

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Salvation

The title Salvation is doubtless too broad as an accurate indication of this chapter's contents. But it is not so narrow as one of its common uses. Some untutored people use the term as a synonym for regeneration. They speak of someone or themselves as being "saved" at a certain time, without having in mind any notion of justification or sanctification. Salvation, however, includes these. It is regeneration plus all the spiritual blessings that succeed upon it. For this reason salvation is incomplete without resurrection and glorification in heaven.

Nevertheless, eschatology with the promise of resurrection, the return of Christ, glorification, heaven, and the penalty of hell too, is such an extensive topic, that though all of it is a part of salvation, it will be reserved for the final chapter. The main topics here are Regeneration, Faith, Justification, and Sanctification. This is already too much for one chapter, and to alleviate the length there will be a division into parts.

#### Part I - Regeneration and Grace

The actual, personal, or subjective first stage in salvation from sin and divine wrath is regeneration. This word derives from the picture of a new birth in the Gospel of John. Everyone knows, or perhaps in this post-reformation decadence not everyone knows that Jesus told Nicodemus

John 3:3      Verily, verily, I say unto thee Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.

This figurative language is not the only nor even the most frequent description of the initial event of Christian life. The idea of death in sin leads to speaking of life as a resurrection.

Eph. 2:5      When we were dead in sins, [God] made us alive to [with reference to] Christ ... and resurrected us ...

This initiation of the new life is also referred to as a new creation and even as an adoption.

II Cor. 5:17 If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Eph. 2:10 We are his product, created by Christ.

Rom 8:14-15 Our Father ... sons of God ... The Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry,  
Abba, Father.

Of these four figures of speech. new birth. new creation. and adoption. give hardly any hint of the characteristics of ordinary life preceding this change. The idea of creation. ex nihilo, could suggest that there was no pre-existing 'matter'. that is, no person existing prior to this creation. Similarly. the new birth. Adoption presupposes a person existing previously, but there is no hint as to his condition; in fact, adoption does not even necessitate being an orphan. The idea of resurrection furnishes the more complete picture. Creation and adoption clearly indicate God's initiative; and all four more than hint at the absence of any human role in the event. But the idea of resurrection most clearly requires, not only a pre-existing person (as creation and new birth do not), but also describes his condition as one of death. And the death is death in sin.

To the few verses just quoted and the references to some others, a few more will now be added. After these an attempt will be made to express the literal meaning and truth of these figurative expressions, so that we may have some clear ideas about what regeneration actually is.

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Gal. 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Col. 2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the  
faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

I Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

The subject of all these verses is, presumably, regeneration; and just above this was identified as the first stage of subjective salvation. The term, however, has not always been so restricted in meaning. Romanism uses the word to designate everything from the first stage to complete salvation in heaven. Both the Lutheran and the Calvinistic theologians also have given it a wide sense, including sanctification if not glorification. Calvin (Institutes III iii 9) wrote "In this regeneration we are restored ... and this restoration is not accomplished in a single moment, or day, or year; but by continual and sometimes even tardy advances the Lord destroys the carnal corruptions of his chosen ... terminated only by death." In later history, the nature of the very first stage of this process has attracted more attention, and it might as well be called regeneration, if the readers understand that the discussion is limited to the initiation, the begetting of or the resurrection to a new life.

Birth and especially resurrection are never the acts of the person born or resurrected. Lazarus walked forth only after God had restored him to life. The person resurrected never has any active role in the event.

The doctrine of complete human passivity in regeneration was directly attacked by the Council of Trent. The document states, "If anyone shall say that the free-will of man, moved and

excited by God, does not cooperate by assenting or yielding to God, exciting and calling him in order that he may predispose and prepare himself to receive the grace of justification, or that he cannot refuse his assent, if he chooses, but that he acts altogether like some inanimate thing, and is merely passive, - let him be anathema."

This is still the official position of Romanism; and Arminianism is indistinguishable from it. The will, free and independent of God, is able to resist and overcome the omnipotent power of God. "In the moment of decision," says one American evangelist, "prayer is useless, for not even God can help." Therefore these people say that the unregenerate sinner can and must cooperate with God in his regeneration. Not only so, but also in his unregenerate state he can prepare himself for that event. This of course implies that man, before regeneration, is not dead in sin; as the Scripture repeatedly asserts. Romanism and Arminianism, therefore, contradict the position of the Westminster Confession that "man ... being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." (IX,3)

That man is completely passive in regeneration is both an explicit teaching of parts of Scripture and a necessary consequence of other parts. A dead man cannot prepare himself for resurrection. Did Lazarus squirm a little in his grave as a preparation for the moment Christ would call him forth? Was Paul as he made his way toward Damascus preparing himself to be a Christian?

One detail should doubtless be put out of the way immediately. The Romanists caricature the Lutheran and Reformed doctrine as an assertion that man is an "inanimate thing" or puppet. Now it is true that Luther used some vigorous figures of speech to describe 'man's sinful estate. He called man a stock or a stone. But to take this as a literal statement of Protestant theology is both to exhibit poor literary insight and to confess bewilderment at Luther's vigor.

Man is not a puppet, awkwardly controlled by strings. In fact, the operator cannot completely control the puppet's motions. God can. Nor is man a stock or stone, however forceful

the figure of speech may be. Luther, Calvin, and all the Reformers held that natural human psychology was operative both before and after regeneration. But regeneration itself is not something a man does: it is something that is done to him. Strictly speaking, regeneration should not be called an "experience" at all, as it often is. Lazarus experienced his walking forth from the tomb; he experienced his new life; but did he "feel" the act of resurrection? "Conversion" and the further activities of the new life are ordinary elements of consciousness; but, if regeneration is the implantation of a new habitus, as will later be argued, it is certainly not a conscious event. The same conclusion follows if regeneration is a creative and therefore instantaneous divine fiat. Conscious states extend through time.

Thus regeneration or resurrection from the dead is an act of God, not an act of man. Man cannot even cooperate; for being dead, i.e. unable to do any spiritual good, he is without any power to prepare himself for this change.

The Old Testament expresses this view as clearly as the New:

Ps. 51:10                      Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Ezek. 11:19                    And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you;  
and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh:

Ezek. 36:26,27                A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.

Ezek. 37:13,14           And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, o my people, and brought you up out of your graves. And I shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.

If all this is not sufficient to convince the Pope and any stubborn Arminian, there is one further passage so clear and unambiguous that attempts to evade its force are ludicrous.

John 1:12,13           But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The latter verse says two things: it says how regeneration does not take place and how it does. Contrary to a common Jewish opinion, a person does not become a child of God by descent from Abraham. The regenerate have not been "born of bloods," -- bloods, plural, to indicate descent by human heritage. Neither are Christians born of the will of the flesh. Since the term flesh often carries an evil meaning in the New Testament, the phrase is to be understood as denying birth on the basis of ordinary fallen human nature. But then, neither is a Christian born by an act of his own will - "nor of the will of a man." Human will is completely ruled out by the last two of these three, wrong answers to the main questions. Well, if none of these three describes how a person is born again, how then does it happen? The answer is unambiguous: not by the will of any man, but of God.

And was not the figure of birth chosen for the purpose of ruling out the person's own activity? The baby has no will to cause birth. Of course, the parents have; but this was ruled out

in the first of the three suggested methods. Rule out parentage, common human nature, the individual will, and God alone remains.

Allow two more verses to serve as an anticlimax:

James 1:18    Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.

I Peter 1:3    Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again ...

The next question is, what precisely is regeneration? In these decadent days, some seem to think it consists in walking down the aisle and shaking hands with an attractive evangelist. Or, if few are so far from the truth, many equate regeneration with a vivid emotional upheaval. Others might allow the possibility of a calmer experience. But not so many would deny that it was an experience at all.

Yet the figure of a new birth rules out experience as much as the figure of creation does. Adam did not experience his creation; and in our first and natural birth, if we did experience a momentary pain, we never had any memory of it. The evangelist who with great emphasis proclaimed, "I was there when it happened and I ought to know," just did not know. Being born gives no baby a knowledge of gynecology. We may be and are later conscious of some of the effects of birth. But since it was God who acted, we cannot remember the act we never did.

What then precisely did God do? In technical, unpopular, theological language, God imposed a 'habit' upon us. The Aristotelian term 'habit', or the scholastic term *habitus*, needs some explanation.

Let us look at the hands of two persons. Whatever minuscule differences there are between them, they are substantially alike. If the persons were hidden from view and only their hands could be seen, one could hardly tell which pair belonged to which person. But actually, though invisibly, there is an enormous difference between them; for one of them can only awkwardly and slowly run a scale, whereas the other perfectly executes a Mozart sonata. These hands possess a habitus that the other person's do not have.

This illustration is defective, as all illustrations are. The musician's habitus, or habit, is the result of hours and years of practice. This is how habits are formed. But there is one habit that is not formed this way. It is as supernatural as if God took a man without musical training and enabled him immediately to play Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. But instead of musical ability, regeneration consists in the implantation of faith, not faith in curative powers of snake oil, but faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ.

At this point, between regeneration and faith, it is appropriate to insert a paragraph or two on the idea of grace. Not that such paragraphs will contain much more than what has already been said, or at least implied, for the material on regeneration is particularly clear on the point that it is God's work, not ours. Of course, after regeneration there comes a process of sanctification, to be considered in the next chapter, in which process there is ample room for our good works. But even so, we depend on grace to accomplish them. It is hardly necessary to quote verses to show that the Scriptures teach a theory of grace; but pro forma and for consistency a very few may be given.

Rom. 5:15     The grace of God and the gift of grace, by the one man Jesus Christ, has abounded to many.

Rom. 5:21     So also shall grace reign through righteousness to eternal life.

Rom. 11:5     There is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Eph. 1:7        In whom we have redemption according to the riches of his grace.

Eph. 2:8        By grace are ...

Titus 3:7       Being justified by his grace.

Let these half dozen verses represent a hundred others. Grace and gift, as in Eph. 2:8, go together. Grace is very simply defined as 'unmerited favor.' When God gives us anything we have not earned, anything he does not owe us, anything we have not merited, it is a gift of grace. The sunlight is a gift of grace, but naturally we are here interested in salvation and its accompanying benefits. These have abounded to us, as Rom. 5:15 says, by reason of the one man Jesus Christ. That there remains a remnant of the Jewish people who accept their Messiah and Lord is "according to the election of grace." No less connected with election and predestination is the grace accorded to Gentile believers. The gift of belief or faith is also grace: it is not of ourselves, it is a gift of God. Therefore Titus 3:7 can say that we are justified by grace, rather than the more common phrase 'justified by faith,' because faith is one part of God's grace. That regeneration is a work of grace is most obvious of all because a man has no active part in it at all.

None of this is hard to understand; but in the history of theology those who shied away from the Scriptural position on election and predestination could not help diluting, compromising, or completely denying the role of grace.

Before the discussion of clearly heretical views begins, one may consider for a moment a theory of so-called common grace that is undoubtedly Biblical. If there is anything wrong with it, the fault lies in its defenders' overemphasis. Since it is no part of saving grace, it is best mentioned briefly and then passed by. This grace is called common because it consists of

benefits which God confers on all men indiscriminately. They are common to the regenerate and the unregenerate alike. The verse usually quoted is:

Mt. 5:45        He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

This can be called grace, if it be agreed that it is both unmerited and a favor or blessing. But though sun and rain are essential for food, in comparison with eternal salvation they are rather trivial. The frivolity may disappear, however, if the preaching of the gospel to all and sundry is an unmerited favor. One theologian argues that the gospel is both a savor of life unto life and also a savor of death unto death. To the reprobate the preaching of the gospel is no favor because as it increases their knowledge, it increases their responsibility and condemnation. Better if they had never heard the gospel. One can reply, nonetheless, that in some cases the preaching of the gospel may restrain an evil man from some of his evil ways. Since therefore sins are not all equal, and since some are punished with many stripes, but others with few, the preaching of the gospel results in the lessening of the punishment. Thus preaching would be a small favor, a modicum of grace. We note it and pass on.

If this theory of common grace is Biblical, and its only fault is frivolity, the Lutheran view, in a logical series of degrees among defective explanations, departs the least from the teaching of Scripture. Grace is a matter of salvation, not just sunshine, and therefore of greater importance. Bishop Martensen of Seeland, Denmark, whom Soren Kierkegaard so unfairly lampooned, is a good example of the Lutheran position. To quote from his Christian Dogmatics (pp. 362, 363): "God's grace is universal; and from eternity, it has been concluded that all shall be gathered together under Christ as the Head. In eternity God looks on all human souls according to this essential testing--looks over them as possible subjects of regeneration ... Dualism does not appear till time begins ... Election of grace ... from the sinful mass ... But this

Dualism prevails only in time; as it is excluded from the eternal counsels of God, ... Grace must submit to the commandments of time ... it must submit to the limitations of human freedom. "

Most obviously God's grace is not universal, for God did not extend saving grace nor give the unmerited gift of faith to Esau and Judas. Furthermore, God in eternity could not have been ignorant of the events of history, for Christ was slain from the foundation of the world and Judas was selected for the purpose he accomplished. Martensen's "Dualism" was therefore present in God's eternal plan; it is not "excluded from the eternal counsels of God." Nor must grace "submit" to anything.

After criticizing Calvin for having "confounded predestination with the election of grace," and for having made the separation of the saved from the lost not merely temporal but with "foundations in the eternal counsels of God," Martensen continues: "Augustinian theologians have often maintained that the operations of Christianity are never fettered by natural restrictions, but that grace can accomplish its object 'what, when, and where' it will. They think that by this doctrine they extol the power of grace. But this is not only contradicted by the universal experience of church history, it is in itself false; it magnifies the second creation at the expense of the first, which on such a principle is violated; it glorifies the Son at the sacrifice of the Father's glory" (p. 369).

