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*"vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo"*  
Colossians 3:3

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## What Should I Read on Jeremiah?

James T. Dennison, Jr.

Lundbom, above all others!<sup>1</sup> His 3-volume revision of the older Anchor Bible Commentary by John Bright (1965) is nothing less than a tour de force. And a rhetorical, poetical, prose-narrative tour de force at that. Yes, this set is massive (2207 pages *in toto*); but it is worth every penny for those searching for penetrating, judicious and even (sometimes) conservative treatment of the prophet. Lundbom takes the historicity of the book seriously. Kudos! Lundbom takes the poetic genre seriously. Double kudos!! Lundbom takes the narrative biography of Jeremiah seriously. Yet more kudos! If there are slight higher critical flaws, ignore them. Lundbom should have resisted the temptation to demonstrate his membership in the SBL clique, but we won't throw out this AB baby with the higher critical bathwater. There is only one person from whom he could learn and advance his understanding of this complex, yet marvelous book—and we will get to her below. But this commentary is the place to visit for stimulating exegesis and theological reflection on the speech-acts of the Protological Weeping Prophet, who anticipates and prefigures the Eschatological Weeping Prophet (Luke 19:41; cpr. Matt. 16:14).

Lundbom is the very antithesis of Robert Carroll, whose original OTL (Old Testament Library) commentary<sup>2</sup> has now been (thankfully) replaced by Leslie Allen's new OTL contribution.<sup>3</sup> Allen can't hold a candle to Lundbom or even Thompson for that matter, but at least he displaces the radical Carroll—even if with forgettable and superficial fluff. Carroll regarded the entire book of Jeremiah as a fabrication (“fabricated”—his word, page 59 of his commentary; and “fictional,” page 514 of his tome)—an invention of the post-Exilic scribal guild (very similar to the post-modernist theological guild of which Carroll himself was a ‘charter’ member).<sup>4</sup> But then all critical-liberal fundamentalists are deconstructionist/reconstructionists. Carroll is simply demonstrating his asinine presuppositions in a commentary which tells us more about the invention of Jeremiah in the image of Robert Carroll (his own personal socio-political ideology drives his commentary as in ‘philosophy trumps fact’) than it does the historical Jeremiah of 626-

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<sup>1</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (Anchor Bible Commentary, 21A, 1999), *Jeremiah 21-36* (Vol. 21B, 2004), *Jeremiah 37-52* (Vol. 21C, 2004). Suggestion: do not waste money on Lundbom's most recent little book on Jeremiah—*Jeremiah Closer Up: The Prophet and the Book* (2010). It is no advance on the commentary; it is rip-off overpriced (\$70 for 123 pages); and my copy arrived with the hardcover boards warped!

<sup>2</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (1986).

<sup>3</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah* (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The reader of this review must understand Carroll's thesis: there never was a person in history named Jeremiah; he is the invention of a group of post-Exilic Jews; an invention which serves their own politico-theologico-cultural agenda. Perhaps we may ask—who invented Robert Carroll? Is he really a name fabricated by a group of academic scribes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century—a group that dribbled various signatures of paper to a Philadelphia publishing location (over a period of years of course) and voila ‘Carroll’ on Jeremiah appeared like an epiphany?!

586 B.C. Whether the particular pericope in Jeremiah is the product of one or multiple redactors, no pericope in Jeremiah is from the historical era claimed in the superscription (Jer. 1:1-4). But like all wood, hay and stubble, this too shall pass away and we may be grateful that it is out-of-print from the original publisher (Westminster, now Westminster/John Knox Press) because it deserved to be relegated to the ash heap of passé idiosyncrasies<sup>5</sup>—abandoned for a less ideological albeit unremarkable approach. But never fear, the press of dead-end liberal scholarship (sic!) (Sheffield Phoenix) has resurrected this dog and reprinted it in two volumes. Unsuspecting and uninformed neophytes, beware!

In between these critical extremes are two other major sets on Jeremiah—the Hermeneia and International Critical Commentary (ICC) offerings. William Holladay is the author of the important 2-volume Hermeneia set (1986 and 1989). William McKane is the author of the unimportant 2-volume ICC set (1986 and 1996). Launched in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the joint editorship of the infamous Charles Augustus Briggs, the ICC commentaries were packed with some of the dullest, most boring, base liberal and unbelieving philological minutia that the reader searching for theological meat (or even pitiful orts) was left in despair with thousands of pages of rubbish. Thankfully, most of this 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century nonsense has been abandoned—as the series itself was in 1951. But some harebrained liberal decided to revive the series in 1975 with the first of C. E. B. Cranfield’s 2-volume work on Romans (published by T&T Clark, the new series volumes are exorbitantly overpriced, which fortunately prevents them from falling into the hands of the average naïve and unsuspecting pastor). At least we got some theological reflection from Cranfield, albeit a neo-orthodox tainted *heilsgeschichte*. Cranfield is the exception that proves the rule—very few volumes in this revived ICC are theologically helpful (though most are filled with a microcosm of minutia which wearies and deadens the brain). McKane’s effort is a case in point.<sup>6</sup> Every passage is minutely dissected for lexicographical details, none of which are brought to bear on the unfolding prophetic narrative biography of the subject of the book—the historical Jeremiah. From this labyrinth of minutia, McKane leaves his reader scratching his head wondering—what on earth does this have to do with God communicating his mind and heart to the prophet, let alone to the redeemed of the Lord? In addition, McKane’s writing style is obtuse—as

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<sup>5</sup> Alas and alack—more idiocy from the ‘scholarly guild’. As recently as 2009, a volume entitled *Production of Prophecy* featured articles in which ‘Jeremiah’ was scientifically proved to be a Persian era creation: “the book of Jeremiah was created in the Persian period by scribes belonging to the Deuteronomistic circle.” (This lunacy is even spreading like a virulent plague; cf. the recent contribution by Ehud Ben Zvi in the 2011 T&T Clark imprint, *Jeremiah (Dis)placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah* featuring SBL [Society of Biblical Literature] papers read at their annual meetings 2007 and 2008—papers which also feature rabid feminist and postmodern ‘readings’. When the inspired prophet is “read” in this manner, the only thing that should be (dis)placed is these witless nabobs. At \$140 a crack, we may be thankful that few will be able to afford this rot.) There is even one learned scholar who has detected three Jeremiahs: original Jeremiah, Deutero-Jeremiah and a mysterious Trito-Jeremiah (do you observe the extension of the brain-dead theories of First Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah along with original Zechariah, Deutero-Zechariah and Trito-Zechariah?). Who says fantasy doesn’t rule the pea brains of liberal-critical fundamentalism. Not even George Lucas or Steven Spielberg could have come up with these ‘box office’ trilogies. Yes, they actually print this idiocy and award Ph.D.’s for it.

<sup>6</sup> 1396 pages; list price \$290—No, that is not a typo. Two hundred and ninety dollars for two volumes. Yikes!

dense as the Jordan River Valley thickets. If they snagged and devoured Absalom's troops (2 Sam. 18:8), *caveat lector!* Gentle reader, do not waste your money—even for lower priced used copies. They will just collect dust on your shelf. Put your money into something you can actually use in preaching or teaching.

Holladay is more helpful, though handicapped by form critical presuppositions. Why these liberals do not get the story of the text is beyond this reviewer. Blinders to the drama of God's revelatory narrative has "holden[ed] their eyes" (cf. Luke 24:16, KJV). More's the pity. Still, Holladay provides a defense of the historical Jeremiah, but a Jeremiah reconstructed from the *formgeschichtlich* rubble of evolving Jewish religion. The evolutionary rubric is taken from the reading of the book of Deuteronomy (Ah! The ever-present liberal fundie Deuteronomist<sup>7</sup>) at six points in Jeremiah's career: 622, 615, 608, 601, 594 and 587 B.C. According to Holladay, this accounts for the "flow" of the book of Jeremiah itself. We occasionally uncover a theological nugget; Holladay does believe in an eschatology of the book of Jeremiah (cf. his treatment of chapters 31-33<sup>8</sup>). But it is an eschatology of the horizon of Judaism, not an eschatology of the vertical heaven of Christianity. Which makes plowing through his 1225 pages tedious and often fruitless. And then there is his bizarre interpretation of Jeremiah 1:2 which, he maintains, means that the prophet was born in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah (627 B.C.), *not* that he was called to his prophetic office in that year. The very Hebrew structure of the superscription (Jer. 1:1-4) belies this absurdity as any exegete with an eye for Semitic rhetorical symmetry could detect.<sup>9</sup> Put your money into Lundbom.

There is a liberal fundamentalist sleeper here which deserves notice on account of its theological suggestions. Louis Stulman has written a comparatively short (400 pages) commentary on Jeremiah in the Abingdon Old Testament Commentary series (2005). While he is a wild-eyed liberal on critical matters, he does redeem the time (and the text) with occasionally useful theological insights (though he is also prone to sappy modern theological rot as page 62, for example, illustrates). Worth at least \$15, but not more. Sadly, he misses entirely the point of Rachel weeping (Jer. 31:15-26, pp. 269-71) because he misses Matthew's use of the poignant text altogether (Matt. 2:17-18).

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<sup>7</sup> A virtual mirror image of his modern creators!! According to critical liberal fundamentalists, the book of Deuteronomy was first 'discovered' in 622/621 B.C. in the Jerusalem Temple (in truth, the book was planted by the Deuteronomic clique in the rubbish of the Temple, to be brought forth to great awe and applause—like a Hollywood blockbuster, but still all fiction and theater). The book is a fabrication and reconstruction (or re-writing) of Jewish religion by a group of anonymous 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. scribes. They invented the figure of Moses (yes, these learned modern scientific scribes maintain that Moses never existed, agreeing with the liars of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. who concocted him) and, obviously (and scientifically, gentle reader), he did not write Deuteronomy. It was 'written' and/or 'discovered' by Temple priests with an agenda (isn't all religion merely agenda?!) for reforming Jewish religion according to their context and pretext in the days of King Josiah.

<sup>8</sup> Though his form critical division of the unit into "recension to the North" and "recension to the South" is maddening and pure fabrication. Here is *real* fabrication with no primary document to support it save the reconstructive fantasy of the modern higher critical mind. Ugh!

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the present reviewer's outline with the nwtu.edu audio lecture "Jeremiah 1:1-4: Overview; Archaeology; Commentaries; Superscription; Narrative Structure" (with attendant handouts).

Now to the commentaries I shall designate “the holy remnant”. What a relief to enter a world of historico-exegetical sanity after the madness of the higher critical fundamentalists. The following commentaries are conservative-evangelical<sup>10</sup>—that is, their authors actually believe that Jeremiah was a real person (not a fabrication) and that nearly all the words in the book which bears his name came from his lips, pen or both (Baruch, the scribe, may have added some explanatory remarks here and there—all under the inspiration of the same Spirit of God which animated the prophet). J. A. Thompson offers a lengthy and substantial exploration of the 52 chapters of our prophet. This volume in the New International Old Testament Commentary series (1980) is a solid piece of work which casts its shadow even on Lundbom (who cites it favorably from time to time). It remains the evangelical standard though it is over 30 years old and the author is now deceased (†2002). There is a 1995 “2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition” which does not differ from the original printing and shows no interaction with the critical commentaries of 1986, i.e., Carroll, Holladay (v. 1) and McKane (v. 1). Hence, it is more a reprint with a new dust jacket than a “revision”.

The other evangelical work is R. K. Harrison’s Tyndale Old Testament commentary (1973/reprinted 2009). The advantage of this exposition is its brevity without sacrificing substance. It is most suitable for the “cut to the quick” student or pastor and provides a trustworthy guide for the Christian layperson or study group. Harrison (†1993) was an excellent historian and defender of a high view of Scripture. While not as “meaty” as the others I have reviewed above, nonetheless it is helpful and reliable in defense and explanation of the words and deeds of the historical Jeremiah.

We now come to the person who is able to teach Lundbom a thing or two and whose work on Jeremiah is indeed revolutionary. Elena di Pede is Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. Her survey of the book in the French monthly *Biblia* (numbers 59 and 60, 2007) provides a superb penetration of the life and times of the prophet. Breaking new ground in Jeremiah studies, her narrative theological work is in French, but worth the effort to translate. Her most substantial and important publications are: *De Jérusalem à l’Égypte ou le refus de l’Alliance (Jr 32-45)* [“From Jerusalem to Egypt or the Rejection of the Covenant (Jer. 32-45)”] (2006); *Au-delà du refus: l’espoir—Recherches sur la cohérence narrative de Jr 32-45 (TM)* [“Beyond the Rejection: Hope—Research on the Narrative Coherence of Jer. 32-45 (Masoretic Text)”] (2005). She has also penned numerous journal articles on our subject. What is so refreshing and significant about her work is that she refuses to reconstruct the book of Jeremiah on the canons of the liberal-critical fundamentalists. Instead (and isn’t this a novelty??!!), she accepts the text as it is and works with the history of the real Jeremiah to elucidate the narrative of his story and his words. Sounds almost like the pre-critical reading of the text (which it is, but she does not ignore the vast literature on Jeremiah as

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<sup>10</sup> A third in this tradition is F. B. Huey, Jr.’s contribution to the New American Commentary Series (1993). While commendably conservative, this work is maudlin at best and disappointing with regard to theological penetration. The exposition is too brief and superficial for such a major prophetic work. Nothing more is gained from reading Huey that is not already present in Thompson. Yes, there is a place for brevity, but that award goes to Harrison, not Huey. Finally, the old conservative 1952 Lutheran commentary by Theodore Laetsch is (sadly) virtually useless.

her footnotes and bibliographies attest). My only quibble is her occasional moralistic appeal to the reader to “take the lesson” of Jeremiah’s life and words and use them today. Professor di Pede, there is a better way—it is called union with the life that is in the prophet in the reader (and that is the glorious life of Christ with whom Jeremiah was united by grace through faith as the believing reader today stands in the same relation, only out of the fullness of the times in being joined to the Eschatological Jeremiah. Rippling inter-connected narrative identities, not moralistic lessons).

