

# AN ANSWER TO DAVID SILVERSIDES

Responses to Appeals Made to the  
*Westminster Standards* and  
Westminster Divines in Support of the  
Well-Meant Gospel Offer



HERMAN C. HANKO



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The following was a response to an address given at the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland Ministers' Conference in 1993. The title of Rev. Silversides' speech was "The Doctrine of Conversion in the *Westminster Standards*."

Professor Herman Hanko, the author of this response, was ordained into the ministry of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1955. After pastoring congregations in Michigan and Iowa, in 1965 he was appointed professor of New Testament and Church History in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Grandville, Michigan. He served in this capacity till his retirement in 2001. In his retirement he remains busy teaching several seminary courses, leading Bible classes, preaching in different churches and writing. Books he has written include *Mysteries of the Kingdom*, an exposition of the Parables of Jesus, *Far Above Rubies*, a book for Christian women, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, a doctrinal history of the PRC, *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace*, a defense of the doctrine of the covenant, *When You Pray*, a biblical treatment of the subject of prayer, *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, an interesting biographical account of the main figures of church history, *Ready to Give an Answer*, a treatment of the history of the doctrine of the covenant in the PRC, *Justified Unto Liberty*, a commentary on Galatians, *Faith Made Perfect*, a commentary on James, *A Pilgrims Manuel*, a commentary on I Peter. These, and other titles are available at [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org) and [www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk).

Scriptures cited are taken from the King James (Authorized) Version of the Bible.

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*"But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14)*

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## Introduction

Ordinarily I do not take the time to answer speeches which have not been published. This speech must form an exception—partly because it has been widely circulated, partly because it contains attacks on my views and the views of my beloved mentor, Rev. Herman Hoeksema; partly because criticisms have been made in it of the British Reformed Fellowship<sup>1</sup>—an organization dear to my heart, and partly because the speech contains misrepresentations which must be corrected.

The speech was given under the title, “The Doctrine of Conversion in the *Westminster Standards*.” It contains many truths with which I heartily agree, and I shall not take the time to mention the numerous areas in which I not only concur with, but heartily endorse the positions of the speaker.

But there are other areas of great importance, in which Rev. Silversides and I disagree. This in itself is understandable. But before these areas of disagreement are carefully set forth, our respective positions ought also to be carefully defined. It is in the interests of defining these areas of disagreement that I write this response.

## On “Eternal Justification”

The first such area of disagreement which emerges is to be found under the title of “faith and justification.” Rev. Silversides takes issue with Rev. Herman Hoeksema and me in this area. He correctly describes the view of the Protestant Reformed Churches as that of “eternal justification,” and it is with this view that Rev. Silversides disagrees.

While it is not altogether clear what the position of Rev. Silversides is on this issue, he quite clearly denies eternal justification and seems rather to hold to the idea that God changes His mind with respect to His attitude towards His people. I frankly admit that the point is not clear to me. However, Rev. Silversides says at one point in his speech, “We speak to men who

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<sup>1</sup> The British Reformed Fellowship was founded in 1990 by a group of Reformed Christians concerned for the defence of the Historic Reformed Faith in the British Isles. For more information, see [www.britishreformed.org](http://www.britishreformed.org).

are under the wrath of God.” And it is precisely this truth which “affects the urgency of preaching.” In another connection, Rev. Silversides speaks of the fact that Herman Hoeksema has a wrong view of God’s immutability.

It would seem from this that Rev. Silversides holds to the idea that God, at one point, looks upon the righteous in wrath; and, at another point, God looks upon the righteous in favor. Thus God changes in His attitude towards His people at that point where they accept the offers of the gospel by faith.

How Rev. Silversides harmonizes this idea with God’s fundamental immutability I do not know. Surely Scripture teaches God’s attribute of immutability: “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6).

