

Hyper-Calvinism
and the
Call of the Gospel

HYPER- CALVINISM and the CALL of the GOSPEL

*An Examination of the
Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*

Third Edition

David J. Engelsma



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*With gratitude for the instruction
of Herman Hoeksema*

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Foreword

This is certainly an interesting, informative, lively, learned discussion of the essence of the gospel call to all mankind. In my opinion Professor Engelsma carefully defines and convincingly avoids hyper-Calvinism himself and clears his denomination, the Protestant Reformed Churches, of so teaching.

The locus of the debate among Calvinists concerns what is called the well-meant offer. Let me locate first what is meant by well-meant offer and the area of difference among Calvinists concerning it.

There is much related to this title that is shared by all Calvinists though sometimes differently phrased; namely, that reprobates hear the call and that it is a serious call to them. There is one part of the understood meaning of well-meant offer that is affirmed by many Calvinists today and denied by others; namely, that God desires and intends the salvation of reprobates in that call they hear or read.

The well-meant offer is *understood* by both sides to include the notion that *God intends and desires the salvation of reprobates* when the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to everyone who hears with his ears or reads with his eyes. The late John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse in *The Free Offer of the Gospel* and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church could declare in 1948 (citing *The Free Offer of the Gospel* by Murray and Stonehouse):

There is in God a benevolent lovingkindness towards the repentance and salvation of even those whom he has not decreed to save. This pleasure, will, *desire* is expressed in the universal call to repentance . . . The full and free offer of the gospel is a grace bestowed upon all. Such grace is necessarily a manifestation of love or lovingkindness in the heart of God, and this lovingkindness is revealed to be of a character or kind that is correspondent with the grace bestowed. The grace offered is nothing less than salvation in its richness and fulness. The love or lovingkindness that lies back of

that offer is not anything less; it is the *will to that salvation*. In other words, it is Christ in all the glory of his person and in all the perfection of his finished work whom God offers in the gospel. The loving and benevolent will that is the source of that offer and that grounds its veracity and reality *is the will to the possession of Christ and the enjoyment of the salvation that resides in him*.¹

I have italicized the three statements that *can only mean* in that context that God *desires and intends* (*will* is used in the sense of “intend”) the salvation of the reprobates. Much else that is stated *can* be so interpreted but is not unambiguous. All Calvinists (and indeed all Christians) agree that not all human persons are saved. Arminians do champion the notion that God desires and intends the salvation of every person. Calvinists do not, but here Calvinists John Murray, Ned Stonehouse, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church do so teach.

On the other hand, Herman Hoeksema, the Protestant Reformed denomination, and author David Engelsma in this book emphatically reject the well-meant offer *as including God’s desire and intention to save reprobates*.

As a Calvinist, not associated ecclesiastically with the tiny Protestant Reformed denomination and sharply divergent from some of her doctrinal positions, I feel it absolutely necessary to hold with her here where she stands, almost alone today, and suffers massive vituperation and ridicule from Calvinists (no less) for her faithfulness at this point to the gospel of God.

I had the incomparable privilege of being a student of Professors Murray and Stonehouse. With tears in my heart, I nevertheless confidently assert that they erred profoundly in *The Free Offer of the*

1. See John Murray, “The Free Offer of the Gospel,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 4, *Studies in Theology, Reviews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 132. Because Ned B. Stonehouse contributed to the study resulting in this work, he is often listed as a coauthor. Because Professor Murray wrote the piece, it is included in his collected writings. As a doctrinal study commissioned by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the work was published as an appendix to *The Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 1948, 51–63. The study soon appeared as a booklet titled “The Free Offer of the Gospel.” This booklet contained no publishing data. Citations of “The Free Offer of the Gospel,” therefore, will reference the work as it is found in volume four of the *Collected Writings of John Murray*.

Gospel and died before they seem to have realized their error, which because of their justifiably high reputations for Reformed excellence generally, still does incalculable damage to the cause of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of his gospel.

It is absolutely essential to the nature of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent that whatever his sovereign majesty desires or intends most certainly—without conceivability of failure in one iota thereof—*must come to pass! Soli Deo gloria! Amen and amen forevermore! God can never, ever desire or intend anything that does not come to pass, or he is not the living, happy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but an eternally miserable being weeping tears of frustration that he was unable to prevent hell and can never end it; thus destroying himself and heaven in the process.*

God, the blessed and only ruler, the king of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen (1 Tim. 6:15–16).