This Lutheran position, however, cannot be maintained. Not only is this not contradicted in church history; it permeates the history of the Old Testament, not to mention the doctrinal material of the New. Augustinianism no doubt maintains the Biblical teaching that "The operations of Christianity are never fettered by natural restrictions;" but it is not so obtuse as to deny that the manifestations of grace are integrated with "natural" conditions. Moses could not have led the Israelites through the Red Sea, if the Red Sea had not been there. The point is that God put the Red Sea there in the first place. Similarly Christ met Paul on the "natural" road to Damascus; but this did not "Fetter" God. God surely accomplishes his precise purposes when, where, and how he pleases. Just why Christ's meeting Paul, at that place at that time and with

that light and voice, "violates" the first creation, Martensen does not explain. Even less explicable is how any of this glorifies the Son at the "sacrifice" of the Father's glory.

Regardless of how vociferously a Calvinist objects to these points of Lutheran doctrine, it ought to be said again that Kierkegaard's charge against Martensen of hypocrisy, paganism, and other things was completely undeserved. Let a strong Calvinist, alongside of passages he wishes to refute, quote one to defend the Bishop's sincerity and good reputation. "The children of Israel, who are a permanent type of an elect nation, were emphatically the elect people; yet there was only a small remnant of elect individuals among them (a holy election) who represented the true and spiritual Israel. So do we find it in every Christian nation. All perhaps have been baptized and incorporated into Christ's kingdom and outwardly united to him, and yet in every period there is to be found but a small number of really awakened and regenerate persons in whom Christianity dwells as a subjective and personal life" (p. 373,374).

The Roman Catholic position on grace is far less Biblical than the Lutheran. It is also excessively complicated. The New Catholic Encyclopedia has lengthy articles on the subject, and its history of the doctrine is very thorough. For the present purpose it may be noted that A Catholic Dictionary, edited by Donald Attwater (3rd ed., 1961) and given a cardinal's imprimatur, lists fifteen sub-species of "grace": actual, baptismal, efficacious, elevating, and on to substantial.

Baptismal grace is a "special aspect" of sanctifying grace.

Efficacious grace is "that grace to which the will freely assents, so that the grace always produces its effects. ... It is an article of faith that this grace does not necessitate the will, although its result is inevitable."

"Grace, Irresistible. The supposedly irresistible efficacy of divine aid, by which, according to Calvinism, man, though free from any physical necessity, is forced to well doing." The short article then quotes the Council of Trent's rejection of the Protestant position.

"Grace, Prevenient. Actual grace enlightens the mind and fires the will with a view to the work of: salvation. In this string of the will there are two moments; the first of these is a grace which moves the will spontaneously, unfreely [!], making it incline to God ... The heavenly inspirations may be accepted freely or rejected freely by the aroused will. If they are accepted, it is in virtue of a further grace ... called consequent or cooperating grace."

"Grace, Sufficient. The grace which for lack of cooperation of the receiver goes without the effect for which it was bestowed and thus is opposed to efficacious grace ... " (Pascal wryly remarks that sufficient grace is not sufficient.)

At this point we arrive at: consciousness or experience; therefore the subject now becomes faith.

## Part II. Faith.

Secular philosophers, at least some of them, have been as much interested in faith as Christians have. Brand Blanshard, The Nature of Thought (Vol. I, pp. 112 ff., 286, 303), a work of superb scholarship, discusses faith or belief. Long before Blanshard, Plato had a theory of opinion. For Plato opinion was a mental state distinctly inferior to knowledge, though in some cases nearly as useful. Perhaps with this in mind some Christian theologians attempt to place faith above opinion and below knowledge. Blanshard and Plato do not discuss saving faith; nevertheless the Christian student faces their problem also, as well as one of his own: he must first give an account of faith as such, and then he must, if he can, enumerate the distinctive characteristics that make one faith saving, while another is not.

## I. Biblical Background

Before the systematic analysis begins, some Biblical material and even a few extra-biblical remarks are in order. No one needs to be told that the Bible has a great deal to say about faith. Almost as obvious, the fact that Abraham is the outstanding example of faith was a part of the refutation of dispensationalism in the previous chapter. Rom. 4, Gal. 3, Heb. 11, and James 2, all, not merely mention, but emphasize Abraham. But before Abraham there was Noah. Gen. 6 may not use the word faith, but it makes clear that Noah believed what God said and obeyed his directions. Clearly therefore faith is not a New Testament novelty.

Nor should the role of faith during the Mosaic era be minimized. There is a Hebrew term only twice translated faith, sometimes translated truth, or truly, but which is frequently translated believe. A negative instance is found in Ps: 78:21-22,32:

"Anger also came up against Israel,  
because they believed not in God ...  
For all this they sinned still, and  
believed not for [in] his wondrous works.

For all the New Testament material, which we too often read without thinking much of its meaning, there are some passages that cause difficulty. James 2:20 speaks of a dead faith. He describes it as a faith unproductive of good works. Precisely what a man of dead faith believes is not too clear. One thing is clear: the word faith here cannot mean 'personal trust' in the sense that some popular preachers impose on it. 'Dead trust' would be an unintelligible phrase. Clearly James means a belief of some sort; and the only belief James mentions is the belief in monotheism. Islam therefore would be a dead faith.

There are some other varieties of faith which may be mentioned as this subsection concludes. Matthew 13 apparently refers to what some theologians call "temporary faith." Hodge

(III, P. 68) writes, "Nothing is more common than for the Gospel to produce a temporary impression ... Those impressed, believe." But Hodge does not say precisely what they believe. He hardly acknowledges that the person in the parable who is represented by the stony ground believes anything, even though we read "heareth the word and anon with joy receiveth it." This sound as if the stony man believed some or even all of the gospel. However, the previous verses describe such men as "seeing, see not; and hearing, hear not; neither do they understand;" following which Jesus quotes Isaiah. A person can indeed hear words without understanding them, but can he thus believe them, and can he receive them with joy? Clearly there are here some troubles that we must ponder.

Other theologians speak of an "historical" faith, by which, strangely, they do not mean only a belief in the truth of historical events recorded in the Bible, but also in some, many, or perhaps all the Biblical norms of morality. Possibly the rich young ruler would exemplify this sort of faith. He certainly believed that he had kept all the commandments; but unfortunately this was a mistaken belief. How much else of the Old Testament he believed, Gen.17?, is not clear.

One further point may be made before the systematic exposition begins. It has more to do with church history than exegesis. In the second century a wide spread heresy almost engulfed and destroyed the Church. It was Gnosticism. The name comes from the word gnosis, knowledge. Later theologians have sometimes contrasted faith with knowledge. This is the wrong contrast, for two reasons. First, II Peter 1:3 says that everything pertaining to godliness comes to us through knowledge. There are many supporting references. The Pastorals have several. The second reason is that the knowledge of which the Gnostics boasted was a theory of cosmology, including highly imaginative accounts of what happened before Gen 1:1.

Admittedly, the Gnostics were devoid of Christian faith; but the contrast is not between faith and knowledge- it is a contrast between the different objects known or believed. The Gnostics knew, or believed in, thirty eons, a docetic incarnation, and a pseudo-atonement. The Christians believed a different set of propositions. Since, however, some students of evangelistic

zeal may question the value of a "merely secular, psychological" analysis of belief, it is best to show the importance and necessity of saving faith. Then as saving faith is recognized as a species of generic faith, the analysis will have its proper setting.

## 2. Necessity of Faith

Faith, like regeneration, is necessary to salvation, if for the moment we defer discussion of infants, imbeciles, and the insane. Because necessary to salvation, it is necessary for theology. Since, too, faith is the first phase of conscious Christian life, it is likely to attract one's attention sooner than the prior regeneration or the subsequent sanctification. The following verses will show that faith is necessary. Host assuredly they teach more than this, and references to them must later be made in explanation of other phases of the doctrine. But they are given here for the sole purpose of pointing out the necessity of faith.

Jn. 3:15,16     Everyone who believes in him has everlasting life. ... He who believes in him shall not perish.

Acts 16:31     Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.

Strictly speaking, these two verses do not show that faith is necessary to salvation. They show that faith is sufficient. If someone believes, he has eternal life. No one is lost who believes. But these two verses, if taken alone, allow for the possibility that something else could be substituted for faith. Suppose I am driving south on Interstate 65, and in Kentucky I come to Cave City. The attendant at the gas station, says, if you take routes 9 and 231 you will surely get to Murphreesboro. True enough. But it is also true that if I continue on I-65 and 24 I shall get to Murphreesboro just as well. Now ...

Mk. 16:16     He who believes and is baptised shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned.

teaches not only that faith is sufficient, but also that without faith salvation is impossible. However, since some scholars do not regard this as part of the canon, three other verses follow.

Jn. 3:18        He who believes in him is not judged: he who does not believe is judged already.

Jn. 3:36        He who believes in the Son has eternal life: but he who disobeys the Son shall not see life.

Heb. 11:6      Without faith it is impossible to please [God].

These verses are sufficiently explicit: but the general doctrine of justification by faith alone is a stronger proof than a few sample verses. The passages on justification may not be so explicit: it is necessary to combine them and draw inferences. But the conclusion is the more compelling because the base is broader.

### 3. The Language

Since faith is of such importance, and even if it were not of such importance, theology must determine its meaning. Those who wish to talk about it ought to know the nature of faith as such, and as well the nature of that particular kind of faith which is necessary for salvation. Herman Hoeksema (Reformed Dogmatics, Grand Rapids, 1966, p. 479) begins his chapter on Saving Faith with this paragraph: "Saving faith is that work of God in the elect, regenerated, and called sinner whereby the latter is ingrafted into Christ and embraces and appropriates Christ and all his benefits, relying upon him in time and eternity." Aside from the fact that some of the verbs in sentence are too vague to be useful, one may admit that the sentence is true. But it is not a definition of faith. To say that faith ingrafts us into Christ says less than to say roast beef gives us nourishment. The latter does not tell us what beef is. Nor does the former tell us what faith is.

Theological terms need to be defined; they need to be understood; or else we do not know what we are talking about. To make progress toward a definition, we begin with the usage of the language.

The Greek verb --for the noun is hardly less frequent -- means believe. So it was translated in the previous verses quoted. Here will follow some instances of its ordinary use, both in pagan sources and in the Bible also.

The Biblical verses from the Septuagint are not chosen because they are Biblical, but, like the pagan sources, they show how the word was used in pre-Christian times. When the New Testament authors began to write, they perforce used the common language.

Aristotle, De Anima 428 b 4: "The sun is believed to be larger than the earth."

Aristotle, Meteorologica 343 b 10 - On a certain point "it is necessary to believe the Egyptians."

Thucydides I, 20 says "it is hard to believe every bit of evidence about them."

Ps: 78:22 in the Septuagint translation says that the Israelites "did not believe in God."

Isa. 53:1 Who has believed our report?

Even though this is the common usage--and in a moment a large number of New Testament passages will show the same thing--a number of theologians give the impression that the translation believe is misleading. They want to make "faith" something other than "mere" belief. The following lengthy list has some bearing on this contention.

Jn. 2:22        They believed the Scripture.

Jn. 3:12      If I told you about earthly matters and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

Jn. 4:50      The man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him.

Jn. 5:47      If ye believe not that man's writing, how shall ye believe my words?

Jn. 6:69      We have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God.

Jn. 8:24      If ye believe not that I am [what I claim to be] ye shall die in your sins.

Jn. 8:45      Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me.

Jn. 9:18      But the Jews did not believe. . . .that he had been blind.

Jn. 11:26     Do you believe this?

27            Yes, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ.

Jn. 11:42     I said it that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

Jn. 12 :38    Who hath believed our report?

Jn. 13:19     Ye may believe that I am he.

Jn. 14 :29    Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens you might believe.

- Jn. 16:27      And have believed that I came out from God.
- Jn. 16:30      We believe that thou earnest forth from God.
- Jn. 17:8        have believed that thou didst send me.
- Jn. 17:21      that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.
- Jn. 20:31      These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
- I Cor. 13:7     Love believes everything.

In reading over these verses carefully, the student should note that the object of the verb is sometimes a noun or pronoun denoting a statement (word, this, things, writings), and sometimes a person (in this list, me; in other verses God), and sometimes there is no explicit object at all. The significance of this should become apparent in a moment.

But first it is clear that the Greek verb pisteuo is properly translated believe, and that this Greek verb and the English believe mean precisely the same thing. The important point now is to see what the object of this verb can be. Obviously it can be, and in the Bible usually is, the truth. Of course a person may believe something false; but even so the nature of the psychological act of believing, called faith, is the same, for the man who believes a falsehood believes it to be true.

In the Scriptures many of the instances of the verb have as their explicit object the noun God; for example, Abraham believed God. This should not be taken to signify something different from the other instances. What Abraham believed was the promise of God. Whenever we say that we believe a person, we mean that we accept his statement as true. If we say that we believe "in" a person, we mean that we believe he will continue to speak the truth.

Kittel (Vol. VI, pp. 203-208) has these things to say. "There is nothing distinctive in the NT usage ... as compared with Greek usage. ... Pisteuein eis is; neither Greek nor LXX. ... Pisteuein eis is equivalent to pisteuein oti, to regard credible or true. Pisteuein eis XJ ... simply means pisteuein oti I. apethanen kai aneste. ... In John especially pisteuein eis and pisteuein oti are constantly used interchangeably. Cf. also Acts 8:37 ... This is proved also by the passive expression episteuthe (cf. I Tim. 3:16) and the fact that pistis eis is equivalent, not to pis tis c. dat. but to pistis c. gen. obj ... "

Two pages later it says, "Pisteuein ... often means to believe God's words. Belief is thus put in Scripture (Jn. 2:22) in what is written in the Law, in what the prophets have said (Lk. 24:35) ... in Moses and his writings (Jn. 5 :46 ff.)." Cf. also pp. 208, 222.

In opposition to Kittel's linguistic studies, some theologians and many ministers wish to minimize belief and detach faith from truth. Louis Berkhof tends in this direction. Since at this time he commands wide-spread respect and since many schools use his book, it proves profitable to conclude this subsection with a few paragraphs concerning his views. The material comes from his Systematic Theology, fourth edition, 1969, Part IV, chapter 8, pp. 493 ff.

