

The Reformed Pastor and Ecumenism

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I. Introduction

The Reformed pastor cannot escape confrontation with the modern ecumenical movement. Many of his fellow ministers will chide him for his lack of enthusiasm for this trend. He may even be called in question for his loyalty to Christ by many evangelical clergymen who profess purely biblical motivations for their cooperative efforts with non-evangelicals. What positive presentation may the Reformed minister give of the biblical view of ecumenism? *Is there such an ecumenism?*

It is the purpose of this chapter to survey the ecumenism of the Bible and to set it over against the concept of ecumenism advanced by so many in the modern church.

The biblical foundation for ecumenism goes back at least as far as Abraham. In sovereign grace God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees and formally made his covenant of grace with him. "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4). The world-church was founded in Abraham's tent. A "multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" will stand before the Lamb, "clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," because, like Abraham, they have believed in him in whom Abraham believed.

The story of ecumenicity is the story of what happened and what will happen between that lonely tent of Abraham and the worshiping multitude of the Book of Revelation. "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16, 17).

When he came into the world it was said of our Savior that he would “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). When he left the world he commanded his disciples to go “and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19, 20). Nothing can hinder the realization of the ecumenical church of Christ.

How sadly his disciples at first misunderstood his mission. But he opened their understanding so that they might grasp the nature of what he had come to do. It “behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (Luke 24:46). Having become one with Christ through faith in his death and resurrection, the disciples must go forth to preach “among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” “repentance and remission of sins” (Luke 24:47).

II. *The Day of Small Beginnings*

Look forward then ye saints of God to the day when that great multitude will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and then, having sung that song, will finally sing creation’s song: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4: 11). But even as you look forward, look backward too. Whence came all this multitude? How did they learn to repent of their sins? The answer is that “the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17). But whence then have they faith? Do men naturally have faith? They do not, you say. Men naturally, by virtue of their being made in the image of God, know him. But “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God . . . (Rom. 1:21). Men “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18). They “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator, who is blessed forever” (Rom. 1:25). “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Is it not true, therefore, that the “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14)? And is it not true that “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (II Cor. 4:4)?

Well then, in a world in which Satan has blinded the hearts of men lest they should believe, in a world in which men are dead in trespasses and sins and of themselves cannot believe, how did Christ prepare for himself this host whom no man can number?

The answer lies, of course, in the grace of God — the triune God of Scripture. God the Father so loved the world that he sent his Son to save the world. God the Son gives himself a ransom for many. “For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come

on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ . . .” (Gal. 3:13, 14a). God the Spirit regenerated the hearts of sinners so that they might receive the salvation wrought for them by Christ.

III. *The Outworking of Grace in History*

But watch now the outworking of the grace of the triune God in the course of redemptive history. Christ plants and then protects the faith of Abraham even in spite of Abraham’s own weakness and doubting. When he seeks for the fulfillment of the promise by means of human strategy, then Christ tells him that he will be the God of Isaac, not of Ishmael. True, upon Ishmael too there would be a blessing, but the promise was to Isaac, miraculously born. The ecumenical church is found only in the tent of Isaac as it had been found only in the tent of Abraham. The multitude that no man can number, from every nation, are born of Isaac as they are born of Abraham.

When through unbelief Abraham would use human strategy in order to become the father of many nations then he is told that Sarah, though old, shall have a son. When Abraham through unbelief would build his house upon Ishmael, then God told him to listen to Sarah and cast out the bondwoman with her son, “for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12). God thus separates unto himself a people for his own possession. Those who have not the faith of Abraham are not the true seed of Abraham. They shall not be found among that numberless company of the redeemed.

Moreover, as God would be the God of Isaac, not of Ishmael, so he would be the God of Jacob, not of Esau. When Abraham wanted to build the ecumenical church on *physical* descent as such, then Christ points him to the fact that only those who by grace believe are in that church. So also, when Isaac in turn would bless Esau, his older son, then Christ points out that he will be called the God of Jacob, not the God of Esau. Jacob is not better than is Esau. It is God’s electing grace alone that sets him apart in order that through him, rather than through Esau, the promises of God to Abraham are to be fulfilled.

It is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, who gathers to himself a people for his own possession. It is the true seed of Abraham, those who have the faith of Abraham, who are gathered round the throne of the Lamb.

