

# Error and its disciples

An evaluation of some false trends in Protestant Reformed theology, showing leaders and some of the followers of those trends.

This is not a work evaluating all types of heresies; that would require much more space and such works can be commonly found. However, I wish here to evaluate some key movements within Protestant theology, and particularly modern Reformed theology, identifying erroneous teachings and aberrant groups.

There is not space in this small compass to fully discuss all the errors, their implications and the reasons why they are wrong. This is a brief survey to give an overall viewpoint with sources for the reader to follow up individual points of interest.

## Amyraldism (4-Point Calvinism)

### Originator

Many Calvinists today do not realise that they are not Calvinists at all but, in their denial of limited atonement and confusion on election, they have actually become Amyraldians.

This was a heresy developed in the Saumur Theological School by Moses Amyraut<sup>1</sup> [1596-1664], a disciple of John Cameron (who held similar views).

### Summary

It has been called 'Hypothetical Universalism' because it is a theological impossibility: it tries to unite two opposite and contradictory things. Amyraut sought to unify Calvinists and Lutherans and developed a compromise between Calvinistic particularism (the elect singled out) and Lutheran universalism (which is similar to Arminian universalism). This was based upon a universalistic Gospel (God loves everyone and desires to save everyone) tacked on to the particularism of Calvinism (God elects only some to eternal life in practice).

The essence of Amyraldism is:

- **Universalism:** salvation is hypothetically offered to all and available for all on the condition that they believe. Thus, God wills all men to be saved. But people are not saved as a result of their sin and rejection of the Gospel. The universalism does not result in the salvation of men and is thus merely hypothetical.
- **Particularism:** salvation is only for the specific people chosen by God since men do not believe the offer.

Thus God loves everyone and decrees the salvation of everyone if they believe. However, since men don't believe God gives faith to the elect. This is a confused and contradictory system - all men can be saved by their own faith, but only the elect are actually saved by the gift of God's faith.

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<sup>1</sup> In those days scholars took Latin names (as they wrote in Latin which was the universal language) so Amyraut becomes Amyrald.

The doctrine was developed to avoid the impression that God is unfair, hateful or unjust in the doctrine of election; but it completely ignores many clear scriptures, such as that God does hate the wicked, or that the reprobate are chosen to condemnation from eternity. It was later used as a basis to merge Calvinism with Arminianism.

### Errors

- Perversion of God's decree.
- Positing a false, hypothetical universalism in the decree.
- Claiming a universal atonement.
- Claiming that God loves everybody.
- Implying that man can do spiritual good, even though he doesn't in the end.
- Teaching mediate regeneration: i.e. that a) the Holy Spirit uses preaching as a means to regenerate the soul; b) this work is an illumination of the intellect but not an act on the will; the will merely follows the mind having this truth. The orthodox position on regeneration is that the work of the Spirit is a direct creative act in the human spirit bringing the soul into conscious will and faith, without any means. Without the creative act of regeneration, the soul cannot receive the truth of God's word to salvation. The Spirit enables us to hear, to change, to will and to believe by a direct act of creation (new birth).

### Followers

- Most modern Calvinists; all 4-Point Calvinists.
- Puritans Richard Baxter and John Davenant.
- Andrew Fuller was a radical Amyraldian with other errors.
- A modern champion of classic Amyraldism is Alan Clifford.

### Sources

- Paul Fahy; *Letter to a closet Amyraldian*, (2012).
- Paul Fahy; *Errors of the Saumur School: The problem of searching for compromise*, (2010).
- BB Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, Eerdmans (1942).
- Robert Reymond; *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Nelson (1998), in loc.

## Atonement: modern errors

### Origins

There isn't a formal name for the new interpretations of the doctrine of atonement that are flooding evangelicalism today. These attacks are chiefly focused against the idea of penal substitution: that is, the traditional truths that atonement is a penal satisfaction that turns away God's wrath against sin (propitiation) and that this is enabled by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on behalf of the elect (a vicarious sacrifice). These ideas are considered cruel and outdated.

Amongst the supposed evangelical theologians that began to attack these truths were NT Wright (see 'New Perspective' later), who suggested strands of thought on this matter and who called the traditional interpretation of Gal 3:10-13 'nonsense';<sup>2</sup> a theme which was taken up by others. In 2000, a famous evangelical publishing house issued a book by Joel B Green and Mark D Baker which denied the Protestant doctrine of the atonement saying

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<sup>2</sup> *Peace & Truth* magazine; 2013:1, p39.

that it was, ‘*the perceived necessity of placating an emotion-laden God ever on the verge of striking out against any who disobey his every will*’.<sup>3</sup> Clark Pinnock (see ‘Open Theism’ later) and Robert C Brow also rejected penal substitution and vicarious atonement proposing a ‘*less violent*’ view of atonement. This was further expounded by J Denny Weaver in 2001 in a book published by another supposed evangelical publisher. Following this was former Baptist, and now Emergent Church leader, Steve Chalke (influenced by Wright) who parroted others and called penal substitution, ‘*cosmic child abuse*’. Another Emergent Church leader, Brian McLaren denied penal substitution and even said that the Gospel is not atonement-centred saying that it, ‘*presents a God who is incapable of forgiving. Unless He kicks somebody else*’.<sup>4</sup>

The basic error of this is so emphasising the love of God, which is endemic in a theologically confused world (in fact holiness is God’s governing attribute) that anything deemed unlovely cannot be ascribed to God, despite the facts of Scripture. Thus Chalke says, ‘*The fact is that the cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse - a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed ... The truth is, the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as Son are prepared to go to prove that love*’.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy that many of the proponents are liberals or New Evangelicals (modern liberals).

### Errors

- Denial that the Gospel is atonement-centred; this is why the Lord’s Supper is at the heart of the local church meeting to constantly remind us of this fact.
- Claims that the concept of penal substitution is a: ‘*mistake*’, ‘*evil*’ and ‘*divine child-abuse*’.<sup>6</sup>
- Contradiction of clear Scriptures (such as: Isa 53:6-10; Rm 1:18; 3:22-5; 5:8-9; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 9:11-28; 1 Pt 3:18; 1 Jn 4:10).
- It ignores the whole context of the OT emphasis upon bloody sacrifices as a substitute for a man’s sin. It denies the fact that it was God who instituted bloody-sacrifices and the concept of substitution. ‘*Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.*’ (Heb. 9:22)
- Some teach meritorious works to remit sin (like Roman Catholics), such as: penitential prayer, repentance and acts of charity (Green and Baker).<sup>7</sup>
- It demeans the seriousness of sin and the anger of a holy God against it.
- It ignores the historical development of the doctrine of atonement, which examined and dealt with this issue in the past.
- It is a return to similar historic heresies, such as Governmental Theory of the Atonement.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Peace & Truth* magazine; 2013:1, p40.

<sup>4</sup> *Peace & Truth* magazine; 2013:1, p40.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Chalke & Alan Mann; *The Lost Message of Jesus*, Zondervan (2003), p182,183.

<sup>6</sup> Green & Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, p147, 173, 181.

<sup>7</sup> Green & Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, p48-49.

<sup>8</sup> The Governmental Theory was first codified by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), based upon Abelard’s earlier Moral Influence theory of the atonement. It proposed that: 1) Christ did not die as a substitute for man’s sin, but suffered as a perfect example of a man who honoured the law. 2) This death is then accepted by God to satisfy the law that sin demands death. 3) An emphasis upon moral law as the natural governing feature of human actions known to the conscience, not as the rule of God’s will. 4) God controls the world by moral influence rather than predestination. 5) Men are encouraged to obey natural, moral law rather than God decreeing the salvation of particular sinners. This influenced Fuller and New Haven Theology.

## Followers

Clark Pinnock, Robert C Brow, J Denny Weaver, NT Wright, Steve Chalke, Brian McLaren Joel B Green, Mark D Baker, James Dunn, Stephen Travis, Alan Mann and Mark Baker.

## Sources

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- Clark H Pinnock and Robert C Brow; *Unbounded Love*, Wipf & Stock Publishers (2001).
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- Steve Chalke & Alan Mann; *The Lost Message of Jesus*, Zondervan (2003).
- David H. Linden; *A review of Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament & Contemporary Contexts*, Joel B. Green & Mark D. Baker, InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, © 2000.
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- Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, Tyndale Press (1955).

## Common Grace

### Origins

#### *Historic form*

The phrase has often been used in theological works, usually to mean the works of providence by which God sustains all men, good and evil. It appears a couple of times in Calvin, but not in the modern sense.

#### *Kuyperian form*

Abraham Kuyper developed a completely new doctrine to assist his alliance with Roman Catholics in forging a new political party in The Netherlands, by which Kuyper sought to Christianise world society in stages. His common grace proposed that all sinners (including the reprobate) could do good civil works as a result of receiving a general grace that assisted men but did not convert them. Thus God looked upon all men with favour and accepted good moral works, even in people who were never converted. This enabled Reformed people to work with Roman Catholics to a common societal goal. Kuyper still remained a champion of particular saving grace and did not teach a well-meant offer.

#### *Modern form*

Starting with the common grace of Kuyper, 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians developed this into an even more pernicious form that is now axiomatic today. This teaches that: 1] God provides good things to all out of grace (in reality this is the doctrine of providence not grace). 2] This grace enables sinful men to do good works that please God; but it does not save (as Kuyper). 3] God looks in favour upon all sinful men and loves everyone; that Jesus died for everyone (contra Kuyper). 4] And that God restrains the evil in society. This doctrine undergirds the well-meant offer.

### Errors

- It destroys the doctrine of Total depravity.
- It perverts the doctrine of grace, which is only from the cross and only aimed at the elect.

- It perverts and confuses the doctrine of God's providence.
- It is unbiblical; there is no mention of 'common grace' in Scripture and no support for the modern form of it.
- It distorts the doctrine of Limited Atonement.
- It paves the way for the well-meant offer (free offer).

### Followers

Kuyper began the problem with his form of teaching, which was then developed by his successor, Herman Bavinck. After that, successors of Bavinck (e.g. Louis Berkhof and Van Til) popularised the doctrine further. John Murray (of Princeton Seminary), Ned Stonehouse and Louis Berkhof in the Christian Reformed Church then formally developed the doctrine of the free offer in the Gospel in 1924.<sup>9</sup> Only Herman Hoeksema challenged this and was formally disciplined for it and left the CRC. Almost all modern Calvinists now subscribe to these errors, with the exception of the Protestant Reformed Churches and a few others.

### Sources

- David Englesma; *Common Grace Revisited*, RFP, booklet.
- Herman Hoeksema; *Calvin, Berkhof and HJ Kuiper, a comparison*, booklet (1930).
- Barry Gritters; *Grace Uncommon*, booklet.
- Herman Hoeksema; *A Triple Breach*, Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, (1942).
- Paul Fahy; *Common Grace*, excerpted from: 'A simple critique of Dominionism'.
- John Bolt; *Common Grace and the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo (1924): A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective*, Calvin Theological Journal, April, 2000-a.

## Covenant Theology (CT)

### Origins

Also known as Federal Theology and Federalism, its beginnings were in the Reformation. It is the traditional theological foundation of Reformed Presbyterianism; especially Dutch-American Presbyterianism and some Reformed Baptists, such as John Gill.<sup>10</sup> Thus many of the best dogmatics are based upon this system.

There are early elements of a sort of covenant theology evidenced in Calvin and Zwingli, but this is not developed into an overarching system. Johan Heinrich Bullinger [1504-1573] took the idea further with his *Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God* (1534) and then his subsequent five volumes of sermons (*The Decades*) were structured around the idea of covenant. However, he does not teach a covenant of works, nor a covenant of redemption. It took a hundred years of development, beginning with Calvin, to reach a mature covenant theology system.

The development was mainly in Dutch theologians; Zacharias Ursinus [1534-1583] spoke of a covenant of works with Adam. Johannes Cocceius [c. 1603-1669] initially developed

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<sup>9</sup> See Herman Hoeksema; *A Triple Breach*.

<sup>10</sup> The most influential and earliest Baptist confessions are more circumspect (covenant theology not having been fully developed in Europe). The London Baptist Confession (1644) makes statements about the Covenant of Grace (with implicit statements about an eternal feature in this) but does not mention a covenant of works. The 1689 Confession refers more specifically to an implied Covenant of Redemption but without naming it as such. It refers to a covenant of works but does not explain it theologically, simply identifying it with the Mosaic Law and the Moral law. Some later Baptists were opposed to Covenant Theology, especially as it is the main foundation of paedobaptism.

the classic formula of covenant theology in *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God* in 1648. Francis Turretin [1623-1687] elaborated Cocceius' theories and finally Herman Witsius [1636-1708] wrote perhaps the most developed formulation in the *Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*. The Westminster Confession adopts the Covenant Theology federal system.

### Summary of position

Covenant Theology is essentially driven by the need to affirm the unity of Scripture and explain the differences between the two testaments (as such it is diametrically opposed to Dispensationalism). It is a theological framework to interpret Bible and salvation history. It is really a hermeneutic; i.e. a way of interpreting scripture consistently. It usually proposes a framework of three essential covenants (there are variations):

1. *The Covenant of Redemption*, established between the Father and the Son in eternity. The Son agreed to perform atonement on behalf of the elect chosen by the Father.
2. *The Covenant of Works*, established between the God and Adam in Eden. Adam was promised life for obedience and death for disobedience.
3. *The Covenant of Grace*, established between God and the elect through Christ. This promised salvation upon faith in Christ. It is the overarching basis for all other subsequent covenants enacted in history [Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, New Covenant].

However, it is agreed that these three covenants are not explicitly presented in scripture but are said to be implicit.

Following on from this artificial structure, CT utilises a strong typological hermeneutic to apply parts of the OT to the church under the New Covenant.

Thus federalism contends that all the covenants are differing administrations of the Covenant of Grace with merely superficial differences in method. '*Reformed theology [is] a structural concept for integrating all that God has so diversely spoken unto men.*'<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the New Covenant is not substantially different from the Old Covenant but emphasises the ministry of the Spirit more. This is why Covenant Theologians tend to emphasise external Mosaic Law as the standard of Christian living and why many became Erastians. This focus on Mosaic Law is also why federalists baptise babies; they believe paedobaptism to be the replacement for circumcision as the seal of the covenant (though this is never stated in Scripture and the sealing of the believer is an act of the Spirit, not the flesh).

### Strengths

- It affirms the unity of Scripture.
- It focuses theology on Christ and the covenant of God with man.
- It counters the errors of Dispensationalism.

### Errors

- The covenant of works is absolutely unbiblical. There is not a shred of evidence for it and its formulation denies the necessity of Christ for salvation. The idea that Adam could have merited salvation by works is anathema. There is no promise of eternal life in Gen 2:17. If Gen 2:17 is the beginning of the covenant, then Adam was not in a covenant between his creation and this time of the prohibition. If Christ is the lamb

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<sup>11</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, (1968), p13.

slain from the foundation of the world (i.e. the only means of righteousness and acceptance with God), how could God lie to Adam that he could merit salvation?

- Adam was never under a contract but under law. Federalists say that the essence of a contract or covenant (mutual obligations and promise of reward or penalty) was present. However, the essence of a contract is agreement and consent. This is not present; yet the imposition of law is. The background is mutual obligations and promise of reward or penalty imposed by law from a higher authority. Note Rm 5:12-13.
- The definition of the Covenant of Grace suggests a bilateral contract.<sup>12</sup> But salvation is not bilateral, it is a unilateral move by God towards man to establish friendship. Man can contribute nothing.
- There is no Biblical mention of either a Covenant of Grace or a Covenant of Redemption.
- Covenants are first mentioned after the fall, not before it. Covenants come into play to establish friendship between God and man after the fall.
- The central revealed cementing of a relationship between men and God is founded upon the cross and is not stated to be a covenant event in pre-history. If we are to be Biblical, we must focus upon the cross and not a covenant of grace that is invisible in Scripture. This is also an apostolic emphasis: **‘God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’** (Gal 6:14).
- John tells us that law came from Moses but grace from Christ. How can the Mosaic Law be a Covenant of Grace when the Moral Law (10 Commandments) are the essence of this covenant?
- When Christ came he fulfilled and replaced all the covenants that anticipated him. These were shadows, Christ is the reality. *‘Each demonstration of God’s relationship to men prior to the coming of the new covenant was a temporal, incomplete, and inferior expression of the in Christ relationship.’*<sup>13</sup>
- To state that the Mosaic Covenant is a covenant of grace is to ignore its conditional nature and emphasis on ‘do this and live’.
- CT leads to irrational statements, such as (sic): *‘that the Mosaic Law is an outworking of the Covenant of Grace, but with a slightly different administration’*. This contradicts Scripture which sets Old Covenant against the New Covenant (which supersedes the OC),<sup>14</sup> law against grace (as an economy),<sup>15</sup> of death against life,<sup>16</sup> of condemnation against mercy,<sup>17</sup> of shadow against reality<sup>18</sup> etc.
- Why is the Covenant of Redemption not Trinitarian? There is no mention of the Spirit in the formulations of it.
- The Covenant of Redemption is not confessional; it appeared after the major Reformed standards.<sup>19</sup>
- CT completely fails to see the newness of the New Covenant, where everything is said to be new, even the nature of believers. Since believers are not ordinary men but have died in Christ, they are not under external Mosaic Law.

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<sup>12</sup> Witusus, *Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, Vol 1, p226.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Hartley; *Defining New Covenant Theology*, [http://www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n10/dnct\\_kdh.htm](http://www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n10/dnct_kdh.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Heb 8:13. How can the Old Covenant be a functioning part of the eternal Covenant of Grace if it is abolished? How can Mosaic Law continue if that form of expression of law is abolished?

<sup>15</sup> Jn 1:17.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Cor 3:7.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Cor 3:9.

<sup>18</sup> Heb 8:5, 10:1.

<sup>19</sup> *‘This particular ‘covenant’ finds no specific development in the classic creeds of the Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it has been recognised broadly among covenant theologians since that time.’* O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., (1980), p17.

- It undermines the focus of the believer on Christ as the standard of manhood (not Mosaic Law) and the ministry of the Spirit to work in the believer to bear fruit and fulfil the law of Christ. It changes the internal work of God in grace into an external work of will.
- Paedobaptism is not taught by the apostles and did not appear in the early church for at least 100 years.

Some Reformed theologians have admitted that the system requires reconsideration; such as Presbyterian Herman Hoeksema, who denied the covenant of works, though he was still a federalist.<sup>20</sup> Baptist EF Kevan also denied the covenant of works;<sup>21</sup> and esteemed Presbyterian Professor John Murray's later writings recognised that further study and re-framing of covenant theology was necessary; he also denied the covenant of works and influenced many others.<sup>22</sup> Others admit that parts of CT are artificial and unbiblical.<sup>23</sup> Problems with this system (recognised early on by Phillip Schaff and Johan Mosheim in their histories of the church) eventually led to the development of the recent New Covenant Theology.

