

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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## Janus Alive and Well: Dr. R. Scott Clark and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel by Sean Gerety

Dr. R. Scott Clark, a professor of theological and church history at Westminster Seminary California, is viewed by many as the standard bearer of Reformed confession-alism. Besides being a recognized opponent of the Federal Vision and New Perspectives theology, Clark is also a devoted follower of the late Cornelius Van Til, and, not surprisingly, is an unapologetic defender of logical paradox in Scripture. Along these lines Clark repeatedly challenged me to read his contribution to the *festschrift* for Robert Strimple, *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine* where he defends the so-called “well-meant” or “free offer” of the Gospel. Clark complained on his website, “do the opponents of the Free Offer ever read anything but their own in-house stuff?”<sup>1</sup> Well, I certainly do, but I was hard pressed to believe Clark could bring anything new to the table not already covered by men like John Murray or Cornelius Van Til, not to mention John Frame, David Bahnsen, David Byron, James Anderson, along with a whole host of other lesser defenders of biblical paradox.

So I purchased the Strimple *festschrift*. Surprisingly in his piece, “Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology,” Clark does not even try to distance himself from the title “Janus” given to defenders of the “well-meant offer” by the late Herman Hoeksema. According to Hoeksema:

Janus was a Roman idol, distinguished by the remarkable feature of having two faces and looking in two opposite directions. And in this respect there is a marked similarity between old Janus and

the first point [of the “Three Points of Common Grace” adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924]. The latter is also two-faced and casts wistful looks in opposite directions. And the same may be asserted of the attempts at explanation of the first point that are offered by the leaders of the Christian Reformed Churches. Only, while the two faces of old heathen Janus bore a perfect resemblance to each other, the Janus of 1924 has the distinction of showing two totally different faces. One of his faces reminds you of Augustine, Calvin, Gomarus; but the other shows the unmistakable features of Pelagius, Arminius, Episcopius. And your troubles begin when you would inquire of this two-faced oracle, what may be the exact meaning of the first point. For, then this modern Janus begins to revolve, alternately showing you one face and the other, till you hardly know whether you are dealing with Calvin or Arminius.<sup>2</sup>

For Hoeksema those who defend the “well-meant offer” are two-faced in that they seek to maintain conflicting aspects of two contradictory and mutually exclusive systems of salvation. While at times “well-meant offer” defenders appear to be Calvinistic in their belief in God’s sovereign election and particular atonement, they also maintain a belief in the universal desire of God for the salvation of those God predestined to perdition; the reprobate. It is this combination of particularism and pluralism, or simply Calvinism and Arminianism that make up the two faces of Janus.

<sup>1</sup> <http://heidelberg.wordpress.com/2008/11/28/hyper-calvinism-rationalism/>.

<sup>2</sup> “A Triple Breach in the Foundation of Reformed Truth,” [http://www.prc.org/pamphlets/pamphlet\\_76.html](http://www.prc.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_76.html).

Oddly, in addition to not distancing himself from Hoeksema's charge, Clark does not even define what is meant by the well-meant offer, sometimes called the "free offer," until his concluding paragraphs and along the way seems to confuse it with the general call of the Gospel. I don't know if this was intentional, but reading the piece some might conclude that opponents of the well-meant offer are also opposed to the free and promiscuous preaching of the Gospel, and this is simply false.

Therefore, to ensure that there can be no confusion, and in the words of John Murray, the well-meant offer is the belief that God "expresses an ardent desire for the fulfillment of certain things [*i.e.*, the salvation of the reprobate] which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass."<sup>3</sup> Or, more simply, the well-meant offer has to do with God's imagined favorable disposition toward the reprobate, since both sides agree that God sincerely desires the salvation of all the elect and accomplishes this very thing throughout history and through the "foolishness of the Gospel." As Paul said in *Romans*, "the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Consequently, both sides of the well-meant offer divide (with the exception of those rightly called "hyper-Calvinists," most notably "hardshell" or Primitive Baptists) believe that the Gospel should be preached universally to all men without distinction and that all who come under its preaching have a responsibility and a duty to repent and believe.

