian theologians of the past. Each of these chapters illustrates what Holmes has in mind when he stresses an approach to theology that listens to the past. The language in Holmes' title, "listening to the past," reflects the twofold aim of this book: it simultaneously calls attention to a method of doing theology and to a series of illustrations of that method.

The first two chapters of Holmes' study provide a general statement and argument for his principal thesis. According to Holmes, the evangelical theological tradition in the modern era has not properly recognized its obligation to read the Bible in the context of the great tradition of Christian theology. Rather than acknowledging that a contemporary reading of the Bible occurs in the context of a long history of reflection on the Scriptures,

evangelical theologians have often approached theology in an a-historical manner. Even within the broader theological community, the interests of social history and preoccupation with contemporary issues have caused the theological work of past theologians to be pushed aside. From the point of view of social history, the contributions of theologians in prior centuries can be largely explained away as little more than a reflection of the ancient or older world in which they lived. From the point of view of those who are preoccupied with contemporary issues, the history of Christian theology proves to be in the main irrelevant to the concerns of the present day.

In his defense of a theological method that prizes the history of theology, Holmes appeals in particular to two theological arguments: first, the Christian doctrine of creation, which acknowledges the goodness as well as the limitations of our creatureliness; and the Christian doctrine of the church, which teaches that theologians fulfill their calling within a catholic community that includes the worthy theologians of the past. In his consideration of the first of these arguments, Holmes notes that the doctrine of creation requires an honest recognition of our “locatedness” and “limitations” as theologians. Though to be a temporal creature is not sinful, it does require a humble awareness of our limits, and the limits of the age in which we live. According to Holmes, the doctrine of creation reminds us of the need to take the passing of time seriously, and to recognize the benefit of the accumulation of theological understanding through the centuries. As a kind of “thought-experiment,” Holmes appeals to the humanity and creatureliness of the incarnate Christ to show that the recognition of creaturely limitation is not owing to the effect of human sinfulness, but inherent to the world as God created it. In his consideration of the second of these arguments, Holmes considers the implications of the doctrine of the catholicity and community of the church for theological method. If the one church of Christ is composed of various members with diverse gifts, this has far-reaching implications for the work of theologians. Theologians who allow the confession of the church’s catholicity to govern their theological method will inescapably interact with and join in theological conversation with theologians of the past. Any failure to take seriously the voices of the past in theology is tantamount to a denial, at least in terms of theological method, of the confession Christians make regarding the church.

After the first two chapters in which Holmes makes a case for listening to the past in theology, the remainder of this book consists of seven chapters that deal with various theologians and debates within the history of theology. The thread that holds these chapters together is Holmes' emphasis upon the need to listen to past theologians and voices as we engage the task of theology today. Since the theologians and topics that Holmes addresses are quite diverse and far-ranging, I will only offer a brief summary of one chapter to illustrate his method.

In chapter eight of his study, Holmes treats the subject of "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Reprobation." At the beginning of this chapter, Holmes notes that Barth's doctrine of election is often regarded to be one of the more striking and innovative features of his theology. Among many students of the history of Reformed theology, it is commonly thought that the traditional doctrine of election was not adequately grounded in Christology. The God who decrees is not clearly understood in terms of his revelation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is thought to distinguish Barth's view is the way he grounded his doctrine of election in Christology (the person and work of Christ). Without disputing the importance of grounding our doctrine of election in Christology, Holmes argues in this chapter that the real innovation in Barth's theology relates to the subject of reprobation. Though all of the better theologians of the Reformed tradition understood God's election in terms of the person and work of Christ, prior to Barth the subject of reprobation was not Christologically based. According to Holmes, Barth broke new ground by providing a clearer explanation than his predecessors in the history of theology of the Christological basis for reprobation. Before Barth the Reformed theological tradition was unable to develop a truly satisfactory doctrine of a "double decree" of election and reprobation, since its view of reprobation was radically divorced from the concerns of the gospel of Christ. Barth's contribution to a theology of election lies in his explanation of reprobation as God's "no" to sinful humanity in Christ. By speaking of Christ as both "elected" and "reprobated" man, Barth was able to provide a Christological account of both sides of God's decree.

Though I am not inclined to agree with Holmes' favorable opinion regarding Barth's doctrine of reprobation, his treatment of Barth illustrates the weakness as well as the strength of his study. The weakness of Holmes' study is fairly evident and is even

acknowledged by Holmes himself when he admits early on that his book is “something of a hybrid: most of the chapters came into being with no thought of a relationship to each other, and in some cases their central arguments add little or nothing to the general thesis of the book” (p. xii). Though some of the chapters, particularly the ones that treat Jonathan Edwards on the will and the debate regarding divine simplicity, bear a closer relationship to the main thesis of the work, others, like the chapter on Barth, do not seem to make much of a contribution or even illustrate Holmes’ main thesis. If someone were to judge this book by its cover and title, they would be surprised to discover that most of its chapters are a miscellany of treatments of theologians and theological topics. This is rather unfortunate, since Holmes argues an important thesis regarding the place of tradition in theology. When Holmes articulates that thesis, and musters a series of arguments for it, in the first two chapters and the last, he makes a persuasive and important case. However, despite the sometimes masterful and theologically significant treatments that Holmes presents in the chapters that comprise the larger portion of his study, the reader will not be able to suppress the conviction that the collection of these chapters in a single volume is somewhat artificial.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God’s Prophetic Plan for Ishmael’s Line*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003. Pp. 304. ISBN 0-8254-3184-0 \$14.99.

Dr. Tony Maalouf summarizes his thesis about “God’s Prophetic Plan for Ishmael’s Line” in these words: “By rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), this book attempts to revive the biblical profile of Ishmael. For long centuries Ishmael has been appropriated by Muslims in general and Arab Muslims in particular, regardless of their various bloodlines. In response, the Christian Church has distanced itself from this biblical figure and espoused to a certain extent a negative attitude toward him. It is time to present Ishmael from a Christian perspective, and to reclaim him as part of biblical legacy. This will help build a bridge for dialogue with those who claim Ishmael as their ancestor. The biblical legacy of Arabs and Jews has the potential to reconcile both antagonistic parties under the Abrahamic umbrella and to offer the

hope of the gospel of peace in an area tyrannized by war” (pp. 38, 39).

As we follow the history of salvation as first revealed in the Old Testament, we cannot escape the fact that God’s saving purposes were wedded to the line of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. There is no hint of a special place reserved for Ishmael and his descendents. Still Dr. Maalouf persists in informing us that “The appropriation of Ishmael by Muslims starting from Muhammad’s time has indirectly led the church to avoid this biblical figure and look at him with suspicion. As a result, any defense of Ishmael, lightly considered, may be misunderstood as an apology for Islam” (p. 49).

There are two main problems with this thesis. First, the author assumes that the “Arabs” are actually descended from Ishmael, and have been a distinct and specific ethnic people throughout history. But over the years, the word “Arabs” has had several meanings as Bernard Lewis has shown in his work, “The Arabs in History” (OUP, 1993). Originally, the term referred to the Bedouins of central and northern Arabia. By the twentieth century, it had evolved to denote all the peoples who speak Arabic and live in the lands between Morocco and Iraq. As far as their ancestry is concerned, most of present-day Arabs are actually the Arabized descendents of the various peoples who had lived in North Africa and the Middle East. The second problem is theological. In Part 4 of his book, Dr. Maalouf contends that “Belonging to the Abrahamic stock and displaying the sign of God’s covenant in their flesh, they were more accountable to God’s revelation. Thus they came first in God’s program of visitation of the nations; the more the privilege, the greater the responsibility. This was a primary reason why Paul visited Arabia first in his missionary activities as apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-17)” (p. 217).

