

HRA Reformation Voice

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THIS ISSUE:

QUESTIONS ANSWERED

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IS GOD CAPRICIOUS? (HC 12)

by R. Scott Clark

HC Q. 12. Since then by the righteous judgment of God we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how may we escape this punishment and be again received into favor?

God wills that His justice be satisfied;¹ therefore we must make full satisfaction to the same, either by ourselves or by another.²

¹ Exodus 20:5. Exodus 23:7. ¹ Romans 8:3,4.

With this question we begin considering the second part of the catechism or the “grace” section of “guilt, grace, and gratitude.”

One of the great misconceptions about the Augustinian doctrine of divine sovereignty, which was restated by the Protestant Reformers and which came to expression in the Reformed confessions, is that it makes God arbitrary or capricious.

Without reflection or if we start from the wrong place, the acts of God might seem arbitrary. After all, during the fires, one house was taken and one was left behind. It's not evident that there is any way to say that this house was taken but that one was left because of anything intrinsic to each house. It's a mystery of providence. Of course folk frequently and falsely set up cause and effect relations to explain providence but Jesus isn't having any of it (see John 9).

This fact, however, does not mean that we cannot say anything about God's justice nor does it mean that God is really capricious. The charge that the God of Scripture is capricious rests ultimately on the assumption that unless we can explain his actions then we may sit in judgment upon them and him. In other words, the charge rests upon rationalism. Of course we cannot explain all of God's acts and we cannot explain fully *any* of them! His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. If he did

explain himself fully it would consume us. We are not capable of understanding.

If we consider that God always acts according to his nature, then he cannot be said to be arbitrary, especially if we concede that God's understanding of his justice transcends our ability to comprehend it. That is a great difference between the triune God of Holy Scripture revealed in Christ Jesus and Allah or fate. The god of Islam really *is* capricious. He may forgive or he may not. No one can know. Allah cannot be known. He is utterly hidden. Indeed, he isn't even really personal. The alleged identity of Yahweh and Allah is a great myth of liberalism and universalism. Such a claim is an insult both to Christianity and to Islam.

God wills that His justice be satisfied; therefore we must make full satisfaction to the same, either by ourselves or by another. (H.C. Ans. 12)

The God of Scripture is, in himself, hidden from us but he also reveals himself to us and what he reveals to us is true. There is a great divide between the Creator and the creature. We cannot know things as God knows them and we cannot know God as he knows himself, but we

can know God because he has come to us and made himself known. He has revealed himself in creation and in redemption and chiefly in his Son, the Word: Jesus the Messiah.

We can correlate God's promises to his saving acts in redemptive history. We can and must count him faithful to fulfill his law and his promises. He threatens judgment for sin. He threatens death for sin and he fulfills that curse (Gen 2:17; Exod 20:5). The whole history of the Israelite holy war against Canaan is the history of God's righteous judgment upon unbelief and sin. He says: "...I will not acquit the guilty" (Exod 23:7). Every human being is personally obligated to produce perfect righteousness before God (Ex 34:7; Ez 18.4,20; 2 Thess 1:8-10; Gal 3:10). Unlike Allah, the God who is, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not arbitrary. He cannot contradict himself. He cannot be what he is not. He cannot do

what is contrary to his nature and his nature is just. The universal testimony of Scripture is that God's righteousness must be satisfied.

Scripture also testifies, however, that God is gracious and merciful. He is merciful in that he does not give to all sinners what they deserve: hell (thanks to Danny Hyde for repeatedly pointing this out on Sunday mornings!) and he is gracious in that he gives to sinners what they cannot earn: his favor. Out of his demerited favor he himself supplies the righteousness required by his justice. I'm grateful to the person at the recent Gospel-Driven Conference at Ponte Vedra PCA who pointed out after one of the sessions that, in Ezek 16:63, Yahweh Elohim promises that he himself will atone for the sins of his people. Of course we remember the scene in Genesis 15 when Yahweh himself passes between the pieces, taking upon himself the obligation to fulfill the promise and to suffer the penalty of violation of the covenant.

This is the difference between biblical religion and all

other religions. Only the God of Scripture promises to save his people by fulfilling the obligations of his law *for* them. All other faiths set up systems whereby we must do for ourselves or, as in the case of Rabbinic and Christian moralism, God gives grace so that we can do so ourselves.