Well, to my surprise Clark does bring something new to the table and rests his belief in the contradictory truths of the well-meant offer, along with his belief in a whole host of other logical paradoxes that he says are laced throughout Scripture, on what he claims is the traditional Reformed understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction dating back to Calvin and Luther. Clark writes:

...the reason the well-meant offer has not been more persuasive is that its critics have not understood or sympathized with the fundamental assumption on which the doctrine...was premised: the distinction between theology as God knows it (*theologia archetypa*) and theology as it is revealed to and done by us (*theologia ectypa*).<sup>4</sup>

Clark's main argument is that since theology as God knows it (*theologia archetypa*) differs from theology as we know and do it (*theologia ectypa*) we should expect to find any number of impenetrable paradoxes in Scripture and in our subsequent theology.

What should be noted is that Clark firmly rests his understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction primarily in the area of epistemology (the study of knowledge) as opposed to ontology (the study of being). This is important, because the distinction Clark draws, and the one he claims is central to the traditional Reformed understanding, is not merely a difference in the mode or process (or, simply, the "how" of God's knowing), but rather it is rooted in the propositions known; the objects of knowledge themselves. Clark makes the error common to virtually all Van Tilians in that he conflates epistemology with ontology and ends up confusing the two. This makes sense since Van Til also extends his understanding of the Creator/creature distinction well beyond the limits of ontology and into the realm of epistemology.

Commenting on the well known illustration Van Til used for his students in order to picture his understanding of the Creator/creature distinction where he would draw a large circle above a smaller one connected by two vertical lines, Dr. E. Calvin Beisner observes:

What are we supposed to think the two circles represent? Knowledge content (that is, truths known), or knowledge mode (that is, the processes by which truths are known)? If the latter, then an overlap of the circles would indeed seem to imply a denial of the Creator/creature distinction. But if the former, it would not, at least not in the judgment of Reformed theologians who don't subscribe to Van Til's idiosyncratic development of that distinction.

It is clear why overlap or intersection would deny the archetypal/ectypal (and hence the Creator/creature) distinction if what the circles represent is ontology, but it is not clear that it would do so if what the circles represent is epistemology, for then it must be asked whether, in epistemology, they represent truths known or the process (mode, manner, way) by which truths are known. If the latter, then the overlap would indeed jeopardize the Creator/creature distinction, since only God knows all things by knowing Himself, and hence the assertion that the creature knows things by the same mode God does would imply that the creature is God. But if the former – if the circles

<sup>3</sup> [www.opc.org/GA/free\\_offer.html](http://www.opc.org/GA/free_offer.html).

<sup>4</sup> R. Scott Clark, "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology," in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine*, David VanDrunen, ed. (P&R, 2004), 152. ("Janus" hereafter.)

represent truths known (the content, not the mode, of knowledge) – then the overlap would not jeopardize the distinction, and indeed the lack of overlap would imply precisely the skepticism [Gordon] Clark said Van Til’s language implied, and that indeed some of Van Til’s language at least colorably could be understood to imply (*e.g.*, Van Til’s denial that God’s knowledge and man’s “coincide at any single point”).<sup>5</sup>

Besides claiming that critics of the well-meant offer “have not understood or sympathized” with the archetype/ectype distinction, it is important to recognize that Clark is not simply referring to the fact that God’s knowledge is intuitive, immediate and exhaustive whereas ours is derivative, successive and limited. Nor is he simply enforcing the idea that God is omniscient and His knowledge is therefore immutable and comprehensive in every detail and implication, whereas ours is only partial and subject to error and revision. Rather, for Clark the archetype/ectype distinction provides a complete break between the content of God’s knowledge and knowledge possible to man. Clark argues:

According to [Gordon] Clark, there is no evidence in Scripture that a proposition is qualitatively different for us from what it is for God. Whereas Deuteronomy 29:29 has traditionally been used in Reformed dogmatics as a proof the archetypal/ectypal distinction, of the necessity of analogical knowledge of and speech about God, Clark understood it to teach only that certain things are hidden solely because they are unrevealed, not because *finitum capax infiniti*.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, there is nothing in Deuteronomy 29:29 that suggests or implies that all of our knowledge about God, even as He has revealed Himself in the propositions of Scripture, is analogical. Clark simply begs the question. The verse simply states that there are secret things that belong to God alone, whereas “the things revealed” belong to us and our children so “that we may observe all the words of this law.” Concerning this verse Calvin writes:

We see how he urges the people to study the teaching of the law only on the ground of a heavenly decree, because it pleased God to publish it;

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5 From an unpublished work, "Critical Comments on John Muether's (April 9, 2009) 'Robert Reymond and Cornelius Van Til: Some Reflections,'" by E. Calvin Beisner. Used by permission.