On this point I concur wholeheartedly with the *Westminster Confession* and mean nothing more by “eternal justification” than what this confession teaches:

God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.<sup>2</sup>

That they experience the wrath of God in their sins remains true. Again, the *Westminster Confession* puts it well:

God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified: and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* 11.4, in *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture-Proofs at Large: Together with The Sum of Saving Knowledge ... Covenants, National and Solemn League; Acknowledgment of Sins, and Engagement of Duties; Directories for Public and Family Worship; Form of Church Government, etc.* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), pp. 69-70.

<sup>3</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* 11.5, in *The Confession of Faith ...*, p. 70.

## Can the Unregenerate Have “Conviction of Sin”?

Turning to the question of “faith and the conviction of sin,” Rev. Silversides expresses disagreement with me when I am quoted as saying, “Conviction of sin is no guarantee of ultimate salvation,” and, “conviction of sin is not confined” to the elect. But in setting forth his own views on the matter, he makes statements with which no one can disagree. He emphatically asserts that an unregenerate man can desire happiness, and that this same unregenerate man desires deliverance from the *consequences* of sin. He is not, however, capable of wanting deliverance from *sin*.

With all this I wholeheartedly agree. What I argue against is the idea that the unregenerate man is capable of seeing sin as *sin against God*, of sorrowing for it *before God*, of showing a desire for *Christ*, of longing for blessedness *in Christ*. This is expressly condemned by the *Canons of Dordrecht* as Arminian:

[We reject the errors of those] who teach that the unregenerate man ... can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God ...<sup>4</sup>

Does Rev. Silversides agree?

## “General and Conditional” Promises

It is when Rev. Silversides begins his discussion of “faith and the covenant” that one becomes aware of sharp and important differences.

Rev. Silversides claims that the *Westminster Confession* 7.3 teaches that the promises of the covenant are unconditional to the elect, but that the promises of the covenant are conditional to all who hear the gospel.<sup>5</sup> I do not find

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<sup>4</sup> *Canons of Dort*, 3–4, Rejection of Errors 4, in *The Three Forms of Unity: Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession & the Canons of Dort* (South Holland, Illinois: The Evangelism Committee of the Protestant Reformed Church, 1983), p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> The article reads as follows: “Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace: whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising

this teaching in *Westminster Confession* 7.3; I find, rather, that the article teaches that the covenant of grace includes two elements: 1) the command to all men to believe in Christ that they may be saved; and, 2) the particular and unconditional promise “to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” With this teaching of Westminster, I have no disagreement. In fact, the same truth is taught in the *Canons of Dordrecht*, in 2.5:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.<sup>6</sup>

But this is not yet the end of the matter.

### “Condition” and the De Wolf Controversy

Rev. Silversides sharply criticizes the British Reformed Fellowship for holding to the *Westminster Confession*, but for denying that faith is a “condition”—and in this connection, he badly and inexcusably misrepresents the position of the Protestant Reformed Churches. He claims, in his speech, that the Protestant Reformed Churches condemned one of their ministers for preaching, “If you believe, you will be saved; if you don’t believe you will be damned.” I cannot understand how Rev. Silversides can be so careless in his recounting of history. I myself have said from the pulpit on numerous occasions the very statement which Rev. Silversides claims we do not believe. In fact, worse yet, the very statement itself is almost a quotation from Scripture (Rom. 10:9), and we are not so bereft of our senses that we would condemn someone for quoting Scripture.

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to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe” (*The Confession of Faith* ... p. 46).

<sup>6</sup> *Canons* 2.5, in *The Three Forms* ..., p. 37.



Rev. Silversides refers to a controversy in our churches in the early 1950s, in which controversy a minister was condemned and ultimately suspended from office for teaching heresy.<sup>7</sup> But that heresy was not: “If you believe, you will be saved.” That heresy was: “God promises to every one of you that if you believe, you will be saved.” That is quite different. The statement teaches (and perhaps Rev. Silversides agrees with that teaching) that God’s promise comes as a promise to everyone who hears the gospel, but that it is a conditional promise, the fulfilment of which is dependent upon faith. It is a *general* and *conditional* promise which our churches have condemned as Arminian.