In the biblical faith, however, God meets the terms of his righteousness *for* us. This is where grace and righteousness meet: in Christ. *For* us he became both righteous law-keeper (Second/Last Adam) **and** the Mediator of gracious, free salvation *sola fide* to and for all those for whom he came, whom the Father gave to him from all eternity.

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WHY IS DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY SO POPULAR?

by Daniel Hyde

The first books I received from my father after my conversion at seventeen-and-a-half years old were a Bible—and get this—*The Late Great Planet Earth* and *The Rapture* by Hal Lindsey. For three years I was on fire for the Lord and busy charting out every verse in the Bible that had to do with our Lord's coming and the "end times." So when a reader of my blog recently asked me why Dispensational theology is so popular in our time and place I wondered if he had even read these books and been in churches that promoted them.

For those of you who do not know, classic Dispensational theology is a system of belief that teaches a radical division between Israel and Church so that God has two peoples, Israel, the apple of his eye, and the Church, created only after Israel rejected Jesus as her Messiah and that will cease at the Rapture so that God can begin anew his relationship with Israel. This teaching is most popularly known through the ubiquitous *Scofield* and *Ryrie Study Bible's* as well as popular authors such as the aforementioned Hal Lindsey and Tim Lahaye of the *Left Behind* series of books. In fact, peruse your local Christian radio station and local church websites and you are more than likely

to find a predominance of Dispensationalism. Why? Because Dispensationalism is sensationalism.

Some History

To understand the roots of Dispensationalism once must know the name John Nelson Darby (1800–82). Darby was a trained lawyer as well as a deacon in the Church of Ireland. He later left his home church for the Plymouth Brethren movement. The Plymouth Brethren's major theological tenet and reason for existence was that all established churches on the earth were corrupt. Since all churches were corrupt, this meant, *ergo*, that so too were their ministers. Thus the Plymouth Brethren rejected the belief that there was an ordained ministry in the New Testament Church.

As a result of this belief, Darby developed what we know as Dispensationalism as a means to promote the Plymouth Brethren's idiosyncratic ecclesiology by strictly dividing between the Old and New Testaments. Israel had an ordained clergy and non-ordained laity, but the Church of the New Testament only had saints. You can remind your Dispensational friends—whom I am sure know

none of this!—that Darby envisioned his system as a protection of the Calvinistic doctrines of grace. He said that the church in America was the worldliest church on the planet and that the only way to renew the church was through Calvinism, Plymouth Brethrenism, and Dispensationalism!

To Darby's dismay, the American church did not listen to him when he came to the States and lectured about the moral and theological corruption of its institutional churches; instead, the American churches took his *ecclesiastical* Dispensationalism and turned it into a system of *eschatology*, a move Darby did not intend.

The Spread of Dispensationalism

So why is Dispensationalism so popular? In the first place because of the work of the American evangelist D.L. Moody and his "Prophecy Conferences." In 1876 he began the Niagara Bible Conference, which was meant to teach Dispensationalism as a means to get people excited about evangelism. After all, if the rapture of the Church is immanent the Church would therefore be overly-enthusiastic about spreading the Gospel.

The second major way Dispensationalism became popular was through the prolific writings of C.I. Scofield and other major dispensational writers. Despite having no formal biblical and theological training, Scofield became a congregational pastor in Texas. In 1909 he published his *magnum opus*, the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Other important books have been John Walvoord's, *Iraq, Oil and Biblical Prophecy* and the works of Hal Lindsey, especially, *The Rapture* and *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

The third major way Dispensationalism spread was through Louis Sperry Chafer and Dallas Theological Seminary. Chafer was a four-point Calvinistic (rejecting definite atonement) evangelist. He founded Evangelical Theological College, (ETS) which later became what is today Dallas Theological Seminary. He saw ETS as the only true Calvinistic seminary in what had become a theologically liberal America. This seminary went on to produce such

notable Dispensationalists as John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Hal Lindsey. By 1900 there were another fifty Bible colleges set up across America with the intent to spread Dispensational theology (I went to one of them!). Chafer's motto, in effect, was one that some of us have heard: "Don't waste your time going to four years of college to learn irrelevant information and then three years at a liberal seminary; instead go to Bible college and learn the Bible because Christ is coming soon."