### **Correction to Covenant Theology**

- The Covenant of Works must be abandoned.
- The eternal counsel of God cannot be called a covenant. It is not done so in Scripture and the features of covenant are not found (such as sin needing to be appeased and a party needing to be reconciled). This is why the word does not appear until after the Fall.
- The overarching, unifying theme of Scripture is not covenant but God's eternal purpose in Christ; God's decree; God's eternal counsel.
- The concept of 'covenant' is an important principle of Scripture, emphasising how God establishes friendship with elect people in Christ, our covenant head and surety. What comes to us from God comes from our federal relationship to Christ our head. Though important, the doctrine of covenant follows on from, and is subservient to, the doctrine of God's decree to fulfil his eternal plan. Covenant features as part of God's decree to complete his pre-existing eternal purpose. Thus covenants in the OT have an earthly emphasis which is later completed, spiritualised and fulfilled in the New Covenant after the cross. Thus the Seed of Abraham is not Isaac but Christ, and through covenant, is also believers in Christ. The kingship of God's people is no longer David's earthly heirs but Christ. The priesthood is no longer Levitical but Melchizedek (i.e. Christ).
- The Lutheran / Dispensational position of a severe discontinuity between law and Gospel is wrong in implying no law (antinomianism); but the CT position of the continuation of Mosaic Law into the New Covenant is also wrong. [This is normally done by positing three sections of Mosaic Law (civic, ceremonial and moral) and affirming a cancellation of two parts but not the moral law. There is no Biblical foundation for this, which would even require splitting up individual verses.]
- The standard of ethics is no longer Mosaic Law, which is abolished as an external form, but the consummation of moral law (in existence since creation and absorbed in the Mosaic moral component) in a person. The standard is Christ, who has fulfilled all the moral law in himself. This perfection of moral law is then experienced by the believer

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<sup>20</sup> See Hoeksema; *Reformed Dogmatics*, RFP.

<sup>21</sup> Kevan; *The Lord's Supper*, p30-31; EP.

<sup>22</sup> Murray; *The Covenant of Grace*, P&R.

<sup>23</sup> 'A sense of artificiality flavours the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God's eternal counsels. To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian 'covenant' with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to exceed the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety.' O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., (1980), p17.



spiritually as he walks in the Spirit, abides in Christ, puts on the new man, and thus fulfils the law of Christ by faith. The believer does not look to the code of the Mosaic Law but to Christ and fulfils moral law as he walks in obedience to Christ by the Spirit in faith. We are not commanded to read the Law of Moses but to put on the new man, walk in the Spirit, abide in Christ, live by faith etc. The Mosaic Law depended upon fleshly effort but the New Covenant is lived by faith in Christ.

- However, there is benefit in studying the Mosaic Law and learning moral principles from it since these are fulfilled in Christ. The OT is filled with examples and warnings for the believer. All the moral features of the law were perfectly obeyed by Christ and imputed to us in justification. New Covenant teachers who deny any value in OT law are wrong. [See ‘New Covenant Theology’ later.] Thus, though there is no specific NT prohibition of incest, believers will avoid incest because the Spirit of Christ will inform them that it is sin; while the Mosaic Law gives plain statements that it is sin.

### Followers

- Claiming to be Reformed usually implies that you support Covenant Theology, unless you specify otherwise.
- Most traditional consistent Calvinists.
- Virtually all Reformed Presbyterians.
- Many Reformed Baptists who are not New Covenant Theologians or Hyper-Calvinists (Covenant Theology is incompatible with Hyper-Calvinism but some, such as George Ella, claim to be both).

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## Federal Vision

### Origin

Federal Vision (‘FV’; also known as ‘Auburn Avenue Theology’<sup>24</sup>) is a development that originally affected American Presbyterian churches but is now spreading amongst other evangelicals; typically the error is centred in supposed orthodox Presbyterian seminaries by erring theological professors. Most of the conservative US Presbyterian denominations now support this heresy.

### Summary

#### *Denial of the Reformation exposition of justification*

Some of the emphases of Federal Vision have been built on the foundational statements of the New Perspective in affirming that justification is not a legal declaration of graciously imputed righteousness but is mingled with sanctification in some way; in other words it teaches meritorious salvation. Justification is by obedience. To do this FV criticises Reformation doctrine: ‘*The Reformation doctrine of justification has illegitimately narrowed and*

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<sup>24</sup> Named after a Presbyterian Church located in Auburn Avenue, Monroe, Louisiana.

to some extent distorted the biblical doctrine' (Peter Leithart).<sup>25</sup> This claimed distortion is to distinguish justification and sanctification and insist that justification is a verdict. For FV, justification is much wider than something judicial; it is also something that sanctifies, which enables good works becoming a part of the believer's righteousness.

*The reprobate can be brought into union with Christ in an objective, external, conditional covenant*

FV emphasises the externals of the faith, such as baptism, and talks about the covenant being 'objective'. Salvation is by birth into believing families, and these children of grace do not need evangelising; saving grace is universal within the covenant (i.e. Presbyterian church). However, this saving grace can be resisted and lost (thus denying irresistible grace). Everyone who is baptised (particularly the child of believing parents but even non-elect persons) is savingly united to Christ; yet many later fall away (thus denying final perseverance). [Note similarities with Roman Catholicism.] For example the oxymoronic statements<sup>26</sup> of Lusk:

Non-elect covenant members are actually brought to Christ, united to Him and the Church in baptism, receive various gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, and may even be said to be loved by God for a time. In some sense, they were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, and really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. The sacraments they received had objective force and efficacy.<sup>27</sup>

Or see Barach:

God truly brings those people into His covenant, into union with Christ. They are 'in Him,' to use Jesus' words in John 15. They share in His blessings (think of Hebrews 6). They experience His love, but that covenant relationship is conditional. It calls for repentance and faith and new obedience. God's choice was not conditional, but life in the covenant is.<sup>28</sup>

The FV emphasis is not on faith for regeneration but on faithfulness in the covenant; in other words – works (note the similarity with the New Perspective here). The emphasis on externals and sacraments to stay in the covenant indicates a similarity with Roman Catholicism. This focus on an external covenant, maintained by works, takes the attention of the believer away from Christ and denies most of the doctrines of grace.

*Baptismal regeneration*

The logical result of this conditional covenant teaching is baptismal regeneration, and FV teaches this. They claim that water baptism results in a temporary regeneration by the Spirit. Everyone who is baptised is regenerated. However, this salvation can be lost. '*The threshold into union with Christ, new life in the Spirit, and covenant membership in the family of God is actually crossed when the child is baptised.*'<sup>29</sup>

*Denial of perseverance*

We have already noticed this aspect, which is but the logical outcome of teaching a conditional covenant and temporary grace.

Those who ultimately prove to be reprobate may be in covenant with God. They may enjoy for a season the blessings of the covenant, including the forgiveness of sins,

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Leithart: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p209.

<sup>26</sup> That is, statements that are self-contradictory, such as '*non-elect covenant members*'.

<sup>27</sup> Mitch Lusk: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p288.

<sup>28</sup> John Barach: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p37.

<sup>29</sup> Lusk: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p109.

adoption, possession of the kingdom, sanctification, etc., and yet apostatise and fall short of the grace of God.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, then, Hebrews 6:4-8 teaches the possibility of a real apostasy. Some people do indeed fall away, and it is a real fall from grace. Apostates actually lose blessings they once possessed. Apostasy is so terribly heinous precisely because it is sin against grace.<sup>31</sup>

All covenant members are invited to attain to a full and robust confidence that they are God's eternally elect ones. Starting with their baptisms, they have every reason to believe God loves them and desires their eternal salvation. Baptism marks them out as God's elect people, a status they maintain so long as they persevere in faithfulness. By looking to Christ alone, the preeminently Elect One, the One who kept covenant to the end and is the Author and Finisher of the faith of God's people, they may find assurance. But those who take their eyes off Christ, who desert the Church where His presence is found, who forsake the external means of salvation, will make shipwreck of their faith and prove to have received the grace of God in vain.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly, FV advocates are closet Semi-Pelagian Arminians. However, instead of being universal to everyone, FV is Arminianism limited within the sphere of the covenant (professing church). Presbyterians are susceptible to this because they also claim that the children of believers are in the covenant, thus they baptise them. Presbyterian (Covenant Theology) critics of FV are on slippery ground. The only difference regarding the covenant is that children who fall away are said by conservative Presbyterians to have never been elect and under grace at all. FV advocates teach that they were elect and under grace once.

### *Election*

Underneath all the FV claims is the idea that there is not one, single election that results in final salvation to the end. There is an election to the grace available in the external covenant, but that does not save. There is another election unto perseverance, which does save. Thus Lusk states that there is a, '*predestination unto grace*,' which is temporary and does '*not lead to final salvation*,' and there is a '*predestination unto perseverance*,' which does issue in final salvation.<sup>33</sup>

All of this tears believers away from Christ and his central place in salvation and even denies that he merits salvation for the elect alone:

Nowhere [in Scripture] is Jesus' accomplishment spoken of as earning salvation ...  
What we receive is not Jesus' merits, but His maturity, His glorification.<sup>34</sup>

Contrary to FV the OT, and the summary of Paul in Romans 9, teaches that election is always of a remnant. Not all Jews were saved; only the remnant. Both Esau and Jacob were in the covenant but only Jacob was loved and elected by God. This fact alone ruins the theological foundation of FV. The Pharisees considered themselves to be children of the covenant but the Lord Jesus called some of them children of the devil.

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<sup>30</sup> Wilkins: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p62.

<sup>31</sup> Lusk: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p274.

<sup>32</sup> *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p289.

<sup>33</sup> Lusk: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p275.

<sup>34</sup> James B. Jordan: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p192, 195. Note that some modern Hyper-Calvinists also deny the active obedience of Christ imputed to the believer in justification, claiming that it is the 'faith of Jesus' that justifies, not his work.

Like other false systems<sup>35</sup> FV tries to attach a sort of universalism onto the plan of salvation.

### Neo-legalism

Some (such as John Robbins of the Trinity Foundation) have called aspects of FV and the New Perspective on Paul (see later) Neo-legalism because the teachings of Norman Shepherd have resulted in a revised form of works righteousness with similarities to the traditional legalism of Roman Catholicism. Note: '*The presuppositions undergirding Paul's statement [in Romans 2:13] include the facts that the Law is 'obeyable,' that truly responding to the Law (the Word) in faith does justify,*' (Schlissel).<sup>36</sup> This denies Romans 3:28, which Schlissel claims only refers to Jewish deeds. Romans teaches that justification is by faith without human deeds; Schlissel teaches that it is by faith plus human deeds - legalism.

### Errors

- FV claims that the Bible is full of contradictions (Lusk), amounting to a denial of Scripture.
- Federal Vision teaches heterodox ideas on a number of matters, such as: the covenant, faith, baptism, the Lord's Supper, election, regeneration, apostasy, and sacramental efficacy.
- Schlissel has stated that Luther's understanding of justification by faith alone was a '*malady*'.<sup>37</sup>
- FV teaches a form of meritorious works righteousness: a right standing before God is achieved partly by Christ's work on the cross but mostly by the believer in obeying the law. A believer's good works, mixed with faith, become part of his justification (similar to Roman Catholic doctrine). Presbyterian Minister Mitch Lusk can dare to say that, '*Works of faith filled obedience in a secondary way cause our final justification;*'<sup>38</sup> while Steve Schlissel affirms that the law is observable.<sup>39</sup> The apostle Paul's statements that it is not are explained away as referring to Jewish ceremonial laws only.
- FV claims that election is merely a decision by God based upon someone believing in time and remaining faithful; a sort of rubber stamp founded upon man's performance. Thus election is conditional on man's faith; it can be resisted and lost.
- It avers that God can bring baptised, non-elect people into direct union with Christ, share in His covenant blessings, be sanctified by Christ's blood, receive new life, know the true love of God and still be lost eternally due to disobedience.<sup>40</sup>
- Like all semi-Pelagian systems, FV teaches that Christ's atonement is universal. Thus Norman Shepherd, '*Missionaries can and must preach to everyone on the basis of Jn 3:16, Christ died to save you.*'<sup>41</sup>
- In keeping with Arminianism the result of FV is that salvation can be lost by disobedience.
- Like Romanism, FV salvation is covenantally linked with baptismal regeneration.
- The key to FV damaging Presbyterians in particular is its version of a conditional covenant theology - grace is universal to all baptised babies, but this grace can then be

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<sup>35</sup> Such as the Free Offer, Neo-Orthodoxy and Amyraldism.

<sup>36</sup> Steve Schlissel in: *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p260.

<sup>37</sup> *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, editors, Athanasius Press (2004), p255.

<sup>38</sup> From the article, *The Tenses of Justification*; quoted in a speech by David Engelsma, *Federal Vision*. <http://www.pca.org/Audio/Engelsma1.wma>

<sup>39</sup> *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner; op. cit. p260.

<sup>40</sup> *The Federal Vision*, Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner; op. cit. p37, 62, 274, 288.

<sup>41</sup> Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*.

rejected. It is Arminianism mixed with covenant doctrine and as such is, ‘*the gravest threat to the Reformed faith since Dort*’.<sup>42</sup> Another reviewer claims that, ‘*Federal Vision is a deviant, unbiblical view of salvation... the proponents of the Federal Vision hold to a deviant view of the covenant, the active obedience of Christ, the way one receives salvation-justification, the role of baptism in conversion, the relation of the reprobate to Christ and the means of assurance*’.<sup>43</sup> It also is a grievous rejection of sovereign grace and an elevation of man.

- It should also be noted that there is a close link between FV and Reconstructionism. One link is James Jordan, a purveyor of foolish allegory.

### Effects

The close connection with these doctrines to Roman Semi-Pelagianism has already led a large number of Presbyterians to Rome.

### Followers

Norman Shepherd, Douglas Wilson, Duane Garner, Mitch Lusk, John Kinnear, Steve Schlissel, Andrew Sandlin, John Barach, Peter J. Leithart, James Jordan and Steve Wilkins.

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- Joseph Pipa; *A Review of The Auburn Avenue Theology*.

## Hyper-Calvinism

### Mistaken accusations

The term arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to apply to radical or extreme Calvinists. Throughout history people have been called Hyper-Calvinists (or some similar label) because someone else considered that their doctrine of Calvinism was too extreme, but this is not Hyper-Calvinism proper. For example:

- Hyper Calvinism is not the belief in Limited Atonement as opposed to Universal Atonement. That is just traditional Calvinism.
- It is not Hyper-Calvinistic to uphold supralapsarianism as opposed to infralapsarianism. Both are Calvinistic.
- It is not Hyper-Calvinism to deny the Free Offer and Common Grace. In fact, upholding the Free Offer and Common Grace is modern and opposed to historic Calvinism.

Ordinary Calvinists who have been falsely accused of Hyper-Calvinism include: Augustus Toplady, Herman Hoeksema, AW Pink, David Engelsma, Gordon Clark and Herman Hanko. However, true Hyper-Calvinism has to do with restrictions on Gospel preaching and denying duty-faith, plus some peripheral theological errors.

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<sup>42</sup> David Engelsma, speech - *Federal Vision* op. cit.

<sup>43</sup> Dr. Joseph Pipa, *A Review of The Auburn Avenue Theology*; p281.

## Origins

There is no single originator but a movement amongst Calvinists that gradually developed in the late 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is associated mainly with Strict and Particular Baptists and Congregationalists in the UK, especially the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists which formed into an exclusive denomination in 1860. Chief names amongst claimed historic Hyper-Calvinists would include John Gill [1697-1771], JC Philpot [1802-1869], William Gadsby [1773-1844], Robert Hawker [1753-1827], John Brine [1703-1765], Joseph Hussey [1660-1726], JK Popham [1847-1937], J Irons, James Wells, and JH Gosden; though not all these were extremists of the Gospel Standard sort.

For instance, Gill believed in eternal justification but did not restrict the preaching of the Gospel or deny duty-faith, or deny progressive sanctification, nor was he an antinomian. He also worked with leaders from other denominations, such as Calvinistic Anglicans Augustus Toplady and James Hervey. So there are several shades of Hyper-Calvinism and Gill is not associated with the modern form; indeed he is not a Hyper-Calvinist at all.<sup>44</sup>

The chief errors were perpetrated by W. Gadsby, Hawker and Philpot. The Gospel Standard articles began as John Gill's *Declaration of Faith*, which were adopted in 1729 by the Goat Yard Church at Horsleydown and in 1843 by JC Philpot; later John Gadsby printed these for use by Particular Baptist churches. In 1866 these articles were amended to become the 'Articles for Strict Baptist Churches'.

In 1841 Philpot formalised the erroneous doctrine in print, which had emerged earlier in W. Gadsby and Hawker, that Christians cannot make general exhortations to believe the Gospel. In 1872 the 17 Gospel Standard articles of faith were expanded to 31. The infamous 'added articles' were the addition of four more in 1878; these are the erroneous statements added by Gadsby to include statements about invitations of the Gospel being only for sensible sinners, denying Duty Faith & repentance and indiscriminate offers to all (Articles 24, 26, 29). Gadsby did this using coercion and financial threats as part of a vindictive attack on Septimus Sears. Thus the origins of the chief modern Hyper-Calvinist doctrines are shrouded in unrighteousness.<sup>45</sup> Most current Hyper-Calvinists are unaware of this black history.

## Errors

### *Denial of duty-faith*

XXVI We deny duty faith and duty repentance - these terms signifying that it is every man's duty spiritually and savingly to repent and believe... we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God.<sup>46</sup>

Hyper-Calvinists deny that sinners should be commanded to repent and believe in Christ, despite clear Scriptures commanding this (e.g. Acts 17:30). They fail to understand that responsibility does not imply ability.<sup>47</sup> The command to believe in the Gospel is the means to effectually call and empower the elect, but to harden the reprobate.

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<sup>44</sup> See the argument in, George Ella 'John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism'; *Baptist Quarterly*, Oct. 1995.

<sup>45</sup> See David HJ Gay, *Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice and Its Aftermath*, Brachus; or Paul Fahy; *Great saints who were victims of the church*, article.

<sup>46</sup> Gospel Standard Articles, 26.

<sup>47</sup> Note that the two sides of this are heresies. Those who believe that responsibility (to repent and believe) implies human ability are Pelagians (man saves himself). Those who believe that inability (to repent and believe) means that man has no duty to believe are Hyper-Calvinists.

*Denial of an indiscriminate preaching of the Gospel.*

XXIX While we believe that the gospel is to be preached in or proclaimed to all the world.... we deny offers of grace; that is to say, that the gospel is to be offered indiscriminately to all.<sup>48</sup>

XXXIII Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them savingly to repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and, on the other, to deny the doctrine of special redemption.<sup>49</sup>

This follows on from the denial of man's duty to believe. Since men must not be commanded to believe (because they are unable) then the Gospel must be limited to those who show signs of regeneration; i.e. those under conviction of sin. Of course, this is impossible since no one can truly know the state of a man's heart. This led to many people under conviction of sin never pressing on to assurance of faith because they were not sure if they were convicted enough to claim regeneration.