The reason is clear to any thinking man. Does God actually promise salvation to a reprobate man? If He does, God promises something which He never fulfils; and the promise becomes a farce. I mock a man without legs if I promise him \$1000 if he walks a mile.

If it is said: “Yes, but faith is the condition,” then the burning question is: Is faith a *part of* the promise (as the *Westminster* teaches in 7.3), or is faith a condition *to* the promise? It is absurd that God would say to a totally depraved sinner: “I promise you eternal life if I will give you faith to believe.” A general promise to all makes faith the work of man.

The *command* to believe in Christ comes to all; the promise is particular and unconditional to believers.

But does not the *Westminster Confession* use the term “condition”? Indeed it does. But Rev. Silversides ought to know that the term “condition” in the *Westminster Confession*, and as it was used by Presbyterian and Reformed divines for centuries, means “necessary means.” Faith is the necessary and God-given *means* of salvation. It is the means of salvation in order that the great salvation God gives us in Christ may become our actual experience already in this life. Faith is the necessary means, for faith is the bond that unites us to Christ and makes us partakers of Christ and all His benefits.

If the word “condition” is used in this sense, no one has any objection. But faith as a condition to a general promise makes faith the work of man. It is another question whether, in the light of today’s rampant Arminianism, we ought to use the word “condition” at all. It is not found in Scripture, and

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<sup>7</sup> On De Wolf and the controversies surrounding this period, see Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth’s Sake* (Grand Rapids: RFPA, 2000), pp. 200ff. This publication can be ordered in the UK at the following address: <https://cprc.co.uk/product/for-thy-truths-sake/>

it is not found in the *Three Forms of Unity*, except in the mouths of the Arminians.

But the main point of this speech of Rev. Silversides is found in the last part where he discusses “the warrant of faith.”

## “Offer”

After asking the question, “What is the warrant of faith?” he rejects several ideas as unsuitable and untenable. He concludes by saying that the warrant of faith is “the free offer of the gospel to sinners as such.”

The burden of much of his speech is to prove that the *Westminster Standards* teach such a free offer of the gospel. Let us be clear on the point. Rev. Silversides specifically rejects the notion that the word “offer” means “to exhibit” or “to present”—which is, by the way, the precise meaning of the Latin term *offere*.<sup>8</sup> He, by implication, means to say that the term “offer” expresses God’s willingness and desire to save all who hear the gospel, and that, indeed, this is an overture of mercy which comes to all sinners in the form of an invitation and which necessarily includes in it the idea of common grace.

It is not my purpose to argue the issue. I have done that in other places and it is clear that Rev. Silversides knows that I reject out of hand his interpretation of the offer of the gospel.

What is important is the question whether the *Westminster Standards* teach the view of the offer set forth by Rev. Silversides. I have argued in another place<sup>9</sup> that this is not the case.

But let us examine Rev. Silversides’ lines of argumentation.

He has various lines of argumentation. We can combine them into two or three separate points.

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<sup>8</sup> For a collection of quotes from various Reformed theologians who verify the meaning of “*offere*,” see the following page: <https://cprc.co.uk/articles/meaningoffer>.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the series of articles in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, entitled “The History of the Free Offer”—recently compiled into a book and published by the RFPA, entitled *Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer*, and can be purchased in the UK at the following address: <https://cprc.co.uk/product/corrupting-the-word-of-god/>.

*The Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*

His first line of argumentation is that the minutes of the Westminster Assembly teach a divine favour for all. He refers specifically to the minutes in sessions 844, 873, and 753. His point is that the minutes clearly show that when the *Westminster Standards* use the term “offer,” they use it in the sense in which *he* believes it: a *gracious favour of God according to which God seeks the salvation of all men and invites them to come to Christ*.

In considering this evidence, it is important, first of all, to remember the fact that the propositions stated in those minutes were not indicative of the view of the Assembly itself, but were *propositions put forward for debate*. It is, therefore, worthwhile to compare the pertinent articles in the minutes<sup>10</sup> with the actual articles in the *Westminster Standards*.