JOHN H. GERSTNER
Ligonier, Pennsylvania

Preface to the Third Edition

The decision of the Reformed Free Publishing Association to publish this book in a third edition gave me the opportunity not only to correct a few printing errors in earlier editions and to add some significant explanation and argument (which I have done), but also to reflect on the worth of issuing the book again.

After all, the work appeared first in 1980, more than thirty years ago.

Does it still address a significant, lively issue in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches and among theologians who regard and present themselves as Calvinists?

The truth defended in the book is sovereign, particular grace in the preaching of the gospel. The book contends that this truth is fundamental to the theology of the Reformed faith in its entirety, that is, to scripture's gospel of salvation by grace alone and to the authoritative confession of the gospel by the Reformed creed, the Canons of Dort.

The charge against the truth, by nominally Reformed theologians and churches, that the book refutes is hyper-Calvinism. This is the charge that the doctrine of particular grace in the preaching of the gospel is, or necessarily leads to, the error of preaching only to the elect, including calling only the elect to repent and believe.

The heresy that the book exposes and condemns is the teaching that the promiscuous preaching of the gospel with its unrestricted call to all hearers to repent and believe is, in fact, the saving grace of God to all who hear the preaching, reprobate ungodly as well as elect. It is the false doctrine of universal, impotent, saving grace with its concomitant error that the efficacy of the saving grace of God in the preaching, and therefore the salvation of sinners, depend not on the grace of God made effectual by the Holy Spirit, but on the acceptance of an offered salvation by the sinner himself.

The heresy that the book opposes parades shamelessly in the Re-

formed community of churches, seminaries, and book stores, like a brazen whore in the seductive “come hither” scanty garb of the well-meant offer of salvation.

It is my conviction, as evidently that also of the publisher, that the truth defended by the book continues to call for defense in 2013.

Certainly the criticism of the confession that the grace of God in the preaching of the gospel is particular, expressing and executing the decree of election, has not diminished in extent or weakened in volume over the past thirty-odd years, since the book was first published. The criticism is that such a view of preaching is not genuine Calvinism, but hyper-Calvinism.

And it remains the conviction both of the author and of the publisher that the false doctrine of universal, impotent grace in the preaching of the gospel, with its necessary implication that sinners save themselves by accepting what is a well-meant offer on the part of God to all hearers, is the overthrow of the gospel of grace in its entirety. This the book proves by demonstrating that in recent years churches and theologians have appealed to the well-meant offer in order to deny limited atonement and double predestination.

I am glad therefore that the book goes out once again for the refutation of grievous false doctrine. But not only for the refutation of error. Our hope is that God will continue to use the work to recover some from the error and to confirm others in the truth of sovereign grace in the preaching of the blessed gospel.

As for the avowed adversaries, is it too much to ask that rather than condemning the book out of hand you attempt to refute it?

DAVID J. ENGELSMA
Grand Rapids, Michigan
November 2013

Preface to the Second Edition

The reprinting of *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel* made possible a thorough revision of the book. The revision is much more than merely correcting the typographical errors in the first edition or even than including a foreword by widely known and highly regarded Presbyterian theologian John H. Gerstner.

I have completely reworked the introduction; significantly expanded most of the chapters; and, most importantly, added a new chapter—the fourth in this edition—“Is Denial of the Well-Meant Offer Hyper-Calvinism?”

An effort was made also to enhance the appearance of the book, especially by printing it in larger type.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. John H. Gerstner for his readiness to grant my request that he write the foreword. As those who know him would expect, he has both unerringly called attention to a basic issue in the controversy over the well-meant offer and boldly called for the consistent defense of Calvinism so that this issue is resolved to the glory of God.

This is my purpose and prayer with the reprinting of this book, as I wrote in the preface to the first edition: “God grant that the glorious light of the Reformed faith may shine again and that the darkness of sovereign man and his self-salvation may flee before it.”

DAVID J. ENGELSMA
Grand Rapids, Michigan
June 1993

Preface to the First Edition

Darkness is falling over the Reformed churches in all the world. The light of the Reformed faith is going out. The truth of sovereign, particular grace is lost and with it, the sovereignly gracious God. In the end Dordt is defeated, and Arminius triumphs.

