

Reformed Differently

Exposing the Heresy of the Cult of MacArthurism

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Reformed Church of Protestants

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Solid-Gold Tombac

John 7:24 *Judge not **according to the appearance**, but judge righteous judgment.*

Gold is a precious metal of great value. Tombac, on the other hand, is an alloy of copper and zinc, and because it is heavy and has a yellow colour resembling gold, it has found a number of interesting uses. Since its value is small and it outwardly resembles gold, in the hands of swindlers tombac has become a tool of dishonest gain.

Thieves sell tombac as gold; they buy cheap and sell dear, all thanks to the superficial likeness of tombac to gold. Yet the substance of tombac is not the substance of gold. To discover this, however, requires a deeper analysis, not a superficial one.

It is no different with false theology. Merchants of the word (2 Pet. 2:3), bringing its weight close to the weight of the truth, give the lie lustre and polish by means of beautiful rhetoric; in reality they sell the lie as truth to the simple, who cannot discern between their right hand and their left (Jonah 4:11). Tickling ears (2 Tim. 4:3), they reach a wide audience and, to put it colloquially, fleece spiritual dupes through the sale of books, commentaries, recordings, publications and other products (such as seminary tuition, royalties and the like). Exposing the lie requires a deep judgement, not one according to appearance.

The theology of John MacArthur resembles orthodoxy, but in reality it is eclectic. That is to say, it contains various, often contradictory, currents of thought. Although Mr John MacArthur, it would seem, steps into the confessional arena bearing the label "*Reformed*" – as indeed he is wont to describe himself – this is a tag attached with glue of rather doubtful quality.

A deeper analysis of MacArthur's non-denominational confession enables the attentive reader not only to reject this teacher as Reformed, but also to cast well-founded doubt on the gospel he preaches and, consequently, of necessity (*ex necessitate*), to call into question the personal regeneration of those who profess it.

To return to the opening illustration, MacArthur's theology is "*solid-gold*" tombac…

Chapter 1 – Biography

A Little History

Prov. 30:6 *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and* ***thou be found a liar.***

The "tombac" method, if one may put it that way, has been employed since the dawn of Christianity. Arius, who lived at the turn of the third and fourth centuries, a presbyter of Alexandria, was relatively speaking its first exponent. Since he came from, and belonged to, the universal church which confessed the deity of Christ, but did not agree with the orthodox faith, he resolved that it must be reformed after his own fashion so as to accord with his personal views.

Before he had gathered a suitable group of followers around him, however, he drew up a Confession of Faith in which he affirmed that the Son of God is the only-begotten Son of God, begotten before the ages, the creator of all things, and God incarnate. This is the content of that document:

> "We believe in one God the Father Almighty: and in the Lord Jesus Christ his Son, who was begotten of him before all ages, God the Word, through whom all things were made, both those which are in the heavens and those upon the earth; who descended, and became incarnate…"[1]

In this way Arius won confidence. Afterwards, however, he secretly added to the truth convictions that had grown up in his unregenerate heart. He maintained that Christ is indeed God, but a created God who had a beginning. To his hearers he whispered that the Son is one with the Father, only that He was made such, just as other men are made one with God.[2] In this way Arius put on the camouflage of orthodoxy in order to spread the gangrene of damnable heresy. Arius changed the original meaning of the words he used. This is the so-called fallacy of equivocation, recognised and branded by Luther:

> "What happened to the Arians through that trope of theirs, by which they made Christ a God only nominally? […] I have observed that all heresies and errors in handling the Scriptures have not arisen from the simplicity of the words, as is so generally stated throughout the world, but *from men not attending to the simplicity of the words*, and *hammering out tropes and conclusions out of their own brain*."[3]

Earlier, Luther had shrewdly pressed his theological opponent, Erasmus, demonstrating that the reception of the truth is a matter of the will, i.e. that the human mind, though it understands certain information, is unable to acknowledge it as true. Unbelief, therefore,

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[1] The Confession of Arius (Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.26).
[2] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.5.
[3] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 72).

according to Luther, is a human presupposition independent of man's intellectual capacities. Even the wisest of men cannot receive the truth of God unless it be given him from above.

> *"Why were all the Arians blind? Were there no men among them of exceeding talent? Why is Christ 'foolishness to the Gentiles'? Are there no men of exceeding talent among the Gentiles?"*[4]

Luther did not discover a new law. Scripture speaks of it all too plainly. The unregenerate theologian will understand the sense and the theological message contained in the Bible, or conveyed by an orthodox preacher, yet he does not agree with it. His intelligence parses perfectly well the information contained in the sentences he reads (or hears), but he wholly or partly rejects their content, finding in its place another, human interpretation. Such a man seeks out many inventions (Eccl. 7:29). This is how heresy arises.

> 1 Cor. 2:14 *But the* ***natural*** *man* (here: the unregenerate man, who has the spirit of the world, verse 12) ***receiveth not*** (οὐ δέχεται *ou dechetai* – literally: does not accept) *the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him:* ***neither can he know them****, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Knowing now the biblical principle by which the fallen mind operates, we can analyse the cause of, or rather the road to, Mr MacArthur's success – and it was a very broad road.

As the Twig Is Bent…

> Jer. 9:14 *But have walked after* ***the imagination of their own heart****, and after Baalim,* ***which their fathers taught them****:*

MacArthur's doctrinal eclecticism has a number of causes. It is worth mentioning at the outset that he himself is neither a product nor a graduate of a Reformed institution. Nor did he bring a tradition of Reformed teaching from home (2 Tim. 2:2; Deut. 4:9). The period in which his religious convictions were formed was spent in institutions that were either ambivalent or highly heretical. As will become apparent, the education he received left a deadly mark upon him and has never been wholly rooted out of his preaching.

John's father was John Fullerton "Jack" MacArthur (1914–2005), founder of Calvary Bible Church in Burbank, a pastor who received his theological training at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia,[5] also known as Palmer Theological Seminary. This was a multi-denominational, theologically eclectic organisation bringing together Methodists, Presbyterians, Mennonites, Episcopalians and others.[6] Jack also served as director of evangelism for the Charles E. Fuller Foundation and as a field evangelist for the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, an organisation professing cessationism and dispensationalism.[7]

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[4] Ibid. (Polish edition, p. 40).
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_MacArthur
[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmer_Theological_Seminary
[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moody_Bible_Institute

John MacArthur Jr. sometimes mentions in his sermons his close relationship with his father and the teaching passed on by him, which influenced him from his earliest boyhood. As a matter of course he took over from his father the doctrines of:

- credobaptism,
- cessationism,
- dispensationalism,
- universal atonement,
- revivalist pressure.

From 1957 to 1960 John MacArthur attended Bob Jones University, an institution which at all costs avoids confrontation along the Arminianism–Calvinism line, thereby opting for inclusivism, that is, for reaching the widest possible range of prospective students.[8] There he absorbed the following concepts:

- fundamentalism and creationism, for which MacArthur is famous;
- incomplete sanctification, taught at that same institution; BJU teaches that sanctification *"will be completed when we stand before God in our resurrected bodies"*,[9] which can easily be misunderstood by applying the statement to the necessity of deepening sanctification understood as the basis of union with Christ, and thereby laying stress on good works as a requirement of salvation. BJU classifies this process as exercising faith ("exercise faith"), which is remarkably consistent with the concept of salvation by works in the doctrine of Lordship Salvation professed by MacArthur;
- biblical paradoxes, smoothed over by MacArthur under the name of parallel truths – a concept absorbed at the same institution. BJU states: "We believe that the Scriptures present some great paradoxes regarding salvation which we gladly accept as belonging to God."[10]
- the well-meant offer of salvation is also taught there: *"God's invitation to salvation is freely offered to all men (…) and is available to anyone who desires to be saved."*[11]

From 1961 to 1963 he attended Los Angeles Pacific College of the Free Methodist Church (as his father Jack had done before him[12]). This organisation was founded by a sect of Arminian Holiness adherents[13] and professes the standard Wesleyan-Arminian creed, with particular emphasis on:

- universal atonement, whereby Christ died for all men, leaving them the free will to choose to accept or reject salvation;

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[8] Dr Robert Congdon, *An Analysis of Bob Jones University's Position Paper on Calvinism, Arminianism and Reformed Theology*.
[9] BJU Position Statements, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Reformed Theology".
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Los_Angeles_Pacific_College_(defunct)
[13] Ibid.

– the doctrine of entire sanctification attainable in this life, which has its source in the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement.

In 1963 MacArthur received, with honours, the degree of Master of Divinity from Talbot Theological Seminary of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles in La Mirada, California. MacArthur also received honorary doctorates from Talbot Theological Seminary (Doctor of Divinity, 1977) and Grace Graduate School (1976). Talbot is a non-denominational institution known for:

– its conservative theological positions,
– in particular its historic commitment to biblical inerrancy.

In 1969 MacArthur became pastor of Grace Community Church, a church founded as a mission of the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood and previously led by its founder, Don Householder, a pastor associated with Trinity Methodist Church.[14] The character of the organisation fitted perfectly with the theology MacArthur had been taught. The right soil for the right seed.

The theological background in which MacArthur grew up and by which he was formed has a number of significant features. In reality MacArthur's present theology differs little and only slightly from his original convictions, as he has indeed confirmed in so many words (*expressis verbis*) on more than one occasion in his sermons. MacArthur's original doctrines are:

– Orthodox doctrines: cessationism, fundamentalism, creationism, conservatism, biblical inerrancy.
– Unorthodox doctrines: universal atonement, revivalist pressure, the well-meant offer of salvation, incomplete sanctification, the possibility of almost entire sanctification in this life, preparationism, works-faith, i.e. salvation by obedience, as well as biblical paradoxes, credobaptism and dispensationalism.

The doctrine of universal atonement requires somewhat fuller treatment. MacArthur claims to hold the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement and has stressed this more than once in his addresses. Undoubtedly the theology of R.C. Sproul influenced this "change" of position. MacArthur admits that he was neither an Arminian nor a Calvinist, but rather stood on both sides of the theological barricade without any awareness of the truth; for example, he was unaware of the doctrine of election, a fundamental truth of Calvinistic (that is, biblical) soteriology:

> "I was like a guy in the Civil War with grey pants and a blue coat, getting shot at from both sides. And then *almost out of nowhere R.C. came into my life.* […]
>
> I had some history with people very close to R.C., namely *John Gerstner.* John actually came to Grace Church and did a series of lectures in his wonderfully unique way. He said of me: because you're a dispensationalist, *you'll end up a heretic*. Later he told R.C. that it hadn't happened, *because I don't think logically*. Nevertheless, for reasons unknown to me, *R.C. opened his heart to me* and invited me to Ligonier to speak, and

[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Community_Church

> then assigned me to speak on *the doctrine of election*, which at the time I really thought *he had invented*. […]
>
> He opened my life to the riches of Reformed theology. I discovered it myself; it was as if I saw glory hidden in a stone, and somehow through his ministry and the connections he made with other people and writers, even going back into history, the full glory of the doctrines of grace exploded on my consciousness. […]
>
> *And the last time we talked here, he finally said to me, 'Why is it, Johnny Mac, that* ***I always have to tell you what you believe?'***"[15]

MacArthur claims that thanks to Sproul (who, *nota bene*, like MacArthur believed in the common grace of Kuyperianism, laid great emphasis on philosophy and regarded Arminians as brethren in Christ) the full glory of the doctrines of grace exploded in his mind. Yet this explosion evidently had to be continually corrected by Sproul's mentoring, without which MacArthur was incapable of making doctrinal progress – and perhaps there was even regress, which unfortunately we shall never know, since Sproul died in 2017.

Ecce homo.

An Analysis of the Theology

> Matt. 13:52 *…Therefore every scribe which is* ***instructed unto the kingdom*** *of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder,* ***which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.***

On closer analysis of MacArthur's theology it turns out that, despite R.C. Sproul's theological oversight, echoes of universal atonement are still present in it. In his case this has taken the form of a theological paradox that grew out of the teaching received at BJU: human responsibility in salvation on the one hand (the theological influence of his father and his colleges) and divine sovereignty on the other (the influence of Sproul). This paradox has been propped up by two powerful heresies:

- the well-meant offer of the gospel (Marrowism), and
- common grace (Kuyperianism).

The necessary result of this mixture is legalism, expressed in preparationism (preliminary conditions of salvation) and in the heresy of Lordship Salvation, whose constituent elements are the doctrines absorbed from the Wesleyans of an incomplete sanctification – one, therefore, that requires completion by man – which implies a life of complete obedience to Jesus as Lord, not merely as evidence of faith but as a component of faith, that is, as a cause of salvation.

Two presuppositions, namely the acknowledgement of the Bible as inerrant and the admission of the existence of paradoxes, forced upon MacArthur's mind the coexistence of contradictory

[15] *R.C. Sproul's Memorial*: John MacArthur's eulogy.

doctrines of divine sovereignty (learned Calvinism) and human responsibility (natural Arminianism). This necessity was reinforced by an emotional stimulus: to acknowledge the gospel of Arminianism as false, and therefore as non-saving, would in MacArthur's case have meant accepting the fact that neither his father, nor the lecturers under whom he studied, nor the members of the congregations to which he belonged, nor even he himself could have been saved by that gospel. And yet this is precisely what *metanoia* consists in: a complete change of mind with regard to the question of salvation, the abandonment of the old way of thinking and faith in the proposition of the Bible…

> "To believe the Gospel is to believe that 'Christ died for our sins.' This involves *a change of mind about both Christ and ourselves*. These two things cannot be separated, for they are parts of one logical judgement. We are not saved by believing the argument that 'Christ died.' We are saved by the Gospel, which contains the statement: 'Christ died for our sins.'
>
> *The act of faith is an act of repentance.* The fact that the Gospel of John does not use the word 'repent' but uses the word 'believe' – a fact on which *Zane Hodges* laid great stress – does not mean that repentance is unnecessary; it simply means that repentance and faith are the same thing."[16]

Let us consider MacArthur's doctrinal aberrations, giving them an appropriate structure, i.e. from the fundamental ones, on which subsequent errors were built, up to the final fruit.

The Fundamental Error: The Methodological Denial of the Complete Sufficiency of Scripture

Definition of the Error

This error is connected with a faulty methodology, namely the grammatical-historical hermeneutic. It is tacitly assumed that there are two sources of truth – revelation and the senses. In order to interpret Scripture correctly, it is necessary to examine thoroughly the historical and cultural background of the original recipients. Hence human reason and Scripture, and not Scripture alone, is the proper form of the interpretation of Scripture. On this foundation of pride all the remaining errors are built. MacArthur denies the formal sufficiency of Scripture; for example, he claims that there is no way of arriving at the true meaning of 1 Cor. 15:29. In one Q&A panel he admitted that the original context of this verse has been lost, which makes it impossible to understand.

> "The careful and honest interpreter may survey the several dozen interpretations offered and still *not be dogmatic about what it means*."[17]

Implications

This is a rejection, or at least a diminishing, of the principle *Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur* in favour of the power of the human mind as an equal, or even preponderant, factor enabling the discernment of truth (in place of the illumination of the Spirit that comes through

[16] John W. Robbins, review of John MacArthur's *Faith Works*.
[17] John MacArthur, *Baptism of the Dead*.

Scripture). Moreover, a correct interpretation of Scripture becomes possible if, and only if, all the nuances of the historical and cultural background are taken into account. Loss of context means loss of the ability to interpret. Distortion of context means distortion of interpretation and errors.

This also calls into question the exegesis of Scripture carried out by theologians who had no access to modern information, as for example at the time of the Reformation. Hence MacArthur holds that the Reformation begun by Luther must still be theologically completed. MacArthur stands on the ground of innovation, and this is essentially the main reason for his rejection of all the official Reformed Confessions of Faith in favour of his own confession, which suits his personal preferences. That is why MacArthur is non-denominational.

> *"I think it's time, after all these years of history since the Reformation – and here I'll show my colours – to break away from tradition and go back to the simple* ***New Testament intent****; it is my own conviction that* ***the Reformation is not yet complete****, and that this consideration ought to force the argument."*[18]

Refutation

While the historical, literal and grammatical methods are auxiliary hermeneutical tools, Scripture itself is a closed, self-defining system. Scripture is intelligible in itself. Scripture was written in order to be understood, and understood fully. Holy Scripture is formally sufficient for Christians. Scripture interprets Scripture; therefore it is fully sufficient and perfectly redundant (i.e. it enables the discovery of the truth even where some elements of a translation are inaccurate). This follows clearly from Scripture, which itself bears witness concerning itself:

> 2 Cor. 1:13 *For we write none other things unto you, than* ***what ye read or acknowledge****; and I trust* ***ye shall acknowledge even to the end****;*
>
> 2 Pet. 1:19-20 19. *We have also* ***a more sure word of prophecy****; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:* 20. *Knowing this first, that* ***no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation****.*
>
> Dan. 9:2 *In the first year of his reign I Daniel* ***understood by books*** *the number of the years…*
>
> Eph. 3:4 ***Whereby, when ye read, ye may*** (δύνασθε *dynasthe* – ye have power: reading gives the power to understand) ***understand*** *my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*

In Article 7 of the Belgic Confession we read:

[18] *MacArthur vs Sproul Baptism Debate*, 10:34.

> "Neither do we consider of equal value any custom, or the great multitude, or *antiquity*, or *succession of times* and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, with the truth of God."[19]

Summary

An excessive emphasis on historical-cultural and literal interpretation sets the human mind on a par with illumination. Moreover, John MacArthur, commenting on Psalm 119:89 (*For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*), argues that no one in this world has access to the pure Word of God, but only to a contaminated version, while men have no means whatever of verifying which passages of Holy Scripture are pure and which are contaminated, since they have no available standard by which they could verify the genuineness of particular passages of the Bible. MacArthur observed:

> "…the key thing is that the verse says God's Word is settled in heaven, *not on earth.* This means that God has a permanent and perfect record of His inspired written revelation to man, *but He has kept that record in heaven*."[20]

Since revelation is closed (as MacArthur himself confesses), and since the Word of God is preserved in heaven but not on earth, according to MacArthur we do not have, and never shall have, access to the full text of the inspired Word of God.

Behold the wisdom of the fallen mind.

A Church without a Covenant

Definition of the Error

This particular view of the dispensations (the church is not in any covenant) is characteristic of MacArthur. It is, to date, the most advanced form of the error, since even John Nelson Darby, the founder of dispensationalism, expressly taught that the church of Jesus Christ enjoyed *"the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant"*.

> *"Third thing, the new covenant is with Israel. It is with the Jews. And this is what I meant when I said this morning* ***God has never made a covenant with Gentiles*** *– as far as I can see, never will.* ***The new covenant is not made with the Church****; it is made with the same people the old covenant was made with. It is made with Israel."*[21]

Implications

A covenant is a relationship of a legal character initiated by God, in which God has defined and ratified its elements. God's covenant is one-sided, or unilateral – God fulfils all the necessary conditions of the covenant which He Himself established. The concept of a church without a covenant with God makes God an adulterer (God has a bride with whom He stands in no legal relationship). If there is no covenant, there is no promise; God is not bound by His oath to anything. The necessary implication is the (at least partial) transfer of responsibility for

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[19] Belgic Confession, Article 7.
[20] John MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*.
[21] John MacArthur, *The New Covenant, Part 1*.

salvation to man (see MacArthur's paradox). A bride without God's Covenant in reality has no guarantee of salvation; nothing regulates the life of the church either, since there exists no regulating law. This is in reality an absurd non-relationship.

Refutation

The Gentiles were incorporated into the Church and therefore into the covenant. The Church and spiritual Israel are interchangeable terms; hence the Church is not a concept exclusive to the New Testament. This is especially evident in the text of Romans, where there is no mention of the planting of a new tree (i.e. a new entity called the Church), but of the grafting of the Gentiles into the old entity (the Church), which previously had a Jewish character. Holy Scripture points to the Church as being in the covenant of Israel, because the Church and spiritual Israel are one and the same:

> Eph. 2:12 *That at that time ye were without Christ,* ***being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise****, having no hope, and without God in the world:*
>
> Gal. 6:16 *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and* ***upon the Israel of God****.*
>
> Rom. 11:17 *…and thou, being a wild olive tree,* ***wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree****;*
>
> Acts 7:38 *This is he* [Moses]*, that was in the church* (ἐκκλησίᾳ *ekklesia* – Church) *in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers…*

In Article 27 of the Belgic Confession we read of the unity of the Old and New Covenants and of the continuity of the Church:

> "We believe and profess *one catholic or universal Church*, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This Church has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be. And this *holy Church* is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though it sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing, *as during the perilous reign of Ahab*…"[22]

Summary

The exaltation of the power of the human mind leads to the rejection of the biblical doctrine of the continuity of God's Covenant, which acquired a catholic character through the incorporation of the Gentiles.

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[22] Belgic Confession, Article 27.

The Denial of the Power of Original Sin

Definition of the Error

MacArthur denies the power of original sin, since according to him all children go to heaven if they die young enough. This special position of children is obtained in some way that might easily be called a grace of overlooking – God turns a blind eye to original sin if you die young enough.

> *"They will be judged according to the light they received. Scripture is clear that children and the unborn have original sin – including both the propensity to sin as well as the inherent guilt of original sin. But could it be that* ***somehow*** *Christ's atonement did pay for the guilt for these* ***helpless ones*** *throughout all time? Yes, and therefore it is a credible assumption that a child who dies at an age too young* ***to have made a conscious, willful rejection of Jesus Christ*** *will be taken to be with the Lord."*[23]

Implications

The ground of the election of all children who have not reached the age of accountability, and of the mentally handicapped, is not God's good pleasure (Isa. 46:10-11; Eph. 1:5, 11; 2 Tim. 1:9) but ignorance and the absence of personal sin (which is an indirect denial of original sin), while the salvation of this group is universal in character. Although children have original sin, God's judgement will not take it into account by reason of ignorance and the absence of personal accountability, which have become the ground of the election of these children.

This is a conditional salvation, in which the critical factor is the attainment of a biological age that makes possible the conscious rejection of the truth revealed in nature and in Scripture. In effect, a man in a state of unawareness is potentially saved, since this salvation may change if he does not die young enough. The natural consequence of this theology is to encourage parents to kill their offspring at a sufficiently young age so that they will certainly go to heaven.

Refutation

There is not a single biblical text suggesting that Christ laid down His life for all children who die young enough. Holy Scripture shows plainly that the wrath of God rests not only upon those who are outside the church and have reached the age of accountability, but also upon their children. How many children did God drown in the Flood in the days of Noah (the population at the time of the Flood probably numbered several billion)? Upon how many children in Sodom and Gomorrah did God rain fire and brimstone? When God commanded the Israelites to destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan, did God command them to spare all the children?

> Ezek. 9:6 ***Slay utterly*** *old and young, both maids, and* ***little children****, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.*

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[23] John MacArthur, *Do babies and others incapable of professing faith in Christ automatically go to heaven?*

Holy Scripture plainly teaches that the children of unbelievers are *"unclean"*. If all children were *"holy"* (at least until the *"age of accountability"*), the Apostle Paul would not have distinguished between the children of unbelievers and the children of believers.

> 1 Cor. 7:14 *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband:* ***else were your children unclean****; but now are they holy.*

Moreover, the ground of election is not ignorance and the absence of personal sin (which is already in itself a blasphemy) but the will of God:

> Eph. 1:5, 11 5. *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,* ***according to the good pleasure of his will****,* 11. *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated* ***according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will****:*

The Canons of the Synod of Dort unequivocally condemn the notion of the universal salvation of all children.

> [The Synod rejects the errors of those] Who teach: That *there are various kinds of election of God unto eternal life*: the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive and absolute. Likewise: That there is *one election unto faith and another unto salvation*, so that there can be an election unto justifying faith, without being a decisive election unto salvation. For this is a fancy of men's minds, invented regardless of the Scriptures, whereby the doctrine of election is corrupted, and this golden chain of our salvation is broken.[24]

> Who teach: That all men [here: those who are young enough] have been accepted unto the state of reconciliation and unto the grace of the covenant, so that *no one is worthy of condemnation on account of original sin*, and that no one shall be condemned because of it, but that all are free from the guilt of original sin. For this opinion is repugnant to Scripture which teaches that we are by nature children of wrath.[25]

Summary

A falsely conceived compassion, combined with a lowering of the authority of Scripture, leads to the conclusion that, since the church is not included in the covenant, all children (lacking the capacity of discernment) are saved, and not only the children of the promise arising from the Covenant.

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[24] Canons of Dort, Head I, Rejection of Errors 2.
[25] Canons of Dort, Head II, Rejection of Errors 5.

The Denial of Total Depravity

Definition of the Error

MacArthur distinguishes between total depravity and absolute depravity (making man in some way good in the eyes of God). According to MacArthur, total depravity means that every human faculty has been touched by sin, yet the corruption is not, in degree, the greatest possible. This of course leaves the sinner with the illusion of possessing a partly good and partly free will. MacArthur's conclusions do not follow from Scripture but have another source – the senses (specifically, the observation of the surrounding reality).

> *"Total Depravity does not mean that the expression of sinful human nature is always lived out to the fullest. One cannot simply look at the two words and conjecture upon the extent of the depravity of humanity. Total depravity means* that *sin has effected every part of man's being and this includes his will* […] In practice, *total depravity* means that *there is no human faculty* ***left untouched by sin****, even in relative terms*."[26]

> "*To say someone is* ***totally depraved****, you know, you think of Jeffrey Dahmers, or Charles Manson, or somebody who has not a vestige of human goodness, and void of all normal affection and restraint. To call someone 'totally depraved' would* ***set them outside normal people*** *as vicious perverts. That is not what is meant when theologians refer to total depravity because* ***not everybody is as bad as they could be, and not everybody is as bad as everybody else.*** *What we're talking about here is what I've call* ***'absolute inability'****."*[27]

Implications

If this explanation of total depravity with regard to the carnal, that is, unsaved, man now means merely that every part of man is stained with wickedness, yet every part of man also still retains some goodness, then man's will too still retains a certain goodness, still having the ability to choose Christ when Christ is presented in the Gospel (see the doctrine of human responsibility). This explanation of total depravity is not only a denial of the biblical and confessional teaching of absolute depravity, but also a shameful shallowing or impoverishment of language. To say of total depravity that every apple in the basket is partly rotten is not what the Reformed Church meant.

Refutation

What the Reformed Faith has always understood by total depravity is the fact that the whole mind of man is darkened, the whole will of man is in rebellion, all his affections are disordered, and his body is wholly the instrument of his hardened heart as a servant of unrighteousness. Total means complete, and that is exactly what the word total means in the church's confession of total depravity. Men are incapable of doing any good whatsoever. What is at issue here is more than merely the condemnation of the works of men; it is the condemnation of man himself.

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[26] MacArthur's statement quoted at https://carrascosuites.com/lost-and-ynz/total-depravity-means

[27] John MacArthur, *The Doctrine of Absolute Inability*.

> Rom. 3:11-12 11. *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.* 12. *They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*
>
> Ps. 14:1-3 1. *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.* ***They are corrupt****, they have done abominable works,* ***there is none that doeth good****.* 2. *The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.* 3. *They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy:* ***there is none that doeth good, no, not one****.*
>
> Eph. 2:3 *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past* ***in the lusts of our flesh****, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*
>
> Rom. 8:7-8 7. *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* 8. ***So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.***

In Article 14 of the Belgic Confession we read that the depravity resulting from sin is absolute. The corruption is total, so that there is in man no good, no light, no gift of God.

> [Man] transgressed the commandment of life which he had received; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life; having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts which he had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for *all the light which is in us is changed into darkness*, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not"; where St. John calleth men darkness.[28]

Summary

Man is not absolutely depraved, which leaves in him remnants of good.

The Denial of the Sovereignty of God

Definition of the Error

MacArthur follows Lenski's heresy of judicial hardening, whereby God waits for man until he has completely hardened himself, making salvation impossible, and God simply seals it as such. Such an approach contains within itself the idea of free will (the hardening of the heart is a choice made by man to cut himself off from salvation). Commenting on the text *What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded* (Rom. 11:7), MacArthur claims that God reacts to a human act of the will:

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[28] Belgic Confession, Article 14.

> "*By judicial act of God in response to their hardened hearts* […] Israel's blindness, hardening, and apostasy are *not irreversible*."[29]

> *"The only hardening that is effected by God and which the Scriptures are acquainted with* ***is judicial****; the only objects of this hardening are men who have* ***first hardened themselves*** *against all God's mercy and have done that to such extent as to be* ***beyond further reach*** *of that mercy."*[30]

Implications

Hardening by God is judicial in character and is a result, not a cause. It follows from a prior hardening of the heart by man himself, and, depending on the source, it either finally cuts him off from the possibility of salvation (the Polish translation, produced under the supervision of Fr Mateusz Wichary) or does not finally cut him off. Whichever version is taken, MacArthur lays the responsibility for not hardening the heart, and consequently for salvation, upon man himself. This heresy has its source in the Roman Catholic religion, as we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which teaches man's natural ability to receive God's revelation and to respond to it properly. From there it is a short step to a volitional act of not hardening the heart, on the basis of which justification is granted – which is exactly what the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

> "Our holy mother, the Church, holds and teaches that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by *the natural light of human reason*." *Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God's revelation.* Man has this capacity because he is created "in the image of God".[31]

> Faith is a personal act – *the free response of the human person to the initiative of God* who reveals himself.[32]

> *Justification establishes cooperation* between God's grace and *man's freedom*. On man's part it is expressed by *the assent of faith* to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the *cooperation* of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.[33]

Refutation

The original cause of the hardening of the heart is God's decree and not the human will in this matter (the latter is rather secondary to God's decree). We read that the hardening of the heart is the result of God's purpose, which must be fulfilled in accordance with God's decree; a

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[29] *The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, Word Publishing 1997, p. 1714 (on Rom. 11:7, 11). The Polish edition of MacArthur's New Testament commentary (*Komentarz do NT*, Wydawnictwo Słowo Prawdy, Gdańsk 2015, pp. 715–716) renders the final clause in the opposite sense: "are now irreversible".
[30] R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on Romans* (on Rom. 9:18).
[31] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 36.
[32] Ibid. 166.
[33] Ibid. 1993.

perfect example of this is Pharaoh, whose heart God hardened before he had made any decision whatever concerning the Hebrews:

> Rom. 9:11 (God hated Esau) *(For the children* ***being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil****, that the purpose of God according to election might stand,* ***not of works****, but of him that calleth;)*

> Exod. 4:21 *And the LORD said unto Moses,* ***When thou goest*** *to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but* ***I will harden his heart****, that he shall not let the people go.*

Let us note that Scripture does not state that Pharaoh would harden his own heart on hearing God's demands concerning Israel, while God would wait until the last plague to pronounce a final sentence of irreversible hardening upon Pharaoh, who was supposed to harden his heart gradually in the course of experiencing the plagues. The sentence was pronounced before Pharaoh was able to do anything good or evil. Pharaoh's heart was hardened in order that God's purpose might stand and God's glory be revealed through judgement upon Pharaoh. Evidently the original cause of the hardening is God's decree, which the human act echoes; unequivocally, the hardening of the heart proceeds from the eternal decree and is not an act *post factum*.

> Rom. 9:17 *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh,* ***Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up****, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.*

Every unregenerate man has a fully hardened, because stony, heart, which is incapable of receiving the truth of the Word of God:

> Deut. 29:4 *Yet the LORD* ***hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear****, unto this day.*

No unregenerate man is able to recognise God's light even when it shines straight into his face (John 3:19). This love of darkness must be removed by a monergistic, divine, completed act. The operation is simple. God takes away the heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh, which is the evidence of the new birth, and which then, and only then, understands the Gospel (Ezek. 36:26-27). Hence it is evident that the only active power in salvation and sanctification is God. The Christian position, which teaches not so much a judicial final hardening as God's eternal decree of the hardening of the heart, is contrary to MacArthur's position.

> John 15:16 ***Ye have not chosen me****, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

In the Rejection of Errors of the Canons of Dort we read that God hardens the hearts of men on the ground of the purpose of His will, without regard to human works. In reality even the

best of men are subject to hardening, and it shows itself, among other things, in the fact that the word of God is not revealed to some men.

> "Who teach: That God, simply by virtue of His righteous will, *did not decide* either to leave anyone in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation, or to pass anyone by in the communication of grace which is necessary for faith and conversion. For this is *firmly decreed*: 'He hath mercy on whom he will, and *whom he will he hardeneth*' (Rom. 9:18). And also this: 'Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, *but to them it is not given*' (Matt. 13:11). Likewise: 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that *thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding*, and didst reveal them unto babes; yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight' (Matt. 11:25-26)."[34]

Summary

Man, by persisting in sin, deprives himself of the remnant of good left in him after the Fall, and thereby cuts himself off from salvation completely or temporarily (depending on the translation).

This Is Not the End

> John 8:32 *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

In considering MacArthur's history we have been able to gain a fairly broad insight into the theological vicissitudes of this preacher. As a man subjected to an evidently heretical education, he became steeped in bad doctrine, preached it and lived it. Certainly his encounter with R.C. Sproul had a decisive influence on the changes in MacArthur's teaching; it is mistaken, however, to claim that in his case we are dealing with repentance and the rejection of his old presuppositions. The substance of his faith remains strongly influenced by the concept of free will, which in effect weakens God's sovereignty.

This is proved, among other things, by the rejection of the covenant, which is inseparably bound up with the doctrine of salvation. As David Engelsma has observed, this is nothing other than the Arminian conception of the covenant, now dominant in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, which denies that Christ ratified the covenant – denies that the death of Christ ratified the covenant with or for anyone.

To sum up: an excessive emphasis on historical-cultural and literal interpretation sets the human mind on a par with illumination. The exaltation of the power of the human mind leads to the rejection of the biblical doctrine of the continuity of God's Covenant, which acquired a catholic character through the incorporation of the Gentiles. A falsely conceived compassion, combined with a lowering of the authority of Scripture, leads to the conclusion that, since the church is not included in the Covenant, all children (lacking the capacity of discernment) are saved, and not only the children of the promise arising from the Covenant. Man is not absolutely depraved, which leaves in him remnants of good. By persisting in sin, man deprives

[34] Canons of Dort, Head I, Rejection of Errors 8.

himself of the remnant of good left in him after the Fall, and thereby cuts himself off from salvation completely or temporarily (depending on the translation). All this is contrary to the Bible and, consequently, to the Reformed Confessions of Faith.