In the minutes of Session 844, held on Monday morning, we read the following:

The Assembly proceeded in debate of the Catechism, and upon debate it was

*Resolved* upon the Q., These two questions and answers,

‘Q. Do all men equally partake of the benefits of Christ? A. Although from Christ some common favours redound to all mankind, and some special privileges to the visible church, yet none partake of the principal benefits of his mediation but only such as are members of the church invisible.

‘Q. What common favours redound from Christ to all mankind? A. Besides much forbearance and many supplies for this life, which all mankind receive from Christ as Lord of all, they by him are made capable of having salvation tendered to them by the gospel, and are under such dispensations of

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<sup>10</sup> The following quotes are taken from *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, edited by Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874).

providence and operations of the Spirit as lead to repentance,'—  
shall stand for debate in order to the Catechism.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting that when these two questions were submitted to the Assembly proper for debate, the Assembly recommitted the matter to the committee. Apparently, these formulations were not satisfactory. In fact, the Assembly not only recommitted the matter, but instructed the committee not to deal with these matters until the commissioners from the Church of Scotland could also be present. In addition to that, the committee was reorganized and several men were added to it.<sup>12</sup>

The final formulation of the recommitted matters is found in *Minutes*, Session 873.<sup>13</sup> This formulation was agreed upon by the Assembly and is found in the *Larger Catechism*, Q&A 57-58:

*Q. 57. What benefits hath Christ procured by his mediation?*

*A.* Christ, by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace.

*Q. 58. How do we come to be made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured?*

*A.* We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured, by the application of them unto us, which is the work especially of God the Holy Ghost.<sup>14</sup>

Notice that the whole idea of common benefits for all was specifically rejected.

In Session 753, we have the following:

The Assembly proceeded in the debate of the Catechism, and upon debate it was

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, fn. 1, p. 369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>14</sup> *Larger Catechism* 57-58, in *The Confession of Faith ...*, p. 204.

*Resolved* upon the Q., ‘Q. What is it to believe in Christ? A. To believe in Christ is to receive according to God’s offer, resting on him alone for pardon and all grace and salvation.’ *Resolved* upon the Q., ‘Q. What ground of warrant have you, being a sinner, to believe in Christ? A. The ground of my believing in Christ is God’s offer of Him in His word to me as well as to any other man, and His commanding me to believe in Him, as well as to believe or obey any other thing in His word.’<sup>15</sup>

The sum of both these questions and answers was formulated by the Assembly in quite a different way. It is found in the *Larger Catechism*, Q&A 72:

*Q. 72. What is justifying faith?*

*A.* 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,<sup>16</sup> for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.<sup>17</sup>

Rev. Silversides also refers to Session 873. The section referred to reads:

... *Q.* Are all they saved by Christ who live within the visible church and hear the gospel? *A.* Although the visible church ... do enjoy many special favours and privileges whereby it is distinguished from other societies in the world, and the gospel

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<sup>15</sup> *Minutes*, p. 309.

<sup>16</sup> This expression “held forth” is the term word “offer.”

<sup>17</sup> *Larger Catechism* 57, in *The Confession of Faith ...*, pp. 216-217.

where it cometh doth tender salvation by Christ to all, testifying that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excludeth none that come unto him; yet none do or can truly come unto Christ, or are saved by him, but only the members of the invisible church, which is the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be, gathered into one under Christ their head.<sup>18</sup>

The crucial word here is the word “tender.” It is obvious that here, too, the word does not mean a well-meant offer, but a *setting forth*, an *exhibiting* of Christ as the One in Whom is full and free salvation. This is evident from the remainder of the article.

But this point is proved from the *Minutes* themselves.