Moreover, as it was not Ishmael but Isaac, not Esau but Jacob, so it is not the descendants of Jacob as such which are the true seed of Abraham. To be sure, the physical descendants of Jacob were the people of God. When Moses saw the multitude about him about to enter the promised land he did see in them the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise of God to Abraham (Deut. 1:10). Even so, when parting from them he pointed out to them that only those who lived like Abraham, in the obedience, the patience, and the hope of faith, would finally be numbered with the people of God. There was to be no toleration of unbelievers in the midst of the covenant people. And if many, or most, of the physical children of Israel reveal themselves as not having the faith of Abraham then the wrath of God will rest upon them and destroy them (Deut.

28:62, 63). It is not the nation as such, it is the “remnant” who are covenant-keepers in whom the nations of the world shall be blessed. The others shall be dispersed. Those, and those only, who *repent* of their unbelief will God gather again from among the nations in order to make them more numerous than their fathers (Deut. 30:2, 4, 5).

Neither the unbelief of the nations (Gen. 11) whom God permits to walk in their own ways, nor the unbelief of the descendants of Ishmael or of Esau, so near and yet so far from the covenant people, nor the unbelief of many of those who are the descendants of Isaac and of Jacob will prevent the Christ from gathering to himself his people whom he has come to save. Neither their common descent from Abraham nor their national heritage based on miraculous redemption from Egypt to Palestine, and in Palestine against the nations, was, as such, sufficient to furnish the binding power for the “people of God.” Only the sovereign grace of God would prevail. The truly ecumenical work of Christ, the King of the church, cannot be stopped. For *he is* the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). “For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (Eph. 2:14). Those who “were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12) are “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). Those who were “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), those who were “dead in sins” God hath “quickened” “together with Christ.” It is they, quickened together with Christ through his blood, who will be of that great host around the throne of the Lamb. Paul sums it up when he says: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). It is God himself through his Son, and the Son through his Spirit, “who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col. 1:13-20).

IV. Christ Gathers His Church

This Christ gathers his church, so that through the church he may save the world. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The great Shepherd of the sheep gathers his sheep. He gathers them through the work of his apostles and disciples as they proclaim the gospel of his grace. “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). At the time of Pentecost “all they that believed were together” (Acts 2:44). “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be

saved" (Acts 2:47). In great amazement Peter beholds that "on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 10: 45). And Paul, who could wish that he "were accursed from Christ" for the sake of his brethren, yet knows that "neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Rom. 9:7). Not "they which are the children of the flesh" but "the children of the promise, are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:8). "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Thus he magnifies his office as the apostle to the Gentiles. For by God's mercy they too have "attained the righteousness which is of faith" (Rom. 9:30).

When the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, went out to preach the reconciliation of all things through the cross and resurrection of Christ, he soon met with opposition. He speaks of this opposition in his letter to the Galatians. The Judaizers were quite ready to accept the gospel Paul preached if only he would include Ishmael and Esau among the heirs of the covenant. Like the Sanhedrin before them they were willing to think of Jesus Christ as one of a class of Saviors. Was not this true ecumenism? How can there be true ecumenism if some members of the covenant, professing to be the seed of Abraham, are excluded? Did they not bear the sign and the seal of the covenant in their flesh?

Paul's answer is unequivocal. He does not apologize for his exclusiveness. A true ecumenism requires the exclusion from the church of Christ of those who have not the faith of Abraham. Only they "who are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). To have the external sign of membership in the covenant is itself no guarantee that one is a true child of Abraham. The Judaizers failed to realize that only they are Christ's who are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29). "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). They who believe this for themselves are of the seed of Abraham. "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman but of the free" (Gal. 4:31). "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:2).

The Judaizers represented an ecumenism not based exclusively upon the death and resurrection of Christ. This false ecumenism is in reality exclusivist and therefore sectarian. Says Paul: "They zealously affect you, but not well; yea they would exclude you, that you might affect them" (Gal. 4:17). The Judaizers first tempted the Galatian Christians with their message of tolerance. They would allow both those who believed in salvation through grace and those who believed in salvation through good works to be members in good and regular standing in the church. But after having attained equality of status for themselves, they tried to push out those who believed in salvation by grace.

There is nothing strange in this. Biblical ecumenism is based on salvation through grace alone. And if a church is truly a church that preaches salvation by grace alone, then it will of necessity not receive those who believe in salvation by works. This does not mean that a truly ecumenical-minded church will judge the hearts of men. It will judge only by the open confession of men. But when men deny that they expect a place in the great company of the redeemed at last *only* because they trust in Christ who bore their

sins for them upon the accursed tree, then they exclude themselves and must be taken at their word.