Unraveling the alleged *tohu-bohu* literary ‘chaos’ of the book, she applies her narrative skill to explaining the sequence of the poetic and narrative sections—and she does so with cogent and sharp-eyed attention to the structure of the Hebrew text (she knows the work of Shimon Bar-Efrat and uses the work of J. P. Fokkelman, among others). She even regards the Masoretic Text (MT) as the original version of the book, while labeling the Septuagint (LXX) version an abridgment or condensation (thus accounting for the abbreviated Greek text, which virtually all other critics regard as the *editio princeps* because it is shorter). Her fascinating suggestion that the LXX is actually a muddled (at places) commentary on the Hebrew original is stunning. She particularly uses her skill in Hebrew narrative paradigms to criticize the LXX for altering the meaning of the MT.<sup>11</sup> Apparently the Greek translators were obtuse to Hebrew narrative style (modern liberal-critical fundamentalists take note!). Fun stuff!!!

She is also theologically astute unpacking redemptive-historical motifs in the words of the prophet as well as relating those comments to the age of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. There are explorations in her comments of: the exodus motif (the anti-eschatological side she classifies as a contra-Exodus, i.e., an inversion of the history of redemption; the eschatological exodus side is a reversal of the inversion, i.e., a restoration); new/eschatological David; new/eschatological covenant and much more. Real theological meat to feed the mind and heart, as the very revelation itself fed the mind and heart of Jeremiah. She even poignantly labels chapters 37 and 38 “the passion” of Jeremiah. Stimulating and rewarding stuff (edifying to boot)! Learn French or demand that she find a French to English translator so the rest of the non-Francophile world can benefit from her with ease (and not need several French-English lexicons at hand).

The recent weighty (sic!—in fact, more than 30 aggregate pounds from all these volumes amassed) work in Jeremiah commentaries is evidence of a fresh look at a major Biblical figure and his “Word of the Lord”. We are poised for a new burst of insight and penetration into the mind and heart of this plangent prophet with di Pede showing us the way to the future, even as we glean from the work of the past—critical and non-critical alike.

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<sup>11</sup> “La manière de raconter et l’enjeu du récit. Jérémie présente Ananias en Jer 28,1 TM et 35,1 LXX.” *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008): 294-301, esp. 298. Cf. “Le récit de la prise de Jérusalem (Jr 46 LXX et 39 TM): son importance dans le récit et son impact sur le lecteur.” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 52 (2008): 90-99.

## Vos on the Law and Merit<sup>1</sup>

. . . Paul has been the great teacher of the philosophy of law in the economy of redemption. Most of the Pauline formulas bear a negative character. The law chiefly operated towards bringing about and revealing the failure of certain methods and endeavors. It served as a pedagogue unto Christ, shut up the people under sin, was not given unto life, was weak through the flesh, worked condemnation, brings under a curse, is a powerless ministry of the letter. These statements of Paul were made under the stress of a totally different philosophy of the law-purpose, which he felt to be inconsistent with the principles of redemption and grace. This Pharisaic philosophy asserted that the law was intended, on the principle of meritoriousness, to enable Israel to earn the blessedness of the world to come. It was an eschatological and therefore most comprehensive interpretation. But in its comprehensiveness it could not fail being comprehensively wrong . . . It is true, certain of the statements of the Pentateuch and of the O. T. in general may on the surface seem to favor the Judaistic position. That the law cannot be kept is nowhere stated in so many words. And not only this, that the keeping of the law will be rewarded, is stated once and again. Israel's retention of the privileges of the berith [covenant] is made dependent on obedience. It is promised that he who shall do the commandments shall find life through them. . . . Only a moment's reflection is necessary to prove that this is untenable, and that precisely from a broader historical standpoint Paul had far more accurately grasped the purport of the law than his opponents. The law was given after the redemption from Egypt had been accomplished, and the people had already entered upon the enjoyment of many of the blessings of the berith. Particularly their taking possession of the promised land could not have been made dependent on previous observance of the law . . . It is plain, then, that law-keeping did not figure at that juncture as the meritorious ground of life-inheritance. The latter is based on grace alone, no less emphatically than Paul himself places salvation on that ground. But, while this is so, it might still be objected, that law-observance, if not the ground for receiving, is yet made the ground for retention of the privileges inherited. Here it can not, of course, be denied that a real connection exists. But the Judaizers went wrong in inferring that the connection must be *meritorious*, that, if Israel keeps the cherished gifts of Jehovah through the observance of His law, this must be so, because in strict justice they had *earned* them. The connection is of a totally different kind. It belongs not to the legal sphere of merit, but to the symbolico-typical sphere of *appropriateness of expression*. As stated above, the abode of Israel in Canaan typified the heavenly, perfected state of God's people. Under these circumstances the ideal of absolute conformity to God's law of legal holiness had to be upheld. Even though they were not able to keep this law in the Pauline, spiritual sense, yea, even though they were unable to keep it externally and ritually, the requirement could not be lowered. . . . This is the most convincing proof that law-observance is not the meritorious ground of blessedness. God in such cases simply repeats what He did at the beginning, viz., receive Israel into favor on the principle of free grace. . . . And in Paul's teaching the strand that corresponds to this Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eerdmans, 1948) 142-44. Cf. also the Banner of Truth edition (1975) 126-28.



doctrine of holiness as the indispensable (though not meritorious) condition of receiving the inheritance is still distinctly traceable.

## **Did Paul Really Teach Republication as “Defined” by VanDrunen?<sup>1</sup>**

Scott F. Sanborn

### **Our Argument in Brief**

VanDrunen’s article, like his thesis, is very vague. One wonders if it is simply smoke and mirrors. He argues that there is an analogy between Adam and Israel in Paul. So what! There are others who do not follow the Klinean paradigm<sup>2</sup> who believe that too, insofar as both Adam and Israel were under the law. The point is not “Is there an analogy between Adam and Israel in Paul’s writings?”, but “How does one account for that analogy?” “What paradigm best explains the analogy?” VanDrunen acts as if proving the analogy proves the Klinean paradigm for explaining it. But that is far from self-evident. Many in the Reformed tradition have given other paradigms for explaining this analogy. The question, as in any science, is “What paradigm best explains all the data?” There is no logical argument in which the analogy between Adam and Israel in Paul necessitates the Klinean view that the old covenant was a meritorious recapitulation of the Adamic covenant. If VanDrunen thinks there is, he must make his case. On the other hand, we believe that this assumed Klinean conclusion is in direct contradiction to all the arguments (from Scripture) that prove that the Mosaic covenant was essentially a covenant of grace, suggesting that no part of it was essentially meritorious. Anyone who presents a paradigm for explaining the analogy between Adam and Israel in Paul must have a paradigm that coherently explains the fact that the Mosaic covenant was essentially *in toto* a covenant of grace. Their paradigm must explain all the facts. VanDrunen does not wrestle with these issues. At best, his fellow Klineans argue that the Mosaic covenant was both a covenant of grace and a meritorious works covenant. In our view, this does not present a coherent paradigm because a covenant that is essentially gracious cannot administer a meritorious works paradigm that is essentially meritorious and therefore not gracious. The Reformed tradition has agreed, presenting alternative paradigms that concur in this, i.e., that Israel’s retention of land blessings was essentially by grace, not by merit.

The state of the question is not “is there an analogy between Adam and Israel in Paul” but “what paradigm best accounts for that analogy and simultaneously does justice to all the other facts of Scripture, especially to the essentially gracious character of the Mosaic covenant?”

### **Our Argument Expanded**

When we hear someone standing in front of the camera and saying that they are for peace, change, or prosperity, how can we disagree? The media adds that these are great goals and our candidate stands for them. If we object to this person’s vision, we are

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<sup>1</sup> This is part one of a series in response to David VanDrunen’s article “Israel’s Recapitulation of Adam’s Probation under the Law of Moses,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (2011): 303-24.

<sup>2</sup> Meredith G. Kline, as will be explained below.

asked, “Are you against peace?” “Are you for stagnation?” or “Are you opposed to economic recovery?” We, sometimes shyly, say, “No, I just think it makes a big difference what view of peace you mean; in fact, it may mean the difference between life and death.”

So it is when we are continually subjected to Dr. VanDrunen’s thesis that the “the covenant of works is *in some sense* republished in the Mosaic covenant at Sinai” (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> It is so vague. It could mean so many things that it is practically meaningless. Except that when you get behind the rhetoric, you find it includes views that are *not* acceptable. Indeed, we find that “republishing” is given a pregnant sense—that *Israel’s actual obedience to the law is in some measure the fulfilling of the covenant of works*, even though those in Israel ultimately break this covenant and are thereby called to see their need for Christ.

John Murray was not suggesting that historic covenant theology argued for this pregnant sense of republishing when he stated: “The view that in the Mosaic covenant there was a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, current among covenant theologians, is a grave misconception...”<sup>4</sup> However, when VanDrunen and his colleagues refer to Murray’s denunciation,<sup>5</sup> we are left with the impression that Murray is acknowledging that the Klinean view of meritorious “republishing” was among the views previously embraced by Reformed theology. But this is not the case.

Dr. VanDrunen’s recent article continues with this implied thesis, though vaguely stated, assuring his readers that he is not arguing for anything dangerous.<sup>6</sup> For Paul even teaches that there is an analogy between being under the law and being under the covenant of works. But here we find Dr. VanDrunen much like the world leader who says that he wants world peace and then to prove his *unique strategy* for achieving it goes on to argue nothing more than the simple truth—that it is better to have world peace than another world war. Since we all want peace, we must agree with our leader’s unique policies. So VanDrunen thinks that just because he proves that for Paul there is some analogy between Israel under the law and Adam in the garden he has proven that all the (*in some sense*) views expressed in *The Law is Not of Faith* (hereafter *LNF*) are acceptable. But we believe this is no less an obfuscation than we find in the platitudes of many world leaders and the modern media that supports them.

In our view, just because Paul sees an analogy between being under the law and being under the covenant of works, this does not mean that all the ways that *LNF* interprets this

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<sup>3</sup> Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009) 6. See also “Israel’s Recapitulation,” 303. “God *in some sense* republished the Adamic covenant of works through giving the law at Sinai, not as a viable alternative way to eternal life but as a pedagogical tool to advance his broader purposes of salvation by grace through the coming Messiah” (emphasis mine). VanDrunen still leaves open *every conceivable view of republishing* in the Mosaic covenant except those claiming that the Mosaic covenant presented the *actual possibility* of meriting *eternal life*.

<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977) 2: 50.

<sup>5</sup> *LNF*, 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> “Israel’s Recapitulation,” 303-4.

analogy are acceptable.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Dr. VanDrunen must argue why his conception of this analogy is proven by Paul just as much as our world leader must argue why his particular policies are best suited for world peace.

In this article, we will argue that VanDrunen's particular conception of this view implicitly claims that *Israel in some measure kept the covenant of works*, though she failed to keep it perfectly and therefore (ironically) did not keep it. This is because Dr. VanDrunen defends the views expressed in *LNF*, including his own, which articulate this position. This becomes all the more apparent when we consider these views in light of the teachings of Dr. Meredith G. Kline.

We will argue, in opposition to Kline and VanDrunen, that insofar as the Mosaic covenant actually administered blessings to Israel, God gave them to her by sanctifying grace, viewed through the lens of Christ's imputed righteousness. The unique legal way in which God administered this grace to Israel was therefore simply a *reminder* of the covenant of works, not a *republication* of the covenant of works. In this way, while Paul expounds the Mosaic covenant, he simultaneously *reminds* the church of the covenant of works given to Adam. But it is the covenant of works given to Adam that is in absolute contrast to the new covenant. It is not some operative principle of works administered in the Mosaic covenant itself that is in absolute contrast to the new covenant.

We also acknowledge that VanDrunen and his colleagues seek to argue that the grace of Christ is behind the arrangement by which Israel merited her blessings in the land. However, we believe that they (together with Kline) express this so ambiguously that they have left themselves in the position of defending a *congruent* view of Israel's merit with respect to earthly benefits. That is, ostensibly in the same way that Rome conceives of merit for eternal life, VanDrunen conceives of merit for Israel's temporal life. At least, this is a view that he implicitly defends by defending *LNF*.

In this article, we will first elaborate our thesis regarding Dr. VanDrunen's view and the contrary position of the apostle Paul. Then we will indicate how our interpretation of Dr. VanDrunen and his colleagues is supported by an evaluation of Dr. Meredith G. Kline. We hope to show in the course of this article that VanDrunen implicitly follows the views of Dr. Kline. Kline argued that there were two opposing principles in the Mosaic covenant, one of works and another of grace. The important point to note here is that the principle of works was not simply a hypothetical promise given to Israel that if she would obey the law perfectly she would have eternal life (Dr. Kline does not seem to express this view). That suggests only a hypothetical promise that is inoperative for sinful Israel since no sinner is morally able to keep it. Instead, Dr. Kline argued that there was a principle of works in the Mosaic covenant that was actually operative in the life of Israel. That is, God gave Israel a covenant of works in which imperfect obedience could merit temporal rewards. These were rewarded to Israel based on pure merit, the exact opposite of pure grace. This is true even though God gave Israel the grace to obey the law. As a result, God *actually dispensed blessings* to Israel according to two completely opposite

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, this claim is implicit in his article, for (as an editor of *LNF*) he included all those views in the book and rejects none of them in his recent article.

principles, one of pure grace and the other of meritorious works. Thus, for Kline, God did not merely *offer* Israel blessings based on these two opposing principles, he actually *gave* Israel blessings according to both grace and merit *in the course of history*.