He admits that John 4:50 uses the verb pisteuo in the literal sense of believing that a proposition is true. Naturally, for the explicit object is the word or sentences that Jesus had just spoken. Similarly John 5:47. Berkhof even allows Acts 16:34, Romans 4:3, and II Timothy 1:12 to mean belief in the truth of a proposition, although the explicit object of the verb is God or Christ.

In spite of these instances, where the predicate is the noun God, though the actual and immediate object is a proposition, and particularly in contrast with the instances where the object is explicitly a proposition, Berkhof says, "On the whole this construction is weaker than the preceding" (p. 494), where pisteuo means confident trust in a person. But why weaker? Would it not be more accurate to say that this construction with a proposition as the object is more literal and accurate than the preceding abbreviated expressions? Berkhof continues, "In a couple of

cases the matter believed hardly rises into the religious sphere, John 9:18, Acts 9:26 ... " But if these are instances of ordinary usage, such as "The Jews did not believe that he had been born blind," it should show all the more clearly what the ordinary meaning of "believe" is. No religious motif is there to distract one's understanding. It is true that the object of belief in such instances does not rise into the religious sphere; sometimes the object may be banal or trivial; but the point at issue is not the object of belief or faith, but the nature of faith and the meaning of the verb pisteuo.

From page 493 on Berkhof speaks as follows. Pistis (the noun) and Pisteuein (the verb) "do not always have exactly the same meaning." He specifies two meanings of the noun in classical Greek. "It denotes (a) a conviction based on confidence in a person and in his testimony, which as such is distinguished from knowledge resting on personal investigation; and (b) the confidence itself on which such a conviction rests. This is more than a mere intellectual conviction that a person is reliable; it presupposes a personal relation to the object of confidence, a giving out of oneself to rest in another."

The lexical information of this quotation is accurate enough; but the comments are groundless. Why is confidence in a person's truthfulness more than "a mere intellectual conviction that a person is reliable"? What is intended in the pejorative use of the word "mere"? Why is a conviction of another person's honesty and reliability not a "personal relation"? And can any intelligible sense be found in the phrase "a giving out of oneself to rest in another"?

However, to continue the quotations from page 494 on, we read that in the New Testament "the following meanings [of the noun pistis] should be distinguished: an intellectual belief or conviction, resting on the testimony of another, and therefore based on trust in this other rather than on personal investigation, Phil. 1: 27 [which rather obviously refers to the doctrines of the gospel] , II Cor. 4:13, II Thess. 2:13 [the object here is truth] and especially in the writings of John; and (b) a confiding trust or confidence ... Rom. 3:22, 25; 5:1, 2; 9:32. ... This trust must be distinguished from that on which the intellectual trust mentioned under (a) above rests."

But, why? No reason is given. Rom. 3:22 does not support him, nor does 3:25. Nor do the other verses. They make no distinction such as Berkhof makes. They simply speak of faith. By saying five lines below that "This last [yielding to Christ and trusting in him] is specifically called saving faith," Berkhof implies that the conviction of the truth of the gospel and "intellectual trust" is not saving faith. Romans is a great book, and we are willing to quote it, more than willing; anxious; Romans 10:9 says that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." As the Old Testament makes abundantly clear, the heart is the mind; and believing that God raised Christ from the dead is as intellectual an exercise as believing that two and two are four. Emotions cannot believe anything.

On page 495 Berkhof continues, Faith "is also represented as a hungering and thirsting ... In eating and drinking we not only have the conviction that the necessary food and drink is present, but also the confident expectation that it will satisfy us."

There are two things wrong with this paragraph. First, it literalizes a metaphorical expression. Of course having food present before us does not nourish us. It must be eaten. Similarly, having the gospel presented to us, so that we understand the meaning of the words does not save us: it must be believed. The truth must be confessed with the mouth and believed with the heart. The term confess, I believe, excludes hypocrisy. But Berkhof seems to confuse the presence of food with the belief in the good news; whereas it is the eating that represents the belief. Then in the second place, "the confident expectation that it will satisfy us" (though Paul hardly had any confident expectation as he journeyed to Damascus) is itself an intellectual belief. It is a thought that we entertain. It is an idea that we accept. Any belief is an intellectual event. Emotions cannot believe.

From page 501 to 505 Berkhof discusses various types of faith: opinion, certainty, historical faith, miraculous faith, temporal faith, and saving faith. Briefly, for it will be discussed

later, saving faith includes an intellectual element (notitia); it also, he says, has an emotional element. This emotional element he identifies as assensus. But assent, throughout the history of theology and philosophy, has always been volitional, not emotional. Furthermore, he fails to overturn this age long understanding of the term, for he nowhere shows that there is anything emotional about assent. Indeed, he gives himself away by admitting that "It is very difficult to distinguish this assent from the knowledge of faith just described." Must we not conclude that Berkhof's account of faith is utterly confused?

There are, he says, other instances of the verb believe where "the deeper meaning of the word, that of firm trustful reliance, comes to its full rights." But. Berkhof, like others, fails to show how this "deeper meaning" differs from the straightforward literal meaning. Among the many instances of the verb believe, there is, to repeat, a difference of objects. One may believe that two and two are four, and this is arithmetic; one may also believe that asparagus belongs to the lily family, and this is botany. Botany is not mathematics, of course; but the psychology or linguistics of believe is identical in all cases. Therefore, one should not confuse an analysis of belief with an analysis of numbers or plants. Christ's promises of salvation are vastly different from the propositions of botany; but believing is always thinking that a proposition is true. The further development will also support this conclusion.

#### 4. Person or Proposition?

While Professor Berkhof serves as a good example, many other Protestant theologians also, both Lutheran and Reformed, tend to make a sharp distinction between 'a confident resting on a person' and 'the assent given to a testimony.' 'Confident reliance' is supposed to differ from 'intellectual assent.' This position is often bolstered up with references to pisteuein eis; but a few paragraphs back Kittel disposed of such a contention. English also has the same usage. As modernism developed and suspicion attached to this or that minister, people would ask, Does he believe in the Virgin Birth, does he believe in the Atonement? One did not ask, Does he believe the Virgin Birth? The preposition in was regularly used. But of course the meaning was, Does he believe that Christ was born of a virgin? To believe in a person is to be confident, i.e. to believe

that he will continue to tell the truth. But Berkhof (p. 494) says, "Confidence ... is more than a mere intellectual conviction that a person is reliable; it presupposes a personal relation to the object of confidence, a going out of oneself to rest in another." If anyone stops to think, he will easily see that such language is completely unintelligible and gives no understandable meaning.

In spite of the popularity, and supposed superior spirituality, of such a view, it seems to rest on a mistaken psychological analysis. Even Berkhof admits, with at least an appearance of inconsistency, that "As a psychological phenomenon, faith in the religious sense does not differ from faith in general ... Christian faith in the most comprehensive sense is man's persuasion of the truth of Scripture on the basis of the authority of God" (p. 501). This is an excellent statement and should be defended against Berkhof's earlier contrary assertions.

The present textbook wishes to insist that believing or faith is an activity of the mind. It is something that the person does. Not that it is an overt physical action, but it is activity, intellectual activity, none the less.

Herman Hoeksema denies this. He makes faith a habitus. It was explained above that regeneration is a habitus. But as the musician's habitus gives its evidence by the musician's execution of a Mozart sonata, so the habitus of regeneration produces the activity of believing. Hoeksema says that the habitus faith makes the soul "peculiarly fit to apprehend spiritual things. It is the fitness to believe, in distinction from the act of believing itself" (p. 480). Me genoito! Not at all; faith is believing. It is the activity of the regenerated sinner's mind. This is not to deny that faith is a gift of God. God causes us to believe. We cannot believe unless God himself makes us willing. And faith is the will to believe. When Paul saw the light and heard the words as he approached Damascus, he indeed saw and heard. These were his actions, however much God had caused them. Now, one of Hoeksema's troubles is that he accepts an extreme form of faculty psychology. He says, "there is no reason" whatever to limit faith to intellect or will; but we must rather conceive the truth of the matter in this way, that from the heart of man the spiritual habitus of faith controls both intellect and will" (p. 484). We reply, faith is believing.

Because of the pietism of those people who might well be called super-devout, but more because of twentieth century anti-intellectualism in the forms of existentialism and so-called neoorthodoxy, this section under the subhead of person versus proposition will conclude with a few more Scriptural passages. The word gospel itself means good news. Mark starts with the beginning of the good news; and in 1:15 after describing Jesus as preaching the good news reports that Jesus commanded the people to believe this information. Information consists of propositions to be believed. But rather than a lengthy examination of the Gospels<sup>1</sup> it seems better to consider some less well known verses in Acts.

The word *logos*, unfortunately translated word in John 1:1, is better translated Treatise in Acts 1:1. A treatise is presumably a mass of information. Acts 2:41 says that the people received the word, the message, the information gladly. It does not say that they received a person without a message. *Logos* in this verse could well refer to Peter's sermon. And certainly the next verse speaks of doctrine or teaching (didache). In Acts 4:29, 31 we have the term word again, but the meaning is obviously message or sermon. Naturally sermons are composed of propositions. When the servants of Cornelius came to see Peter in Acts 10:21, the apostle asked them, For what .. logos, reason, did you come to see me. Reasons are propositions that explain other propositions.

More pointedly the meaning of logos, the importance of true declarative sentences, and also their relation to persons (for this material bears on the alleged separation between persons and propositions) -- more pointedly the significance of the word *logos* is clarified in the remainder of the chapter, especially Acts 10: 36-38, and 44. Here the reader must follow the example of the noble Bereans and open the Bible to examine whether these things be so. In verse 36 God sent a word to the children of Israel; this word was a message of peace through Jesus Christ. It was a sermon, a series of propositions. This same message is designated by the term rhema in the following verse. Whereas logos can mean any expression of reason --it can mean a

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. my Johannine Logos, Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1972.

mathematical ratio, a book, a question, an argument -- the term rhema regularly carries the connotation of words, words as listed in the dictionary, that is, just plain ordinary words. (That logos and rhema can be and often are identical is clear in the Gospel of John.) These words were published throughout all Judaea and Galilee. And the following verse (v. 38) shows that this Logos - or these rhemata are the works of Jesus Christ. For the person of Jesus is not a person without an intelligible message. Subtract the words and the person cannot be known. Then in v. 43 all that believe on him, that is, all who believe the words preached, receive forgiveness of sin. And verse 44 uses the term rhemata again.

For those who are linguistically inclined it might be wise to mention in passing that we are not really talking about words. Words like dog, chien, Hund, are only symbols. They are symbols of thoughts. So that when we identify a person with his words, the point is that the person is what he thinks. The person is his mind. Paul exhorts us to have the mind of Christ, that is, to think his thoughts. But the theory of language needs another publication.

Acts 15:6 says that the apostles came together to consider this matter. The Greek word is logos. It refers to the question whether or not the Gentiles should be circumcised in order to be Christians. The next verse speaks of the word of the gospel. It is not a single word, but an extended message. Verse 32 speaks of a large or great word (in the singular). It refers to two long speeches. Finally, to bring this tedious list to an end, Acts 20: 7 tells how Paul's five or six hour sermon (logos) put a young man asleep.

All these references show that logos should hardly ever be translated word. It means thought or mind or reason, so that John 1:1 can be compared with the wisdom of God and the mind of Christ as given in I Cor. 1:24 and 2:16. Faith consists in believing the word.

## 5. Historical Note

Since the early Christians, before A.D. 325, had not settled upon the doctrine of the Trinity, it is not surprising that they had no clear view of faith. Tertullian spoke about believing on authority rather than by personal investigation and knowledge. After Athanasius, Augustine had more to say. Faith, for him, was voluntary assent to the truth. This is more to the point than Tertullian's very good, but quite inadequate, remarks. The present volume defends the Augustinian position.

The Thomistic view of faith may well be introduced by a reference to an earlier medieval theologian, Hugo. Hugo of St. Victor proposed a definition of faith that was widely accepted both before and after the Reformation: "Faith is a kind of mental certainty concerning absent realities that is superior to opinion and inferior to knowledge." Thomas then notes an objection to Hugo's view. A mean must always be homogeneous to its two extremes. Since both science and opinion have propositions as their objects, the objects of faith must likewise be propositions. But contrary to this the Apostles Creed, an expression of faith, says, "I believe in God the Father Almighty;" and this is different from the proposition, "God is Almighty." Therefore faith concerns a reality, not a proposition. Further, in heaven faith gives way to vision, as I Cor. 13:12 says; this is a vision of God himself, not a proposition; therefore similarly the object of faith is a person, not a proposition.

Thomas Aquinas, noting the divergence between these two views, states his conclusions in his Summa Theologica, (Blackfriars edition, Vol. 31, pp. 11 ff.). "The way the known exists in the knower corresponds to the way the knower knows ... For this reason the human mind knows in a composite way things that are themselves simple. ... From the perspective of the one believing, the object of faith is something composite in the form of a proposition ... In heaven ... that vision will not take the form of a proposition, but of a simple intuition."

This quotation will puzzle anyone who has not studied Thomism. Yet it does have a certain plausibility. Naturally, trivially, tautologically, the way the known exists in the knower corresponds to the way the knower knows. Less plausible is the idea that something so simple as

not to be a proposition, something that has no subject and predicate, can miraculously turn into a proposition; or that a proposition, true because the predicate is appropriate to its subject, can be known otherwise. Can the term cat be a truth? The proposition, 'this cat is black,' may be true; but can a subject minus a predicate be true all alone by itself?

The following is much less plausible: Thomas insists we cannot believe anything that is false. At least he says, "Nothing can be the completion of any potentiality ... except in virtue of the formal objective of that power. For example, color cannot be the completion of sight except through light. ... Nothing therefore can come under faith except in its status within God's truth, where nothing false has any place. ... We can only conclude that nothing false can be the object of faith."

Such was not Augustine's view, for in his defense of faith, against its repudiation by science, he used as an example the belief of a boy that a certain man and woman were his father and mother. In the case of babies adopted in infancy this belief is often false.

