

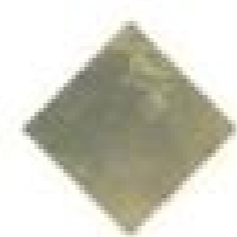
GEERHARDUS VOS



GRACE

AND

GLOORY



SERMONS PREACHED AT
PRINCETON SEMINARY

Grace and Glory

Geerhardus Vos



THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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Contents

Introduction	vii
I. The Wonderful Tree	1
II. Hungering and Thirsting after Righteousness	27
III. Seeking and Saving the Lost	47
IV. 'Rabboni!'	71
V. The More Excellent Ministry	87
VI. Heavenly-Mindedness	109
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VII. Running the Race	131
VIII. The Christian's Hope	147
IX. The Joy of Resurrection Life	165
X. Songs from the Soul	179
XI. The Essence of Christianity	193
XII. The Eternal Christ	209
XIII. The Spiritual Resurrection of Believers	221
XIV. The Gracious Provision	245
XV. Christ's Deliberate Work	255
XVI. Our Holy and Glorious God	271

Introduction

THE name of Geerhardus Vos is perhaps as well-known today as it has ever been. Yet he remains a lesser figure in many minds by comparison with some of his fellow-professors at Princeton Theological Seminary, such as B. B. Warfield, and later J. Gresham Machen and Cornelius Van Til (the latter two becoming founding faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary).

In fact, however, Vos was a theological thinker of immense erudition and insight; probably of all the Princeton men, even more so than his friend and noon-time walking companion, Warfield, he was a theologian's theologian.

Born in Heerenveen, Friesland in The Netherlands in 1862, Vos came to the United States in 1881 when his father accepted a call to serve a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Following intensive theological training from which he emerged with great distinction he was invited to fill a new post as Professor of Old Testament Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam. Despite the encouragement of both Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, he declined, and instead served the theological school of his denomination until 1893 when he accepted the new Chair of Biblical Theology

GRACE AND GLORY

at Princeton Seminary. Here he remained until his retirement in 1932. His wife Catherine (well-known as the author of the widely-appreciated *Child's Story Bible* which the Trust also publishes) predeceased him in 1937. Vos himself died in 1949 at the age of 87.

Vos was a scholar *par excellence* and devoted his best energies to this calling. He seems to have been relatively little involved in the major issues and controversies of ecclesiastical or social life; researching, teaching, writing, preaching and the leisure activity of composing poetry, were the staple diet of his days.

Richard B. Gaffin is surely right in his assessment that Vos would not have gained a large 'following' among the Princeton students, and in analysing why that was the case: 'By many, perhaps the majority, he was probably more respected than understood. No doubt his lectures were like his writings, intrinsically difficult because of the wealth of insight packed into virtually every sentence.'¹

But there were some who particularly appreciated him and were profoundly influenced by his teaching. The young J. Gresham Machen wrote home enthusiastically to his mother following Vos's sermon 'Rabboni'²:

We had this morning one of the finest expository sermons I have ever heard. It was preached by Dr Vos ... and rather surprised me. He is usually rather too severely theological for Sunday morning. Today he was nothing less than inspiring ... Dr Vos

¹ R. B. Gaffin Jr., ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Philipsburg, New Jersey, 1980), p. xiii.

² See below, pp. 69-83.

Introduction

differs from some theological professors in having a better-developed bump of reverence.¹

Another student in whose life Vos's influence would be multiplied to many others, John Murray, described him in these terms:

Dr Vos is, in my judgement, the most penetrating exegete it has been my privilege to know, and I believe, the most incisive exegete that has appeared in the English-speaking world in this century.²

A number of Vos's works have been reprinted in recent decades and continue to be carefully studied. These include *The Self Disclosure of Jesus* (1926), *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930) and his *Biblical Theology* (1948) which was edited by his son. Now to these highly-valued treatises is added the long out-of-print *Grace and Glory*.

In possessing a copy of *Grace and Glory* the reader has in his or her hands a book of sermons which are almost as rare as they are remarkable. Not only so, but in addition to the six sermons which originally constituted the volume *Grace and Glory* the present edition includes a further nine sermons which Vos preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary between 1896 and 1913, as well as an undated exposition of Ephesians 2:4, 5 translated from Dutch. This additional material has been provided to the publishers by James T. Dennison, the Librarian of

¹ N. B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids 1954; repr. Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1987), p. 72.