6 “Janus,” 152,153.

and how he held the same people within these bounds for this reason alone: that it is not lawful for mortal men to intrude upon the secrets of God. [Institutes 3.21.3]

Nowhere does Calvin claim that what “pleased God to publish” is somehow the analogue of what God knows within himself. Instead, Calvin argues that “it is not lawful for mortal men to intrude upon the secrets of God,” thereby limiting or binding men to those things and those things alone which God has revealed. Whereas, according to Clark even the propositions God *has* revealed in Scripture mean something different for God than they do for man. In Scripture man has only the ectype or analogue of the divine propositions that are forever hidden in the mind of God. This is hardly a credible exegesis of Deuteronomy 29:29, much less a credible description of the Biblical Creator/creature distinction.

To further support his understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction Clark wrote on his blog:

...confessional Calvinism teaches what it does not because of some rationalist *a priori* about the way things “must be” or on the basis that “we all know that...” Rather, we teach and hold what we do because we believe it is taught in God’s Word. I wasn’t raised a confessional Calvinist. I was raised a Unitarian Universalist. I know this movement from the inside. Those folks are the rationalists. They are those who begin with the *a priori* about what can and can’t be about the way things work and it is they who make deductions from their premise and it is they who impute their way of thinking to us. This is nothing other than projection. We don’t operate like that. Our faith is full of mystery of paradoxes to wit, the holy Trinity, the two natures and one person of Christ, divine sovereignty and human responsibility (who has flattened out that one but the anti-predestinarians?), the free offer, the true presence of Christ in the Supper, and means of grace (the Spirit operates through the foolishness of Gospel preaching) and that’s the short list.<sup>7</sup>

While I’d love to see Clark’s long list of “mystery of paradoxes” that he says litter the Christian faith, the first thing to notice is that he believes it was “anti-predestinarians” who “flattened out” or rather harmonized the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility at the bar of human reason. Of course, that would make

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7 <http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2008/11/28/hyper-calvinism-rationalism/>.

Gordon Clark, Robert Reymond, John Calvin, Arthur Pink and others who have either attempted to or have successfully harmonized divine sovereignty and human responsibility anti-predestinarians. That is just silly.

Notice too, Clark could easily add to his short list (although I'm sure he would rather not) the contradictory doctrines of justification by faith alone and justification by faith and works. After all, the Scriptures in places do appear to teach both. Didn't James say that a man is "justified by works, and not by faith alone," whereas Paul maintained "that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law"? Why isn't this just another "mystery of paradox" that Christians must embrace in accordance with the archetype/ectype distinction? Frankly, if the Scriptures didn't *seem* to affirm this particular "apparent contradiction" there would hardly be any debate between Protestants and Roman Church-State.

Moving things closer to home, what makes the paradoxes inherent in the Federal Vision's doctrine of justification where a person is said to be justified by faith alone and by faith plus works of obedience (all non-meritorious of course), different from those found on Clark's short list? Federal Visionists, who are virtually all Van Tilians, also claim to teach what they do because they believe it is taught in God's Word and appeal to Reformed tradition in order to justify their contradictory view of justification. They claim that drawing clear and logical distinctions between belief and works is "Hellenistic" (see for example Doug Wilson's *Reformed Is Not Enough*), which is just another way of accusing their opponents of being "rationalists" (how many times have Van Tilians, or Van Til himself, accused Gordon Clark or other Scripturalists of being a "rationalist" for simply trying to harmonize seemingly disparate Biblical truths). Couldn't Federal Visionists also appeal to the archetype/ectype distinction in order to support their contradictory doctrine of justification? Couldn't they simply say that what appears contradictory to us in the ectype (theology as it is revealed to and done by us) is somehow resolved in the divine archetype (theology as God knows it)?

Besides, anyone who has waded through the articles and books by Federal Visionists will see their doctrine of justification is just as contradictory and their language just as ambiguous and misleading as any well-meant offer defender discussing the imagined two wills of God. Frankly, I do not see any epistemological reason whereby Clark can oppose any of the Federal Visionists now disturbing the church other than by some fortuitous aberration in his own philosophic *a priori*; what some

might call a blessed inconsistency or just another in Clark's long list of "mystery of paradoxes."