The minutes of Sessions 522 and 523 are especially interesting and we recommend that they be read in their totality. But in the course of the debate held during these sessions, Calamy, a member of the Davenant School, argued: “God did intend in giving of Christ, and Christ in giving of Himself, did intend to put all men in a state of salvation in case they do believe.”<sup>19</sup> In response to this, Gillespie said: “I cannot understand how there can be such a universal love of God to mankind as is maintained. Those that will say it must needs deny the absolute reprobation.”<sup>20</sup> And, in the same debate, Rutherford added: “All the argument comes to this: there can be no truth in this proposition except this be first granted, that Christ died in some sense [for all, HH] ... I deny this connection ... be[cause] it holds as well in election, justification, as in redemption; if he believe, he is as well elected and justified as redeemed ... [God’s] love is a restricted special love ... It is actual saving love, therefore not a general love.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Minutes*, p. 393.

<sup>19</sup> *Minutes*, p. 152.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 158.

*The Directory of Public Worship*

Secondly, Rev. Silversides appeals to the *Directory of Public Worship* in support of his contention. The pertinent part is under the subheading, “Of Public Prayer before the Sermon”:

After reading of the Word, (and singing of the psalm,) the minister who is to preach, is to endeavour to get his own and his hearers hearts to be rightly affected with their sins, that they may all mourn in sense thereof before the Lord, and hunger and thirst after the grace of God in Jesus Christ, by proceeding to a more full confession of sin, with shame and holy confusion of face, and to call upon the Lord to this effect:

To acknowledge our great sinfulness, First ... by reason of actual sins ... not only out of ignorance and infirmity, but also more presumptuously, against the light of our minds, checks of our consciences, and motions of his own Holy Spirit to the contrary, so that we have no cloak for our sins; yea not only despising the riches of God’s goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, but standing out against many invitations and offers of grace in the gospel; not endeavouring, as we ought, to receive Christ into our hearts by faith, or to walk worthy of him in our lives.<sup>22</sup>

Rev. Silversides apparently refers to the statement, “... standing out against many invitations and offers of grace in the gospel.” That this cannot possibly refer to a well-meant offer is clear from the following considerations. First, the *Directory* gives instruction for congregational prayers which are to be uttered within the *church of Christ*. It is the *church* praying. Secondly, the guidance for such prayers is to bring the worshipping church to a confession of sin by which they humble themselves before God. Thirdly, it is

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<sup>22</sup> *The Directory for the Public Worship of God, in The Confession of Faith ...*, pp. 482-483.

clear, therefore, that the invitations and offers of the gospel refer to the proclamation of the gospel in which Christ is set forth, a gospel which even God's people often despise and against which they stand. To quote this as proof of the well-meant offer is to tear it out of its context of confession of sin.

*The Sum of Saving Knowledge*

In appealing to the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Rev. Silversides most probably refers to Head III where is stated,

... In the word of God preached by sent messengers, the Lord makes offer of grace to all sinners, upon condition of faith in Jesus Christ; and whosoever do confess their sin, accept of Christ offered, and submit themselves to his ordinances, he will have both them and their children received into the honour and privileges of the new covenant of grace.<sup>23</sup>

However, to read this important document in its entirety is to learn very quickly that it is particularistic throughout. The introduction itself reads:

The Sum of Saving Knowledge may be taken up in these four heads: 1. The woeful condition wherein all men are by nature, through breaking of the covenant of works. 2. The remedy provided for *the elect* in Jesus Christ by the covenant of grace. 3. The means appointed to make *them* (aka, the elect, HH) partakers of this covenant. 4. The blessings which are effectually conveyed unto *the elect* by these means ...<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, in *The Confession of Faith ...*, p. 435.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 433; emphasis added.



When speaking of the way in which God works through the means of grace, this document says,

... By these outward ordinances, as our Lord makes the reprobate inexcusable, so, by the power of his Spirit, he applies unto the elect, effectually, all saving graces purchased to them in the covenant of redemption, and maketh a change in their persons ...<sup>25</sup>

It is a strange well-meant offer, in which God expresses His love for the wicked and His intention and desire to save all, that is also used, by the same Lord, to make the reprobate inexcusable.

What, then, about the use of the word *offer* (“the Lord makes *offer* of grace to all sinners”; “... Christ *offered*”)? The *Sum of the Saving Knowledge* undoubtedly explains this expression itself when, almost immediately following the words quoted above, it says, “[The covenant] doth clearly *hold forth* Christ already crucified before our eyes.” Nothing is said about a well-meant offer.