On the other hand, non-biblical ecumenism is based upon the idea of salvation through human merit. And a church that is based upon the idea of salvation by human merit will, of necessity, exclude those who profess salvation by grace alone. The tolerance of non-biblical-minded ecumenism does not go so far as to allow for the inclusion of those who believe in salvation by grace alone. No doubt those who believe in salvation by grace alone would be tolerated in a church controlled by the non-biblical principle of ecumenism only if such people would keep silent. But those who believe in salvation by grace alone cannot keep silent. If they did keep silent, they would sin against their own deepest convictions. Paul the apostle was not silent in relation to the Judaizers. How then could those who trusted in circumcision, i.e., in salvation by works, tolerate one in their midst who would daily tell them that Christ would profit them nothing? How could they tolerate one who, in effect, told them that they have in the nature of the case denied Christ in the basic intent of his work of salvation for men?

The issue, then, would seem to be quite clear. No Christian can be opposed to ecumenism. Those for whom Christ died come from every nation and kindred and tribe. Those whose whole hope of escape from the eternal wrath to come and of entrance into the presence of Christ is the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus, are Christ's body. They are his people whom he came to redeem. He prayed for them before he left this earth: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:16-18).

A. The Early Church

When the early church went out into the world, armed with the truth through which alone true unity could be effected, they, as well as Paul, met with opposition. From its earliest history the church was confronted with those who already had their own principle of unity. The natural man, anxious to repress the truth about himself lest he should have to confess his own guilt, hastens to construct his own principle of unity. According to this principle all "good people" everywhere manifest goodness and will receive at last whatever good Reality may contain. No one is under the wrath to come because no one has transgressed the law of love of his Creator.

Here, then, is non-biblical ecumenism. On its basis every man participates in the principle of ultimate of being, and ultimate being is good. Whatever falls short of this good may be called evil. This evil will, it is hoped, eventually fade away into non-being.

The Greek philosophers have given classic expression to this non-biblical ecumenism. Aristotle thought of God as an abstract, universal principle or form. Correlative to this idea of pure form was the idea of pure matter. All things in heaven and on earth, including man, were interpreted in terms of this form-matter scheme of thought. On this

view there was no such thing as a creation of the world. On this view man was not created in the image of God and did not, because he could not, sin against God. So far as he had reality, man was participant in the universal principle of reality called God. So far as man had any individuality, he had derived it from the principle of pure matter, pure, meaningless contingency.

This form-matter scheme contains a basic dilemma. So far as man had any intelligible awareness of himself as an individual it was in terms of the principle of reality or rationality that devoured his individuality. The ethical separateness of men from one another was not, on this Greek form-matter scheme, a result of human sin but of human finitude. And their unity, if it was to be attained, had to be attained by their absorption into God as eternal being. Thus salvation or redemption was impossible for men. On the one hand they did not need it since they were not sinners. On the other hand, if they were redeemed or saved from sin, they could not be aware of it. For in that case their individuality would be lost in God.

By the grace of God the church did gradually learn to set the biblical idea of ecumenicity over against the non-biblical one. Notably in the Chalcedon Creed those who believed in and worked with a non-biblical principle of ecumenicity were excluded from the church. Both the Eutychians and the Nestorians, working as they did with the Greek form-matter scheme, would, if they had been successful, have disfigured the face of Christ beyond recognition. But the church excluded them in order that the Christ, as true God and true man, might go forth in his church-gathering work.

B. *The Church Reformed*

As time went on, however, the church no longer loved God enough to exclude those who sought salvation by works. She sought for a synthesis between the biblical and the Greek principle of ecumenism. And having wrought out such a synthesis she excluded those who, like Paul, spoke out for salvation by grace alone. A non-biblical inclusivism led, in the case of the Church of Rome, to an equally unbiblical exclusivism.