Yet we testify of a sovereign God and his sovereign grace in Jesus Christ without pessimism. We know this testimony to be no merely provincial concern—the controversy of a few, small, Reformed denominations. It was the heart of the Reformation; it is the gospel, God’s own truth. It shall surely stand. It must be proclaimed. If the children of the Reformation decide now to hold their peace, the stones will immediately cry out.

God grant that the glorious light of the Reformed faith may shine again and that the darkness of sovereign man and his self-salvation may flee before it.

DAVID ENGELSMA
South Holland, Illinois
September 1980

Introduction

HYPER-CALVINISM is a term of reproach and condemnation. It is the charge that a theological teaching that claims to be Calvinism has so exaggerated and distorted Calvinism that it is not genuine Calvinism at all. The body of doctrines described as hyper-Calvinism is accused of having gone beyond true Calvinism so that, although it has a semblance of Calvinism, it is in reality a perversion of Calvinism. Indeed, the seriousness of the epithet “hyper-Calvinism” is that it alleges a theological position to be false doctrine.

The fundamental error of hyper-Calvinism is its restriction of the preaching of the gospel. With appeal to the Calvinistic doctrine of divine predestination, it limits the preaching of the gospel to the elect. There may be no bringing of the joyful tidings to all men and women indiscriminately. Especially forbidden is the earnest, urgent call to all men and women without distinction to come to the Savior by believing on him.

Inexcusable Misrepresentation

Because the Protestant Reformed Churches in North America reject the well-meant offer of the gospel, these churches are commonly condemned and dismissed in Calvinistic circles as hyper-Calvinists.

This has been the judgment upon the Protestant Reformed Churches by the Christian Reformed Church and her theologians from the beginning of the separate existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924. Although he did not use the term *hyper-Calvinists*, this was the charge against the Protestant Reformed Churches by H. J. Kuiper. Writing at the time of the controversy over common grace that resulted in the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Kuiper declared:

One of the most serious aspects of the present denial of the doctrine of Common Grace is the denial of the general offer of salva-

tion. It robs the gospel of its evangelical note. It is bound in time to create an attitude of religious passivism and fatalism which has been the curse of every church where the preaching of election was not counter-balanced by the proclamation of the sinner's responsibility and of God's sincere offer of salvation to all without discrimination.¹

It was this charge that Herman Hoeksema warded off in his book *Een Kracht Gods tot Zaligheid of Genade Geen Aanbod* (A power of God unto salvation or grace no offer). The editor of the Christian Reformed publication *De Wachter* (The watchman) was alleging that Hoeksema's rejection of the well-meant offer meant that the gospel should be preached only to the elect. Hoeksema was responding to this allegation when he wrote:

I emphasize, the doctrine [of the well-meant offer, which Hoeksema rejected] is not that the gospel must be preached by *the preacher* to all men without distinction. But it is that *God himself* offers his grace to all men and with that, therefore, reveals the earnest desire that it shall be accepted by all . . . Our difference, therefore, has absolutely nothing to do with the question whether the gospel must also be preached according to the will of God to all who are in our audience, reprobate as well as elect.²

Christian Reformed histories invariably present the common grace controversy as the Christian Reformed Church's rejection of hyper-Calvinism.

There was a deliberate refusal to allow the Arminian overemphasis on common grace to force the Christian Reformed Church to the opposite extreme of denying that grace altogether. One of the accusations against the Rev. Hoeksema . . . concerned his "insufficient Gospel preaching." The charge was that he preached only for the elect, implicitly denying the sincerity of the Gospel call to the

1. H. J. Kuiper, *The Three Points of Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1925), 13.

2. Herman Hoeksema, *Een Kracht Gods tot Zaligheid of Genade Geen Aanbod* (Grand Rapids, MI: Doorn Printer, 1930), 9–10, 20. This and subsequent translations from *Een Kracht* are mine.