### *Westminster Divines*

Finally, Rev. Silversides argues that the *Westminster Standards* teach a well-meant offer by appealing to the writings of contemporaries of the Westminster Assembly and their views. He refers especially to Rutherford, Goodwin, Sedgwick, Jeremiah Burroughs, John Owen, Guthrie, and Flavel.

I suppose one could go on for a long time quoting from these men—one quoting passages in support of his contention that these men held to a well-meant offer; the other quoting passages which prove that these men held no such views. Rev. Silversides, himself, does not offer one quote, although we are ready to admit that, among some of these men at least, such quotations can undoubtedly be found.

But the statement that all these men taught a well-meant offer *clearly and unambiguously*, that they made it a *central part* of their discussion of the preaching of the gospel, that they “wrote off” any who held to a contrary view, and

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

that, therefore, today's version of the well-meant offer can be supported by these men—these things ought not to go unchallenged.

We offer here, by way of counter argument, a few quotes from these men.

We offer a few quotes, first of all, from John Knox, the father of Scottish theology. He writes:

True is that Isai the prophete and Christe Jesus himself, with his Apostles, do call upon all to come to repentance: But that generalitie is restrained by their own words, to those that thirst, that hunger, that mourne, that are laden with sinne, as before we have taught.<sup>26</sup>

First, you aske, If God have two willes, by reason that he hath a secret will and a reveled will? I answer, That as God in his eternal Godhead is simple and one, so is his will in respecte of himselfe from all beginning simple and one ... But because the instrumentes ... be divers, therefor hath God's will, which in himself in one, diverse considerations, effects, and endes, in respect of the divers instrumentes.<sup>27</sup>

Ye be never able (I say) to prove that we have written or taught: That God by his revealed will, wills all men to be saved, and yet by his secrete will he willeth many to be damned ...<sup>28</sup>

You make the love of God common to all men; and that do we constantly deny ...<sup>29</sup>

Samuel Rutherford writes similarly,

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<sup>26</sup> *The Works of John Knox*, David Laing, edit. (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), vol. 5, p. 404.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

It is most untrue, that Christ belongeth to sinners as sinners, for then, Christ should belong to all unbelievers, how obstinate soever, even to those that sin against the Holy Ghost ... He belongeth only to believing sinners ... [Those] thus and thus qualified, are to believe; that is, humbled, wearied, and self-condemned sinner only, are to believe, and come to Christ. It is true, all sinners are obliged to believe, but to believe after the order of free grace; that is, that they be first self-lost and sick, and then be saved by the physician.<sup>30</sup>

The testimony of David Dickson and James Durham is particularly important for they were the co-authors of the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* referred to above.

Dickson writes,

However he giveth the wicked and violent persecutor to have a seeming prosperity, while the godly are in trouble, yet that is no act of love to them: for *the wicked and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth* ... All the seeming advantages which the wicked have in their own prosperity, are but means of hardening them in their ill course, and holding them fast in the bonds of their own iniquities, till God execute judgment on them ...<sup>31</sup>

In his commentary on Revelation, Durham writes,

[It] cannot be said, that these things are purchased by him as advantageous to them (i.e. the reprobate,

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<sup>30</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: William Collins & Co., 1845), pp. 152ff. Cf. also pp. 348-349 for references to God's hatred of the reprobate and love and peace on the elect; also p. 350 for references to God's love as "simple," not contradictory.

<sup>31</sup> Comm. on Psalm 11, in *A Brief Explication of the Psalms* (Glasgow: John Dow, 1834), p. 51.