The Christ of the Scriptures therefore continued his gathering together of his people through the Reformers and their followers. To be sure, in their midst too the principle of unbelief and therefore of schism and false separation continued to work. But, as has often been recalled, Calvin would have crossed seven seas in order to bring together all those who believed and trusted in the Christ of the Scriptures. Many of his followers down to the present would follow him in this respect. They think of all those who believe in salvation by grace alone through Christ's blood and righteousness as belonging to the church of Christ. They would call upon all their fellow Christians to join them to form the church according to the prescription of the Scriptures. They would be patient and tolerant of the many shortcomings and failures of all the children of God, remembering always that they are themselves greater sinners than are others. But they would, even so, always be mindful of the fact that the sacrament of the Lord must not be profaned by their own adoption of a non-biblical inclusivism. This is essentially the *Protestant*

position on ecumenism, or perhaps we should say, the historic Protestant view of ecumenism.

And this historic Protestant conception of ecumenism may now be compared with the modern Protestant conception of ecumenism.

V. Modern Protestant Ecumenism

For purposes of comparison, we refer first to an article by Dr. Adolf Visser't Hooft in the book entitled *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* on "The Word 'Ecumenical' — Its History and Use."¹ Dr. Visser't Hooft performed a genuine service for us all when in this article he described the various meanings of the word "ecumenical." We limit ourselves to the three meanings which, as Dr. Hooft says, "are modern developments." These three meanings are:

- a. "those pertaining to the world-wide missionary outreach of the church,"
- b. "those pertaining to the relations between and unity of two or more Churches (or of Christians of various confessions)," and
- c. "that quality or attitude which expresses the consciousness of and desire for Christian unity."²

Both the modern and the biblical forms of ecumenism naturally agree on the missionary responsibility of the church. They also agree on the fact that, so far as the principle of the gospel allows, various denominations should unite. And they agree that such union can come about only if there is a genuine desire for unity on the part of all the believers in Christ.

The difference between the two types of ecumenism makes its appearance, however, in mutually exclusive conceptions of the gospel. However difficult it is for us sinful men to do so, we must yet speak to one another of this difference. Let us by the grace of the Holy Spirit speak the truth but speak it in love. Christ our High Priest prayed for our sanctification but he prayed that it might take place by the Word and added "Thy Word is Truth."

As one who with the Reformers would follow Paul as Paul followed Christ, I cannot think that the modern ecumenical movement is based upon salvation by grace alone. Only a lengthy review of the development of modern thought, and, in particular, the development of the modern idea of the church, could fully substantiate this judgment. In the space available we can mention only a few of the high spots of this development.

¹ "The Word 'Ecumenical'—Its History and Use," *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill (London, 1954), p. 735.

² *Ibid.*

A. Immanuel Kant

The modern Protestant ecumenical movement is, of course, based upon the modern view of the church. And this modern view of the church would seem to be a synthesis of the doctrine of grace with the freedom-nature scheme, as this has found its first major expression in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. As Roman Catholicism sought for a synthesis between Christianity and the Greek form-matter scheme, so modern Protestantism seeks for a synthesis between Christianity and the modern nature-freedom scheme. This modern freedom-nature scheme is not essentially different from the ancient form-matter scheme. Both hold to a principle of unification of all men by virtue of human character, i.e., by good works. Therefore modern ecumenism has a non-biblical principle of inclusion and an equally non-biblical principle of exclusion. The modern ecumenical movement is indeed moved by the spirit of unity. It frequently recalls the prayer of Christ that all his followers might be one, but it tends to forget that Christ prayed only for oneness *in the truth*. Or, if the idea of truth is brought into the picture, it is forgotten that the truth is existential in that it requires us to listen to Christ when he said: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him" (John 6:56). Those who implicitly or explicitly deny the substitutionary atonement of Christ in history should be given no place in his church.

It is almost too well known to need recounting that Kant reduced the biblical doctrine of Christ and his grace to a moralistic scheme in which man himself makes the ultimate distinctions between right and wrong. In Kant's total outlook on life there are no sinners who need grace and there is no Christ through whom grace has been given to man. For Kant God is a projection of the ideals that man, as autonomous, projects for himself. Man is said to know nothing of God. If man is to speak of God at all, he must do so in *ethical, i.e., non-intellectual, terms*. Man's independent moral consciousness may postulate a God who will, on the recommendation of man, effect a final triumph of right over wrong. And Jesus Christ is the archetype of the right so far as the ideal of right has ever found expression in history.

B. Friedrich Schleiermacher

The reason for speaking of Kant is that he has largely influenced the movement of modern theology.