G. C. BERKOUWER

This longtime Reformed Churches in the Netherlands professor of theology at the Free University in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, concerned himself seriously with Herman Hoeksema's doctrine of predestination, which included Hoeksema's denial of a well-meant offer of salvation to all humans. The Dutch theologian opposed Hoeksema's doctrine as hyper-Calvinism, but himself denied the eternal, sovereign decree of reprobation as taught by Calvin and confessed in the first head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt. Thus, Berkouwer denied the Reformed doctrine of predestination. His doctrinal development illustrates the truth that confession of the well-meant offer always attempts to blacken denial of the offer as hyper-Calvinism while itself repudiating the genuine Calvinism that sees the preaching of the gospel as the means of sovereign, particular grace governed by election. The Historical Documentation Centre for Dutch Protestantism (1800 to the present) Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

unconverted... The Christian Reformed Church has found it necessary to guard consistently against a tendency to hyper-orthodoxy by way of reaction against Arminianism.³

The official line of the Christian Reformed Church is that she “opposed [the] doctrinal deviation... [of] hyper-Calvinism in the Common Grace controversy.”⁴

This charge against the Protestant Reformed Churches and their theology is spread more widely not only throughout Reformed circles worldwide but also in the broad sphere of evangelical Christianity. Influential Reformed theologian G. C. Berkouwer criticized Herman Hoeksema as a classic hyper-Calvinist:

It is here that Hoeksema’s exegesis of the Canons goes awry, because now the symmetry between election and reprobation becomes a scheme in which the gospel can no longer be truly preached. The missionary mandate, “Make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19), can no longer function properly, according to its undeniable emphasis on the purpose of the gospel... We can no longer speak of glad tidings that go out into the world, except where the gospel reaches the elect. We do not know who they are, but, the purpose of the gospel is twofold: salvation and hardening. The symmetry casts its shadow over the *kerygma*.⁵

Presbyterians are of the same mind and do not hesitate to speak it. In the course of his impassioned defense of a universal love of God in Christ and of a universal will of God unto salvation expressed in the offer of redemption to all men, Scottish Presbyterian theologian Donald Macleod gives a scathing denunciation of the predestinarian theology of Herman Hoeksema: “virtually blasphemous”; “well-nigh blasphemous speculation.”⁶

3. John Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949), 85–86.

4. Clarence Boomsma, “The CRC: What is Happening to Us?” *Banner* 108 (September 28, 1973): 14–15.

5. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), 223.

6. Donald Macleod, *Behold Your God* (n.p.: Christian Focus Publications, 1990), 117–55.

A book circulates among Presbyterians in Australia and New Zealand that is devoted to the refutation of the doctrine of the call of the gospel held by the Protestant Reformed Churches. *Christ Freely Offered* defends the free offer as God's delight in and "pursuit of" the salvation of every sinner (many of whom, however, he fails to catch) and castigates the Protestant Reformed denial of the well-meant offer as hyper-Calvinism.⁷

By the present time, the hyper-Calvinism of Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches is authoritatively and permanently established in the theological dictionaries. This is enough to daunt all but the hardiest (some would say "foolhardiest") soul! How can one resist the wisdom and power of the dictionaries?

The New Dictionary of Theology describes the error as emphasizing

irresistible grace to such an extent that there appears to be no real need to evangelize; furthermore, Christ may be offered only to the elect... It undermines the universal duty of sinners to believe savingly in the Lord Jesus with the assurance that Christ actually died for them.

Having described the error, the *Dictionary* confidently identifies the sole modern hyper-Calvinist: "The most prominent recent theologian is the Dutch-American, Herman Hoeksema, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*."⁸

Correction of the Misrepresentation

It came as a shock to the Reformed and evangelical communities, therefore, that the renowned Presbyterian theologian John H. Gerstner recently defended the rejection of the well-meant offer by the Protestant Reformed Churches. In a chapter entitled "Spurious Calvinism" in which he exposes the Arminianism of dispensationalism with regard to every one of the five points of Calvinism, Gerstner subjects the well-meant offer of contemporary Calvinism to searching criticism.

7. K. W. Stebbins, *Christ Freely Offered: A Discussion of the General Offer of Salvation in the Light of Particular Atonement* (Strathpine, North, Australia: Covenant Press, 1978).

8. *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1988), s.v. "Hyper-Calvinism."