The fourth major way that Dispensationalism became popular was as a sociological phenomenon. Beginning in the 1870's–80's, the American mindset began to shift from the optimism of the postmillennialism of her founders in which America was seen as the "city shining on a hill" to the nations both culturally and religiously. This gave way to

pessimism. The evangelical empire was falling to the new teaching of Darwinian evolution, Higher Biblical Criticism, cultural secularism, the mass immigration of Roman Catholics to America, and a massive demographic shift from the country to the cities where things weren't going so well. Americans saw that the postmillennial dream wasn't working. Add to the mix the

First and Second World War's in

the generations to follow and you have the makings of pessimism, escapism ("Let's get out of here"), and apocalypticism (the end of our "evil times" are drawing near).

Some Remarks About Dispensationalism

With this brief history and survey of its influence, let me add a few comments about Dispensationalism. As a way of reading the Bible and as a system of eschatology, Dispensationalism is a serious error; but, mark this well, it is not a damnable heresy. Adherents to its teaching are staunch advocates of a literal, bodily, personal, and climactic coming of Jesus Christ. On this we agree and rejoice together. As Reformed Christians and pastors, it is our calling to be patient with those whom we see as seriously confused. As a former Dispensationalist, with whom many were patient with me, I see this system as being in serious

Dispensationalism, as a way of reading the Bible and as a system of eschatology, is a serious error – but, and mark this well, it is not a damnable heresy.

error in two major ways in the area of eschatology.

First, Dispensationalism contradicts the analogy of faith (Latin, *analogia fidei*). The analogy of faith are those basic biblical teachings as summarized in the ancient creeds of the Church, which act like roadmaps, keeping us on the strait and narrow. While Dispensationalism does not deny the Second Coming of our Lord, it does utterly confuse the simplicity of the biblical doctrine of our “blessed hope” (Titus 2: 13). Notice how simply and beautifully the ancient creeds confess the Second Coming of Christ:

...He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead (Apostles’ Creed).

...And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end (Nicene Creed).

...He ascended into heaven, He sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; and shall give account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting. And they that have done evil into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved (Athanasian Creed).

What Dispensationalism denies is that Christ is only coming again *once*, and that when he comes it is with great glory to end human history as we know it with the last judgment. There is no secret rapture, no judgment at the end of the tribulation, no thousand-year millennium after his second Second Coming, and no second last judgment at the end of the millennium which finally brings in the new heavens and new earth. *He shall come again* and that is it.

Second, Dispensationalism denies the historic Protestant teaching on the nature of Christ’s coming in the historic Confessions. I will only list two of these confessions for brevity’s sake. The Augsburg

Confession was written in 1530 and is the first confession of faith of our Lutheran brethren. In Article 17, “Of Christ’s Return to Judgment,” it confesses, ...They [the Lutheran Churches] condemn others also, who now scatter Jewish opinions, that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world, the wicked being every where suppressed, the saints alone, the pious, shall have a worldly kingdom, and shall exterminate all the godless.

Notice what the Augsburg is saying. The Jewish hope was a literal, earthly millennium when the Messiah came to rule from Jerusalem. Yet this is confessed to be a “Jewish opinion” which was rejected by the Protestants. The second confession is the Second Helvetic Confession, written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1561 and later published in 1566 by the Reformed Churches in Switzerland. At that time it expressed what nearly every Reformed Church in Europe believed on this subject. In Chapter 11, “Of Jesus Christ, Being True God and Man, and the Only Savior of the World,” the Second Helvetic says similarly to the Augsburg Confession:

...We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies, will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matthew chapters 24-25 and Luke chapter 18, and apostolic teaching in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and 2 Timothy chapters 3-4 present something quite different.

Although our doctrine of the end will not sell millions of books, sell out stadiums, nor be as popular as modern-day Dispensationalism, we believe it to be that simple and pastoral teaching of holy Scripture.

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HRA ANNUAL MEETING
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BEDFORD, PA

WHY CONTINUE TO PREACH THE LAW?

by Wilbur Bruinsma

God will have His commandments strictly preached! That is the undeniable implication of Question 115 of the Heidelberg Catechism which asks, “Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?” Not only are God’s people called to walk in the way of God’s commandments, but the church of Jesus Christ must preach the keeping of these commandments. Neither may the church do so in a vague, general way that avoids pinpointing specific sins of God’s people. The Catechism teaches the church that her preachers are to preach the ten commandments *strictly*.

Certainly, such instruction contradicts the claim of the antinomian that the church of Jesus Christ today is no longer under any law. The charge of the antinomian against the Catechism is that of legalism. The Reformed churches, having been liberated from the work-righteousness of Rome, by demanding law preaching fall back into the error that God’s people are saved by the of law.