*Affirmation of eternal justification, eternal adoption.*

The true believer, by being chosen in Christ in eternity, was justified in eternity and thus also adopted in eternity. This means that nothing really changed when an elect person was converted. Conversion is a superficial change of status; the benefits occurred in eternity.

This is totally unscriptural, denying many texts (such as Eph 2:1-3; Col 1:21) showing that the elect are like the rest of humanity before conversion – enemies of God. It fails to see that the choosing of the elect occurred in eternity but justification occurs in time, after the cross, by faith.

*Denial of rewards*

With the emphasis on God's sovereignty and what God has done for the believer in eternity, there can be no concept of the believer being rewarded for anything. This denies multiple Biblical statements saying that believers are rewarded by god's grace even though this is not a contribution to salvation.

*Denial of progressive sanctification*

Again, due to the emphasis upon what God has done to justify the believer in eternity, there is no growth in holiness. The provision of a new nature at regeneration is complete. This denies multiple statements to add to faith, to press on, to run the race, to fight the fight of faith or to grow in grace. It fails to see that the new nature is a seed of righteousness that grows. Essentially, Hyper-Calvinists fail to see the difference between once-only definitive sanctification in Christ (occurring in the spirit) and progressive sanctification in life (the gradual changes in the soul) and the consummation of sanctification (the provision of a new body).

This was another doctrine which led to Hyper-Calvinists stagnating in their personal lives.

*Exclusivity in church affairs*

Many Hyper-Calvinist leaders (especially in Strict Baptist circles) demanded exclusivity. Christians from other denominations could not share in fellowship in meetings and church members were forbidden to fellowship with Christians from other denominations outside of meetings.

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<sup>48</sup> Gospel Standard Articles, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Gospel Standard Articles, 33.

### *Antinomianism*

Many historic Hyper-Calvinists tended towards antinomianism, but not all. Several modern Hyper-Calvinists deny this accusation. Sometimes, the accusation is a misunderstanding of Hyper-Calvinistic preaching on grace, that believers have died with Christ to the law and have a new nature. However, there have always been claims by theologians and church historians that antinomianism is one of the resultant effects of Hyper-Calvinism.

Indeed, it is logical. If God has done everything and one can do nothing; if there is no progressive sanctification; if there are no rewards for obedience, then surely one can do anything and not be disciplined for it. Grace rules, I am eternally justified, sin can abound.

It is true that we look to Christ, not the objective law, as the standard of ethics but it is wrong to think that there is no law in living in Christ. By walking in the Spirit we also obey the law of Christ, since this is merely God's will for human behaviour. By denying any law Hyper-Calvinists become antinomian. This is a failure to see that the Mosaic Law is cancelled and fulfilled in Christ but that Moral Law is eternal (it is the character of God) and is continued in the Spirit of Christ.

### **Effect**

The effect of these doctrines, which emphasised the sovereign work of God and denied the responsibility of man, tended to produce an introspective, inert congregation. People concluded that it was not their responsibility to do anything at all, since God has done it all; such lives were wasted in God's service. Many others were worse off who constantly examined their state looking to see if they were convicted enough, having no assurance of salvation. Many remained anxious their whole lives.

The doctrines killed off any evangelistic zeal and after the original gifted preachers died off, the churches dwindled away slowly so that few are left. The few Strict Baptist chapels that remain tend to have a handful of old people.

### **Followers**

Some writers wrongly assume that defenders of historic, consistent Calvinism and supralapsarians are Hyper-Calvinists, such as Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Church; but this is patently absurd. Such Calvinists, though opposed to the free-offer (which is not Calvinistic), do not hold the chief errors of historic Hyper-Calvinists; in fact they oppose them. Supralapsarianism is an acceptable form of Calvinism and throughout keypoints of Post-Reformation church history it has been the chief form.

Modern Hyper-Calvinists include Don Fortner (Kentucky) and his followers; supporters of the magazine *New Focus* and *Go Publications*, edited by Peter Meney; George Ella; Ossett Books and surviving Gospel Standard Strict Baptist chapels.

### **Sources**

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## Neo-Orthodoxy [Barthianism]

### Originator

Karl Barth [1886-1968], a Swiss theologian born in Basel. He was a giant of theology and a prodigious writer of dogmatics who produced some helpful material of great insight but who is mostly known for introducing a false view of Scripture, despite seeking to champion the Bible against liberal attacks. He stressed the transcendent hiddenness of God who reveals himself in Christ.

Neo-Orthodoxy, also known as Dialectical Theology [i.e. the dogmatic principles of Barth as opposed to liberalism, such as Schleiermacher] or the New Hermeneutic [the Barthian way of interpreting Scripture], was a major influence in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but continues to influence many today. It originally sought to defend Reformation orthodoxy against liberal advances. The New Hermeneutic emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continued Barth's ideas de-emphasising the text's historical meaning. Despite affirming *sola scriptura*, it really destroyed its traditional meaning. It applied the ideas of existentialism to Christianity (Biblical facts are real to me and their concrete reality in history is irrelevant).

### Summary of position

Barth emphasised divine transcendence, i.e. a great gulf is fixed between the transcendent God and fallen humanity. The importance of scripture was also stressed but critical presuppositions were brought to bear upon it. The essential word of God is Christ (the *logos*) so the Bible is not God's revelation, it is a *witness* to his revelation. Revelation is God speaking. The Bible is only effective as God speaks through it; revelation happens to a person, it is not found in reliable written statements. Since the written word is not revelation, it is fallible at every point and contains errors. However, as a witness to revelation, God uses it when he speaks to a person, then the word becomes revelation. This principle is of huge significance and undergirds much charismatic theology: revelation is subjective, based upon internal feelings of the Spirit, rather than objective, based upon the Bible as truth.

Only God can speak for God. Truth is not necessarily conveyed by reading the Bible, even though it is a witness to God's past word to prophets. Although he speaks of 'verbal inspiration', since God uses the language of scripture, this is not meant to suggest that the words are inspired or this would lock God's revelation in the words of scripture. Verbal inspiration does not mean Biblical infallibility for him.

Revelation is opposed to reason, therefore God is beyond any kind of mental comprehension. Insights given by the Spirit formed theological statements without rational proofs or Biblical statements.

### Errors

- The Bible is a witness to God's revelation (which is Christ) but the actual words are not this revelation. The words of Scripture are not God's actual words.
- The Bible is fallible and contains errors.
- The word of God is subjective; it is an experience of Christ within, based on the word.
- This can lead to theological insights that have no Scriptural proof.
- Barth's ideas led his followers to assert that God's revelation can arise from non-canonical sources.
- Barth's theology led to universalism. Man is innately good. Barth had stressed that sin is not transgression of the law of God but an attempt to break free from the grace in

which he already stands; the attempt to live as if he were not the covenant partner in Christ. On the cross Christ suffered for all, even the reprobate. [Barth denied universalism but it is the logical result of his teaching.]

- Barth's faith approach to revelation is a direct (but unwitting) precursor to the *rhema* teaching of Word Faith and extreme Charismatics.<sup>50</sup>
- His followers also taught that God is so transcendent that only myths can bridge the gulf with God and man; Biblical events are myths that teach truths. Thus they rejected important doctrines like the virgin birth and the resurrection. The fight of Barth against liberalism eventually led to embracing that very liberalism.

This teaching denies many Scriptures, such as: Ps 119:160; Matt 4:4-7, 10, 5:18; Jn 10:35, 17:17; 1 Thess 2:13. The Bible itself is light from God (Ps 119:105, 130) and truth (Ps 119:160; Jn 17:17). If scripture is merely the fallible words of men, there can be no obligation to obey it.

### Followers

R Bultmann, Emil Brunner, P Tillich, CH Dodd, A Nygren, J & DM Baillie, Reinhold & H Richard Niebuhr, Hans-Georg Gadamer, E Fuchs, G Ebeling, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

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## New Calvinism

### Origins

New Calvinism is a fairly recent development that is largely occurring in North America, being a combination of historic Calvinistic theology and Charismatic church practice. It follows a surge of interest in Calvinism that has arisen at a grass roots level, particularly among the generation that witnessed the Jesus People revival in the early 1970s. Many of these people have been through a number of aberrant churches, teachings and cults over the years but are now settling down to a stable position and are getting very interested in theology for the first time.

In addition to this, a number of Charismatic leaders, such as CJ Mahaney, have also been on a journey trying to find a more stable truth and have embraced sovereign grace. However, the chief instigator appears to be John Piper, a long time Calvinist, whose books on desiring and enjoying God not only led to fame but also became a focal point for all these people. The fact that Piper loved God so clearly led them to trust his Calvinistic credentials and seek to know more of his theology.

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<sup>50</sup> This idea posits a separation between the two Biblical terms for 'word'. *Logos* is supposed to be the rational, objective word of God (i.e. the Bible, Jesus as the 'word'), while *rhema* is a 'now word' spoken in faith and powerful application to a person, almost like a prophecy. In fact, the two words are used interchangeable in scripture, sometimes within the same sentence. An early, tentative, suggestion of this is found in Watchman Nee.

Some long-standing American Calvinists are viewed as belonging to the fringes of this group, but have, in fact, claimed to be Reformed in theology for decades. Such would include John MacArthur Jr, Don Carson, John Armstrong, and RC Sproul; only Sproul is more consistent in his confessional Calvinism.<sup>51</sup>

Another factor has been the availability of modern resources, particularly the Internet which has enabled folk to get hold of excellent books that may be hard to find in print. Blogs, websites and discussion panels have also helped to spread the message of grace. Some cite the popularity of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* as a factor. Added to this is the fact that the movement is self-generated by coalitions, networks, and conferences; including Together for the Gospel, the Gospel Coalition, the Acts 29 network, and Sovereign Grace Ministries. A further feature is their quick promotion and use of new media and technology. They heartily embrace social developments like Facebook and Twitter and utilise YouTube more than book publication.

There are some knock-on effects in the UK; for instance Joel Virgo, leader of the flagship New Frontiers church in Brighton, has affirmed his support for the New Calvinists like Piper and Driscoll. This is despite the fact that NF, founded by his father Terry, has always claimed to be in the Calvinistic tradition, but more from the influence of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Spurgeon and Banner of Truth. In actual fact, both Virgos are Amyraldians at best, and so is NF (though in practice many NF churches are various shades of Pelagian). In addition Terry Virgo is a confessed antinomian.

## Roots

It is necessary to look at the confused heretical roots of this new expression in history.

### *Amyraldism*

See earlier article.

### *Jonathan Edwards*

Edwards is a favourite of the New Calvinists, possibly because he is the chief American historic Calvinist, but more likely it is due to his fame as a revival preacher with great power. Edwards said much that was good but sometimes his philosophical side led to compromises in his theology. These developed in his successors into significant rationalist errors. The chief interpreter of Edwards in the New Calvinists is John Piper; most people understand Edwards through Piper's presentations of glorifying God.

### *New Divinity (New Haven Theology)*

New Divinity began as a development of New England Theology, a tradition following the rational system of Jonathan Edwards. His followers continued this method of theoretical reasoning, but gradually began to drift from his pure Calvinism.

It arose out of the ideas of Edward's friends Samuel Hopkins [1721-1803], and Joseph Bellamy [1719-1790] who introduced the governmental view of the atonement.<sup>52</sup> Further deterioration continued under Timothy Dwight [1752-1817], (Edward's grandson and President of Yale College). The power of reason and human will became prominent thus diminishing man's depravity, alongside a new emphasis on law-work.

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<sup>51</sup> Carson is very helpful but has made some un-Reformed statements. MacArthur is a confused Dispensationalist who does not even understand that his position is at odds with Calvinism; he has also equivocated on Limited Atonement and denies double predestination. Armstrong supports the New Perspective on Paul.

<sup>52</sup> See footnote on the Governmental Theory of atonement.

Later, Nathaniel Taylor [1786-1858] took the rationalistic erosion yet further and initiated what became known as 'New Haven Theology'. This taught that man has the power of free-will and self-determination. Total depravity and the imputation of Adam's sin was abandoned, thus sin became the accumulation of errors rather than the fruit of a sinful nature. Then a universalistic system of atonement and rejection of penal substitution was taught alongside a complete denial of God's predestination. Man was seen as an innocent, free, moral agent with the power to sin or to save himself.

Within a hundred years of Jonathan Edward's death in 1758, the strong Calvinism that had permeated New England had fallen into a theology of works-righteousness. Alongside the death of Taylor in 1858 was the death of Edward's Reformed influence and the promotion of human ability.

### *Fullerism*

Fuller [1754-1815] was influenced by the earlier Amyraldism of Saumur, and the Marrowmen, but also contemporary trends such as Anglican Latitudinarianism and the developing errors in American New Divinity. He reacted against both stern Hyper-Calvinism, which neglected Gospel preaching and missions (Fuller felt it: '*had little or nothing to say to the unconverted*'), and also the apathy of many Reformed Baptists. To counter this and to garner support for William Carey, he wrote, '*The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation*' [1785], which became a popular source for modern New Calvinists who are also centred upon mission. Fuller's teaching is also currently being specifically championed by such Calvinistic folk as John Piper, Peter Masters, Michael Haykin, Tom Nettles, Errol Hulse, Robert Oliver, Crawford Gribben, The Banner of Truth Trust and Sword & Trowel Magazine.

What people fail to see in his rambling theological works, which include changing the meaning of words to confuse, is that Fuller produced several errors that are actually more extreme than Amyraldism. Fullerism is essentially a hybrid of Amyraldism and Governmental Theory (Grotianism), mixed with a liberal treatment of Scripture and even some Pelagian and Socinian elements.

Key foundations of Fuller's theology are that man has a natural ability to respond to God, that there is no election of some to life and some to condemnation; that Christ died for everyone without exception and that the Spirit calls all men equally. Thus it destroys four of the five cardinal points of Calvinism. Even Fuller himself admitted, '*I allow that the principles here defended may be inconsistent with the doctrines of grace*'.<sup>53</sup> This is much closer to Arminianism than Calvinism or even Amyraldism.

Fuller taught an unbiblical view of law and atonement. He elevated the powers of man, denying the effects of the Fall and total depravity. He had extreme views about salvation and even denied the penal, substitutionary death of Christ and imputation (of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness). Consequently, he denied unconditional election, justification by faith and effectual calling. For Fuller, justification is by human righteousness obeying the (un-revealed, universal) moral law; man repents from his own volition on seeing the cross as merely a good example. Even sanctification is by human endeavour without any involvement of the Holy Spirit. He even taught an early form of the Free Offer - faith as the duty of man to improve himself by his own efforts.

Fuller's theology is just about the worst type of works-righteousness that can be imagined coming from someone who called himself a Calvinist. What is worse is that he used

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<sup>53</sup> Fuller, *Works*, Vol 2, p367.

disingenuous methods in his writings to give false impressions. Space does not allow us to develop his serious errors here; for more information consult the sources mentioned later.

### *Common Grace*

This has been covered earlier in this paper.

### *Modern 4-Point Calvinism (the free offer)*

We have touched on this in the articles on Amyraldism and Common Grace.

Essentially, this is the view that was propagated after 1924 in American Presbyterian churches,<sup>54</sup> and then through dogmatics such as Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, that

- God loves everybody.
- God desires the salvation of everybody.
- Jesus died for everybody (usually the Fuller and Marrowmen explanation that Jesus' death was sufficient for all but only effective for some).
- The preaching of the Gospel contains exhortations to all to believe in Christ on the basis that all men are invited to believe and all men can believe. Thus reprobates are treated as elect.
- It usually includes the notion that God has two contradictory wills (secret and revealed).

Thus we can see that this is merely a rehashing of traditional Amyraldism.

### **Summary of position**

Essentially the theological position is Amyraldian but mixed with an acceptance of Charismatic gifts and church expression [Calvinists are traditionally cessationists]. Mixed with this is the desire to change the world, often with triumphal, postmillennial overtones (Dominionism). Regarding the law they tend to support New Covenant Theology. Regarding history they tend to be non-confessional. They are also very focused on mission.

### **Objections by traditional Calvinists (Reformed theologians)**

- The movement contradicts Calvin and his followers (whom they claim to follow) in many areas.
- The movement does not follow historic Reformed confessions of faith, and in fact, contradicts them in many places.
- The movement contradicts the faith and practices of the Puritans (whom they claim to follow).
- The movement contradicts cessationism.
- The movement utilises revivalist methods, which were pioneered by Arminians and Pelagians.
- The movement contains people who are Amyraldian, New Covenant, Semi-Pelagian, and Dispensational, which are contrary to Reformed theology.
- Denial of the regulative principle of worship.
- Embracing New Covenant Theology.
- Antinomianism is repeatedly observed.

### **Errors**

- An attempt to mix Semi-Pelagian Arminianism with Calvinism (universalism with particularism).
- Universalism in atonement.

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<sup>54</sup> By Ned Stonehouse and John Murray.

- Denial of double predestination yet affirmation of election.
- Amyraldian in Gospel presentation. A compromised Gospel presentation affirming God's love for everyone and that Jesus died for everyone, yet claiming to affirm election
- Teaching two contradictory wills in God.
- Since the Charismatic expression of church is a compromise with the world, New Calvinism brings people into this wordiness, especially in fleshly emotionalism, passivity, mysticism and occultism in worship. This worldliness comes to its fulness in the ministry of Mark Driscoll, which is often profane as well as worldly.
- The movement is often seen to be very worldly in outward church expression. The impact of the 'performance' is a significant aspect of this ministry.
- There is a tendency to a commitment to pragmatism rather than truth. This leads to a wrong leaning upon commercialism and reliance upon market research and statistics.
- Postmillennial utopianism, the desire to change and perfect the world.
- Their view of culture is Neo-Kuyperian; that is the desire to change the world and its culture into a Christian fashion. Everything in modern culture needs to be used and captured for Christ. This is part of their general utopianism, which is unbiblical. An example of this is the utilisation of modern forms of music in worship, such as rock bands, because they are considered as neutral art forms which reaches out to a certain audience. This focuses mission on sinners instead of Christ.
- Embracing a corrupting ecumenism; e.g. Piper's endorsement of Rick Warren.

### Followers

John Piper, Mark Driscoll, CJ Mahaney, Al Mohler, Mark Dever, Joshua Harris, Matt Chandler, Frances Chang, Kevin DeYoung, Ligon Duncan and Tim Keller; plus many other American church leaders.

### Sources

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- Paul Fahy; *The Problem of Fullerism*, booklet, (2006).
- Paul Fahy; *A short assessment of John Piper*, (2012).
- Paul Fahy; *The End-Time Erosion of Justification by Faith*, (2006).
- Peter Masters; 'The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness', *Sword & Trowel*, 2009, No. 1.
- Jeremy Walker; *The New Calvinism Considered*, sermon, 26 June 2011, Grace Church, Downingtown, PA.
- John Piper; *Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to be Saved*.