These words form the core of the main thesis of this work, namely that there is a “prophetic plan for Ishmael’s Line” to be found in Holy Scripture. However, when Paul deals in Romans 9-11 with eschatological topics and specifically with the problem of Israel’s unbelief and their ultimate salvation, he says not a word about Ishmael. As to the notion that Paul’s visit to “Arabia” constituted the beginning of “his missionary activities as apostle to the Gentiles,” and was a proof for a special divine plan for the children of Ishmael, such a claim rests on very weak grounds. Neither Herman N. Ridderbos’ *Commentary on Galatians* (1953), nor



the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition of *The New Bible Commentary*, equates the “Arabia” of Galatians 1:17, with the Arabian Peninsula, the heartland of Islam. Most commentators on the “Arabia” of Galatians 1 identify it with the Nabatean land of southern Jordan. The official “foreign missions” ministry of Paul and Barnabas began later, according to Acts 13. It was initiated by the promptings of the Holy Spirit and actualized through the call and blessing of the young church of Syrian Antioch.

The author is very concerned about the Arabs and their future. However, to ensure a hopeful future for them in God’s plan of salvation, one need not overlook the particularism of the Old Testament dispensation. After all, it was both provisional and preparatory (Hebrews 1). At the dawn of the New Testament age, the gospel began to go to all peoples, regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. “As the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ ” (Romans 10:11-13).

As to the obstacles to missions to Arabic-speaking Muslims, these cannot be attributed to the church’s neglect of the biblical teachings regarding Ishmael. Rather the difficulties reside in the intrinsic Islamic rejection of the radical consequences of the Fall, and the necessity of redemption. In Islam, salvation takes place under purely revelatory auspices. According to Muhammad, and his followers, what humankind needs is simply divine “information.” To know (God’s will) is to do. This is the basic motif of Islamic soteriology.

Whether we are dealing with Muslims or others, we turn to the greatest missiologist of all time, to Paul. What he said regarding the main reason for the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews of his days, applies to Arab Muslims as well. “For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (Romans 10:2, 3 NIV).

Tony Maalouf’s work has the great merit of drawing the attention of Western Christians to the urgent need for the presentation of the saving Word of God to the Arabs at this very time when their world is at the center of our daily concern. Unfortunately, the specifics of his book are not in harmony with the

accepted principles of hermeneutics that have governed the interpretation of the Bible over the centuries. Still, the book is very worthwhile reading and extremely thought-provoking.

—Bassam M. Madany

Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne, editors. *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004. Pp. 544. ISBN 0-8010-2707-1 \$32.99.

Specialization has come no less to biblical and theological studies than to other fields of inquiry. Bible scholars today specialize in textual studies or synoptics or Johannine writings. This reality makes it difficult for the student and the pastor to keep up with developments across the field. Together with its companion volume, *The Face of Old Testament Studies* (edited by David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold), this volume provide a survey of those developments. Some of its essays discuss trends in NT studies; others identify movements of recent origin; while others analyze the content of a particular field of NT scholarship.

The book's four main sections of twenty-two chapters feature a roster of contributors who are recognized experts in their respective fields, including Stanley E. Porter, David A. deSilva, Craig A. Evans, Scot McKnight, Klyne Snodgrass, Craig L. Blomberg, Bruce Chilton, Donald A. Hagner, James D. G. Dunn, Darrell L. Bock, and Grant R. Osborne.

The opening essays review recent scholarship dealing with the socio-political context of the New Testament, followed by wide-ranging surveys of New Testament hermeneutics, including textual criticism, Greek grammar and syntax, and the use of the Old Testament. Very useful chapters appear in the third main section, which focuses on the Gospels, including modern approaches to the parables, Jesus' miracles, and the relation between John and Jesus. The final section is the largest and most fulsome, paying attention to issues arising in the study of the New Testament epistles.

The editors are clear about their purpose in assembling these essays: "The editors will be more than satisfied if students and their fellow scholars find in these articles a shortened path to the destination of biblical and theological knowledge, without which the church empties its gospel of content and context." Regrettably, this kind of survey leaves the question unanswered: Where, in all this

scholarship and specialization, does the church fit? Perhaps a new generation of Reformed biblical students can serve the church by showing biblical scholars the way back to vibrant ecclesial participation in the doing of biblical studies.

This volume lives up to its title, and supplies numerous helpful bibliographical leads for those interested in deepening their grasp of one or another facet of contemporary NT studies.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

K. Scott Oliphint, *The Battle Belongs to the Lord: The Power of Scripture for Defending our Faith*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003. Pp. 224. ISBN 0-87552-561-X \$12.99.

In the festschrift honoring Cornelius Van Til on his seventieth birthday, entitled *Jerusalem and Athens*, G. C. Berkouwer criticized Dr. Van Til for failing to engage in biblical reflection in his critique of Berkouwer's theology. Van Til conceded that his reply to Berkouwer "should have had much more exegesis in it than it has." Further, he acknowledged that "the lack of detailed scriptural exegesis is a lack in all my writings" (p. 203). Richard Gaffin, in a 1995 article in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, wondered whether Van Til was "too hard on himself and perhaps conceded too much to his critics" in the reply that he made to Berkouwer. Gaffin argued that "a reflective reading of Van Til shows a mind (and heart) thoroughly permeated by Scripture" (p. 103). I think Gaffin is right: a cursory reading of Van Til can give the impression of philosophical considerations trumping exegetical ones. A more careful reading, however, will reveal how thoroughly Van Til's apologetic is grounded in and saturated with the Word.

Gaffin did acknowledge in the *WTJ* article, however, that Van Til was not as explicit in demonstrating the biblical foundation for his apologetic as he might have been. Gaffin assays to correct this lack of direct exegesis by arguing that 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, taken together with other important Pauline and Gospel passages, serves in no small measure as exegetical warrant for Van Til's presuppositionalism. Gaffin demonstrates the implications of the Corinthian passage: that the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God (neither indeed can he) because they are spiritually discerned. In short, Gaffin's concern is to make evident that Van Til's apologetic is faithful to and properly expository of the

Word of God. Others have labored in that project as well. Greg Bahnsen and John Frame, for example, have sought to ground Van Tilianism exegetically. Perhaps the latest installment in this project of showing the biblical roots of Van Tilianism is the slender volume by Scott Oliphint, a professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia).

Like his colleague in apologetics, William Edgar, Oliphint has produced a work that should prove a great blessing to the church. Unlike many defenses of the faith from a Van Tilian perspective, this book is remarkably free of technical terms as it seeks to demonstrate that one who does apologetics needs a firm grasp of the hope within, being ready to give an answer to all who inquire as to the ground of our hope. Apologetics needs to be carried on in a biblical mode, since a significant part of the problem is that “apologetics has become a largely philosophical discipline” (p. 2). To be sure, it is quite helpful, particularly for the pastor or others who would seriously engage a wide range of unbelieving thought, to be philosophically informed and able to apply the tools of reason and logic to apologetic encounters. Even then, for any Van Tilian, revelation must begin, end, and surround the encounter (either explicitly or implicitly), and reason must be employed ministerially and not magisterially.