The question is: does the Heidelberg Catechism in its claim that the decalogue must be preached stand the test of the Bible? Does the Bible insist that the ten commandments yet have a part in the life of God’s people? What is that part? Does that in turn imply that these commandments must be preached? In order to answer these questions, we ought to consider the objections raised by antinomians against the teaching of the Catechism at this point.

The first objection raised is rooted in what Paul writes in Romans 6:14, 15: “For sin will have no dominion over you: since you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means!” (ESV). The reasoning of this objection seems sound enough. The laws of Moses (the civil, ceremonial, and moral laws) were established for use in the Old Testament church. The church at that time was a church under law because Christ had not yet come. The law served as a schoolmaster that forced God’s

saints then to understand that by the deeds of the law no man is justified. Therefore, it forced God’s people in the Old Testament to look for the coming Messiah (Galatians 3:19-26). When Christ came he fulfilled the Old Testament laws of Moses. When He fulfilled these laws they are no longer in affect for the child of God. “After that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (verse 25 - KJV). Now, the life of the child of God is no longer directed by law, but by grace. This does not give the child of God liberty to walk in sin because he is no longer under sin. But the work of God’s grace will naturally lead the child of God into the way God intends him to walk in this world.

**“Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?”
Heidelberg Q. 115**

A second objection leveled against the Catechism in its treatment of the law is: the church becomes enslaved to law again! The members of the church will begin to think and live as if they must strive to keep God’s commandments as a means unto salvation. They will begin to think that they are justified by faith *and* works together, rather than by faith alone on the basis of what Christ has accomplished on the cross. For

that reason, the keeping of the law no longer ought to be preached in the church. The church should preach only the gospel of grace! This second objection, too, sounds reasonable enough - especially in light of some of the more recent development we see in Reformed circles today. The teachings of Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul certainly seem to lend some credence to this objection. Some are returning to the error of Rome when they teach of a “working faith” or a by a “faith that works”

Yet these errors only serve to prove that to walk the way of the Reformed confessions requires maintaining a straight course between two extremes. Certainly, we may not fall into the error of work-righteousness. But then, neither ought we to fall into the error of antinomianism. Why then the teaching of the Catechism in Lord’s Day 44?

To answer the first objection to the requirement of the Christian’s keeping the ten commandments, we

will have to take a close look at what Paul is teaching in Romans 6:14, 15. His main concern in this chapter of Romans is to answer the charge of those that believed that keeping the law was necessary for our justification. To believe in justification by faith alone without the works of the law, they accused, results in a careless and profane life. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound” (vs 1)? In this chapter Paul is answering that charge. In verse 14 Paul states what is true of the Christian: “sin shall not have dominion over you.” The believer is not under the power or the slavery of sin. Why not? Because of grace. God has shown to us His favor in the cross of Christ. He has done this by powerfully delivering us from the chains that sin had on us. He has set us free from the dominion of sin and Satan. We are now under the power of God’s grace. The same cannot be said of us if we were to attempt to free ourselves from sin by keeping the law. If we think we can overcome sin and its dominion by keeping the law perfectly, we will find ourselves miserably enslaved yet to sin. *Grace* frees us from the dominion of sin - never the law.

But does this mean that the child of God is no longer governed by the ten commandments? That would be an impossibility! By God’s grace we are called to “prove what is the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Believers are called to walk in a way that is pleasing to God. What is that way? What is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God? It is that which is revealed to us in God’s commandments. We are not walking in a way that is pleasing to God when we reason: “well, I know God’s commandments say this, but I am no longer under those commandments. The Spirit in my heart has led me to walk in a different way than what God’s commandments tell me.” If I were to reason this way, am I walking according to the good and acceptable will of God? Obviously not! Jesus’ command to His people is clear in John 14:15 and 21, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. . . . Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me: and he that loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” The ten commandments yet govern us in our lives

In fact, the writer to the Hebrews teaches us in Hebrews 8:10 what God does by the power of

His grace through the work of Christ in the hearts of believers. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be my people.” God by means of the work of salvation actually writes on the heart of every believer His laws. The believer views God’s law as a way unto obedience. Not as a way of earning God’s favor or a way to justify himself, but simply as a way of loving obedience. This reveals that the motivation behind such obedience is not a rigorous keeping of the outward demands of God’s law. What motivates the child of God to keep God’s law is *grace*. It is a matter of a heart that loves God and seeks to please Him.