What is also mysterious is why Clark doesn't see the nexus between his own philosophy of Scripture (the "underlying premise" governing his acceptance of the presumed logical paradoxes of Scripture including the well-meant offer) and the Federal Vision? After all, John Frame argued in his defense of Van Til that the doctrine of justification is "just as paradoxical" and impenetrable as any of those included in Clark's short list.<sup>8</sup> Clark seems positively blinded by his own parochial reading of Reformed history to the point where he cannot even see how dangerous and debilitating his own underlying *a priori* has been in the battle over the Federal Vision and New Perspectives. Even if some are not willing to go as far as Van Til who said "All teaching of Scripture is apparently contradictory,"<sup>9</sup> most would agree with Clark that at least *some* of the teachings of Scripture are apparently contradictory and must forever remain that way out of fear of being charged with the sin of "rationalism."<sup>10</sup>

In fact, many Van Tilian opponents of the Federal Vision are simply willing to accept Federal Visionists as their confused "brothers in Christ" while chalking up their deadly doctrines to just another in the long line of "mystery of paradoxes." How often have we heard it said that the Federal Visionists are simply "not as clear as they should be" in their articulation of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, even justification by faith alone. This explains why.

Interestingly, Clark tells us at the outset that he was predisposed to accept the logical incoherence of the well-meant offer from his early days in the Reformed faith. Coming from a Unitarian Universalist background perhaps it is understandable why he would believe that God has a universal desire for the salvation of all men. Clark writes:

It seemed impossible to me, a naive student, that confessional Reformed folk should not embrace the doctrine of the well-meant offer, but as influential as it has been among some of us, it has not

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8 John Frame's "Van Til the Theologian," [www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=/apolgetics/frame\\_vtt.html](http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html?mainframe=/apolgetics/frame_vtt.html)  
9 Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 142.

10 Rationalism properly understood is sinful since it places unaided human reason above God's self-revelation. However, harmonizing the apparent contradictions of Scripture at the bar of human reason is not rationalism. It is the faithful recognition that God's revelation is rational and that truth, by definition, is non-contradictory.

found universal acceptance in either contemporary Reformed theory or our practice.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, when I first came to the Reformed faith after years of wandering the vast ersatz-Evangelical wasteland as a card-carrying Arminian, I could not fathom how any clear thinking Calvinist could possibly embrace Van Til's belief in biblical paradox, not to mention the contradictory doctrine of the well-meant offer advanced by John Murray (a position adopted as the majority position in the OPC following on the heels of the Clark-Van Til controversy and is just one of the many doctrinal aberrations resulting from Van Til's "fundamental assumption" concerning divine revelation). Not surprisingly, Murray in his defense of the well-meant offer inhabits the same exegetical landscape as the Arminian, the only exception being is that the Arminian has the distinct advantage of not contradicting the rest of his theology simply because he premises salvation on the sovereignty of man rather than on the sovereignty of God. According to the Arminian God can be said to sincerely desire the salvation of all men simply because believing the Gospel is premised on the free and undetermined will of man. To the Arminian God is just a helpless and impotent observer longing for the fruition of something that He knows will never come to pass.

Those maintaining the Reformed and Biblical doctrine of salvation premised on God's absolute sovereign will and good pleasure have no such luxury.<sup>12</sup> According to the Reformed faith and in accordance with Scripture, salvation is all of God and man is just the undeserving and even unwilling recipient of God's free and unmerited grace. As Paul says in *Romans* 3, "there are none that seek after God" and in *Romans* 8, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the

law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." And, as John tells us, "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (*John* 1:12-13). Hence, to say that God desires the salvation of those God has determined not to save is irrational. If God desired to save the reprobate then the reprobate would be saved. The God of Scripture, as opposed to the feeble god of the Arminian, does all His good pleasure in Heaven and on Earth "and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" This is why Robert Reymond said John Murray's exegesis in defense of the well-meant offer "imputes irrationality" to God.<sup>13</sup>