MacArthur's rejection of the truth, contrary to John Gerstner's objection, does not have an intellectual basis. MacArthur is one of the most intelligent and eminent theologians living today. The problem has a spiritual basis. The examples of doctrinal aberrations presented here are the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

We sincerely hope that this chapter will sober the followers of John MacArthur, who no doubt regard themselves as Reformed but are not so in any sense. It is worth submitting oneself to biblical tests in order to know the truth that sets one free from the bondage of false doctrine. And finally, a short test. Does the following position, dear reader and follower of John MacArthur, correspond to your views, i.e. to the gospel of Lordship Salvation?

> *"**Faith** in the Lord Jesus Christ **means** accepting Him as Saviour and **living according to His will through repentance and obedience to His commandments.** Learning to act in faith in Christ is **the foundation for deep, life-changing learning**."*[35]

This same "gospel" is professed by the Arminians. The quotation comes from the resources of Brigham Young University, an institution devoted to Jacobus Arminius. This gospel does not save.

[35] "Exercise faith", Learning Model – Brigham Young University–Idaho, http://www.byui.edu/learning-model/5-principles/exercise-faith (accessed 18.11.2019).

Chapter 2 – Parallel Truths and Conditionalism

A Wide Theological Mouth

> Prov. 13:3 *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but* ***he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction****.*

So far we have identified John MacArthur's theological background, which proves to be deeply rooted in the doctrines of Wesleyanism. Taking them in reverse order, these are universal atonement and entire sanctification in this life, absorbed at Los Angeles Pacific College, and earlier, at Bob Jones University, incomplete sanctification, the universal offer of salvation and biblical paradoxes. This was merely a deepening of the theology previously taken over from his father, since John "*Jack*" MacArthur, nominally a General (non-Reformed) Baptist, turned out in practice to be a multi-denominational revivalist and ecumenical preacher.

The revivalist pressure professed by MacArthur lays stress on the number of followers "*won*", in contrast to the pressure of the Reformation, which lays stress on the quality of theology. Of necessity this is a position of compromise, and it is here that we must look for the reason why MacArthur adopted or developed a number of errors and contradictions, of which we have so far drawn attention to:

- The fundamental error: the methodological denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture
- A church without a covenant
- The denial of the power of original sin
- The denial of total depravity
- The denial of the sovereignty of God

These issues are important because they constitute the ground and basis for the development of far wider problems.

Further Analysis of the Theology

> 2 Tim. 3:13 *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.*

This part of the book concentrates on more serious deviations: the denial of Scripture as a reliable source of revelation and of two divine attributes – simplicity and omniscience. Thereby MacArthur, although he calls himself Reformed, in reality denies the doctrines that distinguish Reformed theology from heresy.

The last section will contain an analysis of the social-engineering manipulations used by MacArthur, which may have contributed to his attaining the highly prominent and almost universally unquestioned position of the Greatest Theologian of our times, substantially widening the range of his audience as well as the sales of his books, recordings, commentaries and so on.

Parallel Truths, or the Development of the Concept of Paradox

Definition of the Error

According to MacArthur, Holy Scripture presents a number of mutually contradictory teachings. The flagship example of this is the question of salvation and faith. On the one hand, God is the only sovereign in salvation. Yet man is nevertheless responsible for his salvation.

The phenomenon is given the camouflaging name of parallel truths. By giving the phenomenon an appearance of orthodoxy, MacArthur avoids having to express his conviction directly as the heretical neo-orthodoxy

> "…begun by *Karl Barth* (1886–1968), which holds either that the Bible contains the Word of God (and not that the whole of it always is the Word of God), or that it becomes the Word of God only when God speaks through it to sinful man. The Bible, though fallible, points to God's Revelation concerning Jesus Christ."[36]

Let us consider MacArthur's position:

> "This is a work of God, solely a work of God, but *you will be held responsible* if you do not believe, and *you are called to believe* and *eternal life awaits you* if you will believe. *Those are twin truths that run parallel.* May I tell you? They will always run parallel. They will always run parallel. *They will never come together. They will never intersect. They will never be diminished*; legitimately, they are what they are. *The fact that you don't understand how they go together* only proves that you're less than you should be. It doesn't say anything about God. *Your inability to harmonize* those things is a reflection of your fallenness, my fallenness. People ask me all the time, 'How do you harmonize those?' And my answer is, '*I don't. I can't.*' *They* ***can't be harmonized*** in the human mind. But realize this, you are a puny mind and so am I, and collectively we are puny compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God. All I can tell you is that in the Word of God, *these truths run parallel.* And the answer is *to believe them both with all your heart.* And the one, *divine sovereignty*, will inform your worship and the other, *human responsibility*, will motivate your evangelism."[37]

> "*If we understood everything that is written in the Bible, we would prove that this book was written by a man; if we understood everything that is written in the Bible, we would prove that God is human. One of the greatest proofs that the Scriptures are inspired by God is the* ***incomprehensibility of these great truths****, and we bow before Scripture and, as the ancient* ***rabbis*** *used to say, teach the tongue to say '****I don't know****.'"*[38]

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[36] Michał Głazowski, *Skutki liberalnej myśli teologicznej* [The Effects of Liberal Theological Thought].

[37] John MacArthur, *Twin Truths: God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility*.

[38] *Вы приехали с кальвинизмом в нашу арминианскую среду? Зачем вам это?* [You have come with Calvinism into our Arminian milieu? Why are you doing this?]. MacArthur took this heresy from Cornelius Van Til, who maintained that God's knowledge and man's knowledge "coincide at no point in the sense that in his awareness of the meaning of anything, in his mental grasp or understanding of anything, man is at every point dependent upon a previous act of unchangeable understanding and revelation on the part of God". Thus, according to the conclusion of the teaching of Van Til and MacArthur, man cannot know God at all and has no knowledge of God, but only opinions about God.

Implications

God's logic is different from human logic. The difference of God's logic cannot be understood by human logic. This difference is expressed by the existence in God's mind of contradictory views called paradoxes. These contradictory propositions have been revealed to man, written down and canonised. Man is unable to harmonise the mutually contradictory propositions expressed in Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture is incomprehensible, which proves its inspiration. If Holy Scripture were comprehensible, this would mean either that it was written by men or that God is a man.

If what MacArthur asserts is a fact, then we do not possess a revelation of God's truth, and we can prove anything at all (a tool that will be very helpful to MacArthur in defining such heresies as works-faith and Lordship Salvation).

Again, the inability to harmonise doctrines makes the formation of a systematic theology impossible and is a denial of the Reformed principle of *analogia Scripturae*. If God's logic is not our logic, then none of God's statements can be understood. For example, when God says that His ways are not our ways, on the assumption that God's logic is not human logic, this statement may mean something opposite to and contradictory of human logic, namely that God's ways are human ways.

> Isa. 55:8 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

Thus a man moved by a modesty based on true premises (God is greater than man) but applied falsely (God has revealed something that cannot be understood) can never be sure of the authorial intention of the text, for a simple reason – because in reading for understanding he uses human logic, whereas God's logic is not human logic.

The existence of so-called paradoxes (called by MacArthur parallel truths) excludes the coherence and reliability of Scripture, since it excludes the full agreement of all the doctrines contained in the written Word. Now, if some doctrine discovered by an expositor is contradicted by certain passages of Scripture, instead of correcting the theological error the expositor can appeal to the principle of paradox and freely proclaim contradictions. This applies also to mutually contradictory doctrines.

The principle of logical contradiction rejects the existence of objective truth conveyed by language, and if MacArthur's hermeneutic is applied to the analysis of the text of Isaiah, the conclusions can be infinite, and the text itself can mean whatever the expositor wishes it to mean. This view is entirely consistent with the postmodernist view, which is hostile to the Christian conception of the existence of objective truth and to the Christian view of language:

> "One aspect of postmodernism's *denial of objective truth* is its pessimistic analysis of language. All knowledge and explanation of things use language. But *language is not able to describe anything truly.* Indeed, all language is deceptive. All language about anything is only an attempt by the speaker or writer to gain power over others. Here

> postmodernism differs from modernism, which had faith in reason and a strong confidence in scientific language to explain the world, including man."[39]

Refutation

What is the *analogia Scripturae*? Since in Christ are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (and not merely some or most of them), it is the fundamental principle of the interpretation of Holy Scripture, without which there exists no objectively defined truth. Most simply, we may define the analogy of faith as

> "*the constant and perpetual harmony of Scripture* in the fundamental points of faith [the question of salvation is fundamental] and practice deduced from those passages in which they are treated by the inspired writer either directly or *ex professo in clear and intelligible language*."[40]

The Epistle to the Colossians teaches us that Christ not only reveals the whole truth but also grants the ability to know the truth by illumination. This contradicts the assertion of the alleged inability of the human mind to harmonise biblical doctrines.

> Col. 2:3 *In whom are hid* ***all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge****.*

MacArthur's real attack strikes at epistemology, that is, at the source of truth. The existence of contradictory doctrines destroys the reliability of the foundation, which is Scripture. The concept of contradictory (and yet true) doctrines is a denial of the attribute of God's simplicity (in God there is no contradiction), an attribute which can be known only by means of the written Word.

The simplicity of God means that God is indivisible. In God there is no conflict, contradiction or disharmony. This applies:

- first to the three Persons of the Trinity – that they are not separate gods, but together one God;
- also to the attributes of God. They cannot be separated from one another or set against one another.

God is one and indivisible in His essence, attributes, purpose, will and works. His works are never contrary to His purpose, nor His purpose to Himself. The Word, which reflects God's attributes and represents God's attributes before men, cannot have contradiction within itself. This doctrinal clarity is expressly called the simplicity that is in Christ, and no one doubts that doctrinal simplicity is meant.

> 2 Cor. 11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so* ***your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity*** *that is in Christ.*

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[39] David J. Engelsma, *The Reformed Worldview* 1.3, "The Abolition of Truth".
[40] Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Polish edition: *Protestancka interpretacja biblijna*, p. 24).

All the doctrines of Scripture are in perfect harmony with one another, because the Word of God is perfect, as is shown by the Hebrew word תָּמִים *tamim*, referring to integrity, that is, perfect coherence! No text of the Law, that is, of Scripture, contradicts another. Hence we read:

> Ps. 119:160 ***Thy word is true from the beginning****: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*
>
> Ps. 19:7 *The law of the LORD is perfect* (תְּמִימָה *temimah* – coherent)*, converting the soul*

The basic assumption of the principle of *analogia Scripturae* is the existence in Scripture of one coherent system of truth and theology. We conclude, therefore, that all doctrines must agree with one another. That is to say, interpretations of particular passages cannot contradict the whole teaching of Scripture on the subject.

This is the so-called formal, systematic unity. The authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith assumed the existence of only one system of theology in Holy Scripture. In other words, systematic theology is not only possible but is the basic proof of the truthfulness, and therefore of the complete reliability, of Scripture.[41]

> "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but *the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them*."[42]

The principle of synthesis, that is, the analogy of Holy Scripture, rests on the conviction that no part of the Bible contradicts any other part of it. One Author – the Holy Spirit – is the inspiration of the whole Bible. It forms a wonderful unity. If we hear an interpretation of some text that does not agree with something in another text, then one of the texts (or both!) is being interpreted wrongly.

Horror of horrors! MacArthur believes this too, contradicting his own heretical doctrine! Try to make sense of the man!

> "*But when you have done your… all your work on biblical theology, what it yields is a perfect* ***harmonious ordered*** *theology* ***with no contradictions****, which is what* ***a perfect system*** *is, achieving and accomplishing everything that is* ***perfectly reflective of the nature of God****."*[43]

According to the teaching of the Bible, all the passages of Holy Scripture are intelligible to man and perfectly coherent with one another, which can be demonstrated by the proper use of

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Westminster Confession of Faith 1.7.
[43] John MacArthur, *How to Study Your Bible: Interpretation*.

human reason (in accordance with the logic of Holy Scripture). The Bible confirms that all doctrines are intelligible to Christians regenerated by God, because in them there takes place a change in the disposition of the mind, the reception of God's paradigm. Scripture says plainly that the saved not only can know, but do know, the mind of God, which is to be interpreted as a complete ability to harmonise all of God's truths contained in Holy Scripture.

> 1 Cor. 2:16 *For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

Here is the proof of inspiration. Here is why Martin Luther, in defending his convictions, made Holy Scripture an axiom – the first principle. When he was ordered to recant his views, his answer was as follows:

> *"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures and by plain reason, I cannot and will not recant."*[44]

Luther did not add plain reasoning to Holy Scripture as a source of truth, but argued that logic is part of Scripture itself, and that unless his accusers showed him from Holy Scripture, and by reasoning from Scripture, that he was mistaken, he not only would not, but could not, recant his faith. Luther's assertion, being in accordance with reality, was adopted by the Reformers. All the passages of Scripture are understood and harmonised by the proper application of the logic of Holy Scripture:

> *"The infallible rule* of interpretation of Scripture *is the Scripture itself*: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be *searched and known by other places that speak more clearly*."[45]

Had he accepted MacArthur's parallelism of truths as a fact, Luther would have had no ground for defending his position and would have had to yield under the pressure of the majority teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. Luther's assertion would also contradict the inspiration of Scripture, since according to MacArthur's definition Scripture cannot be understood – and that is how we know it is inspired!

Summary

MacArthur's thesis, carried to its logical conclusion, produces the principle: the less intelligible Scripture is, the more inspired it is, and the more divine God is.

MacArthur's assertion, which deprives the reader of logic – the basis of reasoning – is in fact a postmodernist attempt to gain power over the hearer, while the tools MacArthur uses to achieve this aim are the disloyal eristic devices brought to perfection: *ad culpam* and *argumentum ad verecundiam*. The first achieves its perfection by accusing man of trying to be

[44] Luther spoke these words in 1521 at the Diet of Worms.
[45] Westminster Confession of Faith 1.9.

equal to God in wisdom; the second, on the basis of the shame thus provoked, places MacArthur in the pantheon of unquestioned authorities.

In this way every text of Holy Scripture will have whatever meaning the expositor gives it (eisegesis), while doctrines, if contradictory, are deemed parallel. And the hearer is deprived of the possibility of expressing critical remarks by being burdened with the accusation: "realize this, you are a puny mind". By this appeal to guilt MacArthur gains undivided power over his followers:

- without logic there is no language;
- without language there is no revelation;
- without MacArthur there is no understanding.

Ultimately the God of Scripture and Christianity are degraded to pure mysticism, a tool ruthlessly exploited by MacArthur, the king of paradox and eisegesis. To oppose MacArthur is to oppose God Himself, to exalt the human mind, to make oneself equal with God.

Prima Scriptura-ism in full bloom – how lovely it is…

Soteriological Conditionalism

Definition of the Error

In a number of MacArthur's statements Christ died for the elect, yet the factor distinguishing them from others is that they were to believe. Christ died on the basis of a specific condition, namely their faith. This is evidently another "parallel truth", since at the same time MacArthur professes the doctrine of unconditional election.

> "Jesus Christ made a sufficient sacrifice to *cover* every sin of every one who believes […] Out of all humanity, only those *who believe will be saved*."[46]

> "Everyone who believes, that is. The death of Christ *can only be applied in its efficacy* to those who come to God repentantly in faith, *asking for saving grace and forgiveness of sins*."[47]

> *"God treated Jesus as if he had personally committed every sin ever committed by every person* ***who would ever believe*** *[…] God treated him as if he had personally committed every sin ever committed by every person* ***who would ever believe*** *[…] Doctrine of substitution so that Jesus literally dies under the full fury of God against every sin ever committed by every person* ***who would ever believe****."*[48]

[46] *The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, Word Publishing 1997, p. 1887 (Polish edition: John MacArthur, *Komentarz do NT*, Wydawnictwo Słowo Prawdy, Gdańsk 2015, p. 1122).
[47] Ibid., p. 1899 (Polish edition, p. 1146).
[48] John MacArthur, *What is the true gospel?*, 6:00.

Implications

Conditionalism is the aftermath of the Jesuit doctrine of God's Middle Knowledge adopted by Arminianism, which was logically placed between natural knowledge and free knowledge, producing the following logical sequence:[49]

1) Natural knowledge (*scientia naturalis*): God knows Himself and the totality of all possibilities outside Himself; this is knowledge independent of God's will.

2) Middle knowledge (*scientia media*): God foresaw what men would do by an act of free will in all possible situations.

3) Free knowledge (*scientia libera*): God knows the reality of the past, present and future which He has decided (by His will) to bring to pass (to realise), proceeding from an act of God's free will, which foresaw specific acts of human free will in specific situations.

In conclusion, God created, out of all possible universes, one in which He knows what choices the human free will will make under the appropriate conditions. This is hypothetical knowledge, since the creation of other conditions will yield different choices, and therefore different results. In this way God knows infallibly what choices a human being will make, e.g. whether he will accept or reject God's grace.

It may also be summed up thus: human free will determined God's choice, from among all potentially possible realities, of the one in which, hypothetically, men have the greatest chance of volitionally choosing salvation. By "hypothetically" we mean here the highest degree of probability of a given choice, which may nevertheless differ from the state of affairs that God possesses in His Middle Knowledge. God looked down the tunnel of space-time and learned to make His decisions on the basis of the entirely free will of man and to react appropriately to changes in reality.

Here a deeper dimension of God's hypothetical knowledge shows itself. The relation between hypothetical circumstances and the free will of the creature is not a direct implication, since the connection between the circumstances and the creature's choice may in fact be different from what God possesses in middle knowledge. It is precisely here that man's freedom of decision is anchored, and that is why, hypothetically, anyone can be saved, and why Jesus called Judas to repentance.

Refutation

"*Parallel*" conditionalism is a heresy contrary to Reformed theology, since it attaches a condition to the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice – the condition being a hypothetical faith. Reformed theology teaches that Christ's sacrifice was offered for the elect, all of whom will believe, since faith is an element bound up with the work of the cross; it is a soteriological element, a means of salvation secured by Christ.

Faith, although it is the personal faith of every regenerate man, is not the work of man, but the power of God working in him. Faith is certainty and full assurance of the efficacy of the cross of Christ and of His resurrection. The saved receive the gift of faith as a grace which the cross

[49] Eef Dekker, *Was Arminius a Molinist?*

secured. Hence all conviction of the truth has no human basis; it neither begins nor ends with man. Faith is not hypothetical, but efficacious.

> 1 Cor. 2:2, 5 2. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save* ***Jesus Christ, and him crucified****.* 5. ***That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.***
>
> Col. 2:12 *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through* ***the faith of the operation of God****, who hath* ***raised him from the dead****.*
>
> 1 Pet. 1:19-21 19. *But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:* 20. *Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times* ***for you****,* 21. ***Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead****, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.*

Moreover, taking conditionalism as our starting point, we arrive at a position in which God looked down the tunnel of space-time and learned to make His decisions on the basis of the entirely free will of man and his changeable decisions, of which He at one and the same time knows (*scientia naturalis*) and does not know (*scientia media*) – another of MacArthur's *"parallel truths"*, taken over from Jacobus Arminius and, in fact, from his mentor, the Jesuit Luis de Molina. The nature of God, however, is immutable, and God cannot learn or find out anything, since He knows everything and is able to do everything (MacArthur, of course, claims to believe this too).

> Heb. 13:8 *Jesus Christ* ***the same*** *yesterday, and to day,* ***and for ever****.*
>
> Ps. 102:27-28 27. *But* ***thou art the same****, and thy years shall have no end.* 28. *The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*
>
> Mal. 3:6 *For* ***I am the LORD, I change not****; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*
>
> James 1:17 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,* ***with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning****.*

And here again Mr MacArthur contradicts himself when, preaching to a "*Calvinist*" audience, he develops quite precisely the concept of a Reformed theodicy, rejecting the so-called autonomous theodicy of the Arminians. Evidently this man's point of view depends on where he happens to be sitting.

> "*This gets God off the hook again* – at least it appears to on a shallow level – *but again, it requires reinventing a God* – listen to this – *who values your will over His own.* This is inventing a God who values everybody's will over His own – and that's not the God I just read about in the Scripture. And anyway, if God knew people would choose sin

> and hell, why did He go ahead and create them anyway? And why did He design free will?
>
> He could decide what the noblest of all virtues was; why make it free will if it's going to end up like this, and you're going to have to go to Plan B just to recover from the exercise of these *myriad free wills*? *So, you can see that* ***an autonomous theodicy*** *as a category* ***has to deny the direct involvement of God****, as He is revealed to be in the Old Testament. Does He not know what people are going to do? Or is giving them the freedom to do it more important than the presence of evil?*"[50]

The Canons of the Synod of Dort, a Reformed ecumenical document (uniting the confessors of the Reformed faith), expressly reject MacArthur's concept of conditionalism. In Article 9, rejecting the doctrine of Arminianism, the Synod of Dort sets forth God's truth of the Gospel:

> "This election was *not founded upon foreseen faith and the obedience of faith*, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to the testimony of the apostle: 'He hath chosen us (not because we were, but) that we should be holy, and without blame, before him in love' (Eph. 1:4)."[51]

Summary

By contradicting himself, the Reformed Faith and Holy Scripture, MacArthur has proved that the application of "parallel truths" has a wide range of uses – wide enough to hide the essence of the matter from the ill-taught while maintaining an appearance of theological orthodoxy. This is the consequence of his professed coexistence of contradictory doctrines, which make the Bible a frivolous or even unworthy-of-belief work (which, according to MacArthur, testifies to its inspiration!). Here again it is worth appealing to Luther:

> "Leave the Scriptures alone. And if you mean here *the very substance of the matter*, then again do not accuse the Scripture, but the Arians and those to whom *the Gospel is so hidden* that, through the working of Satan, their god, *they do not see even the plainest testimonies*."[52]

In the Spirit of Sanctifying Manipulation

> Matt. 5:37 *But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

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[50] John MacArthur, *Why Does Evil Dominate the World?*
[51] Canons of Dort, Head I, Article 9.
[52] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 7).

We are slowly realising that the reality of MacArthur's eclectic teaching is not accidental. This is not the babble of an unbalanced and ill-taught mind, as one might conclude from a simple juxtaposition of statements contrary to Scripture and to one another. The strategy is the work of a genius and springs from revivalist pressure. To win the greatest possible number of hearers is the goal, while the means is the skilful adaptation of the content to the audience.

Paraphrasing Scripture (1 Cor. 9:21-22) wrongly, one might say of MacArthur:

> "To them that are without the doctrines of grace, as without the doctrines of grace – being not without the doctrines of grace – *that I might gain* them that are without the doctrines of grace. To the Arminians I am as an Arminian, to the Calvinists as a Calvinist. I am made all things to all men, *that I might by all means gain some*."

To understand the devastating effectiveness of MacArthur's manipulative methods, a direct proof will now be presented. It comes from a recording made by a Russian-speaking community professing an Arminianism hostile to Calvinism. MacArthur visited this community. Its members, aware of the hostility between the two doctrines, expressed their surprise and put an awkward, confrontational question that put their guest with his back to the wall:

> "Our community for the most part holds to Arminian theology. And you, as I understand it, preach Calvinist theology. Yet it seems that you have come to us because you love us. My question is this: how are we to *preserve unity while having such different theological approaches?*"[53]

In a stunning manner MacArthur not only extricated himself from a tight corner, but also won the hearts (and not only the hearts) of the Russians. To understand the rhetoric behind this message we must use Transactional Analysis, which instantly detects manipulation. We shall also find here social-engineering elements of NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming). The analysis was carried out by a specialist psychologist. Here are MacArthur's words:

> "The answer to that question is short. Why did I come here? Because God sent me here."[54]

Analysis: the technique used here is called the Normative (Controlling) Parent ego state, in which the speaker casts himself in the role of an authority sent by God and thus casts his hearers in the role of a child, which puts them in a subordinate role, the so-called Adapted (Submissive) Child. The technique is often used by all kinds of

- demagogues,
- totalitarians,
- but also managers,

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[53] *Вы приехали с кальвинизмом в нашу арминианскую среду? Зачем вам это?* [You have come with Calvinism into our Arminian milieu? Why are you doing this?].
[54] Ibid.

– salesmen,

– and others who practise manipulation.

The NLP anchoring technique is also used here, in which the word "God" is intended to evoke positive associations in the recipients of the message. There is also the rapport technique, which assumes that there are certain concepts, activities or stimuli that place us on the same level as the hearers – the so-called sense of community (creating an atmosphere of trust).

> "When I first spoke with your elders, I knew at once that our hearts were united in the truth […] And that has never changed. I feel welcome here, at home. Almost everything I teach, you already believe."[55]

Analysis: an appeal to similarity, the aim of which is to convince the hearers that "we are, after all, the same". This too is manipulation – by descending to the level of those being manipulated, from the position of Parent to that of the Natural Child. It exploits the principle that we like, value and respect more those who are similar to us.

> "I am only trying to help you understand better what you already believe."[56]

Analysis: and this is the height of hypocrisy – again the Parent, this time the Nurturing Parent, who offers help, of course, to the Submissive Child.

> "I am not bringing you strange, foreign teachings here. God knows this, and I think that is why He sent me here – to deepen your faith. If there are any differences between us, nothing is lost by them in our love and fellowship and mutual service. I do not expect blind acceptance of what I say. But we have so much in common."[57]

Analysis: and again an appeal to similarity. Not only that: in NLP the proper use of phrases and words is very important, e.g. "Don't think of a green apple." And what did you think of?

> "Nowhere else in the world apart from Russia have I felt so much at home – and I have been in many places in the world."[58]

Analysis: and here, crude flattery (crowned on the recording by applause).

> "God brought me and you to this place (again an appeal to similarity). God has joined us together. And I do not think of you as Arminians and of myself as a Calvinist, because those labels are not fair to people. I believe what the Bible says and you believe what the Bible says."[59]

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

Analysis: here the switch pattern technique is visible, i.e. switching between two representations, one of which has a stronger affective element, from a negative to a positive connotation.

> "You are tremendously blessed. You have not had theological schools. That is a tremendous blessing. Because in the West they have theological schools, they become corrupt and teach people lies and errors."[60]

Analysis: the negation of the side one represents, in order to become closer to one's present hearers.

> "You cannot become a heretic just by reading the Bible. You have to go to school. And you have to have some heretics to teach you. But you have not had any heretics teaching you. Instead you have had faithful, godly men. That is a blessing. And God has preserved you to this day. Now there are good teachers who can come to Russia to teach you the truth. Dear brothers, if you do not agree with me on certain aspects of the theology of election, God's sovereignty or the perseverance of the saints, that is only one small area of Christian theology."[61]

Analysis: minimising the differences and reversing the evaluation by denying reality. If schools in the USA produce heretics, and MacArthur graduated from a school in the USA, then of necessity he must be a heretic.

> "You will ask: what about human free will? What about human responsibility in salvation? Well, that is in Scripture too. I do not deny it."[62]

Analysis: a blatant lie intended to remove all barriers – "I believe just as you believe". This is a classic reframing of the context of a statement, which does not change its logical content but changes the conclusions drawn from it in the hearer's head; e.g. a husband rings his wife and says he has to stay late at work today, but does not say that he is doing so on account of his secretary.

This Is Not the End

> 1 Tim. 6:20 *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and* ***oppositions of science falsely so called****:*

MacArthur is a spiritual chameleon. Leaving aside the fundamentalism and cessationism absorbed at his colleges, he adapts himself almost perfectly to the needs of his audience, confirming each person in his own theological conviction. This is a very dangerous strategy, which makes the victims the ultimate measure of truth.

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

> *"[The truth of Jesus] is contrary and hostile to the truth of this world, which is apparent to the natural man by means of his own natural heart and his five natural senses. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, and the way of God is foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). So* **the way of the deceiver is to make sure that man arrives at his own knowledge of 'truth'***, beginning in himself and from himself, using himself as the measure and using* **what he thinks** *as the 'canon' (or measure of truth) by which to judge all things, whether he will receive them as truth or not. The man who proceeds by this standard is called in Scripture a fool (***Prov. 18:2; 12:15; 14:16***), and* **all his ways are folly** *(***Eccl. 10:13***)."*[63]

To sum up: an excessive emphasis on historical-cultural and literal interpretation sets the human mind on a par with illumination. The exaltation of the power of the human mind leads to the rejection of the biblical doctrine of the continuity of God's Covenant, which acquired a catholic character through the incorporation of the Gentiles. A falsely conceived compassion, combined with a lowering of the authority of Scripture, leads to the conclusion that, since the church is not included in the Covenant, all children (lacking the capacity of discernment) are saved, and not only the children of the promise arising from the Covenant. Man is not absolutely depraved, which leaves in him remnants of good. By persisting in sin, man deprives himself of the remnant of good left in him after the Fall, and thereby cuts himself off from salvation completely or temporarily (depending on the translation). The concept of logically contradictory truths has been developed and deepened, which leads to the sanctioning of every doctrine as consistent with Scripture. This has led to making the efficacy of the atonement dependent upon the faith of man foreseen by God, and as such it is a preferring of human free will to God's sovereignty. It is also a denial of God's omniscience.

But this is not the end.

[63] Michael Bunker, *Modern Religious Idols*, p. 18.

Chapter 3 – The Heresy of Common Grace

A Reminder

> 2 Tim. 4:3 *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*

The previous two chapters exposed John MacArthur's theological background, saturated with Arminianism. The education he received at Los Angeles Pacific College and Bob Jones University implanted in him views affirming universal atonement, the incompleteness of sanctification – implying the necessity of good works as indispensable to salvation – and, consistently, the possibility of attaining entire sanctification in this life. Moreover, in the course of his education MacArthur brushed against the concept of the universal offer of salvation, as well as a fundamental error: belief in biblical paradoxes.

The choice of schools was not accidental. John "*Jack*" MacArthur, the father of John Jr., as a General Baptist and in practice a multi-denominational revivalist and ecumenical preacher, passed on to MacArthur not only fundamentalism but also the Arminian understanding of the gospel, in which Christ died for all without exception.

Despite the support of R.C. Sproul, MacArthur did not fundamentally change his original non-Reformed confession, and although he nominally accepted the Five Doctrines of Grace (TULIP), it turned out that he still professes a number of problematic, if not heretical, doctrines. Leaving aside dispensationalism and credobaptism, we have so far drawn attention to some of MacArthur's doctrines that are contrary to the Reformed Faith:

- The fundamental error: the methodological denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture
- A church without a covenant
- The denial of the power of original sin
- The denial of total depravity
- The denial of the sovereignty of God
- Parallel truths, or the development of the concept of paradox
- Soteriological conditionalism

Evidence was also presented of MacArthur's use of specialised social-engineering techniques employed by demagogues, salesmen, managers and totalitarians (NLP, Transactional Analysis and the like), which enable him to break down every barrier in those exposed to his influence. Combined with the denial of the integrity of Scripture through the alleged existence within it of contradictory (that is, parallel) doctrines, this was cleverly used as the basis for MacArthur's assuming ultimate theological authority, and thereby securing almost undivided power over the minds of his followers by implanting two functional axioms:

- MacArthur is always right.
- MacArthur must not be criticised.

This trail has led the attentive reader to the conclusion that, whatever aim MacArthur may have in view, it is not the truth. By using contradictory arguments and promoting two opposing theologies (nominally Reformed, but in substance Arminian), he reaches the widest possible audience, serving each of his target groups a suitably prepared, eclectic message.

In this third part only one doctrine will be analysed, the reason being the wide scope of the error, which embraces the questions of common grace, the image of God in man, cooperation between believers and unbelievers, and the relation of the Church to the state.

The Heresy of Common Grace

Abraham Kuyper was a Calvinist; however, on account of his political aspirations he resolved to create a theological bridge enabling believers to cooperate with unbelievers. In order to win the office of Prime Minister of the Netherlands (which in the end he succeeded in doing) and in this way to Christianise the country, it was necessary to win the votes of those of other faiths.

To this end he devised the doctrine of common grace, whereby all men can in a certain way experience God's goodness – and from there it is a short road to joint efforts by the Church and the ungodly to create conditions favourable to the growth of Christianity.

Definition of the Error

This is a concept not only highly compromising but also unbiblical, which in the final reckoning destroyed the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and brought the country to a state of ultimate moral degeneration (atheism, widespread euthanasia, abortion, homosexual marriage, and so on). Yet according to Kuyper:

> *"all men share in this common grace by virtue of the* ***image of God*** *remaining in them"* [hence] "Christians can and should cooperate with unbelievers in order to *improve living conditions*, fight poverty and promote *social justice for all*."[64]

It was shown earlier that MacArthur denied total depravity, that is, the Reformed doctrine that rejects the existence of even a remnant of good in man. Hence MacArthur's assimilation of Kuyperianism, a heresy that sprang up like a weed in the soil of Calvinism, was only a matter of time. Confirmation of MacArthur's embrace of the heresy is found in two areas: the theoretical (doctrine) and the practical (ecumenism).

A direct doctrinal position acknowledging common grace is found in his commentary on 1 Tim. 4:10:

> 1 Tim. 4:10 *For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour* ***of all men, specially of those that believe****.*

MacArthur interprets it as teaching two kinds of grace: the first concerns eternal salvation, the second temporal salvation.

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[64] Cornelis Pronk, "Neo-Calvinism", *Reformed Theological Journal* 11 (1995), p. 47.

> "Paul is obviously not teaching universalism […] The Greek word translated 'especially' *must* mean that *all men enjoy God's salvation in some way* like those who believe enjoy His salvation. […]
>
> Paul's point is that while God graciously delivers believers from sin's condemnation and penalty because He was their substitute, *all men experience some earthly benefits from the goodness of God*. Those benefits are
>
> 1) *common grace* – a term that describes God's goodness shown to all mankind universally in restraining sin and judgment, *maintaining order in society through government*, enabling man to appreciate beauty and goodness, and showering him with temporal blessings."[65]

Implications

Since, according to MacArthur, God is gracious and is by nature a good and saving God, every man, though to differing degrees, can experience God's grace. God bestows blessings on the reprobate because He is gracious. Therefore those of the elect to salvation who do not receive these blessings are not objects of God's grace. The rich and healthy degenerate has money because he has received such grace from God. On the other hand, the godly Christian living in poverty and sickness has not received grace from God.

In this view God shows His goodness (grace is a good) to the wicked, while to the good (because saved and sanctified by Christ) He shows evil (the opposite of grace). MacArthur creates and worships an unjust god. But that is not all.

