

Leesboek over de Gereformeerde Geloofsleer
H. B. Gravemeijer Parts i-xx. (Some parts in a second edition)
The Presbyterian and Reformed Review 1:146-149. [1890]

The revival of practical religion in Holland has been accompanied, especially during later years, by a revived interest in Reformed Theology. Though the Calvinistic doctrines had never entirely lost their hold upon that part of the people to whom religion was a reality, still they were not recognized in their historical significance. With a beautiful naiveté, the theological tenets of which religious experience attested the truth, were accepted and maintained as positive facts. But this phase has now passed and the time arrived when theology, only kept alive by the inward power of the truth, awakes to the full consciousness of its antecedents and its future calling. That the influence of the old Calvinism is here reasserting itself admits of no doubt. There is a historical continuity between the movement of the present day and the past. This very recognition of the intellectual factor is distinctive of Calvinism. It is characteristic of this historical tendency also, that it has manifested itself in a renewed study of the old systems of Reformed theology, a sort of theological renaissance. The thread of development is taken up where it broke off. A thorough review of the work which the fathers did constitutes the basis of what the men of to-day are striving for.

In this sense Gravemeijer's book is largely historical. It contains a lucid statement of the outlines of the Reformed system, without going into details to any great extent. That the work is rather voluminous (the twenty parts that have appeared up to date cover 2395 pages) is not owing so much to an elaborate treatment of dogma itself and its underlying principles, as to the author's custom of introducing and establishing his views by careful exegetical discussion. While the doctrinal positions do not differ materially from the Reformed consensus, there is a decided improvement on the work of the old theologians in respect to exegesis. The author has not scorned to make use of the light which modern exegesis has shed on many points. Throughout he has handled this part of his task with great skill, and many a truth, which a superficial reader might pronounce foreign to Scripture, is strikingly brought out as the natural product of a progressive course of revelation.

Another commendable feature of this book is its practical character. The title calls it a "Reader," and with few exceptions the style and tone justify this name. If we did not know it, we might infer from the contents that the author has contracted his familiarity with Christian truth in pastoral life and not by secluded study. Everywhere he seizes upon those points by which doctrine stands related to experience. Passages of a hortatory, we might almost say homiletical, character are not wanting. The whole is such a happy combination of the theoretical and practical that its perusal becomes a pleasant task.

That this last trait would somewhat detract from the scientific value of the work was to be expected. Rigid systematizing and unifying of thought are not always compatible with that smoothness and perspicuity which are essential to a book, not in the first place destined for theologians, but for the general public. It would be unfair, therefore, to make this consideration weigh against a "Reader" with the same force with which it would weigh against a professed system of theology. Still it is our opinion that the author might have gone much further in giving prominence to certain unifying doctrines, without seriously impairing the popular character of his work. This is especially applicable to the doctrine of the covenants. Federalism with him is the pivot of the whole system, but nowhere

a separate treatment of it is given. Its different elements lie scattered through various *loci*, and are, as it were, only incidentally referred to. First the concentration of Adam's own conduct into one act is considered under the head of "The Original State of Man," but nothing is said here in regard to Adam's representative character with reference to his posterity. Then, in the discussion of sin, first inherent original sin is dealt with, and only as an expedient in explaining this matter of fact, is our being represented by Adam postulated. The inference is certainly valid, but if once the federal idea be admitted, it can hardly be kept in such a subordinate position. There are sound reasons for asserting that federalism is not that late and accidental accretion to the body of Reformed theology, which at the present day it is often pronounced to be. The doctrine of justification by faith already contains its germ, and those who are in great haste to declare it antiquated, should reflect how far they shall be able afterwards to retain unmodified this great stronghold of Protestantism.

The doctrine of the Scriptures is given its legitimate place at the beginning. Plenary inspiration of the Bible is maintained. The author very strikingly remarks, that the modern view of a partial or relative inspiration is far more guilty of ignoring the organic unity of the Bible than the old theory. The old view may be beset with great historical difficulties, but it has immense advantages over all its modern substitutes from a speculative standpoint. It may be safely predicted that few of the latter will be able to stand the test of criticism as long and as well as the Church-view has done.