Finally, after considering Kline and his connection to VanDrunen, we will look at Romans 7, to which VanDrunen appeals in his most recent article. And we will evaluate whether that text does indeed defend the Klinean conception of republication which VanDrunen advocates. We will argue that it does not.

### Our Thesis

In essence, we will argue that the Mosaic covenant (insofar as it promised Israel blessings and curses in the land) is simply a *reminder* of the covenant of works. It is not a *republication* of the covenant of works. That is, these rewards and curses do not come to the elect in Israel as a fulfilling or failure of the covenant of works. Instead, these blessings and curses come to them insofar as they live by the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace. Therefore, the “curses” are not essentially curses for the saints. Rather, they are (in essence) union with Christ in his sufferings. They only formally resemble the curses of the covenant of works. Thus, they are *reminders* of the covenant of works, but they do not represent its *republication*.

Dr. VanDrunen may object initially to our framing the question this way since the introduction to *LNF* claims to distinguish between the essence of the Mosaic covenant and its form. However, we believe that the book does not carry out this distinction and at best gives this “form” its own distinct essential nature. And that essential nature is meritorious. That is, the book implicitly teaches that the Mosaic covenant (as lived by Israel) was essentially a covenant of works. If VanDrunen denies this, we should at least ask him why he (as an editor of *LNF*) included a chapter from T. David Gordon that explicitly argues that the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant are *substantially* different in nature. As Gordon states, “...the Sinai covenant itself, as it was delivered by the hand of Moses 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant, was a different covenant, *different in kind*, characteristically legal, Gentile-excluding, non-justifying because it was characterized by works, and therefore cursing its recipients and bearing children for slavery” (emphasis mine).<sup>8</sup> Again Gordon writes, “And if Paul contrasts these two [covenants, Gal. 4:24] in as many ways as he does, how can we continue to resist the notion that some covenants have at least some *substantial* differences *in kind*?” (emphases mine).<sup>9</sup> Finally, Gordon states, “Paul did *not* (as Murray) perceive all covenants as being *essentially* alike” (emphases mine).<sup>10</sup> These statements can mean nothing else than that the Mosaic covenant was *essentially* a covenant of works, at least in some respect.

Thus, whatever Dr. VanDrunen’s own position, by including Gordon’s chapter in the book, he was suggesting that this position is acceptable. This position falls under those

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<sup>8</sup> *LNF*, 251.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

that teach that the Mosaic covenant *in some sense* republishes the covenant of works at Mt. Sinai. In Dr. VanDrunen's recent article, he does not recant inclusion of this article in the book he co-edited. Thus, we should conclude that when he recently defended his vague thesis, he was defending Gordon's thesis. Gordon's thesis is acceptable because Paul taught an analogy between being under the law and being under the covenant of works. This is like saying that my argument for total disarmament is acceptable because the people of our nation voted for peace. It does not matter that the people of our nation voted for peace by means of a strong national self-defense. Thus, it does not matter that Paul argued for an analogy between being under the Adamic covenant of works and being under the Mosaic law *as a legal administration of the covenant of grace*. Because of this analogy (for VanDrunen), it is acceptable to say (with Gordon) that the Mosaic covenant is a covenant of works and not a covenant of grace, at least insofar as Israel received blessings in the land.

Whatever one makes of my interpretation of Paul above, it is clear that VanDrunen (by accepting Gordon's chapter) implicitly includes it in his recent defense. Thus, it would not be surprising if we find his own view to be closer to Gordon's than he cares to admit. And this would also apply to any of the other authors who have not publically rejected Gordon in print.

VanDrunen cannot easily get off the hook by appealing to the form/essence distinction in chapter 3 of *LNF*.<sup>11</sup> For all those in the previous Reformed tradition who have distinguished between the *essence* of the Mosaic covenant (gracious) and the *form* of the Mosaic covenant (legal) have done so for the purpose of refuting the view that the Mosaic covenant was *essentially* a covenant of works. But Dr. VanDrunen and his colleagues are happy to engage in common cause with someone who teaches that the Mosaic covenant was essentially a covenant of works—namely Gordon. This would seem to indicate that they do not mean the same thing as our Reformed forefathers when they distinguish the covenant's *form* from its *essence*.

### Essence and Form

To clarify, let us illustrate what we mean by the “essence” and “form” of the Mosaic covenant. This is easiest to illustrate with something that has a different form from its essence. For instance, a statute may have the form of a human being, but it is essentially marble. Most things have the same form as their essence. For instance, a lion looks like a lion. It has the same form as a lion. It does not look like something else. But a statue has the form of something else, like a human being. Still, while it may have the form of a human being, it is essentially marble. But the form of a human which a statue possesses does not make it a human being. No one would argue that since it resembles a human being, it is a human being.

This may help us to understand what the Reformed have meant when they said that the Mosaic covenant was in essence the covenant of grace, but that it had the form of the covenant of works. Like the statue whose essence is marble so the Mosaic covenant is

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 82.

essentially the covenant of grace. But just as the shape of the statue resembles a human being, so the formal shape of the Mosaic covenant resembles the covenant of works. Thus, only in this way does the actual administration of the Mosaic covenant *remind* us of the covenant of works.

Therefore, despite the claims of the introduction to *LNF* to defend the form/essence distinction, the book defends Dr. Meredith Kline's view that the Mosaic covenant actually and *essentially* administered land blessings to Israel on the ground of meritorious works. Since Dr. Kline defines these works as the opposite of grace, these works are *essentially* not gracious. Therefore, this represents an administration in the Mosaic covenant that is not simply a *form* of the covenant of grace, but has its own unique *essential* nature.

In contrast to *LNF*, some further considerations may help us see how this form should be viewed so that does not affect the essential character of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace. The form of the Mosaic covenant results from the *circumstances* of its administration. The formal resemblance of a statue to a human being also results from its unique circumstances. That is, the sculptor has given it certain cuts that are circumstances which determine its shape. The cuts themselves are essentially just cuts in marble, but they combine to resemble the form of a human being. So also, God gave Israel the law that he previously gave to Adam in the garden. This cut (so to speak) is essentially a cut of the covenant of grace. It was given to Israel to live out her new identity in Christ to come. God further tabernacled among them after the giving of the law and brought his tabernacle presence to dwell in the land of promise. God was giving them a land that was a foretaste of heaven by grace through faith cut in the shape of a garden paradise. These cuts were all essentially gracious. But when these circumstances are combined together with the other cuts of this administration (like the combination of cuts in a statue), they formally resemble the situation of the covenant of works.

This essentially gracious character is seen even in the curses of the covenant. When Israel is denied blessings for her disobedience this is *essentially* the same as two things characteristic of new covenant believers. (1) Insofar as Canaan was a foretaste of heaven, when Israel was denied those blessings this was essentially the same as when a new covenant Christian is now denied further blessings in heaven to the degree that she does not lay up treasures in heaven through faith and obedience to Christ. (2) Insofar as Canaan is a land in this world, as a believing Israelite repents of her sins and trusts in Christ, she suffers the loss of the things of this world in union with him. The essence of the blessings and curses of the Mosaic covenant arise from its essentially gracious nature. However, this essentially gracious covenant administration reminds us of the covenant of works. For the above elements of its administration are like the cuts in a statue, that when taken together remind us of a human being. Since the land of Canaan reminds us of the Garden of Eden (another earthly land where God was uniquely present), the loss of its blessings reminds us of the curses of the covenant of works. Two elements (that Canaan reminds us of the Garden and their loss through disobedience) combine to formally

remind us of the covenant of works. However, in every way they are essentially the covenant of grace.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the contributors to *LNF* claim that they are making a distinction between the essence and the form of the Mosaic covenant. However, to use our analogy, it seems to us that they are treating the cuts as if they had a different nature than cuts in marble. Instead, their view implies that the formal cuts and shape of the statue are essentially a human being. That is, it seems to us that they are maintaining a contradictory view, namely, that the essence of the statue is marble while the form of the statue *really* is a human being. It does not simply remind us of a human being. In other words, the Mosaic covenant does not simply *remind* us of the covenant of works, *its covenantal stipulations are a real republication of the covenant of works*.

This is to claim that its *form* has its own *unique essential nature*, that of the covenant of works. This is the opposite of the traditional Reformed distinction between the essence and form of the Mosaic covenant. For that distinction was used to argue that nothing of the Mosaic covenant (as Israel lived it out) was essentially the covenant of works.

In light of these considerations in *LNF*, it is reasonable to interpret VanDrunen's own statements in the book in this light. While he primarily understands the works principle to be the hypothetical promise of eternal life on the ground of perfect obedience, he also finds it "operative" in the actual life of Israel.<sup>13</sup> As he says later in a footnote: "God did not enforce the works principle strictly and in fact taught his OT people something about the connection of obedience and blessing by giving them, at times, temporal reward for relative (imperfect) obedience."<sup>14</sup> VanDrunen seems to suggest that God relaxed the strictness of the works principle, and as a result he rewarded Israel with temporal blessings for their imperfect obedience. That is, the very nature of this promise/reward arrangement had its direct foundation in the covenant of works, which God simply relaxed at times. As it operated in the life of Israel, it was not essentially a covenant of grace but a covenant of works. This understanding of VanDrunen's language is given weight by his continual defense of the views of *LNF*, without qualification. He thereby supports the views of Gordon and Estelle, who clearly teach that the old covenant in one respect had an essentially different nature than the new—namely, its meritorious nature. If VanDrunen objects, claiming that the Mosaic covenant has no other essential nature than that of grace, he fails to articulate how these elements (which republish the covenant of works) are essentially the covenant of grace. This failure is significant in light of the articles in *LNF* and the history of theology to this point.

The result is that VanDrunen implies the following: to the degree that Israel obeyed the law, she was in some measure fulfilling the covenant of works. This is why we believe he was able to accept Bryan Estelle's article in which he stated that Israel received her

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<sup>12</sup> In light of these observations, we do not see why VanDrunen's observation that "Israel's history mimics Adam's story" ("Israel's Recapitulation," 305) proves his distinctive Klinean view that Israel *essentially recapitulates* Adam.

<sup>13</sup> *LNF*, 284.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 301, n. 30.



rewards as a result of her merits. Estelle writes, "...obedience plays a somewhat different role under the old covenant...in the old covenant there was the need for compliance so that this would be the meritorious ground for Israel's continuance in the land..."<sup>15</sup> If according to *LNF*, Israel receives her rewards as a result of fulfilling the covenant of works *in measure*, then the merits ascribed to Israel in *LNF* are merits *essentially* speaking. This is true however much these authors falsely appeal to the essence/form distinction in their defense. We shall now see how Meredith G. Kline's own view of the Mosaic covenant reinforces our interpretation of Dr. VanDrunen and his colleagues.

### **Meredith G. Kline**

In the following pages, we hope to show that for Meredith G. Kline: (1) the Mosaic covenant, at least in one respect—that by which Israel actually retained her land blessings—was simply a covenant of works. (2) This is reinforced by the fact that Kline continuously argues that this works principle administered by the Mosaic covenant is the *absolute opposite* of saving grace. (3) Further, Kline indicates his conviction that the Mosaic covenant was *purely* a works covenant in the way he uses it to prove that the Adamic covenant was *purely* a works arrangement. He sharply identifies the two with respect to their meritorious nature. (We believe that the Adamic covenant was a works arrangement, the opposite of redeeming grace. However, we do not believe this was the case with the Mosaic covenant.)

### **Kline: Two Opposite Principles in the Mosaic Covenant/Economy**

Here we are confronted with two different interpretations of Dr. Kline. One suggests that he claimed that the Mosaic economy was gracious, but not the Mosaic covenant. The other suggests that Dr. Kline believed that the Mosaic covenant itself actually administered two entirely different principles, granting salvation by grace alone and rewarding Israel her retention of the land by merit alone. While I held to the first interpretation for a time,<sup>16</sup> I am now inclined toward the second. However, for our purposes it is not necessary to decide one way or another on this issue. On either position, it is clear that Dr. Kline believed that the merit rewarded by the Mosaic covenant was the absolute antithesis of grace. That will be the primary burden of this section. Nonetheless, if Kline believed that the Mosaic covenant administered both eternal salvation by grace alone and temporal blessings by merit alone, then he conceived of a covenant that administered two contrary principles. That creates some interesting observations when we come to Romans 7.

However, since either position above supports our main contention, we will first present some arguments in favor of the view that Kline held that the Mosaic economy alone was gracious, but that the Mosaic covenant was not. Then we will present some material that appears to favor the view that Kline taught that the Mosaic covenant administered two contrary principles.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>16</sup> This interpretation was first suggested to me by the address of Lee Irons on Leviticus at the 2001 Kerux Conference.

The arguments presented for the first view will still help us understand Kline's view of merit, even if it proves that the latter position (that the Mosaic covenant itself administered two contrary principles) is correct. The position in which Kline considers the Mosaic economy as gracious, but not the Mosaic covenant argues as follows: (1) the Mosaic economy is different from the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic economy administers eternal salvation, the Mosaic covenant does not. The Mosaic economy is a broader category encompassing everything given to Israel during its time as a unique nation. During this period, believing Israelites were given the blessings of the eternal life through the Abrahamic covenant. They were also given a covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant, but this covenant did not directly administer eternal salvation to them. It was simply a covenant of works, not a covenant of *eternal* redemption. Only the Abrahamic covenant directly administered eternal salvation to believing Israel.

However, that **period** can be called gracious because during the Mosaic era (or economy) the **Abrahamic** covenant administered eternal salvation to believers. (Thus, Kline calls the Mosaic **era** gracious, but not out of the conviction that the Mosaic *covenant* administered eternal salvation.) The following paragraph seems to support this.