MacArthur applies the heresy of common grace that he has read into the Epistle – specifically its legal and social aspect – in a rather peculiar way. It is a fact that he does not support active cooperation with Roman Catholics, the Orthodox and representatives of pagan religions such as Islam. Nevertheless, he regards all men as created in the likeness of God (*imago Dei*) and therefore as experiencing God's grace in a specific way, which he transposes onto broadly understood universal rights, guaranteed by the state, to maintain one's personal confession, to assemble and to worship.

He regards these rights as belonging to all regardless of the religion professed, to which he gave expression by signing the manifesto *The Frankfurt Declaration*:

> "We affirm that *every human being is created in the image and likeness of God* (imago Dei) and therefore has inherent dignity and worth, along with *certain inalienable rights and liberties requisite for a proper human life*. These rights and liberties include *the right to corporate worship*…"[66]

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[65] *The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, Word Publishing 1997, p. 1867 (on 1 Tim. 4:10); Polish edition: John MacArthur, *Komentarz do NT*, Wydawnictwo Słowo Prawdy, Gdańsk 2015, p. 701.
[66] *The Frankfurt Declaration*, Article 3.

According to Mr MacArthur, every human being – therefore Muslims, Buddhists and adherents of Hinduism – should have the right to corporate worship guaranteed by the state. A Muslim has the right to worship Allah because:

- he is created in the image and likeness of God, Jehovah, and
- he has been saved by God, Jehovah, in a temporal sense.

In the same way an adherent of Hinduism has the right to the corporate polytheistic worship of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. And this the state should guarantee – which is an unequivocal manifestation of Kuyperianism, which presupposes full cooperation between believers and unbelievers in order to create a better world. Although this is not expressed directly, the implication is obvious. The state is to permit, and therefore not to hinder or interfere with, nor to combat, either Christianity or idolatry.

The logical implication is as follows: since every man is created in the image and likeness of God, and the state is in the service of God, the state is to guarantee to every man the right to profess any idol whatever. Creation in the image of God, through the actions of the authorities, guarantees the right to idolatry. God thus uses the authorities to secure the continuance of false cults.

Refutation

First, the alleged common grace has no passage of Scripture supporting the concept. The text of 1 Tim. 4:10 does not teach common grace. God's grace is not arbitrary (i.e. proceeding from the whim of a deity, as for example in the case of Allah). The grace of Jehovah is always bound up with the blood shed by Christ. Christ did not suffer torments, shed His blood, die and rise again in order to secure for the reprobate temporal privileges, a life of pleasures and health, and that they might sin less so that the final judgement upon them would be less terrible.

Moreover, the Greek word μάλιστα *malista*, translated "specially", has a fairly wide lexical range (i.e. range of meaning). Apart from 1 Tim. 4:10, Holy Scripture in at least three cases out of twelve (25%) uses the word μάλιστα *malista* in a non-differentiating, i.e. explanatory, sense: "*that is*". Taking into account the semantic situation (i.e. the context), precisely such a translation is preferable. Hence:

> *we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men,* ***that is****, of those that believe.*

Secondly, the theology (or rather ideology) of common grace springs from the observation of reality, and MacArthur, as a theologian exceptionally strongly attached to the grammatical-historical method of literal interpretation, treats the senses and human reason as a source of truth. To put it colloquially, MacArthur looks at the world, sees in it "good" though unbelieving people, and is even friends with some of them (e.g. Larry King, the radio and television presenter who died in 2021, on whose programmes he appeared many times).[67]

Then, rejecting absolute depravity, he sees in every man the image of God, that is, an inherited element of God present in every man that makes possible not only lasting friendships but also

[67] John MacArthur, *The Vilification of Jesus, Part 1*.

cooperation. MacArthur applies the knowledge acquired through the senses as a hermeneutical method, which is a cardinal error, since what has been observed by the senses becomes truth read into the text. As D. Engelsma has observed:

> "Common grace rests on what people see, feel and think when they observe their neighbours and the world."[68]

Thirdly, it is not grace but God's providence that causes wicked men to receive good things into their hands and good men not necessarily so. Those of the reprobate who have received many blessings will suffer a greater punishment at the last judgement, because they did not give glory to God for them, but showed themselves to be all the greater enemies of His.

> Ps. 73:4-9 4. *For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.* 5. *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.* 6. *Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.* 7. *Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.* 8. *They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.* 9. *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*

The Psalmist concludes by summing up the reason why God has furnished the ungodly with so many good things, which may be compared to feeding an allergic person with a food which, though good and tasty in itself, will become the cause of his agonising death:

> Ps. 73:18-19 18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.* 19. *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.*

Moreover, some men and even whole nations receive blessings from God because God uses them for His purposes. For example, Assyria became a scourge upon apostate Israel, and therefore grew in military might (Isa. 10). Cyrus became lord of "the whole world" so that Israel might rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Chr. 36). The house of the Egyptian was blessed for Joseph's sake (Gen. 39:5). Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba became a ransom for Israel (Isa. 43:3).

Fourthly, no works of the unregenerate man are accounted good in the sight of God, because:

- they do not proceed from faith – Rom. 14:23 *…for* ***whatsoever is not of faith is sin****;*
- they are not in accordance with God's Law – Ps. 119:1 *Blessed are the undefiled in the way,* ***who walk in the law of the LORD****;*
- they do not give glory to God – Col. 3:17 *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed,* ***do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him****;*
- they are not the working of the Spirit in man – Rom. 8:8 *So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

[68] David J. Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited*, p. 16.

Owing to the absence of the above characteristics, human works – the works of every unregenerate man, even the best of them – are utterly despised by God, since they proceed from an evil and corrupt nature and are therefore thoroughly evil, however good or socially valuable they may appear to other people, Christians included.

> Isa. 64:6 *But we are all as an unclean thing, and* ***all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags****; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*

> Matt. 7:18 *A good tree* ***cannot*** *bring forth evil fruit,* ***neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit****.*

Fifthly, the *imago Dei*, the image of God, was possessed by Adam and Eve before the Fall.

> Gen. 1:26 *Let us make man* ***in our image****, after* ***our likeness***

In defining the essence of the image of God we must take into account six historical views that have existed in the broadly understood church – five false and one true. The false views are:[69]

- Anthropomorphic – held, for example, by the Mormons and by Pentecostals (e.g. Kenneth Copeland). Here God has a body like a man.
- Socinian – the adherents of this Unitarian sect believed that it consists in dominion over the created world.
- Roman Catholic – held by the early church; it concerns the so-called *donum superadditum* – an ability added to human nature, containing spiritual gifts, righteousness and holiness. The Fall deprived man of the *donum superadditum* but did not affect the whole of human nature. Man still possesses some good in himself (a position very close to MacArthur's).
- Eastern Orthodox – distinguishes between the likeness and the image of God; this is a replication of the Catholic position without the use of the term *donum superadditum*.
- Narrower and broader – the narrower is knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, lost in the Fall; the broader is the intellectual faculties, natural emotions and moral freedom, still retained after the Fall. This is a position similar to the Catholic one and was held by some Presbyterian and Reformed congregations (MacArthur's position).

It is worth making a small digression at this point. The probable source of MacArthur's theological error was his spiritual mentor, R.C. Sproul – a theologian firmly grounded in philosophy, who was charged with following the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, who, as we know, was a Roman Catholic scholar proclaiming the existence of two sources of truth: revelation and the senses (which fits MacArthur's profile perfectly). Sproul admits that he was the object of this criticism on the part of John Robbins:

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[69] Angus Stewart, *The Image of God in Man: A Reformed Reassessment*.

> "Don't tell John Robbins that I just quoted Thomas Aquinas, or he'll be pouring Aquinas oil on me for ages."[70]

Returning to the subject: the biblical view rejects the above conceptions. Reformed orthodoxy professes the spiritual/ethical view. Martin Luther defines it as enlightened reason, true knowledge of God and the sincerest desire to love God and one's neighbour.

> "In Adam there was *an enlightened reason, a true knowledge of God*, and *a most sincere desire to love God and his neighbour*, so that Adam embraced Eve and at once acknowledged her to be his own flesh."[71]

Unlike the previous five views, the spiritual/ethical view denies that unbelievers are in any sense the image of God. With the Fall the image of God was utterly destroyed, and only

> "the Gospel brings it about that we are *formed again according to that familiar and indeed better image*, because we are born again into eternal life."[72]

Fallen man is still man, but he is a man who bears the *imago diaboli* (John 8:44; Eph. 2:1-3). Only the regenerate man bears the *imago Dei*. There are restored:

- enlightened reason – 1 John 5:20 *And we know that the Son of God is come, and* ***hath given us an understanding****, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*
- true knowledge of God – John 17:3 *And this is life eternal, that they might* ***know thee*** *the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*
- love of God and one's neighbour – 1 John 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another:* ***for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God****.*

The image and likeness of God is restored only in Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, without which there can be no question of the existence of the image of God or of likeness to God in the unregenerate man.

> Eph. 4:24 *And that ye put on* ***the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness****.*
>
> Col. 3:10 *And have put on the new man, which is* ***renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him****:*
>
> Rom. 8:15 *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received* ***the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father****.*

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[70] R.C. Sproul, *Before the Beginning: The Aseity of God*, 32:45.
[71] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1958), p. 63.
[72] Ibid., pp. 63–64.

> Gal. 4:6 *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth* ***the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father****.*

Paul Bayne, William Perkins's successor at the University of Cambridge, in his commentary on Ephesians 4:24, states very clearly that

> *"the image of God cannot be conceived in bodily things, nor yet does it lie in the substance and faculties of the soul, such as memory, understanding and will,* ***for wicked men have these****;* nor yet in dominion over the creatures, for that is a consequence which followed upon man's being made in the image and likeness of God."[73]

Bayne argues that only what expresses the divine nature can be regarded as the image of God.

> "The image of God stands in those divine qualities which, as certain signs and forms, *express the divine nature, most holy, most righteous*, in so far as the Creator can be represented in such a creature."[74]

Earlier, Bayne states that men born of the flesh are not born in the image of God but in the image of Adam.

> "Since the fall of man we are begotten *not in the image of God*, but in the image of corrupt Adam."[75]

Hence it is evident that Christ, the perfect image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), dwelling in those regenerated by His Spirit, transforms each one, giving him the image of God (1 Cor. 11:7), which is deepened day by day through inward renewal (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10), in order to attain the fullness of perfection in heaven (1 Cor. 15:49). This can by no means be said of the unregenerate.

Sixthly, Holy Scripture denies the concept of the role of the state as the guardian of all religions; MacArthur, however, has deprived the New Testament Church of the Covenant, and therefore does not acknowledge the texts of the Old Testament as being in force; hence he desperately seeks a state that is neutral as to worldview:

> "*There is no political solution to what ails our culture.*"[76]

MacArthur grants the privileges of state protection only to the Jews in the supposed millennial kingdom, where the Gentiles will lick the dust from the feet of Abraham's genetic descendants. Hence the state in the present dispensation, according to MacArthur, should make it possible

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[73] Paul Bayne, "An Exposition of Ephesians, Chapter 2:11 to 6:18", in *Puritan Exposition of Ephesians* (USA: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1958), pp. 360–361.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., p. 359.
[76] John MacArthur, *Why I Signed the Frankfurt Declaration*.

to practise the joy of experiencing the freedom secured by the salvation of common grace. The state is to take a completely neutral position towards every religion – which is not an element of the Reformed faith, but rather its denial.

> Isa. 49:23, 25 23. *And* ***kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet****; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.* 25. *But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.*
>
> 1 Kgs 15:12 [King Asa] *And he took away* ***the sodomites*** *out of the land, and removed* ***all the idols*** *that his fathers had made.*
>
> 2 Kgs 23:2-4 2. *And* ***the king went up into the house of the LORD****, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD.* 3. *And* ***the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD****, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.* 4. *And* ***the king commanded*** *Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door,* ***to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Beth-el****.*

The Reformed Faith rejects the concept of the state's supporting idolatry. The Belgic Confession, in Article 36, states plainly that the task of every government is to support the Church – meaning, of course, the true Christian Church professing the Reformed faith – while at the same time combating false religions, which are demonic concepts adopted by men as a result of the Fall of Adam. The state has the task of supporting the Church, which in turn has the task of destroying the kingdom of Satan, represented by false religions – its glaring expression. In the Christian view, a state governed by Christians is not, and cannot be, neutral as to worldview.

> "We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, *hath appointed kings, princes, and magistrates*, willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; *to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained*, and all things carried on among them with good order and decency. For this purpose he hath invested the magistracy with the sword, for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. *And their office is*, not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state; but also *that they protect the sacred ministry; and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship; that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed and the kingdom of Christ promoted*. They must therefore *countenance the preaching of the word of the gospel*

> *everywhere*, that God may be honoured and worshipped by every one, as he commands in his Word."[77]

Seventhly, MacArthur's confession, contrary to Scripture, is a faith rejected by the Reformed Confessions of Faith. This is an obvious consequence, since the Confessions of Faith merely systematise biblical teaching, whereas MacArthur rejects all the Reformed Confessions and desires a further reform of theology, that is, innovation.[78]

Article 3 of the Scots Confession of 1560, written by the "*six Johns*", among them John Knox, declares the unregenerate to be deprived of the image of God:

> *"By this transgression, commonly called original sin, was* ***the image of God utterly defaced in man****;* and he and his posterity of nature *became enemies to God*, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin."[79]

The Westminster Confession defines the works of unregenerate, that is, carnal, men as sinful. Indeed, according to the Confession there are two kinds of works performed by the totally depraved man. Yet we do not read of a distinction between good and evil works, but between evil and worse, displeasing and more displeasing.

> *"Works done by unregenerate men*, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from an heart purified by faith; nor are done in a right manner, according to the Word; nor to a right end, the glory of God, *they are therefore sinful*, *and cannot* ***please God***, or make a man meet to receive grace from God. And yet their neglect of them *is more sinful and displeasing unto God*."[80]

In the Belgic Confession the concept of the ability of the unregenerate man to perform good works is rejected. The biblical argument is obvious: unregenerate men are evil trees which cannot bring forth good fruit. Evil trees, that is, the unregenerate, can bring forth only evil fruit, that is, evil works.

> *"These works, as they proceed from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable in the sight of God, forasmuch as they are all sanctified by his grace: howbeit they are of no account towards our justification. For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works;* ***otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good****."*[81]

The Canons of the Synod of Dort confirm that common grace, understood as human gifts still left to man after the fall, is a heresy professed by the Arminians and not by the Reformed. Men

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[77] Belgic Confession, Article 36.
[78] *MacArthur vs Sproul Baptism Debate*, 10:34.
[79] Scots Confession (1560), Article 3.
[80] Westminster Confession of Faith 16.7.
[81] Belgic Confession, Article 24.

possess no gifts; they are capable neither of enlightened reasoning nor of true love of their neighbour, to say nothing of love for God.

> [Having set forth the true doctrine, the Synod rejects the errors of those] Who teach: That the corrupt and natural man can so well use *the common grace* (by which they understand the light of nature), or *the gifts still left him after the fall*, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, namely, the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself. And that in this way God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since He applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion.[82]

The Geneva Theses of 1649, the Reformed refutation of the heresy of Amyraldianism, unequivocally reject the concept of common grace. In Chapter 2 we read of the rejection, binding on all the Reformed Churches, of the errors of those:

> Who ascribe to God a twofold benevolence: one express, or first and universal, by which He willed that every man be saved; the other more express and special towards the elect.[83]

Summary

The excessive emphasis on historical-cultural and literal interpretation present in MacArthur's theology sets the human mind on a par with illumination. The exaltation of the power of the human mind leads to the rejection of the biblical doctrine of the continuity of God's Covenant, which acquired a catholic character through the incorporation of the Gentiles. A falsely conceived compassion, combined with a lowering of the authority of Scripture, leads to the conclusion that, since the church is not included in the Covenant, all children (lacking the capacity of discernment) are saved, and not only the children of the promise arising from the Covenant. Man is not absolutely depraved, which leaves in him remnants of good. By persisting in sin, man deprives himself of the remnant of good left in him after the Fall, and thereby cuts himself off from salvation completely or temporarily (depending on the translation).

The concept of logically contradictory truths has been developed and deepened, resulting in the possibility of sanctioning every doctrine as consistent with Scripture. This has led to making the efficacy of the atonement dependent upon the faith of man foreseen by God, and as such it is a preferring of human free will to God's sovereignty. It is also a denial of God's omniscience.

Again, the claim that the image of God remains in every man, together with a misunderstanding of God's character – in which God is presented as the saviour of all men, of the elect in a special way and of the rest in general – leads to the building of a bridge enabling cooperation between those who are perishing and the saved, all in order to establish social conditions favourable to the functioning of the church by making the authorities neutral as to worldview. This bridge is called common grace, and it is a denial of Reformed theology, a

[82] Canons of Dort, Heads III/IV, Rejection of Errors 5.
[83] Geneva Theses (1649), II, Rejection of Errors.

concept that brings its adherents dangerously close to Arminianism and is, in consequence, the road to Rome.

> *"There is no basis for common grace in the Reformed confessions. On the contrary, the Reformed confessions condemn the theory both by name and in all its main elements.* Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the world […] that embrace common grace – these churches *place themselves outside the sphere of the Reformed faith*."[84]

This Is Not the End

The Frankfurt Declaration seems to serve perfectly as self-promotion for the organisation run by John MacArthur, which fits the strategy he has adopted for conquering the neo-evangelical market. As the most recognisable face of his church, this man is responsible for promotion and marketing, and consequently for facilitating the sale of materials bearing his name. For example, Dennis Swanson, a former associate of MacArthur's, asked about his role as president of The Master's Seminary, says plainly:

> "[His role was] *raising money*. When he spoke, he promoted the school, he did that kind of thing. But as for an active administrative role, I would say he had practically none."[85]

The Kuyperianism he has adopted opens the door to lucrative ventures, in which theological compromise is practised under the pretext of the expansion of God's Kingdom.

Since Scripture teaches *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers* (2 Cor. 6:14), why should the state, instead of supporting the Church in destroying idolatry, guarantee freedom of religion to Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists? The question remains open, and it is doubtful whether an answer to it will ever be obtained from the company led by MacArthur. Ever.

MacArthur, in regarding human works as good in the sight of God, seems not to perceive the fundamental difference, defined in the Bible, between the darkness of the unregenerate and the light of those quickened by God. The two groups have been hostile to one another since the Fall (*I will put* ***enmity*** *[…] between thy seed and her seed*, Gen. 3:15), and Christianity constitutes the antithesis of the culture of this world. As a skilful and not unsuccessful travelling salesman of common grace, MacArthur should nevertheless remember the biblical warning that he himself has more than once served up to the charismatics:

> 2 Pet. 2:3 *And* ***through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you****: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

[84] David J. Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited*, pp. 32–33.
[85] *The Roys Report*: "What's the Truth about John MacArthur & His Ministries?"

Dear reader, we hope in our hearts that, having read this chapter, you will at least consider whether it is worth being a devotee of MacArthur's theology, which, as far as substance is concerned, has essentially nothing in common with Reformed theology.

Chapter 4 – The Heresy of the Well-Meant Offer of Salvation

A Reminder

> Eph. 4:5 *One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

The stance and aim of the Reformation was to restore the original apostolic faith in a church consumed, on the one hand, by the legalism of salvation by works, ceremonialism, indulgences and the centralisation of power embodied in the antichrist-pope, and, on the other, to fight against the antinomianism, carnal excesses, dreams, visions, extra-biblical prophecies and anarchy of heretical Anabaptism.

The Reformation rejected the errors of Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism, turning to Holy Scripture as the only source of doctrine (*sola Scriptura*). Since the faith is one, in order to avoid serious charges of innovation, that is, of creating new concepts and a new faith, Reformers such as Luther and Calvin appealed to the Fathers in support of their assertions – in particular to the works of Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430), which are the summary and crown of the theology of the church at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries.

In the following quotation the early church, through the mouth of Irenaeus of Lyons, bears witness that the true faith is the faith present in the church from the beginning, a faith coherent, logical and uniform for all. It is worth remembering this when reading doctrinal texts, especially those that usurp the name of Reformed theology.

> "All these heretics are of much later date than the bishops to whom the Apostles committed the Churches. (…) Of necessity, therefore, (…) *they are blind to the truth* and, *wandering from one road to another, stray from the right path*. As a result *the scraps of their doctrines* do not hold together and *lack logic*. But the path of those who belong to the church runs through the whole world, for it has the firm tradition from the Apostles and enables us to see that the faith of all is one and the same."[86]

John MacArthur, by asserting that man cannot understand God's logic,[87] stands condemned by Irenaeus as a deceiver blind to the truth, wandering through the trackless wastes of faith. This judgement is upheld by the Reformation, as was expressed, for example, by Gordon H. Clark, who defined the rejection of the ability to understand God's truth logically as the absence of knowledge of any truth whatever, and consequently as a sophistical attack on Christianity:

> *"If God knows all truth and knows the correct meaning of every proposition, and if no proposition means to man what it means to God, so that God's knowledge and man's knowledge do not coincide at any single point, it follows by rigorous necessity that*

[86] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5.20.

[87] John MacArthur, *Twin Truths: God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility*; and *Вы приехали с кальвинизмом в нашу арминианскую среду? Зачем вам это?* [You have come with Calvinism into our Arminian milieu? Why are you doing this?].

> ***man can know no truth***. This conclusion is quite contrary to the views of Calvin […] and *undermines the whole of Christianity*."[88]

The illogical MacArthur, nourished on Wesleyan Arminianism,[89] adopted a nominal Calvinism, further modified by scraps of logically incoherent doctrines, of which the following have so far been discussed:

- The fundamental error: the methodological denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture
- A church without a covenant
- The denial of the power of original sin
- The denial of total depravity
- The denial of the sovereignty of God
- Parallel truths, or the development of the concept of paradox
- The heresy of common grace, or Kuyperianism

This time we shall consider Marrowism, yet another instrument of separation from the truth of the Gospel, used by MacArthur to win new followers.

Identifying the Problem

What is the heresy of the well-meant offer of salvation, that is, Marrowism? Its first seeds were introduced into theology by William Ames (1576–1633), who lived earlier. In his book *The Marrow of Theology* (*Medulla Theologiae*) he argued that there is a special grace of God for the elect and a common grace of God, which was supposed to demonstrate a kind of universal love of God for the whole creation.

> *"God's* ***sustaining grace*** *extends to the whole creation, whereas the special government which God exercises over the human race, the 'intelligent creature', is the covenant of works."*[90]

The doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel is closely connected with the doctrine of common grace. The logical connection is this:

→ if God is in some way gracious to all men,

→ if God in some way desires the salvation of all men,

→ then God in some way loves all men.

The Marrow controversy rests precisely on this dependence of common grace and universal love. It arose from the book of Edward Fisher (1627–1655), a seventeenth-century English

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[88] Gordon H. Clark, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, p. 100.
[89] The theological school from which MacArthur graduated teaches precisely Wesleyan Arminianism.
[90] William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* 1.10, in Joel R. Beeke, *Purytanie* [The Puritans], Tolle Lege, p. 38.

Calvinist, entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. The general aim of this work was to set out a middle way between legalism and antinomianism. Fisher argued that

> "the middle way is a true receiving of Jesus Christ and *a walking worthy of the Lord*."[91]

In his work Fisher dealt with a theology close to the heresy of Lordship Salvation promoted by MacArthur, according to which faith, in order to be saving, must be a working faith:

> "[faith consists of] a firm persuasion… a personal surrender… [and] *conduct inspired by such surrender*."[92]

The proponents of Marrowism claimed to be Calvinists, but they attacked the Reformed faith in the area of the preaching of the Gospel.

> "The preaching of the Gospel must reach the whole world. It must be given such a form that it not only confronts man with the obligation to forsake sin, repent of it and believe in Christ, but it must be presented in the most attractive form possible. In the preaching of the Gospel there is *an element of God beseeching men to believe; God does all in His power* to persuade men of the necessity of receiving the Gospel and believing in Christ."[93]

In the minds of the adherents of Marrowism, the only way in which the Gospel could be brought to the unconverted had to be expressed in a universal desire of God to save all men. Out of God's love for all men, God besought men to *"close with Christ"*, to use the Marrowmen's favourite expression.

From 1957 to 1960 John MacArthur studied at Bob Jones University, an institution where the heresy of the well-meant offer of the gospel is preached in its Arminian form.[94] He received his Calvinism from R.C. Sproul, who was tainted with Marrowism;[95] it seems that it was precisely Marrowism, as an element common to the Arminianism professed by MacArthur, that may have encouraged him to take an interest in neo-Calvinism.

Definition of the Error

In its message Marrowism assumes that God has a favourable attitude towards mankind in general, and not only towards the elect; that there is a certain grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general; and that the general offer of the gospel is an expression of this favour of God towards all men.

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[91] Joel R. Beeke, *Purytanie* [The Puritans], p. 194.
[92] John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, p. 47.
[93] David J. Engelsma, Herman Hanko, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Polish edition: *Pięć Punktów Kalwinizmu*, pp. 6–16).
[94] BJU Position Statements, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Reformed Theology".
[95] R.C. Sproul teaches Marrowism openly: "In speaking of the love of God, we distinguish three kinds of this love – the love of benevolence, the love of beneficence and the love of complacency. The reason for the distinction is to draw attention to the different ways in which God loves all people in a certain sense, and the special way in which He loves His people, the redeemed." R.C. Sproul, *Abundant Love*, Ligonier Ministries.

In this system God, in His eternal decree, did not choose certain men for salvation and therefore had no will to save them; yet in the history of salvation He beseeches those very men whom He predestined to damnation to be converted, and does all in His power to persuade them to it, doing everything contrary to His own decree. This is an internally contradictory system.

In this sense Marrowism proves to be close to the heresy of Amyraldianism, in which Christ died for all because, as a good God, He loves all, but gives faith – the means of grace enabling the reception of Christ's sacrifice – only to the elect. Here too God, so understood, acts contrary to His eternal decree of Christ's death for all men, since that death remains ineffectual with regard to the overwhelming majority for whom Christ died, namely those who are not endowed by God with the means of grace. This too is an internally contradictory system.

Since God's love has a judicial basis in the cross, the Marrowmen taught that Christ did indeed die for His people, but at the same time is dead for all men. Thus both Marrowism and Amyraldianism profess a universal, general, peculiar love of God for the whole creation, rooted in the cross of Christ and contrary to God's eternal decree.

MacArthur, nourished on the heresy of Arminianism, adopted a so-called Calvinism containing within it the heresy of Marrowism, which is close to Arminianism. Whereas the Arminians believe in a messiah who saves all without exception, the Marrowmen, at least nominally, preach the doctrine of limited atonement after the manner of Calvinist orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the feature common to both systems is precisely the offer of salvation to all without exception (whereas Christianity teaches that the Gospel is not an offer but a promise).

MacArthur proclaims Marrowism by asserting that God has indeed chosen some for salvation, yet offers salvation to all. One of the biblical texts used in support of the alleged common grace of God is found in the Gospel of Matthew.

> Matt. 11:28-30 28. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* 29. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* 30. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Hence Christ not only besought Judas, the son of perdition, to be converted, but also did absolutely everything for his conversion. MacArthur argues:

> "… Jesus gave him *warnings and pleas to bring him to repentance and salvation*. And at every point he turned it down. We see that clearly in John 13."[96]

> "4) *the gospel invitation* – salvation in Christ is *indiscriminately offered to all*. God is, by nature, a saving God."[97]

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[96] John MacArthur, *Unmasking the Betrayer* (retrieved 30 October 2020).
[97] *The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, Word Publishing 1997, p. 1867 (on 1 Tim. 4:10); Polish edition: John MacArthur, *Komentarz do NT*, Wydawnictwo Słowo Prawdy, Gdańsk 2015, p. 701.

> "But the truth of divine election in v. 27 *is not incompatible with the free offer to all* in vv. 28-30."[98]

> "God's law given at Sinai prescribed many severe punishments, but the punishment is far worse for those who reject *His offer of salvation* through His own Son, Jesus Christ."[99]

Implications

The categorical error committed by MacArthur consists in assuming that there exists a certain general favour of God towards all men, and that without a universal love of God for all, the preaching of the Gospel is impossible. For if God does not love all and does not will to save all, what is the point of preaching the Gospel to all with a sincere wish and desire for their conversion? In this way the divine perspective is equated with man's limited perception of reality, while common grace is supposed to constitute a bridge between them, thanks to which the preacher is not exposed to embarrassment or the charge of hypocrisy.

Yet this general grace of God and general love of God cannot save anyone, because this is contrary to God's decree of damnation of those who are not elect to salvation (cf. Rom. 9:21-22; Prov. 16:4; 1 Pet. 2:8; 2 Pet. 2:3; Jude 4; Matt. 11:25-26; Ps. 92:7; 139:16; Exod. 9:16; Job 12:14; Isa. 45:9; Hab. 1:12) and who were not redeemed by Christ on the cross (cf. John 15:16; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 5:9; Matt. 11:25-26; Ps. 139:16). The well-meant offer of the gospel thus teaches that God, in the preaching, goes out to many sinners in love and grace,

- desiring to save them,
- trying to save them,
- but failing to save them.

Moreover, the "Calvinistic" theological circle gathered around MacArthur calls whatever disagrees with the promoted view of common grace hyper-Calvinism, which

> *"…denies that the gospel makes any 'offer' of Christ,* ***salvation*** *or* ***mercy to the non-elect*** *(or denies that the* ***offer*** *of divine mercy is* ***free*** *and* ***universal****)."*[100]

Consequently, the well-meant offer of the gospel teaches that God's grace is universal, although this is contrary to God's decree of damnation, in which God's grace was particular, granted only to the elect:

1. God's eternal will was not to save a certain group of men;

2. God's will in the preaching of the gospel is a sincere desire and endeavour to save that same group.

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[98] Ibid., p. 1413 (on Matt. 11:28-30); Polish edition, p. 152.
[99] Ibid., p. 1921 (on Heb. 12:29); Polish edition, p. 1196.
[100] Martyn McGeown, *An Answer to Phil Johnson's "Primer on Hyper-Calvinism"*.

Refutation

The Myth of the Universal Offer

First, universal love is a myth, an extra-biblical fiction and a projection of the personal convictions of those who preach it. It is a doctrine based on observation and not on the Word of God. The example from the Gospel of Matthew is a flagship interpretive abuse, that is, eisegesis – the reading of a preconceived doctrine into the text of Scripture. What does the text of Matthew speak of?

> Matt. 11:28 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Does the call concern all and is it general, or is it particular, God calling the elect? The key word, decisive in the dispute, will be *all*. Christ calls to Himself a certain group, designated precisely as *all*; yet this call does not concern every person in the world.

A) According to the immediate context, namely the preceding verse 27, *all* are those who have been given to Christ by the Father: *All things are delivered unto me of my Father*. At the same time this group is designated as those who know the Son, that is, all *to whomsoever the Son will reveal him*. All those to whom the Son reveals Himself and who are called by the Son (*come unto me*) are, according to verse 28, *those that labour and are heavy laden*.

Those who toil in the service of sin and Satan are laden with iniquity and insensible to it: speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience *seared* (1 Tim. 4:2) – they have no need of rest for their souls.

Those who groan, burdened with the guilt of sin upon their conscience, crushed by the consciousness of their sinfulness, which becomes known through the moral commands of the law – these are the ones who toil to the point of weariness to obtain peace of conscience and rest for their souls, effectually convinced by the Holy Spirit of sin, of righteousness and of judgement (John 16:8).

B) The unregenerate cannot be aware of the real burden of sin, and, not understanding their tragic situation before God, consequently do not desire to come to Christ. The totally depraved man never does so: *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God* (Rom. 3:11). They have no need of rest, since, being spiritually dead, there is no spiritual struggle in them (Rom. 7:24; Gal. 5:17).

C) Thus only the regenerate Christians, effectually called by Christ, conscious of sin and burdened by sin, labour in the struggle of the new man against the old man. Christ gives them rest – spiritual rest, peace of conscience, peace of mind, peace of soul – through the application of the grace of forgiveness, the insight into free justification through the righteousness of Christ and the full satisfaction for sins through His sacrifice: *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Heb. 9:14). To the regenerate, burdened by the struggle with sin – a struggle sometimes lost – Christ secures a great rest, secured by Himself, by the blood of His cross.

Conclusions: the text does not teach a free offer of the gospel to all men but gives assurance of rest in Christ to all the elect to salvation, who in due time are drawn to Christ, regenerated and justified, who repent, recognising their sin, and flee to Christ as their only hope of peace with God, which gives them the peace of a weary and heavy-laden conscience. It is not an invitation to the Gospel, but a pointing to Christ's satisfying work on the cross as the means of grace available to the elect, not to all.

The Case of Judas

Secondly, Judas is not an example of Christ's common grace but rather of His anti-grace. The assertion that Christ warned Judas and besought him to repent finds no confirmation in John 13. Not a single verse of this chapter (nor of any other in the closed canon of Scripture) brings us even a millimetre closer to an insinuation of this kind.

A) The chapter opens with the scene at supper where the Lord washes His disciples' feet. Judas too is washed. The act of washing itself, though physical, had a spiritual significance and signifies cleansing by Christ, as the illustration assures us: *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me* (verse 8). Judas had no part in this spiritual reality, since he was a servant of the devil: *the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him* (verse 2). That is why Christ calls him unclean: *and ye are clean, **but not all*** (verse 10).

Why did Christ speak these words? To warn Judas? Was that the purpose of the verbal communication? The answer is found in verse 11: it is not a warning, but the words were spoken because Jesus *knew who should betray him; **therefore said he, Ye are not all clean***. Not a warning but the revelation of Christ's omniscience was the purpose of the statement.

B) The next important moment of the supper is the meal. Jesus *was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me* (verse 21). Was the Lord troubled on account of His desire to save Judas? The disciples heard perfectly well about the coming betrayal and asked: *Lord, who is it?* (verse 25). Who is the traitor? The direct response to a question so put was a precise answer and a concrete action: *He it is, to whom **I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon*** (verse 26).

Was this a warning? Does Christ here call to Judas: I beg you, for your own good, do not do this – encouraging him to repent? The Lord does the opposite. By handing him the sop, sovereign permission was granted to Satan to act through Judas: *And after the sop Satan entered into him.* And then Christ's direct command: *Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly* (verse 27). Go and do what the devil commands you. The command concerned the fulfilment of the necessary action, so that God might be glorified in His Son through the crucifixion: *Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him* (verse 31). Had Christ willed to save Judas, He would have acted contrary to God's command; He would have become a sinner fulfilling His own will but not the will of God, depriving God of glory.