Some pages further on (Blackfriars' edition, p. 61) Thomas gives a fuller explanation. "The verb to think can be used in three senses. The first is the widest sense any act of intellectual knowing. ...The second is a narrower sense, where thinking designates a thinking of the mind that is accompanied by a certain searching prior to reaching complete understanding in the certitude of seeing. ....The third sense is an act of the cognitive power [and has no part in this discussion] ... In its first and broadest sense, 'to think with assent' does not bring out the precise meaning. ... If, however, to think is understood in its proper sense, the text does express the meaning distinctive of the act of belief. Among the acts of the intellect, some include a firm assent without pondering thus when someone thinks about what he knows scientifically. ... Other mental acts are ... inconclusive ... suspicion ... opinion. The act of believing, however, is firmly attached to one alternative, and in this respect the believer is in the same state of mind as one who has science or understanding."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The notes in the Blackfriars' edition list other passages that go into further details.

Since this is not a treatise on Thomistic theology, the conclusion is only that Thomas, with many details, defined faith as assent to an understood proposition.

Somewhere in a discussion on faith, the Romish view of "implicit" faith should be considered. When an Italian or Irish peasant asserts that he believes whatever the Church teaches, though, of course, his knowledge of what the Church teaches embraces no more than one percent of the Tridentine confession, he is said to have implicit faith. Even an educated Catholic, a professor of philosophy in a secular university, did not know the essential element that makes baptism valid. But all such people profess belief in whatever the Church teaches. Protestantism has always rejected this proposition as absurd. It should be clear that no one can believe what he does not know or understand. Suppose a person who knows no French is told, "Dans ce roman c'est M. DuPres qui est le meurtrier": can he believe it? Certainly the Scripture does not countenance such ignorance. The sacred writers constantly emphasize doctrine, knowledge, wisdom, edification. The well known verse, Matt. 28: 20, says, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I command you." Nothing is to be left untaught. A person cannot "observe" a doctrine or obey a command unless he knows it. Faith is strictly limited to knowledge.

This note on implicit faith serves to introduce Calvin's discussion in the Institutes, Book III, chapter ii. Ridiculing implicit faith he says, "Is this faith to understand nothing? ... Faith consists not in ignorance, but in knowledge. ... By this knowledge [that God is propitious to us through Christ] I say, not by renouncing our understanding, we obtain an entrance into the Kingdom of heaven. ... The apostle [in Rom. 10:10] ... indicates that it is not sufficient for a man implicitly to credit [believe] what he neither understands nor even examines; but he requires an explicit knowledge of the Divine goodness. ... Faith consists in a knowledge of God and of Christ" (III ii 2,3).

Further: "Paul connects faith as an inseparable concomitant with doctrine, where he says ..."as the truth is in Jesus ... [and] 'the words of faith and good doctrine' ... Faith has a perpetual relation to the word. ... 'These are written, that ye might believe. ' ... Take away the word, and then there will be no faith left. ... We must further inquire what part of the word it is, with which [saving] faith is particularly concerned. ... When our conscience beholds nothing but indignation and vengeance, how shall it not tremble with fear? ... But faith ought to seek God, not fly from him. But suppose we substitute benevolence and mercy [and Calvin quotes a number of verses]. .... Now we shall have a complete definition of faith, if we say, that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the Divine benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gratuitous promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds. and confirmed to our hearts, by the Holy Spirit" (6 and 7).

With due respect to Calvin, one may ask whether or not this definition tends to confuse faith with assurance. More on this later. It may also be doubted whether the definition is "complete." At least there is more to be said. It is clear, however, that Calvin emphasizes knowledge, in particular the knowledge of God's promise. Hence the object of belief is a proposition.

In reading Calvin one must consider the date of the Institutes. This work was first published in 1536. The final edition, much enlarged, came in 1559. The Council of Trent was called in 1542; it recessed in 1547 and resumed in 1551. It recessed again from 1552 to 1562; and its final decisions were confirmed by the Pope in 1564. Thus, Calvin began writing before the Council convened; he finished his work before the Council concluded; and hence his description of Romanism could not be accurately based on the Council's conclusions. He had to use concrete examples from actual authors and preachers. The result is that some of his descriptions of Romanism are not true of what later became the official Roman position.

For example, in III ii 8, he says, "They maintain faith to be a mere assent, with which every despiser of God may receive as true whatever is contained in the Scripture." Now, maybe

some brash or stupid Schoolman said this; but it is not the post-tridentine position. In the twentieth century Catholic Encyclopedia, faith is stated to be "fiducial assent." Nor is it clear that a despiser of God can receive as true whatever-some things no doubt, but everything?--is contained in the Scripture.

However much we oppose the Roman church, even to asserting the Reformation view that the Papacy is the anti-christ, it is unnecessary, and we do our cause no good, to misrepresent these idolaters. Hence, as a matter of history, there follows a section on the decrees of Trent. These decrees contain much that is wrong. They teach that baptism is the instrumental cause of justification, and that in justification God makes us just. They assert human cooperation and deny irresistible grace; and many other things, including of course the abominations of the Mass. However, and nonetheless, there are some remnants of Christianity. The quotation following concerns faith, and though mixed with stultifying error, there are some good phrases.

Sixth Session, chapter viii: "We are therefore said to be justified by faith because faith is the beginning of human salvation. ... without which it is impossible to please God. ... We are therefore said to be justified freely because none of those things which precede justification--whether faith or works--merit the grace itself of justification ... otherwise grace is no more grace."

Then follow (Chapter IX) a repudiation of Reformation heretics, (Chapter X) the increase of justification; then on keeping the Commandments, presumption and predestination, perseverance, (Chapters XI,XII,XIII) etc.

After Chapter XVI come some Canons opposing the Reformation view of Justification. For example, "If anyone saith that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ ... to the exclusion of (infused] grace and the charity that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, arid is inherent in them. ... let him be anathema" (Canon XI).

Even here this is not so bad as it sounds to postreformation ears; or at least the error is often incorrectly identified. The Romanists included in their term justification what the Reformers and the Bible call sanctification. This latter of course requires infused grace and love. A more accurate identification of the Romish error would be their complete blindness to Biblical justification. They used the term, but they omitted and denied God's judicial, justifying acquittal, of which more will be said later.

In addition to the decrees of Trent, something from the Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council (A.D. 1870) forms an interesting historical note. "Chapter III, On Faith, Man being wholly dependent upon God, as upon his Creator and Lord ... we are bound to yield to God, by faith in his revelation, the full obedience of our intelligence and will. And the Catholic Church teaches that this faith, which is a supernatural virtue, whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that the things which he has revealed are true. . . because of the authority of God himself ... But though the assent of faith is by no means a blind action of the mind, still no man can assent to the Gospel teaching, as is necessary to obtain salvation, without the illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit who gives to all men sweetness in assenting to and believing in the truth. Wherefore faith itself, even when it does not work by charity, is in itself a gift of God, and the act of faith is a work appertaining to salvation, by which man yields voluntary obedience to God himself, by assenting to and cooperating with his grace, which he is able to resist."

This is certainly not Reformation theology, and some of its phrases clearly contradict the teaching of Scripture. Nevertheless it may appear that Calvin did not correctly anticipate the Tridentine Symbol when he gave the Romish definition of faith as "a mere assent which every despiser of God may receive as true whatever is contained in the Scripture."

In addition to the fact that Calvin wrote before the Council of Trent assembled, and finished writing before it concluded, misunderstandings, especially on our part today, can arise because of changes in the meanings of words over four centuries. Calvin says "the assent which

we give to the Divine word ... is from the heart rather than the head, and from the affections rather than the understanding." Since the Scripture never contrasts the head and the heart, but frequently contrasts the heart and the lips, one ought to suppose that by head Calvin meant the understanding and by heart the will. Nor is "the obedience of faith," which he quotes in the very next sentence, an "affection," but a volition. Obedience is always voluntary. A few lines below Calvin speaks more clearly: "It is an absurdity to say, that faith is formed by the addition of a pious affection to the assent of the mind, whereas even this assent consists in a pious affection, and is so described in the Scriptures" (III ii 8).

If much that Calvin says exposes the errors of Rome, these last words should warn evangelicals not to belittle assent, 'mere' assent of the mind, for this voluntary acceptance of the truth is itself a pious action (if not an 'affection').

The Larger Catechism (Question 72) will serve as a conclusion for this historical digression.

"Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner, by the Spirit and word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation."

Unfortunately there is one phrase in this answer that seems to deviate from Calvin, and for which the proof text follows an inaccuracy in the King James translation. Not to extend this subsection unduly, the student may study the exegesis of Ephesians 1:13, in Hodge and other commentators. Though it differs somewhat from Hodge, the student may consider this translation: "In whom also you received an inheritance, having heard the word of truth, i.e., the gospel of your salvation, in [or by] which [neuter] also having believed, you were sealed. ..."

## 6. Psychology

Though the Larger Catechism does not address itself directly to the psychological analysis of faith or belief) this problem is one that has merited the attention, not only of Christian theologians. but also of secular philosophers. These secularists, even when they are not so successful as the theologians, have one advantage; to wit, their task is simpler because they do not consider religious complications. Many theological discussions fall into confusion because elements necessary to saving faith are assigned to any belief whatever. Here one must first try to analyze belief as such, and then characterize those beliefs, or that belief, which justifies.

The most usual evangelical analysis of belief separates it into three parts: notitia, assensus, and fiducia, or understanding, assent, and trust. Perhaps even theologians who use this analysis might omit fiducia, if they confined themselves to belief as such; for in a colloquial manner a person who believes that Columbus discovered America in 1492, or in 1374, is not taken as an example of trust. Yet is he not actually an example of confidence?

Thomas Manton in his Commentary on James expresses the usual evangelical view quite well; and he distinguished, well or poorly, between saving faith and other faiths. The passage is too long to quote, so a condensation, sometimes verbatim, sometimes not, must suffice.

Quoting James 2:19 about the devils Manton remarks that the faith here is a "bare speculation" and cannot possibly save anyone.

That this faith cannot save is very true. It is no more than a belief in monotheism. This the Moslems possess. But however it may be with Moslems, it seems incorrect to call the faith of devils a bare "speculation." This word often is used to refer to some proposition that is so

unverifiable as to be more likely false than true. Granted, Manton also calls it a knowledge; and this is better, because on this point, if on nothing else, the devils believe the truth.

He continues: "Thou believest; that is, assentest to this truth."~ Belief therefore is an act of assent to the truth. Yet Manton adds, believing is the "lowest act of faith." In view of the Scriptural commands to believe, this sounds very strange.

Is there than a higher act of faith? And if so, is it higher because it has a more detailed object, i.e. a greater number of propositions? But in this case it would still be an ordinary act of believing. Or is it higher because some element beyond the act of believing is present?

Manton continues with the object of this belief. "There is one God. He instanceth in this proposition, though he doth limit the matter only to this." This is a now rare usage of the verb, not noun, to instance. It means, to give an instance; the proposition, 'there is one God,' is therefore an instance or specification of what the man believes. Manton suggests that the man believes or assents to "other articles of religion." This is doubtless true, for nearly everyone who believes in any sort of God believes something else about him beyond bare existence. That the man has an extensive Jewish or Christian theology, however, is not clear.

"Thou doest well", quotes Manton; "it [the scriptural phrase] is an approbation of such assen:,so far as it is good and not rested in."

Again Manton has described the act as voluntary assent. Naturally, all assent must be voluntary. But what also needs to be noted here are the words "rested in." When we say we rest in, or should not rest in, this or that, do we mean that in addition to notitia and assensus there is some other psychological element in saving faith called "resting"? Or does it mean that saving faith, rather than being psychologically different, must be an assent to other propositions in addition to monotheism? The latter seems to be the case, whether or not Manton meant it so. We should not -rest in," i.e. be satisfied with the single proposition, 'There is but one God.' This

proposition even the devils accept. But for salvation men must not only accept the monotheistic proposition, but as well other propositions relating to the Atonement.

On the next page Manton notes that the devils assent to this one truth and to other truths revealed in the word, even to "many truths in the Scriptures" (on the following page). But how much of the Bible the devils believe, justification by faith perhaps, is a question that we in our ignorance of satanic psychology cannot answer. Manton apparently wants to maximize the devils' orthodoxy.

"Bare assent", says Manton, "to the articles of religion doth not infer true faith. True faith uniteth to Christ, it is conversant about his person." Two factors seem to be confused in Manton's mind: the psychology and the propositions. Does this quotation mean that saving faith, in addition to belief in monotheism, must also include the Chalcedonian Christology? Certainly an assent to Chalcedon, however "bare," is "conversant about his person." Or does Manton's statement mean that the devils themselves subscribe to Chalcedon, and that "conversant" is a psychological element in addition to assent? It would seem so because otherwise no contrast could be made between "assent to the articles of religion" and "conversant about his person."

Faith "is not only assensus axiomati, an assent to a Gospel maxim or proposition; you are not justified by that, but by being one with Christ. It was the mistake of the former age to make the promise, rather than the person of Christ, to be the formal object of faith."

The mention of the person of Christ is pious language. Similar expressions are common today. One slogan is, "No creed but Christ." Another expression, with variations from person to person, is, Faith is not belief in a proposition, but trust in a person.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In recent years the neo-orthodox and pseudo-evangelicals have propounded the pious nonsense that the Greek word for faith (pistis) should be understood by its use for a Hebrew term and not in its Greek meaning. The Hebrew term or terms mean trust or faithfulness and not belief. James Barr, who can in

Though this may sound very pious, it is nonetheless destructive of Christianity. Back in the twenties, before the Methodist Church became totally apostate, a liberal in their General Conference opposed theological precision by some phrase centering on Christ, such as, Christ is all we need. A certain pastor, a remnant of the evangelical wing of the church, had the courage to take the floor and ask the pointed question, "which Christ?"

The name Jesus Christ, at least since 1835 in Strauss' *Leben Jesu*, has been applied to several alleged persons. Strauss initiated the "Life of Jesus Movement." It ran through Ernest Renan to Albert Schweitzer.<sup>4</sup> But the persons described are nothing like the person described in the Creed of Chalcedon, nor, for that matter, are they alike amongst themselves. It is necessary therefore to ask, which Christ, or, whose Christ? The Christian or Biblical answer is the Creed of Chalcedon. A person can be identified only by a set of propositions.