The **old covenant was law, the opposite of grace-faith**, and in the postlapsarian world that meant it would turn out to be an administration of condemnation as a consequence of sinful Israel's failure to **maintain** the necessary **meritorious obedience** (emphases mine).<sup>17</sup>

Here Dr. Kline makes it clear that he believes that the old covenant was a covenant of meritorious works, not a covenant of grace-faith.

The words that precede this may subtly indicate how he distinguishes the Mosaic economy from the Mosaic covenant. But at the very least, they indicate that he believed there was a principle in the Mosaic covenant that was the very opposite of grace, namely meritorious works.

That the Mosaic **economy**, while an administration of grace on its fundamental level of concern with the **eternal salvation** of the individual, was at the same time on its temporary, typological kingdom level informed by the principle of works. Thus, for example, the apostle Paul in Romans 10:4ff. and Galatians 3:10ff. (cf. Rom 9:32) contrasts the old order of the law with the gospel order of grace and faith, identifying the **old covenant** as one of **bondage**, condemnation, and death (cf. 2 Cor 3:6-9; Gal 4:24-26) (emphases mine).<sup>18</sup>

Here Dr. Kline only describes the Mosaic *economy* as administering eternal salvation, not

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<sup>17</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue, Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000) 109.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the *old covenant*. Instead, he simply describes the old covenant as one of bondage. In the following paragraph, Kline makes the same distinction between the Mosaic economy and the old covenant.

Most familiar of the instances of the introduction of a works principle in a premessianic **redemptive economy** is the Mosaic Covenant. According to the emphatically and repeatedly stated terms of this **old covenant of the law**, the Lord made Israel's continuing manifestation of cultic fidelity to him the ground of their continuing tenure in Canaan. **This was not then one of the covenants of grant**; it was not a matter of Israel's being given the kingdom originally in recognition of past meritorious conduct.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the redemptive *economy* is gracious, but not the old covenant. It was simply one of those things administered during the Mosaic economy and it was only a covenant of law.

As we can see, Dr. Kline states that the old covenant “was not then one of the covenants of grant”. This is significant. By making this statement, he puts it in the same category of covenants as the covenant of works. This does not mean that all covenants of grant arise (for Dr. Kline) from the merit of Christ. No, he taught that Noah and other luminaries were granted blessings as the reward for their works. However, covenants of grant granted them favors for obedience *already performed*. On the other hand, non-grant covenants only promise blessings to people if they perform works *in the future*. Our point will be that covenants of grant (as Kline views them) might be covenants of grace (when something is bestowed based on the previous work of another), but non-grant covenants cannot be. Non-grant covenants must be covenants of works.

For further clarity on this point, let us look to Dr. Kline for his understanding of covenants of grant.

The Genesis 6:18 covenant with Noah might be identified more precisely as a covenant of grant. That is the kind of covenant that ancient rulers gave to meritorious individuals for faithful service to the crown. Such grants had the character of a royal charter or prebend. They might guarantee to the grantee his special status, or bestow on him title over cities or lands with their revenues, or grant to territory under his authority exemptions from customary obligations. In our introductory comments on the Creator's Covenant of Works with Adam we suggested that that covenant was comparable to the **proposal of a grant** in which a great king offered to give favored treatment to a lesser ruler on the condition of his assuming and performing the obligations of loyal service as a covenant vassal. Although Adam was created with the status of covenant servant, he was under a probation

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 237.

which **proposed** a special eschatological grant for covenant-keeping. Noah, unlike Adam, is viewed as a covenant servant who has **already** demonstrated his fidelity. He therefore receives *not* just the **proposal** of a grant *but* the **actual reward**, which the Lord was in fact in the process of bestowing in making this covenantal disclosure with its directives concerning the ark, the means of salvation and kingdom realization (emphases mine).<sup>20</sup>

If Dr. Kline denies that the old covenant was a covenant of grant, he places it in the same category as the covenant of works. The old covenant itself only **proposes** a grant; it does not actually grant Israel blessings. This further implies that it is only a covenant of works.

Even if we end up taking the view that Dr. Kline believed that the Mosaic covenant administers both saving grace and merit, his claim that the Mosaic covenant is not a covenant of grant tells us how he conceived the Mosaic covenant insofar as it administered rewards for merit. Those rewards did not flow from the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace, for in this respect the Mosaic covenant was not a covenant of grant.

Again, our point here is not that all covenants of grant (in Kline's view) are covenants of grace as the Reformed tradition understands it. For Kline, Noah is granted blessings based on his own past obedience. However, when we find the covenant of grace, it is a covenant of grant—granting eternal life to God's people on the ground of Christ's redemptive work. As Kline states, "It is a covenant of grace in distinction from works inasmuch as it bestows the grant of the kingdom of God on those who have forfeited their right to God's favor and so lost their hope of glory."<sup>21</sup> Thus, if a covenant is *not* a covenant of grant—and the old covenant is not—it is not a covenant of grace.

In defense of the view that the Mosaic economy alone was gracious, Dr. Kline makes no clear qualification to his claim that the Mosaic covenant was not a covenant of grant. Some may claim that his words "it was not a matter of Israel's being given the kingdom originally in recognition of past meritorious conduct"<sup>22</sup> are a qualification, meaning that he is only talking here about how Israel receives the land, not about eternal salvation (which he also believed was administered by the Mosaic covenant). However, there is reason to believe that these words are only an *explanation*. Here Kline is explaining why he does not view the old covenant as one of grant. The reason is that the old covenant only administers earthly blessings to Israel and these are conditioned on their works.

Others might claim that the words that follow the ones we have quoted are more clearly a qualification. We quote them here with those already quoted (for the sake of context).

Most familiar of the instances of the introduction of a works principle in a premessianic **redemptive economy** is the Mosaic Covenant. According to the emphatically and repeatedly stated terms of this **old covenant of the law**, the Lord made Israel's

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 234-35.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 237.

continuing manifestation of cultic fidelity to him the ground of their continuing tenure in Canaan. **This was not then one of the covenants of grant**; it was not a matter of Israel's being given the kingdom originally in recognition of past meritorious conduct. But this case of the **old covenant** is relevant in the present context as another notable example of the pattern **which finds the principles of works and grace operating simultaneously**, yet without conflict, because the works principle is confined to a separate typological level. Paul, perceiving the works principle in the Mosaic law economy, was able to insist that this did not entail an abrogation of the promises of grace given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob centuries earlier (Gal 3:17), precisely because the works principle applied only to the typological kingdom in Canaan and not to the inheritance of the eternal kingdom-city promised to Abraham as a gift of grace and at last to be received by Abraham and all his seed, Jew and Gentile, through faith in Christ Jesus (emphases mine).<sup>23</sup>

Do the words “which finds the principles of works and grace operating simultaneously” suggest that the old covenant administered both the contradictory principles of works and of grace? Is Dr. Kline here asserting that the Mosaic covenant administered eternal salvation by grace as well as meritorious rewards? It is possible to read the passage in such a way as to avoid this conclusion. On this reading, Kline is simply asserting that the old covenant (as a covenant of works) is an example of the operation of a works covenant alongside a gracious administration of eternal salvation. The old covenant of works does not make ineffectual the administration of eternal salvation through the Abrahamic covenant because it was not promoting works as a means of eternal salvation. It was only promoting works as a means of temporal blessings. Nonetheless, it did not administer that eternal salvation itself, only the Abrahamic covenant did this. These both operated simultaneously during the Mosaic economy. On this reading, the point of the paragraph is that works and grace can operate alongside one another in the Mosaic *economy*, not that they both operate within the *old covenant*.

This is how one might interpret the crucial sentence “**this case of the old covenant** is relevant in the present context as another notable example of the **pattern which finds the principles of works and grace operating simultaneously**, yet without conflict...” (emphases ours). It is not the old covenant itself (alone) which is the “pattern” in which we find the principles of works and grace operating simultaneously. It is “this *case of the old covenant*”, the case in which it operates simultaneously alongside the Abrahamic covenant. It is this case, *the case in which* the old covenant operates beside the Abrahamic covenant in the Mosaic **economy**, which is the *pattern* which finds the principles of works and grace operating simultaneously.

Once again, on this reading, it is the Mosaic economy, not the old covenant that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 237.

administers eternal salvation (for Kline). There may be no indication here that works and grace operate simultaneously within the old covenant itself. They only operate in the Mosaic economy.

This understanding of Kline fits well with everything else we have seen from him, in which he argues that the old covenant was a covenant of works, in antithesis to faith-grace-promise. At the same time, the view that the Mosaic covenant itself administered two completely contrary principles also fits with what we have seen in Kline. For this view can also do justice to Kline's belief that the Mosaic covenant was purely meritorious. We simply have to qualify that and say that it was purely meritorious *insofar* as it administered earthly blessings to Israel. Again, this is Kline's view, not our own.

Thus, on this understanding of Kline, the definition of merit, the opposite of grace, is still applied with full force to the way that Israel retains her land blessings.

In support of the view that the Mosaic covenant itself presented two contrary principles, the following paragraph may be adduced.

The new covenant is not a renewal of an older covenant in the sense of confirming the continuing validity of the old. If we speak of the new covenant as a renewal of the old it must be to express their *continuity as two administrations of the Covenant of Grace* or, more specifically, the continuity of the new covenant with *the underlying, foundational stratum of the old covenant*, the substratum of gospel-grace as the way to the ultimate heavenly hope in Christ. But *with respect to the old covenant as a typological realization of the promised kingdom realm*, the new covenant does not confirm the continuing validity of the old but rather announces its obsolescence and end.<sup>24</sup>

On the surface of things, this paragraph appears to teach that both the old and new covenants are "two administrations of the Covenant of Grace". As such one gets the impression that "the underlying, foundational stratum of the old covenant" is a stratum within the old covenant itself. If so, it is the old covenant itself which administers "gospel-grace as the way to the ultimate heavenly hope in Christ". It may be objected by those who hold to the sharp distinction between Mosaic economy and Mosaic covenant in Kline that he is only speaking here of "the underlying, *foundational stratum of the old covenant*" (emphasis mine), not something in the old covenant itself, but only something else foundational to it, namely the Abrahamic covenant. And this may be the case.

However, when we interpret this paragraph together with another one in Kline, we get a different impression.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 345.

By its identification with the gospel of Jesus Christ the Abrahamic Covenant is seen to be a promissory anticipation of the new covenant. It is a *subadministration of the overarching Covenant of Grace*, which as a whole is mediated by the Son as the one who faithfully fulfills the eternal intratrinitarian covenant, the foundation of all redemptive covenants. God's saving grace in and through Christ Jesus is thus the underlying explanation of the redemptive blessings provided through the covenant of promise to Abraham in *both its old and new covenant stages of fulfillment*. (We shall, however, be observing that the suretyship of Christ does not relate to the typological level of blessings under the old covenant in the way it does to the ultimate soteric realities in view in *all administrations of the Covenant of Grace*.)<sup>25</sup>

In this paragraph, Kline states that the ultimate soteric realities are in view in “all administrations of the Covenant of Grace”. We might ask, “Is the Mosaic Covenant an administration of the covenant of grace?” And the answer would come back to us from the previous paragraph (using the exact same language) that both the old and the new are “two administrations of the Covenant of Grace”.

If we take this into consideration while reading the paragraph immediately above, we are left with the following reading: the old covenant, like the Abrahamic, is one subadministration of the covenant of grace. It is mediated by the Son insofar as it is a covenant of saving grace. The Abrahamic covenant has two stages of fulfillment—one in the typological blessings of the old covenant and one in the new covenant. However, the old covenant is not restricted to the typological level because it also contains another level in which it administers eternal salvation to the elect since it is an administration of the covenant of grace.

This does not mean that Kline now holds to a traditional Reformed view of the Mosaic covenant. Instead, as we have seen above, he believes there is a meritorious works principle operative in the old covenant that is the opposite of grace. That is, on this construction, he believes that the Mosaic covenant actually administers two contrary principles.

This appears to be indicated by the following paragraph.

At the same time, Paul affirmed that the Mosaic Covenant did not annul the promise arrangement given earlier to Abraham (Gal 3:17). The explanation for this is that the *old covenant order* was *composed of two strata* and the *works principle* enunciated in Leviticus 18:5, and elsewhere in the law, applied only to one of these, a secondary stratum. There was a foundational stratum having to do with the personal attainment

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 295.

of the eternal kingdom of salvation and this underlying stratum, *continuous with all preceding and succeeding administrations of the Lord's Covenant of Grace* with the church, was informed by the principle of grace (cf., e.g., Rom 4:16). Because the *Abrahamic covenant of promise found continuity in the Mosaic order at this underlying level*, it was not abrogated by the latter. The works principle in the Mosaic order was confined to the typological sphere of the provisional earthly kingdom which was superimposed as a secondary overlay on the foundational stratum.<sup>26</sup>

Here Kline speaks of the old covenant order, not simply the Mosaic economy. While this still contains some ambiguity, we get the impression that it refers to the old covenant itself, not simply a broader order associated with it. Thus, the old covenant is composed of two strata: the primary level which administers redeeming grace and a secondary level which administered land blessings as a result of Israel's merits. It was the primary aspect of the Mosaic covenant that was "continuous with all preceding and succeeding administrations of the Lord's Covenant of Grace". The association of the Mosaic covenant with the covenant of grace (found in the previous chapter) confirms this interpretation.

After indicating that a strata of the Mosaic covenant administered salvation, he further indicates this with the words "the Abrahamic covenant of promise found continuity in the Mosaic order at this underlying level". If the *Mosaic* covenant itself did not administer salvation at some level then the *Abrahamic* covenant would not have something with which to find continuity. It would simply continue to exist during this period. However, if the Mosaic covenant at some level administered saving grace then there was something in that covenantal order which had continuity with the Abrahamic covenant.