Conclusions: no warning, insinuation or plea, nor any call to repentance, took place in Jesus' dealings with Judas. Rather, Christ acted in accordance with the eternal decree of Judas's damnation: *but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up*

his heel against me (verse 18). Christ knew from the beginning who was His elect to salvation (*I know whom I have chosen*) and who was appointed to damnation (*I speak not of you all*). He knew, because Judas's betrayal had been ordained by God's decree, and Judas could not escape the destiny appointed for him by God (Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14; 55:20-21; Zech. 11:12-13).

The Saviour, Specially of Those That Believe

Thirdly, the Apostle did not teach that Christ is the Saviour of the elect in a special and eternal way and of all in a general and temporal way, as the word *specially* in the text of the Epistle to Timothy might suggest:

> 1 Tim. 4:10 *For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men,* ***specially*** *(μάλιστα* malista*) of those that believe.*

A) μάλιστα *malista* is an ambiguous word; all three uses were permissible, and their correct reading depended on the context. Let us consider three possible variants of translation:

- *the Saviour of all men,* ***in particular*** *of those that believe;*
- *the Saviour of all men,* ***most of all*** *of those that believe;*
- *the Saviour of all men,* ***that is****, of those that believe.*

The context of the chapter shows that God cannot be regarded as bestowing an alleged common grace on deceivers. The grace of temporal life follows from obedience to the teaching of Holy Scripture, which is the guarantee of spiritual peace by reason of godliness (purity, keeping oneself free from sin). Paul does not teach Timothy that God is gracious to deceivers (verses 1-7). An interpretation of that kind is inconsistent with the authorial intention of the text. Hence the reading is as follows: Christ is the Saviour of all men, *that is*, of those that believe – Christ is the Saviour of all believers.

B) This is a normal use of the word in Greek, confirmed by Scripture itself. In the Acts of the Apostles Paul was not brought before King Agrippa "in another way", or more than before the other observers (Bernice, Festus and their retinue). The idea of the word μάλιστα *malista* carries the message: Paul was brought before you, that is, before King Agrippa. It is still the same person who is spoken of.

> Acts 25:26 *Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth* ***before you****, and* ***specially*** *(μάλιστα* malista*)* ***before thee****, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.*

In the Epistle to Timothy the Apostle commands that every family should provide for its own, that is, for the members of its household. *His own* and *those of his own house* are one and the same group, for whom the other members of the family are to provide. The word translated "specially" is to be understood as "that is". Thus one must provide for the members of one's household, which is evidence of continuing in the faith.

> 1 Tim. 5:8 *But if any provide not for* ***his own****, and* ***specially*** *(μάλιστα* malista*) for* ***those of his own house****, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

Peter, in his Second Epistle, tells of the reserving unto the day of judgement of the unjust (persons lacking the imputed righteousness of Christ), that is, of those who are carnal (not regenerate). "The unjust" and "them that walk after the flesh" are the same group of people, and the word translated "chiefly" carries the idea of "that is". God declares that "the unjust shall be reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished, that is, them that walk after the flesh".

> 2 Pet. 2:9-10 9. *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve* ***the unjust*** *unto the day of judgment to be punished:* 10. ***But chiefly*** *(μάλιστα* malista*)* ***them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government****. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

Conclusions: the text of the Epistle to Timothy not only does not prove common grace, but does the opposite. Grace, and therefore the Gospel, concern only the elect to salvation – all those men who, at the proper time appointed by God, will believe the Gospel through God's grace.

A Promise, Not an Offer

Fourthly, the preaching of the Gospel is not an offer but a promise. Whereas an offer places the responsibility for the right choice on man, a promise refers to God's assurance of salvation and to the realisation of salvation in the lives of those whom it concerns. The close connection between the promise and the Gospel is evident in the Epistle to the Galatians and in the Acts of the Apostles:

> Gal. 3:8 *And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith,* ***preached before the gospel unto Abraham****, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*

> Acts 13:32-33 32. *And we declare unto you* ***glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers****,* 33. ***God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again****; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

According to the text, when the promise was given to Abraham, the Gospel was preached to him. Thus the Gospel and the promise are identified in such a way that God's giving of the promise to Abraham is the preaching of the Gospel. It is obvious that the promise made to the fathers and fulfilled to us, their children, is the same as the one mentioned in Galatians 3. It is obvious that the Apostle speaks of the proclaiming of this promise as the preaching of the Gospel, or the declaring of glad tidings. The Gospel is therefore essentially, according to its idea, the Gospel of promise and not of offer.

God's Eternal Purpose

Fifthly, the alleged universal desire of God, who "*beseeches men* to believe", God doing "*all in His power* to persuade men of the necessity of receiving the Gospel and believing in Christ", is unbiblical.

A) God beseeches no one, since He is the Sovereign Lord and deals with every man as He pleases:

> Dan. 4:35 *And* ***all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing****: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and* ***none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?***

Some He hardens, others He brings to faith:

> Rom. 9:18 *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.*

The concept of a beseeching God is a blasphemy against His sovereignty.

B) A God who does all in His power to save those whom in His eternal decree He determined not to save is a logical contradiction. There is only one purpose of God, namely the decree of the non-salvation of certain men, which God does not counteract at a later time, when these reprobate are born.

> Ps. 33:11 *The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.*

Conclusions: since the counsel of the Lord stands for ever, it is unchangeable. Since the counsel of the Lord consists of the unchangeable thoughts of His heart, God does not have contradictory intentions towards the group of the reprobate – an eternal one, to damn them, and a temporal one, to save them.

If the purpose of saving all were real, it would have to be an eternal purpose, and therefore a decree of God. We know, however, that the eternal decree concerns the salvation of the elect, not of all.

Confessions, Catechisms and Canons

Sixthly, the doctrine of God's opposing purposes is contrary to the Reformed Confessions of Faith.

A) The essence of God is simple; there is no complexity in it in the sense of the existence of contradictory thoughts or aims. In the Belgic Confession we read of the simplicity of God:

> "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only *simple* (Eph. 4:6; Deut. 6:4; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Cor. 8:6) and spiritual Being, which we call God."[101]

The subject requires some explanation. When we speak of the simplicity of God, we use the term to describe the state or property of being simple, a state free from division into parts, and therefore from complexity. This means that God is not composite and is not subject to division in any sense of the word. With regard to the attributes of God, God's simplicity means that they cannot be separated from one another or set against one another. There is, for example, no division or conflict between His justice and His mercy. His mercy will always be just, and His justice merciful.

B) Nor can God both love and hate the same person. Therefore in God there is no contradiction or disharmony. He is one and indivisible in His Person, in His attributes, in His purpose and will, and in His works (Exod. 3:14; Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 110:4). The reprobate, that is, those not elected to salvation, are the objects of God's eternal wrath and not of His love. In the Westminster Confession we read that God ordains them to dishonour, not to common grace.

> "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, *for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures*, to pass by; and *to ordain them to dishonour and wrath* for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice."[102]

C) The Canons of Dort, of the ecumenical and universal Synod of the Reformed faith, demonstrate that God does not will to apply the benefits gained by Christ to all, which condemns the concept of the well-meant offer of the gospel, which teaches the contrary: a God who wills to apply them (but fails) to the reprobate. Such a notion is the heresy of Pelagianism, not Reformed theology.

> "Who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instil into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that *God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally* the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life and others do not, this difference *depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception*, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace. For these, *while they feign that they present this distinction in a sound sense*, seek to instil into the people *the destructive poison of the Pelagian errors*."[103]

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[101] Belgic Confession, Article 1, "There Is Only One God".
[102] Westminster Confession of Faith 3.7.
[103] Canons of Dort, Head II, Rejection of Errors 6.

D) The Belgic Confession teaches that there is only one purpose of God with regard to every man, not two, according to which God governs the life of every man. This purpose is unchangeable and eternal. The mind of God is simple in the sense that there are not in it two competing or opposing purposes.

> "We believe that the same good God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that *He rules and governs them according to His holy will*, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment."[104]

Conclusions: the Reformed Confessions positively cry out against the modern heresy of Marrowism. The Reformation does not teach the well-meant offer. Heretics do.

The Testimony of Scripture

Seventhly, Holy Scripture in many places contradicts the well-meant offer of the gospel.

A) God's Word never returns to Him without accomplishing its intended purpose. Thus the argument about the insincere preaching of the Gospel is overthrown.

> Isa. 55:11 *So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

The preaching of the Word of the Gospel is always sincere, because it has two definite effects, which are always attained. For the elect, the preaching of the Gospel aims at their effectual calling (the savour of life unto life); for the reprobate, its aim is their hardening unto damnation (the savour of death unto death).

> 2 Cor. 2:16 *To the one we are* ***the savour of death unto death****; and to the other* ***the savour of life unto life****. And who is sufficient for these things?*

B) God has no good intentions towards the reprobate. He sincerely and eternally hates them and derides them unceasingly, all the time:

> Ps. 37:12-13 12. ***The wicked*** *plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.* 13. ***The Lord shall laugh at him****: for he seeth that his day is coming.*

> Ps. 5:5 *The foolish shall not stand in thy sight:* ***thou hatest all workers of iniquity****.*

> Ps. 26:5 ***I have hated the congregation of evil doers****; and will not sit with the wicked.*

[104] Belgic Confession, Article 13, "The Providence of God and His Government of All Things".

The reason for the granting of various benefits to the reprobate is not common grace but rather God's will that their condemnation be all the heavier, the more good things they have received from God:

> Ps. 73:3-9 3. *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.* 4. *For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.* 5. *They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.* 6. *Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.* 7. *Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.* 8. *They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.* 9. *They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.*

> Ps. 73:18-20 18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.* 19. *How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.* 20. *As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*

Not grace but a curse is in the house of the wicked:

> Prov. 3:33 *The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.*

The ultimate reason why God has created and tolerates the reprobate in the world is not so much common grace as the glory of God expressed in the day of the last judgement. God will judge the wicked and will punish them for eternity in the lake of fire. Thus God's justice will be displayed and glorified.

> Ps. 37:1-2 1. *Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.* 2. *For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.*

> Prov. 16:4 *The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.*

Conclusions: Holy Scripture, by the broad testimony of many passages, overthrows the folly of the heresy of Marrowism. And yet, in keeping with Luther's rhetoric, a single quotation would suffice to overthrow the whole lie definitively, regardless of the number of texts allegedly supporting it.[105]

[105] Martin Luther uses a similar argument against the heresy of free will: "But I, 'a poor soldier of the common levy', will display our army by means of these two passages, although no troops are needed where the fortune of war is such that one soldier puts ten thousand to flight (1 Sam. 18:7). For if one passage overcomes free will, its scanty hosts will avail it nothing." – *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, pp. 71–72).

Calvin and the Universal Offer

Eighthly, common grace was condemned by John Calvin. The Reformed must reject the well-meant offer with its teaching that the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ is directed to all men in the preaching of the Gospel. John Calvin expressly rejected the well-meant offer, as well as the common grace from which it springs:

> *"…who, by* ***extending the saving mercy of God to all*** *without distinction, diminishes, as far as in him lies, the glory of that mercy? Furthest of all from praising the* ***grace*** *of God according to its greatness are certainly those who maintain that it is in fact* ***common to all men****."*[106]

Did John Calvin believe in common grace? Most certainly… not.

> "Every promise which God gives is a testimony of His good will. This is invariably true, and is not inconsistent with the fact that *the large benefits which the divine liberality is constantly bestowing on the wicked* are preparing them for *a heavier judgement*."[107]

Calvin never so much as dreamt of the well-meant offer of the Gospel. But the so-called "Calvinists" certainly have…

Summary

The true Church, faithful to the Word, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2; John 6:45; 14:17, 26; 16:13), preserves the continuity of doctrine (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:2; Heb. 3:6) through preachers faithful to the truth (Isa. 8:20; 2 Tim. 2:15, 19; Titus 1:9), proclaiming the truth *which is come unto you, as it is in all the world* (Col. 1:6), which distinguishes its individual representatives from heretics. The latter always willingly and cunningly add to *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3) concepts of their own, not only contrary to Scripture but also devoid of logic.

The heresy of Marrowism creates a frustrated god with his contradictory desires for the salvation and damnation of the same group of people. It creates a confused christ who ineptly, or not at all, fulfils the will of his father. It is also a false spirit, incapable of effectually calling those whom the false god sincerely desires to save. Such is MacArthur's theology – contrary to Holy Scripture, contrary to the Reformed Faith expressed by the Confessions, Catechisms and Canons, and logically self-contradictory.

Beware, dear "Calvinists", of MacArthur's theology. Scripture speaks of it as knowledge falsely so called, that is, gnosis.

> 1 Tim. 6:20 *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and* ***oppositions of science falsely so called****:*

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[106] John Calvin, *A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God*.
[107] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.2.32.

This Is Not the End

As the most influential theologian among ill-informed and confused "Calvinists", MacArthur is responsible for deepening and consolidating doctrinal deformation and ecumenism with the Arminians. This man is not only an exceedingly gifted manipulator, but also says of himself that he does not accept defeat:

> *"I'm very competitive. I like to win, I don't like to lose. I've always been that way. I've spent a lot of my life losing, but I've never liked it. I like to win. I'm competitive."*[108]

Evidently the "greatest theologian of all time" will do anything to win the game for the government of souls in the neo-evangelical and neo-Calvinist milieu, while the means to this end is the assimilation of every possible form of aberration from the truth, while maintaining an appearance of orthodoxy – to which the utilitarian use of the name "Calvinism" is subservient. This means is evidently very effective, since voices speaking of the fortunes of the MacArthur family are heard ever more clearly.[109]

Marrowism, based on Kuyperianism, is the door through which Preparationism, yet another heresy, must enter. For if the offer of the gospel is for all, then the factor determining the difference between those who take it up and the rest is, of necessity, proper preparation to receive God's message and, as a result, the taking of the opportunity of salvation that God gives – although Scripture denies such a possibility:

> John 3:27 *A man can receive nothing,* ***except it be given him from heaven****.*

Scripture teaches: man cannot prepare himself for salvation. The whole of this work belongs to God; it is therefore soteriological monergism. This is an obvious paradox, but MacArthur believes in paradoxes as parallel, mutually contradictory truths. And – horror of horrors – this is a gospel identical with the one preached by the Arminians.

The Arminian version: "God loves each one of you, and in His great love for you all He sends you this gospel with the express, sincere desire that you be blessed by it. He sincerely promises that He will save each one of you, but first you must believe."

The well-meant offer version: "God loves each one of you, and in His great love for you all He sends you this gospel with the express, sincere desire that you be blessed by it. He sincerely promises that He will save each one of you, but first you must believe."

Dear reader, repent of the heresy of Marrowism. We call upon you to reject MacArthur as a teacher, because for the sake of his own interests he teaches falsehood.

May God enlighten your eyes – for this we fervently pray.

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[108] John MacArthur, *The Qualities of True Love, Part 2*.
[109] *The Christian Post*, "Official denies John MacArthur makes more than $500K a year from Grace to You".

Chapter 5 – The Heresy of Preparationism

A Reminder

> 2 Pet. 2:1 *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

The old saying "it is darkest under the lamp" describes a method of underhand action popular among perverse men. He who tries to hide his wicked intentions will do so best by appearing as the greatest defender of the truth. In this way he gains a good reputation and quiets the conscience of those over whom he extends his influence to an ever greater degree. Certainly a masterly use of the art of deceit will be the work of a false preacher that consists in publicly exposing deceivers like himself – false preachers.

The pattern of psychological manipulation is not difficult to identify: he who most ably and most loudly fights the opponents of biblical truth cannot himself be its opponent. It is an almost perfect deceit, since it lulls the vigilance of followers, creating at the same time an almost indestructible barrier of uncritical trust which hinders the ability to analyse logically the content served up by the deceiver.

Thus even the presentation of evidence speaking directly against the false teacher causes his victims a state of unpleasant psychological tension. The disturbance of the image of the "holy and infallible" theologian causes discomfort, all the greater the longer he has had the opportunity to influence his hearers. The discomfort must be discharged and the psychological tension relieved by drowning out or even ignoring inconvenient facts, which is a typical and at the same time bad way of reducing cognitive dissonance. To put it colloquially, a man will look for every possible "rational" explanation of the lies and wrong conduct of his spiritual guru, just so as not to look a fool.

> "Dissonance theory postulates that people strive to create (and maintain) the belief that they are rational individuals. Consequently, most people try to explain their own actions reasonably (if I do something and do not know why I act this way, dissonance appears in the form of a suspicion that I am a foolish person, *which damages my good self-esteem*)."[110]

In psychology this defence mechanism is called splitting. Splitting is thinking in extremely dichotomous categories: *"my teacher is pure goodness, god incarnate, and his opponent is pure evil, the devil incarnate"*.[111] As a consequence, the serious logical fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundiam* is committed. This fallacy occurs when we claim that something is true merely because some authority says so. In the case of theology this fallacy takes a dangerous form based on the pattern:

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[110] https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dysonans_poznawczy

[111] Rodryg Florysiak, *Analiza psychologiczna środowisk podatnych na manipulację* [A Psychological Analysis of Milieus Susceptible to Manipulation].

→ The Bible is an infallible source of truth (true).

→ The theologian under whose influence I am fights for the truth (true).

→ He is able to do so because he rightly divides Holy Scripture (not necessarily true).

→ Therefore what the theologian says is the pure teaching of the Word of God (not necessarily true).

→ For this reason the theologian's teachings possess the same authority as the Bible (false).

→ Criticism of the theologian cannot contain truth and must be rejected in advance (false).

John MacArthur has mastered the above art of manipulation to perfection. Being a fundamentalist, MacArthur stands on the right side in matters of morality, at least nominally;[112] he is known as an advocate of cessationism and a defender of the doctrine of the Trinity and of creationism; he styles himself an orthodox Calvinist. It is precisely his nominal Calvinism that will help to illustrate MacArthur's hypocrisy.

Criticising the so-called Calvinistic charismatics, he appealed to John Calvin, advising them to abandon the word "Calvinistic", since John Calvin would not have accepted their charismatic faith:

> *"Don't call yourselves* ***charismatic Calvinists. John Calvin would have rejected that. John Calvin did reject that.*** *You're going to have to give up the 'Calvinist' part."*[113]

In this way MacArthur achieved two aims. First, by appealing to the truth of Calvin's rejection of the charismatic heresy, he lulled the vigilance of his hearers. Secondly, he subconsciously aroused in his audience the conviction that he himself stands at the centre of the camp of orthodox Calvinist preachers. These two premises lead to the conclusion:

→ (first premise) since MacArthur calls himself a Calvinist,

→ (second premise) since MacArthur advises those who do not teach what Calvin would have accepted to abandon the name "Calvinistic",

→ (conclusion) then MacArthur certainly teaches what Calvin would have accepted.

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[112] It is worth noting here MacArthur's practical conduct towards women, as brought to light in the Christian press: "women who sought refuge in biblical counselling at John MacArthur's church say they feared discipline for seeking refuge from their abusive marriages", in: *Christianity Today*, "Grace Community Church Rejected Elder's Calls to 'Do Justice' in Abuse Case".

[113] John MacArthur, *An Appeal to Charismatic Friends*.

This image is false to the core, and the proof of this is a series of heresies preached by MacArthur which not only Calvin, but no orthodox Reformed or Presbyterian Church either, could accept, under pain of excommunication, still less preach. So far the following have been discussed:

- The fundamental error: the methodological denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture
- A church without a covenant
- The denial of the power of original sin
- The denial of total depravity
- The denial of the sovereignty of God
- Parallel truths, or the development of the concept of paradox
- Soteriological conditionalism
- The heresy of common grace, or Kuyperianism
- The heresy of the well-meant offer of salvation, or Marrowism

Although John Calvin taught nothing on the above list, MacArthur will not apply his own remedy and will not abandon the word "Calvinist" to describe his position and theology. This chapter will be devoted to another of MacArthur's doctrinal deviations, namely preparationism.

The Heresy of Preparationism

Preparationism, also called preparatory grace, is a heresy contrary to Scripture which crept quite early into the theology of some of the Puritans (it was held by William Perkins, William Ames, Richard Sibbes and others, who lived at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Some date the beginnings of the problem as early as 1570, when certain English theologians began to teach that the sinner *"can in some way dispose himself to saving grace"*.[114]

What was generally meant by this was that the unregenerate sinner had the ability to prepare himself for the grace of regeneration by a series of serious considerations of his sins, and in this way to contribute to the new birth.

Preparationism has its inglorious history, in which the adversary of God, in the most cunning way, used the criticism of a false doctrine as the basis for further deception. Anne Hutchinson, who lived in the seventeenth century, a mystic and adherent of extra-biblical revelation, and at the same time a person highly educated in theology, drew the Puritan minister John Cotton (1584–1652) into her machinations against Christian orthodoxy. Before Hutchinson was excommunicated from the community, she confirmed Cotton in the conviction that the

[114] Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 3.

preparationism he held[115] was a good doctrine – by criticising this heresy. If a heretic criticises a doctrine, it must be true.

John Cotton has gone down in the memory of posterity as *"the patriarch of New England"*,[116] and it need hardly be added that by his authority he helped to establish the false doctrine of preparationism in the hearts of many hearers, a doctrine which ultimately found its way into the heart of John MacArthur.

Definition of the Error

Preparationism assumes that, in order to obtain saving grace (that is, salvation), the sinner must perform a series of actions, pass through many different states and display the marks of salvation. In the final reckoning preparationism *"leads to the belittling of the command to believe contained in the promise of the Gospel"*,[117] focusing the believer's attention not on objective faith in what Christ accomplished on the cross on behalf of and for the elect to salvation, but on subjective experiences on which he must rely as a co-cause of salvation.

The Puritan theologians taught that preparatory grace was often present in the reprobate (Rom. 9:21-22; Prov. 16:4; 1 Pet. 2:8; 2 Pet. 2:3; Jude 4; Matt. 11:25-26; Ps. 92:7; 139:16; Exod. 9:16; Job 12:14; Isa. 45:9; Hab. 1:12), so that preparation for regeneration did not necessarily lead in the end to salvation.

The Reformed opposed this with the Auchterader Creed, which every candidate for the ministry had to accept and sign. The principle, which was intended to root out preparationism, rejected any human acts as the basis for entering into covenant with God:

> "I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that *we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God*."[118]

In 1717 William Craig, a student of theology, challenged the Reformed Auchterader Creed, which had arisen in the context of combating preparationism. Not understanding the context in which the Creed had arisen, Craig attacked the Creed's rejection of the requirement of purity as an indispensable component enabling the obtaining of salvation. He lodged a complaint with the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland against what the Auchterader Creed proclaimed. As a consequence:

> "the General Assembly upheld Craig's position and declared the proposition to be 'unsound and most detestable'. It stated that 'it tends to encourage sloth in Christians and slacken people's obligation to *gospel holiness*'."[119]

Let us note that the error committed by the General Assembly lay in assuming the ability of the unregenerate sinner to undergo a gradual sanctification leading ultimately to salvation.

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[115] Joel R. Beeke, *Purytanie* [The Puritans], pp. 128–129.
[116] Ibid., p. 161.
[117] Ibid., p. 684.
[118] Ibid., p. 195.
[119] Ibid.

Further identification of the heresy leads us to the circle of the legalistic neonomians. Neonomianism means "new law", that is, a new law offering forgiveness to those who repent of breaking the law, so that, cleansed by the act of repentance, they might consequently receive Christ into their hearts.

> "The neonomians, known as the 'Moderates', preached the necessity of forsaking sin so that thereafter one might receive Christ."[120]

Since John MacArthur denies the doctrine of the total, or absolute, depravity of man, seeing in him a natural ability to do good, and professes the heresy of the well-meant offer of the gospel, which is offered to all without exception in the hope that the sinner will make the right decision, John MacArthur consistently incorporates the heresy of preparationism into his personal deposit of faith, which he then serves up to his victims.

> James 4:7-10 7. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* 8. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.* 9. *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.* 10. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

Of particular importance will be his interpretation of the text of James, disastrous in its consequences:

> "*Jesus made* ***strong demands*** *of those who desired to enter the kingdom,* ***principles*** *that we can sum up in one word:* ***righteousness***."[121]

> *"****Unbelievers*** *(who are in view here) fight (unsuccessfully) against the evil desires they cannot control. […] In a series of 10 commands (10 imperative verbs in the Greek text) James reveals* ***how to receive saving grace****. These verses delineate* ***man's response to God's gracious offer of salvation****: 1. submit to God; 2. resist the devil; 3. draw near to God; 4.* ***cleanse your hands****; 5. purify your hearts; 6. lament; 7. mourn; 8. weep; 9. stop laughter; 10. humble yourselves."*[122]

> "Let me interject an important clarification. People ask: are the truths and the beatitudes *the rules on how you get into the kingdom*, or are they rules on how you behave once you are in the kingdom? The answer is yes, *both*."[123]

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[120] Ibid.

[121] John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus* (Nelson Books, Kindle Edition, locations 1374–1381).

[122] *The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, Word Publishing 1997, pp. 1932–1933 (on James 4:1-10); Polish edition: John MacArthur, *Komentarz do NT*, Wydawnictwo Słowo Prawdy, Gdańsk 2015, p. 806.

[123] John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now*, p. 88.

Implications

MacArthur's preparationism is a doctrine of the conditional grace of God. God grants grace to man conditionally, when he fulfils specific requirements that enable him to receive the grace offered by God. It is therefore a doctrine consistent with the heresy of the well-meant offer of the gospel and indirectly consistent with the heresy of common grace, which is an absurd denial of God's sovereignty, since the birth from above is a work of God independent of man. MacArthur denies salvation by grace (Rom. 4:6; 5:15-17; 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 5:4) through faith by setting before man specific conditions of salvation.

The first of these is a personal righteousness preceding regeneration. In order to enter the kingdom, says MacArthur, a man must be righteous, which he can attain by observing specific biblical principles. Thus not only is salvation by works of righteousness, but the righteousness in question is the exclusive merit of man.

The second condition of salvation is man's personal obedience to the requirements, or principles, established by God that make it possible to get into the kingdom.

The necessary consequence of both of the above is that the unregenerate man – and, worse still, a person who is not elect to salvation – can desire righteousness, and that the will of the natural man is pliable to the will of God. The unregenerate and even the reprobate man can consciously and willingly do the will of God.

MacArthur's theology argues that grace is conditional, that man can prepare himself for the new birth, that human works are necessary to salvation, and that gradual sanctification leads to regeneration and salvation. The implication of MacArthur's words is the assumption that those who for a time tried to enter the kingdom but then abandoned their purpose, though ultimately reprobate, were objects of God's grace.

Refutation

The Myth of Preparationism

None of the above conclusions is true or has any biblical warrant. It is significant that the adherents of preparationism are unable to prove their convictions by adequate texts of the Word of God. Instead, they either proclaim their convictions without biblical argument or rest on mistaken interpretations of quotations torn from their context (e.g. 2 Chr. 19:3; Ezra 7:10; Job 11:13; 1 Sam. 7:3; Luke 1:17). If we examine these cases, we notice that each of them speaks of persons already regenerate. Only the regenerate can prepare their heart to seek God, whereas the unregenerate, according to the biblical doctrine of total depravity, never seek God.

In reality it is God who, in a certain sense, prepares the sinner for salvation, in a providential manner. As David Engelsma has observed,[124] when a saint is born in the history of this earth, the circumstances of his birth, the parents of whom he was born and the country or race to which he belongs are important preparations for the unique place of that saint in the temple. All his experiences in life, without exception, are part of the forming, shaping, cutting and

[124] David J. Engelsma, *The Gospel Truth of Justification* (Polish edition: *Ewangeliczna prawda usprawiedliwienia*, p. 130).

chipping that are necessary to prepare the saint for his own place. His calling and duties and his place in the family, society and nation are part of the preparation for his place in the temple.

> Rom. 9:16 *So then* ***it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth****, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

Without the grace of God he is a useless, dirty and ugly rock hewn out of the earth. He must be shaped and fitted for his place in God's heavenly temple. More importantly, he must be transformed from a spadeful of earth or a useless stone into a shining and translucent block of marble. This transformation can take place only through regeneration, calling, faith, justification and sanctification, with all the blessings of that common salvation which the saint needs in order to prepare him, in his own unique life with all its experiences, for his own, single place in glory.

The Proper Interpretation of the Text of James

In his commentary on James 4:1-10 MacArthur rests on a false premise: "unbelievers (who are in view here)". Hence the further interpretation of the text appears in his mind as conditions, expressed in ten steps, for receiving saving grace, that is, conditions for receiving salvation. Unregenerate, natural and depraved men are accordingly encouraged

- to resist the devil,
- to draw near to God,
- to cleanse their hands of sin,
- to purify their hearts,
- to be afflicted,
- to mourn,
- to weep,
- to stop laughing,
- to get rid of joy,
- to humble themselves before God.

> James 4:7-10 7. *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* 8. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.* 9. *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.* 10. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

Let us carry out a logical analysis of MacArthur's thought, taking his words at face value: 1. There are unregenerate sinners. 2. They hear the so-called "gracious offer of the gospel" (which is itself a heresy). 3. The unregenerate hearers of the gracious call have 10 imperative commands to carry out. 4. The result of fulfilling these steps is the receiving of the grace of salvation.

A) There are, of course, no biblical examples of any unregenerate person possessing such wonderful powers, which only the Holy Spirit can impart to a man in whom He dwells.

In the Epistle to the Romans we read that the mortification of sin is possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit: *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye* ***through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body****, ye shall live* (Rom. 8:13). MacArthur advises the opposite: if you want to live, mortify the deeds of the flesh by the flesh.

In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians we learn that the only sorrow leading to faith in God comes from God, while carnal sorrow leads to death: *For* ***godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation*** *not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death* (2 Cor. 7:10). MacArthur proposes the reverse: sorrow according to the flesh leads to life.

In the First Epistle of Peter we find the teaching according to which washing from sin takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, by the application of the blood of Christ to the person elect to salvation: *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,* ***through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood*** *of Jesus Christ* (1 Pet. 1:2). And here too MacArthur teaches the reverse: the sinner, without the participation of the Spirit, is to wash himself from sin, and therefore, consistently, saves himself.

B) In MacArthur's world an adulterer evidently cannot be a saved person, but only a friend of this world, an unregenerate person. Hence he applies James's exhortations to unregenerate persons, in order that they may prepare themselves for salvation. Let us consider verses 4-5, which precede the text under discussion, examining their logical structure and identifying the subject:

> 4. ***Ye adulterers and adulteresses****, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore* ***will be*** *(βουληθῇ* boulethe*) a friend of the world* ***is*** *(καθίσταται* kathistatai*) the enemy of God.* 5. *Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain,* ***The spirit that dwelleth in us*** *lusteth to envy?*

We notice that the adulterers and adulteresses of verse 4 are the same group of people in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, as verse 5 specifies. Those who have the Holy Spirit are saved and regenerate (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 12:3). These were, therefore, regenerate Christians fallen into sin, who by their conduct had exposed themselves to God's fatherly anger (Ps. 94:12; Heb. 12:6-8).

C) Greek grammar confirms that the choice – a choice tragic in its consequences – was made by a Christian. The word βουληθῇ *boulethe* is in the aorist tense; it is better translated: whosoever *willed to be* … a friend of the world.

The sentence ends with the word καθίσταται *kathistatai*, written in the present indicative, middle voice. The middle voice means that the active performer of the action is the object on which the action is performed and which it affects. Hence it is better translated as

> the enemy of God… **makes himself**. Which together gives the sentence: whosoever **willed to be** a friend of the world **makes himself** the enemy of God.

The active subject in the sentence is the sinner himself, formerly a friend of God, who by his stubborn sin makes himself an enemy of God.

D) Furthermore, James, a man certainly saved, calls this same group of sinners brethren, and that at the very time when he admonishes them for a further sin: *Speak not evil one of another, **brethren*** (verse 11). Thus those who were to cleanse themselves from sin, repent of it, resist the devil and return to God's fatherly grace were brethren to James, and not unregenerate persons pretending to be Christians.

Conclusions: in the text the author was addressing believing, though fallen, Christians. He was not teaching the unregenerate how to receive saving grace. This text is as far from confirming the heresy of preparationism as the east is from the west.

Conditional Grace

A) There is no concept in Holy Scripture of conditional grace – or, more specifically, of grace based on the condition of human works or of preparations for salvation. There are no passages of Scripture confirming such a doctrine.

B) Grace is granted sovereignly by God, independently of man's endeavours. God has established only one condition for the granting of grace, and that is the cross of Christ, the central point of the whole of reality. On the cross the innocent Christ, suffering for the guilty, satisfied the demands of God's wrath and merited grace for the elect. He not only prepared but also obtained redemption by His life and death. The Holy Spirit applies the blood of Christ to the regenerate, incorporating them into the body of Christ, without any conditions set before the sinner.

> Eph. 1:5-6 5. *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,* 6. *To the praise of the glory of **his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved**.*
>
> 2 Thess. 2:13 *But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation **through sanctification of the Spirit** and belief of the truth:*
>
> Rom. 9:16 *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

C) The only condition for the granting of grace to the sinner is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. God does not show mercy without Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice. Grace is always bound up with the shedding of the holy blood of Christ for a particular sinner.

> Exod. 34:7 *Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will **by no means clear the guilty**; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

Rom. 3:24 *Being justified* ***freely by his grace through the redemption*** *that is in Christ Jesus:*

Eph. 1:7 *In whom we have redemption* ***through his blood****, the forgiveness of sins,* ***according to the riches of his grace****;*

Heb. 9:22 *…and* ***without shedding of blood*** *is no remission.*

Gal. 1:3-4 3. ***Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,*** 4. ***Who gave himself for our sins****, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:*

Conclusions: preparationism cannot be true, since there are no human works required for the granting of grace to the sinner by God. In reality it is a heresy based on the assumption that man can co-operate in the work of his own salvation.