## New Covenant Theology (NCT)

### Origins

This fairly recent movement has no centre, no school and developed slowly over the past four decades, chiefly in America, with many variations. There is no centrally published, formally agreed, core theological statement of beliefs; this makes evaluation difficult.

One early source was the writings of Jon Zens in the magazine, '*Searching Together*', formerly the *Baptist Reformation Review*. It is a movement that is centred in Reformed Baptists who are uncomfortable with the overarching principles of Covenant Theology (CT), which lead to paedobaptism, but who deny Dispensationalism also. In the end it has many similarities with CT but adopts a few Dispensational ideas also.

The basis of it has origins in views on God's law for Christians that go back centuries, at least to the Reformation, often found in Hyper-Calvinists and others. In fact some call it 'Modified Lutheranism' since it has similarities with Luther's discontinuity of the Mosaic Law and the NT. It was also similar to the position found in some Higher Life writings and popular works, such as by Watchman Nee. In reality there are a wide variety of theological positions, both in these sources and in the modern movement. So, it is difficult to formulate a clear review of the movement; some aspects of it are good and some erroneous; some proponents are sound while some are unorthodox. In addition, critics of the movement vary significantly; some (like George Ella in *New Focus*) completely misread the situation, tarring innocents along with the guilty, and generally misrepresenting the whole spectrum.

Many proponents tend to support the First London Baptist Confession of Faith rather than the 1689 Baptist Confession or the Westminster Standards; especially in its 1646 edition.

### Good points

- It seeks to correct the wrong emphases of Covenant Theology.
- It has a better exposition of the New Covenant than Covenant Theology.
- It has a better understanding of God's eternal purpose as not being a formal covenant.
- Denies a covenant of works but affirm that Adam was a federal head of men.
- Denies the existence of a formal covenant of grace.
- Teaches that the work of the Spirit on men was different in the OT and that permanent indwelling was only after the ascension (Jn 7:39, 13:16-18). [CT teaches that Spirit has indwelt believers in all ages.]
- The better expositors teach a better doctrine of law for the believer than most Covenant Theologians, but some writers are confused and neonomian or antinomian.<sup>55</sup>
- It strives against legalism.
- It avoids the pitfall of Erastianism.
- It denies paedobaptism.

### Points of agreement with Covenant Theology

- Calvinist.
- Accepts literal and figurative (spiritual) interpretation of the Bible (unlike Dispensationalism). For example: 'Israel' can mean national Jews or spiritual Israel (the elect) depending upon the context. Prophecies about Israel can apply to national Israel or the church depending on context and the interpretation of the apostles. The Seed of Abraham is Christ not Israel.
- God has one people.
- God's central purpose is not with Israel but with Christ and the church.
- The New Covenant is with all the elect (Lk 22:20; Heb 8).
- God's programme in history is not centred in dispensations but in various covenants, culminating in Christ.

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<sup>55</sup> CT says that The Law has three purposes: to restrain sin in society, to lead to Christ, and to instruct Christians in godliness. The ceremonial laws and civil laws have been abolished except for their general equity; the moral laws continue. But: Mosaic Law was only for Israel in a theocracy and does not restrain sin in society today. It does not lead to Christ (or all Jews would be saved) but reveals sin in men; it was a caretaker 'until Christ came', which is different. It is not the standard of Christian ethics, Christ is. Neither is the abolishing of two sections and the continuance of one section Biblical. Dispensationalism teaches that the Mosaic Law has been abolished for the church but continues for Israel and will be restored in a future Jewish, earthly, millennial kingdom. Many NCT people agree with Dispensationalism (but denying a Jewish kingdom), which is wrong and leads to antinomianism; some add that only NT laws are applicable (as in Disp.). See my statements on law, in. loc.

- Believers in the OT and the NT are in Christ and part of the body of Christ.
- Amillennial.<sup>56</sup>
- The church is the kingdom of God.

ATB McGowan writes, "It is, of course, possible to hold a view that makes much of Adam as the representative head yet without a covenant of works (this was certainly the position of Augustine)."<sup>57</sup> In some sense new covenant theology is a redaction of federal thought, returning to the roots of federal theology without the restrictions of later expressions of the covenant of grace and the covenant of works.<sup>58</sup>

### Errors

- Some have fallen into the error of antinomianism; i.e. all law, including moral law, has been abolished; the 10 Commandments are only for Israel.
- Some over-emphasise the discontinuity between the OT and NT into a more Lutheran form.
- Some make Christ contradict Moses. Failure to see that Christ fulfils Mosaic Law in himself.
- In agreeing with Dispensationalists that the church is not seen in the OT, it fails to understand God's purpose or see texts that mention the church. NCT claims that OT elect saints are added to the church after the cross.
- Some misrepresent God in their exegesis of the OT, such as saying that it teaches believers to hate their neighbour.
- Some deny the active obedience of Christ applied to the justified (e.g. Steve Lehrer).
- Many deny that ethical prohibitions in the OT (moral law) are valid unless they are repeated in the NT. This would make incest or bestiality acceptable, for instance (e.g. Steve Lehrer).

### Followers

Jon Zens, John Reisinger, Tom Wells, Fred Zaspel, Steve Lehrer, Steve Atkerson, Frank Viola, Gary Long, Geoff Volker, Douglas Moo, Tom Schreiner, DA Carson<sup>59</sup> and many others. It is now a common position amongst American Reformed Baptists. There is wide spectrum of differences amongst followers of NCT. Many people claim to be NCT because they disagree with both Dispensationalism and CT, and yet do not follow many core principles of NCT.

### Sources

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- John Reisinger,<sup>60</sup> *Abraham's Four Seeds*, New Covenant Media, (1998).
- Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*, New Covenant Media, (2002).
- Wayne Strickland (ed.); *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Zondervan (1996).
- Richard C. Barcellos; *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology*, Winepress Publishing, (2001).
- George Ella; series of articles in *New Focus* magazine. [This is a very confused evaluation filled with misrepresentations, poor argumentation, Biblical errors,

<sup>56</sup> This is the predominant CT position but some have been Postmillennial.

<sup>57</sup> ATB McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*, Paternoster, (1997), p10.

<sup>58</sup> Kevin Hartley; *Defining New Covenant Theology*, [http://www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n10/dnct\\_kdh.htm](http://www.soundofgrace.com/v7/n10/dnct_kdh.htm)

<sup>59</sup> Carson is on the fringes of NCT, having endorsed Well's and Zaspel's book, but is not a spokesman for the movement.

<sup>60</sup> Brother of the late Ernest Reisinger.



theological errors and glaring omissions. The reference is given since many have read them; but the articles are not recommended, except as examples of error.]

## New [Neo] Evangelicalism

### Origins

This disparate movement began formally in 1948 when Harold Ockenga coined the word during the convocation address for Fuller Seminary. It is a mainly American emphasis that developed as a reaction to hard-nosed Fundamentalism which has infiltrated almost all American evangelical institutions with a new liberalism.

Fundamentalism was never a term widely taken up in Britain but is popular in the USA. It began as a reaction to the modernism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; in fact it was coined from a series of apologetic books called *'The Fundamentals'* which were collections of essays championing central Christian truths against the liberal advances. In the States it was originally an equivalent for 'evangelicalism'. It became noted for its feature of separation from those considered unorthodox and gradually became pilloried as intolerant and overly strict; in fact today it is used as a term for radical intransigence in any religious group.

New Evangelicalism is a reaction against this Fundamentalism, advocating tolerance and openness by reducing any necessity for essential orthodoxy. It was inspired by the impact of the social sciences, anthropology and philosophical speculations in the United States and riding on the back of Neo-Orthodoxy. All doctrines can be held tenuously, or even abandoned, in order to pursue pragmatism of methods and dialogue with others. It also replaces evangelical Gospel preaching with social action or, at least, prioritises social involvement.

Fuller Theological Seminary has been a key player in the advancement of this movement. The rise of New Evangelicalism parallels the advancement of Fuller since 1947 to be the largest interdenominational 'evangelical' seminary in the world.

### Summary of position

New Evangelicalism is virtually a reformatting of liberal ideas since the importance of Scripture and defined doctrine is repudiated. Its chief emphasis is tolerance and avoiding separation from other groups; ecumenism reigns – even with non-evangelicals. In practice a wide variety of even core Christian doctrines are either denied or watered down by differing New Evangelicals in order to pursue their goals. This includes the Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus.

### Errors

- Rejection of the inerrancy and authority of the Bible to the point where most evangelical leaders do not hold the historic view. *'[It is] almost impossible to find an evangelical professor in the theological schools of our land and abroad who still holds uncompromisingly to the doctrine of the infallible inspiration of the scriptures'*.<sup>61</sup>
- Upholding Higher Criticism.<sup>62</sup>
- Adoption of false doctrines and compromise with error and false religions.

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<sup>61</sup> Herman Hanko, *The Battle for the Bible*, p2-3.

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Moses did not write the Pentateuch; miracles are exaggerations; historical narratives contain myths; Paul did not write Ephesians etc.

- Note: The Bible repeatedly commands separation from sin, the world and the flesh. Indeed, the Lord himself demanded separation from sin and false teachers. Deliberate fellowship with error is a sin.
- Note: The Bible also commands obedience to core doctrinal truths, which are meant to direct one's life. Chief amongst these is the truth that Scripture, being the inspired word of God, is verbally inspired, inerrant and useful for godliness.
- Utilising Dynamic Equivalence in translating the Bible (e.g. the NIV).
- Denial of the Trinity by some (e.g. Eugene Nida).
- Denial of the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g. Charles Taber).
- Denial of original sin (e.g. Charles Kraft).
- Seeking syncretism with world religions (e.g. Kenneth Cragg).
- Adoption of psychotherapy methods of counselling.
- Denies the Biblical affirmation that the faith is rational, worship is rational, that the mind must be protected and that understanding is to be pursued. It replaces this with emotionalism and exciting experiences.
- The more one allies with false teachers the more one is corrupted. Thus New Evangelical churches became completely compromised.
- Condone worldly ideas, such as music, drama, sensuous worship.
- Political activism.
- Encouragement to involvement in humanistic social programmes to make the Gospel acceptable, to make the church an instrument of social change.
- Concessions to evolutionary theories.
- Supports the Charismatic Movement.

## Effects

Even by the late 70s the change in evangelical morals could be documented. After surveys in Christian colleges it emerged that: young couples were engaging in sexual intercourse without guilt, profanity became acceptable, masturbation was called 'a gift from God', viewing pornography was tolerated, young girls had abortions and evangelical gay associations sprang up.<sup>63</sup>

The New Evangelicalism is a theological and moral compromise of the deadliest sort. It is an insidious attack upon the Word of God. ... The New Evangelicalism advocates toleration of error. It is following the downward path of accommodation to error, co-operation with error, contamination by error, and ultimate capitulation to error!<sup>64</sup>

## Followers

### *Personalities*

Billy Graham, Rick Warren, Carl Henry, Bernard Ramm, Bill Bright, Harold Lindsell, John R.W. Stott, Luis Palau, E.V. Hill, Leighton Ford, Eugene Nida, Charles Taber, Charles Kraft, Kenneth Cragg, Charles Stanley, Bill Hybels, Warren Wiersbe, Chuck Colson, Donald McGavran, Jack Van Impe, Tony Campolo, Arthur Glasser, D. James Kennedy, David Hocking, Charles Swindoll, Max Lucado, John Maxwell, Tony Evans and Jerry Falwell etc. etc.

### *Institutions*

National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Seminary, National Religious Broadcasters, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade for Christ (Agape in UK), Back to the Bible, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, World Vision, Operation Mobilisation, the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association, World Evangelical Fellowship, and the National Sunday School

<sup>63</sup> See Richard Quebedeaux, *The Worldly Evangelicals*, (1978), p16-17; James Hunter, *Evangelicalism The Coming Generation* (1987) and Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.

<sup>64</sup> Dr. Charles Woodbridge, *The New Evangelicalism*, (1969) p. 9,15.

Association, Fuller Theological Seminary, Wheaton College, Gordon-Conwell, BIOLA, Regent College, Westminster, The Evangelical Divinity School, and Moody Bible Institute. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, National Association of Evangelicals, Evangelical Alliance of Britain, World Evangelical Fellowship, National Religious Broadcasters, National Sunday School Association, International Congress on World Evangelisation, Operation Mobilisation and Promise Keepers.

### *Media*

Christianity Today, Eerdmans, Zondervan, Inter Varsity Press, Tyndale House, Moody Press, Thomas Nelson, and Broadman.

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## **New Perspective on Paul (NPP)**

### **Originator**

NPP began with writings by EP Sanders<sup>65</sup> and then James DG Dunn (liberals),<sup>66</sup> but was revised by the evangelical NT Wright, Bishop of Durham, followed by John Armstrong and others. Amongst evangelicals the chief protagonist is Anglican NT Wright. While there are variations within the movement, the key factors are a new way of looking at Second Temple Judaism,<sup>67</sup> and thus reappraising Paul's teaching on justification as understood by Reformation theologians.

### **Summary of position**

Since the movement is diverse, it is difficult to summarise the position with absolute fairness to all participants. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to assess what NPP teachers are actually saying.

### *Judaism was not legalistic but full of grace*

The new view started when a liberal scholar, who did not believe in Biblical inspiration, challenged the traditional Protestant view as a result of reading non-Biblical ancient Jewish documents. The foundation is Sander's claim that Second Temple Judaism was not

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<sup>65</sup> EP Sanders; *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, Fortress, (1977).

<sup>66</sup> Dunn was the first to coin the term 'The New Perspective' in a 1983 Manson Memorial Lecture, *The New Perspective on Paul and the Law*.

<sup>67</sup> That is from c. 515 BC when the original second temple was rebuilt, to 70 AD when Herod's temple was destroyed by the Roman army.

a religion based upon legalistic self-righteousness, but grace.<sup>68</sup> Keeping the law flowed from a grace initiative from God establishing the covenantal scheme. Works are not to get in (God's gift), but to stay in the covenant (this is called 'covenantal nomism'<sup>69</sup>). Wright: '*we have misjudged early Judaism, especially Pharisaism, if we have thought of it as an early version of Pelagianism.*'<sup>70</sup>

From this they maintain that Paul was not concerned about grace versus works for salvation, but about the status of Gentiles in the church. Justification was more about Jewish Gentile relations than personal standing before God. Justification is not concerned with acquittal from sin, but with being established in the covenant community. According to Wright, [the Traditional Protestant way] '*of reading Romans has systematically done violence to the text for hundreds of years.*'<sup>71</sup> Thus the Reformation exposition of justification by faith, which began with Luther, is a mistake.

Aside: it should be noted that recent evangelical scholarship is now contradicting the theories of Sanders; e.g. '*Justification and Variegated Nomism*,' two-volumes edited by Don Carson. However, even if Sander's theory was proved true, this still does not alter the fact that Scripture tells us the opposite; it would merely mean that contemporary Jews thought they were in grace, due to national status, but were not.

*Justification is for identifying those in the covenant ('covenant nomism')*

Justification is 'covenantal inclusion', or 'covenant community status', a kind of badge of Christianity, something that shows believers are in relationship with God and each other; it is not about being saved nor a part of the Gospel. '*Justification... is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences.*'<sup>72</sup> It is currently a temporary anticipation of a future acquittal on the Day of Judgment. Staying in the covenant requires obeying the law; thus for both the Pharisees and Christians, obeying the law maintains one's place in the covenant and is not about legalism.

Westerholm makes the valid point that, '*If Judaism preached good Protestant doctrine after all, then what could Paul possibly have found wrong with it?*'<sup>73</sup> Also there is much confusion and contradiction in various NPP writers. Sanders claims that salvation is by national covenant inclusion but Wright claims that Jewish "'national righteousness" (the belief that fleshly Jewish decent guarantees membership of God's true covenant people)' [i.e. exclusivity] is the cause of Israel's condemnation.<sup>74</sup> Dunn agrees with Wright here but also affirms the works of the law as covenant nomism, badges of the covenant (what distinguishes Jews from pagans).<sup>75</sup> Yet Dunn also denies that justification depends on covenantal nomism.

<sup>68</sup> This is supposedly supported by contemporary Jewish literature.

<sup>69</sup> Sanders says that, '*covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.*' EP Sanders; *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p75.

<sup>70</sup> NT Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Eerdmans, (1997), p32.

<sup>71</sup> NT Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Eerdmans, (1997), p117.

<sup>72</sup> Wright; *ibid.* 120-122 Note: Wright insists that faith is the badge and justification the recognition of faith.

<sup>73</sup> Stephen Westerholm; *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*, Eerdmans, (2004), p250.

<sup>74</sup> Wright; *The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith*, Tyndale Bulletin 29 (1978), p65.

<sup>75</sup> Dunn; "Paul's Theology," in *The Face of New Testament Studies*, p336.

*Righteousness is not imputed for justification but is a badge of being in the covenant*

Righteousness is not something given to us by God, but is rather the declaration that we have believed in Christ and are recognised as being in covenant. *'It makes no sense that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or gas that can be passed across the courtroom.'*<sup>76</sup> The righteousness of God in Romans refers to God's faithfulness rather than the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

The works mentioned in the NT 'judgment' passages are more than evidences of conversion, however, they are not meritorious either. This is confused. Some avoid this confusion by suggesting that the believer faces a future judgment based on works – thus justification becomes based upon works.

Paul's condemnation of self-righteousness, especially of Jewish legalists (see Galatians), is interpreted as a challenge to the idea of a supposed 'national righteousness' (only Jews are righteous) rather than self-righteousness.

*The law can be kept by men*

Underlying NPP is the belief that the Old Covenant could be successfully kept by men (and was by certain Jews) and did not require perfect obedience in all points; chiefly idolatry was to be avoided. The NPP avers that Israelites were given life by being born into the covenant, and now obeyed the law to ensure that they stayed within the covenant. This denies the traditional Reformed view that the Old Covenant could not be kept by anyone and was a means of directing the sinner to Christ, God's deliverer.<sup>77</sup> It also fails to see that eternal life was not by being born in the right place but was by faith in God's Messiah, as mediated by the rituals of the Old Covenant; only a remnant who had faith were saved; the majority in the covenant were destroyed.

For example Garlington, in his book *Role Reversal and Paul's Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:10-13*, claims that the law could be kept: *'[The law's] "curse" falls not on those who do the law, but on those who fail to do it. ... the law is in fact performable. Obedience to the Torah in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves ... is never portrayed as an unobtainable goal.'*<sup>78</sup> This fails to understand Paul's argument that justification is by faith and not law-keeping. It also ignores the teaching of James that failure of one point of the law resulted in failure in all points (Jm 2:10); perfect obedience was required, which is why we need a perfect Deliverer to keep it for us; the Son of God. In fact, it ignores the teaching of Moses himself that all of the law was to be kept, not just avoiding idolatry (Deut 27:26, 28:1, 58, 30:1-2). Furthermore, Deut 27:15-26 is not *'dealing primarily with idolatry'* (as Garlington<sup>79</sup>) but regards many laws resulting in a curse, including sexual sins.