Needless to say, I quickly learned that Murray's doctrine of the well-meant offer was widely embraced on exegetical grounds complete with the implicit contradiction his interpretations entailed. Further, I learned that the mainstream of Reformed thought believed that the Scriptures contain any number of logical paradoxes impervious to logical harmonization at the bar of human reason. I just couldn't imagine how such otherwise bright and godly men could be so stupid as to buy into Van Til's lie that while the supposed apparent contradictions of Scripture must remain for us, contradictions that we are told come from even the faithful and accurate reading of Scripture, we are to have faith that there are no contradictions for God. Or, embrace the impious foolishness of Van Tilian apologist David Byron who disparages God's complete and perfect Word claiming, "God doesn't reveal enough to us for us to see how some of the teachings of Scripture cohere..."<sup>14</sup> Or, the similar nonsense coming from Reformed Theological Seminary professor James Anderson who claims the apparent contradictions in his doctrinal formulations "aren't real" but are the result of "unarticulated equivocation among key terms involved in the claims [of Scripture]."<sup>15</sup>

Unlike Clark, who has clearly never completely divorced himself from the universalism of his earlier Unitarianism, when I first came to the Reformed faith one of the initial difficulties I had was reconciling the so-called "Arminian verses" of Scripture with the idea of God's sovereignty in salvation along with limited or particular

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11 "Janus," 150.

12 In another odd twist Clark claims that the Divines at Dort were objecting to the "rationalism" of the Remonstrants who sought to resolve the general call of the Gospel with election through an appeal to free will. However, those meeting in Dordrecht were not opposing "rationalism" at all; they were opposing the Remonstrants' departure from the clear teaching of Scripture and their introduction of the foreign and heretical element of a libertarian "free will" into God's comprehensive plan of salvation. Similarly, the Divines believed the general call could be satisfactorily harmonized with the rest of Scripture. If anything, the 5 points that came out of their deliberations are the epitome of logical harmonization as each of the 5 heads logically implies the other. As one particularly nasty Arminian I once came across said, the 5 points at Dort make Calvinism a "domino religion" in that if any one of these five pillars is removed the whole structure collapses. This is one time an Arminian happened to be correct.

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13 Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), note. 25, 692-693.

<sup>14</sup> [www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/vantil-list/archive-Aug1999/msg00056.htm](http://www.ccir.ed.ac.uk/~jad/vantil-list/archive-Aug1999/msg00056.htm).

15 James Anderson, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 222.

atonement. Verses like *1 Timothy 2:4*, *2 Peter 3:9*, *Ezekiel 18:32*, *33:11* and others were particular problematic. And, since I was convinced by the sheer weight of Scripture (and as a result of first wrestling with Gordon Clark's masterpiece *Predestination*) that God's eternal decree governs all things including the seemingly mundane actions and thoughts of men, returning to the errant belief in my own free will was not an option. Consequently, if these verses and others like them could not be harmonized with the rest of my newly discovered Reformed faith and in light of Scripture, I was willing to toss my Bible into the nearest trash can, admit that the Scriptures are the intellectual equivalent of Rune Stones, and confess that the entire Christian faith is an impenetrable pile of irrational rubbish. I didn't need Gordon Clark to tell me that if the doctrines of Scripture contradicted themselves in one place they were untrustworthy in every place and that Christianity is a farce.

Thankfully, and by God's grace, what I learned from reading the likes of Calvin, Luther, Owen, Edwards, Pink, (Gordon) Clark, Boettner, Reymond, Hoeksema and others is that there are no "Arminian verses" in Scripture. For example, *1 Timothy 2:4* is a reference to all classes or strata of men and not all men universally considered. *Second Peter 3:9* is in reference to all of God's elect and not all men in general. The verses in *Ezekiel* (18:23, 32; 33:11), while perhaps a little more difficult, could also be interpreted so as to do no violence to the rest of the Reformed system of faith. For example, some Reformed commentators argue that these passages provide a temporal reference to the nation of Israel, and, per Gordon Clark, "indicate that God has no pleasure in the death of Israel" and not all men in general.<sup>16</sup> Others like Turretin argue that these verses refer to "God's will as commanding, not to the will of his good pleasure...."<sup>17</sup> Calvin takes a similar approach in his commentary of *Ezekiel 18:23*:

Since, therefore, repentance is a kind of second creation, it follows that it is not in man's power; and if it is equally in God's power to convert men as well as to create them, *it follows that the reprobate are not converted, because God does not wish their conversion; for if he wished it he could do it: and hence it appears that he does not wish it. But again they argue foolishly, since God does not*