Oliphint does not deny that there is a transcendent necessity about things like the law of non-contradiction, but he also does not affirm that either the law of non-contradiction or any other laws of logic can account for themselves. God is not validated by the law of non-contradiction, but the law of non-contradiction is validated by God. Without using the language of the ontological Trinity or the self-attesting Christ of Scripture or seeking explicitly to refute the myth of neutrality, he does those very things from a number of biblical texts. The battle, he reminds us in the Introduction, is truly the Lord’s, and thus we must fight in the Lord’s battle defending the Lord’s truth in the Lord’s way by the Lord’s weapons.

The biblical text with which Oliphint begins is, appropriately enough, 1 Peter 3:15-17. This passage is certainly one of the classical texts of apologetics. Inasmuch as Stackhouse and others have called us to humble apologetics and have, in my estimation, failed in that task (is it humble to grant any ultimate validity to that which is opposed to him who is the way, truth, and life?), Oliphint succeeds. His tone and approach are not at all shrill and his writing exudes genuine humility, bowing at every point to the Lordship of

Christ, the quintessence of humility. To bring every thought captive to Christ and to submit all of our thinking to God's revelation is the true mark of humility. And it is this that Oliphint here and throughout this book seeks to do. After treating the Petrine text, Oliphint proceeds to Jude 1:3, developing its exhortation to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." He notes in this regard that attacks on the faith come both from without and from within the church. It is a fight in which we are engaged and, though we are to be meek, we are properly to fight. That fight is to be carried on stealthily and comprehensively, as he argues in chapter 3, expositing 1 Corinthians 10:3-5.

Oliphint notes that "perhaps one of the most difficult things about the Christian life, and particularly about apologetics, is the balance of authority and gentleness that is required if it is to be practiced obediently" (p. 76). Otherwise, apologetics devolves into postmodernist relativism on the one hand or authoritarian arm-twisting on the other. Oliphint avoids the latter, knowing that apologists for the faith are commanded to be gentle and that the Holy Spirit must work in the hearts of those whom we would seek to persuade; and he avoids the former by recognizing that apologetics, together with all theology, is grounded in the authority of God's Word. "Apologetics," Oliphint declares, "in many ways, is simply a battle over authorities" (p. 83). But it is not thereby reduced to a post-modernist "my-authorities-can-beat-up-your-authorities" position. No, the Bible as our authority is the only valid and ultimate authority; for this reason, "we are to let nothing turn our mind from following what God has said, from viewing the world in the way he has described it to us" (p. 86). Here's the point: apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, we do not see the world through the eyes with which God intends us to see it. Only by his gracious working in us by the Spirit do we have the new eyes to see, to look at reality wearing the spectacles of Scriptures. We realize that no matter how much Dan Rather or Michael Moore or anyone may say to the contrary, the sole criterion *of* and *for* truth is nothing other than God speaking in his Word.

Since the Spirit must make what the believer would seek to communicate to the unbeliever intelligible, does this not then render the apologetic task meaningless? Not at all. Though the unregenerate man, the man without the Spirit, does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, certainly at the level of epistemological self-consciousness, this does not mean that we should not present

an apologetic to him. We should present an apologetic because the Spirit might illumine him to see our argument. Moreover, we should present an apologetic because, on the deepest level, in his heart of hearts, the unbeliever knows God, being made in the divine image, yet suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. In chapters 4 and 5, Oliphint develops these themes in an extended treatment of Romans 1:16-32. His presentation is one of the best popular treatments of this passage and, as reviewers like to say, is alone worth the price of the book. In an era of theological confusion, it is refreshing to hear a fellow Van Tilian say what Oliphint does on pages 106-111 concerning the righteousness of God, noting that though God has not “compromised his just and holy character,” he has provided in the gospel a way that sinners might be justified and gain access to a holy God through the person and work of Christ.

That all unregenerate persons have a knowledge of God which they suppress means that all people are in a relationship with God. Not a saving relationship, to be sure, but “a relationship nevertheless” (p. 126). Because of this relationship, all people are without excuse and without a defense of their unbelief. This means that “any and every position that is opposed to Christianity is utterly indefensible” (p. 128). Oliphint argues that this truth needs to be burned into our hearts. I believe he is absolutely right in saying so. What we need most in the apologetic encounter is the humble conviction that the one opposing the truth has ultimately no defense. He may know lots of things and we may learn lots of things from him. We can do this freely without being shaken in our ultimate commitments because we know that on one level the unbeliever does not know the truth and thus cannot successfully challenge the gospel. Our certainty arises also because we know that on another level the unbeliever is suppressing the truth to which we can make appeal. Thus the unbeliever is not to be feared or despised, but may rightly be pitied as a person at war with him- or herself. No matter how much unbelievers may belittle the believer, God has placed eternity in their hearts as well. Unbelievers know that there is a just judge to whom they will one day give account, and all their protestations to the contrary, they are simply trying to convince themselves that they are unafraid when in fact they are terrified. If we keep this in mind, then we will not be frightened in the encounter, but loving, patient, and firm. When we are frightened, we tend to engage in abusive *ad hominem*. When we know that we are on the side of truth, we have a quiet confidence that

allows us to deal with our opponent not out of desperation but out of true humility. This humility leads us to wonder why we are guests while thousands of our fellow human beings would rather starve than come.

Chapter 6 furnishes us with an excellent treatment of Paul's defense before the Areopagus in Acts 17. Here Oliphint distinguishes between proof and persuasion, and delineates valid, sound, and persuasive arguments (pp. 149 ff.). Again, Oliphint does this simply and clearly, requiring no philosophical training or background on the part of his readers, and thus giving some helpful insights into apologetic presentation.

Oliphint closes the book with a conclusion that reminds us that the battle is the Lord's, which is what we need to hear at every point in the apologetic encounter, lest we grow arrogant or discouraged. We are but servants, something Oliphint draws out further in his first appendix. There he writes about "apologetics and the Holy Spirit," encouraging us to remember who the real Apologete is, in order that we might labor not in the flesh but in the Spirit. In the second appendix Oliphint sets forth "Scripture passages for apologetics." He offers the following headings: "The Lord our Defender"; "Our Attitude in Defense"; "Wisdom in Defense"; "Relying on the Lord"; and "The Wicked Ensnared by Their Own Devices."

This book is a rich encouragement for believers concerning all that they possess, understanding that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It may even serve to unmask unbelievers as they continue in their fool's errand of denying the truths of the gospel and, in this way, the book may lead them to Christ.

—Alan D. Strange

Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman, III., *A Biblical History of Israel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. Pp. 426. ISBN 0-6642-2890-8 \$24.95.

The last several decades have witnessed sharp disagreements among Bible scholars who have addressed themselves to the historical record that is set forth in the pages of the Bible, especially the historicity of the kingdom of Israel. The so-called "minimalist" school (represented by people such as K. W. Whitelam, N. P.

Lemche, P. R. Davies, T. Thompson, etc.) has affirmed that the Biblical account of Israel's history is a figment of the imagination of the Bible's several authors, that there never were such figures as David and Solomon, and that the kingdom of Israel, at least as represented by the books of Samuel and Kings, did not exist. Such a challenge has not gone unanswered by scholars representing a wide spectrum of theological views (witness, for example, the two recent books by William Devers on the archaeological evidence for Israel's existence).