This answers the second objection to preaching strictly the law. True believers will not become legalistic. They will never begin to view their works as meritorious. They will never begin to think that they must earn their righteousness by their deeds. Keeping God’s commands is strictly a matter of thankfulness. Nothing more. We must take careful note that Lord’s Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism is under the third part of the Catechism that deals with our thankfulness. The decalogue is a rule of thankfulness in the life of believers.

**The decalogue
is a rule of
thankfulness
in the life of
believers.**

Then there is also the other matter that the antinomian argues that Jesus has done away with the law in the life of the believer. The Bible does not teach this. Jesus explains in Matthew 5:17 that He has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. This means that by means of His death and resurrection He does not do away with the law in the life of God’s people. Rather, those Old Testament types and ceremonies contained in the law were fulfilled by Christ. They served to point His Old Testament church to Him. Once He came and fulfilled them there was no longer any need for them. The outward ceremonies of the law of Moses fall away for the church today. But the principle demands of the law remain in tact. For that reason, Paul could write in Romans 3:31, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”

But where is the necessity of the preaching of the law? We need only use the example of the nation of Judah under the reign of king Josiah to answer that

question. Josiah and the nation of Judah were ignorant of the law of God until which time, when cleaning the temple, two of his men found the book of the law. It was then read in Josiah's presence. He was appalled at the disobedience that characterized the nation of Judah. He then caused the law to be read in the ears of all the people of the nation to remind them what God's will was for them. The church today too must periodically preach through the ten commandments in order to remind believers of their calling before God. The church ought not to expect its sheep to follow in the way of God's commands unless the shepherds of the sheep lead them in the way of God's commandments.

Question and Answer 115 of the Heidelberger reminds us that there are two blessed benefits of regular law preaching. First, by means of the preaching of the law "we learn more and more to know our sinful nature." Of course! When we are given to know what God's commandments demand of us in the way of obedience we learn that we are "prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor" (Lord's Day

2; Q. & A. 5). It is out of the law that we come to know our sin and misery (Q. & A. 3). The more we come to know what is in our sinful flesh, the more we seek the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ. The law today still forces us to look to the cross of Christ alone for our righteousness before God.

The second benefit is that we, out of a deep love for God, "constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit that we might become more and more conformable to the image of God." Since we desire to be imitators of our heavenly Father, we use the law as a guide to conform our lives to His will. In this way God preserves His church and believers in the ways of His Word.

May God grant His people the grace to walk in His commandments. May God give us the boldness as ministers of the gospel to preach the commandments!

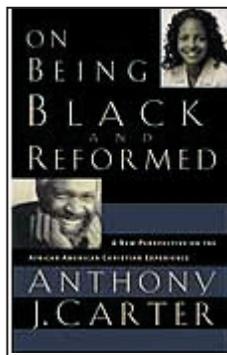
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Book Reviews

ON BEING BLACK AND REFORMED by Anthony Carter. P&R Publishing, 2008. Reviewed by R. Scott Clark

This is an important book for at least a four reasons. First, it is the first book of its kind demanding and giving compelling reasons why white Reformed Christians should think about and pay attention to and learn from the experience of black Christians. Second, it provides a window into a community whose experience and history is (probably) quite different from that of its intended audience—though I suspect that Christians of all races could learn from this work. Third, it is an excellent starting place for a dialogue that needs to begin where it has not and that needs to continue where it has begun. Finally, for those who are interested in seeing the Reformed faith reach every people group in North America and in the rest of the world, this book is an essential starting point.

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Southwest Christian Fellowship, Anthony frequently travels as a conference speaker and guest lecturer. Anthony lives in Jonesboro, GA where he and his wife, Adriane, are raising their 5 children..

I won't survey the book here because I want readers to read it for themselves. I regret that book reviews, instead of becoming a stimulus to read and learn, have become opportunities not to read but rather executive summaries for those too busy to read.

The strongest chapter is chapter 3: "The Church From Chains," in which Carter provides a brief but quite helpful introduction to the rise of the modern slave trade and to the history of the experience of black Christians in North America. He nails the incongruity of self-professed "evangelicals" owning slaves and refusing to allow them to be catechized (pp. 50-51) because that would lead to baptism and that would lead to freedom for the slaves and economic loss for the slave owners. The Christian capitulation to culture has taken many forms. Carter observes the implicit

anthropology by which “Christian” slave owners justified their sins, by denying humanity to the slaves. This ability to decide at will who is and isn’t human would come to haunt the modern world in a variety of ways including mass slaughter in the twentieth century in Germany, Russia, and in American abortion clinics.