² These words were written by Murray in 1974 in commendation of the reprinting of Vos's *Biblical Theology* by the publishers.

GRACE AND GLORY

Westminster Theological Seminary in California and the editor of the journal *Kerux*, in which the bulk of it has already been printed. Mr Dennison originally uncovered Vos's personal sermon book in 1971 in the Heritage Hall Archive of Calvin Theological Seminary and transcribed the material. As heirs of his labours the publishers are also indebted to the Heritage Hall Archive of Calvin Seminary for the privilege of reproducing the material in this more permanent form.

But the uniqueness of these sermons extends far beyond the difficulty of obtaining the original edition of *Grace and Glory* or the providences which led to the rediscovery of the manuscript material now in book form for the first time. It is the nature of the sermons themselves which will have a stunning effect on the reader. For they combine such constantly penetrating depths of biblical and theological understanding with such soaring heights of eloquence that it is difficult to imagine their like being heard in any pulpit in the world today. They are at one and the same time intensely demanding on the reader and glorious in their exposition of Scripture. These pages contain a thesaurus of theological riches, a gold mine whose every vein is packed with gleaming insight.

Such is the character of these sermons that, to a world which is obsessed with 'sound-bites' and in a church which has become unused to concentrated thought, their content and style may seem almost overwhelming.

No doubt some small element in this lies in the fact that Dutch and not English was the native tongue of Vos's formative years through teenage. But far outweighing that

Introduction

is the fact that what Vos hears Scripture teaching cannot be reduced to a few easily-grasped thoughts, an alliterated outline, a ten-minute homily. He wishes to speak to his hearers about God. He wants to instil in them precisely the sense that God is gracious *and* God is glorious. Nothing short of an eloquence which is both gracious and glorious will suffice him. Every sensitive and thoughtful reader will be struck by the mountain peaks which Vos's mind and vocabulary seemed to be capable of scaling.

In these pages the reader is invited, almost commanded and certainly demanded, to become a spiritual mountaineer. There are times when many will be left gasping for the higher oxygen levels of the lower slopes. But Vos was aiming for the summit, and those who follow him there will find panoramic views of the wonders of God and his ways which will make the ascent immensely rewarding. Having been taken to such mountain peaks, the vision of God we have beheld in Scripture will produce in us a new and more holy and heavenly perspective on the whole of life.

So remarkable are these sermons that we may even be tempted to ask, 'What group of people – even of theological students – could have taken in the substance of any of these sermons at one hearing?' Perhaps the answer is 'very few, either then or now'. Certainly the judgement of the brilliant young Machen quoted above would seem to confirm that. But it would be a mistake to lay them aside on that account for two reasons. Firstly, because with the publication of these pages we now have the privilege to 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' them at our own pace. But secondly, because their sheer all-demanding weight teaches us a

GRACE AND GLORY

principle which our present generation has both rejected and forgotten: all of Scripture, all of its rich teaching, is for all of the people of God; its deepest and highest theology is not the exclusive preserve of the sophisticated intellectual, but has been given for the maturing of the whole congregation of the faithful.

There is no doubt that if Vos assumed that all of his hearers would be able to follow him he was mistaken; even the supposition that most of his listeners would be able to do so was perhaps too complimentary to theological students. But for those errors of judgement grateful readers of these pages will forgive him. And many will believe that the benefit of having them now in print is adequate compensation.

Here, then, is material calculated to enrich the mind, heart, will and emotions; grace and glory indeed.

Sinclair B. Ferguson
Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
January 31, 1994

I: The Wonderful Tree

Hosea 14:8: *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.*

THIS prophetic utterance represents one of the two inseparable sides in the make-up of religion. If we say that religion consists of what God is for man, and of what man is for God, then our text in the divine statement, 'From me is thy fruit found', stands for the former. To balance it with the other side some such word as that of Isaiah might be taken, 'The vineyard of Jehovah of Hosts is the house of Israel.' Nor would it be an arbitrary combination of disconnected passages thus pointedly to place the one over against the other. In each case a careful study of the prophet would reveal that not some incidental turn of thought, but an habitual point of view, imparting tone and colour to the entire religious experience, had found expression in a characteristic form of statement. The two points of view are supplementary, and, taken together, exhaustive of what the normal relation between God and man involves. Until we learn to unite the Isaiah type of piety with that of Hosea, we shall not attain a full and harmonious development of our religious life.