The work *A Biblical History of Israel* is one response to the "minimalist" challenge. Two of the authors currently are professors at Regent College (Vancouver, British Columbia): Iain Provan, who is Marshall Sheppard Professor of Biblical Studies, and V. Philips Long, who is Professor of Old Testament. The third contributing author is Tremper Longman, III, who currently is the Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College (Santa Barbara, California). Provan provided the editorial leadership for this work as well as the bulk of the book's content (although it was a group project). Provan wrote the bulk of chapters 1-3, 5, 9-10 (that is, most of Part I: "History, Historiography, and the Bible", "A Biblical History of Israel," and the two chapters on the later monarchy). Long contributed chapters 4 ("Narrative and History: Stories about the Past"), 7 ("The Settlement in the Land"), and 8 ("The Early Monarchy"). The third contributor, Longman, wrote chapters 6 ("Before the Land") and 11 ("Exile and After"). Writing styles have blended quite well, and all the chapters demonstrate a wide-ranging competence in the Biblical data, archaeological findings, and current scholarly discussion.

Part I (chapters 1-5) is a kind of *apologia* for reading the biblical text as the primary source for our knowledge of Israel's history, yet without neglecting all relevant research. In view are two particular works that have explicitly and implicitly called into question what the Old Testament text reveals about the history of the kingdom of Israel. Provan specifically takes on Alberto Soggin's *History of Israel* and Miller and Hayes' *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, as well as taking side glances at similar historical-critical works.

Part II (chapters 6-11) examines Israel's history from the time of Abraham to the Persian period, taking up a number of the "problematic" areas of Israelite history, such as the large topic of the patriarchal history, the theological and literary role of the Joseph



narrative, the date of the Exodus (a perennial topic), and the conquest and settlement of Israel in the land, among others.

What is typical of the approach of the authors is that they do not deal with every possible historical question that has arisen or may arise in Old Testament studies. Rather, in dealing with the several subjects that they do address, after explaining the questions that have been posed by historical-critical scholarship, they then take note of what from the biblical text itself as well as all relevant archaeological data may be fairly said about the historical material in question. They also show how the text can be read in the light of all contextual material. The authors of the book demonstrate that the Bible may be read as historically accurate, but also how to read it for its message. In other words, Provan, Long, and Longman seek to do the hard task of reading the Bible as God's Word in the light of all the environmental and other contextual material that surrounds the message of the Bible as the Word of God.

The authors are aware that many may dismiss this work as "conservative" (p. 99), but the approach taken in this history has much to commend it. The authors are very deliberate in their methodology, noting that the primary source for a biblical history of Israel will be the Bible itself. But having said that, they affirm that the Bible must be read correctly *as a text*, and if it is not read with proper attention to the literary qualities of a text, the result is bad reading. Any historian who reads a text must utilize a high "degree of literary competence" (p. 99). The authors defend the historicity of the biblical accounts while not sidestepping the necessity of giving close attention to the rhetorical devices and literary craft that is evident in the scriptural text. Since both factual historicity and literary shaping undergird a biblical-theological approach, the emphasis in this work's approach is greatly appreciated.

This history also notes the importance of bringing the results of archaeological research to bear in the reading of the text. All the finds that archaeology has put forward are still in need of interpretation. What has been found in digs, whether that material is written documents or broken walls or ostraca, still needs interpretation. By themselves archaeological data are mute. But precisely in the area of interpretation, the presuppositions and faith commitments of the historian and the archaeologist come into play (the "ideology of the historian," p. 8). The radical claims made by the minimalists are in fact the result of the methodological approach of earlier historians of Israel (for example, Soggin, Miller and

Hayes), who sowed the seeds of doubt when advocating that the “scientist” should read with doubt the biblical text in terms of its historical value. For example, when a historian begins with, say, the united monarchy as the point in the biblical record when real history begins, while everything before that point is “proto-history,” he or she is beginning at a purely arbitrary point. On what basis can one say that the united monarchy material in the Bible is historically more reliable over against other accounts that read as historical accounts? The minimalists make a valid point when they charge scholars such as Soggin or Miller and Hayes as being arbitrary. The minimalists have simply been consistent in a particular direction and have said that there is virtually no real history present in the Old Testament.

The authors’ discussion in the earlier chapters is excellent when it addresses the importance of presuppositions as well as how far the evidence (textual, archaeological, etc.) allows us to speak with confidence. Thus this book takes its place next to similar recent works such as Walter Kaiser’s *A History of Israel* and Eugene Merrill’s *Kingdom of Priests* as histories of the Old Testament times, which works pastors and students can use with great profit.

The extensive endnotes show that a great deal of research lies behind this work. Readers will be grateful that the authors also interact often with their sources. While this history of Israel is not a commentary as such, along the way the authors do offer some new insights into well-traveled passages, and they present their work in a well-written and lively manner.

The authors have included helpful indices of biblical passages and scholars cited, as well as an index of “select topics.”

—Mark D. Vander Hart

Samuel D. Rima, *Rethinking the Successful Church: Finding Serenity in God’s Sovereignty*, Baker Books, 2002, Pp. 192. ISBN 0-8010-9117-9 Price unknown.

Many pastors wonder whether or not their efforts in the church are successful. But how is success to be measured? Since we live in a bigger-is-better culture, it shouldn’t surprise us that pastoral success is often gauged in terms of numbers. Here’s how it works. If a church is growing by leaps and bounds, obviously the pastor is successful. But if the number of members, visitors, baptisms, and

the amount of giving are static or in decline, there's a strong possibility that the pastor is a failure.

But if success is defined numerically, even the greatest of God's prophets would be classified as failures. Though they spoke the truth of God's Word (including new and fresh revelations given by the Holy Spirit), most of the prophets were despised and rejected by the people they served. For them, "success" meant doing their job without compromise. It meant proclaiming God's truth whether it was popular or not.

In his book, *Rethinking the Successful Church*, Samuel D. Rima examines the concept of pastoral success in terms of the mega-church movement. Though he appreciates the positive contributions of mega-churches, Rima critiques the notion that mega-church pastors and church growth experts have recipes for success that other pastors can use to make their churches grow. He writes, "In the Pastoral Epistles, where one would expect to find advice for helping the church grow, Paul's emphasis is almost exclusively on encouraging church leaders to lead a godly life, and assist their congregations in doing the same. If they would do this, live a life that was worthy of their calling, Paul knew that their example would provide powerful confirmation of the gospel realities that they preached" (p. 37) When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Rather than giving advice on how to grow the church, Paul seems to discount the impact of human ingenuity and technique, attributing the growth of the church in Corinth to the presence of the Spirit powerfully at work among them. Paul specifically says that he chose not to employ brilliant ideas in bringing them the Gospel, but rather he had determined to deliver the message in straightforward simplicity, relying on the power of God to make the message effective and produce growth" (pp. 37-38).

Rima doesn't argue against what he calls creative and new ways to reach people with the Good News of freedom from sin and new life in Christ. Yet he strongly cautions against putting more confidence in new ways of communicating the gospel than we have in the gospel itself. For it's the gospel itself, and not our new way of declaring it, which is the power of God unto salvation.

Part of Rima's book is autobiographical. He recalls a time in his life when he was caught up in a prideful quest for numerical success. "Because I have always been able to cloak these intentions in kingdom language, and because most of the leaders I have served

with have also defined success in similar terms and have been as desperate as I to see it, I was never able to come to terms with my inner strivings for success and personal advancement.” However, when Rima served a church that didn’t experience rapid growth, he began to search his heart and discovered that he had been driven by his own desire to make a name for himself in the church, and that he had been relying on church growth methods to do so. He notes, “Contrary to the prevailing opinion, we are not the masters of our own destiny. That is God’s job. But because of the constant messages we receive from our culture, it is easy to forget this biblical truth and try to take control of our life” (p. 53).