HH), in respect of any fruit that should flow therefrom unto them: because the effect sheweth that in the end they have no advantage by them: and therefore it cannot be said that he intended them as advantageous to them ...<sup>32</sup>

In his treatise, *The Method of Grace*, John Flavel writes,

The order of the Spirit's work in bringing men to Christ, shows us to whom the invitation and offers of grace in Christ are to be made; for none are convinced of righteousness, that is, of the complete and perfect righteousness in Christ for their justification, until first they are convinced of sin; and consequently, no man comes to Christ by faith till his convictions of sin have awakened and distressed him, John xvi. 8, 10. This being the order of the Spirit's operation, the same order must be observed in gospel offers and invitations.<sup>33</sup>

To refer to one more writer, James Walker, in his book, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1750*, refers in many places to the theologians who were contemporaries of the Westminster Assembly. One could quote many passages from this book, but one will have to suffice.

There is one point in Fraser's book to which I have not alluded, and which is of larger interest than some of his other doctrinal speculations. It was a part of his scheme that Christ had purchased 'common benefits,' the ordinary temporal blessings of life, and that it is through His grace that the world is sustained as it is, and that all its bounties are enjoyed by mankind.

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<sup>32</sup> *A Learned and Complete Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation* (Glasgow: David Niven, 1788), pp. 325-326.

<sup>33</sup> John Flavel, *The Method of Grace, in the Holy Spirit's Applying to the Souls of Men the Eternal Redemption* (London: The Religious Tract Society, n. d.), p. 160.

At different times and in different forms this question has been debated in Scottish churches.

Durham has an essay, in which he considers whether any mercy bestowed upon the reprobate, and enjoyed by them, may be said to be the proper fruit of, or purchase of, Christ's death. And he answers decisively in the negative. The native fruits of Christ's death, he says, are not divided, but they all go together. So that for whom He satisfied and for whom He purchased *anything in any respect*, He did so in respect of everything. There may be certain consequences of Christ's death of an advantageous kind which reach wicked men. But that is a mere accident. Nay, to the wicked there may be given common gifts, by which the Church is edified and the glory of the Lord advanced; but these belong to the covenant of redemption, as promised blessings to God's people. It is argued further, that it is very doubtful whether, looked at in every point of view, it can well be said that it is a blessing to men who yet reject the Son of God, that they have the morally purifying influences of Christianity, and are more or less affected by them in their character, or by any such blessing as can be said to fall from the tree of life. So, too, thought Gillespie, and so thought Rutherford.

In the Simpson trial the subject came up in another shape. Simpson maintained that there was in nature a dim revelation of grace. That the wrath of God did not straightway overtake sinners; that the sun shone, and the showers fell, and the harvests still came round to supply the wants of men,—was this not, in its measure, a revelation of grace? ... But the idea was decisively rejected by the evangelical divines of the day ...

Halyburton handles the question in his own way in a famous excursus of his *Natural Religion*,—on God's

government of the heathen world. ‘Is that government,’ he asks, ‘in any sense one of grace?’ He answers in the negative. Remarkable indeed it is, that the guilty should be spared from generation to generation. But who knows all the reasons God may have for that? As Adam stood the representative of the race of mankind, is it not fitting that all whom he represented should come into existence, and bear their part in the great responsibility? Why should only a part of mankind live, and sin, and suffer, and others involved in the great transaction as well as they never come into existence? Besides, some of the chosen ones may still belong to those to whom He exercises this forbearance, or, as it were, this holy connivance in their sins. Not any law of grace, but the law of creation ...<sup>34</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

This article has become sufficiently long. For more information on the question of whether the Westminster divines believed in a general and well-meant offer of the gospel, see my articles in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* on “The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel.”<sup>35</sup> In those articles it is shown that many eminent writers, including William Cunningham, argue persuasively that the well-meant offer was not only not held by the Westminster divines, but was in fact rejected.



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<sup>34</sup> James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland Chiefly of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872), pp. 50-51. Cf. also pp. 52-53 where he quotes Adam Gib (1714-1788) to the effect that the gifts of providence are not expressions of divine love, but “wrath.”

<sup>35</sup> See footnote 9, above.

I express herewith my gratitude to Mr. Chris Connors, a student in our Seminary from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, who has immeasurably aided me in the research which is included in this article.







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