This is what Manton refers to as "the mistake of the former age." Thomas Manton was a Puritan of the seventeenth century, and when he speaks of "the former age," he is not referring to apostate Romanism, but to the Reformers themselves. Hence he is a witness that they defined faith as an assent to the promise of the Gospel. By the same token, he wishes to introduce some other element into faith in addition to this act of will. What is it? He answers, "There is not only assent in faith, but consent<sup>5</sup>: not only an assent to the truth of the word, but a consent to take Christ. ... True believing is not an act of the understanding only, but a work of all the heart."

A careful study of these words, and of the complete context in Manton, plus a comparison with the Scripture, should conclude that Manton is confused. The first point is that the word consent receives no explanation. It makes a pleasant alliteration with assent, but literary

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no sense be thought favorable to what Manton calls "the mistake of the former age" i.e. the mistake of the Protestant reformers, in his superbly scholarly volume, The Semantics of Biblical Language, Oxford University Press, 1961, reduces the pseudo-evangelical view to unscholarly ruins.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Geerhardus Vos. *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*

<sup>5</sup> Possibly the first systematic theologian to use this term was John of Damascus or Damascene: "fides est non inquisitus consensus;" i. e., "faith is an unquestioned consent."

style is no substitute for analysis. Is "consent" an act of will? Ordinary language would make it seem so; but if so, how is it different from assent? If "consent" is not voluntary, and if it cannot be an act of the understanding either, what sort of mental state is it? Then too, when he says that "true believing is not an act of the understanding only, but a work of all the heart," he is not accurately confronting "the former age." The former age never said that true believing, or false believing either, is an act of the understanding only. The former age and much of the Eater ages too specify assent in addition to understanding. They make this specification with the deliberate aim of not restricting belief to understanding alone. One can understand and lecture on the philosophy of Spinoza; but this does not mean that the lecturer assents to it. Belief is the act of assenting to something understood. But understanding alone is not belief in what is understood.

Manton himself acknowledges, "I confess some expressions of Scripture seem to lay much upon assent, as I John 4:2 and 5:1; I Cor. 12: 3; Matt 16: 17; but these places [Manton strangely says] do either show that assents, where they are serious and upon full conviction, come from some special revelation; or else, if they propound them as evidences of grace, we must distinguish times."

Now, Matt. 16:17 is not clearly a special revelation. It can well be, and more probably is, an illumination such as God gives to every believer. Nor is I Cor. 12:3 a special revelation: it refers to all men--it is a completely general statement--and cannot apply only to the few recipients of special revelation. Unless therefore one wishes to be very dogmatic about Peter in Matthew, all of these verses, in Manton's opinion, are to be set aside, are to be explained away, by "distinguishing the times." True enough, God administered the covenant in the Old Testament in a manner different from his administration of the New. Then too, but the differences are much less important, the apostolic age, and the following two centuries, faced difficulties that do not so directly trouble us now. But such historical differences are entirely irrelevant to the present discussion. Whether the propositions and promises of the Old Testament were more vague and less specific than those in the New, and whether the truths of the Gospel seemed more "contrary to the ordinary and received principles of reason" there than now [which is much to be doubted),

all this is irrelevant because the mental act of believing is the same in every age and every place. Manton's account of faith is therefore confused, and it has led him to set aside some instructive New Testament material.

The crux of the difficulty with the popular analysis of faith into *notitia* (understanding), *assensus* (assent), and *fiducia* (trust), is that *fiducia* comes from the same root as *fides* (faith).<sup>6</sup> Hence this popular analysis reduces to the obviously absurd definition that faith consists of understanding, assent, and faith. Something better than this tautology must be found.

## 7. John Owen

If now Thomas Manton has deserved mention, all the more so does his younger and greater contemporary, John Owen, who, among other things, wrote a four thousand page commentary on Hebrews. Here his smaller four hundred and fifty page book on Justification by Faith compels our attention. The page numbers are those of the Sovereign Grace edition of 1959.

On page 70, Owen begins an examination of the nature of faith. But the reader must take care. The examination is introduced thus: "Of the nature of faith in general, of the especial nature of justifying faith, of its characteristical distinctions from that which is called faith but is not justifying. ..."

No objection can be made to such an examination; but the student should take care to understand what the nature of faith is in general. Justifying faith is a species of faith, and if one does not know what faith in general is, one cannot know' what the faith is that justifies. Does Owen keep this distinction clear?

Unfortunately he does not make it sufficiently clear to us. In fact he says, "The distinctions that we usually made concerning faith. . . I shall wholly pretermit: not only as

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin fides is not a good synonym for the Greek pisteuo.

obvious and known, but as not belonging to our present argument." Owen seems to have had an optimistic view of his generation." But even if these distinctions were as obvious and well known then as he says, they are not so today. But even "pretermitted" much, Owen cannot escape giving some indication of what the act of believing is.

His very next paragraph speaks of a non-justifying "historical faith." It is not because this faith has much to do with history that it is called historical. In addition to events to history, this faith believes the promises of the Gospel. "But it is so called from the nature of the assent (ital. his) wherein it doth consist." Apparently then there are two kinds of assent. What this difference specifically is, Owen does not say. He indeed says the difference does not lie in the object of the faith, the proposition believed, but in the nature, or psychological characteristics of this particular type of assent. We would like to know what this different psychology is.

Owen is quite clear that "all faith is an assent upon testimony" (p. 72)'. "Divine faith is an assent upon a divine testimony." Obviously divine testimony is different from human testimony; and as the great Puritan said, the effects of some beliefs differ vastly from the effects of other beliefs. But differences in effects as well as in objects are irrelevant to the question whether there are species of believing. It is to be feared that some notion of '~species of beliefs' has been confused with 'species of believing.' Nor is a reference to a temporary faith as opposed to a permanent faith any more relevant. In fact Berkhof (op. cit. p.501) who follows Owen, adds that temporary faith may last all through one's life, that it is not necessarily hypocritical and that it includes a stirring of the conscience. No wonder he remarks that "Great difficulty may be experienced in attempting to distinguish it from saving faith,." This view also bears on the doctrine of assurance. Yet Owen says, "Justifying faith is not a higher, or the highest degree of this faith, but is of another kind or nature." Yet all his evidence shows not a different type of believing, but a different object of belief. He refers to: (1) different causes, (2) different objects of a previous or preparatory belief, and (3) different objects of faith (p. 80), though he had previously ruled out objects as the difference.

As Owen's account continues, the confusion grows worse. Not only does he misunderstand the Roman position, describing their faith as an assent that does not produce obedience: but also he is dissatisfied with "such a firm assent as produceth obedience unto all divine commands" (p. 801). For Owen, faith seems to have three main characteristics, the third of which has eight subdivisions.

The first of these is assent to the truth: "all divine faith is in general an assent unto the truth that is proposed unto us upon divine testimony." The second point is rather a reassertion of the first. The only difference seems to be that the first refers to some limited number of truths a given individual happens to know, while the second includes "all divine revelation." Now, it is not likely that a new Christian, recently justified, understands and assents to every proposition in the Bible. After a life-time of study a learned theologian could hardly know so much. But, one may say, even the new Christian assents to Biblical infallibility. Quite so, that is a single proposition. Does he then have implicit faith in all the other Biblical propositions? On the contrary, Evangelicalism excludes the Romish doctrine of implicit faith. Hence justification cannot depend on our assent to all revealed truth. Justifying faith must be an assent to some truths, not all. Even Owen himself, after having said "all divine revelation," restricts justifying faith to some truths only. But in addition to whatever, all or some, is believed, Owen insists that justifying faith must include certain causes and adjuncts.

His third paragraph begins with an explicit denial that faith is an assent, no matter how firm and steadfast, no matter how perfect an obedience it produces. Nor does it equally respect all divine revelation, but only some. And then follow eight points, mainly negative.

(1) Assent is not an act of the understanding only. Since, however, no one ever said it was, but all at least include it, one may take Owen's first subpoint merely as an attempt to be complete.

(2) "All divine truth is not equally the object of this assent." If it were, the statement that Judas was a traitor would as much effect our justification as that Christ died for our sins.

(3) Justifying faith cannot exist without a previous work of the law. This may be true, though the sudden conversion of Saul might make the word previous a logical rather than a temporal succession. In any case, and no matter how true, this does not contribute to an analysis of the act of believing.

(4) Point four is very confused, and point (5) asserts, what is at best doubtful, that the devils in James assent to everything in the Bible. Point (6) asserts that hope and trust are not contained in a "mere" assent to the truth, "but they - hope and trust - require mental actions other than what are peculiar to the understanding only." But is not Owen off the track? Of course hope and trust require the volition of assent as well as an understanding of the promise or hope.

Point (7) strays completely away from Scripture and depends entirely on introspective experience. Thus his objection to assent here is given solely on his own authority, rather than upon the authority of Scripture.

(8) Point 8, however, is indubitable because tautological. "That faith alone is justifying which hath justification actually accompanying it. ... To suppose a man to have justifying faith and not to be justified., is to suppose a contradiction." Of course it is; but for that very reason it is a fallacy to conclude "Wherefore it is sufficiently evident that there is somewhat more required unto justifying faith than a real assent unto all divine revelations."

Owen continues for several difficult pages. He objects to identifying the object of faith with Christ's promise of forgiveness. Instead he maintains that Christ himself is the object of justifying faith. Although this sounds very pious, Owen and others might not have said this, if instead of the term faith they had used the Scriptural word believe. When we believe a man, we believe what he says. Nor does it help Owen's view to insist on the Scriptural phrase, believe in Christ, as something essentially different from believing Christ. As we said before, believing in a

man may indicate a willingness to believe what he will say in the future as well as what he has said in the past. But belief must always have a proposition as its proper object, and therefore must be assent. Owen, let it be repeated for the sake of clarity, does not deny that assent must always somehow be included in faith. Speaking of the promises of forgiveness he says, "It cannot be but that in the actings of justifying faith, there is a peculiar assent to them. Howbeit, this being only an act of the mind, neither the whole nature nor the whole work of faith can consist therein" (p. 87). Now it may well be said that the work or results of faith are several; but such results, such as the preaching of the gospel by an evangelist, are not justifying faith - they are works of righteousness, none of which justify; but if faith or believing itself is not an act of the mind, there remains no hope for finding it anywhere else. Dare we suggest it is the work of the fingers, lungs, or stomach?

All the foregoing comes from Owen's chapter on the causes and object of justifying faith; and this may to a certain extent excuse the confusion. The following chapter is the nature of justifying faith; and it would seem better to have described what belief is before specifying the object of particular beliefs.

At the beginning he remarks that the faith he is discussing is a sincere faith. So be it. Assent is always sincere. No matter what a person believes, he believes it sincerely. A person does not always sincerely state what he believes. He may obscure or even deny his beliefs. But assent to a proposition is ipso facto sincere.

Owen then gives negative as well as positive examples. "The unbelief of the Pharisees ... is called the 'rejecting of the counsel of God' ... most of those who rejected the Gospel by their unbelief, did it under the notion, that the way of salvation and blessedness proposed therein was not a way answering divine goodness ... " (p. 94-95). Surely this quotation is a statement of truth; but it confutes much that Owen has said, for whereas the disciples assented to Christ's statements when they understood them, the Pharisees assented to or believed contradictory propositions. Therefore, one must reject what Owen says a few' lines below; to wit, "unbelievers ... may give an assent unto the truth of it [the gospel], so far as it is a mere act of the mind." This is logical

nonsense, psychological impossibility, and theological confusion. His only defense here, just a few lines below, is that he is no longer talking about sincere faith but only insincere faith.

However severe this criticism of Owen may seem, let not the student suppose that Owen is to be despised. He is one of the greatest Puritans, and we should be extremely happy if we could make as few mistakes as they did. Furthermore, for all the confusion on this point, Owen nonetheless seems to acknowledge that believing is voluntary assent to an understood proposition. Put aside questions as to the object or objects believed, recognize that phrases not containing the words voluntary or assent may nonetheless have the same meaning, and realize that the act of belief is psychologically the same no matter do what is believed, and it is hard to find a phrase descriptive of belief better than voluntary assent.

Thus in his great commentary on Hebrews, at chapter eleven, verse 8, Owen says, "'By faith we understand,' that is, by faith we assent unto the divine revelation. . . . we come not only to assent unto it as true, but to have a due comprehension of it [creation] in its cause, so as that we may be said to understand it ... Those who firmly assent unto divine revelation, do understand the creation of the world, as to its truth, its season, its manner, and end." Perhaps Owen is too optimistic as to the extent of our understanding; but any rate faith or belief is a volitional assent to an understood proposition.

Since chapter six on The Atonement quoted the Lutheran theologian John Theodore Mueller and disagreed with him, it may be interesting briefly to note what he says about the elements of faith. On page 325 he uses the common three-fold division of knowledge, assent, and confidence. But he seems-and this puzzles a reader-to restrict knowledge and assent to uninterpreted historical events. Surely he cannot have meant this, for obviously a person can believe a doctrine as well as an historical event. Some modification, fortunately, occurs on the next page, where he says, "However, if the term notitia is understood in the sense of true spiritual knowledge of Christ ... and the term assensus is conceived as spiritual assent to the promises of the Gospel ... then both of these terms include the fiducia cordis."

Even on the puzzling page he said, "Faith which justifies is not merely a knowledge of history ... but it is assent to the promise of God ..." And two pages earlier (p. 323) he asserted, "Saving faith is always fides actualis (not the Romish implicit faith), or the apprehension of the divine promise by an act of the intellect and will."

If a Reformed theologian begs to differ with the Lutheran on some very important points, he may still be gratified here. Some supporting verses are now appropriate. Promises in the Bible, all of which require assent, are too numerous to quote; but the following touch on knowledge.

John 17:3      This is life eternal, that they might know thee . . .

II Cor. 4: 6      ... hath shined in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Phil. 3:8      I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

I John 5: 1, 5      Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God ... Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (Note the emphasis on knowledge in verses 18, 19, 20).