Preparation for Regeneration

A) Man cannot prepare himself for the new birth. No one has any part in, or can assist in, his own birth from above. Nicodemus understood this when he asked Jesus how a man might assist in the process of the new birth:

John 3:4 *Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

In His answer Christ made it clear that Nicodemus could not prepare himself for the birth from above, because it does not depend on his endeavours and efforts. Let us now note the literal wording of the text of John 3:7, translated as:

John 3:7 *Marvel not that I said unto thee,* ***Ye must be born again****.*

Δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν

Dei hymas gennethenai anothen

It is necessary for you to be born from above

Here γεννηθῆναι *gennethenai* is an aorist passive infinitive. In Koine Greek the infinitive form of an aorist verb concerns an action without reference to person or number and serves mainly to express acts, situations and, in general, "states of affairs" which depend on another verb or on a participle in the nominative or accusative, usually not an infinitive.

The nearest reference meeting the above criteria will be γεγεννημένον *gegennemenon* (that which is born), which refers to the work of the Spirit:

John 3:6 *…and that which is* ***born*** *(γεγεννημένον* gegennemenon*) of the Spirit is spirit.*

γεγεννημένον *gegennemenon*

Part of speech: participle

Tense: perfect (a present state resulting from a past act)

Voice: passive

The birth from above depends exclusively on the work of the Holy Spirit, not on man. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "*It is necessary for you to be born from above*", eliminating the human factor from the process.

B) Just as the carnal man had no part in his conception and birth, so too the spiritual man. He is begotten by God on the basis of God's will, according to God's mercy, by the washing of regeneration of the Spirit, without the participation of the human will and human works.

> John 1:13 *Which were* ***born****, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh,* ***nor of the will of man, but of God****.*

> 1 Pet. 1:3 *Blessed be the* ***God*** *and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ***which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again*** *unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

> Titus 3:5 ***Not by works*** *of righteousness which we have done,* ***but according to his mercy*** *he saved us,* ***by the washing of regeneration****, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

Conclusions: Holy Scripture excludes preparations made by man as a condition or auxiliary element of regeneration. Hence the myth of preparationism is utterly destroyed.

C) Gradual sanctification leading to regeneration is a heresy. The unregenerate man not only cannot gradually sanctify himself, but the only thing he is able to do is to plunge further into sin, degenerating his soul every day.

Even the best efforts of the natural man are works of the flesh, which are in their nature like filthy rags and for that reason cannot please God; to Him they are an abominable act. All the more does this contradict the doctrine of preparationism, which presupposes gradual sanctification as bringing one nearer to God and to regeneration.

> 1 Tim. 6:9 *But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,* ***which drown men in destruction and perdition****.*

> Job 15:14-16 14. *What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?* 15. *Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.* 16. ***How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?***

> Isa. 64:6 *But we are all as an unclean thing, and* ***all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags****; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*
>
> Rom. 8:8 *So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

D) Human works are as necessary to salvation as the righteousnesses of the unregenerate are acceptable in the sight of God. Since they are an abomination in God's sight, there is no possibility that any good work (from the human point of view and by human standards) could hasten the moment of the birth from above.

The carnal man does not please God, and therefore cannot prepare himself for salvation. Adding works of preparation to the doctrine of salvation is a denial of the biblical doctrine of salvation apart from human efforts and without the participation of the human will.

> Rom. 11:6 *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

E) It is God who draws the sinner to Himself because of His mercy; therefore man cannot draw himself to God, since he is not the author of mercy. Only the author of mercy can draw man to Himself.

> Jer. 31:3 *The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee* ***with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee****.*

F) The unregenerate man is not spiritually understanding and does not seek God. Since he does not seek God, he cannot prepare himself to meet Him. It is an absurdity, since the unregenerate sinner is incapable of doing anything of spiritual value, being himself spiritually dead.

A further issue is that salvation is here made dependent, at least partly, on the work of man. This is a serious heresy striking at God's sovereignty. Striving for salvation is overthrown *explicite* by Scripture:

> Rom. 3:11-12 11. *There is none that understandeth,* ***there is none that seeketh after God****.* 12. *They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*
>
> Rom. 9:16 *So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

G) God saves, that is, regenerates, men who are deliberately unbelieving, who perform the works of the flesh and live as enemies of God according to sinful thoughts, and not those who are somehow preparing themselves – just as the Apostle Paul did not prepare himself to receive grace on the road to Damascus. Rather, he breathed out a lust for the murder of Christians. The children of disobedience cannot obediently prepare themselves for regeneration. That is an absurdity.

> Eph. 2:1-2 1. *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;* 2. *Wherein in time past* ***ye walked according to the course of this world****, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh* ***in the children of disobedience****:*

Conclusions: a personal righteousness preceding regeneration, making entry into the kingdom possible, cannot be obtained by observing specific biblical principles. Man's merit and obedience have no part in the preparation for regeneration. It is enough to read the testimony of Paul's conversion. He not only did not prepare himself to become a Christian, but positively desired to murder the followers of Christ when he was regenerated, contrary to his natural will.

The Reprobate as Objects of God's Grace

The concept that God grants grace to those appointed to damnation is an absurdity. Since Christ did not shed His blood for them, they cannot be objects of grace in any sense.

In fact the purpose of the existence of the reprobate is damnation and God's just judgement upon them for their sins. God creates the reprobate and endures the reprobate in order to reserve them for the last judgement.

> Prov. 16:4 *The LORD hath made all things for himself:* ***yea, even the wicked for the day of evil****.*

> Rom. 9:22 *What if God,* ***willing to shew his wrath****, and to make his power known,* ***endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction****:*

> Ps. 73:18 *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.*

Confessions, Catechisms and Canons

A) Reformed theology in its pure form is in accordance with the teaching of Holy Scripture and rejects the false assumption of man's ability to prepare himself for conversion to God. Consistently, the Westminster Confession of Faith, a milestone of the Reformation, points to the fall and the total depravity of human nature flowing from it as the cause of the inability of the natural man to perform the work of preparation:

> "Man, *by his fall* into a state of sin, *hath wholly lost all ability* of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, *or to prepare himself thereunto*. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good."[125]

B) According to the Canons of the Synod of Dort, the natural light remaining in man after the fall is insufficient for an act of preparation of the sinner for regeneration. In reality this light

[125] Westminster Confession of Faith 9.3–4.

brings about the knowledge of sin, making him aware of his absolute depravity and removing him further from conversion instead of bringing him nearer to it.

The natural man is incapable of using the natural light aright; therefore, without regeneration, any thought of preparing oneself for salvation proves to be a nightmarish error.

> "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient *to bring him to a saving knowledge of God* and to true conversion, that *he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil*. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God."[126]

C) The same Canons show that those who desire to turn to God are in reality already regenerate persons. The Canons thus preserve the proper order of salvation, the *ordo salutis*, according to which regeneration comes first and then faith (Eph. 2:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:15-16; John 6:35-37, 63-65; 1 Cor. 2:14).

> "Much less cause have they to be terrified by the doctrine of reprobation, who, though they *seriously desire to be turned to God*, to please Him only, and to be delivered from the body of death, *cannot yet reach that measure of holiness and faith to which they aspire*; since a merciful God has promised that He *will not quench the smoking flax*, nor *break the bruised reed*."[127]

Conclusions: Reformed theology – both the Westminster Standards of the Presbyterians and the Three Forms of Unity of the Reformed – unanimously rejects the unbiblical concept of preparationism. With reference to the doctrines of total depravity and original sin, the refutation of preparationism is crushing. No man who claims to profess Reformed theology can, or has the right to, profess this doctrine. It is a heresy.

Summary

Preparationism leads to despair. No one can be sure whether he has properly prepared himself to receive saving grace, and whether the marks accompanying his faith are sufficient evidences of regeneration.

The doctrine of preparationism is a theological fiction. It finds no justification either in Scripture or in the Reformed Confessions.

- James was addressing believing, though fallen, Christians and was not teaching the unregenerate how to receive saving grace.

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[126] Canons of Dort, Heads III/IV, Article 4.
[127] Ibid., Head I, Article 16.

- According to the Word of God there are no human works required for the granting of grace to the sinner by God.
- A personal righteousness preceding regeneration, making entry into the kingdom possible, cannot be obtained by observing specific biblical principles.
- Man's merit and obedience have no part in the preparation for regeneration.
- Reformed theology – both the Westminster Standards of the Presbyterians and the Three Forms of Unity of the Reformed – unanimously rejects the unbiblical concept of preparationism.

What, then, is its source? MacArthur's doctrine is in principle a copy of Roman Catholic doctrine. Trent anathematised those who deny that

> "man's free will… co-operates towards *disposing and preparing itself for obtaining the grace* of justification."[128]

Again, the Roman Catholic Catechism confirms the decisions of Trent, attributing to the natural man the ability to know God and to draw near to Him apart from the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, which is identical with preparation for salvation.

> "Man's faculties *make him capable of coming to know* the existence of a personal God. But in order that man *might be able to draw near* to Him, God willed to reveal Himself to him and to give him grace *so that he could receive this revelation in faith*. The proofs of God's existence can, however, dispose a man for faith and help him to see that faith is not opposed to human reason."[129]

The convergence of the Roman doctrine and MacArthur's "Reformed" or "Calvinist" doctrine is not accidental. They have one author – certainly a spiritual one – namely Satan, the author of all heresies. It is worth repeating at this point the rock-hard and inviolable teaching of the Word of God which strikes at the doctrine of preparationism, according to which man ought to desire salvation and strive for salvation by his good works. This is a worthless doctrine:

> Rom. 9:16 *So then* ***it is not*** *of him that willeth, nor of him that* ***runneth****, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

MacArthur's "Reformed" theology is in reality not Reformed. Beneath a veneer of formal orthodoxy it is stuffed with a venomous theology contrary to everything that is Reformed, biblically and historically. He himself spoke rather telling words (though quoted out of context), whose value must be acknowledged precisely apart from their context:

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[128] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Session VI, Canons on Justification, canon 4.
[129] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 35.

> "Somehow *my Reformed theology* makes me responsible for tens of millions of people going to hell."[130]

And indeed, MacArthur's brand of preparationism is soteriological legalism. It is ten steps necessary for obtaining saving grace. It is strong demands and principles of righteousness that make entry into the kingdom possible. It is the rules on how to get into the kingdom. Only it is the kingdom prepared for Satan and his angels.

> Matt. 25:41 *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:*

This Is Not the End

> Jude 3 *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and* ***exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints****.*

Martin Luther began the Reformation in 1517, so as in the following years to stand in the front line of the defence of the faith once delivered to the saints, defending it especially against the attacks of the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics, enemies of the Reformation who were in a certain respect of one mind. Both heretical currents, of course, professed the doctrine of free will and, consequently, of man's ability to do good. Luther, though unknowingly, touched upon the question of preparationism when fighting Erasmus of Rotterdam in his work *The Bondage of the Will*.

What Luther described as the heretical view of the human will was the alleged wisdom to accomplish everything apart from God's grace. This is a concept identical with the idea of preparationism, in which sinful and unregenerate man, apart from God's grace, can perform an act of preparation for receiving saving grace – just as if grace were not irresistible but resistible by man! The will of man above the will of God. Such is the result of preparationism.

> "The result is that, *not willing to grant to the will of God alone* the will and the power to harden and to have mercy and to do all things, *we ascribe to the human will the power to do all things, even though it is not yet endowed with grace* – which, however, we previously denied, namely that without being endowed with grace it can do anything good."[131]

Many followers of MacArthur and of his heresy of Lordship Salvation, dying in the conviction of their salvation, will stand at the Last Judgement only to defend, reproachfully, their self-acquired right to eternal life.

Many will say in that day: Lord, Lord! Did we not in thy name resist the devil? Did we not draw near to God? Did we not cleanse our hands from sin? Did we not purify our hearts? Were we

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[130] John MacArthur, *The Theology of Sleep*.
[131] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 77).

not afflicted, did we not mourn and weep, did we not stop laughing, get rid of our joy and humble ourselves before God, taking these ten steps, these ten imperatives which MacArthur gave us, so that you might grant us saving grace?

> Matt. 7:23 *And then will* [the Lord] ***profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.***

Dear reader, repent of the heresy of preparationism. We also call upon you to reject MacArthur as a teacher. It is no shame to admit an error, even a long-standing error of blindly following his theology. He is an exceedingly cunning man, and detecting his heresies is no simple matter.

Chapter 6 – The Heresy of Works-Faith

A Reminder

> Rom. 4:5 *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

Holy Scripture is extraordinarily plain and clear on the question of justification. It is not possible for the good works of a sinner to constitute any element whatever of the sinner's justification before God. We mean here absolutely all good works:

- those in accordance with God's Law,
- those meriting salvation,
- those proceeding from the work of the Holy Spirit in the sinner.

John MacArthur, with his definition of works-faith, is a legalist, since he lays a foundation of salvation that is not the merits of Christ but the sinner's own faith, defined by personal conviction and good works. MacArthur's position should come as no surprise, since he is a dispensationalist – and a peculiar dispensationalist at that. He not only professes the supremacy of the genetic descendants of Abraham in the future, alleged millennial kingdom, before whom the nations will bow down,[132] but also deprives the Church of the ground of salvation, stripping it of the Covenant between God and the elect people, that is, the Church.[133] MacArthur's followers, blindly devoted to this doctrine, overlook its nightmarish consequence.

It is evident that the ground of justification is set in the Covenant. According to the Counsel of the Covenant (Ps. 89:3, 19-20, 20-26), God, by a sovereign, eternal and unconditional decree (Ps. 2:7; Heb. 5:5), appointed the incarnate Son as the Head of the Covenant of Grace (Isa. 42:1, 6; 1 Pet. 2:9), choosing in Him great hosts out of all the nations of the human race (Gen. 17:7; Isa. 42:6; Acts 3:25; Eph. 2:12-13) as His Body, that is, the Church (Acts 7:38; Eph. 5:23), in order to save them from sin and death and to bring them into the fellowship of the covenant with God (Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 2:6; John 10:28).[134]

Since the ground of justification is set in the Covenant (and, according to MacArthur, the Church is not in the Covenant), justification without the Covenant is not possible. Faith, which lays hold of the merits of Christ and imputes them to the sinner, becomes an instrument insufficient to save man from his sins through the imputation of the obedience of Christ's life

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[132] MacArthur's position arises, for example, from a mistaken interpretation of the text of Isa. 49:22, which he describes in his commentary on Holy Scripture as follows: "Nations and leaders who in history oppressed Israel will bow down before the redeemed people of God's covenant, and Israel will know that waiting on the Lord will not disappoint" [*The MacArthur Study Bible*, NKJV, p. 1032].

[133] John MacArthur, *The New Covenant, Part 1*. MacArthur's blasphemous statement, in which the Church is excluded from the covenant, understood as an agreement between physical Israel and God, reads: "Third thing, the new covenant is with Israel. It is with the Jews. And this is what I meant when I said this morning God has never made a covenant with Gentiles – as far as I can see, never will. The new covenant is not made with the Church; it is made with the same people the old covenant was made with. It is made with Israel." It seems that no other dispensationalist has gone so far into heresy.

[134] David J. Engelsma, *The Gospel Truth of Justification* (Polish edition: *Ewangeliczna prawda o usprawiedliwieniu*, p. 260).

and death to the sinner and of the sinner's sins to Christ. If faith is an insufficient means, the sinner's good works will be necessary for salvation. Here, however, MacArthur is too well acquainted with Reformed doctrine to preach openly salvation by faith and works, as Roman Catholicism, the Arminians, the Federal Vision, the New Perspective on Paul and other departures from orthodoxy do.

To send his followers to perdition, MacArthur uses a cunning tool. It is the "works-faith" mentioned above – another mechanism to be added to the already considerable list of heresies present in the theology of "the greatest theologian of our times", listened to so willingly and uncritically by millions of the faithful. So far we have considered:

- The fundamental error: the methodological denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture
- A church without a covenant
- The denial of the power of original sin
- The denial of total depravity
- The denial of the sovereignty of God
- Parallel truths, or the development of the concept of paradox
- Soteriological conditionalism
- The heresy of common grace, or Kuyperianism
- The heresy of the well-meant offer of salvation, or Marrowism
- The heresy of preparationism

Let us now consider the controversial question of "works-faith".

The Heresy of Works-Faith

Works-faith, that is, a faith made up of personal conviction and good works – including in particular good works of obedience to Christ – is a concept held by the Roman Catholics, arising from a mistaken exegesis of a number of texts of Scripture, in particular the Epistle of James, where we read:

> James 2:20 *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that* ***faith without works*** *is dead?*
>
> James 2:26 *For as the body* ***without*** *the spirit is dead, so* ***faith without works*** *is dead also.*

Roman Catholicism, appealing to the Epistle of James, rejects the biblical definition of faith as certainty and conviction of the truth of the Gospel and simple trust in Christ (Heb. 11:1; Eph. 3:12), introducing in its place the definition of a works-faith, i.e. one that consists of good works, specifically of acts of abstaining from sin:

> "The gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1545). But 'faith without works is dead' (James 2:26): faith deprived of hope and love

> does not fully unite the believer with Christ and does not make him a living member of His Body."[135]

The doctrine of the Roman Catholic church concerning justification proclaims that the guilty sinner becomes righteous at God's judgement partly by his good works of faith. Rome adds that the sinner performs these works only with the help of grace. The good works that justify are those that proceed from true faith in Christ. Appealing to Galatians 5:6, "faith which worketh by love", Rome claims that justification is by faith and the works of love which faith performs. But the sinner is righteous in the divine act of justification by his own works. The sinner's righteousness before God is therefore partly the work of Christ and partly the sinner's own good works of faith.

Norman Shepherd, the leading propagator of the heresy of the Federal Vision, which is destroying the Reformed churches, is an ardent supporter of the Roman Catholic definition of faith as working. Referring to the obedience that God required of Israel in the Old Testament, Shepherd writes:

> *"**Obedience** is simply **faithfulness to the Lord**; it is **justification by faith**."*[136]

Shepherd here cleverly formulates his defence of the heresy of justification by works in language that will slip past orthodox Reformed believers:

> *"**Justifying faith** is a living and active, a **penitent and obedient faith**."*[137]

Shepherd means that justification is by faith and the working of faith, by repentance and obedience, that is, by the works of faith.

> "In Romans 3 Paul is *not* now teaching… that… *faith without faithfulness* is, after all, the true key to justification!"[138]

This means that the "faithfulness" of faith, consisting of the good works that faith performs, is "the true key to justification". Justification is decidedly by the truly good works of the believer. Justification is by works.

Definition of the Error

This is the error of equivocation defined by Luther, i.e. depriving words of their original, plain meaning, whereby a different or even contrary meaning is extracted from them.[139] The biblical definition of faith has been denied, namely the intellectual understanding of the truth of the Gospel together with its complete acceptance, and trust in Christ (Heb. 11:1; Eph. 3:12; 1 John

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[135] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1815.
[136] Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*, p. 39.
[137] Norman Shepherd, "Faith and Faithfulness", in Andrew Sandlin (ed.), *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p. 65.
[138] Ibid., pp. 67–68.
[139] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 72).

5:13). Following in the footsteps of Vatican and neo-Calvinist theologians, in place of the simple definition of faith MacArthur argues that faith has three components:

- a firm conviction,
- a personal surrender,
- and right conduct arising from that surrender.

Faith is here defined as works. In this way MacArthur covertly lays a foundation for an attack on the doctrine of *sola fide* (justification by faith alone), suggesting that works are to be understood as part of faith, and that salvation is possible thanks to a *"works-faith"* that is the sum of the intellect's doctrinal convictions and of works. Hence salvation by faith is to be understood as salvation by faith and works. Let us listen to MacArthur's own words and his definition of faith, since according to him simple intellectual believing, acceptance of the truth about Christ and trust in Christ are insufficient for salvation. Something more is needed…

> "It is not enough to know about His promises or even *intellectually believe the truth of the gospel*."[140]
>
> *"[Faith consists of] a firm conviction… a personal surrender… [and] conduct* ***inspired by such surrender****."*[141]
>
> "If you say that it's simply believing, what do you mean? Do you mean by that… you mean there's no sense in which *faith becomes operative*, it's just something in my head and that's it? No, I think faith in the New Testament, *saving faith* […] *it's a way to live*."[142]
>
> *"Clearly, the biblical* ***concept of faith is inseparable from obedience. 'Believe'*** *is treated as if it were* ***synonymous with 'obey'****."*[143]
>
> "*Faith and works are not incompatible.* Jesus even calls the act of believing a work (John 6:29) – not merely a human work, but a gracious work of God in us. He brings us to faith, then enables and empowers us *to believe unto obedience* (cf. Rom. 16:26)."[144]
>
> "…Forsaking oneself for Christ's sake is not an optional step of discipleship subsequent to conversion; *it is the sine qua non of saving faith*."[145]

Implications

MacArthur, identifying himself with Christianity while stressing the significance of works for union with Christ in the gospel, perverts its meaning. Salvation by faith in MacArthur's

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[140] John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, p. 47.
[141] Ibid., pp. 173–174.
[142] John MacArthur, *The Lordship Controversy*.
[143] John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Polish edition: *Ewangelia według Jezusa*, p. 190).
[144] Ibid. (Polish edition, p. 48).
[145] Ibid. (Polish edition, p. 143).

conception means exactly what the Roman Catholics teach: salvation by a works-faith, that is, by faith and good works. The consequence of MacArthur's inclusion of good works in the definition of faith, as John Robbins rightly observed, is that thing "which makes faith a saving faith by means of works".[146] The features essential to MacArthur's definition of faith, and at the same time peculiar to it and therefore distinguishing it from the orthodox conception, are as follows:

First, it is not enough to believe the Gospel in order to be saved. The principle of *sola fide* is overthrown.

Secondly, faith is a way of life; self-denial, that is, the forsaking of sin, is an indispensable condition of saving faith, and faith consists of a firm conviction, a personal surrender to Christ and conduct arising from surrender to Christ.

Thirdly, the definition of faith includes the sinner's obedience to Christ.

Thus MacArthur's theology overthrows the biblical, and consequently the Reformed, definition of faith, establishing in its place a pure soteriological legalism: saving faith is ceasing to sin and living a holy life in obedience to Christ. It may be summed up even more briefly: to be saved it is not enough to believe; one must also perform works of obedience.

Refutation

We shall begin the refutation of MacArthur's idolatrous theology by demonstrating from Scripture that it is entirely contrary to the teaching of the Lord God, and that MacArthur therefore has no right to use the title "Christian". We shall then turn to John Calvin and to the historic documents of the Reformation to prove that MacArthur is not only a cunning heretic but also has no right to appropriate the names *"Calvinist"* and *"Reformed"*.

Holy Scripture

A) Faith is not a personal surrender and conduct inspired by surrender. Saving faith is not a way of life. These are not components of faith. The Word of God is the best and only source of concepts and of their definitions; hence the best definition of faith will be the one given in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Addressed to a community with legalistic tendencies, it plainly and clearly identifies faith as an inward conviction of, and assent to, the truth of the Gospel:

> Heb. 11:1 *Now faith is the* ***substance*** *(Gr. ὑπόστασις* hypostasis *– assurance) of things hoped for, the* ***evidence*** *(Gr. ἔλεγχος* elenchos *– conviction of) of things not seen.*

In the Epistle to the Ephesians we find the warrant for faith as trust in God. Trust means certainty of the fulfilment of the promises and reliance on the Word of God by acknowledging it as true, and thereby acknowledging God as truthful.

> Eph. 3:12 *In whom* [i.e. in Christ] *we have boldness and access* ***with confidence by the faith of him****.*

[146] John W. Robbins, *The Gospel According to John MacArthur*, The Trinity Foundation.

B) Faith is nothing other than the subjective acceptance of the objective truth of the Gospel set forth in Holy Scripture. Since the carnal man does not accept the Gospel in its spiritual dimension, the spiritual, regenerate man – reversing this principle – accepts it, and thereby acknowledges it as the wisdom of God unto salvation. It is precisely the Gospel that is foolishness in the eyes of unbelievers, and faith in it gives salvation.

> 1 Cor. 1:21 *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God* ***by the foolishness of preaching to save*** *them that* ***believe****.*

> 1 Cor. 2:14-15 14. *But the natural man* ***receiveth not*** (Gr. οὐ δέχεται *ou dechetai* – does not accept) *the things of the Spirit of God: for they are* ***foolishness unto him****: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* 15. *But he that is spiritual* ***judgeth all things****, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

C) The Apostle John, writing his First Epistle, indicated that its contents were exactly what must be confessed in order to possess eternal life by faith. Faith in Christ is saving faith; works have been excluded from it. In fact it is the written Gospel, and its further development and confirmation in Scripture, that develops saving faith. Good works have no influence on faith; they can in no way help it. Faith is not built on good works but on the text of Scripture inspired by the Spirit.

> John 1:12 *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even* ***to them that believe on his name****:*

> 1 John 5:13 *These things have I written unto you that* ***believe on the name of the Son of God****; that ye may* ***know that ye have eternal life****, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

D) Jesus Christ defined salvation not as obedience but as faith in the Word of God heard. What a Polish reader may wrongly interpret as obedience (the Polish *kto słucha* can mean both "he who listens" and "he who obeys") in fact means in Greek "to hear". Hence an important element of faith is the proclamation of the truth, so that there may be recipients of the Gospel able to hear it. As a result of hearing, faith may arise in the hearer (*may*, because man is unable to awaken faith in himself; God does so, its author and finisher).

> John 5:24 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that* ***heareth*** *(ἀκούων* akouon *– hears) my word, and* ***believeth on him*** *that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*

E) The only obedience necessary for salvation is the obedience of Christ. It is not the resultant of the co-operation of the obedience of Christ and of the believer. It is the monergistic work of the Messiah. It is He who merited the salvation of the elect people by His own obedience. Faith appropriates this obedience to the sinner, so that it is reckoned to him as his own.

> Rom. 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so* ***by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous****.*

F) If good works, even those performed by the Holy Spirit, were a component of faith, then saving faith would consistently work out for the sinner at least part of the righteousness required before God.

First, salvation would then be the sinner's due, thereby putting God in debt (God would owe the sinner payment, i.e. salvation).

And secondly, it would be a ground of the sinner's boasting at the Last Judgement, who would have every right to take away from God part of the glory for salvation and ascribe it to himself. Scripture excludes each of these possibilities:

> Rom. 4:4 *Now* ***to him that worketh*** *is the reward not reckoned of grace, but* ***of debt****.*

> Rom. 3:27 ***Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law?*** *of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

> Isa. 48:11 *For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted?* ***and I will not give my glory unto another****.*

G) To be saved it is enough to believe the truth of the Gospel. This is evident in a number of passages of Holy Scripture, and especially in those in which all the good works of the sinner have been excluded from the definition of faith – since faith lays hold of the merits of Christ.

> Rom. 4:5 *But to him that* ***worketh not****, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

H) The Apostle Paul, writing *For I know nothing by myself* (1 Cor. 4:4), i.e. no sin, had every ground, according to the definition – or rather redefinition – of the assurance of salvation, to say, "and therefore I have assurance of salvation". What, however, does Paul say? "*yet am I not hereby justified*". The Apostle rejects MacArthur's proposal.

He does not regard himself as justified by looking within himself, by looking at his life and specifically at his good works – surrender to Christ, obedience to Christ, a life in accordance with surrender. Instead, he places all his hope of justification in God: "*but he that judgeth me is the Lord*". The Apostle regarded his salvation as certain (I am justified) because he turned his eyes to God.

I) Defining faith as a firm conviction, a personal surrender to Christ and conduct arising from surrender to Christ makes many passages of Scripture logically contradictory. An example is the text of Ephesians, classically used to defend the doctrine of *sola fide*. Let us see how paradoxical it sounds when MacArthur's definition is substituted for the word *faith*:

> Eph. 2:8-9 8. *For by grace are ye saved through* ***a firm conviction, a personal surrender to Christ and conduct arising from that surrender****; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:* 9. *Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

The logical contradiction appears in verse 9, where the plain statement is made that salvation is not of works, which is negated by the assertion of verse 8, where salvation is described as possible thanks to personal surrender to Christ and conduct arising from that surrender. Salvation, then, is of conduct, but not of works.

This is an obvious paradox (salvation is not of works, and yet at the same time it is of works), although MacArthur himself sees no problem here, professing the heresy of "parallel truths", i.e. of mutually contradictory doctrines as equally valid propositions, which will be harmonised only in eternity…

John Calvin

A) John Calvin, who writes of the objective and knowable deposit contained in the written Word, provided an interpretation of the full concept of faith as defined by the Bible. The substance of faith is God and His will; hence it is not only objective but also knowable by reason. As God is, so too is the information about God. And information can be assimilated, whereas the acceptance of the truth conveyed by that information remains a matter of dispute.

> *"Faith consists not in ignorance, but in knowledge – knowledge not of God merely, but of the divine will."*[147]

> "We shall now have **a full definition of faith** if **we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ**, and revealed to our minds and sealed on our hearts *by the Holy Spirit*."[148]

> "To have faith is not to waver, to vary, to be borne up and down, to hesitate, to remain in suspense, to vacillate, and finally to despair; it is to possess sure certainty and complete security of mind, a place to rest and firm ground on which to plant one's feet."[149]

B) Again, saving faith requires believing that Christ died for the elect. The application of this to the saved person himself (Christ died for me) is secondary to the objective message concerning the extent of salvation.

> "He who is to have justifying faith *must believe that Christ died for him*. I deny that this pertains to the immediate and direct act of faith; but I grant that it pertains to the reflex and *secondary act, or in the compound sense* (the first act being presupposed), but not in the divided sense (the first act being excluded)."[150]

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[147] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.2.2.
[148] Ibid. 3.2.7.
[149] Ibid. 3.13.3.
[150] Source as cited in the Polish original: John Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, p. 479.

C) According to Calvin, saving faith is not a working faith, but is defined by confidence in God, which enables one to stand before Him with a boldness arising from the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins. Good works are not an element of saving faith. Confidence and faith are synonyms – and therefore not works!

> "Very different is the feeling of full assurance (πληροφορία) which the Scriptures uniformly attribute to faith – an assurance which leaves no doubt that the goodness of God is clearly offered to us. This assurance we cannot have without truly perceiving its sweetness and experiencing it in ourselves. Hence from faith the Apostle deduces confidence, and from confidence boldness. His words are: 'In whom [Christ] we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him' (Eph. 3:12), thus undoubtedly showing that our faith is not true unless it enables us to appear calmly in the presence of God. Such boldness springs only from confidence in the divine favour and salvation. So true is this, *that the term faith is often used as equivalent to confidence*. […]
>
> In one word, he only is a true believer who, firmly persuaded that God is reconciled and is a kind Father to him, hopes everything from His kindness, who, trusting to the promises of the divine favour, with undoubting confidence anticipates salvation; as the Apostle shows in these words: 'We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end' (Heb. 3:14) – those who confidently glory in being heirs of the kingdom of heaven. […]
>
> *No man, I say, is a believer but he who, trusting to the security of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death*, as we are taught by the noble exclamation of Paul (Rom. 8:38)."[151]

D) Ultimately Calvin teaches a passive faith, not a working one. Saving faith is not active, and therefore not a working faith. Faith is the passive instrument that appropriates the merits of Christ to the sinner. Let us listen to Calvin:

> *"For faith, in regard to justification, is something merely passive, bringing nothing of our own to procure the favour of God, but receiving from Christ that which we need."*[152]

Calvin not only contradicts MacArthur's doctrine but wholly negates and overthrows it. An active faith, a working faith, adds the sinner's good works to his justification. It is therefore the heresy of legalism, a damnable heresy.

Confessions, Catechisms, Canons

A) The Belgic Confession shows the inability of the Christian to perform even one good work as the ground of justification, since the ground of that justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner (Rom. 4:6-7; 5:17-21; Phil. 3:6-9; Isa. 61:10; Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor.

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[151] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.2.15–16.
[152] Ibid. 3.13.5.

5:21) and the imputation of the sinner's sins to Christ (Isa. 53:5-6, 11-12; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3-4). Hence it is impossible that any work could affect justification, which, from eternity, through the cross, up to the Last Judgement, is unchangeable. In Article 24 of the Confession we read:

> "…though we do good works, *we do not found our salvation upon them*; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable…"[153]

The text of the Confession appeals to the passage of Isaiah 64:6: *But we are all as an unclean thing, and* ***all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags****; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.* The legalist cannot be saved, since for him the ground of justification is, at least partly, his works, which, even the best of them, are accounted by the Law as filthy rags. The legalist will stand at the Last Judgement in a filthy garment and will be taken by surprise:

> Matt. 22:11-13 11. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man* ***which had not on a wedding garment****:* (but the filthy rags of his own righteousnesses) 12. *And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.* 13. *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

B) In the Heidelberg Catechism we read a simple definition of faith which excludes good works from it. Faith is the certainty of knowledge of the truth of the Gospel and trust in the Gospel through the Holy Spirit. There is no mention here of works-faith, MacArthur's open blasphemy.

What is true faith?

> True faith is not only *a certain knowledge*, whereby *I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word*, but also *a firm confidence* which the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel, that not only to others, but *to me also*, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.[154]

C) In the Canons of the Synod of Dort we observe a clear separation of sanctification, with which good works are connected, from faith, which lays hold of the merits of Christ, of the good works of His life and of the suffering of His death. This means that the two works of Christ, justification and sanctification, though anchored in the cross of Christ, are not identical works.

They must not be mixed, since in that case the result of the mixture is pure legalism. It is worth emphasising that this consideration has been placed in the article on Election, that is, on God's

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[153] Belgic Confession, Article 24, "Man's Sanctification and Good Works".
[154] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21.

unchangeable act of choosing certain sinners for salvation apart from their works, that is, apart from the merits of good works.

> "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath *out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will*, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation. This elect number, though by nature *neither better nor more deserving than others*, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification…"[155]

Summary

Holy Scripture, and the Reformation faithfully following it, positively cry out that faith is not a working faith. Works are bound up with faith: they are the works of Christ, His life and suffering, imputed to the sinner by faith. That is why the sinner's works must be excluded from faith. Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:6), so we too believe that we are saved by grace, without works, or works included in the definition of faith. Scripture warns of this dichotomous division:

> Rom. 11:6 *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace.* ***But if it be of works, then is it no more grace****: otherwise work is no more work.*

That MacArthur's teaching on works-faith is identical with the Catholic definition of union with Christ, that is, the definition of the ground of salvation, Rome itself will testify through the mouth of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), a Catholic theologian who saw union with Christ in the same way as MacArthur: as a relationship arising from human merit, which can attain its final form, namely salvation, by human merits – penance, prayers and good works, including obedience to Christ – although, unlike MacArthur, Bernard saw this also in the sacraments.