As a result of these considerations, I presently find it more probable (though not irrefutable) that Kline believed that the Mosaic covenant itself administered eternal salvation. At the same time, he most certainly believed that the Mosaic covenant actually administered earthly benefits to Israel as a result of her merits. These two principles were contraries. They were opposite principles at work in the life of Israel. This is true on the construction in which only the Abrahamic covenant administered eternal salvation. But it is also true on the construction in which the Mosaic covenant (as Kline sees it) administers two contrary principles.

Our claim will be that this Klinean construction actually presents two contradictory principles when they are packaged in one covenant. If they were both operative in the same covenant (which seems to be the view of Kline and many of the authors of *LNF*), then we have a dialectical covenant that contained contradictions.

If it turns out that we should take Kline's claim that the Mosaic covenant is not a covenant

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 321.



of grant as a claim about the nature of that covenant *in toto*, we are still left with the conclusion that Israel's merits (on Kline's view) were not grounded in justifying grace. They were truly merit, the opposite of grace. And Israel was still under two contrary principles, one administered by the Abrahamic covenant and one administered by the Mosaic covenant. However, since I have suggested that both of these principles (for Kline) are administered through the same covenant, I will assume that this is his construction as I continue my remarks.

We will now reinforce this impression (of Kline's absolute antithesis between grace and merit) by indicating Kline's view that the merit of the *Adamic* covenant of works had essentially the same nature as the "merit" of the Mosaic covenant.

### **Nature of Works: Same in Adamic and Mosaic Covenants**

Next we notice how Dr. Kline compares the Mosaic covenant (as a covenant of works) to the Adamic covenant (as a covenant of works).

[T]he identification of God's ***old covenant*** with Israel as one of ***works*** points to the works nature of the creational covenant... the significant point is that the old covenant with Israel, though it was something more, was also a re-enactment (with necessary adjustments) of mankind's primal probation—and fall...the covenant with the first Adam, like the typological Israelite reenactment of it, would have been a ***covenant of law*** in the sense of ***works***, the ***antithesis of the grace-promise-faith principle*** (emphases mine).<sup>27</sup>

Again, Kline asserts that the old covenant was a covenant of "works, the antithesis of grace-promise-faith".

The point to observe here is that Kline does not simply see in the Mosaic covenant a reminder of the covenant of works. He asserts that the old covenant as a covenant was itself a covenant of works. He sees a one-to-one correspondence between the Mosaic covenant and the Adamic covenant with respect to their nature. He can thus use no stronger language to describe the Adamic covenant than he has already used to describe the old covenant. Both are covenants of "works, the antithesis of grace-promise-faith".

Kline's point here is not simply that Abraham is guaranteed his eschatological reward in a way that Israel is not guaranteed her retention of the land. If this were his only point, we would agree—at least insofar as Israel received these blessings in a provisional form in the land. However, it is the way that Kline justifies this truth that is troubling. He justifies it by seeing a one-to-one correspondence between the nature of Adam's merit and the nature of Israel's merit—at least insofar as they are *merit*. Yes, he acknowledges differences between the two, at least insofar as Adam is promised eternal life and Israel is only

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 110.

promised the retention of the land. And he would acknowledge that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of believing Israelites. However, when it comes to the fundamental nature of the merit that earns them their rewards, both Adam and Israel receive their rewards as a result of God looking directly to their works and considering them meritorious.

Once again we notice the strict way that Kline identifies the nature of merit in the Mosaic economy.

... the Mosaic economy, while an administration of grace on its fundamental level of concern with the eternal salvation of the individual, was at the same time on its temporary, typological kingdom level informed by the *principle of works*...The old covenant was law, the *opposite of grace-faith* (emphases mine)<sup>28</sup>

Again, this works principle is the very opposite of grace. Thus, God does not receive the works because of justifying grace. He may work them in the hearts of his people by his Spirit, but he receives them because he judges them to be worthy of his justice. They are meritorious!

For Dr. Kline, the claim that the old covenant contains a works principle that is the opposite of grace is not the claim that the Mosaic covenant presents the hypothetical promise of eternal life for perfect obedience. His claim is that Israel, insofar as she was *actually rewarded* the retention of her land blessings, was rewarded those blessings on the meritorious grounds of her obedience. These came to her as a result of works, the very opposite of grace.

This is indicated in the same paragraph quoted above. For Kline goes on to say:

The old covenant was law, the opposite of grace-faith, and in the postlapsarian world that meant it would turn out to be an administration of condemnation as a consequence of sinful Israel's *failure to maintain the necessary meritorious obedience*. Had the old typological kingdom been secured by sovereign grace in Christ, Israel would not have lost her national election. A satisfactory explanation of Israel's fall demands works, not grace, as the controlling administrative principle (emphasis mine).<sup>29</sup>

Kline speaks here of "Israel's failure to maintain the necessary meritorious obedience". This suggests that *Israel did perform meritorious obedience*; she just failed to *maintain* it. This meritorious obedience was "works, not grace". That is, it was the direct opposite of grace. As a result of this meritorious obedience, Israel possessed the "old typological kingdom". She simply failed to maintain her meritorious obedience, and therefore she

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,

lost the typological kingdom.

This is further indicated by the following quotation: “In the covenant mediated through Moses at Sinai it was arranged that Israel’s enjoyment of the external typological kingdom awaiting them in Canaan should be governed by the principle of law, that is, works, the opposite of the gospel principle of promise.”<sup>30</sup>

Kline has presented two completely opposite principles, each actually administered by the Mosaic covenant. The principle of grace administers eternal life (presumably) and the principle of works administers the continuation of blessings of the land. The principle of works is the exact opposite of grace. Thus, it is not grounded in grace, but in merit. These two principles are in absolute antithesis to one another.

### **Kline: Merit is Deserved Favor**

If anyone should doubt this last point, let us look at the way that Kline defends merit further. Our first claim in this section will be that Dr. Kline believed that people both before and after the fall are capable of meriting blessings from God. Second, for Kline, God gives blessings to people because they deserve to receive them. Third, this is true justice as God defines it. When we read the covenants and find that God rewards obedience with earthly typological blessings, we can assume that the covenant is defining justice. It is telling us what justice is. Thus, any attempt to define justice in terms of God’s eternal nature and then use that as the standard by which to judge whether a covenant is administering justice or grace is unacceptable. At least this is true for Kline when it comes to covenants granting temporal typological blessings. This way of putting the issue may not quite be the language Kline uses to describe his view, but we believe it essentially represents his position.

These three things indicate that (for Kline) Israel after the fall actually merited her blessings according to strict justice. Even if God worked in her heart to produce her obedience, he looked directly to that obedience and judged it to be meritorious. And for Kline, God judged it to be meritorious or non-meritorious according to the only standard of justice there is, namely that particular covenant. For Kline will not accept any other standard of justice (such as God’s nature considered apart from that particular covenant) by which to judge whether something is meritorious or gracious. Thus, for Kline, Israel actually merited blessings from God. This was genuine merit, truly the opposite of grace.

First, the following quote indicates that Kline believed that Israel actually received her blessings in the land by merit.

Since these factors are always present in the religious relationship, they would—if they were valid arguments against the works principle—not only prove the creation covenant was not a covenant of works but negate *the possibility of a covenant of works anywhere else*. Therefore, the biblical teaching that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 118.

*there actually have been covenants of works* shows that these factors do not in fact negate the operation of the works principle nor demonstrate the presence of its opposite, grace; no more so in the creational covenant than they do elsewhere (emphases mine).<sup>31</sup>

Clearly Kline is indicating that there have been covenants of works after the fall (“anywhere else” besides the Adamic covenant). We have already seen this. But what is instructive here is that the type of strict justice we have described above is the very type of merit he believes is found in Israel. This (the second point of our section) is indicated by his discussion of merit. The following quote follows directly after the previous quotation above.

Furthermore, though Adam could not enrich God by adding to his glory, it was nevertheless precisely the purpose of man’s existence to glorify God, which he does when he responds in obedience to the revelation of God’s will. And according to the revelation of covenantal justice, God performs justice and man receives his *proper desert* when God glorifies the man who glorifies him (emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup>

Man receives his “proper desert” when he merits. This is strict merit if anything ever was. Here Kline is talking about Adam. However, the movement from the previous paragraph to this paragraph (without qualification) suggests that Kline is describing the nature of merit wherever he sees it. That is, when Israel merited blessings in the land, she was receiving her “proper desert”.

Kline further describes this “proper desert” when he says that “God glorifies the man who glorifies him”. This is purely a matter of reciprocal justice, as Kline sees it. And this applies to Israel after the fall no less than to Adam before the fall.

How does Kline justify this? How does he rebuff those who might say, “If man truly merits before God, he has something to boast about?” His answer is as follows:

*To be so rewarded is not an occasion for man to glory in himself against God.* On the contrary, a doxological glorying in God in recognition of the Creator’s sovereign goodness will become the Lord’s creature-servants. But if our concepts of justice and grace are biblical we will not attribute the promised reward of the creation covenant to divine grace. We will rather regard it as a just recompense to a meritorious servant, for justice requires that man receive the promised good in return for his doing the demanded good (emphases mine).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

It is true that Dr. Kline is talking here specifically about Adam. However, as indicated, the last three paragraphs I have quoted are successive. When read together, we see that Kline makes no qualifications when moving from the merit of other “covenants of works” after the fall to the covenant of works before the fall. Thus, when he describes the nature of the merit that is true of the Adamic covenant, he suggests that Israel’s merit had the same nature. Hence, he implies that for Israel “justice requires that man receive the promised good in return for his doing the demanded good”. This is strict justice if there ever was such. It is the actual operation of meritorious works in the administration of the Mosaic covenant. And Israel’s deserts are given her according to the standards of strict justice.

It is true that Kline seems to qualify this in the quotation two paragraphs above with the words “And *according to the revelation of covenantal justice*, God performs justice and man receives his proper desert when God glorifies the man who glorifies him” (emphases mine).<sup>34</sup> Thus, we might think that Kline is appealing to a distinction between strict justice and covenantal justice. Some Medieval Roman Catholic theologians used this distinction to claim that they were not saying that we are justified by strict merit but only covenantal merit.

However (and here we come to the third point of this section), we will see that Dr. Kline’s appeal to “covenantal justice” is not an appeal to covenantal justice as distinct from the strict justice of God’s nature. Instead, Dr. Kline believes that covenantal justice is all there is. And he ridicules any other conception of justice as abstract justice. Thus, we refer to Kline’s position as strict justice because covenantal justice is the only kind of justice Kline believes exists. Thus, it is the only standard of strictness. As he states below:

The disproportionality view’s failure with respect to the doctrine of divine justice can be traced to its approach to the *definition of justice*. A proper approach will hold that God is just and his justice is expressed in all his acts; in particular, it is expressed in the covenant he institutes. The terms of the covenant—the stipulated reward for the stipulated service—are a revelation of that justice. *As a revelation of God’s justice the terms of the covenant define justice* (emphases mine).

Here Kline is rejecting the traditional Reformed view of the covenant of works. According to that view, there is such a disproportionality between God and his creatures that not even his image bearers strictly deserve eternal life as a result of their works. Here the Reformed are trying to do justice to passages like Romans 11:35, “who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again?” No one has ever given unto God that God should repay him. Reformed writers have seen this as a revelation of God’s nature and relationship to man qua man. However, Kline only thinks the covenant of works (considered alone) is the revelation of God’s justice. Thus, it reveals the justice of that

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

arrangement and nothing else. In other words, Dr. Kline is rejecting the idea that the Scriptures elsewhere (e.g., Rom. 11:35) give us a strict standard of God's attributes and justice in relationship to man qua man—a relationship that we should consider when considering the covenant of works. For him, only the covenant of works reveals justice. Whatever God says in the covenant (as Dr. Kline understands it) is how we should define justice. As he says next: "Refusing to accept God's *covenant* word as the *definer of justice*, the disproportionality view exalts above God's word a standard of justice of its own making" (emphases mine).<sup>35</sup>

The "covenant" alone is the "definer of justice". As a result, whenever Kline finds a connection between obedience and rewards in post-fallen covenants (granting earthly rewards), he is free to call the arrangement "merit". This is because Kline does not believe that there is a standard of strict justice revealed in Scripture (e.g., Rom. 11:35) that stands outside the various particular covenant administrations and by which they may be judged as strictly meritorious or not. Reformed orthodoxy, by contrast, had another biblical standard of strict justice (e.g., Rom. 11:35) that stood outside the Adamic covenant and by which the Adamic covenant could be judged. By this criterion they concluded that the Mosaic covenant was not *strictly* meritorious. It was not determined by God's strict justice even though it revealed his justice. Instead, it was called merit within the covenant arrangement in which the obedience of Adam alone was required without the obedience of a substitute and surety. Kline, by contrast, has no other standard to which the Adamic covenant may be contrasted in order to determine whether it is strictly meritorious. His only standard for determining whether the Adamic covenant is strictly meritorious is the Adamic covenant itself (a circular approach).

This is the way Kline approaches other biblical covenants as well. He contends that some of them (e.g., the covenants of grant to Noah and Abraham and the Mosaic covenant) are meritorious. However, he makes this claim by denying that there is a criterion of strict justice outside each of these covenants by which to judge whether these arrangements are in fact meritorious.

This must be qualified by noting that Kline has some criteria for determining if a covenant is meritorious (mostly if we only find the explicit ratification of the human agents in the transaction). However, once it is determined that a covenant is meritorious by this criterion, then that covenant defines the nature of merit within it. It is reasonable to conclude that each of Kline's meritorious arrangements (e.g., the covenants of grant to Noah and Abraham and the Mosaic covenant) are just as much meritorious within their own covenants as any other arrangement. And there is apparently no other standard by which to judge one more meritorious than another.