Rima’s approach is balanced. He acknowledges that God doesn’t want churches to become stagnant, ingrown, and so self-centered that they don’t care about people who don’t yet know Christ. But he reminds us to reach out with the gospel, and to leave the results up to God’s sovereign purposes.

In his book, Rima returns many times to the concept of God’s sovereignty, not just as a great theological truth, but as the church’s source of serenity. The truth that God is sovereign is an antidote to what Rima calls “success sickness.” For if a congregation and its pastor are intent on fast and dramatic numerical growth, they may experience corporate depression and a tailspin into decline. Rima cites examples of church splits, crippling indebtedness, and even the deaths of congregations that came on the heels of failed church growth. And for church leaders—especially pastors—the effects of “success sickness” are particularly grievous. They may experience discouragement and disappointment, a crippling sense of failure, anger at the church, and either resign prematurely or drop out of the ministry altogether.

As a pastor, I greatly appreciated Rima’s book. For it reminds pastors and other church leaders to be humble, to be faithful in proclaiming the gospel in word and deed, and to leave the results up to God.

—Roger Sparks

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy*. Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2003. Pp. 107. ISBN 0-940931-63-X. Price unknown.

For those who are aware of recent debates and controversies within the confessional Reformed community in North America,

the subject of this short history by O. Palmer Robertson will no doubt be familiar. In this relatively small volume, Robertson details the history of what is known as the “Shepherd Controversy” at Westminster Theological Seminary and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the period from 1975-1982. This history, which concluded with the dismissal of Shepherd from the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, is one with which Robertson is personally familiar. As a colleague of Shepherd’s at Westminster during this period, Robertson witnessed and participated in the controversy. Though Robertson seeks to provide an accurate account of the history as it unfolded, he writes by his own admission as a party to the controversy and as one who opposed (and opposes) Shepherd’s re-formulation of the historic Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. Since Robertson describes a past controversy, it might seem that the title of this volume is ill-chosen. However, in recent years the controversy has reignited and threatens the unity of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America. Robertson provides a sketch of the earlier chapter of the controversy out of the conviction that the last chapter remains to be written and in the awareness that the issues under debate at an earlier time are once again in the forefront of contemporary discussion.

The sensitive nature of the subject of Robertson’s volume is attested by the remarkable history of the book itself. In a foreword, Robertson informs the reader that his history was originally written for publication in *Presbyterian*, the theological journal of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Though Robertson’s history was originally approved for publication by the Editorial Committee of this journal, a subsequent decision was taken not to publish it due, as Robertson describes it, to the fact that “the material might prove offensive to another respected seminary of the Reformed and Presbyterian family in America” (p. 9). When Robertson’s appeal of this decision was denied by the Eleventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, he distributed it to the commissioners in attendance at the Assembly. Convinced that the story told in his account of this history needed to be widely known, Robertson consented to its publication by The Trinity Foundation.

Robertson’s history is a clearly told and fascinating tale of the Shepherd controversy from the time of its beginning until its conclusion. Though he does not write as a dispassionate witness, he nonetheless carefully describes from original sources and

documents the course of the controversy as it ebbed and flowed during the period from 1975-1982.

Though I will not attempt to trace all the twists and turns of the story Robertson recounts, several features of this history are noteworthy. According to Robertson, the controversy commenced in 1975, when certain students at Westminster were reported to hold the position that justification was by faith and by works. In the course of the examination of Westminster students by church bodies, several gave answers on the doctrine of justification that raised questions regarding professor Shepherd's teaching. Reports of these examinations aroused concern among some members of the Westminster faculty and initiated a series of discussions within the Faculty and Board regarding Shepherd's views. Robertson maintains that the principal concern at this time was Shepherd's apparent teaching that works, though not the ground of justification, are an "instrument" or the "way" of justification. These early discussions would prove prophetic of the subsequent course of the controversy. Whereas Shepherd maintained his full agreement with the doctrine of justification set forth in the Westminster Standards, there remained a great deal of uncertainty and confusion regarding his understanding of the role of works in the believer's reception of the grace of justification or acceptance with God. Throughout the remainder of the controversy, participants would divide over the question whether Shepherd's formulations, though orthodox, were simply unclear or whether they were at odds with the historic Reformed view.

After a period of inconclusive discussions within the Westminster Seminary community, the controversy moved to the courts of the church. On May 27, 1977, charges were filed against Shepherd in the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. These charges were considered and deliberated by the Presbytery for fully a year, at the end of which the Presbytery was evenly divided between defenders and opponents of Shepherd's views. In order to assist the Presbytery in its consideration of Shepherd's teachings, Shepherd submitted an important summary of his teaching, *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*. Like the earlier discussions within the Westminster Faculty, the Presbytery's deliberation ended inconclusively; most, but not all, of Shepherd's theses were approved, though motions to declare all of the theses in accord or out of accord with Scriptural teaching failed (the first by a

tie vote, the second by a larger majority). The actions of the Presbytery were in many ways a mirror reflection of the earlier inability of the Faculty and Board at Westminster to resolve the question whether Shepherd's views were in error or not.

The remainder of Robertson's history details how the controversy played out within the Westminster Seminary community. Board and Faculty committees were appointed to address and resolve the controversy. Outside theologians were contacted to get their evaluation of Shepherd's formulations (some approved, others disapproved). Constituents of Westminster Seminary, including a significant number of ministers and members of the newly formed Presbyterian Church in America, raised questions and aroused concern among supporters of Westminster. Only after a long period of intense discussion and debate did the controversy come to a conclusion with Shepherd's dismissal in 1982. In Robertson's reading of this history, a critical turning point occurred when President Clowney found himself no longer able to defend Shepherd against his critics. Robertson argues that this took place at the time it became evident that Shepherd's re-formulation of the doctrine of justification was related to a series of theological emphases, particularly his covenant view, that were not clearly in keeping with the classical form of Reformed covenant theology.

In his interpretation of the outcome of the controversy, Robertson devotes special attention to the actions of the Board of Trustees in Shepherd's dismissal. Though defenders of Shepherd argue that his dismissal was largely based upon ecclesiastical and institutional considerations, Robertson maintains that the Board-approved "Reasons and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees" (Feb. 26, 1982) suggests otherwise. Robertson appeals to several statements in this explanation of the Board's action to support his thesis that "doctrinal substance actually was at the root of his [Shepherd's] removal" (p. 75). Three features of Shepherd's views were singled out by the Board as problematic. First, Shepherd did not state with sufficient clarity that faith alone is the exclusive instrument of justification. Because Shepherd tended to view the believer's response to the covenant in the one way of an "obedient faith" or "faithfulness," the distinctive role of faith in justification does not come into its own. Second, Shepherd was criticized for treating the response to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace as though they were virtually identical. In Shepherd's formulation of the covenant, the obligation of

obedience in all the covenants was viewed as the same. And third, Shepherd's use of the language of "maintaining" justification by works raised questions regarding his understanding of the assurance of faith. Robertson argues that these objections to Shepherd's formulations constituted the real basis for his dismissal from the faculty.