JOHN H. GERSTNER

The prominent Presbyterian theologian startled the conservative Reformed and Presbyterian church world by his condemnation of the well-meant, or free, offer of the gospel, as taught particularly by Westminster Seminary professor John Murray. Gerstner explicitly defended the Protestant Reformed Churches' rejection of the theology of a universal love of God and desire for the salvation of all, which is the theology of the well-meant offer. As a Presbyterian, holding the Westminster Confession, Gerstner disavowed a "frustrated" God. Archives and Special Collections Department, Clifford E. Barbour Library, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

We must also sadly admit that the majority of Reformed theologians today seriously err concerning the nature of the love of God for reprobates. We mention this here only because this defect in contemporary Reformed theology makes it all the easier for the dispensationalists to continue in their abysmal error.

Most Reformed theologians also include, as a by-product of the Atonement, the well-meant offer of the gospel by which all men can be saved. Some Reformed theologians take a further step still and say that God even intends that they should be saved by this Atonement which nevertheless was made only for the elect. For example, John Murray and Ned Stonehouse write: "Our Lord . . . says

expressly that he willed the bestowal of his saving and protecting grace upon those whom neither the Father nor he decreed thus to save and protect." One may sadly say that Westminster Theological Seminary stands for this misunderstanding of the Reformed doctrine since not only John Murray and Ned Stonehouse but also Cornelius Van Til, R. B. Kuiper, John Frame, and, so far as we know, all of the faculty, have favored it. The Christian Reformed Church had already in 1920 taken this sad step away from the Reformed orthodoxy and has been declining ever since. The Presbyterian Church, USA had even earlier, though somewhat ambiguously, departed and the present mainline Presbyterian church affirms that "The risen Christ is the savior for all men."

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (now part of the Presbyterian Church, USA) is not far behind, and the separatist Presbyterians such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America are following in this train. Only the Protestant Reformed Church seems willing to hold to the whole counsel of God on this doctrine.⁹

Gerstner sees the well-meant offer as laying a foundation for "a radical break with the Reformed tradition." The well-meant offer teaches that God is frustrated in his desire to save certain persons. But, says Gerstner, "God, if He could be frustrated in His desires, simply would not be God."¹⁰

The issue of the well-meant offer is very much alive in Calvinistic circles.

It is the purpose of this book to show that the rejection of the well-meant offer by the Protestant Reformed Churches is not hyper-Calvinism. This rejection involves no restriction of the promiscuous, lively, urgent preaching of the gospel. It entails no hesitation to call everyone in the preacher's audience to repentance and faith. It originates in no determination to weaken the responsibility of man before the face of the sovereign God.

9. John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, Inc., 1991), 127–28.

10. *Ibid.*, 128–29.

Rejection of the well-meant offer is pure, sound, consistent Calvinism. It arises out of the Reformed faith itself. It is merely the negative side of the unique Reformed doctrine of the preaching of the gospel as the divine call. It harmonizes perfectly with the other truths of the Reformed faith. Its avowed purpose is the maintenance of the Reformed faith.

The well-meant offer, on the contrary, is not Reformed. It conflicts with basic Reformed truths, notably the truth of predestination. It betrays embarrassment with certain essential doctrines of Calvinism, particularly reprobation. The well-meant offer is, to coin a term, *hypo-Calvinism*, that is, a teaching that *falls below* true Calvinism and that works the apostasy from Calvinism of the churches that try to hold the well-meant offer in tension with the five points of Calvinism.

It is also a purpose of this book to give a sharp warning against the real threat of hyper-Calvinism. Some Calvinists have succumbed to hyper-Calvinism. Zealous for the glory of God in the saving of the elect by sovereign grace alone, they denied that the gospel should be preached to all. They specifically denied that the church should call all hearers to faith in the Savior.

It may even be the case that some Reformed and Presbyterian Christians, especially in the British Isles, sincerely confuse the Protestant Reformed Churches' rejection of the well-meant offer with this genuine hyper-Calvinism. For certain hyper-Calvinists in England spoke of their view as the denial of the offer of salvation.

Hyper-Calvinism is a danger.

It is a danger exactly to the church that embraces the truth of sovereign, particular grace with believing heart by the mighty working of the Spirit of Christ. It is no danger to most churches today. It is no danger to most Reformed and Presbyterian churches today.

The church that confesses sovereign grace must guard against the temptation of restricting the preaching of the gospel: hyper-Calvinism.