Carter also offers a helpful explanation for why it is that Reformed and Presbyterian folk have such a poor track record at reaching the black community with the faith. Baptists and Methodists “welcomed slaves into their communions and condemned the practice of slavery” (p.54). According to the founder of the AME, the Presbyterians were too were too “high flown” to reach the slaves (p.55). A third reason why the Methodist and Baptists churches command the loyalty of African-American Christians is that they were willing to “develop and promote African-American preachers” (ibid).

A Preface and A Challenge

Before I make some criticisms of this book, let me be direct, it needs to be read by the denominations and federations that I serve as a seminary teacher, i.e. the NAPARC groups. For example, to my knowledge, the URCs have reached almost no African-Americans. We have not reached into any African-American communities. So far as I know, no one has any plans to reach into African-American communities.

To the degree that the African-American community remains, relative to the Reformed churches, largely an unreached people group, it testifies to the truth that many of our congregations lack a sense of mission. There is not a strong sense in all Reformed congregations that every congregation has been tasked with a mission to reach the lost and to teach those whom, by God’s grace, we reach. In my experience our congregations often lack a sense that the visible, institutional church is a divine institution with a mission to proclaim the gospel, the make disciples, and to administer the sacraments. All that is further justification getting this book, putting it in church libraries and into the hands of elders and other leaders.

Point One

The first question/problem I want to raise about this work is the claim that there is such a thing as “Black theology” (ch. 1). There is no question

whether all theology is culturally and historically situated. Everyone does theology in some language. Nevertheless, I do not think that it follows that because one does theology in a given time, place, language, and culture that therefore that culture is *so* determinative of the theology that, as a result, it must be qualified by the culture in which was written. The universals “Protestant” and “Reformed” or “evangelical” (in the old sense) transcend national and cultural boundaries. Indeed, the adjectives “Christian” and “catholic” transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries. Even though I’m a middle-class, middle-age, middle-American white guy, I have the much the same faith as the North Africans Tertullian and Augustine, Europeans such as Bernard, and Englishmen such as Anselm, Perkins, and Owen.

Carter asks the important question (p. 3), “Do we need to speak theologically within the African-American context?” The answer, of course, is “Yes,” but I don’t see why that means we need a “black” theology. When we go to Asia, do we need an “Asian” theology? The question of contextualization is difficult, but I don’t see that we’ve really helped ourselves by Balkanizing Christian theology by racial or national or ethnic sub-groups. Can apply this same sort of Balkanization to the biblical authors? I don’t think so. Scripture is nothing if not multi-ethnic in context but the message, the theology that unifies it transcends particular cultures even as it arises within particular cultures.

Perhaps one might respond, “You’re a white, middle-class male. Of course you don’t want to speak of a ‘black’ theology or ‘female’ or ‘Asian’ theology because that would challenge your hegemony.” I reply: No, it’s not about hegemony because I don’t accept the premise of the objection that doing theology is necessarily some exercise of power. Theology is a ministerial discipline. Anyone who regards theology as an act of power is probably deluded or in the wrong business. Further, if we concede that there really such things as “female” theology or “Black” theology or “physically-challenged” theology we’ve traded meaningful universals for radicalizing particulars. The many has swallowed up the one. Catholicity is lost to interest groups and theology is lost to politics.

We need to hear the voices of every ethnic group in theology. There is no question whether each group has its own experience. We all need to hear each other

and account, as best we can, for the influence of our time and place on our understanding of Scripture and theology. Carter, however, cites David Wells' comments about "American" theology (p.5) and some various traditions (dispensational etc; p. 10) from which he concludes that there must also be "black" theology. Isn't it a bit of an equivocation to equate a theology that is done by "Americans" (i.e., in a given national context) with "black" theology to equate or a theological tradition such as "covenant" theology with theology done by a racial or ethnic sub-group? Is there then a "white" theology, a Latino theology etc? There are African-American covenant and dispensational theologians.

Another assumption that I fear lies behind the language "black theology" is the notion that theology is really an expression of human religious experience. I'm not imputing this notion to Carter but I worry about the unintended consequences of this sort of language. It is the fundamental assumption of modernism and chiefly of the architect of modern theology: Friederich Schleiermacher. Theology is the revelation of God in Scripture. As some anonymous medieval theologian said (no, it wasn't Thomas) Theology is given by God, teaches God, and leads to God. We are getting to grips with divine revelation. Yes, we do it in a time, a place, and with necessary limitations, but the truth that we apprehend, *sola gratia et sola fide*, transcends our time and place. Wouldn't it be more helpful to speak about the need to communicate Reformed theology to the various sub-groups that make up the African-American communities?