Robertson concludes his history with an extended reflection upon what he terms the "causes of the controversy." In Robertson's estimation, a number of false reasons have been given for the controversy and its outcome in Shepherd's dismissal. Some have argued that it was a classic instance of "misunderstanding" between Shepherd and his critics. Some have suggested that Shepherd's formulations represented a different Reformed theological tradition (Dutch Calvinism) than North America Presbyterianism. Still others have suggested that the controversy was the product of a "personality conflict" or the unchristian behavior of Shepherd's critics. Robertson judges each of these explanations of the controversy to be inadequate. In Robertson's view, "only the presence of an issue of substance can explain the controversy" (p. 89). To support this claim, Robertson summarizes a number of the most distinctive features of Shepherd's view. Among these features are the following: justification is understood, not so much in a legal framework, but in a covenant framework; election is viewed from the vantage point of the dynamic of the history of redemption, rather than the eternal decrees of God; the formulations of a Reformed *ordo salutis* are displaced by an emphasis upon membership in the covenant community, which is effected sacramentally; and faith is viewed as including all the obligations of obedience in the covenant, so that "faithfulness" or the "obedience of faith" becomes the instrument of justification. In addition to these distinctives of Shepherd's view, which Robertson regards as significantly at odds with the historic consensus of Reformed theology, he also observes that Shepherd's formulations tended to substitute a new kind of "biblical theology" for the more traditional systematic or dogmatic theology of the tradition.

Readers will have to judge for themselves whether Robertson proves his case that the Shepherd controversy was about a doctrinal matter of great substance. Before expressing an opinion regarding this controversy, however, they ought to read this little volume. Not only is it clearly and dispassionately written, but it exhibits throughout an intimate acquaintance with the course of the



controversy, including the sources and documents that must be consulted before offering an opinion about its significance. Robertson has done his homework. Unfortunately, in the climate of suspicion and controversy that pervades some parts of the North American Reformed community, opinions are formed and expressed about this controversy before the record is consulted. As one who has read Robertson's study, as well as the documents and materials upon which it is based, I am persuaded that his basic thesis is correct. That thesis was never more clearly posed than by Roger Nicole, whom Robertson quotes to have said regarding Shepherd's view (p. 89): "Either his [Shepherd's] view is really consonant to what the Reformed tradition has generally understood to be the Biblical teaching on this subject, and here it would seem a pity that he should disturb the Church and the Seminary for the sake of a variant formulation that does not affect the substance of doctrine. Or, his view is really novel, and represents a significant departure from what has been taught at Westminster Theological Seminary for 50 years and in Reformed circles for 450 years. But then a much more thorough proof seems needed. . . ."

Robertson's recounting of the justification controversy suggests that the latter interpretation is the more plausible of the two.

—Cornelis P. Venema

William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Editor, Alan W. Gomes. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2003. Pp. 992. ISBN 0-87552-188-6. \$59.99 (cloth).

In the history of theology, there are few works that deserve to be entitled "classics." William G. T. Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*, though not as well known or regarded as the work of his contemporary, Charles Hodge, is arguably one of the classics of Reformed theology. Students of the history of Reformed theology, therefore, should gladly welcome this fine third edition of Shedd's great work.

Several features of this third edition are worthy of notice, and will serve to make it a more accessible source than its predecessors. Due to the technical nature of Shedd's system of theology, the editor, Alan W. Gomes, who is an associate professor of historical theology at Talbot School of Theology, provides the reader with a glossary of technical terms. Gomes also provides a glossary of brief

biographical entries on theological writers, including contemporaries of Shedd, with whom readers of his work may not be familiar. Convinced that an abridgment or paraphrase of Shedd's work would do more harm than good, Gomes' edition is a complete, unabridged printing of Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology*. In an effort to make Shedd's work more accessible, Gomes does adopt "modern conventions of capitalization, punctuation, italic type, and spelling" to aid the reader. He also translates Shedd's foreign-language citations in the text, and places the original language quotations in footnotes.

Two further characteristics of this edition will likely prove especially helpful to modern readers. First, Gomes incorporates the third volume of Shedd's work into the main body of his theological system. Shedd's original systematic theology was published in two volumes in 1888. Six years later, Shedd published a third volume of miscellaneous observations and quotations from various authors, which corresponded to the sequence of topics in the original two-volume work. In this edition, Gomes has collated the material from Shedd's third volume and incorporated it into the main body of his system, moving the relevant portions to the end of each chapter. Second, whereas the original work did not have subdivisions or headings throughout, Gomes provides the reader subject headings in the margins to clarify the sequence of topics and the structure of Shedd's argument. All of these features of Gomes' editing combine to make this edition far more accessible and useful to the reader than the first and second editions.

In addition to these excellent features of this volume, the editor provides a fine introductory essay on Shedd's theological work and the distinctive contributions of his *Dogmatic Theology*. In this essay, Gomes identifies the following general characteristics of Shedd's theology: his literary style and erudition; his sensitivity to and grasp of the history of theology; his speculative or philosophically attuned form of argumentation; and his adherence to the Protestant principle of Scripture as the supreme norm for theological study. Though Shedd wrote from a distinctively Reformed standpoint, his theology displays a keen awareness of the great tradition of Christian theology and the catholic breadth of the Reformed faith. As Gomes suggests in his preface, these qualities of Shedd's theology compare favorably to the kind of theological faddishness and superficiality that characterize many contemporary theologies.

It is not often that a book is published that deserves to be on the shelf of every serious student of Reformed theology. This new edition of Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology* is such a book.

—Cornelis P. Venema

Robert Spencer, *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West*. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2003. Pp. 256. ISBN 0-8952-6100-6 \$27.95 (cloth).

Robert Spencer, the director of *Jihad Watch* ([www.jihadwatch.org](http://www.jihadwatch.org)) is a writer and researcher who has studied Islam for more than twenty years. He is not only the author of the title here under review, but also of *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith* (Encounter). With Daniel Ali, he is coauthor of *Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics* (Ascension), and coeditor of the forthcoming essay collection *The Myth of Islamic Tolerance*. Spencer (MA, Religious Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) is an Adjunct Fellow with the Free Congress Foundation. Besides the above mentioned titles, he has written seven monographs on Islam that are available from the Foundation: *An Introduction to the Qur'an; Women and Islam; An Islamic Primer; Islam and the West; The Islamic Disinformation Lobby; Islam vs. Christianity; and Jihad in Context*. His articles on Islam and other topics have appeared in the *Washington Times*, *FrontPage Magazine.com*, *Insight in the News*, *Human Events*, *National Review Online*, and many other journals.

The title of this book, *Onward Muslim Soldiers*, could conceivably be a headline for a news item in a Western newspaper. Throughout the closing days of 2003, and early in 2004, we have lived with a heightened sense of danger as the terror alerts kept rising, and several air flights to the U.S. were canceled. Thanks to Robert Spencer's *Onward Muslim Soldiers*, we have on hand a non-varnished description of this new era in global history.

Soon after 11 September, 2001, the contents of Muhammad Ata's suitcase were discovered. In it were found the Arabic text of the instructions he gave his fellow-conspirators on the eve of their horrific attack on New York and Washington, DC. After exhorting them to remain calm and to rejoice in anticipation of their attack on the symbols of the hated West, he quoted an Arabic poem: "Smile in the face of death, O young man / For you are on your way to

immortality in paradise.” Then, he went on quoting several Qur’anic texts to bolster their resolve to become the vanguard of a new type of *shuhada* (martyrs) in the path of Allah. What Ata’s hastily composed hand-written notes revealed, Robert Spencer documents in his new book on *Islamic Jihad*.