The church that confesses sovereign grace must give her defense of sovereign grace in the preaching: the call of the gospel.

Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel is such an apology and a warning.

1

Hyper-Calvinism

IN MOST CASES the charge “hyper-Calvinism” is nothing but a deceptive attack upon Calvinism itself. Someone hates Calvinism or the uncompromising, consistent defense of Calvinism. Yet he hesitates to attack Calvinism openly and forthrightly. Therefore he disguises his attack as an attack on hyper-Calvinism and hyper-Calvinists.

Treacherous Attack on Calvinism

An outstanding and clear example of this cowardly, deceitful method of attacking Calvinism is the attack on Calvinism by the self-styled evangelist John R. Rice in two books, *Some Serious Popular False Doctrines* and *Predestined for Hell? No!* Chapter 7 of the former is entitled “Hyper-Calvinism—A False Doctrine,” and the cover of the latter explains that the author is busy “correcting the errors of Hyper-Calvinism.” Under pretense of opposing hyper-Calvinism, Rice fights the truth that men are saved by God’s sovereign grace alone and propounds the ancient heresy that man saves himself by the exercise of his free will.

This is obvious in the scurrilous little book *Predestined for Hell? No!*¹ The author’s tactics are the despicable tactics that the Arminians have always used against the Reformed faith. As the title indicates,

1. John R. Rice, *Predestined for Hell? No!* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Foundation, 1958).



JOHN R. RICE

Exposing his Reformed allies, the fundamentalist, Baptist evangelist added his Arminian voice to the chorus of nominally Reformed critics of the Protestant Reformed confession of particular, sovereign grace in the preaching of the gospel. Unlike his Reformed allies, Rice made no effort to hide the reality that objection to particular grace in the gospel is the criticism of the genuinely Reformed faith by Arminianism and Pelagianism.

the attack on election and salvation by sovereign grace alone is launched specifically against the doctrine of reprobation. The crafty Arminians are aware that men have more natural antipathy to reprobation than to any other doctrine and feel that they can put the Reformed faith in a bad light from the outset if they succeed in making reprobation the first and main subject of debate. This was exactly what Episcopius and the Arminian party tried to do at the Synod of Dordt when, having failed in their political maneuverings, they proposed to the synod that the synod first take up the doctrine of reprobation.²

2. The synod wisely and justly refused to follow this order. It began with election and salvation by God's free and sovereign grace. The answer to the question, are some men sovereignly and eternally ordained by God to hell? is yes. But this is not primary. God's election of his church in Jesus Christ is primary. Nor is reprobation the issue between the Reformed and the Arminians. Gracious salvation founded on election is the issue. Today also, we defenders of gracious salvation must not allow the Arminians to set the agenda or to determine what will be emphasized as primary and central.

Then the author caricatures reprobation. On the cover of his book is this picture: a disconsolate, unwilling man is forced into the livid flames of hell at the point of a sword tyrannically wielded by the arm of God. Already on the third page of the book, Calvinists are epitomized as people who teach that “there are babes in Hell not a span long.”

The contents of the book are an open, all-out assault upon the first four of the well-known five points of Calvinism, a rejection of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace.³

What it is that Rice hates with all his heart becomes plain when he quotes the man who is for Rice the quintessential hyper-Calvinist, Herman Hoeksema. To illustrate hyper-Calvinism, Rice quotes from Hoeksema’s book, *Whosoever Will*.⁴ What does Hoeksema write in the offensive paragraph? That God is a tyrant who shuts his ears to the pleas of poor sinners to be saved and thrusts them, willy-nilly, into hell? Nothing of the sort. Hoeksema proclaims these truths:

[Salvation] is absolutely divine. Man . . . cannot possibly cooperate with God in his own salvation . . . The sinner is of himself neither capable nor willing to receive that salvation . . . With absolute sovereign freedom, God ordained and prepared this salvation for His own, His chosen ones alone, and upon them He bestows it.⁵

This is all: the total depravity of man by nature; salvation by free, sovereign grace alone; God’s gracious election of some men unto salva-

3. Rice claims to believe the fifth point of Calvinism, the perseverance of saints, which he calls “eternal security.” This is an insignificant oddity of some in the Arminian camp. Someone has wittily characterized this position of some Arminians as the teaching that “you can get in by yourself [that is, into salvation], but you can’t get out.” In reality there is a basic difference between Rice’s teaching of eternal security and the Reformed doctrine of perseverance. For Rice and his ilk, eternal security is the certainty that everyone who makes a cheap decision for Christ will go to heaven, no matter how he lives after he has made the decision. The Reformed doctrine of perseverance is the truth that God preserves the regenerated elect through sanctification of life (cf. Canons 5).