> *"Growth in grace brings an enlargement of confidence. First we cast ourselves at His feet. We weep before the Lord who made us,* ***lamenting the evil we have done****. And then* ***we reach out for the hand that will lift us up****, that will steady our trembling knees. And finally, when* ***we have obtained these graces through many prayers and tears****,* ***we humbly venture to raise our eyes to His mouth****, to receive His kiss. And he who is joined to Him in the holy kiss becomes, by His good pleasure, one spirit with Him."*[156]

John MacArthur demonstrates that, although he would have himself called "Reformed", on closer examination of his theology the mask falls, revealing his carefully hidden true face – that of an Arminian. And as such MacArthur stands condemned by the Synod of Dort. The principal reference to the Arminian doctrine of justification occurs in the Rejection of Errors of the

[155] Canons of Dort, Head I, Article 7.
[156] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs*.

second head of the Canons. In the context of rejecting the teaching of the Arminians, who maintain that the death of Christ "acquired for the Father only the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as He might please, *whether of grace or of works*" (a necessary implication of the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement), the Canons condemn them, that is, the Arminians:

> Who teach: That the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, *does not herein consist that we by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God* and saved, *but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of faith, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith*, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.[157]

MacArthur's obedience of faith, or works-faith, is a heresy condemned by Dort. As David Engelsma has observed, many teach today that justification is conditioned by the sinner's faith and obedience, so that his righteousness before God is at least partly the merit of the sinner, of his own good, meritorious deeds; this of necessity presupposes that the death of Christ was not a substitutionary satisfaction of God's justice on behalf of all for whom Jesus died.[158]

This Is Not the End

> 2 Tim. 2:19 *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And,* ***Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity****.*

Appalling is the blindness of the tens of millions of MacArthur's followers. They are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood, the Gospel from legalism, faith from works, and they are therefore in great danger of their lives. For if they persist unrepentant in the heresy of legalism, they will indeed at the Last Judgement present their soiled garments to God the Judge and will be cast out into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Only the white robe of Christ's righteousness saves from damnation, and no patch of works, or of works-faith, can be sewn onto it.

Yet we know from Scripture that the Church of Christ stands firm. God will snatch every one elect to salvation from the clutches of heresy. He will do so even if MacArthur's evil theology were to flood the whole world. As Luther observed, all hope is in God, even if it seems that the whole world has fallen on its knees before the gates of hell:

> "Look at the period of the Arians, *when scarcely five Catholic bishops were preserved in the whole world*, and even they were driven from their sees, while everywhere the Arians reigned in church offices and with church titles; and yet under the rule of these

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[157] Canons of Dort, Head II, Rejection of Errors 4.
[158] David J. Engelsma, *The Gospel Truth of Justification* (Polish edition: *Ewangeliczna prawda o usprawiedliwieniu*, p. 222).

> heretics Christ preserved His Church, but in such a way that it was not at all regarded or treated as the Church."[159]

Dear reader, we call upon you to forsake MacArthurism – which beneath the skilfully donned mask of "Calvinism" is pure Arminianism – and to confess the biblical Gospel. MacArthur's doctrines are pure paradox, logical contradiction, and he himself is an exceptionally perfidious deceiver. Reformed Christians, just like Calvin, should despise paradox instead of professing it.[160]

[159] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 33).
[160] "I despise paradox" – John Calvin wrote these words in his *Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3, p. 149.

Chapter 7 – An Introduction to the Heresy of Lordship Salvation

A Harmful Status Quo

> Eph. 4:13-14 13. *Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:* 14. *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

The hardest, or even impossible, task for a mind enslaved by false theology is to reject it. Nor is it helped by human nature, which is so constructed as to resist change and to rely on human, highly eloquent authorities (1 Cor. 2:4-5; 2:13) rather than on the Word of God, which leads directly to apostasy (Jer. 17:5; Ps. 146:3; Isa. 2:22; 20:5; Heb. 3:12).

On the other hand, the attainment of a *status quo* in the matter of religious convictions is not only desirable but also commended by the Word of God itself. The role of teachers of the Word is to work towards a noble goal: being established in the orthodox faith and being enabled to detect heresy. To achieve this, the appropriate means are necessary:

- the unity of the faith,
- the knowledge of the truth,
- right practice,
- constant perfecting,
- the attainment of maturity.

It may also be put somewhat differently: the mature Christian is spiritually complete, lives a holy life and believes the truth, which is one and the same, independent of the human factor. Yet the practice of perfecting and unifying doctrine, that is, Reformation, can easily be disrupted.

Augustus Nicodemus Lopes, a Presbyterian professor of theology, has drawn attention to two causes of theological deformation. They are, respectively, skilful deceivers in the pulpits and the passive attitude of seemingly orthodox theological circles.[161]

John MacArthur fits this pattern perfectly.

The Poisoned Root

MacArthur's alleged *"Calvinism"* is essentially the heresy of common grace, diluted with the doctrines of Arminianism and present in circles that regard themselves as *"Reformed"*,

[161] Augustus Nicodemus Lopes, speaking at a conference in 2017, stated: "To understand what reformation is, we should first understand what deformation is. Deformation often begins in the church itself – through men devoid of the truth who deceive God's people, leading the church into the embrace of doctrines and practices contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Degeneration usually happens step by step, over a long period of time, through small changes introduced little by little into the church's confession, by men who have already inwardly departed from the truth of the Gospel and who receive the support of conservative but passive professors, pastors and elders. Historically, deformation did not begin in the pews but in the pulpits."

according to which God is good to all men without exception in a non-saving way. This goodness of God is temporary, since God ceases to be good to some when they go to hell.

It is worth recalling that R.C. Sproul, MacArthur's theological mentor, proved to be a Presbyterian who broke his own confession of faith. For common grace and Presbyterianism are contradictory concepts. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states that God is unchangeable in His goodness. It is therefore not possible for God to show a common goodness to the reprobate, since God's goodness is unchangeable.

> *Question 4: What is God?*
>
> *God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.*[162]

It is evident that God's unchangeable goodness would then have to be shown to the reprobate in hell; hence Sproul's heresy, inconsistent and contrary to his own confession of faith, made dialogue with MacArthur possible. R.C. Sproul, as MacArthur's mentor, not only confirmed him in the lie of God's universal love, in which MacArthur had always believed,[163] but also, by introducing MacArthur into the theological *"salons"*,[164] contributed to the popularisation in Christianity at large of false doctrines such as:

- The methodological denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture
- A church without a covenant
- The denial of the power of original sin
- The denial of total depravity
- The denial of the sovereignty of God
- Parallel truths, or the development of the concept of paradox
- Soteriological conditionalism
- The heresy of common grace, or Kuyperianism
- The heresy of the well-meant offer of salvation, or Marrowism
- The heresy of preparationism
- The heresy of works-faith

MacArthur is an exceptional figure. Being a golden-mouthed theologian, he finds a hearing both among neo-evangelicals and among the *"Reformed"*, and as such he shapes new

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[162] Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 4. The biblical references given in the Catechism's answer to this question are John 4:24; Job 11:7; Ps. 90:2; James 1:17; Exod. 3:14; Ps. 147:5; Rev. 4:8; 15:4; Exod. 34:6.

[163] During his visit to the Russian Arminians MacArthur stated: "Our hearts are one in the faith. And that has never changed… Almost everything I teach, you already believe. I am only trying to help you understand it better. I am not bringing strange teachings here." *Вы приехали с кальвинизмом в нашу арминианскую среду? Зачем вам это?* [You have come with Calvinism into our Arminian milieu? Why are you doing this?].

[164] Sproul's influence on MacArthur lasted several decades. In 2017, delivering his eulogy, MacArthur said: "I first heard R.C. Sproul teach several decades ago. I don't remember the exact date, but I remember his teaching as if it were yesterday." *A Tribute to My Friend: John MacArthur Remembers R.C. Sproul*, 15 December 2017.

generations of followers, leading them ever further away from the truth of the Gospel (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:3).

Let us, then, examine some elements of the heresy of Lordship Salvation, since, like every poison threatening spiritual health and life, this doctrine requires careful analysis and exposure, as a warning and admonition to the children of God, that they may not follow it (2 Tim. 2:25; Acts 8:22; Jer. 13:15).

The Basis of the Heresy of Lordship Salvation

At the root of all MacArthur's serious heresies lies a deeply hidden conviction of the free will of man. Although this may not be visible at first glance, it is precisely this false doctrine that constitutes the foundation of the rejection of the complete sufficiency of Scripture, of the Covenant, of total depravity and of God's complete sovereignty. It is also the basis of the teaching of paradoxes, conditionalism, common grace, the well-meant offer of salvation, preparationism and works-faith.

These doctrines cannot be explained otherwise than by the inclusion of the free will of man in theology. That MacArthur's fundamental heresy has always been the heresy of free will is attested by orthodox Reformed theologians – who, *nota bene*, were not involved in the dispute over the heresy of Lordship Salvation:

> *"To this day influential theologians such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John MacArthur maintain that the man of Romans 7 is an unsaved man. In so doing they give themselves to the heresy of free will."*[165]

The necessary consequence of teachings contrary to the Gospel is a fruit that is poisonous, harmful and deadly. The crown of MacArthur's theology is the affirmation and warm embrace of the theology called *"Lordship Salvation"* – a legalistic pseudo-gospel which MacArthur announced as his official theological position by publishing it in 1988 in the book *The Gospel According to Jesus*.[166]

By this means the heresy of salvation by works – or, more precisely, of salvation by obedience to Christ – acquired the status of an orthodox doctrine not only among neo-evangelicals, but also found recognition in circles that formally regard themselves as *"Reformed"*, circles greatly weakened by the raids of such prominent doctrines as the *"Federal Vision"* and the *"New Perspective on Paul"*.

What does the phenomenon of the heresy consist in?

Defining the Error

> 1 Cor. 6:11 *And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but* ***ye are sanctified****, but* ***ye are justified*** *in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

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[165] David J. Engelsma, *Still Totally Depraved?*
[166] *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Zondervan.

An important element of the concept of Lordship Salvation is the laying of strong emphasis on good works as an element of the Gospel. MacArthur has evident problems in distinguishing between two works of Christ: justification and sanctification. The teaching of Reformed theology is very clear on the question of both works of Christ:

> "Although, therefore, **justification** and **sanctification** must be distinguished from one another as **two different blessings** of God's grace in Christ, they are necessarily connected with one another, since both are **contained in regeneration**."[167]

Whereas orthodoxy acknowledges both as inseparable but distinct works of Christ, which He accomplished on the cross, MacArthur, scandalised by the attitude of many *"evangelicals"*, resolved to cure antinomianism with legalism. In his understanding, justification and sanctification are evidently one and the same work of Christ.

In effect, justification is dependent on sanctification, the latter being the resultant of the working of Christ and of the sinner himself, and therefore synergistic in character. While MacArthur uses a great deal of the terminology of sovereign grace, on closer examination his theology turns out to be a very convoluted form of synergism, which assumes that:

1) the new birth is complete surrender to God;

2) the obedience of two parties, Christ and man, is required to make man righteous;

3) and it appeals to antinomy or paradox in order to *"reconcile"* the contradictory principles it affirms (for example, the well-meant offer of salvation and particular redemption).

Not faith alone, but faith together with further requirements for attaining salvation justifies the sinner before God. MacArthur thereby denies the only ground of justification, which is the merit of Christ's life and death imputed to the sinner in his mind at the time of regeneration:

- Christ was made sin so that the elect might obtain righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).
- Christ is the fulfilment of the Law on behalf of the elect sinners (Rom. 10:4).
- The righteousness of Christ covers the elect (Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4).
- The cross is the crowning of the work of the justification of sinners (Phil. 2:7-8; John 17:19; Rom. 5:19).
- The righteousness of Christ's life and death is the propitiation and satisfaction made by Christ for the elect (Rom. 3:24-25; 5:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:21).

The sinner's good works are completely excluded from the righteousness necessary for salvation. MacArthur is too cunning to follow in the footsteps of the heretics gathered in the circles of the New Perspective on Paul or the Federal Vision and to state openly that salvation is by faith and by the sinner's works. MacArthur subtly smuggles elements of works into the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

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[167] David J. Engelsma, Herman Hanko, *Be Ye Holy* (Polish edition: *Bądźcie świętymi*, p. 33).

He not only defines faith as working, denying its character as the instrument that lays hold of the merits of Christ, but also, after the pattern of the Judaizers of the first century, introduces a number of burdens impossible for the sinner to bear as a condition of salvation, while at the same time claiming that salvation is without human works. He claims that salvation is without works, and at the same time claims that salvation is by the sinner's good works. The evidence of the heresy is extensive and at the same time terrifying…

Implications

> Rom. 10:3 *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

Although MacArthur has received much sharp criticism for this from many of the *"Reformed"*, he has not changed his position nor retreated from it. In other words, John MacArthur has resolved to hold fast to the sinner's own righteousness as justifying him before God. The following premises flow from MacArthur's teaching:

First, God's Law is replaced by a new set of commands and commandments, which is a yoke of standards that the sinner fulfils with the support of the Spirit.

Secondly, the new principles are a necessary precondition of obtaining salvation and a condition of retaining salvation.

Thirdly, the gospel is defined as repentance, a merit of man without which no one can be saved.

Fourthly, saving faith is a complete and perfect surrender to Christ, while Christ ruling completely over the sinner is the essence of the gospel.

Fifthly, the sinner's obedience to God is a precondition of salvation, while Christ's rule over the sinner is an integral part of the message of salvation.

Sixthly, the only evidence of salvation for the sinner is obedience to Christ.

Seventhly, justification is by good works.

The above implications follow from specific statements of MacArthur's, which he has never renounced. They are also widely available, whether in electronic form on the gty.org website or in printed publications.

MacArthur has not withdrawn from circulation the materials that compromise him, and he still profits from their sale in the form of royalties. Accordingly, MacArthur's statements are to be treated as the official position of the organisation he leads.

Chapter 8 – The Neonomianism of the Heresy of Lordship Salvation

The Basis of the Error

According to MacArthur, God's Law is replaced by a new set of commands and commandments, which is a yoke of standards that the sinner fulfils with the support of the Spirit and which must be borne in the Christian life. The question therefore concerns sanctification understood in a synergistic way.

> *"When any sinner comes to Jesus, Jesus removes God's crushing and condemning law from that center, then replaces that law with His own set of commands once the sinner is yoked with Jesus' commands […] He takes away your heavy burden and gives you His yoke that is easy and His burden that is light. Carrying on my back the standards of God and the commandments of Christ while supported by the Holy Spirit is an easy burden compared to the weight of my sinfulness carried alone."*[168]

The new set of commandments is neonomianism, or *"new law"* – present in the heresy of Lordship Salvation – which has its source in the heresy of Richard Baxter, who taught a sanctification in which the sinner's own strength co-operates; that is, that a man is not saved, or will not be saved at all, unless he applies the means of sanctification.

> "*For Baxter the death of Christ was more a legal satisfaction of the claims of the law than a substitutionary death for elect sinners. Baxter's doctrine of justification was called neonomianism (i.e. 'new law'), because he maintained that God had established a new law and offers forgiveness to those who repent of breaking the old law.*"[169]

This is exactly what MacArthur actively teaches. It is a serious error, one that cuts off from salvation. Dr John Owen (1616–1683) devoted an entire volume of his five-volume set, his treatise *Of the Mortification of Sin*, to dismantling such an idea. And yet John MacArthur resurrects the semi-Pelagian error of a sanctifying obedience that leads to salvation.

It is a form of legalism. What is more, the heresy undermines justification solely on the ground of the merit of Christ, suggesting that one can lose one's justification by not keeping up the sanctification for which man is jointly responsible.

Refutation

In order to refute the heresy of neonomianism we shall go first to Holy Scripture and then to the Reformed Confessions, in order to confirm the falsehood of MacArthur's theology and to bring the truth to light.

Holy Scripture

A) Nowhere in the Word of God shall we find confirmation that in the New Testament a new law with a new set of commandments is in force. In reality, the whole of the morality contained

[168] John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now*, p. 67.
[169] Joel R. Beeke, *Purytanie* [The Puritans], p. 51.

in the Decalogue, that is, in the Ten Commandments, was summed up by Christ as love of God (the first table) and love of man (the second table).

The first table – love to God	The second table – love to man
1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 2. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. 3. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image of God, nor worship it. 4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.	5. Honour thy father and thy mother. 6. Thou shalt not kill. 7. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 8. Thou shalt not steal. 9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

The Law rests upon two commandments (Matt. 22:40). The sum of the commandments of the first table of the Law is love to God, that is, the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36-38). The second, equally important commandment is love to man, the sum of the commandments of the second table (Matt. 22:39).

B) Hence we read that love is the fulfilling of the whole Law. This love is not a new commandment *sensu stricto*, but an explanation and summary of the Law by Christ Himself. The direct expression of the command to love one's neighbour can already be found in the Pentateuch (Lev. 19:18). In saying *"A new commandment I give unto you"*, Christ gave it to be understood that it is explained in the Gospel in a new way – explained more clearly and with new arguments, and supported by the new example of their Lord and Master.

> Rom. 13:10 *…therefore* ***love is the fulfilling of the law****.*
>
> John 13:34 *A* ***new commandment*** *I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*
>
> 2 John 5 *And now I beseech thee, lady,* ***not as though I wrote a new commandment*** *unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.*

C) Christ never established a new Law. The Law itself is perfect, good and holy. "Perfect" in Hebrew is תָּמִים *tamim*, which means *complete*. God's Law could not be replaced by a new set of commandments, since it was and is complete in its perfection, and therefore requires neither supplementing nor change. That is why Paul constantly calls the Law good, holy and just, and the Apostle did not point to the existence of some new, easier Law.

> Ps. 19:7 ***The law of the LORD is perfect*** (תְּמִימָה *temimah*)
>
> Rom. 7:12 *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*

D) Scripture plainly teaches us that certain aspects of the Law have been abolished, namely the ceremonial ordinances (Eph. 2:14-15), which is to be applied in particular to the fourth commandment. The curse of the Law has also been abolished for those who are in Christ, since it is He who fulfilled the Law for His elect people (Gal. 3:10, 13; Col. 2:14).

E) The yoke of Christ is not a new set of commandments, light to bear thanks to the ministry of the Spirit. MacArthur appeals in his reasoning to the text of Matthew 11, but interprets it wrongly. The rest is not a lighter load and the help of the Spirit in bearing new commandments. The yoke of Christ refers to the rest for souls that Christ gives to those who labour, that is, who are burdened with the consciousness of sin. The yoke is therefore to be understood as the forgiveness of sins.

> Matt. 11:28-30 28. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* 29. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* 30. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

The consequential conjunction *for* (Gr. γὰρ *gar*) makes the clause of verse 30 the conclusion of the preceding argument. Those who labour and are heavy laden can obtain rest by taking upon themselves the yoke of Christ, which gives rest to the soul. The forgiveness of sins is light and easy for the soul of the sinner who comes to Christ seeking rest from the torment of a conscience burdened with sin.

F) Analogous texts of Scripture confirm the interpretation of the yoke of Christ as rest of the conscience from sin. Three passages of Scripture are important here, which encourage us to draw near to God and confess our sins in order to cleanse the conscience, of which the blood shed by Christ for the sins of the guilty assures the sinner. The yoke of Christ is the cleansing of the conscience from the accusing power of sin, which is, after all, the breaking of God's perfect Law. The yoke of Christ is the certainty of the forgiveness of every sin committed.

> Heb. 9:14 *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God,* ***purge your conscience from dead works*** *to serve the living God?*

> Heb. 10:22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,* ***having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience****, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

> 1 John 1:9 ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

Confessions, Catechisms, Canons

A) A text significant for our consideration will be Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, which treats of the false church. From the definition of this article it follows plainly that the church to be regarded as false is the one that does not take upon itself the yoke of Christ. Perhaps

MacArthur's followers will rejoice at this point, reading their neonomianism into the text of the Confession, but this joy is premature. Let us look at the source text:

> *"As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ."*[170]

What reference does the Belgic Confession make for the yoke of Christ, and how does it define it? No Reformed Christian should be surprised by its reference to Psalm 2:3, which speaks not of a new set of commandments but of deliverance from the power and bondage of sin, expressed typologically by reference to deliverance from bondage to foreign powers.

> Ps. 2:3 *Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.*

According to the Confession, the yoke of Christ is the breaking of the bonds of sin.

B) John Calvin contrasts the yoke of Christ, which is light and easy, with the doctrine of the papists, which, as is well known, proclaimed salvation by the keeping of the works of the Law made possible by the help of the Holy Spirit. Calvin lays stress on personal humility and meekness, qualities that bring us near to Christ as our propitiation for sins.

Christ by His blood made propitiation for all the sins of His people; hence seeking rest in the sinner's own works is not only unwarranted but impossible and greatly harmful.

> *"…when His example has accustomed us to meekness and humility, we shall no longer feel His yoke to be troublesome. For the same purpose He adds: I will ease you. So long as the flesh kicks, we rebel; and those who throw off the yoke of Christ and try to appease God in any other way torment and waste themselves in vain. Thus we see the papists dreadfully torturing themselves and silently enduring a dreadful tyranny under which they groan, so as not to bow to the yoke of Christ."*[171]

According to Calvin, the yoke of Christ refers to the doctrine of propitiation and speaks of satisfaction for sins. The yoke is neither a new nor an old set of commandments to be borne in order to appease God – still less with the help and support of the Holy Spirit. In reality, this is what Rome asserts:

> *"In every circumstance, each one of us should hope,* ***with the grace of God, to persevere 'to the end'*** *(cf. Council of Trent: DS 1541) and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ."*[172]

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[170] Belgic Confession, Article 29.
[171] John Calvin, *Commentary on Matthew 11:29*.
[172] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1821.

Chapter 9 – Pelagianism, or the Conditions of Salvation in the Heresy of Lordship Salvation

The Basis of the Error

John MacArthur, in his pursuit of sanctification, which he tries to force upon his followers by making justification dependent on sanctification, introduces his characteristic teaching of works as a condition of salvation. At the root of his assertions lies an evident desire to persuade of the necessity of forsaking sin; this, however, is done without distinguishing between the doctrine of justification and that of sanctification.

MacArthur mixes the two doctrines by establishing new principles as a necessary condition of obtaining salvation (which he describes as "getting into the kingdom") and, consequently, of retaining salvation (if the condition of obtaining salvation is a life in accordance with principles and truths, then it is necessary to acknowledge those same principles and truths as a condition whose fulfilment results in getting into heaven).

MacArthur rests on a disastrous eisegesis of the text of Matthew 5:1-12. Let us note the source text:

> **Matt. 5:3-12** 3. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* 4. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.* 5. *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.* 6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* 7. *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.* 8. *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.* 9. *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.* 10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* 11. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.* 12. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Commenting on the text of Matthew, MacArthur states:

> *"Let me interject an important clarification. People ask: are the truths and the beatitudes the rules on how you get into the kingdom, or are they rules on how you behave once you are in the kingdom? The answer is yes, both."*[173]

The message flowing from this comment is: in order to see God, in order to inherit the kingdom, in order to be saved, the unregenerate sinner must fulfil specific conditions set by MacArthur:

- he must be poor in spirit,
- he must mourn,
- he must be meek,

[173] John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now*, p. 88.

- he must hunger after righteousness,
- he must show mercy,
- he must have a pure heart,
- he must make peace,
- he must suffer persecution for righteousness' sake.

In order to enter the kingdom, the unregenerate sinner has been laid under a task which in simple words may be summed up as self-salvation. The sinner is burdened with the responsibility for making himself poor in spirit, mourning and meek and, most importantly, for creating a pure heart within himself – and that even before his regeneration (for carnal, unregenerate men cannot belong to the kingdom). We clearly see in the above theological statement doublethink, that is, the logical contradiction contained, for example, in the sermon *"Twin Truths: God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility"*.[174]

The argument verges on the heresy of parallel truths, i.e. of two mutually contradictory theological propositions supposedly harmonised in the mind of God in eternity. Thus God is sovereign in salvation (a bow towards Calvinism), but man is responsible for his salvation (a bow towards the Arminians) – which, indeed, MacArthur expressed directly during his visit to Russia, saying to the assembled Arminians:

> *"You believe in human responsibility in salvation, and I believe in human responsibility in salvation."*[175]

At express speed the theology professed by MacArthur turns out to be nothing other than pure Pelagianism. According to the definition,[176] Pelagianism taught that human nature was not affected by the fall of Adam, but that all men still have the freedom to choose good or evil, to obey God or to disobey Him. In this case the unregenerate sinner chooses righteousness, mercy, mourning and so on.

MacArthur preaches pure Pelagianism. The unregenerate man must be poor in spirit, must mourn, must be meek, must hunger after righteousness, must show mercy, must have a pure heart, must make peace, must suffer persecution for righteousness' sake. And these are the conditions whose fulfilment by the sinner qualifies him to enter the kingdom! Evidently man must assist in the work of regeneration by a series of acts of obedience.

What qualifies the sinner to enter the kingdom is the sinner's good works. This accursed heresy was clearly condemned by John Wycliffe, the forerunner of the Reformation. Wycliffe argued that the error of making man responsible for salvation is worse than Pelagianism and was the cause of the fall of the church:

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[174] John MacArthur, *Twin Truths: God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility*.

[175] *Вы приехали с кальвинизмом в нашу арминианскую среду? Зачем вам это?* [You have come with Calvinism into our Arminian milieu? Why are you doing this?].

[176] The definition of Pelagianism available at www.monergism.com.

> *"Belief in the power of man in the work of regeneration is the great heresy of Rome, and from that error has come the ruin of the Church. Conversion proceeds solely from the grace of God, and the system which ascribes it partly to man and partly to God is worse than Pelagianism."*[177]

The refutation of this Roman Catholic heresy, insidiously pressed into the minds of unsuspecting *"Protestants"*, is therefore a necessity.

Refutation

Since Pelagianism is an ancient heresy, to the testimony of Scripture and the documents of the Reformation we shall add texts of the Fathers of the church, which will help us in analysing MacArthur's error.

Holy Scripture

A) MacArthur's assertion is the most anti-Christian of all his heresies. According to the Word of God, the only necessary qualification for participation in the kingdom is not conditional conduct according to principles and truths. God has qualified every Christian for participation in the kingdom without the sinner's participation in this act, without his help, without any form of activity whatever. The sinner is a passive recipient of this qualification.

> Col. 1:12 *Giving thanks unto the Father, which* ***hath made us meet*** *(Gr. ἱκανώσαντι* hikanosanti *– qualified) to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:*

B) The Greek word ἱκανώσαντι *hikanosanti* is an aorist active participle. The aorist is a past, completed tense, and the use of the participle indicates the presence of a temporal aspect. Verse 14 of the same passage makes reference to the redemption that took place on the cross:

> Col. 1:14 *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:*

And this is precisely the moment in time at which the qualification for participation in the inheritance of the saints took place. Christ obtained the forgiveness of sins, paying for it with His blood, and thereby qualified the elect people to participate in the inheritance. The qualification and enabling to participate in the inheritance of the saints, in the kingdom of God, is the merit of Christ and of Christ alone.

C) The means of qualification for the inheritance is the blood of Christ shed for the sins of the elect people. This qualification for the inheritance signifies justification and sanctification. Let us note that, contrary to MacArthur's heresy, the sanctification that qualifies for the inheritance concerns regenerate persons (whereas MacArthur sets conditions of sanctification before the unregenerate sinner!).

At the same time, sanctification is not synergistic in character, with man and God co-operating in the work of sanctification, but monergistic. Sanctification is accomplished by God, through

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[177] John Wycliffe, as quoted in J.H. Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 5.

the word of grace, through *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24), that is, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

> Acts 20:32 *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which* ***is able*** *(δυναμένῳ* dynameno*)* ***to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified****.*

D) The Greek δύναμαι *dynamai* used in the text means *to have power*. Only the word of grace has the power to build up the Christian and to give him an inheritance among those who, like him, are sanctified. Again, by the commending to God of those who are to possess the inheritance of the coming kingdom, we arrive at the conclusion that the responsibility for the success of the undertaking rests not on man but on God.

God in His sovereignty furnishes the saved sinner with all the means of grace, building him up in such a way that the inheritance can be received by him. And, as John Gill observed,

> *"By the inheritance is to be understood the heavenly glory, which is the free gift of grace, and not obtained by the works of the law, nor by the industry of men."*[178]

The sinner receives this heavenly glory through the application of the means of grace, which is the Gospel. God opens the sinner's eyes so that he believes, and by faith appropriates to himself all the merits of Christ and is thus qualified to enter the kingdom! It is faith that sanctifies the sinner, qualifying him to participate, and not his works.

> Acts 26:17-18 17. *Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,* 18. *To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins,* ***and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me****.*

E) The qualification for the inheritance shows itself in a concrete way. It is the creation in the regenerate sinner of a new, inward, spiritual nature, which unfortunately must live in a sinful, outward body. This new nature has a number of characteristics:

- it is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17);
- it is a quickened spirit (John 3:6);
- it is incorruptible (1 Pet. 1:23);
- it is renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16);
- it cannot sin (1 John 3:9).

F) The qualification for participation in the kingdom cannot have as its cause human acts such as mourning, acts of righteousness or making the heart pure. These are rather works of the

[178] John Gill, *Exposition of the Bible*, on Acts 20:32.

Holy Spirit in the sinner who is regenerate, and therefore qualified for participation in the kingdom.

This is all the more evident since these two natures – the sinful, carnal one and the spiritual, holy one – being in constant conflict, fight for the person (that is, for the mind, heart, affections, thoughts and so on). Hence the reference to a complete sanctification accomplished by the hand of God, to the preparation of man for the coming of Christ:

> 1 Thess. 5:23 *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body* ***be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ****.*

G) The key error of MacArthurism and its fans is that it merges the doctrine of justification with that of sanctification. The complete sanctification of the whole person does not mean a state of perfection in this world, since that is impossible. Complete sanctification will, however, take place at the coming of Christ, that is, at the Last Judgement, when every saved man will receive a glorious, fully sanctified body. Thus the whole man will be fully sanctified in his person, without conflict between the two natures – the carnal and the spiritual.

The fruit of the conflict of the inward, spiritual man with the outward man, with the members of the body, is sin.

> Rom. 7:20-23 20. *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.* 21. *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.* 22. *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:* 23. *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*

H) Progress in sanctification does not, therefore, refer to the improvement of the sinful nature (for that cannot be improved), nor to the improvement of the new nature (for that is perfect). Progress concerns the person, and in particular the thoughts and the acts flowing from those thoughts.

Growth in grace and the mortification of sin inevitably lead to a change in the quality of the person. The person led by the Spirit overcomes the flesh (Gal. 5:17; Rom. 8:13; 2 Cor. 2:14) and thereby receives the witness of adoption and of the inheritance of the kingdom of God.

> Rom. 8:15-17 15. *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* 16. ***The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God****:* 17. ***And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ****; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

Confessions, Catechisms, Canons

Having considered the arguments from Holy Scripture refuting the heresy of MacArthurism, let us now turn our faces towards the Reformed Confessions. As we know, the Confessions are

neither a new revelation nor a supplement to the Word of God, but merely a systematisation of theology. And here too the allegations of *"the greatest theologian of our times"* are overthrown.

Let us recall that MacArthur argues that there is a series of principles and laws, the observance of which qualifies the sinner to enter the kingdom, that is, to obtain salvation. What do the Reformed documents say about this?

A) According to the Belgic Confession, entry into the kingdom, that is, the salvation of the sinner, rests solely on the finished work of Christ, which secures the forgiveness of sins and the imputation to the sinner of the righteousness of Christ. In addition, the Confession rightly informs us that in the matter of salvation the sinner cannot rely on his own merits and personal obedience to laws and principles, since only the righteousness of Christ is the foundation of the sinner's salvation. This is what we may call the ground that qualifies the sinner to enter the kingdom.

> *"We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied: as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works. And the same apostle saith, that we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ. And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in him."*[179]

In reality MacArthur's doctrine strips God of glory by ascribing to the sinner abilities that make self-salvation possible, and also completely overthrows the doctrine of salvation by grace alone; it therefore strikes at the Reformed *sola gratia*.

B) The Canons of Dort, which refute the heresy of Arminianism, will speak to us plainly. The Synod rejected the teaching of the necessity of displaying piety, humility and meekness as conditions of election to eternal life. Although MacArthur does not express himself on the question of the doctrine of election, nevertheless as a pseudo-Calvinist he affirms this doctrine and must understand that the kingdom is destined only for those who have been included in the decree of election. Appealing to the following article of the Synod is therefore fully justified:

> *[The Synod rejects the errors of those] Who teach: That in the election unto faith this condition is beforehand demanded that man should use the light of nature aright, be pious, humble, meek, and* ***fit for eternal life****, as if on these things election were in any way dependent. For this savours of the teaching of Pelagius, and is opposed to the doctrine of the apostle, when he writes: "Among whom also we all had our*

[179] Belgic Confession, Article 23, "Wherein Our Justification before God Consists".

*conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (**Eph. 2:3**).*[180]

Let us note that the language of the Arminians and the language of MacArthur are almost identical. Both the Arminians and MacArthur set before the unregenerate sinner the condition of humility, piety and meekness, and the fulfilment of this condition results in salvation – whereas Scripture teaches us that before regeneration humility and meekness are impossible, since everyone is a child of wrath.

The Synod unequivocally described the teaching of the Arminians, and therefore the teaching of MacArthur, as the teaching of Pelagius, condemned as heresy in 431 at the Council of Ephesus. Both heresies contain the doctrine of the ability to use the natural light as sufficient for the piety and humility necessary for obtaining salvation.

C) The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks directly of the relation between the justification which Christ accomplished on the cross and the qualifying of sinners to participate in the inheritance which is the kingdom of heaven. There is no place here for human obedience to laws and principles as a condition of entering the kingdom.

> *"The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in **the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him**."*[181]

Still more interesting is the fact that the inheritance, and therefore the capacity to participate in it, is linked by the Confession with the doctrine of election. The way in which the two theological truths are connected is as follows: the inheritance is purchased and secured for the elect, while the means qualifying them to participate in the inheritance, which is the kingdom of heaven, is the sacrifice of Christ, reconciling the elect to God by satisfying God's justice.

Now MacArthur, by teaching human abilities of obedience, meekness and so on, in reality denies the doctrine of election, since if the unregenerate sinner is able to do this, then everyone is able to do it, and therefore everyone can enter the kingdom.