Friedrich Schleiermacher is the "father of modern theology." True, he did not like Kant's moralism. For Schleiermacher, in Christianity "everything is related to redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth."³ Schleiermacher wants to be truly Christological in his approach to all theology. But with Karl Barth he may assert: "Jesus of Nazareth fits desperately badly into this theology of the historical 'composite life' of humanity, a 'composite life' which is really after all fundamentally self-sufficient. . . ."⁴ For

³ *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh, 1928), p. 52.

⁴ *Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl* (New York, 1959), p. 313.

Schleiermacher, our redemption is not based upon a transition from wrath to grace, effected for sinners in history through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Schleiermacher, human nature has inherent within it the power of taking the divine restorative element into itself. Schleiermacher says that

if only the *possibility* of this resides in human nature, so that the actual implanting therein of the divine element must be purely a divine and therefore an eternal act, nevertheless the temporal appearance of this act in one particular Person must at the same time be regarded as an action of human nature, grounded in its original constitution and prepared for by all its past history, and accordingly as the highest development of its spiritual power (even if we grant that we could never penetrate so deep into those innermost secrets of the universal spiritual life as to be able to develop this general conviction into a definite perception). Otherwise it could only be explained as an arbitrary divine act that the restorative divine element made its appearance precisely in Jesus, and not in some other person.⁵

Here, then, we have the foundation for Schleiermacher's idea of the ecumenical church. The personality-forming activity of human nature "wholly accounts for the personality of Jesus." In a deeper sense even than is true in the case of Roman Catholic theology, the church is for Schleiermacher the continuation of the incarnation, and the Redeemer himself springs from the personality-forming activity of the cosmos. Therefore, according to Schleiermacher, all men are inherently in the church. All churches can readily unite on the basis of the ideals that human personality makes for itself, and the missionary task of the church is already accomplished in advance of the coming of the missionary to foreign soil.

C. *Neo-Orthodoxy*

Of even more importance for a comparison between the historic Protestant and the modern Protestant idea of ecumenism is neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodox theology has given great emphasis to the ecumenical movement. But we must be specific and speak more particularly of the theology of Karl Barth.

Basic to all that Barth teaches is the idea that in Christ God is wholly revealed and at the same time wholly hidden. In the Christ-event the full relation between God and man is expressed. If Schleiermacher's theology is Christological, Barth's theology is even more outspokenly so. But the question is whether the Christ of the Scriptures fits any better into Barth's theology than he does in that of Schleiermacher. And to ask this question is, in effect, to ask also whether Barth's theology is really a theology of grace, like that of the Reformers, or is a theology of salvation by character, like that of Schleiermacher.

⁵ Schleiermacher, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

One thing is clear, namely, that if Barth's theology is a theology of grace, then, on Barth's own estimate, the Reformers, and in particular Calvin, had no true theology of grace at all.

According to Barth grace is inherently both sovereign and universal. It is sovereign in that it is God's freedom in Christ to turn wholly into the opposite of himself, and as such enter into the realm of pure contingency with man. According to Barth, Calvin had no eye for this true, biblical idea of sovereignty, inasmuch as he believed that God is bound by his revelation in Jesus Christ as a direct and directly identifiable revelation of himself. According to Barth, Calvin had no eye for the fact that though revelation is historical, history can never be revelational.

Again, says Barth, as grace is inherently sovereign so it is inherently universal. The original relation of every man is that of grace which is his in Christ. Calvin had no eye for this true universality of grace as he had no eye for the sovereignty of grace. Calvin did not see that the highest attribute in God is that of grace. Therefore he did not see that man's offense against the holiness and righteousness of God can never separate him from the grace of God. According to Barth, Calvin did not realize that reprobation is only the penultimate while election in grace is always the ultimate word of God to all men. Man's atonement precedes his existence in history. Thus, Barth's "purified supralapsarianism" involves the "ontological impossibility" of sin.⁶

On this view of grace, the empirical separation of churches is merely evidence of the fact that in history, human personality can never fully realize its own ideals. On this view the missionary task of the church is that of informing all men everywhere that they are in Christ because they have always been in Christ.

Perhaps we should now make contrast between the Christ of Schleiermacher and the Christ of Barth. Barth says that Christ has an uneasy place in the theology of Schleiermacher. But his remedy is to include all reality in Christ. For Barth the Christ-event as Act includes all reality. The unification of all things in Christ is of the essence of man as such. Ideally every member is a member of this unity even though empirically no one will ever fully be.