4. Rice, *Predestined*, 11; cf. also 95–98.

5. Herman Hoeksema, “*Whosoever Will*,” 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945; repr., Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 4.

tion. This, says Rice, is the height of hyper-Calvinism. But in reality, it is simply Calvinism, the historic Reformed faith.

There is no need to refute Rice's arguments against Calvinism nor to expose his defense of Arminianism from scripture, although a lover of the Reformed faith is sorely tempted to do this in order to lay bare the utter poverty of modern Arminianism. Rice blunders around in the Bible, as Luther said of Erasmus, the way a pig roots about in a sack of feed.

It serves our purpose to stress two things regarding the war cry "hyper-Calvinism" that become plain from such works as those of John Rice.

First, the charge "hyper-Calvinism" masks an attack on *Calvinism*. Rice is an Arminian and a Pelagian. He admits to holding that every man's salvation depends on the choice of his own free will. This is Arminianism. He also maintains that men only *potentially* died in Adam and that the natural man who has nothing more than the testimony of God in creation may be saved by this natural light. This is sheer Pelagianism. Rice is guilty of the one, great, "serious popular false doctrine": man saves himself by his own willing and running. As such, he is an inveterate foe of Calvinism, which maintains the true doctrine: man's salvation is of God who shows mercy (Rom. 9:16).

The attack on Calvinism by means of the charge "hyper-Calvinism" is another of the calumnies heaped upon the Reformed faith, as the conclusion of the Canons of Dort puts it. It is reproach for Christ's sake that Reformed people must suffer in this life. But we do, with the conclusion of the Canons, warn the calumniators "to consider the terrible judgment of God which awaits them," and we do urge as many as piously call upon the name of Jesus not to judge our faith on the basis of the accusations of our enemies.⁶ In light of the fact that foes of the Reformed faith have always misrepresented that faith, men today ought at least to consider that the charge "hyper-Calvinists" might be a cheap shot at a thorough-going, consistent Calvinism.

6. Conclusion of the Canons of Dort, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983), 3:596.

Second, it is significant that the heart of Rice's opposition to Calvinism is his insistence that the doctrines of Calvinism make preaching, particularly the call of the gospel, impossible. In Rice's terminology, Calvinism destroys "soul winning."

This doctrine [Calvinism] insists that we need not urge a man to turn to Christ. He cannot turn until God forces him to do so. If God has planned for him to be eternally lost, he will not be turned to God. If God has planned for him to be saved, then "irresistible grace," the hyper-Calvinist says, will force him to be saved.⁷

In the chapter entitled "The Harm Done by Hyper-Calvinism Heresy," Rice says that the first two alleged evil consequences of Calvinism are: "I. Hyper-Calvinists Actually Hinder and Oppose Gospel Preaching and Soul Winning" and "II. Hyper-Calvinism is Either Indifferent to or Opposed to Foreign Missions."⁸

This was the charge laid against the Reformed faith by the Arminians at the time of the Synod of Dordt. The Arminians argued that election, limited atonement, and sovereign grace ruled out the serious call of the gospel to all who hear the preaching. In the Canons the Reformed churches proved that the charge was false and that the lively preaching, including the serious call to repentance and faith, retains its full rights within the framework of the doctrines of Calvinism. The Reformed faith does full justice to preaching, including the call of the gospel, *while holding wholeheartedly and without qualifications to predestination, limited atonement, and irresistible grace*. Its response to the monotonous Arminian allegation that it has no place for the call of the gospel is never that it hedges on or compromises predestination and sovereign grace.

Compromise of Calvinism

This is forgotten by many Calvinists today to the peril of the faith that they profess to love. To the charge that the Reformed faith in the preaching cannot call all who hear to repent and believe, they respond

7. Rice, *Predestined*, 11.

8. *Ibid.*, 95, 100.