So much then for defining faith as volitional assent to an understood proposition. But which of all possible propositions is the object of justifying faith?

## 8. The Object

If the Romish doctrine of implicit faith be rejected, and if it is impossible, at least in any five minute period, to believe every declarative sentence in the Bible, it is natural to ask, Which of all these propositions is the one by whose means a sinner is justified?

This question obviously issues from the wording of some of Owen's paragraphs. It is not irrelevant to the preceding discussion. But it is a question no one can answer. Years after Athanasius wrote the Nicene Creed a so-called Athanasian Creed was formulated that pronounced damnation on everyone who did not believe its numerous propositions on the Trinity. The propositions themselves are on the whole very good; but less than one percent of the Christian community can recite them from memory. Possibly not more than twenty-five percent have even heard them. No Calvinist would assert that salvation requires us to believe them explicitly. On the opposite end of the scale from those who would insist on the wording of the Athanasian Creed, some independent churches write their own creed of five or six articles with fewer words than this one article on the Trinity. But are these few the irreducible minimum for salvation? The question above asks for precisely those beliefs which are necessary for justification.

Consider the case of Justin Martyr, one of the earliest heroes of the faith. Did he really have saving faith? But he was a Christian, was he not? He died for the name of our Lord and Savior. He must have been regenerated and justified, must he not? But it is doubtful that any strong Lutheran or Calvinistic church today would have admitted him to membership. Quite possible the strife-torn church in Corinth, troubled with fornication, law-suits, and idol worship-its members do not seem to have denied Christ's resurrection, but only the resurrection of believers-had a better theology than his. But to what propositions did he assent that he might be justified?

Now, Justin Martyr was not a moron. Morons have doubtless been regenerated and justified. Some members of extremely primitive tribes also, with their minds incredibly confused. What propositions did they believe? Is there any passage in Scripture that identifies, in a scale of decreasing knowledge, the very minimum by which someone can still be justified?

But even if a minimum of propositions could be listed, below which number justification were impossible, it would still be the wrong question with a perverted outlook. The Church is not commanded, encouraged, nor even permitted to be satisfied with a barest minimum of theology. The command requires the maximum possible:

Matt. 28:19,20            Teach all nations ... instructing them to observe all whatever I commanded you.

There seems to be no other conclusion but that God justifies sinners by means of many combinations of propositions believed. For which reason a minister should not confine himself to topics popularly thought to be "evangelistic," but should preach the whole counsel of God, trusting that God will give someone the gift of faith through sermons on the Trinity, eschatology, or the doctrine of immediate imputation.

### Part III - Justification.

The two basic and essential principles of the Protestant Reformation, in scholastic terms called the formal principle and the material principle, are (1) the Scripture alone, its inerrancy as the very word of God, to which we must add nothing and from which we must subtract nothing; and (2) Faith alone, the doctrine of justification by faith without any admixture of human works or merit. These two are the chief and indispensable parts of the definition of the term evangelical. Deny the inerrancy and logically no Christianity is left at all. Deny the two alone and we have Romanism.

The opponents of evangelical Christianity -- there is no Christianity that is not evangelical -- attack on both fronts. The first chapter of the present volume examined the attack against the Bible. This chapter will mention the less well-known attack on the doctrine of justification and then proceed to expound the same.

Luther in particular and virtually the entire Protestant movement emphasized justification by faith alone. On the corner stones of many Lutheran churches one can read the name Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is no exaggeration to say that justification by faith alone was the driving impetus of the Reformation. Even the later Arminians tried not to deny it.

However, today the ecumenical movement seeks reconciliation with Rome. This is true, not only of the Anglicans, but even of several Lutheran bodies. Incredible as it may seem, a contingent of Lutheran theologians, meeting at Wartburg (what memories the name Wartburg stimulates!) Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, made plans to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in a joint conference with the Roman Catholics. The name Reformation Sunday, it is planned, will become Reconciliation Sunday. Doesn't anybody have an ink-well to throw at the devil? The arguments for rapprochement are similar and even verbally identical to those used in the sixteenth century. Because of this Lutheran development, because of the liberal rejection of all Christian doctrines, and because even the early Arminians, perhaps unwittingly, undermined the doctrine of justification, this essential element of Christianity needs special emphasis today.

## 1. Definitions

The plan now is to give a brief statement as to what Romanists and Arminians consider the essence of justification and then to state the Calvinist definition.

Both Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide are contrary to Romanism. As explained in an early chapter, Romanism adds tradition and papal infallibility to the Scripture- witness its rosaries and crucifixes, its sacraments and its priesthood, its idolatry and Mariolatry. It also lacks the doctrine of justification by faith alone. To do justice to the Romish doctrine of justification, the simple contrast between justification by faith and justification by works is not quite accurate. The underlying defect in Romanism at this point is rather the lack of any doctrine of justification.

One should say, the lack of any Biblical concept of justification. What the Romanists call justification most assuredly depends partly on works; but what they call justification is not what the Bible means by the term. Their use of the term is essentially the equivalent of sanctification. Of course this requires good works. But what is lacking in Romanism is the concept of a divine judicial pronouncement of acquittal, plus some other elements yet to be enumerated.

It is therefore essential and elementary to define the term justification; i.e. to state what the word means in the Bible, particularly the New Testament. For this purpose, instances of its use are now quoted.

Luke 7:29     The publicans justified God.

Luke 7:35     Wisdom is justified of all her children.

Rom. 3:4        That thou [God] mightest be justified ... and mightest have the victory when thou art judged.

Rom. 3:20      By works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Rom. 3:24      Being justified freely by his grace.

Rom. 3:26      That he might be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.

Rom. 3:28      A man is justified by faith apart from works of law.

Rom. 5:1,9      Being justified by faith ... justified by his blood.

Some of these verses and many others in addition speak of justification by faith alone apart from good works. This is the substance of the doctrine. But at this point the preliminary

question is, What does the word justification mean? This may appear as 'mere semantics' to some: cannot anyone define his technical terms as he pleases? Yes, he can; but our aim is to determine how it pleased the Holy Spirit to define this term. We want to know what the Bible teaches: not what some non-biblical religion teaches. Definition in any case is no trivial matter. The more important a subject is, the more precisely must its terms be defined.

The Liddell and Scott lexicon lists these classica usages: to set right (from a fragment of Pindar); proved or tested (passive participle); hold or deem right ...; pronounce judgment: do a man right, chastise, pass sentence on; pronounce or treat as righteous, vindicate. Arndt and Gingrich, briefly, have: to do justice to someone, vindicate, acquit, make free from (cf. Acts 13:38) and, to quote, "In I Corinthians 6:11 edikaiothete means you have become pure." The last assertion, however, is more than doubtful: The context by no means requires a meaning not found elsewhere in the New Testament, as many commentaries will show.

Lexicons get their information from the Greek texts themselves. We can begin this work by examining the list of verses just quoted. The main question is, Does justify mean to make a man just, or to declare that he is (already) just.

It is incredible that even Romanists should have missed the meaning. The first verse quoted says, "The publicans justified God." How can anyone think that the publicans made God just? Next, the metaphorical phrase, "Wisdom is justified of all her children," obviously means that the results of wisdom demonstrate the goodness of wisdom. Wisdom did not wait to become good until her children made her so. The third verse again speaks of God's being justified. God is judged, and pronounced just. God is not made just; he is pronounced or acknowledged to be just. The fourth verse, "By the works of the law no flesh shall be justified," supports the same conclusion because the works of the law are essential to sanctification. Hence justification, which excludes works, is not any part of the process of becoming subjectively righteous. This verse and the remainder in the list emphasize another aspect of the doctrine of justification, but they are also instances of the same usage. The conclusion therefore is: The verb to justify means

to acknowledge someone as just or righteous, to vindicate or to acquit him of accusations. It does not refer to any moral change by which a previously unjust person is made subjectively good. On the contrary, it is a judicial pronouncement, which in itself does not alter the character of the accused in any way.

The definition, however, is not the full doctrine. It merely tells us what the Bible means by the word.

## 2. An Act

The whole doctrine, succinctly stated in the Shorter Catechism, is "Justification is an act of God's free grace, whereby he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone. " The subheads will now follow this outline.

Justification is an act of God's free grace. This proposition is most directly derived from the meaning of the main term. The Shorter Catechism has another question: "What is Sanctification;" to which the answer in part is, "Sanctification is a work of God's free grace. . . ." The contrast between act and work is deliberate, as are all the words of the Catechism. They were meant to distinguish between an instantaneous pronouncement and a life-long process.

As alluded to earlier, this distinction must be kept in mind in opposition to Romanism. The Roman Catholics have no concept of a judicial acquittal. For them, justification is a long process of moral improvement. But in favor of the term act in the Catechism, the meaning of the Greek verb is decisive. When the publicans justified God, they did not initiate a long, drawn out process of moral purification. They made a judgment. - It was a momentary act.

Although the publicans were not official, legal judges, God is; with the result that one may properly call his act of acquittal forensic. It is the judicial act of a competent judge in

absolving an accused person from the penalty of the law. That this is a forensic act is indicated by some other verses now to be quoted.

Rom. 5: 16     For the judgment was from one to condemnation, but the free gift was from many trespasses to justification.

Rom. 8:33     Who shall bring any accusation against God's elect? God is the justifier.  
Who is the condemner?

It is obvious that condemnation is not a moral change for the worse in the condemned man. When a judge condemns a man for a felony, he does not make him a lawbreaker. The judge declares that he has already broken the law. The judge declares that he is a criminal and is guilty as charged. But this declaration is not a moral process in the prisoner. Since now, in these both verses, justification and condemnation are antithetical, the one is as much objective and forensic as the other, and as little a moral process.

### 3. Pardon

The previous chapter, under the subhead of Expiation, discussed the cancellation of sin by the work of Christ. Here the concern is the application of redemption to believers, particularly in connection with justification. The former is the prerequisite of the latter.

Now, essential as it is, in view of Romanism, to know that justification is a forensic judgment of acquittal, more/a good deal more, must be said concerning its effect on the justified sinner. This eventually includes, as an inevitable consequence, the whole process of sanctification, but at the moment we are concerned with what occurs at the time of justification. Several things occur with or are included in justification. The first, at least in the order the Catechism gives, is pardon of sin. As a matter of fact, the English word pardon occurs rarely in the King James Bible. It seems strange that the Catechism chose it. But though the word is rare,

the idea is frequent. It is expressed in terms of forgiveness, remission, purging away, washing, cleansing, and the like. The list is:

Isa. 40:2      Her iniquity is pardoned.

John 20:23    Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted.

Acts 2:38      Repent ... for the remission of sins.

Acts 13:39    By him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could  
not  
be justified by the law of Moses.

I Cor. 6:11    But ye are washed ... sanctified . . . justified.

James 5:15    It shall be forgiven him.

I John 1:9     He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

That God is a God of mercy, and that "there is forgiveness with thee" (Psa. 103:4) is not something a Bible student would likely doubt. He might suggest, however, that the verses quoted do not clearly place pardon in the act of justification. In reply, one might say that Acts 13:39 connects justification and belief, and that this is connected with freedom from the law of Moses, i.e. freedom from its penalty, and we may infer that freedom from penalty is the equivalent of forgiveness.

I Cor. 6:11 makes a clearer connection between justification and pardon or washing. Washing surely indicates some sort of escape from sin; and for all its figurative style it is still a rather momentary than an incessant life-long process, like sanctification. In fact, it is more than

doubtful that "you were sanctified" (aorist tense) refers to the process of sanctification. Rather, as the noun in I Cor. 7:14, it refers to being set apart or dedicated to God. Thus, a momentary act is indicated. With this understanding, the verse definitely connects pardon or washing with justification. But it is not so much these disjointed verses that so strongly connect forgiveness with justification, as it is the pervasive meaning of the term itself as already explained. When a judge pronounces acquittal, the accused is discharged from all obligation to pay the penalty.

That John Wesley and the Arminians do not regard justification as a judicial act of acquittal is evident from Sermon V in Sermons on Several Occasions (1746). "Least of all does justification imply that God is deceived in those whom he justifies, that he thinks them to be what, in fact, they are not; that he accounts them to be otherwise than they are." Before continuing the quotation one may note that this last phrase denies that Christ's righteousness can be accounted to sinners. Of course God is not deceived into thinking that his saints are subjectively and perfectly sinless; but the Scripture surely declares that righteousness is imputed to us and that justification is the contradictory of condemnation. Now, the quotation continues, "... Neither can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy because another is so. He can no more confound me with Christ than with David or Abraham." Again, if this were so, then neither could God "confound" me with Adam, and therefore I did not die "in Adam." Clearly an error in one place reappears often throughout any system of theology; and naturally so, because a system is as logically consistent as its author can make it.

Wesley thus restricts the meaning of justification to pardon. "The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon." To be sure, he adds that the Father pardons us "for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son;" but why the Father needs propitiation in order to pardon can hardly be made clear on Wesley's premises. Paul gives the why. That God may be just and the justifier" etc. The Calvinist of course does not deny that God pardons our sins, but he finds in Scripture more than pardon in the doctrine of justification.

The difficulty, however, is not yet entirely dissolved. Arminians are likely to contend that acquittal and pardon are incompatible. If a man is pronounced innocent, he cannot be pardoned, since if innocent he has no crime that needs pardon; but if he is pardoned, then he cannot be acquitted, for pardon is based on his having committed a crime and thus his being ineligible for acquittal.

This difficulty would be serious if the conditions of the divine judgment seat were limited to the conditions of a human court. When in human affairs a Governor of a State or the President pardons a person who has broken the law, it is indeed an act of mercy, but it is not an act of justice. Justice is simply set aside. There are often good reasons for this; and in any case that is the most a merciful executive can do.