## Errors

- The NPP foundation avers that the Pharisees were in a grace religion and were not works based (Sanders). Luke 18:9-14 alone disproves this. This resolves itself into the question as to whether we trust the words of Jesus in Scripture regarding Jewish works-based religion or Sander's interpretation of Jewish history. This then depends upon whether we trust Scripture or non-Biblical sources. NPP is basically liberal in

<sup>76</sup> Wright; *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p98; *The Shape of Justification*, p5.

<sup>77</sup> Rm 3:19, 20, 4:15, 5:20, 7:7; Gal 3:19; 2 Cor 3:7.

<sup>78</sup> D. Garlington; *Role Reversal and Paul's Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:10-13*, p97. Quoted in Reisinger; *The New Perspective on Justification*, p12.

<sup>79</sup> D. Garlington; *Role Reversal and Paul's Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:10-13*, p97.

demeaning the value of the simple reading of Scripture and allowing it to interpret itself.

- Claiming that the Reformers and subsequent Reformed writers failed to interpret the NT properly by misunderstanding the cultural and historical background. This supposedly led to fundamental theological errors.
- The Reformed confessions of faith are treated with suspicion, especially on the doctrine of justification by faith.
- The claim that the righteousness of Christ is not imputed to believers (Dunn and Wright).
- Teaching that justification is not pardon from sin and being legally accepted as righteous in heaven's court but confusing it with sanctification. In fact the three tense aspects of sanctification (past, present and future applications) are applied to justification.
- Averring that Christians are in a works based religion; works done in faith contribute to salvation. While some NPP writers would deny teaching meritorious works, they do state that works are more than an evidence of faith but do not explain this. E.g. Thom Smith: '*they are more than evidences in that they are realities*' and '*the basis of final ... justification*'. Garlington: '*there is a phase of justification yet to be*'. This denies that justification is a completed act of God.
- The idea that being a fleshly Jew meant automatic inclusion in the covenant, which was then maintained by faith to stay in, contradicts many scriptures.
- Denial of Biblical righteousness. Righteousness (or being in the covenant) is established by faith in God's mercy, not law (For example: Lk 16:15; Rm 9:31, 10:3; Gal 5:4; Phil 3:9).
- Claiming that the sinner gets into God's covenant by faith; but he stays in it by his good works.
- There is a suggestion of baptismal regeneration. Wright: '*This declaration (i.e. justification) is in turn closely correlated with baptism, in which one becomes a member of that family in its historical life*'.<sup>80</sup> Baptism does not place people into the spiritual covenant community; it is a sign that they are already in it.
- Denial of multiple Scripture passages, such as: Rm 1:16-17, 4:6-8, 5:19-20; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9.
- Most New Perspective authors submit to the liberal critical idea that the apostle Paul did not write Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastoral Epistles, so these are not trustworthy sources to found doctrines upon.
- The New Perspective threatens the cardinal doctrine of Total Depravity with its view of the law.
- Failure to see that faith for salvation is not our meritorious faith but God's gift.
- Failure to see that there is no real conflict between texts which state that salvation is solely by grace and passages that teach judgment is by works. The latter are evidential, not meritorious and related to rewards.
- Arrogance: the implication that every great mind in Christianity has misunderstood justification for all of history until these men recently discovered the truth.
- Hypocrisy: NPP advocates claim to be children of the Reformation and Reformed in theology.

According to the new perspective, the Reformation was wrong about Paul, wrong about Judaism, wrong about Roman Catholicism, wrong about justification, and therefore wrong about the gospel.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Maurice Roberts; *The New Perspective On Paul And Other Errors*, Banner of Truth Articles.

<sup>81</sup> James Boice and Philip Graham Ryken; *The Doctrines of Grace*, Crossway Books (2002), p63.

## Followers

EP Sanders, James Dunn, NT Wright, Alan Sugate, John Armstrong, Alistair McGrath, Robert Gundry, Don Garlinton, Thom Smith and Scott Hafeman.

## Sources

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## Neo-Sandemanianism

### Origin

This is not a formally accepted term but one that I have coined to describe a worrying trend amongst some extreme Calvinists in America.

### Original Sandemanians

Originally called 'Glasites' in 1728 from the pastor John Glas, who was expelled from the Church of Scotland. The movement developed with Robert Sandeman [1718-1771], the son-in-law of Glas; both claimed to be high Calvinists. Sandeman taught the following:

- Faith was just the ordinary, everyday belief; the value of faith was in the object of it. Faith was not a special gift from God. [Truth: faith is a divine gift of grace; it is more than assent since it involves a change in man's spirit.]
- Faith was bare intellect, it did not involve the emotions. [Truth: the gift of faith in regeneration affects the emotions and the will.]
- Sandeman felt that if you introduced any element of feeling, holy affection, good dispositions or pious exercises into Gospel preaching, it re-introduced human works (but his rationality was just another human work).
- Taught regeneration followed faith.
- Saw no place for conviction of sin and a broken heart for misdeeds.
- Opposed 'popular preachers' like Whitefield and the Calvinistic Methodists in Wales because of their emotional pleading in preaching.
- Did not call men to repentance (as this introduced works based on feelings).
- Called people to believe that God loved them and then accept Jesus immediately.

The results of this teaching were:

- A dour, cold spirit.
- Quenched the spirit of prayer for conversion of sinners.

- Diminished zeal for evangelism.
- Focused on minor things.
- Lack of assurance of salvation.
- Mechanical performance of duties.
- Legalism.
- Externalism in church practice, such as foot-washing, love feasts, community of goods and casting lots.

Theological errors included

- Denied justifying faith as a gift from God.
- Denied faith is a duty (as Hyper-Calvinism).
- Denied faith is a grace.
- Denied that repentance and faith are united.
- Denied that regeneration comes before faith.
- Denied that faith or unbelief is a state of the heart.
- Denied Biblical assurance.
- Denied the rule of individual conscience e.g. in usage of finances and food.

Now these are serious errors and the modern form is not a carbon copy of the historical form but rather following the spirit of it. The centre of Sandemanianism was an emphasis upon cold intellectualism: true salvation follows the assent given to a certain set of doctrines deemed to be vital. This places far too much credit upon man whom the Bible states can do no spiritual good and cannot contribute to his salvation at all.

It is odd that Sandemanian Calvinists fall for this error since they also affirm Total Depravity, and yet demand that conversion depends upon a man believing a set of intellectual truths which (in practice) many take years to learn.

#### *Modern Sandemanianism*

The modern version began to appear in the 1960s when Martyn Lloyd-Jones could say that Sandemanianism was: ‘one of the main problems before us at the present time’.<sup>82</sup> He was chiefly referring to the cold, heartless, dogmatic, spiritually dead orthodoxy of many contemporary Calvinists. But in the 1990s a new breed developed which was full of vitriol and legalism. This movement grew to be very vocal and swift to propagate its errors. Central to this new development was the teaching of Marc Carpenter and his journal *Outside the Camp*, which initially found favour with many Reformed folk, until it showed its true colours.

Carpenter claims to be one of the very few true Calvinists and Christians; everyone that disagrees with him is doomed to hell (this alone demonstrates his cultic nature). He demands that his version of Calvinism (in reality an extreme Hyper-Calvinism) is the only true theology and everyone else are antichrists. In other words, in order to be saved you must believe a set of intellectual premises that form the basis of Carpenter’s theology.

#### **Summary of position**

Essentially the position places an undue emphasis upon intellectualism; faith is intellectual. Mental acceptance of certain ideas (usually supralapsarian doctrines of grace<sup>83</sup>) are deemed necessary to be a true Christian. If you do not believe these doctrines then you cannot be a true believer. Thus anyone who qualifies these doctrines, despite

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<sup>82</sup> Puritan and Westminster Conference address (1967).

<sup>83</sup> I.e. affirming double predestination as the basis of God’s decree.



their otherwise excellent pedigree, are nominated as ‘sons of the devil’. An example of teachers suffering this fate today are the theologians AA Hodge, Lorraine Boettner, Louis Berkof, Horatius Bonar, Thomas Chalmers, J. Gresham Machen and David Engelsma; whether we agree or not with all they say, it is clear that these men were/are genuine believers and preachers of a Calvinistic Gospel.

People who are considered unregenerate:

- All Arminians (not just some).<sup>84</sup>
- Anyone who supports an Arminian presentation of the Gospel.<sup>85</sup>
- Any Calvinist who does not agree with Arminian theology but tolerates Arminians.<sup>86</sup>
- Anyone who calls an Arminian ‘brother’.<sup>87</sup>
- Anyone who ‘greet[s]’ an Arminian.<sup>88</sup>
- Any ‘Calvinist’ who denies Limited Atonement.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, anyone who says that they received Christ under an Arminian presentation of the Gospel, but later became enlightened in the truths of Calvinism, was not converted by their original experience of God, but only when they accepted Calvinistic doctrine.<sup>90</sup> Conversion is thus tested by the intellect not a righteous new life.

### Errors

- It is noteworthy that this error produces much spleen. The modern advocates are noted for their bile and vituperative criticism of anyone who disagrees with them. This was also evidenced in the original Sandemanians whose caustic attacks led to much criticism (e.g. by Christmas Evans, Andrew Fuller and William Williams).
- Failure to see that conversion is ultimately a yielding of the will; submission to Jesus following revelation from divine illumination. Those who submit to Jesus as Lord, seeking forgiveness for sins, may yet have little understanding of the doctrines of grace or supralapsarianism, but they are still saved.
- Failure to see that regeneration, which leads to conversion, is likened to being born again as a babe. This does not imply maturity of doctrinal thought.
- Failure to see that believers are called to grow in knowledge. Understanding complex doctrines takes time. God promises to give a new heart and new spirit to the believer - he does not promise a new mind.<sup>91</sup> The mind is constantly being renewed and enlightened as part of our sanctification throughout life.
- Nowhere in the New Testament is conversion instigated by what a person knows intellectually. God’s salvation is based upon a person, not a system. Truth is a person

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<sup>84</sup> Marc D. Carpenter, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 2:1, p1, column 1; p7 column 2; Vol 3:1, p8, column 2. Article by Christopher Adams, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 1:2, p2-3.

<sup>85</sup> See the force of Pedersen’s article in, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 2:1, p2-3.

<sup>86</sup> Leaders who do this are: showing ‘affinity for the devil’s perverse lie’ are ‘mean and brutal’ and are ‘false shepherds’. John K. Pedersen, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 2:1, p2-3. ‘Hypo-Calvinists who tolerate ... Arminianism are unregenerate.’ Marc Carpenter, Vol 3:1, p5 column 2; also p2, column 2, ‘speech that tolerates [an Arminian] ... is a partaker of his evil deeds’; p8, column 2, ‘all who hold to any of the doctrines of Arminianism are lost, as are those who speak peace to them.’

<sup>87</sup> Marc D. Carpenter, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 3:1, p3; he calls this ‘spiritual harlotry’ Vol 2:1, p1.

<sup>88</sup> Marc D. Carpenter, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 3:1, p3. Christopher Adams, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 1:2, p3, column 2.

<sup>89</sup> See implications in Pedersen’s article in, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 2:1, p2-3. Carpenter applies overly simplistic logic when he states that the Gospel = the 5 points, therefore not holding to limited atonement = preaching a false Gospel, teaching a false Gospel ‘speaks the lie of Satan’, therefore, four point Calvinists are agents of Satan. *Outside the Camp*, Vol 3:1, p2, column 2.

<sup>90</sup> Marc D. Carpenter, *Outside the Camp*, Vol 2:1, p5; p7. Christopher Adams, Vol 1:2, p3.

<sup>91</sup> As opposed to Carpenter’s statement in *Outside the Camp*, Vol 2:1, p5, column 2, and Parker.

not a proposition. Christ is the truth and as Christ is apprehended by faith inspired by God, a person is saved. The thief on the cross knew nothing of Calvinistic doctrine, but he knew Christ and submitted to him as Lord and was assured of Paradise. Apollos was confused in doctrine but was still affirmed as a genuine brother, but one that needed educating.

- The Gospel is yielding to Christ as Lord (Acts 2:21), receiving Christ (Jn 1:10-13), believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth (Rm 10:10, Acts 16:14), calling upon the name of the Lord (Rm 10:12-13).
- Many good Calvinists were originally Arminians; e.g. Augustus Toplady, James Hervey and John Ryland Sen.

### **Followers (of the modern version)**

Marc D. Carpenter (Editor of *Outside the Camp* Journal), John K. Pedersen (Sovereign Grace Church, Gettysburg), Christopher Adams and Bill Parker (*Reign of Grace* Newsletter).

### **Sources**

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## **Open Theism**

### **Originator**

Clark Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College in Ontario, Canada [1937-2010]. It was first expressed in the book he wrote in 1994 with four other scholars,<sup>92</sup> *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Pinnock also calls the movement, 'free will theism'; others also call it, 'the openness of God view' or 'open view theism'.

### **Summary of position**

Pinnock is concerned about the determinism of divine sovereignty and predestination; that is, men cannot really be free agents in the light of this. Open Theism attacks classical Reformed theology's commitment to the sovereign providence of God, claiming that it destroys any real meaning to human freedom and responsibility. Furthermore, if God foreordains all things then God must be the author of sin and men cannot be held accountable for their sins. Therefore, God cannot predestine everything and his sovereignty cannot control men's free actions; sin is permitted. This is a typically Arminian assertion and the authors Pinnock uses to support his view are all non-evangelicals (such as Karl Rahner, Karl Barth and Walther Eichrodt). It also forces new definitions of God's attributes, especially his infinity, foreknowledge, providence, simplicity, immutability and impassibility.

In simple terms, Open Theism is a radical, hyper-Arminian reaction to a hatred of Calvinism which, in its proposals, denies God's attributes. It seeks to eradicate the view of a God of anger and judgment by proposing a God of love, peace, and mercy. It also seeks to make man the centre of history instead of God by denying God's sovereignty.

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<sup>92</sup> Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger.

## Errors

### *Denial of God's omniscience*

While Open Theists claim to uphold God's omniscience, they limit it by saying that God only knows that which is knowable; the content of what God knows is limited. Thus God does not know man's future free choices. This has shades of medieval *media scientia*.<sup>93</sup>

### *Denial of God's sovereignty, providence and foreknowledge*

Open Theism is an extreme form of Wesleyan Arminianism. It affirms free will as a gift of God to humanity, which has to be protected at all costs. Since human independent actions impinge upon God's decrees, God cannot know the future without harming independent free will. Humans cannot perform free actions if predestined by God. So if free will is true, then God cannot either prepare the future or even know the future. Thus God's sovereignty is necessarily self-limited. Therefore God is not totally sovereign, cannot know the future, cannot control history cannot prevent the free actions of men and therefore cannot be God.

Man's libertarian free choices are affirmed and thus the future has many different possibilities. God can influence these but does not control them or know how they will pan out in detail. Thus God willingly gave up his sovereign control of history. If this is true then there is no certain of hope final victory over evil.

This is taking Arminianism into dangerous heresy with overtones of Pelagianism and Socinianism.<sup>94</sup> These errors deny much of Scripture, such as: Ps 139:2-4, 16; Prov 16:4; Dan 4:25, 35; Rm 9:15-16; Col 1:16-17. Even Arminius did not go this far but affirmed divine providence based upon foreknowledge. In this matter Open Theism departs from Biblical Christianity altogether.

There are variations amongst Open Theists. Pinnock claims that all of the future is conditional whereas Boyd avers that some of it is decreed by God but other aspects are open and unknowable.

### *Denial of God's immutability*

Since man's free will reigns, God cannot control the future and must swiftly react to decisions of men, good or bad. Thus God's position constantly changes. In response to prayer, for example, God actually changes his mind on certain decisions. God continually changes his plan in response to new and unforeseen circumstances.

### *A quandary over free will*

Since Open Theists affirm libertarian (absolute freedom for) human will by self-causation they undermine their position. For them, human choices are un-caused; there are no antecedent causes (such as God's sovereignty), not even moral character. However, there is no such thing as self-causation; all choices are affected by something, even if only a person's character, environment and background. Jonathan Edwards proved that there is no such thing as absolute pure free will. '*Self-causation cannot exist and be exercised in a vacuum if choices are to be meaningful, it must be linked to a person's character. Actions reflect character* (Matthew 12:33-37).'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> The Jesuit proposal of a middle knowledge in God to avoid sovereign predestination. God does not sovereignly control men but controls them through contingencies (he sets things up knowing the way men will choose of their own free will).

<sup>94</sup> Socinianism was a late 16th century anti-Trinity heresy which also argued against original sin, the pre-existence of Christ and Biblical atonement. The Socinians denied God's sovereignty, making God subject to the free decisions of men, insisting that he neither foreordains nor foreknows anything.

<sup>95</sup> Stephen D. Giese; *A brief critique of Open Theism*,

<http://www.theologicalperspectives.org/ABRIEFCRITIQUEOFOPENTHEISM.htm>

### *Literal hermeneutic*

Open Theism claims to interpret Scripture literally and simply. Thus if God is said to change his mind – then he has relented and changed; if God is said to learn something – he has acquired new information. Of course these destroy God’s attributes of immutability, perfection and omniscience. This failure of hermeneutic does not see the use of anthropomorphism and anthropopathisms<sup>96</sup> in the descriptions of God.<sup>97</sup> Scripture uses many literary forms and these must be taken into account.<sup>98</sup>

### *Affirmation of purgatory and Patripassianism*

In a later book, *Flame of Love*, Pinnock affirms the Roman doctrine of purgatory – the possibility of progressive sanctification after death and *Patripassianism* which teaches that God the Father was born in the incarnation, suffered and died.<sup>99</sup>

### *False religions reveal God and can be accommodated*

Pinnock has even suggested that evil may triumph in the end. This is the logical conclusion of his theology – there can be no certain victory since God is rendered changeable and powerless. Pinnock also believes that other religions can reveal God’s truth and the schism with Rome should be healed.<sup>100</sup>

### **Effects**

Apart from the contradiction of many theological principles, particularly the denial of God’s decree and several attributes of God’s character, such a position means that praying for the salvation of free agents is pointless. If God cannot control history then the world is in chaos and there is no certain future hope.

Pinnock’s proposal fails to interact with many clear didactic passages which categorically state that God is sovereign over men’s affairs and knows the end from the beginning.

### **Summary of problems**

- This teaching is utterly unbiblical. Scriptures used in support can all be interpreted better.
- It does not solve the problems Pinnock sets out to solve. For instance: God’s permission for man to sin without opposition (as opposed to controlling his sin within the divine plan) still carries implicit responsibility for man’s sin since he created him with the knowledge of his potential for falling and a resultant sinful disposition and allowed him to sin. Furthermore, permission is either willingly or unwillingly. If this permission is unwilling on God’s part, then it posits that man is stronger than God. If it is willingly, then that implies compliance.
- Absolute free will does not exist. Men choose on the basis on their physical constraints (they cannot choose to fly), or their background, their upbringing, their health, their character and so on. Man’s choices are severely limited. Sinful men have no ability to choose good because of their total depravity (Rm 3:10-12).
- If God made men without any control over them and their future actions he could be accused of immorality for failing to control them.<sup>101</sup>
- It denies God’s omniscience (Isa 42:8-9, 44:8, 45:21, 46:9-10).