Gravemeijer's book is weakest on its speculative side. Both in questions belonging to Theology proper, and in those belonging to Anthropology and Soteriology, there is a want of depth and precision. That knowledge is confined to a demonstration of things in so far as they are in time or space is a serious concession to a Gnosiology that is not ours. Some very lucid remarks are made about the interaction of conscience and the innate knowledge of God, but in another passage (Part i, 26), conscience is represented as bearing a direct testimony to God's existence, while on page 39 of the same part Kant's construction of the moral argument seems to be favored. Two speculative constructions of the Trinity are given, from the idea of God's self-knowledge, and from that of His love, which apart from their questionable value, are not in keeping with the sober character of the whole. That the world had a beginning in time is argued on the ground that otherwise God's infiniteness cannot be maintained, which reasoning clearly proceeds on the principle that the infinite must be the all. Time and space are repeatedly represented as exclusively subjective, and without any adverse comment Kant's views in regard to them are quoted, and, as it seems, adopted. By doing this the author has introduced into his Gnosiology an element of subjectivity which it would be impossible to confine to these two forms of representation. It would have been quite sufficient, for the purpose of establishing God's eternity and omnipresence, if the validity for God of time and space as *subjective* forms of consciousness had been denied. If time and space be something objective then they certainly are such for God, just as all human finiteness is, but it will not follow from this, that God's conscious life is governed immanently by these forms, as ours is. The distinction between the form and matter of sin is made use of to suggest an explanation of the problem, How God's providence stands related to sin? The distinction no doubt is valid, but the author errs when he introduces it as furnishing the mysterious thread of connection between the certainty in God's decree respecting evil and the realization of evil in the world. After subtracting from evil processes their physical or metaphysical substratum, that ethical thing which is sin, whatever we may call it, will still always remain, if not as a substance yet as a reality, and it is not given to us to explain how God's concursus can be either operative or inoperative with regard to this reality.

In Anthropology and Soteriology also there are many questions that need a fuller and more distinct treatment. From the outset the line between Adam's federal relation and his natural relation to God is not clearly drawn. In one place the remunerative side of God's justice is, in accordance with Kant's view, represented as the correlate of his vindicatory justice, and an innate knowledge of both is ascribed to man (Part vii, 43). Later on, however, we are told that all reward is *ex pacto* (p. 44). It does not seem natural that man should possess an innate knowledge of what is of positive enactment. In regard to the covenant of grace we again miss a separate and thorough treatment. Everywhere, however, the federal principle is recognized. Christ's sinlessness, notwithstanding His birth from sinful humanity, is explained by His exemption from the covenant of works, and is based on the impersonality of His human nature. It would be interesting to institute a critical comparison between the theories of Realism and Federalism in regard to this single point. Dr. Shedd is compelled by his premises to postulate not only an antecedent sanctification, but also a proleptic justification of the human nature of Christ, in so far as, being *de facto* in Adam, it would be both guilty and polluted. This would seem to endanger the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us since it has been made use of already for His own justification. Gravemeijer, as a federalist, by denying the guilt of Christ's impersonal humanity, has no place for any such justification, and all that Christ does actively and passively remains available for the elect.

We have looked in vain for a clear definition of the Scriptural term $\sigma\alpha\rho\tilde{\xi}$. The conception of death also might have been brought out in its importance. Such psychological defects have evidently impaired the author's representation of the *ordo salutis* on its subjective side. Regeneration through faith is taught and the latter taken as the logical *prius* of the former. Conversion precedes both. It is not easy to see how conversion, or even that part of it which is called contrition, though it be rather a noetic than a voluntary act, can be possible without an undercurrent of harmony with the Divine law, *i.e.*, without a change of will. We may find the source of these statements in the proposition that the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit proceeds from the understanding. If this be meant in the unqualified sense that no immediate influence is brought to bear upon the will, it certainly is an incorrect and dangerous position to hold. The ground why the author makes faith precede regeneration appears to be that, until we are actually united with Christ by faith, the saving power of His spirit cannot be subjectively applied to us—no new life can be infused. This again amounts to an implicit denial of the principle of pure imputation, which the author recognizes elsewhere. Of what value does the latter remain if God cannot give us life, unless an actual union has taken place? Moreover, this statement, when carried out to its legitimate consequences, would render every beginning of the subjective process of salvation impossible, for we might ask with equal right, how God could bestow upon a sinner the gift of conversion and faith, as long as he is outside of the mystical body of Christ. Against this confusion of the juridical and the mystical unions with Christ, we may refer to the statement of Weiss, "New Testament Theology," i, 460, 461, note 10.