As indicated, Kline then carries this over into other covenant administrations besides the Adamic covenant. If Dr. Kline finds in the Mosaic covenant a works arrangement, we must assume this is the only definition of "merit" that we should consider when considering the definition and nature of merit in that arrangement. We should not consider what the Scripture says elsewhere about the holy nature of God and man's

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

sinfulness. Of course, Dr. Kline does not explicitly say this, but this is the implication. Yes, he seeks to reconcile this with what the Bible elsewhere says about grace, but, as we will see, this does not qualify his definition of merit as merit. Israel's blessings are still given her by the only definition of merit there is—the arrangement of do this and (merit) life in the Mosaic covenant. Thus, we may say that Israel strictly merits her blessings, even though God works in her hearts to perform them.

Why do we call this “strict” merit? Because for Dr. Kline, we cannot judge what the covenant says about merit by any other standard (i.e., the nature of God understood apart from that particular covenant). Thus, we cannot affirm that this is anything else but a strict standard of justice. If one has no standard of justice outside the covenant then this is the only standard of justice there is. It is the strictest standard of justice that exists. For Kline there is no standard of justice (outside the covenant) to which to compare the covenant and say that its justice is anything other than a strict standard of justice. That is, if I do not have a straight standard by which to judge something (i.e., the covenant), then the covenant itself becomes the straightest and only standard I have. It defines strict justice.

The point of all of this is that Kline has thus defined merit in the most antithetical way to justifying grace possible. The merit he ascribes to Israel is rewarded to her by strict justice. She really deserves the rewards she continues to retain in the land. She merits them according to the strictest standard of justice available. This further reinforces what Kline says when he states that Israel received her blessings in the land by merit, the opposite of grace. He means that the standard by which God judged Israel's obedience acceptable was the *absolute opposite* of justifying grace. This indicates that for Kline, Israel's *merit* and *justifying grace* are *essentially* different. What's more, they are *essential opposites*.

### **Kline: Is there Grace in Israel's “Merit”?**

The following passage is sometimes appealed to in support of the view that Kline did not believe that Israel's “merit” was strict merit. It is true that the passage refers to Kline's belief that Noah merited his passage in the ark during the flood. However, it is reasonable to conclude (as most do) that Kline believed the explanation he gives here for how to relate grace and works in a meritorious arrangement should also be applied to Israel.

It is, of course, the gospel truth that God's dealings with Noah found their ultimate explanation in the principle of God's sovereign grace. This covenantal grant to Noah came *under the Covenant of Grace whose administration to fallen men deserving only the curse of the broken creational covenant* (and Noah too was one of these fallen sons of Adam) *was an act of God's pure mercy in Christ*. Wherever enmity has been reestablished between man and Satan it has been due to sovereign divine initiative (Gen 3:15). There is no reconciliation with the Creator, no renewal of love for him or genuine confession of Yahweh as covenant Lord that is not in the last analysis due to God's

restorative power operating in forgiving grace. What is said in Genesis 6:8 is consistent with that but that is not the point that is being made in this verse. It rather refers to a covenant grant bestowed on Noah as one whose loyal service received God's approbation (emphases mine).<sup>36</sup>

At first glance, this paragraph seems to be at odds with everything we have seen so far on the nature of merit, as Kline conceives it. However, I will suggest a reading of this paragraph that is consistent with what we have observed to this point.

In this reading, I suggest that Dr. Kline is not saying that the covenant grant itself (considered as a covenant arrangement) is gracious. He is simply saying that only someone who has been forgiven and sanctified by the covenant of grace is able to perform the required stipulations of this works arrangement. However (we might add), the arrangement itself is purely meritorious, as defined by the covenant. And this covenant alone is the definer of justice.

This would account for how God's grace can be the "ultimate explanation" why Noah received these blessings. He would not have received them apart from his obedience, and this could not come to him except by grace. Thus, in the "last analysis" Noah was granted this blessing "due to God's restorative power". The "forgiving grace" (insofar as it served as a backdrop for the grant) was only the means by which Noah was delivered from God's wrath and received the "restorative power" of a new heart. *In its relationship to the grant*, this mercy (at best) eliminated the **negative** effects of the fall and placed Noah in a position similar to pre-fallen Adam—back in the Garden of Eden. It left Noah in a position (like Adam), in which he had not yet attained the **positive** righteousness needed for his potential reward. Instead, (like pre-fallen Adam) Noah was still capable of *meriting* that reward and once his works were sufficient, God gave him the grant. Therefore, God's mercy was not the *positive* ground of Noah's grant. When God judged Noah's obedience worthy of the grant, he did *not* do so by looking at his own forgiving grace *together with* the full positive justifying righteousness of Christ. Instead, for Kline (with respect to the grant), God looked directly at Noah's obedience *apart from* the **positive justifying merits** of Christ. That is why Noah's obedience was meritorious.

In this way, the "covenantal grant to Noah" came "*under* the Covenant of Grace" (emphasis mine). The covenant of grant was not itself the covenant of grace. It did not give Noah his reward on the ground of his justification. Instead, in the covenant of grant, God looked directly at Noah's works. Admittedly, these works were done by the Holy Spirit, and thus the covenant of grace formed the backdrop apart from which the covenant of grant would not have had fruition. In this way "the covenantal grant to Noah came *under* the *Covenant of Grace*" (emphases mine), but was not itself the covenant of grace.

Thus, it was not the covenant of grant but only the "*Covenant of Grace whose* administration to fallen men deserving only the curse of the broken creational

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 236.



covenant...was an act of God's pure mercy in Christ." The covenant of grace *alone* was an act of *pure mercy* in Christ. On the other hand, the covenant of grant rewarded Noah blessings based on his merits.

It is true that Kline's words "*deserving only the curse of the broken creational covenant*" might suggest that in this paragraph Kline conceived the mercy of God always present with Noah as the backdrop of God's acceptance of his works. (The term "act" of God's mercy may preclude this, but not necessarily.) However, if this is the case, we must interpret this together with Kline's other statements, to the effect that merit is the opposite of grace. Again, when Kline here appears to hint at the relationship of Noah's eternal salvation to the grant, he only speaks in terms of how the mercy of God has reversed the *negative* effects of the fall ("the curse"). He has not asserted that Christ's positive righteousness is the ground on which Noah's works are judged acceptable (in terms of the grant).<sup>37</sup>

Is this approach to Kline correct? All would agree that Kline did not believe that God rewarded Noah this grant simply because Noah was a justified person. But for Kline, did God look upon Noah's sanctification, seen through the lens of Christ's positive justifying righteousness, and reward it? Was this analogous to the degrees of reward that the saints will receive in heaven based on the degrees of sanctification in this life? If so, he does not elaborate on this point.

The preponderance of his statements on the nature of merit as the opposite of grace seems to lead in another direction (as we have suggested). Considering all that Kline states on the subject, if Kline did intend mercy as the lens through which God judged Noah's works worthy, this lens of mercy (in its relationship to the grant) fell short of the positive justifying righteousness of Christ. The fact that it falls short of complete imputed righteousness is further supported by Kline's claim that Noah's *eternal salvation* came to him as a result of God's grace, but he received his *typological blessings* on the ground of his merits, the opposite of grace. This bifurcation between the two different ways God deals with Noah—grace in terms of eternal salvation versus merit with respect to temporal-typological rewards—is more consistent with Kline's overall approach than the more alternative synthetic approach considered in the previous paragraph. In this latter (synthetic) approach, the complete imputed righteousness of Christ is the lens through which God viewed Noah's works *for both temporal and eternal rewards*. Anyone who adopts the more synthetic interpretation of Kline must account for all that we have found so far in Kline on the nature of merit as the opposite of grace and inherently deserving reward. Further, the bifurcated approach to Noah is supported several pages later in the following words.

Noah's subsequent obedience to God's directive to construct the kingdom-house of God in the form of the ark would have been a

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<sup>37</sup> Neither does Kline address this issue in *By Oath Consigned* when he states: "the demands made by God's covenant upon the individual...both as stipulations and sanctions are met and satisfied for men in their faith-identification with the Christ of promise" (23). Here he is dealing with how an "individual" sinner receives eternal life during the older economy, not how Israel retained blessings in the land.

supplementary extension of the faithfulness that was the ground for his reception of the kingdom grant. As in the other cases we have discussed, *we must keep in mind the typological level of the kingdom that was secured by Noah's righteousness if we are to perceive the consistency of this works-grant with the grace principle* that was operating at the permanent, fundamental stratum of the Covenant of Grace. The flood judgment was but a type of the messianic judgment and the kingdom in *the ark that was granted to Noah as the reward for his good works was only typological of the messianic kingdom. Therefore, this covenant of grant to Noah was not in conflict with or an abrogation of the grace of the redemptive covenant* that had been revealed to the Sethite community of faith and, of course, continued to be operative in the sphere of *eternal realities* in the days of Noah and his covenant of grant (emphases mine).<sup>38</sup>

Here we find the reason Kline gives for not believing that there is a conflict between grace and merit: it is simply that grace brings eternal rewards while merit brings typological rewards. If the more synthetic interpretation of Kline is to be preferred, this distinction between temporal and eternal should not be a crucial point. For let us assume that Kline simply believed that Noah received his reward by God looking at his good works through the lens of Christ's justifying grace. This would not differ from the way God rewards saints with greater degrees of heavenly blessings. Then why should it matter whether the rewards are temporal or eternal? There is no problem with God rewarding either looking at our sanctification through the lens of Christ's righteousness. However, Kline constantly appeals to this distinction between the temporal (typological) and the eternal riches to explain why there is no conflict between "merit" and grace.

This suggests that he does not simply misuse the term merit, as if it referred to God rewarding his saints for their sanctification, seen through the lens of Christ's righteousness. Instead, Kline views it as merit traditionally understood. And that is why he defines it as merit, the opposite of grace. On Kline's view, it is inherently worthy of reward. None of this is consistent with the view that God is simply looking upon our sanctification through the lens of Christ's righteousness.

Kline has presented us with two contrary principles, each administered by the Mosaic covenant. Grace may be necessary to perform "meritorious" duties. Nonetheless, when God looks upon the deeds of Israel, he does so directly—apart from the *positive* merits of Christ. Only then are Israel's works truly meritorious, inherently deserving reward, the very opposite of grace.

At best, Kline has constructed a form of *congruent merit* for *temporal* rewards parallel to the congruent merit that *Rome* constructed for *eternal* rewards. There is clearly a parallel

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 238-39.

here between Rome's view of possessing eternal life and Kline's view of Israel possessing temporal benefits. Let us consider some of those parallels. First, Kline argues that Israel received land blessings by means of a works arrangement. Rome argues that the Church receives eternal life by means of a works arrangement. Second, Kline defends his position as one of grace by arguing that God worked in Israel to produce these works. Rome defends her position as one of grace by arguing that God works in the Church to produce works. Third, Kline might argue that his position is still one of grace for the work of the Holy Spirit in Israel was ultimately grounded in Christ's death and resurrection. Rome also argues that the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church is grounded in Christ's death and resurrection. Finally, Kline argues for a form of mercy that falls short of imputed righteousness, for temporal rewards. Rome also argues for a form of mercy that falls short of imputed righteousness, for eternal life.

What then makes Rome's position meritorious? The fact that she does *not* argue that *the arrangement by which the Church receives eternal life* administers justification. What makes Kline's position meritorious? The fact that he does *not* argue that *the covenant arrangement by which Israel received land blessings* administers justification. For Rome, the covenant that promises eternal life does not administer justification. For Kline, the covenant that promises land blessings (the covenant of works) does not administer justification. For Kline, the Mosaic covenant, insofar as it dispenses eternal life, may grant justification. However, insofar as it grants land blessings, it is meritorious—the very opposite of justifying grace.

In this regard, the following section of dialogue from *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* may be instructive in concluding this section.

Nomist: But stay, sir, I pray; you are mistaken in me; for though I hold that God doth accept of my doing my best to fulfil the law, yet I do not hold with the Papists, that my doings are meritorious; for I believe that God accepts not what I do, either for the work or worker's sake, but only for Christ's sake.

Evangel: Yet do you but still go hand in hand with the Papists; for though they do hold that their works are meritorious, yet they say it is by the merit of Christ that they become meritorious; or, as some of the moderate sort of them say, "Our works, sprinkled with the blood of Christ, become meritorious." But this you are to know, that as the justice of God requires a perfect obedience, so does it require that this perfect obedience be a personal one, viz : it must be the obedience of one person only; the obedience of two must not be put together, to make up a perfect obedience; so that, if you desire to be justified before God, you must either bring to him a perfect righteousness of your own, and wholly

renounce Christ; or else you must bring the perfect righteousness of Christ, and wholly renounce your own.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity, with notes by the Rev. Thomas Boston* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1850) 92-93.

## **Apples of Gold for a Needy People: Reading Geerhardus Vos**

Jan C. Shreve

I am no theologian. I am not a pastor, nor a professor, nor an historian. I like to think of myself as fairly intelligent, and that is probably true. A genius, I'm not.

Why do I begin with who I am? Because I read Geerhardus Vos. Often. With joy. And ever more frequently, with deep understanding and emotional connection. And some find that incredible.

But, they say, Vos is hard. He is obscure. Definitely not a casual read. And, of course, there is no practical help there: even if he is correct about Biblical Theology (which he might not be), you can't get anything from him about real life. He writes about eschatology and isn't that just for when we die? So future, so not now, so divorced from my life.

Ah, you see, I beg to differ. Yes, Vos is sometimes hard to read. But it is worth every second it takes to wrestle his ideas to the ground. Every reading adds some eternal gem of understanding to my life. Obscure? I think not. Practical help? Yes! I find in Geerhardus Vos a balm for my soul and the deepest kind of instruction for living in my Lord here on earth. Vos's view of eschatology profoundly impacts the here and now. This biblical view drives us to realize that our vital union with Christ implores us to live our lives on earth out of his heavenly kingdom. And this Kingdom changes the life upon which it is bestowed.