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Anthropomorphism’ = human physiology and actions ascribed to God to illustrate who he is and what he does. ‘Anthropopathism’ = human emotions are ascribed to God.

<sup>97</sup> See Michael Horton; *When God Lisps: An Analogical Account of Divine Repentance*, (2001), JETS.

<sup>98</sup> Such as figures of speech, poetry, allegory, typology and analogical reasoning.

<sup>99</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, p 123f, 179 and 27, 42, 91, 109.

<sup>100</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, p217, 237

<sup>101</sup> See argument of Warfield in ‘Some Thoughts on Predestination’, *Selected Shorter Writings*, Presbyterian & Reformed, (1970), 1:104.

- It denies God's sovereignty.
- It denies God's immutability.
- It denies the economy of the Trinity.
- Claims that love is God's supreme attribute and this informs his other attributes. Thus God does not predestine anyone to damnation (or salvation for that matter). Instead he predestines blessings on those who choose him.
- It denies the decrees; especially the decree of election.
- It denies the full effect of Adam's fall.
- It proposes annihilation instead of hell since a God of love would not torment sinners.
- It limits Biblical knowledge to what is understandable to human reason. God is subject to human knowledge. [Cf. Arius' epistemology: '*I will not believe what I cannot understand. What I cannot understand cannot possibly be true.*']

### Followers

Clark Pinnock, Greg Boyd (*God of the Possible*), John Sanders (*The God Who Risks*), Richard Rice, William Hasker, David Basinger, Robert Brow and Terence Fretheim. The movement has also been supported by Christianity Today magazine, the Evangelical Theological Society, Baker Books and IVP, which have contributed to its growing popularity.

Clark Pinnock, who identifies himself today as a Pentecostal Arminian, has been supported in the UK by Gerald Coates, Sandy Millar, Graham Kendrick, Roger Forster, John Noble and others in that stable.<sup>102</sup>

Aside: Note that the two chief Charismatic streams in the UK are fractured theologically. Gerald Coates' 'Pioneer People' / Roger Forster's 'Ichthus' are radical Arminians while Terry Virgo's 'New Frontiers' are compromised 4-Point Calvinists.

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<sup>102</sup> *The Openness of God* was on the recommended advance reading list for the conference 'A Theology for Revival' hosted by Coates and others in London in November 1997. Pinnock was called the, '*theologian for revival*' when he spoke at Coates' Westminster revival meetings, supported by the others mentioned.

## Preparationism

### Origin

This is not a theological system but a methodology that has penetrated many Calvinist churches, especially those who have a blinkered attachment to the Puritans.

#### *Puritan preparationism*

There is much to admire in the Puritans<sup>103</sup> but every teacher must be evaluated and tested. The gold may be kept but the dross must be abandoned. Thus even the best Puritans had ideas that were erroneous, such as a second blessing experience of spiritual assurance, Old Covenant legalism, tendencies to Erastianism and also Preparationism.

Preparationism began to appear in Puritanism by 1570. Despite believing in Total Depravity, many Puritans taught that a man could, *'dispose himself for saving grace.'*<sup>104</sup> In other words, a sinner could prepare himself to receive regeneration by conforming to certain duties. These were variously listed, such as: serious consideration of his sins in the light of the law; self-examination generally; loathing sin; reading the Bible, listening to sermons etc. Some even described this as a preparatory grace, which may not lead to salvation. This comes close to the errors of Common Grace and Wesleyan Preventive Grace.

Incredibly, supralapsarian theologians like William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, John Owen and William Ames could teach this, describing the stages through which a seeking sinner passes before gaining regeneration which are not the fruits of grace but preparations for it. Sibbes could say that an unregenerate person can, *'subject [himself] to the Spirit of Christ'* and can *'make his own heart tender so that it is more open to yielding to the Spirit,'* (sic).<sup>105</sup> Owen averred, *'in reference unto the work of regeneration itself, positively considered, we may observe, that ordinarily there are certain previous and preparatory works, or workings in and upon the souls of men, that are antecedent and dispositive unto it.'*<sup>106</sup> This does not involve saving grace and these works may not lead to conversion.

Owen listed the stages of preparation as:

- A diligent searching out by the mind (searching for the truth).
- Attending to the means of grace, (prayer, Scripture, church attendance).
- Understanding and accepting revealed truth by use of reason.
- Remember that they are just men.
- Turn to God.
- *'These things are required of us in order unto our regeneration, and it is in the power of our own wills to comply with them.'*
- Thus the effects of sermons to people so prepared result in, *'1. Illumination; 2. Conviction; 3. Reformation. The first of these respects the mind only; the second, the mind, conscience, and affections; and the third, the life and conversation.'*

All this contradicts Scripture which categorically states that no man seeks for God (Rm 3:11) until God draws him to Christ (Jn 6:44, 65). Only when a man has received grace

<sup>103</sup> To call them *'grandiloquent heretics'* (as per *Outside the Camp*) is shocking and facile.

<sup>104</sup> Norman Pettit; *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, Yale University Press, (1966), p3.

<sup>105</sup> Pettit; *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, Yale University Press, (1966), p68, 70.

<sup>106</sup> Owen; Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, chapter: *'Works of the Holy Spirit Preparatory Unto Regeneration'*, *Works*, Vol 3, Banner of Truth (1977), p228-242.

does he begin to seek God. To avoid contradicting these Scriptures, the Puritans developed complex reasoning about divisions in the human will.

The issue rests on this; either:

- The work of preparation is a fruit of grace – in this case every recipient must later be converted; but many are not therefore there is a theological problem with the idea. [E.g. Thomas Shepard, Joseph Alleine.]
- Or the work of preparation is not a fruit of grace but a preparation for it – but this contradicts Scripture that no one seeks God. [E.g. William Perkins.]

The only alternative is the idea of common operations of the Spirit that are not saving grace and that do not always lead to salvation – but there is no teaching on this in the Bible. Yet this was the position of the Puritans (and many others).

Aside: This raises a question that has largely been ignored by theologians throughout history. It is true that no man is saved without conviction of sin, and that this is brought by the Holy Spirit upon a man's conscience. But where is this in the *ordo salutis*? Many Calvinistic theologians and preachers have taught that conviction of sin may not lead to conversion, [e.g. Shedd, Buchanan, M'Cheyne] but genuine conviction of sin must always lead to conversion if it is a work of grace (unless you believe in an unbiblical prevenient grace). If it is a work of the Spirit it must be part of the effectual call and thus must lead to regeneration or be part of regeneration. Thus conviction of sin is always effectual. Examples proffered of men under conviction who were not saved (Judas, Felix etc.) cannot be recipients of true conviction by the Spirit but examples of men under natural guilt. Though often instantaneous, there may be a short gap between conviction of sin and conversion – moments in Acts 2:37-41, 16:29-33, or three days Acts 9:5-18. However, we must not suggest (as with Hyper-Calvinists) that there is always a long gap between the two and then, in fact, the Gospel is only preached to those who show a present conviction of sin under law.

It seems that the Puritans were affected by a lack of clarity on this issue, as many since, in teaching that preparatory acts were with God's assistance, even in reprobates. Total Depravity means that man cannot do these works himself but God helps him. This sort of thinking is very prevalent in times of revival when men were said to be 'awakened' by a work of the Spirit and yet may not be later saved. Note 'The Great Awakening' for example. This is the danger of teaching 'common operations of the Spirit'; something done since the Reformation by most theologians, including Calvin. In truth an 'awakened sinner' is a person under conviction as a result of the effectual call who will then manifest conversion (faith and repentance). [For a discussion of this subject see Paul Fahy; *Awakened Sinner: Is this an acceptable term?*]

Subsequent theologians also taught Preparationism, such as the Dutchman Wilhelmus à Brakel [1635-1711] or the American William G. T. Shedd [1820-1894] who taught a common or prevenient grace.

The error was very common in New England Puritanism. Preparation for salvation was emphasised as a sequence of steps; such as:

- Trying to observe the Ten Commandments.
- Failing to obey the Ten Commandments.
- Experiencing emotional disappointments as a result of this failure.
- Developing an increasing sense of hopelessness.
- Recognising that only Christ can bring salvation.
- Receiving saving grace.
- Experiencing a struggle between faith and doubt.
- Believing that one is saved.

Examples of this are Thomas Hooker and his son-in-law Thomas Shepard. Hooker was defended in this by former Banner of Truth editor, Iain Murray.<sup>107</sup> These teach that unregenerate men may yet seek mercy, have true conviction, mourn for sin, be truly humbled, separate from sin and care for Christ – all without regeneration.

Jonathan Edwards was another American historical example. Edwards said that conviction of sin does not result from the Spirit infusing special grace, or result from regeneration, but rather, involves the Spirit assisting natural principles ('common grace'). The purpose of this work is that the sinner can clearly see his natural, sinful state.<sup>108</sup>

All of this both denies Scripture (e.g. Jn 3:20; Rm 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14) and sound confessions (e.g. *Synod of Dort, Canons III/IV, Rejection: 4*).

Note that Puritan Preparationism is not the same as the providence of God in keeping an elect but unsaved person from harm and gradually lead him into truth, often by stages.

### *Modern Preparationism*

Essentially, this is the same as the Puritan form but in a modern package.

### **Errors**

- Man should make every effort to prepare for salvation by attending to certain duties. These include self-examination, listing known sins, attending Gospel preaching, reading Scripture, praying for mercy (even without conviction of sin). These are not bad duties but the Preparationist teaching implies that they contribute to conversion, or worse, are necessary before conversion.
- Some teach that grace is involved in these works. This grace is then resistible.
- Some teach many forms of grace other than saving grace (the only true form); such as: 'enlightening grace,' 'awakening grace,' 'affecting grace,' 'prevenient grace' or 'common grace'.
- Others teach that grace is not involved in these works, which implies a denial of Total Depravity.
- Yet others teach that a preparatory grace is involved, not really grace but God aiding the seeker in some unbiblical manner.
- In general there is the implication that God aids the reprobate in some way.
- Incorporated into this teaching is an emphasis upon a sinner being under a long period of being 'lashed' by the law. This is not the Gospel. Conviction of sin and belief in Christ can be immediate (e.g. Lk 19:8-9).
- Ignores the Scriptural facts that the unregenerate cannot produce good fruit (Matt 7:18), cannot do spiritual works because they are dead (Eph 2:1-2), cannot understand God or seek God (Rm 3:10-18), cannot receive godly things (1 Cor 2:14). Furthermore, their prayers are an abomination (Prov 28:9), their good works are sinful (Prov 21:4), and they are at enmity towards God (Rm 8:5-8), they love the darkness (Jn 3:19) and only do dead works because they are spiritually dead following the devil (Eph 2:1-3; Heb 9:14).

All this confuses the Lord's people and can lead to despair and lack of assurance. Indeed, many Puritan converts struggled with assurance and this led to developing the idea of a subsequent mystical experience being necessary to obtain it. If conviction of sin, seeking

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<sup>107</sup> Iain H Murray; *Thomas Hooker And The Doctrine Of Conversion*, [www.puritansermons.com/pdf/murray4.pdf](http://www.puritansermons.com/pdf/murray4.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> 'A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God Shown to be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine', *Works* Vol. 2. p13.



God, a desire to read the Bible, wanting to be found in Christ, thirsting for righteousness and seeking out godly sermons are possibly not indicative of regeneration (but only a preparation), then who can be sure of their regeneration? Puritans certainly taught that all these things were no guarantee of regeneration.

Paul did not labour that he might receive grace, but he received grace in order that he might labour.<sup>109</sup>

### **Followers, of the modern form**

Peter Masters (Metropolitan Tabernacle, London) and many influenced by *Sword and Trowel* magazine (edited by Masters). Masters emphasises that salvation comes from following a series of steps, on the basis of Puritan Preparationism.

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## **Preterism**

### **What is it?**

It is more a hermeneutic than a theology. The term 'Preterism' comes from the Latin word '*praeter*' (= 'past') as applied to certain biblical prophecies being fulfilled (i.e. past). It essentially means 'past fulfilment', as opposed to Futurism, which means 'future fulfilment'. Dispensationalism is Futurist and is a vocal opponent of Preterism. [See appendix one.]

Preterism arose as a theory to explain the book of Revelation. It claims that Revelation describes the conditions of the early church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century; it is an apocalyptic writing speaking against the persecution of the church by imperial Rome which is not a future prophecy of the end. Everything was fulfilled before 70 AD (or end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century or 3<sup>rd</sup> century, depending on your Preterist sect). This position is denied by the book itself in many places. Revelation claims to be a prophecy (1:3; 4:1; 22:7; 10, 18, 19) while the Second Coming is described and this has not yet occurred.

Extreme forms of Preterism claims that all of the prophecies in the Bible have been fulfilled, not just those in Revelation.

### **Origin**

Early forms of this can be found in certain church fathers, such as Eusebius [c.263–339].<sup>110</sup> However claims that the early fathers supported this in general are false. Many people aver that the theory developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Jesuit Luis de Alcasar as part of the Roman Counter Reformation attack on the growing Protestant Churches (which generally held a Historicist interpretation<sup>111</sup>). Thus Anglican church historian Farrar [1831-1903],

It has been usual to say that the Spanish Jesuit Alcasar, in his *Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi* (1614), was the founder of the Præterist School.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Augustine, *De gestis Pelagii*, xiv, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea; *On the Theophania*, p245-246.

<sup>111</sup> Revelation's prophecies are worked out in history over time.

<sup>112</sup> Frederic W. Farrar; *The Early Days of Christianity*, volume 2 (1882).

The chief purpose in this was to prove that the Antichrist was not the pope, as claimed by the majority of Reformed Calvinistic interpreters, but a 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Emperor (e.g. Nero [emperor 54–68] or Domitian [emperor 81–96]).

As part of the general Post-Amyraldism erroneous movements to compromise Calvinism and initiate various attempts of alliance with Catholics, some began to take on Preterist views; such as Hugo Grotius the father of Moral Government Theory. A very few Puritans succumbed to this interpretation regarding the book of Daniel (not Revelation), such as Thomas Hayne and Joseph Hall. Henry Hammond was about the only Protestant who followed Grotius regarding Revelation. However, other continental heretics took up the notion.

This was a position held by liberal theologians who dismissed much of the veracity of the Bible in late Victorian times and the teaching began to appear in America in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Moses Stuart [1780-1852], though most Americans were Futurists<sup>113</sup>). It was not a position held by many evangelicals and was not popular. However, in recent years a radical reformation of this idea has occurred, especially in America, and large numbers of people now support it. This includes many Open Theists.

### **Partial Preterism**

This is also called ‘orthodox Preterism’, ‘classical Preterism’ or ‘moderate Preterism’. This group claims to be in accord with the historic ecumenical creeds, unlike Full Preterists.

This holds that most eschatological prophecies (e.g. Antichrist and the great tribulation), including the coming of the Lord in judgment, were fulfilled by 70 AD. ‘Babylon the Great’ (Rev 17-18) is identified by some as the Roman Empire, by others (e.g. Wright) as Jerusalem. Most see Nero as ‘the beast’ and his mark as his image stamped on coins.

However, the physical Second Coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead have not yet occurred.

### **Full Preterism**

This is also known as, ‘Preterism’, ‘consistent Preterism’, ‘True Preterism’ and ‘hyper-Preterism’.

In this scheme all eschatological prophecy was fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem [70 AD], including the Second Coming of the Lord, the final judgment and the resurrection of the dead. This is based on Matt 16:28 which, taken literally, puts the Second Coming in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Thus the Second Coming is invisible and issues in judgment on Jerusalem. A general judgment on men is occurring now and is applied on death.

The resurrection of the dead is not physical but the raising of the soul from Hades – i.e. the righteous dead gained a spiritual body in heaven - and the unrighteous dead were cast into hell. [The first part is true; the second part has not yet happened.] This denies clear Scriptures regarding a physical new body on a physical new earth, which reigns with Christ which, occurs at the end.

The new heavens and earth are equated with the closing of the Law in 70 AD and are thus a spiritual experience.

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<sup>113</sup> Futurism = prophecies regarding the end are all in the future. This is the position of most Dispensationalists.

## Problems

One of the problems caused by this interpretation of Revelation is that many Preterists openly deny the resurrection or claim that it has already occurred in the past. This strips believers of all hope. Denial of a physical resurrection is a cardinal error (note 2 Tim 2:17-18). There is also a close link between Preterism and Reconstructionism (Theonomy), the New Perspective and Open Theism. Note also that Full Preterists tend to just call themselves 'Preterists' and their writings can take readers by surprise in claiming to make sense of prophecy.

Preterists claim that their view is 'spreading like wildfire' and gaining the support of many media organisations. There are certainly large numbers of Americans falling for this error.

## Errors

- Denial of a future time of great tribulation for the church which is plainly spoken of by Paul and John (Preterists claim that this occurred only for Jews in the siege of Jerusalem).
- Serious misreading of the book of Revelation.
- Denial of the future physical resurrection of the body by Full Preterists.
- Denial of the physical and glorious Second Coming of the Lord by Full Preterists.
- Denial of the Day of Judgment by Full Preterists.
- Claim that the new heavens and earth are covenantal and not literal by Full Preterists.
- Claim that the term 'Last Days' refers to the last days of the Mosaic Covenant. However, Partial Preterists believe that the term 'Last Day' is still future.

## Partial Preterism followers

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., R. A. Taylor, Dee Dee Warren, J. P. Holding, Keith A. Mathison, Jay E. Adams, R. C. Sproul, Larry T. Smith, NT Wright.

## Full Preterism followers

Don K. Preston, Todd D. Dennis, Samuel M. Frost, Michael A. Fenemore, Richard K. McPherson, David G. Embury, Dave Green, Ward Fenley, Kurt M. Simmons, Kelly Nelson Birks, John S. Evans, Ward Fenley.