What we had observed in Spencer’s *Islam Unveiled* (2002), we find strengthened and well-documented in *Onward Muslim Soldiers*. The book has ample references to jihad in the authoritative texts of Islam, the *Qur’an*, *Hadith* (plural: *Abadith*), as well as in the recognized commentaries of both Sunni and Shi’ite Islam. Based on these texts and the history of the Islamic conquests in Asia, Africa, and Europe, one cannot avoid the conclusion that *Jihad is part and parcel of the Islamic tradition*.

The reason why many of our contemporaries find it difficult to accept this fact is that they regard Islam as simply a religious faith, like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shinto. But Islam is, and has always been, far more than a religion in the accepted sense of the word. It began as a religious faith in Mecca (610), and then it progressed into an expansionist religio-political system from Medina (622). Eventually Islam produced a distinctively Islamic culture and worldview in Baghdad and Cordoba (after 800).

Most Americans have an added difficulty as they seek to understand Islam. The birth of the United States in 1776 occurred at a time when the last major Islamic power, the Ottoman Empire, was in a state of rapid decline. It finally disintegrated at the end of World War I when most of its territories were taken over by European colonialists. Up to the mid-forties of the twentieth century, the United States had very little to do with Islamic countries. The meeting of President Roosevelt with King Saud on a U.S. destroyer in the Suez Canal during World War II marked the beginning of America’s practical “encounter” with Islam.

Now *Onward Muslim Soldiers* provides us with this much-needed guide to understanding the true nature of Islam, and its attitude to the rest of the world. This book is organized around three parts. Part One deals with “Jihad Now.” Part Two covers the history of jihad under the rubric of “Jihad Then.” The title of Part Three is very disturbing, “The Great Jihad Cover-Up.”

This “Cover-Up” is evident, for example, in “The Carolina Qur’an Controversy” related on page 145. In 2002, the University of North Carolina assigned “a translation of a part of the Qur’an to

all incoming freshmen” that became “a cause for genuine concern.” The assigned book was *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*, translated by Michael Sells. “The ‘early revelations’ of the subtitle are the Meccan suras . . . which preach tolerance and mutual coexistence without a hint of the doctrines of jihad and dhimmitude that unfold in the later Qur’anic revelations.”

Robert Spencer asks: “what was such a misleading misrepresentation designed to accomplish, especially in light of continuing threats from terrorists?” He then states: “Sells has defended his decision to translate only early Meccan Suras on the grounds that they are the most accessible introduction to the Qur’an and Islamic study as a whole. That may be true, but taken in isolation as the only book a young non-Muslim would read about Islam, *Approaching the Qur’an* could be severely misleading about the nature of the religion as a whole and about the intentions and motives of Islamic terrorists, the very people who have made Islam such a ‘hot topic’ for students.”

This literary product of Professor Michael Sells, in keeping out the Medinan chapters of the Qur’an, does not surprise me. In May 2001, and later on in January 2002, PBS televised a documentary, “Islam: Empire of Faith.” This expert on Islam was one of several Western commentators who contributed to this program, whose very title was historically questionable. How could the Islamic Empires of the Umayyads, Abbasids, Ottomans, and the Mughals, be described as “Empires of Faith” when they were all built on the “*futubat*,” i.e., on conquests? Neither Michael Sells nor any of his fellow-commentators ever referred to the impact of jihad on the native populations of the conquered territories, nor to such infamous institutions as “dhimmitude.” The apex of disinformation in “Empire of Faith” was reached when reference was made to the “devshirme” system of the Ottomans in Eastern Europe. The Western scholar described this barbaric institution of taking young Christian boys from their families, forcibly Islamizing them, and enrolling them in the elite Ottoman corps of the Janissaries as “recruitment.” Is this genuine scholarship, or a white-wash, as Robert Spencer would describe “The Great Jihad Cover-Up”?

The author concludes his book with these sober words. To ignore them is irresponsible, and tantamount to wishing away a real danger that will be with us for decades to come. “The theology and history of Islam bear out that this is how all too many Muslims have always understood their law. Until Islam undergoes a definitive and

universal reform, this is how the warriors of jihad understand it today and will continue to understand it. This is the version of Islam that radical Muslims are pressing forward with bombs and guns and threats around the world. That is why the struggle against jihad is the struggle of every true lover of freedom” (p. 304).

*Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* is a much-needed book. To read it and digest its contents is of utmost importance as we daily face the by-products of Jihadism all over our world. We thank Robert Spencer for his excellent work on a topic that remains as current as the daily newspaper, radio, and television news.

—Bassam M. Madany

Ned. B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Fiftieth Anniversary Edition). Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 2004. Pp. xv + 470. ISBN 0-934688-97-4. Price unknown.

It is a happy occasion to welcome this invaluable biography of J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) back into print on the fiftieth anniversary of its first printing by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Many of us in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and in other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations recall with fondness when we first read the Stonehouse biography of Machen. Reading it as I did in seminary, I was both inspired by Dr. Machen’s example and encouraged to become a part of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a denomination that he and other faithful men had a hand in forming in 1936. One of my colleagues on the faculty here at Mid-America Reformed Seminary was moved to pursue the gospel ministry when he read the book in high school. John Muether, Historian of the OPC, writing in the Foreword to this fiftieth anniversary edition, notes that not a few have likewise been encouraged in their service to Christ by this portrayal of the life of one of the twentieth century’s great confessional church leaders.

Very few, if any, who call themselves Reformed disagree in any substantive way with John Calvin. One need only think of Karl Barth claiming Calvin against the Calvinists (along with a host of others in recent years), and of those in the recent debates over covenant, election, justification, almost all of whom, on both sides, appeal to Calvin. Similarly, though in a more parochial world, particularly that of the OPC, no one significantly disagrees with J.

Gresham Machen, or if they do (as in the matter of the length of the creation days, for example), they tend to claim that if he were alive today he would agree with them. That is to say, all parties in a dispute in the OPC tend to want to claim Machen as supportive of their position, which means that there remains a strong desire for a “usable Machen.” It is for this reason alone that the republication of the Stonehouse biography is of such significance. In this fine work, Stonehouse gives us his perspective on this man whom he knew and loved well. Whatever we believe Machen to have been and stood for, we must take into account what Stonehouse thought of him.

As John Muether notes in his Foreword, Stonehouse expended a great deal of time and energy in writing this book. Muether is correct in saying that Stonehouse was “the most fitting person to write the book,” having been perhaps most deeply affected by Machen’s premature death in early 1937. What is more, as junior colleague to Machen in the New Testament department at Westminster, “perhaps no one knew Machen as well as he did.” Because of his intimate knowledge of Machen—of his trials and triumphs, of his struggles and successes—Stonehouse both understood these episodes in Machen’s life and sympathetically chronicled them. Though neither a professional historian nor an unbiased writer, Stonehouse gave us a “Machen in context” that ultimately serves us better than all the “usable Machens” that others might create.

To be sure, many critical scholars would not write in this vein and would consider this hagiography. Stonehouse never envisioned the work as a disinterested treatment of his friend and mentor, and it thus has some of the weaknesses that a highly sympathetic biography does—a tendency on the part of the biographer to overlook, explain away, or insufficiently explore the failings and shortcomings of his subject. On the other hand, being sympathetic as it is, one is drawn into the life and concerns of Machen in a way that one suspects Machen would like us to see him. A sympathetic portrayal by a close associate often gives a sense, as nothing else can, of who someone was. This is particularly important to most of us now, who never knew Machen, and to future generations as well. In this way, we can all in some measure come to know this father whose faith is worthy of emulation and whose legacy needs to be preserved and extended.