Point Two

In chapter two Carter lays out a brief summary of "Reformed" theology. This criticism applies equally to the enthusiasm for those "young, restless, and reformed" theologians and leaders. The question is about the definition of the adjective "Reformed." I have a book coming out this fall on this very topic so I'll be brief here. I understand that the word "Reformed" gets used in a lot of different contexts to mean a lot of different things. The way it's used in ch. 2 of this work (and widely through the book) reflects a somewhat reductionist definition that revolves around soteriology. In short "Reformed" as used

in *On Being Black and Reformed* is defined by the Five Points of the Synod of Dort. The chief problem with this definition is that it omits the doctrines of the church and sacraments, as well as Christology, worship, and ethics. Inherent in the word Reformed, properly defined, is a Christology, is an ecclesiology, and doctrine of the sacraments that excludes about 90% of American evangelicals. To be Reformed is to belong to a confessionally Reformed congregation, to submit to its government and discipline, to confess its faith, and to participate in its sacramental life. Most of those in the USA who call themselves "Reformed" do not meet those tests. I appreciate the enthusiasm in this book for elements of the Reformed faith but it is in the vital interests of the Reformed churches that we challenge the minimalist definition of the word.

Point Three

On p. 78 Carter complains that black theologians have been ignored. This is a weighty and important point. This goes to the moral necessity of Reformed folk hearing all the voices who might be speaking our faith in their context. There is one Reformed faith but there might be a variety dialects (Dutch, British, German-Reformed, African-American etc). On p. 83, however, he concedes or suggests, by way of quotation, that theology done by African-Americans has, for understandable reasons, not always had the technical sophistication of other dialects. Fine, but it's not fair to demand that African-American theologians receive equal time if their theology is not all that interesting *as theology*. For example, in my Medieval-Reformation course I don't lecture on "English" theology at length. Why? The most interesting theologians in the Reformation were European. Does that mean I'm slighting the English? No. We pay attention to the controversy over the civil war, the rise of "Puritanism," and other important factors that formed the English church. So, it's one thing to pay attention to a theology as a witness to the experience of a people (whether English or African-American) and it's another thing to pay attention to it because its inherent theological interest.

Point Four

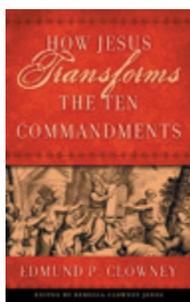
Finally, in chapter 5 Carter gives reasons why African-Americans ought to become Reformed. This is terrific and the list is fine as far as it goes but it's too

short and it lacks an important category that could be a boon to African-American Christian families and congregations: the covenants. Anyone with any social awareness knows that the African-American family has been decimated during the Great Society and since the advent of “urban renewal.” Historic African American communities have been fragmented. Whatever the exact causes of this phenomenon, one message the African-American folk need to hear, indeed that all Christians need to hear, is that the God of the Bible is a promise-making and promise-keeping God. We are covenant breakers and therefore various social covenants have been broken, but God made a covenant (promise) of salvation and worked out the fulfillment of that promise (covenant) of grace through redemptive history and fulfilled it in Christ. African-American Christians need to hear that God administers his gracious covenant promise in congregations and makes promises to Christian families to be a God to believing parents and to their children. This means that the family unit is not simply a collection of autonomous individuals but an entity through which God works to accomplish his promises. The covenant family is integral to the way God ordinarily works. The family is not the church and home-life is not the objective means of grace, but the family is the recipient of promises.

Another way to go at this question is to say that the Reformed faith should simply be considered a sort of second-blessing to be added to American individualist revivalism but as a radical principle of ecclesiastical and theological and religious reorganization. If Reformed theology is covenant theology, then the absence of overt covenant theology is a significant omission from this work. Further, If African-American congregations adopted covenant theology they would have a compelling alternative to the various Black-nationalist heresies (e.g. the Nation of Islam) and perhaps even to the pernicious health and wealth messages peddled to the African-American communities. The promise that God has made to African-American believers and to their children is not earthly prosperity but “I will be a God to you and to your children.”