Have I read all of Vos's work? Not even close. Do I understand all I read? Regrettably, no. But knowing there is more treasure waiting to be uncovered in Vos's works is a profoundly exciting bit of knowledge. Certainly, understanding the truth that Vos is communicating is easier as you become familiar with his work. But I guarantee the challenge will always remain. Vos calls you to a biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God, here and now; and that calls for some of the deepest and most rewarding cogitation about relationship—relationship with the triune God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Right here, right now—eternally.

I ask you, my friends, have we have become lazy, reading only light, easy to understand books and sermons? Do we desire to be spoon-fed, not so much rejecting as dismissing the solid food of theologians such as Geerhardus Vos? Have you allowed a cursory look at theology to satisfy you? Do you feel well fed by that which is easy? Ah, then you miss the soul stimulating, thought provoking, wonder producing results of doing the hard work involved in digging to the very core of God's heart. I beckon you to the work it takes to understand the biblical ideas Vos so beautifully shares with those who will persist.

Geerhardus Vos's sermons and articles have birthed in me a greater desire to live my life fully and obediently in Christ. Are you a pastor? What pastor would not want that for his flock (or for himself)? Are you a layperson? You can, indeed, understand the scriptural, life-changing truths Geerhardus Vos sets forth in his work. Indeed, Vos has drawn me into the story of my redemption in a way that compels me to awe and drops me, hard, to my knees.

It is with pleasure I invite you to partake of the feast I have begun. Begin by reading one of Vos's sermons from his book, *Grace and Glory*. Speak often with those who read and understand Vos. Participate in Vos reading groups. Start a Vos reading group. Audit the "Vos Readings" class at Northwest Theological Seminary.

Perhaps you are not familiar with Geerhardus Vos and are wondering exactly what this fellow has to say. I invite you to meditate on a few quotes from Vos's work as a short introduction to his thought to stimulate your taste for his writings. I offer here a few quotations for you to savor.

First, an appetizer from Vos's sermon titled "The Christian's Hope" (1 Peter 1-5).

*The hope [Peter] refers to is the hope of the future Kingdom of God, the final state of blessedness, the hope of heaven, as we would call it... The Christian is a man, according to Peter, who lives with his heavenly destiny ever in full view. His outlook is not bounded by the present life and the present world. He sees that which is and that which is to come in their true proportions and in their proper perspective. The center of gravity of his consciousness lies not in the present but in the future. Hope, not possession, is that which gives tone and colour to his life. His is the frame of mind of the heir who knows himself entitled to large treasures upon which he will enter at a definite point of time; treasures which will enable him to become a man and develop his powers to their full capacity, and every one of whose thoughts therefore projects itself into the period when he shall have become of age and enjoy the fruition of his hope.<sup>1</sup>*

Reading this, we can feel our present life paling in comparison to the hope we are invited to in Christ. Our "center of gravity" moves: we are no longer earth-bound, focused on things of this world. Our perception of the future shifts so we become in this life not just heaven bound, but heaven dwellers. Our thoughts and therefore our attitudes become pinned to the knowledge of the Kingdom to which we belong. And so our lives change. We can be content in this life in all situations. We do not strive to collect possessions and relationships to affirm who we are. We no longer need to worry over the loss of earthly possessions as if our hope would be destroyed through the destruction of them. We are set free from our dependence upon temporal things as we begin to be fed by the eternal. Having our hope set securely in the age to come, we become free to truly love our spouses, friends, and even our enemies because we now, forever, receive our sustenance

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<sup>1</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory, Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (1994) 142.

from Heaven and not from the things of this world. And feasting with deep satisfaction on the heavenly food drives us to offer others the nourishment we receive that they might also dwell in the eternal.

Now I serve you a morsel from Vos's sermon entitled, "Heavenly Mindedness" (Heb. 11: 9-10).

*When [the writer] affirms that by faith all these things were suffered and done, his idea is not that what is enumerated was in each case the direct expression of faith. What he means is that in the last analysis faith alone made possible every one of the acts described... Whether the call was to believe or to follow, to do or to bear, the obedience to it sprang not from any earth-fed sources but from the infinite reservoir of strength stored up in the mountain-land above. If Moses endured it was not due to the power of resistance in his human frame, but because the weakness in him was compensated by the vision of him who is invisible.<sup>2</sup>*

What a boon to our insecure, fluctuating idea of faith. Here, the biblical doctrine of faith is elucidated in a way that is personal and uplifting. We began to think scripturally about what faith is, and what is its source. Faith is no longer something we demonstrate or work for, but is a gift, flowing from the very Kingdom we inhabit by virtue of our salvation. Dare to think deeply about what dwelling in the heart of the gift of faith means. We no longer can settle for the idea that faith is only a feeling of confidence, albeit a gift from God. We must confront the idea that faith has something to do with "the vision of him who is invisible."

Note that the focus here is on heaven, from whence this faith proceeds. It is not an earth-bound faith, given because we need it to serve God here. No, although certainly faith enables much in us. Note that faith comes from "the infinite reservoir of strength stored up in the mountain-land above". In this age of social gospel and "personal" faith, we, who worship in Reformed churches, should rejoice that there is a theologian such as Vos that points us away from the road most traveled, i.e., faith as an objective or faith as a means to get stuff. We must understand that we don't need "stuff" because we already possess all the riches of heaven.

This is eschatology! Not a dry, difficult system of doctrine void of comfort. Not merely a description of the world to come. But a vital, life-giving knowledge that transports us into the understanding that God's love for his people is so deep, so eternally committed, that he has broken into our world, bringing a Kingdom built by his own hands, inviting us through a true experience of that Kingdom now, on this earth, to come up to him. He is inviting us to union with our Triune God in the present time, beckoning us to partake of that union and reap the benefits of it in our own needy souls now, even as we gaze with faith, "not from any earth-fed sources". Ah, the driving desire to know more of our holy God is met in the writings of Geerhardus Vos.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 106.

Ready for another ‘course’? Perhaps this is the main course. This passage is from Vos’s work with the intimidating title “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit”.

*The Spirit’s proper sphere is according to this the world to come; from there He projects Himself into the present, and becomes a prophecy of Himself in His eschatological operation.*<sup>3</sup>

The Spirit of God, in heaven, in us, showing us himself in heaven. The divine circlet of heaven to earth to heaven. Christ, come to earth, was raised up to heaven, now sends his Spirit to dwell in man on earth who dwells even now in heaven. We gaze upward and cry, “Glory!” as our minds and hearts explode with a new understanding of what eschatology brings to us even now in this world, and we are changed. Does that excite your interest? Do you yearn to take hold of these ideas? I pray you do.

One last serving at our banquet: dessert. I leave you with two stirring sentences from “Jeremiah’s Complaint and Its Answer”.

*The hidden man of the heart is the supreme religious reality that has value in the sight of God, and to Him this is so transcendently precious that He makes it the object of His chief joy. It is from there that the divine image looks back upon itself, so as to enable God to love His own in us.*<sup>4</sup>

Our hearts yearn for love, a love that accepts and cherishes. And here we understand that we already possess that love, and more than we can comprehend. This is the very intra-Trinitarian love relationship that draws us up into heaven. This is a love that began in the Trinity from eternity and is now bestowed upon us by our Holy God who sees himself in us and loves us, in Christ, joyously. Stunning! Exhilarating! Humbling! These words are indeed apples of gold to a needy people.

I entreat you, my friends, to give your attention to the writings of Geerhardus Vos: dig deep, think hard, understand well. Partake of the banquet of biblical truth that Vos has prepared for you. Be filled and let the tears of thankfulness flow, and in flowing, sweep you into the true knowledge of God in his Triune being, who has gifted himself to us in the here and now, in order to show us himself and his kingdom to come in which we now truly participate.

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<sup>3</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (1980) 103.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.



## **A Philosophy of Revelation: The People of God and the Nation-States— Interfacing Eschatology and Anti-Eschatology in Organic Continuum (Daniel 2-12)**

James T. Dennison, Jr.

In unfolding the story of the four monarchies of Daniel 2 and 7,<sup>1</sup> we have unfolded to our understanding the history of tyranny—the history of imperious tyrannical rule and absolute power, from the collapse of the terror-based Assyrian empire to the fall of the gladiator-games-loving Roman imperium. Both empires reveled in human butchery as entertainment. These tyrannical empires were driven by lust—the lust for conquest, the lust for domination, the lust for subjugation and prostration, the lust for manipulation and seduction, the lust for blood. Simply put, powerful persons—together with their religious cohorts, their military henchmen, their political thugs—aggressively marched, pillaged, genuflected, schemed, ruled and governed for the purpose of controlling human beings—human souls weaker than their tyrannical might—human lives which they could dominate with threats, with intimidations, with abuse, with conquest, with death! Their lust to control lives, peoples, nations, economies, armies, the gods and their sacred precincts, omens, priests and priestesses—this lust to control is the foundation of all tyranny. The exercise of power over others is a vested self-interest; it is the vested interest of the one using others for purposes beneficial to the user, the controller, the dominator, the manipulator, the ruler, the god-like one with absolute power. This power is fundamentally imperious, tyrannical, abusive (either verbally or physically or both); it is contemptuous of the lesser, the inferior rubes and peons—the less enlightened—even as it is degrading of their dignity and integrity.

The psychology of tyranny (may I suggest the pathology of tyranny) has been crafted not only in the biblical portraits of Egypt's hard-hearted pharaoh, Judea's Herod the great baby-butcher and Babylon's apocalyptic Whore, it has also been captured in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Mao-Tse-Tung's *Little Red Book* of quotations from Chairman Mao, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle* (with its brooding portrait of the insidious Josef Stalin)—to mention only a few of the portraits of tyrants as legion as the brand itself.

Human history reveals a veritable menagerie of tyrants and tyranny—autocratic despots, egomaniacal dictators, shrinkers and shrivelers of individual liberty and personal dignity. All is subsumed to the ego, the personality of the user—the dominator anointed to use others for personal gain, fame and blame (every one other than the egomaniacal user). We have a small museum of these iron-fisted totalitarians in the prophecies of Daniel. In fact, we have a summary of the historical manifestation of spiraling and progressive

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<sup>1</sup> See the author's audio series of lecture studies on the book of Daniel at [nwts.edu](http://nwts.edu).

tyranny such that one views all tyranny in history subsumed in the four monarchies of Daniel 2 and 7.<sup>2</sup>

The succession of dictatorial rulers and states is not so much an incremental calculus of burgeoning tyranny as a progressive unfolding of the tyrannical principle—the progressive unfolding of the tyrannical principle come to its judgment under the crushing supernatural power of the fifth monarchy. Gentile powers will rise and fall, catch Israel in the vice of invasion, subjugation and domination from Assyria to Egypt to Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome until the appearance of a kingdom which cannot be squeezed or invaded or subjugated or dominated by the nation-states of this age—this world. A kingdom whose genotype is eternity—an everlasting kingdom not vulnerable to the principalities and powers of this age whether Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome or any of the myriad kingdoms of this world which have come in their likeness or tramped boot-step in their footsteps with the genotype of conquest, terror, domination, subjugation, genocidal annihilation. They shall perish and their vaunted brutality shall be turned to their destruction—one by one, one after another—in an endless cycle of wars and rumors of wars—rising kingdoms and falling kingdoms destined ever and always to be perpetually looking over their shoulder for the next more powerful dark lord and ally of the prince of darkness to devour them as Babylon devoured Assyria, Persia devoured Babylon, Greece devoured Persia, Rome devoured Greece—and so and so forth until kingdom come.

The inaugural skirmish of that fifth monarchy victory having been of the spirit, not of the flesh, the unrepentant tyrannical principle will continue to replicate and recapitulate itself in all subsequent human history until that same fifth monarchy will crush and defeat it in the end time, in the flesh *as in the spirit*.

Such a climactic crisis will necessitate a consummate clash between the quintessential prince of tyrannical wickedness and the sempiternal prince of eudaimonistic righteousness. If we move in history from the victory of the fifth monarchy over the four—and that a manifest victory of the Servant of the Lord and his Servant Kingdom over the brutal despotism of the principalities, powers and kingdoms of this evil age—a victory of the spirit over the flesh—then we shall also see the final battle—the eschatological conflict—the concomitant clash between the full expression of this deified tyranny in a son of man, son of Satan, son of perdition versus *the* Son of Man, Son of God, Son of Heaven—and that a victory of the flesh over the spirit.

Daniel's prophecies project both—the victory in the spirit at the incarnation of the Son of God and the victory in the flesh at the coming again in glory of *the* Son of Man. The victory of the Kingdom of God is recorded in Daniel's prophecies—the inaugural victory present in the coming of the Kingdom in spirit and in truth and the consummate victory to

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<sup>2</sup> The fourth monarchy is epexegetical of all the worst in its predecessors as well as prophetic of the definitive horror which will replicate itself like the legendary Hydra in one post-Roman empire or nation-state after another. All tyrannical kingdoms since 476 A.D. are merely variations on a Roman theme. Hence Daniel projects nothing beyond this penultimate “dreadful” fourth monarchy.

come in the Kingdom of the resurrected righteous flesh and the dominion over the kingdom of the wicked flesh.