D) The last witness in the case will be the Canons of Dort. Here the source of the heresy is shown, namely free will. This alleged free will denies the satisfaction of Christ and puts in its place new conditions, the fulfilment of which is necessary for the final salvation of the sinner. Thus MacArthur in reality teaches Arminianism.

> *"Who teach: That Christ by His satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that He merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as He might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to*

[180] Canons of Dort, Head I, Rejection of Errors 4.
[181] Westminster Confession of Faith 8.5.

> *pass that either none or all should fulfil these conditions. For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do* ***in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained****, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error."*[182]

The Fathers and Reformers of the Church

The heart of the Pelagian theology professed by MacArthur is the free will of man. Only the free will of man makes him responsible for his salvation (even if this is merely a *"parallel truth"* in relation to God's sovereignty).

A spiritually dead man can make himself humble and righteous, cleanse his heart and, by these efforts, enter the kingdom and become saved. Hence salvation is by a merit of the sinner preceding regeneration.

A) Bede the Venerable, who lived at the turn of the seventh and eighth centuries, would certainly not have agreed with this view:

> *"No one receives the gift of justification on the basis of merits arising from works previously performed, since the gift of justification comes from faith alone."*[183]

B) Martin Luther too would have had serious objections to the heresy of Pelagianism promoted by MacArthur – to salvation by the sinner's works. Luther did not regard (and rightly so) fallen men as possessing free will, and therefore as able to merit salvation. In fact, for Luther the whole concept was laughable, and the very concept of merit was blasphemy to him:

> *"If someone were to tell you that that is free which can do something by its own power, but only in one direction, namely evil, while in the other direction, namely good, it can indeed do something, yet not by its own power, but only with the help of another – could you, my friend, keep from laughing? For in this way I shall easily prove that a stone or a log has free will, since it can move both up and down: by its own strength, however, only downwards, and upwards only with the help of another."*[184]

C) Let us finally turn our attention to the Epistle to the Corinthians and to the reasoning of John Calvin:

> 1 Cor. 6:9-11 9. *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,* 10. *Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.* 11. *And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

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[182] Canons of Dort, Head II, Rejection of Errors 3.

[183] Bede the Venerable (673–735), quoted in Gerald Bray (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 11, p. 31.

[184] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 45).

Commenting on this passage, John Calvin drew attention to the essence of the relation between repentance and salvation. Repentance, that is, turning from sin and turning to Christ as Saviour, follows regeneration; hence it can never constitute the ground of justification, nor a condition of entering the kingdom. Calvin stated:

> *"The ungodly, then, shall inherit the kingdom of God, but only if they first turn to the Lord in true repentance and thus cease* ***to be wicked. Although conversion is not the ground of forgiveness, we know that none can be reconciled to God but those who repent."***[185]

Conclusions

Conclusions: God, and God alone, is responsible in salvation for bringing the sinner into the kingdom. First, the qualification for the inheritance took place on the cross, when Christ paid for the sins of His people, thereby accomplishing the justification of that people. Secondly, He does it by imputing the righteousness of Christ to the sinner at the time of his regeneration and incorporation into the body of Christ. Thirdly, the citizen of the kingdom becomes a person with two natures: the spiritual and perfect one, which will survive death, and the carnal one, of which the saved sinner is rid at death, while at the resurrection he will receive a new, glorious and sinless body.

Thus the qualification for entry into the kingdom does not take place by cleansing the old nature, nor by getting rid of the remnants of sin from the new nature. Those entering the kingdom are, during their lifetime, still sinful, but nevertheless sanctified and qualified for participation in the inheritance by God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is therefore a Trinitarian work, in which the sinner is nothing other than a passive recipient of the gift of grace. Those who are regenerate, yet still sinners in the flesh, have complete assurance of the inheritance and of participation in the kingdom, since they are spoken of as those who, even during their lifetime, are seated in heaven in Christ.

> Eph. 2:5-6 5. *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)* 6. ***And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:***

How is this possible? Christ, as the head of His body, the Church, seated in heaven, waits until His whole body, that is, the Church, becomes complete. The death of the saved sinner immediately transfers him into glorious, heavenly fellowship with Christ. This is the first resurrection.

Access to the kingdom is through Christ alone, and not through Christ and the sinner's good works, through obedience to laws and commands, as the heresy of MacArthurism teaches.

> Eph. 2:18 *For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

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[185] John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9*.

MacArthur openly proclaims that we are saved by our works and does not even mention faith in Jesus Christ. What makes this still more abominable is the fact that he does so in the form of an explanation that rejects salvation by grace alone (*sola gratia*).

MacArthur does not once mention the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to believers and received by faith alone. To tell an enquiring sinner that his or her obedience to God's commandments is the way to enter and remain in the Kingdom of God is pure heresy.

We are not saved or justified by our obedience to God's Law, by humility, meekness, mercy, mourning, a pure heart and so on. No sinner is, no sinner can be, deserving of salvation or of justification before Jehovah. It is an insolent thing to teach such a heresy while pretending to be a Calvinist. He is a counterfeit; he is not Reformed.

Chapter 10 – Repentance as the Functional Gospel in the Heresy of Lordship Salvation

The Basis of the Error

> Gal. 1:8 *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

Characteristic of the heresy of Lordship Salvation is the redefinition of the Gospel and its adaptation to a concept that equates sanctification with justification. Since MacArthur, like his Roman Catholic mentors and brethren in the faith, sees no difference between these two distinct works of the cross of Christ, and regards them as one whole, he of necessity includes the sinner's good works in what is, according to him, the saving gospel.

This is in effect the exclusion of Christ from the biblical Gospel and His replacement by the sinner himself. Since the necessary ground of the sinner's justification before God is perfect obedience to God's Law (which is impossible, cf. Rom. 2:13-15) and the necessity of satisfaction for sins (which is impossible, cf. Ps. 49:7-9), the requirement laid upon the sinner of complete obedience to the *"new principles"* – as MacArthur earlier calls them – becomes the accomplishment of the work of redemption, and thereby proves to be the *"good news"* of the heresy of Lordship Salvation, which its adherents have been obliged to preach to every creature.

> *"From Athens to Los Angeles, first century to twenty-first century and everywhere in between, repentance may not be popular, but it's still the gospel. Teach this post-Christian culture about God and then command repentance. That's* **the only message we have; without it, no one would be saved**.*"*[186]

> *"[Repentance is] radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience."*[187]

In MacArthur's soteriological system repentance is defined as complete obedience to God and a definitive turning from evil. Thereby the gospel, understood as repentance, proves to be a merit of man, without which no one can be saved. A simple substitution of the expanded definition of repentance into the definition of the gospel results in legalism:

> *"From Athens to Los Angeles, first century to twenty-first century and everywhere in between,* **radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience** *may not be popular, but it's still the gospel."*

And again the sinner's own works become the condition of salvation:

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[186] John MacArthur, *How to Confront the Culture*.
[187] John MacArthur, *What Is Biblical Repentance?*

> *"Teach this post-Christian culture about God and then command* ***a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience****. That's the only message we have; without it, no one would be saved."*

MacArthur's blasphemy is a definitive denial of the cross of Christ. The allegedly *"saving gospel"* preached by the heresiarch is in reality the sinner's good works:

- *a definitive turning from evil* (ceasing to sin);
- *a resolute turning to God in total obedience* (fulfilling the commands of the new law).

If a follower of MacArthur desires salvation, he must cease to sin and fulfil the commands of the new law, or persevere in the principles necessary for the sinner's salvation. And – horror of horrors – this is the only gospel of this system.

Refutation

The Gospel refers to God's work of the justification of the sinner before God as Judge. God, in His infinite holiness, justice and majesty, punishes even the least sin with death (Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:56). Therefore the justification of the sinner, together with the preservation of God's justice, is a necessary condition of salvation unto eternal life. The distinction between justification and sanctification is obvious:

- justification is the legal declaration of our innocence, our being reckoned legally sinless, and this is the heart and content of the Gospel;
- sanctification is our release from the prison of sin, and is a consequence of the Gospel.

Release from sin is not part of the legal declaration of innocence. Release from sin is rather a consequence of the legal declaration. The justified man is consequently set free from the power of sin. On the other hand, release from the power of sin is not the ground of the sinner's justification before God.

To use an illustration: the ground for releasing a prisoner from his cell is the judicial decree pronounced by the judge. But leaving the cell has no influence on the judge's decree of release. On the other hand, an attempt to leave the prison cell without a valid decree of release would be a crime.

The motive of the heresy is to make justification dependent on sanctification, so that sanctification becomes the condition of justification. The error teaches: the sinner is justified on the basis of, and thanks to, his holiness.

Holy Scripture

Since the only foundation of theology is the written Word of God, which contains all the wisdom necessary for discerning the truth (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Ps. 119:160; Isa. 8:20), let us turn our eyes to it, applying the sword of Scripture to the doctrines of John MacArthur.

A) The Gospel as defined in the Word of God has nothing in common with the sinner's works. It has everything in common with the historical event described by Holy Scripture: the life, death and resurrection of Christ, who thereby paid for the sins of the people elect to salvation.

The objective Gospel of Jesus Christ excludes human obedience and works altogether. Let us hear the apostolic testimony:

> 1 Cor. 15:1-4 1. *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;* 2. *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* 3. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received,* ***how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures****;* 4. *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

Paul sums up the saving Gospel, wholly excluding from it human works and faith. Faith is not part of the Gospel but an abiding conviction of the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel concerns a historical event to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. The Gospel is complete and perfect and concerns the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. The Gospel informs the sinner of the unique experience and achievement of Christ:

- Christ, God incarnate, voluntarily laid down His life and died in order to save sinners deserving of death, which was His intended purpose. He did not die for sins He had personally committed; He Himself had no sins.
- Christ died as the substitute of the sinners elect to salvation and was the only Substitute acceptable to God. Through the death of Christ those for whom Christ laid down His life are free from punishment and can never be condemned, because they are justified.
- The Old Testament foretold this through the prophecies concerning Christ, fulfilled by Jesus.
- The crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ are historical events, not a myth or a story of the Holy Spirit detached from reality.
- Death was conquered by Christ through Christ's death and resurrection, the eternal plan of God.

The Gospel is not an encouragement to anything, but a declaration of the work of Christ. The Gospel does not concern human experience, water baptism, church membership, repentance and faith, the sinner's definitive turning from evil, or surrender and obedience to Jesus Christ. None of the above are elements of the Gospel, nor are they what the sinner contributes to salvation.

B) The Gospel is neither the power nor the work of man, but the power of God effectually saving those subject to that power, that is, all the elect.

> Rom. 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for* ***it is the power of God unto salvation*** *to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

The original Greek text teaches δύναμις … Θεοῦ *dynamis … Theou – the power of God*. The Gospel is an instrument, or means, of divine origin (not human!) serving the salvation of

sinners through faith. Faith merely embraces what God has done in His power to save sinners. Faith, too, is

- a gift of grace (2 Pet. 1:1; Phil. 1:29; Acts 18:27; Eph. 2:8; 6:23; 1 Cor. 3:5; Rom. 12:3; Acts 13:48),
- and God's working in man (John 6:29; Gal. 5:22; Acts 3:16; Col. 2:12; Eph. 1:19-20).

Hence faith is not an element of the Gospel *sensu stricto*, but a means of grace secured by Christ on the cross (1 Cor. 2:2, 5; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:19-21).

C) The Gospel refers to the complete obedience of Christ, which is the ground of the sinner's justification before God. The complete obedience necessary for the sinner's justification before God embraces both the life of Christ and His death as a martyr.

> Rom. 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so* ***by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous****.*

D) By the life and death of Christ we understand His complete and perfect obedience to God's Law, which was fulfilled by the Messiah in its entirety:

> Phil. 2:8 *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and* ***became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross****.*

> Rom. 10:4 *For Christ is* ***the end*** (Gr. τέλος *telos* – fullness, fulfilment) *of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

E) The complete obedience of Christ is especially visible in the time of His awaiting the cross and of the pouring out upon Him of God's wrath as the punishment for the sins of the elect people. Christ, as truly man and truly God, has two wills – a truly human and a truly divine will. That human will, though distinct, was and is completely obedient to the divine will:

> Matt. 26:39 *And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:* ***nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt****.*

F) The whole suffering of Christ, both that which He experienced through His life and that at His death on the cross, is a necessary element of redemption, that is, of satisfaction made to God for the sins of the elect people by the Substitute, Jesus Christ. This obedience of Christ is, of course, imputed by faith to those elect to salvation.

> Heb. 5:8-9 8. *Though he were a Son,* ***yet learned he obedience*** (ὑπακοήν *hypakoen*) ***by the things which he suffered****;* 9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them* ***that obey*** (ὑπακούουσιν *hypakouousin*) ***him****;*

G) The obedience of Christ is designated by the Greek word ὑπακοή *hypakoe* – *submission, fulfilment*. For Christ the fulfilment of God's Law was a process of its experiential realisation

through works in accordance with the standard of the perfect Law. Since Christ perfectly fulfilled the Law, He became perfect and became the cause of eternal salvation (His obedience is the ground of the sinner's justification). This is the part of the Gospel called justification.

On the other hand, the obedience of Christ's followers is designated by the word ὑπακούω *hypakouo* (to hearken to Christ) and refers us to the visible result of salvation; it is not part of the Gospel but its result. It is a reference to the doctrine of sanctification.

H) This righteousness wrought out by Christ is imputed to the elect sinners, while the sins of those elect to salvation were imputed to Christ and punished by God. The Son of God bore the punishment. In this way the sinner becomes righteous (acquitted) before God, and God remains a just Judge:

> 2 Cor. 5:21 *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*
>
> Gal. 3:13 *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*
>
> Rom. 4:6-7 6. *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness* ***without works****,* 7. *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*
>
> Rom. 3:26 *To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

I) Scripture speaks in antithesis to MacArthur's heresy, which makes the sinner's good works part of the gospel, the ground of his salvation and therefore of his justification. Paul rejected all his works as a ground of justification; he therefore regarded them neither as an element of salvation nor as the content of the Gospel (as he plainly expressed in 1 Cor. 15:1-3, not including the sinner's obedience in the message). Indeed, the Apostle counted good works as worthless dung (just as Isaiah calls good works filthy, cf. Isa. 64:6).

> Phil. 3:8-9 8. *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,* 9. ***And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith****:*

MacArthur includes the dung of human works in his version of the gospel, trying to cover sin with the filthy garment of the sinner's own righteousness, contradicting the Word of God:

> Rom. 8:3 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

J) Since the Gospel is rooted in an unconditional covenant based on God's promise of salvation, no works of the sinner can constitute a component of it. In Gen. 15:1-6 we see God's gracious initiative in choosing Abraham and securing blessings without preconditions, crowned by the bestowal on Abraham of the gift of faith and his being reckoned righteous (*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness*, verse 6).

The promise given to Abraham was unconditional, as was Abraham's justification. Further, God's mercy (that is, in principle, the Gospel) is shown to be unconditional (*my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed*, Isa. 54:10).

The Gospel leads us straight to the doctrine of Election. God, out of the great multitude of sinners, unconditionally chose some for salvation. These are all those who have been included in the unconditional promise made by God.

> Eph. 1:4 *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*
>
> Acts 2:39 *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

Since God's promise of salvation is unconditional – and therefore so too is the Gospel, which is the proclamation of this promise fulfilled through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – defining the gospel as the obligation to turn from evil and to turn to God in total obedience denies the unconditional nature of God's promise and overthrows the Gospel, replacing it with pure legalism. Man becomes his own saviour.

K) The definition of *metanoia* that MacArthur uses is also legalistic and has nothing in common with the Bible. According to the heresy, *metanoia* (translated as repentance) is *a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience*.

In the New Testament the word μετάνοια *metanoia* is used 22 times, and a careful analysis of this word of God gives us a different definition (confirmed by Luther and Calvin):

Metanoia is an abiding change of doctrinal thinking, understood as faith – specifically, faith in Christ as the crucified and risen Messiah who will return to the Last Judgement as Judge – accompanied by the abandonment of false religion with its ceremonies. At the centre of repentance stands the cross of Christ. Repentance is the faith, arising from regeneration and leading to eternal life, in the sin-cleansing merits of Christ, God incarnate, the Triune God, together with an understanding of one's personal sinfulness and inability to justify oneself, which is threatened with judgement and eternal perdition. It is a sobering up and an awakening from the spiritual anaesthesia of sin, especially of legalism – a sobering that brings one to one's knees before Christ with a plea for justification. *Metanoia* is not a feeling, nor a change of conduct, nor obedience and surrender, nor a turning from evil. Although all of the above follow from repentance, they are not repentance.

Conclusions: Holy Scripture, our only rule of faith, cries out against a theology that includes the sinner's good works in the Gospel. The Gospel of Holy Scripture is a historical event – the

life, death and resurrection of Christ on behalf of the elect sinners. In reality, the inclusion of the sinner's good works in the Gospel is a denial of the Gospel and the historic failure of the Roman church. Like MacArthur, Rome defines penance as a change of life, a break with sin and obedience to God, which leads to the evangelical hope of mercy. The ground of hope of the Roman Catholic sinner, like the ground of hope of the adherents of Lordship Salvation, is the sinner's good works, as the catechism of the religion of Antichrist assures us:

> *"Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His grace."*[188]

Confessions, Catechisms, Canons

God has commanded all members of the Church to be of one faith: *that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you* (1 Cor. 1:10), which is inseparably bound up with the necessity of the existence of confessions of faith. Confessions of faith do not replace the Word of God, but are a systematic summary of theology. Over the centuries confessions of faith grew, because the Christian faith was attacked by a number of heresies. Confessions of faith refute heresies, bringing the truth to light. And as such they will serve us excellently in refuting the heresy of Lordship Salvation.

A) The Augsburg Confession is the basic confession of faith of the Lutheran Church and one of the most important documents of the Protestant Reformation. The Augsburg Confession was drawn up in German and Latin on 25 June 1530. As a milestone of the Reformation, the Confession defines the Gospel not as obedience to God, as MacArthur does, but as God's promise of grace:

> *"We cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works or satisfactions, but we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith."*[189]

What is more, faith is not a *"work"* of man:

> *"To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these… God gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."*[190]

B) The Heidelberg Catechism will be our second witness. The definition of the Gospel in the Heidelberg Catechism is found in Part II, entitled *Of Man's Deliverance*. Having stated that God's justice must be satisfied (Q&A 12) and that man cannot make satisfaction to God (Q&A 13 and 14), it shows us the only Mediator, God incarnate, Jesus Christ (Q&A 15–18), as the One

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[188] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1431.
[189] Augsburg Confession, Article IV.
[190] Ibid., Article V.

who was able to secure satisfaction, since He was absolutely righteous and in His power surpassed all creatures. Question 19 of the Catechism asks: *Whence knowest thou this?* And it answers:

> ***"From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son."***[191]

Hence the Gospel is the work of Christ's life, His death and resurrection in the place of sinners: full obedience to the Law and to the will of God during the suffering of the crucifixion. Further, the Catechism defines the content of the Gospel as the merit of Christ, which made possible the bestowal of grace by God on sinners, to whom the gift of righteousness, and thereby the forgiveness of sins, is imputed. Of course, nothing about penance and human obedience…

> *"…that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits."*[192]

The Catechism, too, defines the Gospel as a promise. In order to be saved, the Christian does not have to be obedient to God and keep away from sin, does not have to change; what he must do is believe the promises of the Gospel:

> *"What is then necessary for a Christian to believe? All things promised us in the gospel…"*[193]

C) The Canons of Dort, the main line of defence of the Reformed Faith against the heresy of Arminianism (that is, the Roman heresy resurrected within the Reformation), call the Gospel the tidings concerning the Messiah[194] and concerning the merits of Christ, through which the sinner is delivered from God's wrath and destruction.

> *"The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it and embrace Jesus the Saviour by a true and living faith, are by Him* ***delivered from the wrath of God and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them****."*[195]

The Canons also define the Gospel as a promise. The preaching of the promise of the Gospel should be accompanied by a call to faith and repentance. This, however, is not the content of the Gospel, but the instrument that makes it possible to lay hold of the merits of Christ and to appropriate them.

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[191] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 19.
[192] Ibid., Q&A 21.
[193] Ibid., Q&A 22.
[194] Canons of Dort, Heads III/IV, Article 6.
[195] Ibid., Head I, Article 4.

> *"Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel."*[196]

Moreover, the Canons call the Gospel the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul;[197] therefore human obedience to principles or law is excluded from the Gospel. Man can do nothing to be born from above (John 1:13; 3:3-7).

D) The Westminster Confession teaches us that the concept which maintains that the sinner's obedience is the only saving gospel should arouse revulsion in every Reformed Christian. The assertion that the righteousness which is the ground of salvation could have anything to do with the sinner's obedience, or even with his faith, is a horror introduced into theology by Rome and rejected by the Reformation. The only obedience, and no other, that has significance in the justification proclaimed in the Gospel is the obedience of Christ.

> *"Those whom God effectually calleth, He also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God."*[198]

E) The Helvetic Consensus arose in 1675 in order to refute the heresy of Amyraldianism, according to which Christ died for all (though He gives faith only to the elect – which was merely Amyraut's ruse, a bow towards the Reformation).

The Amyraldians rejected the doctrine of the total depravity of man, basing their argument on a merely moral, and not a natural, inability. By excluding the natural inability to do good and teaching its moral counterpart, they in reality proclaimed man's natural ability to do good, including obedience to God. This position is very close to MacArthur's heresy, who likewise rejects the total depravity of man and requires obedience as an element of the Gospel.

> *"Those who are called to salvation through the preaching of the Gospel can neither believe nor obey the call, unless they are raised up out of spiritual death by that very power whereby God commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and God shines into their* ***hearts with the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*** *(2 Cor. 4:6)."*[199]

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[196] Ibid., Head II, Article 5.
[197] Ibid., Heads III/IV, Article 17.
[198] Westminster Confession of Faith 11.1, "Of Justification".
[199] Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), Canon 21.

It is obvious that the call to salvation refers here to the acceptance of the truth about Christ, who lived, died and was raised for the elect sinners.

Conclusions: the Reformation condemns the heresy of Lordship Salvation and condemns John MacArthur as a preacher of a strange gospel and a strange christ. With all firmness, the Reformed confessions do not support the idea of obedience to God (to the law, or to any principles of God) as an element of the good news.

The Fathers and Reformers

> 1 Cor. 4:6 *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us* **not to think of men above that which is written**, *that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*

The Reformation is an important voice in the discussion of the Gospel, since the Holy Spirit worked mightily through many theologians, reviving the Church almost from the ashes. The false gospel of Rome, which made salvation dependent on obedience to the Law, and in particular on the sacraments, struck terror into the hearts of the adherents of papism. Against this the Reformation, guided by the pure milk of the Word of God, launched a victorious doctrinal war, recovering the knowledge of the Gospel, of the cross and of the Saviour. On the foundation of *sola Scriptura* the doctrine of salvation was rebuilt: *sola gratia*, *sola fide* and *solus Christus*.

A) Philip Melanchthon summed up the theology of the Reformation by setting the Gospel against the doctrine of salvation by works, including works of obedience to Christ:

> *"The Gospel is a promise." It is not a threatening law, but a friendly invitation – good news – giving comfort to the terrified, forgiveness to sinners and faith to the doubting.*[200]

B) John Calvin, leading the reader from the biblical narrative and the messianic promises to the Gospel itself, shows that our eternal life and present comfort rest in Christ alone. According to Calvin, the heart and definition of the Gospel is the work of Christ. Let us note that Calvin does not once include human works in the Gospel – for example, obedience or turning from sin. In Calvin's summary the Gospel concerns the merit of Christ and the benefits flowing from it for the saved.

> *"It follows that every good thing we could think or desire is to be found in this same Jesus Christ alone. For He was sold, to buy us back; captive, to deliver us; condemned, to absolve us; He was made a curse for our blessing, a sin offering for our righteousness; marred, that we might be made fair."*[201]

[200] Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* (Wittenberg).
[201] John Calvin, *The Weight, Beauty and Comfort of the Gospel* (preface to the Olivétan New Testament).

C) John Gresham Machen, a Presbyterian theologian who lived in the USA at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, regarded as the last great theologian of Princeton, speaks of the Gospel as knowledge of the salvation wrought by God, and not by the sinner:

> *"What I need first of all is not exhortation, but a gospel; not directions for* ***saving myself, but knowledge of how God has saved me. Have you any good news? That is the question that I ask of you.***"[202]

The Fathers of the Church

> 2 Tim. 2:2 *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

Since all generations of Christians rest on one and the same source of truth, namely the written revelation in the form of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, it is reasonable to assume that in fundamental matters – and the question of the Gospel is such a matter – agreement as to the message should be obvious. The Reformers could be sure that their understanding of the Gospel accorded with the teachings of the ancient church, because they taught the same Gospel.

Let us hear what the fathers of the church had to say on the subject of the Gospel of grace.

A) Clement of Rome lived in the first century and was born at about the time of the crucifixion of Christ. He is named by Irenaeus and Tertullian as bishop of Rome, holding office from 88 until his death in 99.[203] He is regarded as the first of the Apostolic Fathers of the Church, one of the three most important together with Polycarp and Ignatius of Antioch.[204]

Here are Clement's words on the Gospel, defined as the finished work of Christ, from which he excludes works of obedience and piety:

> *"And we too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith…"*[205]

B) Ambrosiaster, our second witness, is the name given to the unknown author of a commentary on the Epistles of St Paul, written between A.D. 366 and 384. His fourth-century testimony of faith excludes the merits of man from the Gospel of salvation.

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[202] J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*.
[203] Elizabeth A. Livingstone (2005), "Clement of Rome, St", *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, p. 363.
[204] Henry Palmer Chapman (1908), "Pope St. Clement I", in Charles Herbermann (ed.), *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4.
[205] Clement of Rome (30–100), *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 32.4.

> *"Thus it has been determined by God, that whoever believes in Christ will be saved and will receive the forgiveness of sins, not by works, but by faith alone, without merit."*[206]

C) Theodoret of Cyrus said in the fifth century that salvation is not by obedience, but that grace is given through faith, which itself proceeds from God's grace. Also important is his rejection of purity of life (and therefore of obedience to law or principles) as an element of the Gospel and of salvation:

> *"All that we bring to grace is our faith. But even in this faith the grace of God has itself become our enabling factor. For Paul adds: 'and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast' (Eph. 2:8-9). It was not of our own will that we came to faith after being called, and even when we had believed, He did not require of us* ***purity of life, but, approving faith alone, God bestowed on us the forgiveness of sins****."*[207]

Conclusions: the early church excluded from the Gospel radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil and a resolute turning to God in total obedience. This teaching is foreign to the church of the first centuries. No one – except perhaps the heretical Ebionites and, before them, the Judaizers – ever dreamt of making the sinner's good works, and especially obedience to God and a break with sin, part of the good news. These things were indeed preached, but as the result of the saving Gospel. Let us recall the position of the Judaizers:

> Acts 15:1, 5 1. *And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said,* ***Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved****.* 5. *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying,* ***That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses****.*

MacArthur does not, it is true, make God's Law an element of the saving Gospel, but he nevertheless enjoins it indirectly. Departure from sin is possible only through the keeping of the Law, *for sin is the transgression of the law* (1 John 3:4).

Here the mask of the heresy falls, revealing the old Pharisaic filth…

Summary

Entry into the marriage of the Lamb, inaugurating the period of eternal rest and salvation, has its requirement, which is the possession of a wedding garment. The illustration is obvious and refers to the spotless robe of righteousness; this is especially evident in the type found in Isaiah:

> Isa. 61:10 *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for* ***he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of***

[206] Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 1:4.
[207] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Interpretation of the Fourteen Epistles of Paul*, FEF 3:248–249.

> ***righteousness**, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*

The wedding garment is the robe of righteousness. This righteousness is the righteousness of Christ Himself, as is shown by Christ's transfiguration on the mount (*And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them*, Mark 9:3). It is a righteousness not of this world (no fuller can attain such a quality), perfect and therefore infinitely white.

This robe of righteousness will be necessary in order to enter into the joy of God. The metaphor of the wedding garment preserved in the text of Matthew 22:11-13 teaches us the necessity of possessing the perfect righteousness required in order to remain in the presence of God.

- Without the wedding garment there is no fellowship with God (Matt. 22:12-13).
- The wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ (Mark 9:3).
- The wedding garment, that is, the righteousness of Christ, is put on the wedding guests; it is the garment of salvation (Isa. 61:10).

The garment provided by Christ, the garment that secures salvation, is perfect, perfectly white, because the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner is perfect. An attempt to add to this righteousness the sinner's good works, even the best works, is a defiling of the righteousness of Christ – figuratively speaking, a defiling of the garment.

> Isa. 64:6 *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;*

The heresy of Lordship Salvation patches Christ's wedding garment with the good works of man. Patches are sewn on: of good works arising from commands and commandments, of bearing the yoke of Christ, of principles and preconditions for attaining salvation, of penitential merits, of complete and perfect surrender and obedience to Christ. O how defiled is this garment, full of the sinner's *"righteousnesses"* – even those done with the support of the Holy Spirit!

To MacArthur and his followers we may dedicate the warning spoken by C.H. Spurgeon, which perfectly conveys the danger of clothing oneself in a wedding garment of one's own righteousnesses:

> *"If there be but one stitch in the celestial garment of my righteousness which I am to put in myself, I am lost. If there be one drachma in the price of my redemption which I am to pay, I must perish. If there be one contingency – one 'if', 'though' or 'but' – about my soul's salvation, I am a lost man. But this is my confidence: the Lord who began will perfect. He has done it all, He must do it all, He will do it all. I cannot rely on what I*

> *can do, nor on* ***what I have resolved to do, but entirely on what the Lord will do. 'The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me.'"***[208]

Yet even if the whole world were to follow the teaching of the heretic and apostate[209] John MacArthur, our confidence is in the Lord Jesus. As Luther observed, there have already been periods in the church as black as night, when only a handful of Christians held fast to the orthodox truth:

> *"Look at the period of the Arians, when scarcely five Catholic bishops were preserved in the whole world, and even they were driven from their sees, while everywhere the Arians reigned in church offices and with church titles; and yet under the rule of these heretics Christ preserved His Church, but in such a way that it was not at all regarded or treated as the Church."*[210]

We believe that, just as under the rule of the heretical Arians God preserved His Church in Jesus Christ, so too it will be with the elect who are in bondage to the yoke of the heresy of Lordship Salvation.

We call upon all the followers of John MacArthur to forsake MacArthur's gospel, accursed by God, ***which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ*** (Gal. 1:7). We call upon you to repent and believe the Gospel, God's simple message, which excludes human works as the ground of salvation.

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[208] C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, on Psalm 138:8.

[209] Besides the heresy of Lordship Salvation, MacArthur also professes the heresy of the well-meant offer. This is open evidence of apostasy, just as was the case with the Genevan theologians after they abandoned the truth of God's absolute sovereignty. Angus Stewart, in his article "The Geneva Theses (1649): A Recently Discovered Gem", unsparingly calls that defection by its name: "When Geneva turned from the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God, who is 'the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns', the 'broken cisterns' of Amyraldianism, well-meant offer theology and the like, 'that can hold no water', it departed from its creeds and apostatised." A proper understanding of the meaning of the word apostate will enable us to identify MacArthur's tragic fate: "Apostates are not people who were Christians and then ceased to be. From the beginning apostates were never Christians, and only later did it become clear that they were not Christians." [Dr Michael Kruger, *What is an Apostate?*]

[210] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 33).

Chapter 11 – Salvation by Works

MacArthur's Lemmings

> **2 Pet. 2:1-3** 1. *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.* 2. *And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.* 3. *And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

A belief has become established in our culture in the phenomenon of the mass suicide of lemmings, small creatures driven by instinct, throwing themselves into the water only to drown.[211] This rather peculiar phenomenon provides an irresistible metaphor for human behaviour: someone who blindly follows the crowd – even towards disaster – is called a lemming. Over the last century this myth has been invoked to express modern fears about how individuality can be submerged and destroyed by mass phenomena such as political movements, consumer culture or religious sects.

Religious sects, although they may give the appearance of being *"democratic"* and may even have a board made up of many *"elders"*, are in reality run by domineering leaders, supported by a group bound to the guru by a community of interests. Peter warned against crafty leaders, and John MacArthur is a model fulfilment of this warning:

- he acts out of covetousness,
- he preaches feigned words,
- he acts privily, pretending to be a Reformed theologian,
- he brings in damnable heresies,
- many follow in his footsteps, some thoughtlessly, others out of calculation.

Before we proceed to the culmination of our consideration, namely MacArthur's direct expression of the view of salvation by works (a damnable heresy), we shall recall the false theology of his that has been exposed so far and shine a little light on the finances, in the hope that MacArthur's lemmings will wake from their stupor and forsake the road to destruction onto which they have more than once been unwittingly led by their beloved theologian.

[211] In reality lemmings do not commit mass suicide. This particular myth is, however, based on certain real behaviours of lemmings. Lemmings experience a large increase in population every three or four years. When the concentration of lemmings in one place becomes too great, a large group will set off in search of a new home. Lemmings can swim, so if they reach a water obstacle such as a river or lake, they may try to cross it. Inevitably some of them drown. But that can hardly be called mass suicide.

A Family Business

> 1 Tim. 6:6-8 6. *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* 7. *For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* 8. *And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

While MacArthur's followers zealously defend their guru, it turns out that the emperor has no clothes, and his nakedness is uncovered by covetousness. Thanks to the theological naivety and ignorance of his hearers, his unparalleled eloquence and his talents (not only as a writer but also as an organiser), MacArthur has earned millions of dollars; hence he is indisputably known as

> *"one of the most influential preachers of his time. MacArthur has written or edited more than 150 books. His MacArthur Study Bible has sold more than a million copies and received a Gold Medallion Book Award."*[212]

Covetousness

Let us begin with covetousness. As befits a *"modest"* preacher who is content with food and a roof over his head (1 Tim. 6:6-8; Heb. 13:5), according to the tax returns of GTY in the years 2005–2015 the preacher beloved by the world earned 3.5 million dollars, and in 2012 alone almost 506 thousand dollars. After 2015 MacArthur's church stopped filing tax returns.[213] Income from the church is not the only source of support of *"the greatest theologian of our times"*. To this must be added fees from conferences, royalties from book sales, speaking honoraria, donations and so on. As a result MacArthur has three luxurious *"roofs over his head"*, one of them with a swimming pool and tennis court – that is, as the classic poet suggests, he leads a life of *"golden modesty"*.