An Invitation

I realize that I’ve spent more words criticizing this work than I have praising it. I hope that these criticisms are taken as signal of my high regard for this book. I hope the reader will investigate this book and these questions for himself. I hope also that this book is only an introduction to these topics and that Carter produces a sequel to this work that fleshes out some of the positive themes that he introduces



HOW JESUS TRANSFORMED THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, by Edmund P. Clowney. Edited by Rebecca Clowney Jones. P & R Publishing, 2007. Reviewed by Rev. Howard Sloan

The title of Dr. Clowney’s book does not do the contents justice. This is not just about what Jesus had to say about the ten commandments, but about how His person, work, and teaching transform them. It is about His life and death transform them. It is about what He left for us in the apostles teaching and ministry transform them.

The book is divided into twelve chapters – an introduction, a conclusion, and ten chapters on the commandments themselves. Each chapter has study questions at the end for use in individual study or for a Sunday School class. The chapters are very rich

and deep. The commandments are not presented as a bare list of don’ts, but in a way that drive us to greater piety and obedience. The depth of each command as Clowney presents them is far greater than I can illustrate in such a short review.

The one chapter that may cause some debate is Clowney’s treatment of the second commandment. It is his discussion of images of Jesus that I particularly have in mind. Clowney states a position that in certain limited cases images of Jesus might be acceptable and not idolatrous. Much of the Reformed community holds that any image of Jesus is idolatry. I urge you to read his argument before making any judgment.

Overall, I found the book to be a great read. It is full of encouragement toward deep and abiding holiness. It is strong statement on the depth and breath of the commandments, as well as the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

News, Notes, and Prayer Requests

NEWS AND NOTES

• Central Ohio Reformation Studies Conference
October 28-30, 2008
Sponsored by ADVOCATE Enterprise
<www.advocateenterprise.org>
Location: Camp McPherson Lodge (between Loudonville & Mount Vernon)
Proposed Presenters and Round Table Participants:
Richard “Rick” Daniels, Th.D., Westminster Seminary; L. Gordon Tait, Th.D., Mercer Professor of Religious Studies Emeritus, The College of Wooster; Honorary Fellow of the University of Edinburgh; John Hood, D.Min., Ashland Theological Seminary; Rev. Phillip A. Ross, Pastor, Author, Webmaster
Rev. David C. Brand, M. Div., Fuller Seminary;

Th.M., Westminster Seminary; Director, ADVOCATE Enterprise. For more details see the ADVOCATE Enterprise website.

• We need people willing to write book reviews for the Reformation Voice. Contact Howard Sloan if you have a book to review.

PRAYER REQUESTS

• Pray for the fall business meeting and the future direction of the association.

• The HRA will be having a table at the CCCC Annual Conference in Buffalo, NY in July to promote our work. Pray for the Lord’s blessing over that.

Bible Conference Report

The first annual Bible Conference of the HRA was held on May 27-29, 2008 in Bedford, PA at St. Paul’s Reformed Church. Our speaker was Rev. Ronald Cammenga who treated us to a wonderful feast of the great Reformation themes to be found throughout the Heidelberg Catechism. Audio of those sessions is available free of charge at the HRA website. We had attendees from five different states this year. And all had a wonderful time of fellowship. Special thanks to Michele Sloan who helped to prepare and coordinate the meals.

A roundtable discussion time took place over the uses of the Heidelberg Catechism in church life. Of course the preaching the HC was prominent in the discussion. Also discussed was the use of the HC in confirmation classes, as confession of faith during the worship

service, and the use of the catechism in pastor work and counseling.

During the business session five new members were officially received: Ron Cammenga, R. Scott Clark, Daniel Hyde, Jay Fluck, and Jai Mahtani. An information table at the Annual CCCC Conference was also approved.

The fall meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 11, 2008 at St. Paul’s Reformed Church. The 2009 Bible Conference is tentatively scheduled for the first week of June 2009. It will again be held at St. Paul’s Reformed Church in Bedford, PA. The proposed theme is “Calvin and the Catechisms” in honor of John Calvin’s 500 birthday.

Editorial Policy for the Reformation Voice

1. The Executive Committee shall serve at the editorial committee for the Reformation Voice. They shall have the right to select or reject any content for inclusion in the Reformation Voice.

2. Content may be submitted by members, pending members, or members of member churches. The Executive Committee may also solicit the right to (re)print articles from other authors or reviewers whose writings may be of value to the membership of the HRA.

3. In keeping with the purposes of the Association, books reviews in the Reformation Voice shall be reflective of the purposes and standards of the Association.

4. The Reformation Voice shall not be used as a platform to voice views and positions that are particular to a denomination or group. Rather, it should seek to promote those theological positions which are held in common by all who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.