I would argue, moreover, that the republication of this book goes beyond the need of those of us in the OPC who want to be faithful to the legacy of Machen. All who want to defend and promote biblical Christianity should rejoice at the opportunity to learn of Machen, and also to learn from him. Stonehouse reminded us again and again in his book that Machen was an untiring stalwart against the Modernists and all those who taught that the Bible was a merely human reflection on the divine or, at best, a divine/human production fraught with error (cf. pp. 270-301). Machen understood the importance of doctrine and stood against the rising anti-intellectualism of his time, which declared that Christianity was not a doctrine but a life. Machen maintained that Jesus was foundationally unique in his person and work and secondarily exemplary in his life and conduct—not the other way around, as the liberals portrayed it. Machen taught that without a firm dedication to God’s Word and its teaching, to biblical doctrine, no life—certainly not the Christian life—was possible. He wanted no part of the project of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, and others of that ilk, which reduced religion to certain feelings and rejected the “fundamentals of the faith” as embarrassing rejects of a bygone era.

When Machen appeared on the scene, the nineteenth century had witnessed the ascendancy and triumph of the Documentary Hypothesis and the whole higher critical project within the academy, which asserted that the Bible was not God’s inspired and infallible Word to human beings but rather man’s religious musings about God. The anti-super-naturalism of the Enlightenment project also manifested itself in a variety of ways in Machen’s field of New Testament studies, most notably in the “Quest for the Historical Jesus,” which posited a dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Not surprisingly, Jesus ends up looking remarkably like this or that German critical scholar. Machen ultimately and decisively rejected this approach in favor of the biblical faith, though he did not come fully to embrace the faith of his fathers (and, particularly in his case, of his mother) without much intellectual and spiritual struggle. Once he emerged from his spiritual and intellectual struggle, he became a champion of the faith and his defense of the Bible and the classic doctrines of Christianity against the Modernists cost him dearly, both academically and ecclesiastically. Stonehouse lays this all out clearly and compellingly (cf. pp. 65-102; pp. 302 ff.).



Instead of succumbing to unbelief in the face of the teaching of a number of Europe's leading critical scholars, especially the Ritschlian Wilhelm Herrmann at Marburg, Machen emerged the stronger for his confrontation with liberalism in its strongest and most articulate expressions. Machen's first-hand-encounter, and one may say, flirtation with liberalism steeled him for his subsequent confrontations with Harry Emerson Fosdick, Robert E. Speer, and a host of other liberals or "moderates." This experience gave him an abiding conviction that "Christianity and Liberalism," as he expressed it in his 1923 polemic, were two different and incompatible religions. He continued his vigorous defense of the Bible and what it taught, refuting the attempt of many critics to pit Paul against Jesus—with Paul depicted as the creator of Christianity and Jesus as a spiritually-attuned teacher of ethics. Machen had already demonstrated that *The Origins of Paul's Religion* (1921) was of a piece with all that Jesus Christ was, did, and taught, also defending and expounding who the Christ was in *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930).

Though Machen immersed himself in liberal theology, or perhaps because he did, he proved to be one of the early twentieth-century's greatest and most effective foes of liberalism. Machen's unyielding stance against liberalism and modernism cost this privileged son of Baltimore high-society and mainline Presbyterianism (at that time, the ruling class in America) the prestige he enjoyed at patrician Princeton, sending him into comparative exile to labor in relative obscurity at Westminster Theological Seminary and in the tiny newly-formed OPC (pp. 377 ff.). In his unflinching devotion to God and his Word and his willingness to give up his favored status, he is a model to us all of courage and integrity.

Several books of a purportedly more scholarly tone have been written since the Stonehouse biography, questioning whether Machen was such a stalwart for the faith or, more likely, a curmudgeon determinedly bent on having his own way at all costs, a fierce fighter willing to split the Presbyterian church for no just cause. To be sure, Machen was not without his faults, but we have no good evidence that he was dyspeptic and that he acted with the determination that he did because he was something of a misanthrope who failed to speak the truth in love. In fact, some who knew Machen have lamented that Stonehouse's book did not adequately portray Machen's indomitable sense of humor even in

the face of many difficulties. Perhaps reading Stonehouse's book will help rehabilitate Machen for a relativistic age that could use something of his clear-headed commitment to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

As we consider Machen's legacy, the following observations from Muether's Foreword seem particularly apt: "It is often suggested that the polemics of Machen's day are inappropriate in a 'postliberal' age, where winsomeness should replace contentiousness. In taking stock of the years since Machen's death, one theologian [John Frame] claims that 'once the Machenites found themselves in a "true Presbyterian Church" they were unable to moderate their martial impulses. Being in a church without liberals to fight, they turned on one another.' [Frame] goes on to identify twenty-two theological debates that have engaged 'Machen's warrior children,' and much of it is a sketch of OPC history with its struggles over the incomprehensibility of God, the Sabbath, charismatic gifts, and covenant theology. In all of these controversies he claims the moral high ground of conscientious objector and from that position he challenges the importance that Machen attached to doctrine: 'The almost exclusive focus on doctrinal issues in many Reformed circles is itself part of the problem' of Reformed theological warfare." Muether's assessment of this is that "Machen might have classified such sentiments as 'theological indifferentism,'" and indifferentism, he insisted, 'made no heroes of the faith.' Christianity was a way of life *founded upon doctrine*. Although Machen's adversaries commonly portrayed the controversies in the church as administrative disagreements or personality clashes, Stonehouse refuses to engage in such reductionism. His book urges readers not to lose heart in the doctrinal causes to which Machen gave his life" (p. xii).

Stonehouse's urging is needed today as never before. It is disappointing that Frame, in enumerating the twenty-two debates that have occupied "Machen's warrior children," does so by placing all the disputes on the same level (see his essay on this in *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology*, pp. 113-146). Some of what Frame cites as the internecine warfare of Machen's followers, in other words, does not raise the same degree of concern and bear the same importance as do other things. The questions, for instance, of whether a right use may be made of alcohol or whether any use may be made of guitars in a worship service can scarcely be thought to be in the same vein as questions about the covenant and

justification and about the law and gospel. The alcohol/guitars question is clearly more peripheral than questions about covenant, justification, law, and gospel, which are more central and significant to the church. If all these are mentioned in the same breath, as Frame does, by one who laments battles within the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, as Frame does, this seems to ignore that some things are worth fighting for, even strenuously. Frame believes that none of these issues rise to the level of the battle between Machen and the modernists. But some of them may.

The notion that Machen was a warrior and that his warrior children continue misguidedly to be warriors is itself misguided. Every age, church history demonstrates, must fight its battles. Frame knows this right well, I hasten to add, and has proven himself to be a good warrior in many of these battles (a recent example being his helpful polemic against Open Theism). But there are certainly aspects of the disputes over covenant and justification, for instance, that warrant as much careful attention and confessional commitment as did many of the issues engaged by Machen. So the question is not whether or not we will fight, but whether we will acquit ourselves with the resoluteness and humility of J. Gresham Machen, whose dying words, in the telegram to John Murray—"I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it" (p. 451)—remind us that what Machen stood for remains contested. We must be certain that we are on the right side of this contest.

—Alan D. Strange