MacArthur's son, Mark MacArthur, a former member of the board of *Grace Community Church*, was charged in connection with a fraud involving 16 million dollars.[214]

MacArthur's son-in-law, Kory Welch, draws huge profits from a lucrative contract after an *"honestly"* won tender for the media services of the sect, and thanks to the laundering of money through non-profit institutions. We are still speaking of millions.[215] *"A family business"* is a truly delicate description of the practice carried on under the cover of Christian orthodoxy.

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[212] Wikipedia.

[213] *The Roys Report*.

[214] The Securities and Exchange Commission charged the firm Criterion Wealth Management Insurance Services and its co-owners Mark MacArthur and Robert Gravette with failing to disclose financial conflicts of interest when recommending certain investments to their clients (religionnews.com). Moreover, "the defendants kept their clients in the dark about all material facts, and in so doing breached their fiduciary duties and defrauded their advisory clients", the SEC complaint stated (julieroys.com).

[215] "According to individual audits and 990 forms for the tax years 2003–2016, Welch and his companies received payments of more than 7 million dollars from Grace to You – the non-profit media organisation serving his father-in-law's church, Grace Community. In 2003 Welch received 145,700 dollars for 'production of materials'. Then in 2006, as director of video production at Grace to You, he received total compensation of 130,228 dollars. By 2007, the last year in which he appeared in the audit, Welch was receiving a formal salary from Grace to You as director of television broadcasting, compensation worth 103,677 dollars." These moneys were paid out by the president of The Master's

Feigned Words

As for his wealth, MacArthur has acquired it by preaching invented lies, theological innovations and novelties – proverbial *"strange tales"* – or, as Scripture plainly calls it, by feigned words. It must be admitted here, in accordance with the truth, that MacArthur has essentially no equal as far as oratorical ability is concerned. Yet he uses this gift in an evil way and evidently from evil motives. Besides the heresy of dispensationalism invented in the nineteenth century, this is proved by his false theology, which tickles the ears of the great majority of his hearers and is contrary to Holy Scripture:

- revivalist pressure,
- the denial of the complete sufficiency of Scripture,
- a church without a covenant,
- the denial of the power of original sin,
- the denial of total depravity,
- the denial of the sovereignty of God,
- biblical paradoxes.

The above concepts have no place in Reformed theology; they are ordinary invented tales tickling the ears of unregenerate hearers, fables that secure crowds of admirers for those who preach them. Unlike MacArthurism, the Christian Church is amillennial and believes in spiritual renewal, the unity of the Old and New Covenants, original sin, a depravity that is total and at the same time absolute, and the complete, absolute sovereignty of God, basing everything on the inerrant written Word of God, free of paradoxes and complete here on earth.

Damnable Heresies

On the canvas of these basic theological errors, and thanks to media propaganda, under the cover of Christian, Calvinist orthodoxy, MacArthur has managed to smuggle damnable heresies to a wide audience. These are, respectively:

- soteriological conditionalism,
- preparationism,
- common grace, or Kuyperianism,
- the well-meant offer of salvation, or Marrowism,
- works-faith.

Yet all this is merely a prelude. Although MacArthur is a master of camouflage, having considered his most important doctrinal statements we arrive at the heart of the problem: at the centre of MacArthur's beliefs stands the doctrine of Arminianism, which presupposes salvation by works. Although he certainly preaches in many other places salvation by faith

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University, an institution under the direct influence of the sect of Grace Community Church led by John MacArthur (hometownstation.com).

alone without the sinner's works, he nevertheless at the same time preaches salvation by faith in the sinner's own good works. This is his typical Hegelian dialectical doublethink.[216]

Bearing in mind that we are still moving in the sphere of the doctrine of *"Lordship Salvation"*, let us consider MacArthur's statements directly expressing salvation by the sinner's works, beginning with salvation by faith in good works, obedience to God's lordship, the obtaining of justification by good works, and ending with an assurance of salvation based on the sinner's good works.

Salvation by Works

> Gal. 1:6-7 6. *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:* 7. *Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.*

MacArthur's conviction, shown earlier, of penance as the gospel proves, according to the definition of penance (and not repentance!) that he has adopted, that the good news preached from Athens to Los Angeles, from the first to the twenty-first century, does not concern the historical, finished work of Christ – His life and death for the sins of the elect, and His resurrection – as Scripture teaches (1 Cor. 15:1-4). This *"MacArthurian good news"* refers to the sinner himself. In order to attain salvation it is not so much a matter of believing in the work of Christ and His merits (though this too is an object of the faith of MacArthur's lemmings); rather, in order to be saved one must, respectively:

→ undergo a radical conversion,

→ transform one's nature,

→ definitively turn from evil,

→ resolutely turn to God in total obedience to the new principles.

The transformation of nature that MacArthur has made a condition of salvation is a human act consisting in cleansing oneself from sin, the proper application of sorrow, weeping and lamentation, and humbling oneself before God; and all of this has been laid down as a condition of entering the Kingdom, according to MacArthur's commentary on James 4:1 and 4:7-10. These injunctions are carried out by the unregenerate man, and since what is spoken of are conditions of entering the Kingdom, this is a rather extensive list of good works whose performance makes regeneration possible, in accordance with the teaching of John: *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3).

But that is not the end. The soteriology of the heresy of *"Lordship Salvation"* develops dramatically, pouring out upon MacArthur's followers, who are subject to God's judgement, just like the seven vials of God's wrath upon an apostate world.

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[216] The Hegelian dialectic is a method of reasoning that proceeds from a given concept (thesis) to its opposite (antithesis) and unites them in a higher quality (synthesis).

1) Saving faith is complete and perfect surrender to Christ, while Christ ruling completely over the sinner is the essence of the gospel:

> *"…Yielding completely to Christ's lordship is that vital an element of true saving faith, and therefore the proclamation of His lordship is an absolutely necessary component of the true gospel."*[217]

2) The sinner's obedience to God is a precondition of salvation, while Christ's rule over the sinner is an integral part of the message of salvation:

> *"He made it clear that obedience to divine authority is a prerequisite of entry into the kingdom. Clearly, His lordship is an integral part of the message of salvation."*[218]

3) Justification is obtained by good works with the co-operation of God:

> *"Paul replies in Romans 2:13: 'For not the hearers of the law are just before God but the' – what? – 'the doers of the law shall be justified.' Now, the word for 'hearers' is not the usual word. It is not the normal word akouō, which is the normal word to hear, but it is akroatēs, and it's used specifically of pupils who hear because they're constantly in the educational process. Vincent, I think, is a good translation of it, 'Those whose business is hearing,' and that is exactly what the Jews did in the synagogues, didn't they? They heard and heard and heard and heard, it was read to them week after week after week after week after week, it was explained to them and they were literally professional hearers. But it is not to the ones who make it their business to do the hearing,* **it is to the ones who make it their business to do the doing that justification comes***. […]*
>
> *And here's the terrible frustration, because you can't obey it in your own strength. And so he literally backs them into a corner, you see. I mean you're constantly hearing but you don't do it. And so there is a judicial verdict against you. But the one who does – verse 13 – the doer of the law shall be justified, not the hearer. So God requires perfect obedience. God requires a manifestation of righteousness but no one can do that. Thus, the law is meant to drive us to a point of desperation where* **we turn to God for the power to do what we otherwise couldn't do***."*[219]

4) Therefore obedience to Christ, that is, the sinner's good works securing his justification, constitutes the only evidence of salvation:

> *"…The validation of salvation is a life of obedience. It is the only possible proof that a person really knows Jesus Christ."*[220]

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[217] John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Polish edition: *Ewangelia według Jezusa*, p. 36).
[218] Ibid. (Polish edition, p. 227).
[219] John MacArthur, *Principles of God's Judgment, Part 4b*, gty.org.
[220] John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Polish edition: *Ewangelia według Jezusa*, p. 217).

> *"…one's assurance of salvation […] should rest on the reality of a changed life marked by obedience, a love for Christ and His righteousness, and a hatred for sin."*[221]

Definition of the Error

> 2 Pet. 3:16 *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

The Arminian John MacArthur was brought up in the tradition of Methodist theology, which lays stress on the sinner's good works. Having become acquainted with the doctrines of R.C. Sproul, steeped in Amyraldianism, he resolved to incorporate them into his system of belief. As we observe, in this system faith is the good works of man, and good works are the ground of entry into the Kingdom. Good works (performed with God's help and enabling) are also the ground of the sinner's justification, and ultimately the sinner's good works are the only assurance of the sinner's salvation. From beginning to end *"Lordship Salvation"* makes the sinner's good works the essence of salvation and of the gospel.

At best this is soteriological synergism, that is, co-operation between God and the sinner in salvation. At worst it is a monergism understood as the self-salvation of the sinner himself by good works. The sinner, by performing good works, merits entry into the Kingdom; by self-justification through good works he merits salvation; and his assurance of salvation is secured by good works. This is a copy of Roman Catholic doctrine:

> *"Hence we can hope in the glory of heaven promised by God to those who love Him and do His will. In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere 'to the end' (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1541) and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ. In hope, the Church prays for 'all men to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:4). She longs to be united with Christ, her Bridegroom, in the glory of heaven."*[222]

The Roman Catholic heresy regards the performance of good works in accordance with God's commandments as the ground of the sinner's justification before God.

> *"The fact of special privilege, expressed in the possession of the Law – more than that, even the scrupulous reading of the Law in the liturgy of the synagogue or in private devotion at home, and a detailed knowledge of it – none of this of itself in any way ensures justification. […] According to the Jewish teachers, merely hearing the Law is not enough; a man must also keep its commandments. Few would have objections to Paul's argument at this point."*[223]

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[221] John MacArthur, *How Can I Be Sure I'm Saved?*, gty.org.
[222] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1821.
[223] *Biblia Tysiąclecia z komentarzami* [The Millennium Bible with Commentary], 5th edition, Wydawnictwo Pallottinum 2006, p. 4468.

This is an interpretation identical with MacArthur's. What is even more interesting, the language of MacArthur and of Rome is almost identical.

Roman Catholicism:

> "*[to be justified] merely hearing the Law is not enough; a man must also keep its commandments*" … "*[heaven is the reward] for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ*."

MacArthur:

> *"the doer of the law shall be justified, not the hearer. So God requires perfect obedience… [hence] we turn to God for the power to do what we otherwise couldn't do."*

The vicious circle of good works as the ground of justification and salvation is MacArthur's real problem, which has been given an appearance of orthodoxy by the use of Reformed phraseology. MacArthur speaks of salvation by faith alone without works, while at the same time making good works the object of faith. It is therefore a distinction without a difference, since faith is works. He also speaks of justification on the ground of the merit of Christ, while at the same time making the sinner's good works the ground of the sinner's justification before God. Francis Turretin will be helpful in identifying the problem; he rightly distinguished a verbal error (concerning only expressions) from a real error (concerning the doctrines themselves).[224] Turretin was referring here to the question of the definition of terms; hence it is the sense, and not the words, that gives the fault its character. As Jerome says:

> *"The Gospel is not contained in the words of Scripture, but in its sense; not on the surface, but in the marrow; not in the leaves of the words, but in the root of reason."*[225]

MacArthur's error is not verbal, but concerns the sense and substance of theology. MacArthur's fault concerns definitions. In every case where MacArthur uses such terms as *"gospel"*, *"repentance"*, *"faith"* and *"justification"*, and *"assurance of salvation"*, they are to be understood in the same sense in which MacArthur understands them. All of them have been defined as good works:

a) the gospel is the sinner's good works;

b) faith is the sinner's good works;

c) justification is the sinner's good works;

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[224] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 1.14.12.
[225] Jerome of Stridon, *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Galatas* 1 [PL 26.347], on Gal. 1:11-12.

d) assurance of salvation is the sinner's good works.

The level of theological absurdity of the heresy of *"Lordship Salvation"* has reached its peak. According to the definitions adopted by MacArthur, the whole sense – or, to use Jerome's analogy, the marrow and root – of the gospel, salvation, justification, faith and assurance of salvation is the sinner's good works. These definitions must be borne in mind every time MacArthur speaks of salvation.

Refutation

> Gal. 2:5 *To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*

Although apostate Christianity, including pseudo-Reformation and neo-Calvinism, joyfully acknowledges the doctrine of *"Lordship Salvation"* as the crown of Christian theology,[226] orthodoxy from the beginning – from the Fathers of the Church to the Reformers – positively cries out against MacArthur's proposal. This cry rests on the centuries-long struggle of the defenders of the Gospel against legalists, waged in defence of the truth on the basis of the rightly divided Word of God.

Let us first overthrow the mistaken interpretation of the text of Romans 2:13:

> 13. *(**For*** (γὰρ *gar*) *not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

A) MacArthur believes that the text of Romans 2:13 concerns doing the law in order to be saved, which is possible through being enabled to do so by God. He observes that it is not the hearer but the doer of the law who is saved, and that the unregenerate man must turn in an act of desperation to God for the ability to manifest righteousness. In effect, the manifestations of righteousness performed by the sinner, with God's enabling, are the ground of the sinner's justification.

According to the heretic, the law does not lead to Christ as our righteousness. The law leads man to God, so that He may enable man to do the law, and that perfectly, and salvation is by the perfect works of the law through God's enabling.

B) Rome has always appealed in a similar way to the text of Romans 2:13 in support of its doctrine that the sinner is in fact justified by faith and his own good works. MacArthur agrees with Rome's interpretation. According to MacArthur, justification comes only to those who fulfil the law. Justification is therefore by faith, which is a good work, and by fulfilling the law. It is thus salvation not so much *from faith to faith* (Rom. 1:17) as *"from good works to good works"*.

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[226] For example, J.I. Packer considers MacArthur's doctrine to be "good, clear, convincing and edifying": "What is in dispute is the nature of faith." Quoted by John W. Robbins in *The Gospel According to John MacArthur* (reformowani.info).

C) The correct interpretation of the text of Romans 2:13 is obvious. All who are without the righteousness of Christ will perish. According to verse 12, both the Gentiles will perish:

> 12. *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law:…*

and the Jews:

> *…and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;*

Verse 13 begins with the conjunction γάρ *gar*, followed by the negation (οὐ *ou*), used to express an explanation of what precedes it. Thus the assertions of verse 13 are the proof of the thesis of the second clause of verse 12. Those who have sinned in the law (and all have sinned) will be judged by the law, because not the hearers of the law shall be justified before God, but its doers. This gives the following logical construction:

> *as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law,* **because** *not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

That, in order to be justified by the works of the law, it is necessary to do it perfectly throughout one's whole life is proved by other passages of Scripture:

> Gal. 3:10 *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written,* ***Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them****.*

> James 2:10 ***For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.***

Since all sin, all are guilty. Breaking one commandment is equivalent to breaking all the commandments. Hence upon everyone who desires justification by the law an impossible condition is laid: he must fulfil the whole law. And since he is unable to do so, he is cursed by the law. Why? Let us again recall Paul's argument – because

> ***not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.***

Let us now proceed to the refutation of MacArthur's remaining arguments, turning our eyes to Scripture and to the Reformation.

Holy Scripture

Holy Scripture unanimously acknowledges the mercy and free love of the heavenly Father towards us as the efficient cause of our eternal salvation. The material cause is Christ, through the obedience by which He purchased righteousness for us. The formal or instrumental cause is faith.

The Gospel

A) The Gospel is the objective, propositional, certain and eternal truth about Christ; therefore the Gospel is not an experience and can be found only in the written Word of God. Since the obedience of man does not belong to the proposition of the Gospel contained in the Bible, it cannot, as such, constitute an element of the Gospel. Moreover, the Gospel is historical in character, whereas the sinner's good works do not belong to the history of the Gospel. The Gospel cannot refer to the sinner's good works, since the Gospel concerns the finished work of Christ:

- His incarnation,
- His sinless life,
- His satisfying death for the sins of the elect,
- His resurrection,
- Holy Scripture as the source of this truth.

B) The decisive text is, of course, the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which clearly defines the Gospel by which one is saved as the historical testimony of Holy Scripture concerning the incarnation, life, death on the cross for the sins of the elect and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

> 1 Cor. 15:1-4 1. *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;* 2. *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* 3. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;* 4. *And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*

Faith

A) Repentance, μετάνοια *metanoia*, is used 22 times in the New Testament. It is an abiding *change of mind* in doctrine, understood as faith – specifically, *faith* in Christ as the crucified and risen Messiah who will return to the Last Judgement as Judge – accompanied by the abandonment of false religion with its ceremonies. At the centre of repentance stands the cross of Christ.

Repentance is the *faith*, arising from regeneration and leading to eternal life, in the sin-cleansing merits of Christ, God incarnate, the Triune God, together with an *understanding* of one's personal sinfulness and inability to justify oneself, which is threatened with judgement and eternal perdition. It is a *sobering up* and an awakening from the spiritual anaesthesia of sin, especially of legalism – a sobering that brings one to one's knees before Christ with a plea for justification. *Metanoia* is neither a feeling nor a change of conduct, though both follow from it.

B) Faith and repentance are essentially synonyms. The definition of faith does not include the sinner's good works, e.g. his obedience:

> Heb. 11:1 *Now faith is* **the substance** (Gr. ὑπόστασις *hypostasis* – assurance) *of things hoped for,* **the evidence** (Gr. ἔλεγχος *elenchos* – conviction of) *of things not seen.*

Faith is the assurance and conviction of the biblical propositions concerning Christ. He who, on the basis of Scripture, has a firm conviction of the life, the death for the sins of the elect and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is saved. That works of obedience do not save and are not an element of saving faith, and that only faith in the biblical propositions of Holy Scripture concerning the life and death of Christ saves, is attested by John the Apostle, who sums up the whole content of the written Gospel as the basis of saving faith. It is thus a somewhat expanded and developed body of knowledge, confirming what 1 Corinthians 15 teaches in great simplicity.

> John 20:31 *But these* [things] *are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God;* ***and that believing ye might have life through his name****.*

C) The ability to discern and acknowledge the biblical propositions concerning the life and work of Jesus Christ is crucial for salvation. Salvation takes place in the truth, which is the so-called *modus operandi*[227] of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, and therefore in the salvation of the sinner. Eternal life is obtained by those who have known the true God. The knowledge of the true God, who is Jesus Christ, takes place through the knowledge of the objective truth of the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ, and the acceptance of this truth proves regeneration. The carnal, and therefore unregenerate, man does not possess this ability.

> 1 John 5:20 *And we know that the Son of God is come, and* ***hath given us an understanding****, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*

> 1 Cor. 2:14 *But the natural man* ***receiveth not*** (οὐ δέχεται *ou dechetai* – does not accept) *the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because* ***they are spiritually discerned****.*

Justification

A) The justification of the sinner takes place through the imputation to the sinner of the merits of Christ through faith in those merits. Faith appropriates the merits of Christ, making the obedience of Christ the property of the sinner by way of imputation.

> Rom. 4:5-7 5. *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.* 6. *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,* 7. *Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*

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[227] *Modus operandi* means, freely translated, "manner of working".

Rom. 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*

1 Cor. 1:30 *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*

2 Cor. 5:21 *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

1 Pet. 2:24 ***Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.***

B) Justification takes place through faith, which excludes works; hence defining faith as works is a denial of the Gospel and a declaration of justification by the sinner's good works. To demonstrate the nonsense of this assertion, let us consider the text of the Epistle to the Galatians, first in its original wording and then substituting MacArthur's definition in place of the word *"faith"*.

First the original text:

Gal. 2:16 *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but* ***by the faith of Jesus Christ****, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

Now the same text with the change:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by complete and perfect surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ, even we have completely and perfectly surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by complete and perfect surrender to the lordship of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

The nonsense of the above assertion is all too plain. One cannot be justified by obedience to principles established by Christ and at the same time not be justified by works.

C) The ground of the sinner's justification before God is not the sinner's obedience to Christ. The Apostle, rejecting the false gospel of salvation by works propagated among the Galatians – understood as an attempt at obedience to the ordinances of the Law – calls it a refusal to obey the truth about Christ. Thus obedience to Christ understood as the ground of justification is contrary and antithetical to obedience to the truth about Christ crucified in the place of the elect sinners.

Gal. 3:1 *O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you,* ***that ye should not obey the truth****, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?*

D) Since the ground of the sinner's justification is faith in the merits of Christ, the sinner's assurance of salvation is also based on the merits of Christ. Human works cannot give assurance of salvation, though they can strengthen it to some degree.

> Heb. 11:1 *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*
>
> Rom. 5:1 *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*
>
> Eph. 1:13 *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,*

E) No works of righteousness, even those performed by a Christian – and still less (which is impossible) by an unregenerate person – can be either the ground of salvation, or a requirement for entering the Kingdom, or a condition of participating in it. Isaiah calls works filthy, because they are performed by a man dwelling in the flesh. Job too acknowledges himself to be wicked, recognising the shame in his works of righteousness, defiled, alas, by the flesh. Since Job's best works cannot justify him, Job says that he will not lift up his head, i.e. he will not place his trust in them.

> Isa. 64:6 *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*
>
> Job 10:15 *If I be wicked, woe unto me; and if I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head. I am full of confusion; therefore see thou mine affliction;*

Assurance of Salvation

A) Assurance of salvation is assurance of justification. Therefore, since the obedience of Christ is required for the sinner's salvation, the sinner's assurance of salvation also rests on this very obedience of Christ, which secures for the sinner a perfect righteousness. The obedience and the blood of Christ shed for the sins of those elect to salvation are the means that provide assurance of salvation.

> 1 Cor. 1:30 *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*
>
> Rom. 5:1 *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*
>
> Rom. 5:9 *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

> Rom. 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*

B) Hence the inclusion of the sinner's obedience in faith and making it a requirement of salvation can result only in the terror of doubts that drive one to madness.

> Ps. 73:18-19 18. *Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.* 19. ***How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.***

Conclusions

Holy Scripture teaches that no good works of the sinner can constitute a condition of salvation, a condition of entering the Kingdom, or a condition of justification, and that they are not even the principal ground of assurance of salvation.

Catechisms, Confessions, Canons

The Gospel

A) The Gospel is defined in the Heidelberg Catechism as the promises set out in a body of biblical propositions which must be confessed for salvation. These propositions have been listed as the basis for the further development of doctrine by consequence and analogy.[228] The Gospel, then, according to the Catechism, refers to the basic articles of the faith and has nothing to do with the sinner's obedience.

> Question 22: *What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?*
>
> ***All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us*** *(that is, the so-called Apostles' Creed).*[229]

Question 84 of the same Catechism shows that the content of the Gospel is the promises of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the merits of Christ. Hence the Gospel refers to the merits of Christ and not to the sinner's obedience.

> *"…as often as they by a true faith embrace the promise of the gospel, God really forgives them all their sins, for the sake of Christ's merits."*[230]

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[228] "That what is to be believed is not found here in so many words (*autolexei*) and directly, but implicitly, by consequence and analogy: for example, although nothing is said of the grace of God and the satisfaction of Christ, there is nothing about providence, preservation and the like, yet they may easily be deduced from what is said." [Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 1.14.22]

[229] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 22. Here is the text of the Apostles' Creed contained in the answer to Question 23: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; I believe an holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."

[230] Ibid., Q&A 84.

B) The Westminster Confession emphasises that the Gospel bestows liberty on believers; it therefore refers not to the works or obedience of the sinner himself, but to the merits of Christ, by which He purchased all the gifts of grace.

> *"The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law…"*[231]

C) The Canons of Dort define the Gospel as the promise of eternal life received through faith in Christ crucified. It therefore refers to the merits of Christ's suffering and to Himself as the substitutionary sacrifice for the elect sinners. Nothing about the obedience of the sinner himself.

> *"Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life."*[232]

Faith

A) According to the Heidelberg Catechism, true faith does not consist in obedience to Christ, but in complete assurance of the forgiveness of sins and deep trust in Christ, who paid for those sins with His holy blood. Faith has nothing to do with the obedience of the sinner himself. Faith is used here as a synonym of assurance and is defined by objective truth, that is, by the knowledge and acceptance of the propositions of the Word of God.

> Question 21: *What is true faith?*
>
> ***True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also a firm confidence which the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.***[233]

B) The Belgic Confession identifies faith not as the ground of justification, but rather as the instrument that enables the sinner to appropriate the merits of Christ in order to be set free from sin. It is therefore a faith that saves on account of the obedience of Christ, and not of the sinner himself.

> *"…faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins."*[234]

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[231] Westminster Confession of Faith 20.1.
[232] Canons of Dort, Head II, Article 5.
[233] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21.
[234] Belgic Confession, Article 22.

C) The Westminster Confession calls faith the alone instrument of justification, through the receiving of the righteousness of Christ.

> *"Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification…"*[235]

Justification

A) Contradicting MacArthur's heresy on the question of justification, the Westminster Confession teaches that justification cannot come from obedience to the Gospel, that is, from the sinner's works, but has its only source in the obedience of Christ imputed to the sinner by faith.

> ***"…nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God."***[236]

B) The Belgic Confession sets out justification as proceeding from all the works of Christ which He accomplished in the place of the elect sinners, thereby making satisfaction to God. Faith is again treated instrumentally and not as the ground of the sinner's justification. By faith the sinner receives the merits of Christ as his own.

> *"Therefore we justly say with Paul, that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith without works. However, to speak more clearly, we do not mean that faith itself justifies us, for it is only an instrument with which we embrace Christ our righteousness. But Jesus Christ, imputing to us all His merits and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness."*[237]

C) The Canons of Dort condemn the obedience of faith, understood as a condition of salvation, as Pelagianism, an accursed heresy hatched in hell. At the same time, professing the obedience of faith proves the ineffectiveness of the cross of Christ, of which, instead, only a potential efficacy is implied.

> *"Who teach: That Christ by His satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that He merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man,* ***and to prescribe new conditions as He might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man****, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfil these conditions. For these adjudge too*

[235] Westminster Confession of Faith 11.2.
[236] Ibid. 11.1.
[237] Belgic Confession, Article 22.

contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error."[238]

D) The Sandomierz Confession teaches us that justification is imputed through faith. Faith, too, has been stripped of any ability to justify by itself. This confession treats faith as the whole Reformation does, that is, instrumentally.

> *"…justification before God is ascribed to faith, because by faith, and by nothing else, we receive Christ as our righteousness – and not on account of our faith (which is also a work), but on account of Christ Himself, given to us by God for our righteousness and redemption."*[239]

Assurance of Salvation

A) The Belgic Confession shows that assurance of salvation cannot be based in the least degree on the sinner's good works understood as the ground of salvation, since in that case man would be driven only by doubts (like all MacArthur's followers). Why? Because no good work of the sinner can either merit salvation or contribute to it. It is also worth noting the language of the Confession. The addition of human works to the ground of salvation not only plunges one immediately into torment but also destroys the merit of Christ, making it ineffectual. And that is precisely what the MacArthurites do!

> *"Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found* ***our salvation*** *upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Saviour."*[240]

B) The Westminster Confession speaks of an assurance that is neither illusory nor changeable, since it does not rest on human works.

> *"This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made…"*[241]

Conclusions

The Confessions and other Reformed documents speak with one voice with the Word of God. No good works of the sinner can constitute a condition of salvation, a condition of entering the

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[238] Canons of Dort, Head II, Rejection of Errors 3.
[239] Sandomierz Confession (1570), Chapter 15.
[240] Belgic Confession, Article 24.
[241] Westminster Confession of Faith 18.2.

Kingdom, or a condition of justification, and they are not even the principal ground of assurance of salvation.

The Testimony of the Church

Finally, let us hear selected statements of the Fathers of the Church and early Christian testimonies. The Epistle to Diognetus teaches justification by imputation, with the simultaneous *"taking away"* of the sinner's wickedness. Here we have the doctrine of double imputation, in which the sinner's obedience is completely excluded from justification:

> *"O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! That the wickedness of many should vanish in the righteousness of One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors!"*[242]

Jerome of Stridon, known to all for his translation of the New Testament into Latin, lived at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries. Jerome confirms that the faith of the church in his day rejected the sinner's works as the ground of justification:

> *"Justification does not depend on the merits of man, but on the grace of God, who, without the works of the law, accepts the faith of believers."*[243]

Again, that one cannot pay for justification with one's own merits we shall hear from the lips of Leo, the very eloquent bishop of Rome in the fifth century. Interestingly, Leo is regarded by Roman Catholics as a pope…

> *"Justification is not paid for with human merits, but is simply given as a free gift."*[244]

Bede the Venerable, doctor and renewer of the church – and also, interestingly, a proponent of the sphericity of the earth – at the turn of the seventh and eighth centuries still rejected the merits of man as the ground of justification, making faith the instrument that embraces the merits of Christ:

> *"No one receives the gift of justification on the basis of merits arising from works previously performed, since the gift of justification comes from faith alone."*[245]

As regards an assurance of salvation based on the sinner's good works, Calvin enters a firm objection here. Good works understood in this way lead only to uncertainty, that is, to unbelief.

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[242] *Epistle to Diognetus* (2nd century), 9.
[243] Jerome of Stridon, *Against the Pelagians* II.7, Migne, PL 23:543A–B.
[244] Leo of Rome (400–461), *Sermon* 49.3.
[245] Bede the Venerable (673–735), quoted in Gerald Bray (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 11, p. 31.

"If they begin to estimate it [their security] by their good works, nothing will be weaker or more uncertain; works, when estimated by themselves, no less proving the divine displeasure by their imperfection, than His good-will by their incipient purity."[246]

[246] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.14.18.

Chapter 12 – Final Conclusions

> 2 Cor. 11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

MacArthur's subterfuge has become plain to us. The definitions given by the deceiver himself – the definitions of faith, salvation, repentance and justification – are entirely contrary to the teaching contained in Holy Scripture and, of necessity, to the Reformed faith. Although this man moves freely within Reformed terminology, he does not profess the substance of that theology. He makes his faith merely superficial, and he does so in order thereby to win over hearers who think they are *"Reformed"*.

As to the substance and sense of his theology:

According to MacArthur, the new birth is synonymous with complete surrender. The new birth is both a completely sovereign act of God and, at the same time, man is responsible for the new birth. Here is the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Both doctrines are true, and human logic is unable to reconcile them.

MacArthur claims that salvation is a monergistic work of God, i.e. that only one party (God) works in salvation. But if God does His part in the work of salvation and man must do his part (complete surrender and obedience), we are dealing with two parties working in salvation – we are speaking of pure synergism.

God + man = two working parties. A sovereign monergism with two working parties… is like a two-wheeled unicycle.

The attempt to escape this is as follows: MacArthur claims that it is God who gives man faith, repentance and complete surrender. So God gives obedience, but man still has to obey. Salvation, that is, being righteous before God, therefore follows from the obedience of two parties – of man and of the Messiah – which is excluded by the Epistle to the Romans:

> Rom. 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so* ***by the obedience of one*** (Jesus) ***shall many be made righteous****.*

MacArthur teaches another gospel (which, according to the curse of the Epistle to the Galatians, *"is not another"*). The heart, that is, the essence and indispensable element, of MacArthur's other gospel is Christ's lordship over the believer, obtained through the sinner's personal surrender to the lordship of Christ. Perhaps it is worth saying it once more:

The so-called gospel of MacArthur is the sinner's surrender to the lordship of Christ, and saving faith is precisely the ability to surrender to Christ.

Of course, by the lordship of Christ is to be understood a set of new *"standards of God and the commandments of Christ"*, which can be borne *"while supported by the Holy Spirit"*,[247] and

[247] John MacArthur, *Kingdom Living Here and Now*, p. 67.

which are the ground of the sinner's justification before God – with the support, of course, of God's working:

> "*the law is meant to drive us to a point of desperation where we turn to God for the power to do what we otherwise couldn't do*" and "*it is to the ones who make it their business* ***to do the doing*** *that justification comes*".[248]

Also an essential element of MacArthur's *"saving"* gospel of the lordship of Christ is what is done by the sinner himself…

> "*…radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience*."[249]

It is worth mentioning at this point that MacArthur has not withdrawn his books from sale, has not added an erratum to them, and has not removed his sermons from the official website of his pseudo-Reformed organisation. This is therefore the official position of himself and of the sect of *Grace Church* which he leads. MacArthur is not the only crafty preacher promoting salvation by works. Norman Shepherd, the heretic of the Federal Vision, formulates his defence of the heresy of justification by works in remarkably similar language, which will slip past orthodox Reformed believers:

> *"Justifying faith is a living and active, a penitent and obedient faith."*[250]

Shepherd means that justification is by faith and the working of faith, by repentance and obedience, that is, by the works of faith – just like MacArthur. The faith of Shepherd, the representative of the heresy of the Federal Vision, and the faith of MacArthur are sister faiths. The former is destroying the Reformed Churches, the latter the Baptist pseudo-Reformation.

David Engelsma is right in saying that the most powerful argument promoting the heresy of justification by faith and the works of faith consists simply in this: that since the Bible teaches that true faith is always a working faith – a faith that loves God and the neighbour, and therefore performs works of love – justification is the work of God through a working faith. To this emphatic declaration the heretics usually add the warning that if the faith which claims to be the means of justification is not a working faith, it is not true faith at all.[251]

Had MacArthur lived at the time of the Reformation, it would probably never have come about. On the other hand, had Martin Luther lived in our times, he would certainly have directed his sharpest criticism against MacArthur:

> *"Everywhere you find something with which to oppose Holy Scripture. No wonder, since you do nothing but search out what you might oppose. At one time you take*

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[248] John MacArthur, *Principles of God's Judgment, Part 4b*, gty.org.
[249] John MacArthur, *What Is Biblical Repentance?*
[250] Norman Shepherd, "Faith and Faithfulness", in Andrew Sandlin (ed.), *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p. 65.
[251] David J. Engelsma, *The Gospel Truth of Justification* (Polish edition: *Ewangeliczna prawda usprawiedliwienia*, p. 167).

> *refuge in the expositions of the ancient authors, at another in the absurdities of reason; and where neither the one nor the other serves you, you consider views that are foreign or related, if only you need not keep to the passage of Scripture at hand."*[252]

Were the Apostle Paul living in our times, he would say:

> Acts 13:10 *And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*

We call all the followers of the heresy of MacArthurism to repentance.

Oslo, 25.10.2026

[252] Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Polish edition: *O niewolnej woli*, p. 95).