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## Reconstructionism

### What is it?

It is the proposal to reconstruct society on the basis of the Mosaic Law. It is a type of Postmillennial Dominionism which is also called 'Theonomy' ('God's law'). It is explained in these positions:

- CALVINISM: a theology centred on God. Faith must affect all of life, not just spiritual matters. [However, Rushdoony shows a low view of Calvin himself.]
- THEONOMY: the Mosaic Law has not been cancelled but continues to reflect God's will. Its purpose is a) to drive the sinner to Christ. b) to provide a standard of ethics for the believer's sanctification. c) The means to provide order in society, restraining and punishing civil wickedness; Israel's civil laws are normative in all societies for all time. Thus adultery and homosexuality are capital offences. Christians are obligated to keep the whole law as a moral standard.<sup>114</sup>
- PRESUPPOSITIONALISM: refusal to prove the existence of God or the authority of the Bible. There is just a proposition of faith. No attempt to convince sinners but a claim that they already know the truth. Sinners do not need persuasion or evidence but repentance.
- POSTMILLENNIALISM: Christ will only return after the Spirit has empowered the church to take over the world. All nations must submit to God's law first.
- DOMINIONISM: the elect must take dominion over the earth. Every area that belongs to God that has been dominated by sin must be reconstructed to comply with God's law. This begins with the individual sinner, then the family unit, then the church, then the wider society, including governance of the state. Civilisation must become Christian. The church is separate from the state but the state is not separate from God. This is not achieved by military rebellion but by obeying the Bible and trusting the Spirit in the preaching of the Gospel.

This can be summarised as the desire to create a modern theocracy, a state ruled by God. It includes such principles as, decentralised government, strong private property rights, abandonment of social welfare, isolation of education and business from government, re-introduction of voluntary slavery and a general right wing agenda. Criminal law would be Mosaic; including the death penalty for incorrigible children. Restitution of robbery would involve forced slavery when the felon could not repay.

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<sup>114</sup> Greg Bahnsen; *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Craig Press, (1979), p34.

## Originator

Rousas J Rushdoony, an American Presbyterian. Van Til was an original influence, though he distanced himself from the movement. The Reconstructionist Movement only appeared in America in the 60s, but has grown substantially since then.

## Errors

### *Postmillennialism.*

Postmillennialism affirms the victorious advance of the kingdom (church) to create a utopia on earth. Reconstructionism teaches that we are now in the millennium and must physically build the kingdom in every country under God's law.

There are very clear NT Scriptures which demonstrate that the end is a period of degeneration for the church; many apostatise (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Thess 2:1-10) and the world is filled with false prophets and false teachers (Matt 24:5, 11, 24). A global evil empire gradually emerges which persecutes the church in the name of God (Jn 16:2; Rev 13:7). The final world society is not godly but immoral and corrupt (Rev 13). In every aspect, Scripture teaches the opposite of the Reconstructionist agenda. Postmillennialism is predicated on the false interpretation of obscure, poetics and symbolic OT passages. This is contrary to Calvinistic exposition.

### *Legalism in Christian development*

'Justified by grace; sanctified by law', Rushdoony.<sup>115</sup> This denies all apostolic teaching on sanctification.

### *Re-establishing the Mosaic Law, which God says is cancelled.*

The result is nonsense, such as demanding that every new house has a battlement for its roof (Deut 22:8) or garments cannot be made from mixed materials (Deut 22:11). It fails to see that the law cannot be perfectly obeyed by men. OT saints could not obey the law, even with miraculous prophetic exhortations (Acts 15:10); why should men now? The point of the Mosaic Law was to point to Christ and not be a blueprint for all societies. When Christ came the law was fulfilled (Rm 10:4); it was only ever a shadow of Christ. It fails to see that the ministry of the law produces death not life. (2 Cor 3:7). It is not the means of sanctification. If blasphemy and idolatry are capital crimes, it means the genocide of all adherents of false religions; billions of people. Reconstructionism logically would result in a totalitarian state worse than Nazi Germany.

### *It contradicts the Bible's statements that sinners are not part of the kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-10).*

The church is not called to change human society or create a peaceful world today but to preach the Gospel and build the church.

### *Worldly compromise*

It fails to see the clear Biblical warnings about being set apart from the world, dying to the world.

### *Inconsistency in hermeneutics*

They apply a 'visualisation'<sup>116</sup> approach to Revelation but interpret the OT literally. Numbers are sometimes rounded up and no specific (such as 40 or 1,000) while others are taken literally.

<sup>115</sup> Sic *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p4.

<sup>116</sup> Utilising a sort of moderate symbolic approach but not consistent allegorising. The Bible must be read as pictures painted by the writers, involving a literal as well as associated symbolic interpretation.

*Presuppositionalism*  
See Van Tilism.

### Followers

- RJ Rushdoony, Andrew Sandlin, Gary DeMar, Gary North (Rushdoony's son-in-law), David Chilton, Joseph Kickasola, Ray Sutton and Greg Bahnsen.
- Gary North had a significant impact upon Charismatics, feeding their version of Dominionism, as a result of influencing Robert Tilton's wife.
- The Chalcedon Foundation (established by Rushdoony), Geneva Ministries (Gary North).

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## Van Tilism

### Originator

Cornelius Van Til [1895-1987] was a Reformed theologian heavily influenced by theologian Abraham Kuyper<sup>117</sup> and philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd. He tended to merge theology with philosophy; indeed some writers consider that his system is a syncretism of Scripture and Kantian philosophy.<sup>118</sup> He is considered as, '*perhaps the most important Christian thinker since Calvin*' by his disciples.<sup>119</sup> He heavily influenced the Reformed world by reason of his credentials as professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, and the Banner of Truth magazine later supported his Presuppositionalism.<sup>120</sup>

### Error 1: Presuppositionalism in apologetics

Van Til derived the use of the term 'presupposition' from Kant and also used his philosophical transcendental method in an almost Platonic way.<sup>121</sup> 'Presupposition' is interpreted in Kantian fashion as: '*We cannot attain unto impartial and impersonal knowledge of facts. ... We see facts not as they are in themselves, but in the light of our own personal categories of belief and interpretation.*'<sup>122</sup> Thus natural man's presuppositions are all wrong.

<sup>117</sup> 'So far as a choice had to be made between the two positions, I took my position with Kuyper rather than with Hodge and Warfield ... Negatively Kuyper was surely right in stressing that the natural man does not, on his principles, have any knowledge of the truth.' *Common Grace and the Gospel*, page 184.

<sup>118</sup> Such as DR Trethewie. '*Van Til's assertion is that Kant's philosophy teaches, what Van Til believes all non-Christian philosophy teaches, but less clearly than Kant, that man is the ultimate reference point and not God.*' *Critique of Van Til*, p43.

<sup>119</sup> John Frame; *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, P & R Publishing, 1995, p44.

<sup>120</sup> *Banner of Truth Magazine*: 'James MacGregor and his Significance', by John Keddie; November 1976, issue No. 158; John Child; 'Review of *Van Til: The Theologian*, by John Frame', No. 153, page 27, June 1976.

<sup>121</sup> Van Til condemned human reason as a competent faculty and source of valid beliefs. '*We must avoid the idea that human reason exists as a known and definable entity apart from God so that we can begin from it as from an ultimate starting point.*' *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p21.

<sup>122</sup> Van Til articulated by Alan Richardson; *Christian Apologetics*, SCM Press, (1948) p12-13.

In Kant's philosophy, as has been shown, the Categories provide the presuppositions, defined also as primary judgments, necessary for the knowledge of objects. The study of these first truths and the way they are applied to objects is called epistemology. We hold that the powers of primary judgment are a part of man's nature, whether Christian or non-Christian, created by God, enabling man to know in a finite way. Van Til objects to this.<sup>123</sup>

Based on his notion of presuppositions, Van Til taught that apologetics should not attempt to prove the existence of God or the divine authority of the Bible by rational means. He thus condemns evidentialist (empirical<sup>124</sup>) apologetics. This is contrary to the command to defend the faith from outside attack or questions (1 Pt 3:15).<sup>125</sup> It is also contrary to the evidential methods used by God himself, such as proving that he is omniscient by stating the end from the beginning.<sup>126</sup>

Van Til also averred that all natural empirical proofs for God are invalid, such as explaining the complex, integrated nature of the universe and inferring the need for a divine designer (or 'First Cause'). He teaches that God must presuppose our consideration of creation, that we must start with God, not with creation. He thus demands a priori<sup>127</sup> proof of God's existence. This denies that men can know that God exists by seeing his glory in creation by using natural reason; Van Til claims that this revelation posits a 'finite God' (i.e. no God at all), contra Rm 1:20-21. Instead, Van Til affirms that non-Christians are able to '*recognise something of the truth of the revelation of God within themselves*'?<sup>128</sup>

Van Til claimed that human knowledge is analogical to God's knowledge, with no point of coincidence. Fallen man can never arrive at any truth apart from God: '*the Christian-theist must claim that he alone has true knowledge about cows and chickens as well as about God.*'<sup>129</sup>

Thus Van Til not only denied that human reason could be used to investigate God's word but that it could not investigate reality either.<sup>130</sup> This was directly contrary to both Calvin and the Puritans. Warfield's criticism of Kuyper is valid here, Van Til '*makes too absolute the contrast between the two forms of science [i.e. non-Christian and Christian].*'<sup>131</sup> Van Til thus denied the Christian duty to face people with plain facts which, contrary to Van Til, can be perceived by human reason. This is not 'rationalistic' in the liberal sense but something repeatedly done by the apostles (Acts 17:2, 17, 24:25, 28:23).

The Christian is committed to truth and thus should avoid following a certain rigid theoretical perspective to determine all interpretations. Theories must be subjected to known facts (e.g. Scripture) and verifiable logic, using valid, rational arguments. What does not stand up must be rejected as false. Van Til fails this test. What is worse in Van Til

<sup>123</sup> DR Trethewie; *Critique of Van Til*, p40.

<sup>124</sup> Empirical = verifiable by observation or experience rather than theory or pure logic.

<sup>125</sup> One traditional argument for God's existence, the ontological argument derived from Anselm, needs refuting. The mere conception in the human mind of a perfect divine being is no guarantee of the real objective existence of such a being. See JH Thornwell; *Writings of Thornwell*, Volume 1, p64-66 and RL Dabney; *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p8-9.

<sup>126</sup> 'Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,"' Isa 46:9-10.

<sup>127</sup> A priori = knowledge which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience.

<sup>128</sup> Van Til; *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p198.

<sup>129</sup> *Metaphysics of Apologetics*, Presbyterian and Reformed, (1931) p194.

<sup>130</sup> '*Without the light of Scripture, no fact can be truly known. Not only facts, but all nature and history exist in terms of eternal categories.*' Rushdoony; *Van Til*, p42.

<sup>131</sup> BB Warfield; *Selected Shorter Writings of Warfield - II*, p100.

is that his theoretical perspective, used to evaluate everything, is a flawed philosophical perspective derived and twisted from a secular source (Kant). It denies Col 2:8: 'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ'. Van Til's essential position is to hold a rigid, mechanical, flawed, secular theory to determine all knowledge.

Van Til consequently denied any value in Natural Theology. This is the study of truths that emanate from the light of nature, axioms determined by studying natural phenomena, which result in knowing that there is a God who created all things, that he must be worshipped and (from conscience) knowing right and wrong and that God judges sin. Natural Theology cannot lead to salvation, but it does result in responsibility to worship God and is a beginning for the Gospel witness and a warning about judgment to come (see Paul in Acts 17:23-31). Thus, says Van Til, '*Paul does not teach natural theology in the first chapter of Romans.*'<sup>132</sup>

This is contrary to orthodoxy; '*If nature reflects any light concerning God (as Scripture asserts), then man is capable of deriving some theology from nature.*'<sup>133</sup> Natural Theology teaches us certain basic truths and all truth is valuable and a testimony to God. It also incites us to search for God to know more.

God created man with reason to be utilised to have dominion over the earth. God did not give supernatural revelation of all physical laws but encouraged man to find these out for himself using his natural created gifts (observation, judgment, rationality etc.) and experiencing divine providence. Thus man worked out a scientific method and disciplines of learning which led to the discovery of the law of gravitation and the use of electricity, for instance, in time.

Furthermore, with the work of the law written on man's heart, man had sufficient ethical gifting to work out basic principles of morality with which he could rule with justice in society as a delegated agent of God. '*Since, however, man's efforts are not always so utterly fruitless as not to lead to some result, especially when his attention is directed to inferior objects. Nay, even with regard to superior objects, though he is more careless in investigating them, he makes some little progress.*'<sup>134</sup> For this reason God could condemn nations (which had no divine law) that ruled with injustice and oppression. Indeed, John Newton added:

[Man's] natural powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man, by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, etc., sufficiently proclaim that the hand that made him is divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, 'majestic though in ruins.' He can reason, invent, and, by application, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators etc., are wonderful. But man cannot know, love, trust or serve his Maker, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind ... [which requires that] a principle of grace (be) super-added.<sup>135</sup>

[See Appendix Three.]

*Followers of Van Til:* Most modern Reformed theologians, especially Francis Schaeffer. *Opponents of Van Til:* Gordon Clark (a different type of presuppositionalist), and evidentialists: John Gerstner, Herman Hoeksema, the Ligonier group (RC Sproul etc.) and those influenced by them.

<sup>132</sup> Van Til; *Toward a Reformed Apologetic*, p12.

<sup>133</sup> RL Dabney; *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, p6. See also, A. A. Hodge; *Outlines of Theology*, p44.

<sup>134</sup> John Calvin; *Institutes of Religion*, Volume 1, p234.

<sup>135</sup> John Newton; *The Utterance of the Heart*, Baker, (1979) p123.



Theologians taking the traditional Calvinist ('Old Princeton') View	Theologians taking the Dutch (Van Tilian) View
Charles Hodge	A Kuyper
AA Hodge	Herman Bavinck
BB Warfield	Cornelius Van Til
RL Dabney	H. Van Der Laan
James Thornwell	Francis Schaeffer

### *Practical errors arising from this*

DR Trethewie lists the following effects of Presuppositionalism:

- It obscures the doctrine of historical faith (something true of Kuyperianism generally) See BB Warfield; *Selected Shorter Writings of Warfield* - II, pages 115ff, P & R, (1973).
- It fails to define correctly the faults in rationalism. The overthrow of rationalism, requires a thorough and accurate knowledge of these matters, as well as of Scripture.
- Van Til twists doctrine with distortions of philosophical concepts, ignoring the warning of Christ in Matthew 16:6.
- Van Til's method is not contained to apologetics but is intended to be used in systematic and exegetical theology as well. Van Til himself states that, '*The consequences of (this) position for systematic theology ... are again far reaching.*'<sup>136</sup> See for example his expositions of the fall and hell in *Van Til*, by R. J. Rushdoony, pages 25 and 48 respectively.
- Francis Schaeffer also insists that his teaching, which is similar to Van Til's, is of great practical import. See his *Escape from Reason*, pages 7-8, Inter Varsity Press, 1971.
- Kuyperianism sets a wrong postmillennial vision with the achievement of earthly goals (Utopianism, Dominionism) being confused with the establishment of the kingdom of heaven. This Kuyperian streak remains strong in Van Til.<sup>137</sup>
- There is the suggestion of Christian domination of the state, above legitimate natural civil investigations but also of exercising outright intolerance and even persecution of both non-Christians and of Christians who do not agree with Kuyperianism. This is linked to support in the *Solemn League and Covenant* of Scotland, 1643 and 1648, and *Westminster Confession of Faith*, page 359, II and page 367. [PF: This led directly to Reconstructionism by influencing Rushdoony, but Van Til later distanced himself from the movement, though he caused it.]
- The Kuyperian doctrine, that there are no ordinary rational grounds for justifying the existence of God and the inspiration of Scripture, allies Van Til with secular humanism, which has come to the same conclusions. This denial of ordinary rational functions, common to Christians and non-Christians supplies arguments for rationalistic sceptics to attack Christianity.

### **Error 2: A wrong formulation of the Trinity**

Van Til averred that God is one essence and also three essences; one person and also three persons, in a paradox. This is unorthodox. God is one, but subsisting in three persons. There is one God that is three persons. The suggestion of three essences is the heresy of Tritheism.

Followers: John Frame,<sup>138</sup> Gary North,<sup>139</sup> David Chilton,<sup>140</sup> James Jordan.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Van Til; *Apologetics*, Westminster Theological Seminary, (n.d.), p13.

<sup>137</sup> Cornelis Pronk; 'The Dutch Puritans', *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, Nos. 154 to 155, July/August, 1976 page 1ff.

**Error 3: The Bible is full of contradictions; disparaging of logic**

This is usually described under the formula of ‘paradox’. Two opposite things are equally upheld and the contradictory logic is dismissed by claiming that the truths are a paradox. A classic example of this is the idea that there are two contradictory wills in God. If this were true God could no longer be God, but the idea is claimed to be a paradox in its appearance to men.

Followers: John Frame,<sup>142</sup> Richard Pratt,<sup>143</sup> Edward H Palmer.

**Error 4: Common Grace leading to the well-meant offer**

See section on ‘Common Grace’. The well-meant (free) offer includes the heresy that God desires the salvation of all men and that Christ died for all men; despite not choosing them.

Followers: most ‘Calvinist’ teachers today.

**Error 5: Presentation**

Though not strictly an ‘error’, it has to be said that Van Til is extremely difficult to follow and his writings seem to be deliberately unclear, ambiguous, filled with contradictions and cryptic, confusing prose.<sup>144</sup> Note: ‘*we embrace with passion the idea of the apparently contradictory.*’<sup>145</sup> Indeed, he has been repeatedly charged with deceptive subtlety. It has been said, even by his own followers, that: a) no one but Van Til understands his works; and b) even his disciples misunderstand them.

This is evidence of, at least, poor teaching; teaching should aim to make complex matters intelligible to all. It is a characteristic common to many unorthodox teachers (e.g. Andrew Fuller). It appears to me that many people quote Van Til but are afraid to admit that they do not understand what they write, so no one challenges it in order not to appear foolish.

Example: Van Til contends that unregenerate man both knows God and yet does not know God. He explains that this is due to two natures in unregenerate man, an old and a new. ‘*To be sure, the natural man knows God ... by virtue of his old man within him he knows that he is a creature of God and responsible to God. But as far as his new man is concerned he does not know this. He will not own this. He represses it.*’<sup>146</sup> Clearly, this is utterly unbiblical, being based upon the two natures of the believer. It is also nonsense.

Van Til’s delight in contradiction stems from the refusal to apply reason to the text of difficult Scriptures but rather frame philosophical paradoxes.<sup>147</sup> The true position is that we must use the God-given gift of reason to compare Scripture with Scripture to come to the truth since there are no paradoxes or contradictions in God’s word. Problems in interpretation are the fault of the interpreter, not the text. Van Til can thus teach erroneous

<sup>138</sup> *New Horizons*, [Magazine of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church], October 1985, 1. *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, P & R Publishing, 1995

<sup>139</sup> Gary North; *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, p18.

<sup>140</sup> David Chilton; *The Days of Vengeance*, p58.

<sup>141</sup> James B. Jordan; *Biblical Horizons*, No. 46, Feb.1993, p2.

<sup>142</sup> *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p226, 307.

<sup>143</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *Every Thought Captive*, p25.

<sup>144</sup> ‘*When we look at Van Til's work as a whole, even a sympathetic critic is bound to admit that some things are obscure.*’ Colin Brown; *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, Tyndale, (1969) p249.

<sup>145</sup> *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p9.