This final conflict is cosmic. It is not regional, partial, local, but ecumenical, universal, global. Nor is this final conflict one between a myriad succession of petty tyrants and the Kingdom of God. Rather the final conflict is a once-and-for-all clash between the son of perdition, the man of lawlessness and the Son of glory, the Man of righteousness. This is an eschatological clash between Christ and anti-Christ, between God and Satan, between the eschatological ally of the Prince of Darkness and the eschatological Prince of Light. The seed of Adam in its archetypal explosion will display its full genotype—son of rebellion, son of the Adversary, a human replication of Satan incarnate (were such a thing possible), a man-child who will call himself God—being an anti-God, a counter-God, a contra-God, knowing and promoting evil and depravity, while hating and despising all good and righteousness: all this in its eschatological manifestation. This is the last gasp of the enemy of God—to replicate in human history once-and-for-all what he attempted in heaven: namely, to conquer God and his Son, to destroy the righteousness of Heaven and turn Heaven into a Hell—turn it into his kingdom, his domain, his power-base, his tyranny—this arch-fiend, this arch-demon, this arch-apostate, this arch-tyrant. And since he was rebuffed in Heaven and himself cast down to Hell, from whence sewer of perdition he issued forth to assault the Kingdom of God once more in the wilderness of Judea—attempted to use the very Son of God as his lackey, only to be vanquished to the pit of Hell once more, bound there in chains by the stronger Man; even so, in this consummate eschatological clash with the Kingdom of Heaven once-and-for-all, Satan will venture forth from the bowels of Hell and enlist the seed of Adam (sons of Adam and daughters of Eve)—enlist the consummate anti-Christ to roar throughout the whole earth, the whole globe, the whole inhabited cosmos. To roar against the lion of Judah; to elevate himself to deity against the deity of the Son of God; to unleash all manner of vile wickedness upon the earth against the sweet and precious righteousness of God in Christ; to seduce and prostitute the world to apostasy, to lies, to deception, to lying wonders, to the pleasures—the lusts—the vile passions of wickedness—against the resurrection and prostration of the elect in the book to fidelity, to truth, to integrity, to bona fide miracles, to the holy pleasures, the sacred desires, the born again passions of love and righteousness.

This last gasp of Satan and his man-child—his covenant child in the black arts of his anti-eschatological kingdom with his anti-Christ, his anti-God—this will bring the final clash, the final crisis in the arena of human history. Time and space will behold—will be the stage—of the final conflict: Christ and anti-Christ; God and Satan; Good and Evil; Tyranny and Liberty; Despotism and Servanthood; Life and Death; Heaven and Hell; Election and Reprobation; Glorification and Perdition; Anomia and Theonomia; Anomia and Christonomia; Anomia and Pneumatonomia.

He will be slain, this man of sin, this anti-Christ; he will be slain with the breath of the mouth of God; and he will be cast into the lake of fire where he will be tormented by God's just and righteous wrath forever. And his followers, his worshippers, his tyrannical

imitators and whoremongers will be imprisoned with him in everlasting flame and darkness.

Satan and his anti-Christ and his anti-Kingdom and his anti-Heaven: what a hellish horror that will be—the eternal crushing weight of the tyranny of unremitting evil and abuse and dominance and power and subjugation and rage and hatred of Heaven! Dante was not even close!!

If Daniel 11:36-45 provides the revelation of this belligerence crystallized in a geopolitical and militaristic figure, then 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 supplements, recapitulates, epexegetically completes the revelation of the personality as a cosmic religious figure. The characterization of this anti-Christ may be explored from Daniel's prophetic portrait; Paul provides a narrative biographical characterization. Paul's description of the Man of Sin (or Man of Lawlessness, 2 Thess. 2:3) borrows from the figure in Daniel's portrait. Paul's anti-Christ makes great boasts of braggadocio (2 Thess. 2:4) as does Daniel's anti-Christ (Dan. 7:8, 11, 20). Paul's anti-Christ makes blasphemous claims, displaying himself as God (2 Thess. 2:4)—language which reflects the characterization of Daniel's anti-Christ in chapter 11:36. Paul's description of the Man of Sin (or Man of Lawlessness, *anomia*) is epexegetically expanded by naming him a son of perdition or a son of damnation or a child of Hell (2 Thess. 2:3). In both passages, we are assured that this anti-Christ seed of the serpent cannot frustrate the predestinating purpose of God—noted in Daniel 12:1 where those resurrected in righteousness are found written in the book of rescue, while the apostle declares that God had chosen the beloved in the Lord Jesus for salvation from the beginning (2 Thess. 2:13). Whom Daniel reveals as a global militarist, Paul further characterizes as a false, self-deified apostate.

Daniel brings this rolling, unfolding clash of the four monarchies of wickedness with the fifth monarchy of righteousness to two successive denouements: first, a provisional victory of the fifth monarchy in the era of the fourth monarchy—the era of the Roman empire and thus Christ's first advent (a “now” semi-eschatological victory); second, a “not yet” consummate victory of the fifth monarchy especially manifest in its principle scion—the Messianic Son of Man, Lord of the glory clouds of Heaven, Righteous Savior-Prince—a consummate victory of the King of the Fifth Monarchy over his arch-enemy at the end of days, when he will slay the Satanic culmination of the four kingdoms with the breath of his mouth and shut them up in the lake of fire forever and ever—never again to deceive the nations or to tyrannically oppress the elect of God.

Historical recapitulation issues in eschatological consummation once-and-for-all.

The provisional semi-eschatological now

balanced by

The consummate eschatological not yet.

And in-between, the waxing and waning of the clash between the fourth monarchy and its antithesis—the everlasting Kingdom of Heaven, the Fifth Monarchy.

All this projected via the recapitulatory symmetry of the macrostructure of Daniel 2-12.

## Review

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Antonio Portalatín, *Temporal Oppositions as Hermeneutical Categories in the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006. 295 pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8204-9946-8. \$88.95.

Time and its twin—space: surely the stuff of finitude. But the epistle to the Hebrews (as all divinely-inspired Scripture, hence non-Apocryphal *graphē*) directs us to infinitude—beyond time and space. And yet . . . . the interface of time and eternity as well as the spatial and aspatial is the fundament of what Geerhardus Vos calls “the philosophy of revelation and redemption” (cf. the profound 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*). What do we encounter—Who do we encounter in receiving the self-disclosure of the Father, who in these last days speaks by the Son through the Spirit? The Very One-Triune who creates the one dimension while remaining distinct and separate from it (classic Creator-creature distinction) is infinite, atemporal, eternal, aspatial—in fine, he is of an entirely different dimension. And yet, *magnum mysterium*, he binds himself to the obverse (this God whom heaven and earth cannot contain)—nay, embodies himself in time and space. What wondrous love is this, O my soul?! The Infinite→finite. The Eternal→temporal. What transforming juxtaposition is this that time and space serve the One who made them—even by encapsulating deity in the *ordo salutis* to recapitulate *ordo historiae*! And the *telos*/end of all this is the inversion of the obversion: glorification of time and space (concomitantly encapsulating those who are his very own sojourning in it). What does it mean to possess a country where time is no more—only unending eternity? What does it mean to belong to a city which has no limits—an aspatial metropolis rolled out like an infinite scroll on a celestial lapis lazuli tarmac? What does it mean to participate in eternity and infinity—in very God himself—even as one participates in faith in very God himself? What does all this mean to “many sons” (and daughters) of these eschatological days?

It is the rôle of this book to prod, to provoke, to break beyond the maudlin, the commonplace, the ho-hum—to push the envelope of the temporal to exegete the atemporal—to prod us to interface with a profound mind and pen (the Hebrews author) as he becomes the vehicle of God incarnate so as to unfold (in measure) the intersection of the temporal horizon with the eternal prospect. The oppositions (?dare we say antitheses) in time (redemptive-historical in nature) are the substratum of the narrative perspective of the writer to the Hebrews. Portalatín meticulously unpacks these categories in his exegesis while leaving us with the supreme antithesis—namely, the eschatological antithesis. It is a remarkable achievement and pushes the reader beyond its pages to . . . . atemporal eternity!

This volume is a slight revision of a dissertation presented to the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in 2005. Portalatín’s Roman Catholic predilections do not often interface with his exegesis—the text holds him captive as it also should every Protestant. And from the text, our author mines riches which arise from the revelation itself—the

revelation alone—only and solely the revelation spoken by God in “these last days”—finally, once-and-for-all (ἀπαξ/*hapax*)! He reviews the literature on the genre and structure of Hebrews (9-40); he sets forth the lexical and semantic range for the Greek vocabulary of time (41-43); he provides a superbly nuanced analysis of the summary preface to the epistle (1:1-4, a summary which encapsulates the whole epistle in the opening four verses) (43-53); and then unfurls the bulk of his thesis in page after page of reflections on the temporal horizon in opposition (interface) with the eternal dimension as the inspired writer traces, reveals and interprets from chapter 1 to chapter 13 of his marvelous letter.

The result is stunning—indeed, revolutionary in part. While all of this is present already in the text of the epistle, Portalatín directs us away from the scholarly agendas (critical and fundamentalist alike) to the mind of the writer which (in our opinion) is the mind of God Triune.

In fact, Portalatín is an unabashed affirmer of the (ontic) deity of the Son of God—joining the writer to the Hebrews in this confession of an eternal Being dwelling temporarily in the temporal arena (Heb. 1:8 declares the Son of God God, 135). This antithesis of permanence versus transience contrasts the Creator-creation divide (Heb. 1:11); creation changes with time, grows old with time, perishes in time; the uncreated Son remains, immutable (cf. 13:8), bearing in himself the ‘time of God’ (i.e., eternity) (139). Eternity interfaces with time so time may interface with eternity. All of which means Christians are united by a faith which possesses (Heb. 11:1) the permanent, unchanging, remaining, uncreation of God eternal, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that eternity feature of the Son of God penetrates into every aspect of his temporal *historia salutis* work/acts/deeds: eschatological man (Heb. 2); eschatological Moses (Heb. 3); eschatological Joshua (Heb. 4); eschatological priest (Heb. 5); eschatological Melchizedek (Heb. 7); eschatological sacrifice (Heb. 9); eschatological Hebrew (Heb. 12:2). The nature of the eternal One manifests itself in the created ones as the created ones reflect the manifestation of the eternal glory of the uncreated One. A certain assurance (Heb. 10:22) flows to the Christian sojourner of eternal glory on account of the incarnation of glorious eternity in time and glorification of ‘time’ in eternity (152). All who “draw near” (7:19, 25) in him become the beneficiaries of what he possesses—permanent, abiding, everlasting, atemporal mediation. And that intercession “is based . . . not [on] his natural life of his days on earth, but his heavenly one” (159). So much the greater is the priesthood of Christ than that of Levi or Moses or even Melchizedek—for this One has the “power of an endless life” (7:16).

One of the most helpful portions of this book is Portalatín’s interpretation of 12:26-28 where the author of Hebrews distinguishes moveable and unmoveable things, transient and durable elements (160ff.). Here he ventures beyond time and space. Now the transient perishes while the intransient remains—the shakeable passes away while the unshakeable endures. Like time itself (vis-à-vis eternity), space will be superseded, transcended, eclipsed by an aspatial place called “heaven”, “city of God”, “kingdom of God”. The “then” and “now” (12:26) is antithetical—as Sinai versus the present; as the local versus the universal (note the merismus of totality and the disappearance of the

heaven-earth creation, 12:27). Yet, what of the fulfillment of the not yet “now”? Portalatín states: “The cosmic tremor is not punctual, but it extends through a period of time . . . . This is the eschatological time already present. . . .” (167). Is this double-talk?—a kind of perverse dialectic? An over-realized eschatology? Actually, no! Portalatín is clear that complete removal of the moveable (“they will perish”—1:11) will occur at a point in future time. It is the possession of the unshakeable kingdom, and its Christ who is eternal God the Son, with its permanent city in which there abides a perdurable tabernacle/sanctuary and the endless mediation of an everlasting High Priest. In other words, Portalatín is pushing us to realize that a semi-realized eschatology (“now”/“not yet”) carries the atemporal into the present even as it assures of the non-temporal future—a future in which time and space (creation) will be displaced by the spaceless timeless God, all in all. The Sabbath day, from the creation, is a revelation of this paradigm (183, 188). Overarching the “rest which remains” (4:9) is the rest which abides—in God himself (and so summons all God’s children to walk in that eternal rest now, one day in seven especially, even as the week reminds them in its inauguration of the saints everlasting rest).

As with the eternal Sabbath, so with the eternal city (“the heavenly Jerusalem,” 12:22)—Portalatín explores that “better” place (aspatial) in that “better” duration (atemporal) (193ff.). It is the place (“city”) sought by all the faithful pilgrims down through the ages (i.e., from Abel to the present; cf. Heb. 11). “Because they knew that God had prepared for them a better and heavenly city, they sought it” (201). And the readers of Hebrews receive the same invitation “by faith”—to participate in seeking that city which remains (beyond space) in a dimension which remains (beyond time). This fortifies them in persecution (10:32-34; 12:4; 13:3, 23) because it assures them of participating in the final eschatological crisis—the crisis of these last days—these eschatological days inaugurated by the speech-acts of the Son of God. “[T]here is no expectation of a new age in this world” (213) because this world of space and time is shakeable, moveable, impermanent, transient, perishable, annihilable. The new age is the arena of the Son already drawing its pilgrim sons and daughters into its glory—eternal and infinite, atemporal and aspatial.

Portalatín has directed us to plumb the deeper elements of this drama—a drama which Geerhardus Vos once suggested contains “a catholicity of religion not merely in the form of space but as well in the form of time” (“Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke,” in Gaffin, ed., *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 196). For biblical theology in the Vosian tradition, this book advances the discussion. Read all Vos’s Hebrews material and then work through Portalatín—you won’t be disappointed. Yes, the book is expensive for a paperback. But the investment will be repaid via the textual and spiritual riches received. And that is the dividend of this important book. In fact, the most important book on the epistle in over 20 years! It is, in the proverbial vernacular, a game changer!!

—James T. Dennison, Jr.