But God, if we may so speak, faces a problem that no human judge can meet. The pertinent verse is found in one of the most important paragraphs in the whole Bible. It would be difficult to find any passage of comparable length that so succinctly and completely presents the Gospel in its entirety. Of these half dozen verses, the quotation is:

Rom. 3:26     To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

The difference between a human court and the divine assize is that the former does not maintain strict justice. The "problem" God faces was how to be just, completely just and righteous, and at the same time to justify the ungodly. Its verse quoted and its predecessor speak of God exhibiting his righteousness. As a matter of fact, there is no mention of pardon at all in these half dozen verses. Were salvation merely a matter of pardon, God could simply forget justice and the law and let the guilty sinner go free. Pardon, ordinary pardon, requires no atonement. God's salvation does. This disposes of the Arminian objection.

#### 4. The Ground of Justification

The question here to be answered is, On “what ground, or for what reason goes God justify a sinner? The answer to this question also shows how God can himself be just and also the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus.

Since all men are sinners, totally depraved and utterly unable to do any spiritual good, it is obvious that God cannot acquit them on the basis of their conduct. Even if someone at age nineteen could from that day forth perfectly keep the law of God, he could not be acquitted on such a basis, for he had already broken the law before he became nineteen. It is no defense against a charge of murder, that one has now given up his previous habit of murdering people.

Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that, whatever other grounds or reasons God may have, so far as the sinner himself is concerned, the benefit is conferred upon him by God's free grace. The following passages exclude all human works and assert unmerited favor.

Rom. 3:20,24 By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. ... being justified freely by his grace . . . (cf. 27-28)

Rom. 4:4,5 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned by grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Ga 1. 2: 16 . . . . not justified by the works of the law, ... because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (cf. 3: 11) .

Eph. 2:8 By grace are ye saved.

But while the theme of grace excludes all human merit, it does not specify the ground or reason for which God extends his justifying grace to anyone. To acquit is to pronounce innocent,

righteous, acceptable in God's court. Now, if God, who does not lie, pronounces a sinner righteous, what is such righteousness and where does it come from? How can God be both just and justifier?

The Shorter Catechism, whose order this section somewhat follows, said, "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone." Thus this document, written for the instruction of children, asserts that the ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ.

Something has already been said about the active obedience of Christ. Had he not been altogether innocent and perfectly righteous, had he offended in one point, had he sinned, he would himself have deserved his punishment, which then could not have availed for anyone else. This is all part of the doctrine of the vicarious, propitiatory atonement. But now that he did not suffer for himself, he paid our penalty and God imputes his righteousness to us. On the ground of Christ's righteousness, therefore, as imputed to us, God is both just and the justifier of him who has faith in Jesus. The present subhead therefore merges into the next.

##### 5. Imputation and Federal Headship

That Christ's death was a vicarious sacrifice, that he paid our penalty, that he was our substitute is the equivalent of asserting his federal headship. He was our representative, and what he did in this capacity is reckoned or imputed to us. Adam was also our representative or federal head, and what he did in such capacity had also been imputed to us. A page or so further on it will be necessary to discuss Romans 5:12-19. At that point one should note, what seems strange to us today, that Paul argues for the federal headship of Christ on the basis of Adam's position; whereas we, with our modern mind-set, must defend Adam's headship on the basis of Christ's position.

First of all, and aside from Romans 5:12-19, is a selection of verses that mention imputation. These will illustrate the usage and meaning of the term, and then the doctrinal discussion can follow.

Rom. 4:3-8 Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. (cf. James 2:23, imputed). ... the reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt. ... his faith is counted for righteousness . . . unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works . . . Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

II Cor. 5:19 God was in Christ . . . not imputing their trespasses unto them.

II Tim. 4:16 Let it not be imputed to them.

Philemon 18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.

As various translations show, impute (logizo) means to reckon or to put to one's account. The verses from Romans 4 say that God counted something as righteousness for Abraham; this something was a gift of grace to Abraham; it was not a debt that God owed him. Because of this gift sin was not, or no longer, counted. Now, what was it that God imputed to Abraham for righteousness? If one should restrict his reading to just one or two verses in Romans four, or to James 2:23, it would seem that God accepted the subjective act of believing in place of actual righteousness. Belief then would be taken for the righteousness necessary for Abraham's acquittal. Does it not say, "His faith is counted for righteousness"? However, this seems to imply that God set aside the requirement of perfect obedience, disregarded the maintenance of justice, and pardoned Abraham on the basis of his belief in God's promise. Thus, Abraham's own act would be the ground of justification; and he could boast of his insight into spiritual affairs, an insight others did not have, for he was a better man than they. However, Romans 4:5 does not stand alone. It has both an immediate context and a wider context. The immediate context says

two things: (1) Abraham had no ground for boasting; (2) verse six says that the something which was imputed was, not faith itself, but righteousness. The Arminian dependence on verse five, for the view being discussed is Arminianism, is plausible only so long as the context is ignored, not only the immediate context, but even more the passage in the preceding chapter. Note that after Paul includes the whole human race under sin, he summarizes the doctrines of the atonement and justification in 3:21-26. Here we have Christ's propitiation and God's justice. Now, if faith as the mental act of believing is sufficient for pardon, if not for acquittal, where is the need for an atonement at all? Must not the justice of God be maintained? If God knew that he was going to lower his standards after man sinned, why did he establish stricter standards in the garden of Eden? Well, then, after Paul in Romans 3:26 insists on divine justice, he uses Abraham as an outstanding example of justification. But having already described the work of Christ, he shortens his phraseology, expecting his readers to bear the preceding section in mind. This should be sufficient for Romans 4 and James 2. But there is a still wider context to support the conclusion that the basis of justification is Christ's merit, and not our act of believing. A very important part of this context is Romans 5:12-19. But since Arminianism has been mentioned, let us continue with it for a while, since this discussion too will help to clarify the subject matter.

First of all, let it be stated that we do not wish to misrepresent the Arminians any more than we wish to misrepresent the Romanists. Let it also be acknowledged that at least some Arminians repudiate the objections above stated relative to faith rather than Christ's righteousness as the basis for justification. Arminius himself (as quoted by Wiley) wrote, "Justification is a just and gracious act of God by which ... he absolves man from his sins. . . on account of Christ and his obedience and righteousness ... " Wesley defined justification as "that act of God the Father, whereby for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he sheweth forth his righteousness by the remission of the sins that are past."

Both of these quotations seem to rule out faith as the basis of justification; both mention Christ's propitiation, obedience, and righteousness. They might in some other respect be

incomplete; they might restrict the effect of justification to pardon alone; but what they assert seems Scriptural.

More surprising to those who have criticize Arminianism is Article IX of the Twenty-Five Methodist Articles: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the sake of Christ."

This is taken from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, verbatim with the exception of the final clause. Perhaps that change is significant; it has to do with imputation; but at least it does not restrict justification to bare pardon.

Wiley himself, who gave these quotations, shows some vacillation. On page .382 he says, "Here it is evident that forgiveness and justification are synonymous terms, the one explanatory of the other, but with a shade of difference." However, on the next page he indicates considerably more than a "shade" of difference: "The justified sinner is accepted as righteous ... It is thus distinguished from mere forgiveness." But he does not stay with this, because later (p. 395) he adds, "The sole ground of justification being faith in the blood of Christ ... works of the law are immediately excluded." Here faith is the sole ground of justification: Christ's active obedience is ruled out. And further on the same page he continues, the word imputation "is never used in the sense of reckoning or accounting the actions of one person to have been performed by another. A man's sin or righteousness is imputed to him when he is actually the doer of the sinful or righteous act."

These verbatim quotations, and their contexts which any student can look up, are sufficient to show that without any misrepresentation Arminianism differs substantially from Calvinism. What follows is more than sufficient.

After the previous quotation Wiley continues by summarizing three theories of imputation. First is the "Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ." This is generally known as the Hyper-Calvinistic or Antinomian theory of Justification" (p. 396).

If now we do our best not to misrepresent Arminianism, we would be pleased if Arminians made a similar effort. Aside from the fact that Hyper-Calvinism is a pejorative term, usually left undefined, and recklessly asserted even of weak Calvinists, Wiley's subhead, "Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ" fits Hodge, Warfield, and the Westminster standards themselves (cf. Conf. XI, 1,2, Larger Catechism, 70,73). That this doctrine "is generally known as the ... Antinomian Theory of Justification" is ludicrously false and positively slanderous. What other creed of any other church places so much stress on the Ten Commandments? Have the Arminians ever read the Larger Catechism, Question 93: "The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto . . ." If this be hypercalvinistic antinominanism, let us have much more of it.

Wiley has further objections . The Calvinistic position, he says, "overlooks and undervalues the subjective work of the Spirit in imputation of righteousness." But, to reply, justification is an objective judicial pronouncement; it is not a change in the sinner's subjectivity at all. Regeneration produces ,subjective effects, particularly faith) and sanctification inevitably follows justification. An alleged faith that results in no good works is not saving faith at all. But justification is a decision from the bench. The Arminian holds, says Wiley, that "the faith by which we are justified ... has in it the inherent power of righteousness." So it does, but not as Wiley thinks. The righteousness, an imperfect righteousness, that faith produces in the worst or best of sinners is not the perfect righteousness on the basis of which he is acquitted of all guilt.

Further incompetent objections to Calvinism follow. Wiley (p. 397) quotes from Wesley's Sermon on Justification, "God can no more confound me with Christ than with David or Abraham." Remarkable! As if God could not distinguish Christ from the person to whom he has

imputed Christ's merit. Then again, beginning with a Calvinistic quotation, Wiley adds, "He who claims for himself the righteousness of Christ presents himself to God, not in the habit of a righteous man, but in glorious attire of the Divine Redeemer.' This attitude is not characteristic of the humility of the genuine Christian."

But even John Wesley translated Zinzendorf, "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, My beauty are, my glorious dress."

This is precisely the point: we stand before God's throne, dressed in the righteousness of Christ alone.

Zinzendorf was not much of a Calvinist, so that perhaps Wesley had less qualms about translating him. But Horatio Bonar added:

"Thy righteousness, O Christ, Alone can cover me."

And Edward Mote sang:

"My hope is built on nothing less than  
Jesus' blood and righteousness  
...  
Dressed in his righteousness alone  
Faultless to stand before thy throne.  
...  
All other ground is sinking sand."

To complete what Wiley would doubtless call this diatribe against Arminians, note that on page 400 he says, "it is faith itself, as a personal act of the believer, and not the object of that faith that is imputed for righteousness." This means that our subjective or psychological act of believing, is imputed or put to our account -- and naturally so, for it is our own personal

psychology - instead of the perfect righteousness of Christ. Hence we are acquitted, declared innocent, not because we are innocent, but because we believe. The Arminians may say and hope that this believing is not to be classed as a "good work"; but surely it is. It is such a good work that for them it produces regeneration; regeneration does not produce it. For to continue, Wiley writes, "Justification ... cancels guilt ... [regeneration] renews the moral nature ... The two, however, are coincident in time, for they are accomplished in answer to the same act of faith" (p. 402; cf. pp. 416 ff.). Surely this makes faith a work too good to be true.

The discussion now approaches a more expository form. The doctrine of the federal headship of Adam and immediate imputation of Adam's sin to all his natural posterity depends chiefly on the exegesis of Romans 5:12-19. It is doubtless a difficult passage; but there is one exceedingly clear point, and this clear point is the key to the main message. It is extremely clear that the passage draws a parallel between Adam in his relation to the race and Christ in his relation to the elect. Furthermore this basic thought sufficiently disposes of the main objection Berkouwer belabored. While various theologians bemoan the injustice of God if he imputes guilt apart from the individual's own personal act of sin, they all, perhaps with the exception of Pelagius, are quite satisfied to have God impute righteousness apart from the individual's own personal perfect obedience to the law. Consistency requires one or two positions: either there is no immediate imputation of guilt or righteousness, or there is immediate imputation of both. If what is called vicarious ethics is acceptable in the case of righteousness, no one can consistently object to vicarious ethics in the other case. And conversely, if one rejects the immediate imputation of sin as immoral, logic requires him to reject the immediate imputation of righteousness as equally immoral, for precisely the same reasons. Now, then, the exegesis.

Romans 5:12-21, as was said before, draws a parallel between Adam and his natural descendents on the one hand and on the other hand Christ and his spiritual descendants. The passage, no need to quote it now, begins by stating that sin entered the world of humanity by the act of one man. It was not the act of Eve, for she was deceived and Adam was not; nor was the introduction of sin and death due to Adam's succeeding sins. It was through his (one) sin, or

through the (this) sin, that death came. The cause was the one act of the one man. If anyone suspect that in view of the exact wording of the verse, the idea of one has been given too great an emphasis, the reply is that verses 15, 16, and 17 make this emphasis is more than sufficiently explicit. The cause of death coming upon all men was the act of the one man - "because all sinned."

But how can all have sinned, when only one man, by one act, committed a single sin? Those who hold to straightforward justification by works (and this is not Romanism), and those or some of those who assert free will, answer that Adam's posterity followed his bad example, so that their later personal transgressions caused their death. To this the reply is, (1) The text does not say that all Adam's posterity "have sinned"; the text says they all "sinned", (this is an aorist tense, denoting a single act, not a perfect, indicating a continued series of acts or a present state); then (2) this aorist is in keeping with the idea of the one man and his one act. Note particularly the adverb "thus:" one man sinned and thus all died. Death was the punishment for sin, and since they all died, they must all have been guilty of the one act of the one man. The implication is that Adam and Christ were both our representatives: the one for death, the other for life; but both our substitutes.

Verse 12 is not a complete sentence. Verses 13 -18 form a parenthesis and a subparenthesis; then verse 19 rephrases verse 12 and completes the parallel. Note that in verse 12 there occur words "and thus" but in verse 19 the words are "thus also." The former does not, the latter does complete the parallel. However, since this is not a Commentary on Romans, only one point will be made for verses 13-14, which is that Adam is a type of Christ. There are of course important differences between these two, which differences are indicated in verses 15-17. But there is one great similarity: they both substituted for us, they were both our federal head, one in sin, the other in righteousness.

The connection with justification and imputation becomes clearer in verse 18. Adam as the substitute for all his natural posterity and by his one sin caused our condemnation; Christ,

also by substitution, and by one righteous act of acquittal (verses 16 and 18) gave all his spiritual posterity justification of life. By Christ's obedience, both active and passive, the many shall be established as just.