<sup>146</sup> Van Til’s Introduction in BB Warfield; *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p38-39.

<sup>147</sup> ‘*When scripture says: "Come, let us reason together" ... it never regards [men] ... as really competent to judge.*’ *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p29. In this text (Isa 1:18), God is actually commanding sinners to use reason to consider that they are sinners and guilty.

doctrines, like Common Grace, by applying paradoxes when there is not one iota of Biblical teaching on this matter. It is a failure to see that logic is an attribute of God used in the creation and sustaining of the universe.<sup>148</sup> The Bible repeatedly affirms the proper use of the mind and wisdom. We are not to be afraid of logic and reason but must give them their proper subordinate place (and affirm that reason cannot contribute to salvation).

In passing we can notice what is fairly obvious to anyone with some knowledge of philosophy, that Van Til's system is a priori dogmatic transcendental irrationalism, which he has attempted to give a Christian name to.<sup>149</sup> [I.e: a spiritual, metaphysical system of belief based on an incontrovertible theoretical deduction that disregards or contradicts rational principles.]

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## Conclusion

There are limits in an overview such as this one. Despite intending to be very brief, I have managed to cover far more pages than intended; even so, the snapshots of each error covered are only a summary of the subject. Needless to say, there are significant varieties in each movement and some followers would not support all the doctrines attributed to it. Without writing a book on each system mentioned, this is the best that we can hope for in a small compass.

Nevertheless, clearly the modern church is in deep trouble. This overview shows that not only church leaders but also seminary professors are leading the Lord's people astray with a variety of very serious heresies. Indeed, we could add to the list covered herewith with many more errors that are abounding today,<sup>150</sup> but we have limited ourselves to those who would consider themselves to be evangelical and were once Reformed.<sup>151</sup> We have not

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<sup>148</sup> Note the continuing discoveries of mathematics undergirding both astrophysics and genetic composition.

<sup>149</sup> DR Trethewie; *A critique of Cornelius Van Til: Being a Defence of Traditional Evidential Christian Apologetics*, Reforming and Congregational Church East Geelong, (2002), p15.

<sup>150</sup> Such as Process Theology, Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology and Theology of Hope; these all have liberal overtones.

<sup>151</sup> Open Theism, despite later claiming to be radical Arminianism, is included because it arose from Reformed seminaries by supposedly Reformed professors.

considered the heresies associated with ecclesiology (such as Charismaticism), mysticism (e.g. New Thought, Unity, Third Wave, Word Faith), universalism (e.g. Arminianism, Socinianism, New Divinity) or Dispensationalism (such as Jewish Root theology or Pre-tribulationism). Many modern theological seminaries are steeped in these errors as well.

The leaders of the heresies covered in this paper claim, or once claimed, to be Reformed; hence the serious danger to young students seeking the truth. The significant problem is that professors who would contend against Dispensationalism, Charismaticism and Arminianism, for example, still fall foul of modern errors, such as Federal Vision, New Calvinism or the New Perspective. More traditional, conservative Calvinists may avoid the modern problems and yet submit to Hyper-Calvinism or its opposite, Amyraldism. It is a dangerous world full of theological minefields out there and never has the ministry of true teaching in the church been more necessary, and yet there is a dearth of it.

You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen. 2 Pt 3:17-18

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## Appendix One

### Spurgeon on views of Apocalyptic Prophecy

This is taken from CH Spurgeon; *Commenting and Commentaries*, introduction to Revelation.

Davidson distinguishes a fourfold manner of apprehending Apocalyptic Prophecy.

1. *Preterists*. The prophecies contained in the Apocalypse were fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of heathen Rome. This is the view of Bossuet, Grotius, Hammond, Wetstein, Eichhorn, Ewald, De Wette, Lucke, and others, among whom is the American expositor, Moses Stuart.
2. *Continuists*. [= modern Historicists] The Apocalyptic prophecies are predictive of progressive history, being partly fulfilled, partly unfulfilled. Thus Mede, Brightman, Isaac Newton, Woodhouse, Cunningham, Birks, Elliott (and many Germans).
3. *Simple Futurists*. According to these, only the first three chapters relate to the historical present of the Seer, all else having reference to the absolute future of the Lord's Appearing. Thus, Burgh, Maitland, Benjamin Newton, Todd, and others.
4. *Extreme Futurists*. Even the first three chapters of Revelation are a prophecy relative to the absolute future of Christ's Coming—being a prediction of the condition of the Jews after the first Resurrection. Kelly, and some Irish authors.

## Appendix Two

### The life and influence of Kuyper

It will have been observed that this name has cropped up a number of times in this review of teachings; thus it behoves us to consider this man a little since modern folk appear to know little of him.

Abraham Kuyper [1837-1920] was a Dutch theologian and politician, eventually rising to be the Dutch Prime Minister for a short time. He was a consistent Calvinist and wrote a series of articles for a newspaper on particular grace. These were later collated into his book, *Particular Grace*,<sup>152</sup> which is an excellent defence of classic Calvinism focused on God's sovereignty. I recommend this to students.

He was born in 1837 in Maassluis where his father was a minister in the Reformed Church but the family later moved to Middelburg in Zeeland (1841). The religious situation in the Netherlands at this time was desperate, having largely succumbed to Victorian liberalism, but many of the simple country people thirsted for God. These responded to the De Afscheiding (The Separation) movement of Hendrick De Cock, which had rapidly spread but was subsequently persecuted.

After graduating from school in 1855 Kuyper entered the University of Leiden where he imbibed modernist ideas but became a brilliant student. He managed to support himself by private tutoring and graduated in 1858, then entering the Leiden Divinity School to prepare for ministry but was here subject to very liberal and humanistic teaching. After graduating in 1861 he went on to gain a doctorate in 1863. It was in university that Kuyper was converted.

After completing his doctorate he accepted the role of pastor to a church in Beesd and married Johanna Hendrika Schaay, from Rotterdam. As a young preacher he became enthused by the deep-seated Calvinism of his villagers in Beesd, studied the Reformers and returned to his roots. He became a powerful preacher of true faith. In 1867 he moved to a very large church Utrecht and in 1870 he was called to another large church in Amsterdam<sup>153</sup> where he supported the conservative Reformed that had coalesced in the liberal state church. In 1869 he was an associate editor (then editor) of *De Heraut* in (The Herald<sup>154</sup>) pushing him towards political ideas and in 1872 he also became the editor of the daily Christian newspaper *De Standaard*. Kuyper's reputation grew as a strong and powerful preacher and he achieved many great things in serving the people; he was truly noteworthy. He wrote profusely, working long into the night and his writings had tremendous influence far and wide.

It was in Amsterdam that he became interested in politics in the neo-Calvinist movement and ran for Parliament, being elected in 1874, resigning from church ministry. This was probably his greatest mistake. He led the Anti-Revolutionary Party, seeking to make Calvinism a political force in the nation against the rising modernism. This led to developing a Calvinistic world-view based on a series of institutions through which

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<sup>152</sup> Kuyper; *Particular Grace: A Defence of God's Sovereignty in Salvation*, Trans. Marvin Kamps, RFPA (2001).

<sup>153</sup> A church of 140,000 members, 136 office-bearers, 28 ministers, 10 sanctuaries, and four chapels. The orthodox prevailed in this church but it still had many of liberal persuasion, resulting in tensions.

<sup>154</sup> Its mission statement was, 'For a free church and a free school in a free land'.

Calvinism could affect society. In pursuing his desire to make Christianity the force to forge a political Dutch Utopia he was obliged to make political alliances with the Roman Catholics (the 'Monstrous Coalition'). This was required to defeat the liberal forces opposed to him in Parliament. In 1888 his coalition won the government and Kuyper was feared as a potential Cromwell. In complex political circumstances he became Prime Minister in 1901 but was ousted in 1905 at the age of 68, though he lived on as a major statesman for fifteen years. One key achievement was the passing of a school bill giving Christian schools legal parity with state schools. Kuyper also made endeavours to make Christian education available to the poor and sought to alleviate the burdens on the poor and needy, especially children in work.

In 1880 Kuyper started the Free University based on Calvinism, which was free from both state and church control, where he taught Dogmatics. He also called for state aid to religious schools founding the Christian School Association (1878). In 1886 he led a faction of over 100,000 orthodox people from the state Reformed Church (the 'Doleantie', The Grieving Ones, or, The Aggrieved Ones) which joined the earlier separatist group (of De Cock), forming the Gereformeerde Kirk in 1892. This became the second largest Protestant church in the Netherlands.<sup>155</sup>

Kuyper had a strong influence upon American Presbyterianism, especially in the Christian Reformed Church, but less so amongst evangelicals in general. His influence is chiefly noticed in the formation of many American faith schools. He wrote many other books, some of which have become classics, including *The Work of the Holy Spirit, To Be Near Unto God* (which showed tendencies towards mysticism) and *Lectures on Calvinism*. He is considered to be the father of Dutch Neo-Calvinism (not to be confused with Barthianism or American New Calvinism) which tirelessly contended against the prevailing Dutch liberalism; though today there is little trace of true Calvinism in the liberalism of the Netherlands. He also had considerable influence on Herman Dooyeweerd, Francis Schaeffer, Cornelius Van Til, and Alvin Plantinga.

However, Kuyper is mainly noted for his development of the new doctrine of Common Grace, which was necessary to formulate a union with Catholics in politics (see 'Common Grace'). Out of this came three emphases which were deleterious. These are 1) the modern form of Common Grace which led to the Free Offer; 2) dominionistic Utopianism which prompted many modern forms of postmillennial triumphalism (e.g. Reconstructionism); 3) and initiating the Presuppositionalism apologetic later matured by Cornelius Van Til. He also taught 'presumptive regeneration', which is presuming the salvation of children born to believing parents. [Note the comparison with Federal Vision.] These errors have led to some authors identifying a general heresy of 'Kuyperianism'.

Furthermore, Kuyper tended to criticise the Dutch Second Reformation as Pietistic, though he personally appreciated many of the writers of that period.<sup>156</sup> Thus the Neo-Calvinists advocated the transformation of society and cultural involvement instead of concentrating on the soul. This Utopianism was to be achieved by Christian control of various state institutions (political parties, trade unions, hospitals, schools etc.). Coupled with the error

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<sup>155</sup> Many emigrated to America where they became the Christian Reformed Church. Differences between the earlier 'Separation' of De Cock and the later Kuyperian secession resulted in folk being at odds with each other over covenantal doctrine.

<sup>156</sup> This was a sort of Puritan movement in the late 16<sup>th</sup> – early 17<sup>th</sup> century which ameliorated the cold intellectualism of Dutch theology and introduced a warm spirituality and experimental, practical theology; which was influenced by William Ames. Noted in this period are: Willem Teelinck, Gijbertus Voetius, Jodocus van Lodenstyn, Wilhelmus a Brakel, Bernardus Smijtegeld, Theodorus van der Groe, Comrie and Herman Witsius.

of presumed regeneration, in time this emphasis led to a coldness of religion. Look at the Netherlands today!

Thus we have the irony that some teachers, focusing on Kuyper's early works, label him a Calvinistic champion against liberalism; which is true. But others, focusing on his later and more political leanings, label him as a heretic; which is partly true. He was less of an outright heretic and more of a man who unfortunately fell into certain errors of judgment while claiming to maintain a Calvinistic theology.

What cannot be disputed is that he was a truly great man. He was a tireless worker, an outstanding preacher, a good family man, a prodigious writer, a man devoted to good social works, someone who not only cared for the poor and disenfranchised but was loved and appreciated by them because he communicated with them effectively. It is no wonder that his funeral was attended by thousands.

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## Appendix Three

### Thornwell on natural reason and its limitations

So far as the simple knowledge of duty is concerned, we may err, on the one hand, by exaggerating the necessity of revelation, and on the other by exaggerating the sufficiency of reason. There can be no doubt that morality is a subject which falls within the province of natural light ... (Rm 2:14). A being without the sense of obligation and a spontaneous recognition of the fundamental differences of right and wrong could not be responsible ... But it is equally an error to maintain that, because the Scriptures presuppose the moral constitution of man, they are of little importance considered as a rule of life. It is one thing to say that reason is a law, and another to say that it is a perfect law ... There never has appeared an absolutely perfect rule of duty among any nations, however civilised and cultivated, that were destitute of Revelation. It is only of the law of the Lord as contained in the Scriptures that we can justly say, it is perfect.

'Discourses on Truth, I. The Ethical System of the Bible.' *Collected Writings*, Volume 2, Banner of Truth, (1974) p456-457.

### John Elias on the use of reason

Reason knows something of natural religion, yet it errs sometimes even in this respect. It may perceive there is a God and that he must be infinitely powerful and wise; that man ought to fear and worship him. It may also understand that man is not what he ought to be. But natural reason knows nothing of supernatural religion, nor of the way to restore fallen and rebellious man to a state of reconciliation with God, and true happiness. ... Reason can see by clear proofs that there is a God, and that the Bible is His Word, and that consequently it should be believed as to everything, without doubting. Romans 1:20."

John Elias; 'On the Use of Reason', *Life and Letters*, by Edward Morgan, Banner of Truth. (1973) p344 & 347.

### BB Warfield on rational evidence (contra Kuyper)

It should be noted that there is always the danger of mysticism when rationality is completely ignored. Where folk rely upon the revelation of truth by spiritual means alone, subjectivity can result in irrationality and mysticism. This is true of Charismaticism in general but there are also leanings towards this in Kuyper and Van Til. True spiritual knowledge will always be backed up by rational evidence, such as clear exegesis of Scripture. BB Warfield noted:

The convictions of the Christian man, we are told, are not the product of reasons addressed to his intellect, but are the immediate creation of the Holy Spirit in his heart. Therefore, it is intimated, we can not only do very well without these reasons, but it is something very like sacrilege to attend to them. ... Dr. Abraham Kuyper, one of the

really great theologians of our time, is a very striking instance of thinkers of this tendency. ... When we read, for instance, the beautiful exposition of [the relation of] sin and regeneration to science which Dr. Kuyper has given us in his *Encyclopaedie*, we cannot understand why he does not magnify, instead of minifying, the value of Apologetics. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in a tendency to make too absolute the contrast between the 'two kinds of science' - that which is the product of the thought of sinful man in his state of nature, and that which is the product of man under the influence of the regenerating grace of God.

'Introduction to F. R. Beattie's Apologetics.' *Selected Shorter Writings of B. B. Warfield, II*, Edited by John E. Meeter, Presbyterian and Reformed, (1973) p94, 95, 100.

## John Gill on innate knowledge of God

There are some indeed among us who deny that there are any innate ideas in the minds of men, and particularly concerning God: but to such writers and reasoners I pay but little regard; when the inspired apostle assures us, that even the gentiles, destitute of the law of Moses, have 'the work of the law written in their hearts", Romans 2:15, which as it regards duty to God, as well as man, necessarily supposes the knowledge of him; as well as of the difference between good and evil, as founded upon his nature and will: and though this light of nature is not sufficient to lead men in their present state, to a true spiritual and saving knowledge of God; yet it furnishes them with such a sense of him, as puts them upon seeking him; 'if haply they may feel and grope after him and find him', Acts 17:27. These notices of a divine Being do not flow from the previous instructions of parents and others; but from a natural instinct; at the most they are only drawn forth by instruction and teaching. *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Baker, (1978), Vol 1, p5-6.

## John Owen on innate knowlege

Do we not all know that our minds are inclined by indwelling conscience to that simple acknowledgment —God is— and that to deny this would be to deny our own rationality. ... All of human experience testifies that the human mind acquiesces uniformly to this truth, be it truly innate, or be it arrived at by some power of logic. *Biblical Theology*, Soli Deo Gloria Pub. (1994) p33-34.

## John Owen on natural reason

Human intellect, struggling as it must under the defect of indwelling sin, has still that within it which constantly urges onward to seek for God, and to find out what is knowable about Him from His works of creation and providence. ... Attempt, as men will, to systematise such thinking and urges, to label and analyse them, still all must come to the same futile end at last. The human mind is advanced in knowledge of the earth and of the universe without, but still, by its reasonings, it could not find any answers to its condition or any contact with its Creator." *Biblical Theology*, Soli Deo Gloria Pub. (1994) p97.

## Matthew Poole on innate knowledge

Because it might be further objected in behalf of the Gentiles, that the notions of God imprinted in their nature are so weak, that they may be well excused; therefore the apostle adds, that the certainty of them is further confirmed by the book of the creatures, which was written before them in capital letters, so that he that runs may read. The invisible things of him: the apostle tells us afterwards himself what he means by the invisible things of God, viz. his being and his attributes, particularly his eternity and almighty power; to which we might add, his wisdom, goodness, &c. These, though invisible in themselves, yet are discernible by his works, and that ever since the creation of the world. By what they see created, they may easily collect or understand, that there is an eternal and almighty Creator; they may argue from the effects to the cause. So that they are without excuse: some render it, that they may be without excuse; but it is better rendered in our translation: the meaning is, not that God gave them that knowledge for this end or purpose, that they might be inexcusable, for they might catch even at that for an excuse; but the plain sense is this, that God has given all men such means of knowledge as suffices to leave them without excuse, there can be no pretence of ignorance. *Commentary on the Holy Bible, On Romans 1:20, Banner of Truth, (1968).*

## Stephen Charnock on innate knowledge and criticism of Van Til's position as Socinian

I have spoken more of this place [Heb 11:6], because the Socinians use this to decry any natural knowledge of God, and that the existence of God is only to be known by revelation (of Scripture), so that by that reason (they argue that) any one that lived without the Scripture has no ground to believe the being of a God. [However], The Scripture ascribes a knowledge of God to all nations in the world [Romans 1:19]; not only a faculty of knowing, if they had arguments and demonstrations, as an ignorant man in any art has a faculty to know; but it ascribes an actual knowledge (verse 10), 'manifest in them'; (verse 21) 'They knew God', not they might know him; they knew him when they did not care for knowing him. The notices of God are as intelligible to us by reason, as any object in the world is visible; he is written in every letter. *The Existence and Attributes of God, Volume 1, p28.*

### Note on reason

Reason is not 'rationalism'. Reason is not to be feared or disparaged but is a tool to be used by the Christian man as well as the heathen; it is the proper application of the mind (created by God) to observe, judge, discriminate, evaluate and conclude.

The Christian condemns scepticism or liberal rationalism, which is an attempt to magnify human reason as the be all and end all with no submission to God. That is human reason run wild and made sovereign; it is anathema. However, the power of God-given reason is a creation ordinance placed in all men by God to be used to live right.

By reason men can observe the natural world (including their own bodies) and realise that they necessitate a divine creator. This then leads to the necessity of worship and a fear of judgment.

The use of reason applied to the prompting of conscience lead to an understanding of good and bad and the knowledge of social morality. This too leads to a fear of judgment.

What reason cannot do is provide the knowledge for salvation; that has to be revealed by the enlightenment of the Spirit based on Scripture. However, reason is vital to be used in ordering human relations, social government and even for searching towards God.

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