With Professor G. C. Berkouwer of the University of Amsterdam we must say that for Barth "a transition from wrath to grace in the historical sphere is no longer thinkable. It is clear that *this* transition is excluded. . . ."⁷ Such a theology, as is obvious, wipes out all such boundaries as were made by Paul between those who believed in salvation by grace and those who believed in salvation by works.

The neo-orthodox view of the church is therefore not basically different from Schleiermacher's view of the church. Nor is it, as has been definitely shown by such

⁶ Ibid., p. 401.

⁷ *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, 1954), pp. 233-234.

theologians as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Hans Kung, basically different from the Roman Catholic idea of the church. The Roman Catholic synthesis of Aristotle, and Christ is not basically different from the Schleiermacher-Barth synthesis of Kant and Christ. And as G. Hoshino, the Buddhist philosopher, points out, the gospel as Barth interprets it is readily acceptable to his sect of Buddhism.⁸ Why then should not the modern ecumenical movement, so far as it is informed and directed by neo-orthodox theology, proceed first to the unification of all "Protestant" churches, then to the unification of the Protestant and the Roman Catholic churches, in order finally to join forces with all men, of all religious convictions, to strive for the perfection of human personality according to a common ideal, in which such figures as Buddha and Christ may be thought of as personifications?

An ecumenical movement thus initiated by a church in which there is no transition from wrath to grace in history may expect to find support from a "Christian historian" such as Arnold Toynbee.

According to Toynbee, history from time to time produces originative and noble personalities. These originating personalities seek to lead the human race to ever-higher heights of nobility and selfless love. The passion of Christ was "the culminating and crowning experience of the suffering of human souls in successive failures in the enterprise of secular civilization."⁹ It was in Christianity that the comprehensive character of the spiritual law "proclaimed by Aeschylus" was realized, to the effect that "through suffering learning comes." The "doctrine of redemption is the theological way of expressing the revelation that God is love."¹⁰

Here then is the principle of self-sacrificial love, assumed to be inherent in all men in greater or lesser degree, that seems to be that which, in the eyes of present-day ecumenical theologians and historians of culture, will eventually unite all things on heaven and on earth. This God of love is the God of Ishmael and of Esau, no less than the God of Isaac and of Jacob. All men are ideally one in this God by virtue of their manhood. None of them will, because none of them can, suffer the righteous indignation of God, for love or grace is always higher than righteousness.

All men are welcome in this church, that is, all except those who speak, because they must speak, of him who bore the wrath of God in their place upon the cross.

Dr. Georgia Harkness calls such men "dissident fundamentalists." Karl Barth tells them there *can* be no finished work of salvation accomplished in history. Toynbee calls them to repentance from their pride, in the name of the universal cosmic principle of love and in the name of the sacred missionary task of true human personality.

⁸ *Antwort* (Zollison-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag Ag., 1956).

⁹ Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity and Civilization* (London, 1940), p. 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

If Christianity is presented to people in that traditional arrogant spirit it will be rejected in the name of the sacredness of human personalities — a truth to which the whole human race is now awakening under the influence of modern western civilization, which originally learned that truth from the Christianity that modern man has been rejecting.¹¹

Yet those who follow Luther and Paul, seeking humility, knowing that what they have, they have received by grace alone, must, in their turn, call for repentance. They must call for repentance lest men abide forever, as now they are, under the wrath of the holy God. They must call for repentance so that men may have a true bond of fellowship with Christ through his righteousness freely imputed unto them and made manifest in his resurrection from the dead. They must call upon men not to forsake the ecumenical ideal, but to build it upon the transition from wrath to grace effected for sinners in the death and resurrection of Christ. Constrained by the love of Christ for lost sinners, they must proclaim redemption through Christ's blood and righteousness to all men everywhere. Only thus can the true and the whole body of Christ be built up, and that numberless host of the vision of John in the last book of Scripture be brought together. May God give all of us the grace to seek forgiveness for our sins through him who was made a curse for us and then enable us to engage in our true ecumenical task.

VI. General Conclusion

In this volume we have sought to give the Reformed pastor an insight into the main movements of modern philosophy and theology. This has, we trust, given him a deeper insight into the fact that no half-hearted apologetic will meet the need of the hour. The Arminian type of apologetics, so largely used, even by Reformed theologians, is unable to set off the full God and Christ-centered theology of Scripture over against the man-centered theology of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. Only a fully biblical and therefore fully Reformed theology and apologetic can meet the need of the hour.

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¹¹ Christianity Among the Religions of the World (New York, 1957), p. 99.

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