GRACE AND GLORY

Let us look at the half-circle of truth expressed by the older prophet. The text stands in the most beautiful surroundings, not merely within Hosea's own prophecy, but in the entire Old Testament. There is a charm about this chapter more easily felt than described. It is like the clear shining after rain, when the sun rises, a morning without clouds. In what precedes there is much that is hard to understand. Hosea's style is abrupt, full of strange leaps from vision to vision. But here we suddenly pass out of the labyrinth of involved oracles into the clear open. It is a prophecy suffused with deep feeling. All the native tenderness of the prophet, the acute sensitiveness and responsiveness of his emotional nature, rendering him, as it were, a musical instrument expectant of the Spirit's touch, are here in striking evidence; the dissonances of the many prophecies of woe resolve themselves in the sweet harmony of a closing prophecy of promise. And besides, the incomparable light of the future shines upon this chapter. It is bathed in the glory of the latter days, those glories which no prophet could describe without giving forth the finest notes of which his organ was capable. In the repertoire of the prophets the choicest always belongs to the farthest. When their eye rests on the world to come, a miracle is wrought in their speech, so that, in accord with the things described, it borrows from the melodies of the other world.

Still the spell thrown upon our minds by this piece is by no means wholly, or even chiefly, due to its form. It is the peculiar content that captivates the heart as the music captivates the ear. It is not to be expected of any prophet that he shall put into his prophecies relating to the end

The Wonderful Tree

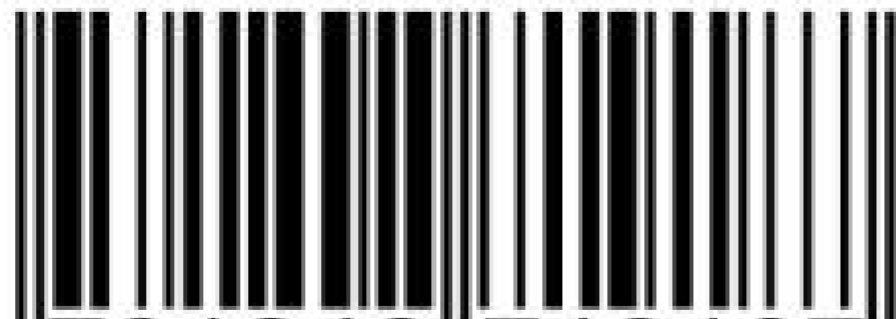
indiscriminately of his treasure, but chiefly what is to him its most precious part, that which the Spirit of revelation had led him, and him above others, to apprehend and appreciate. From utterances of this kind, therefore, we get our best perception of what lay nearest to the prophet's heart. So, certainly, it is here with Hosea.

In its last analysis, the charm of this chapter is none other than the innate charm of the prophet's most cherished acquaintance with Jehovah. And, applied to the future, this may be summed up in the idea that the possession of Jehovah himself by his people will be of all the delights of the world to come the chief and most satisfying, the paradise within the paradise of God. The whole description leads up to this and revolves around it. As preparing for it, the return to Jehovah is mentioned first. The end of the great change is that the people may once more live in the presence of God. The prayer the prophet puts upon their lips is, 'Take away all iniquity', with the emphasis upon the all, so as to indicate that not otherwise than by the absolute removal of all sin can the cloudless atmosphere be created for the supreme enjoyment of God. And the people pledge that their eyes and hearts henceforth shall be closed to the lure of idols. As a helpless orphan Israel casts herself upon Jehovah's grace: 'We will not say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.' But Jehovah also addresses the people on that day, to the effect that he himself is eager to pour out the riches of his affection upon the heart of Israel and meet her desire for him to the utmost measure of its capacity: 'I will be as the dew to Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth

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SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

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