So much should be enough for the conclusion that Adam's sin was imputed to us and Christ's righteousness also to his chosen people, characterized as those who receive the free gift of righteousness.

There is another important point to be observed in this paragraph; but its discovery requires a little meditation. The point is that in both cases the imputation is immediate, i.e., without means. The two views may be contrasted as follows: Adam's sin produced his moral degradation, a depraved nature, and tendencies to sin, all of which were transmitted to his posterity by natural generation; this inherited depravity caused posterity to sin, and Adam's sin was imputed to them by means of inherited depravity. In this view the death of a descendent is due to personal depravity. The other view is that depravity is not the means or method of imputation, but its result.

In support of this latter view one must note that the death Adam incurred was not physical death alone. It was spiritual death, of which physical death is only a part. God had said, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Adam died that day; though his physical life continued for nine centuries. This means that a depraved nature is a punishment for sin. This sin is the ground of the punishment; hence the punishment or depravity cannot be the means of imputation. It is the imputation that makes the depravity a just penalty. Therefore Adam's one sin must have been imputed without depravity as a means, much more without subsequent sins as a means, for these follow naturally from the depraved nature. Imputation of sin therefore is immediate imputation.

The Scriptural basis for this is not hard to understand. One must, however, consider the objections of those who do not want to see the Scriptural position, probably because they are committed to some foreign philosophical position. One needs also to consider how immediate

imputation is integrated with federal headship, for an objection at one point affects all others. A chapter from Berkouwer makes a good example.

## 6. Berkouwer

Berkouwer (Sin, 1971) seems to accuse federal theology of attributing caprice or arbitrariness to God, if he imputes guilt and sin to other men on the basis of Adam's first sin. In support of this accusation he refers to the attempt of Shedd and others to establish a "realistic" connection, between Adam and his posterity in their common human nature. Thus the realists arrive at some sort of personal identity with Adam so that posterity personally sinned when Adam sinned; and therefore God did not arbitrarily impute guilt and sin to anyone who had not himself personally sinned.

The motive behind Shedd and others in the earlier history of theology is to vindicate God's justice by denying that he imputes guilt to any man for a sin which that man did not personally commit. To condemn me for what another man did is unjust.

The individual identification of John Doe with Adam is difficult to maintain. Plato himself, the founder of Realism, never confused Socrates with Aristotle. Surely Adam and I are not the same person. Berkouwer points out that even Bavinck side-steps the problem by qualifying the identity of the two persons by phrases such as "in a certain sense," "virtually," "potentially," and "seminally." Such evasions may point at the difficulty, but they are far from solving it. Shedd tried to solve it by a so-called "realism" that merged all men into Adam. Hence when Adam sinned, I myself personally sinned, and hence God does not so much impute Adam's sin and guilt to me, as he imputes my own.

At this point it is necessary for us to distinguish between problems, which, though related and even overlapping, are nonetheless distinct. The general problem of realism is one. In philosophy the term realism denotes any theory that holds it possible to know the "real" object and not just a representation of it. Aristotle therefore was a realist though not a Platonic realist.

Since the present writer cannot accept the Aristotelian theory of abstraction, as well as much else in that encyclopedic philosopher, this volume is based on what may loosely be called Platonic realism though actually Philonic realism; for there are varieties of even "Platonic" realism. Briefly, realism is necessary to make knowledge possible. It was the well nigh universal position of the Church until Thomas Aquinas rejected Augustine; and it became, at least more than any other philosophy, the somewhat tacit position of Calvin and the Reformed Church.

Undoubtedly realism can be used in the manner to which Berkouwer objects. His account of Bavinck's vagaries and Greijdanus' rather clearly unbiblical constructions are well taken. But realism itself does not require "a clear distinction between the ground for imputation in the case of Christ's righteousness and the ground in the case of Adam's sin" (p. 439, n. 10). Realism and federalism are far from being incompatible. There may of course be realists who reject federalism; but there are also nominalists who reject federalism.

For this reason a certain awkwardness runs through Berkouwer's discussion. He writes, "We can only do justice to realism, however, when we inquire exactly what is meant by this 'co-sinning.'" This would be true if the men he has mentioned were the only realists. In that case "realism" would be nothing else than the realism of these men. But Berkouwer gives the impression that refutation of these men destroys all forms of realism. If it did, Berkouwer would be obligated to provide a different epistemology. He would have to adopt nominalism, or the Aristotelian theory of abstraction, or some form of representationism.

Aside from such basic philosophic choices, Berkouwer's objections to Bavinck and Greijdanus are well taken: "It is very striking that when we ask that perfectly legitimate question, we receive no clear answer" (p. 440). But his awkwardness appears when he tries to tie in the preexistence of the soul. To be sure, Plato's realism, or better, Plato's general philosophy defended pre-existence. Augustine, on the other hand, explicitly repudiated pre-existence without discarding realism.

The immediate conclusion is therefore that Berkouwer reduces to absurdity the particular form of realism adopted by Bavinck and others; but the refutation is based more on the Scriptural concept of imputation than on any philosophic difficulty in generic Platonism.

In the next chapter Berkouwer considers Federalism. If the biological unity of the race, to which Bavinck had virtually reduced realism, is not sufficient to explain the relation between Adam's sin and the sin of his posterity, what other theory is there for this purpose and also for the purpose of explaining the relationship between the righteousness of Christ and that of his people? The first half of the problem is not the fact that some people suffer because of the sins of others, but the idea that some people are punished for the sins of others, to wit, the sin of Adam. Does not this idea conflict with the justice of God? Are the imputation and representation of the federal theory just?

The difference between federalism and Bavinck's form of realism lies in the fact that Bavinck and Greijdanus consider men as personally co-sinning in Adam, whereas federalism asserts that God regards all men as sinners on the basis of God's having chosen Adam as his posterity's representative.

Berkouwer makes very clear his belief that "Consistent realism cannot be allied with federalism" (p. 451, n.12), If he had said, 'The biological unity of the race and the federalist view of representation cannot both be the explanation of universal human sinfulness,' everyone would have to agree. Berkouwer, however, objects even to Honig's statement that the physical unity is of great importance, even though inadequate as an explanation of original sin. But this statement by Honig is surely unobjectionable, and indeed unavoidable. Does Berkouwer think that federalism must deny the "physical unity" of the race? Of course not; but then once again Honig, whatever else he may have said, is correct that this obvious unity does not explain original sin.

Because of its importance the point at issue allows for emphasis. An imputation of guilt, sin, and punishment to a man who has not individually committed a sin is capricious and arbitrary, according to these "realists."

The tacit but plausible assumption in this view is that a wise, rational, just God cannot act arbitrarily. But perhaps these theologians do not reflect sufficiently on the nature of arbitrariness in a sovereign Being. Take for an example some less explosive matter. The solar system presumably contains ten planets. The exact number is unimportant. Now, an omnipotent God could have created, for all we know, a solar system with only seven, or as many as thirteen planets. Is not therefore the present number arbitrary? Did it not depend on God's choice? Hence an accusation that federalism is false because it pictures God as arbitrary carries no weight. Ultimately everything that God does is arbitrary.

Now suppose someone was to reply: Of course God is sovereign and the ultimate cause of everything; but this does not make his choices arbitrary because in everything he does, he acts for a purpose. Purposeful actions are not arbitrary.

This reply is, of course, no more than a definition of the term arbitrary. The term should indeed be defined, for it is rather clear that those or some of those who charge God with caprice are not too sure of what they mean by the word. So far, so good; but the reply itself is not of great help to the "realists" mentioned. Their opponents can still object that though God always acts purposefully, yet if he entertained immediate imputation as an essential means of his end, he would be acting unjustly.

Turning the question around, and inquiring whether the theory of mediate imputation - one cannot discard imputation altogether, for the Bible mentions it too often - escapes the charges leveled against immediate imputation, one might consider one of its advocates.

Placaeus, a French theologian, tried to avoid arbitrariness, not by a realistic theory, but by asserting that mankind inherited a depraved nature from Adam, and on the basis of this depravity God adjudged them guilty. The Synod of Charenton in 1644, Greijdenus the realist, Shedd in America, and others not so attached to realism easily pointed out the flaw in the theory of mediate imputation. The question is obvious: On what basis does God cause degeneration in Adam's posterity? Or, as Shedd put it, "Why should the effect be imputed, and not the cause?" Placaeus thus did not escape arbitrariness; he merely located it in a different spot.

Since it seems impossible on any ground to escape arbitrary sovereignty, why should one try? Why not embrace it?<sup>7</sup> Berkouwer and Barth quote Polanus: "The reason for this truth [of imputation] is nothing other than the will of the Creator." Barth, and no doubt Berkouwer agrees, calls this a strange and bitter truth, but he also calls it indisputable. Indisputable truth, however, can be strange and bitter only to those who feel more comfortable with error than with truth.

In spite of Berkouwer's declaration that "federalism is unable to answer these questions in a satisfactory manner, the federalist is satisfied upon two grounds: first, the exegesis of Romans 5:12ff, and second, the concept of justice.

The subject of justice is doubtless a more profound theological and philosophical matter than the exegesis of a single passage'; but it is less detailed. The question is, What is justice, which acts are just and which are not, and does God's justice differ from ours? Human obligations to act justly can easily be defined by referring to the divine commandments. For man, stealing is unjust, so is murder, and any other infraction of the moral law. But what is divine justice? It cannot be the same as human justice because, for one thing, the Ten Commandments do not apply to God. God cannot steal, for he is the owner of all wealth. God cannot honor his

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<sup>7</sup> Parenthetical note. Perhaps a realist might be found or imagined who would say that since Adam is generic humanity, the sin of generic humanity (this realist's substitute for the Platonic Idea) is ipso facto, the sin of every man. 'This surely seems to avoid arbitrariness, but at an impossible price, for the Scripture describes Adam as an individual human being, not as a Platonic Idea, and his sin was a temporal act, not an eternal characteristic of an eternal idea.

father and mother; nor covet, and so on. Therefore, when we say that God is just, we use the predicate in a somewhat different sense from that by which it is predicated of men. This view, which frequently stimulates expressions of horror on the part of devout and pious saints, has been almost uniformly accepted by theologians who on other matters disagree considerably.

The solution must be that men are just, or unjust, as subject to the laws God imposes on them. But God is just in the sense of imposing these laws. If one asks, why is an act just, the answer must be, because God commanded it. But what answer can be given to the question, was God just in issuing this particular commandment?

Only two answers have been tried in the history of philosophy. Plato, especially in his Euthyphro, and Leibniz posited a principle of justice superior to God. Of course, Plato's Demiurge, maker of heaven and earth, was neither omnipotent nor sovereign. There was a World of Ideas above him, to which he owed moral conformity. The World of Ideas itself, the supreme reality, contained the Idea of justice, and can even be taken as a personal God; but the Demiurge, not the Ideas, was the maker of heaven and earth. With further Platonic scholarship, we have nothing to do at the moment. Leibniz, with his astounding theory of the best of all possible worlds, pictured God - to put it in modern terms - as looking over all the blueprints of worlds he had in his filing cabinet. Some were poor, some were better, and one was the best of all possible worlds. So God created our world on this plan. In such a view God is not sovereign; there is a principle of goodness and justice independent of his will and he must submit to it in order to be a good God.

Calvin and Descartes had a different view. For Descartes there is no "best of all possible" worlds. Any world that God might have created would have been good simply because God would have had created it. This present world is good for the same reason. Goodness depends on God's decision.

Maybe Descartes (died 1650) took this view from John Calvin (died 1564). In any case, Calvin wrote, "Augustine justly complains that it is an offense against God to inquire for any cause of things higher than his will" (Institutes, I, XIV, 1). Later, in two chapters or a whole book that should be repeatedly studied, he says, "The will of God is the highest rule of justice; so that what he wills must be considered just, for this very reason, because he wills it. When it is inquired therefore why the Lord did so, the answer must be, Because he would. But if you go further and ask why he so determined, you are in search of something greater and higher than the will of God, which can never be found" (III xxiii,2). Then he explodes the pretensions of those who try to solve the present problems by inventing a distinction between a decretive and a permissive will. Calvin remarks, "Here they recur to the distinction between will and permission, and insist that God permits the destruction of the impious but does not will it. But what reason shall we assign for his permitting it, but because it is his will?" (III, xxiii, 8; cf. III, xxiv, 14).

Similarly Zanchius in his Absolute Predestination says: "Whatever comes to pass, comes to pass by virtue, of this absolute omnipotent will of God, which is the primary and supreme cause of all things" (I, Position Six). "His will is the rule of all things. He did not therefore will such and such things because they were in themselves right ... but they are therefore equitable and right because he wills them ... Bucer likewise observes, 'God has no other motive for what he does than ipsa voluntas, his own mere will, which will is so far from being unrighteous that it is justice itself" (I, Position Seven) . And finally, "Whatever things God wills or does are not willed and done by him because they were in their own nature and previous to his willing them, just and right, or because from their intrinsic fitness he ought to will and do them; but they are therefore just, right, and proper because he, who is holiness itself, wills and does them" (V, Position Three).

These passages should be studied all the more careful because contemporary evangelicalism has so deteriorated from the doctrine of the Reformers that the latter seems strange now. There are still some, however, who hold to the Reformation principles.

There is one theme in Berkouwer that deserves explicit commendation. He excoriates the several theologians who, either through incompetence or, worse, through a cowardice to acknowledge the clear implications of their positions, take refuge in pseudo-pious protestations of humility and finite comprehension. In the sixteenth century, when such tremendous progress was being made, the absence of some distinctions that were later drawn is not surprising. Calvin himself cannot be blamed for not arriving at a clearer distinction between saving faith and assurance, nor for not going further toward the immediate imputation of Adam's sin than some now tantalizing references to Adam's being the "trustee" of human nature and the one who lost God's gifts not only for himself but also for others. However, after the distinction between imputed guilt and inherited depravity had been made, and after the Westminster Confession contrasted the guilt's being imputed with the corruption's being conveyed, a theologian must face the problem and give his opinion in clear language. He may fail through incompetence, but to evade is dishonest.