*wish all to be converted, he is himself deceptive, and nothing can be certainly stated concerning his paternal benevolence.* But this knot is easily untied; for he does not leave us in suspense when he says, that he wishes all to be saved. Why so? for if no one repents without finding God propitious, then this sentence is filled up. But we must remark that God puts on a twofold character: for he here wishes to be taken at his word. As I have already said, the Prophet does not here dispute with subtlety about his incomprehensible plans, but wishes to keep our attention close to God's word. Now, what are the contents of this word? The law, the prophets, and the gospel. Now all are called to repentance, and the hope of salvation is promised them when they repent. This is true, since God rejects no returning sinner: he pardons all without exception: meanwhile, this will of God which he sets forth in his word does not prevent him from decreeing before the world was created what he would do with every individual: and as I have now said, the Prophet only shows here, that when we have been converted we need not doubt that God immediately meets us and shows himself propitious. [644, emphasis added]

Calvin interprets this passage in terms of a general call while at the same time harmonizing it with particular election, and, by implication, limited atonement. Notice nowhere does Calvin argue that God earnestly desires the salvation of those he has determined from eternity not to save; *i.e.*, those whom God predestined would not "repent and live." Notice too, Calvin's logic is impeccable when he argues: "it follows that the reprobate are not converted, because God does not wish their conversion; for if he wished it he could do it: and hence it appears that he does not wish it." And, as should be obvious, if God does not wish a person's conversion, he does not desire it. Further, even if no one repents and lives it would not affect the meaning of the verse in the slightest.

First, the verse teaches us that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, which makes sense even if one thinks in terms of a human judge. A judge may in accordance with the rule of law justly sentence a murderer to death, but unless he is a sadist, it would be extremely odd for a judge to take pleasure in handing down the death sentence. God is not a sadist.

Second, the verse merely tells us what we ought to do (repent and live), not what we can do or even what God will do or desires to do. That's because *nothing* can be inferred in the indicative from something written in the

16 As cited by Garrett Johnson in "The Myth of Common Grace" which also provides a nice summary of how Reformed men have historically understood the so-called "Arminian" passages of Scripture in contrast to Murray: [www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/055aTheMythofCommonGrace.pdf](http://www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/055aTheMythofCommonGrace.pdf).

17 *Ibid.*

imperative, or what Turretin calls “God’s will of commanding.” As Dr. Elihu Carranza observes propositions alone “are the premises and conclusions of arguments” simply because only propositions (which are the meanings of declarative sentences) can be either true or false. Commands, like the one found in *Ezekiel* 18:23 & 32 (“Therefore, repent and live”), questions (with the exception of rhetorical questions which are intended as propositions), and exhortations “are neither true nor false.”<sup>18</sup> How well-meant offer advocates think they can infer anything from a command, much less God’s universal desire for the salvation of all, is indeed a mystery. Consequently, the verse does not tell us is that God desires the salvation of the reprobate. Like the Arminians before them, well-meant offer advocates are guilty of reading too much into these verses.

More importantly, notice that Calvin’s exegesis does not end in an impenetrable paradox, but rather he tells us the “knot” that some see in the verse “is easily untied” and creates no tension, no conflict, no “mystery of paradoxes” with the rest of Scripture. That’s because unlike many today, Calvin was a theologian faithful to preserving the harmony of Scripture and was interested in resolving and answering, not maintaining and promoting, the so-called “apparent contradictions” of Scripture. This was, after all, the hallmark of all the great Reformed theologians – something one would have thought even a professor of theological and church history would have recognized. However, and in no small part thanks to Van Til, most Reformed theologians today are no longer interested in untying the “knots” of Scripture, but instead seek to maintain them in a perverted sense of Christian piety even imagining that their failure to harmonize their own contradictory doctrines is to think in submission to Scripture and is even a sign of their faithfulness to the Reformed tradition.

Another reason I find the exegetical position of well-meant offer advocates so offensive is that they simply ignore the centrality of the cross. God always views all of his chosen and adopted children from Adam onward through the prism of Christ’s shed blood on the cross. It is only on basis of Christ’s finished and propitiatory cross work that God’s promised mercy expressed throughout the Scriptures to his fallen creatures finds its intended recipients; those particular individuals given to the Son by the Father and those alone. The Gospel always comes, whether expressed in the Old or New Testaments, and in passages like those found in *Ezekiel*, as

the sweat smell of life to those who are being saved. But, to those who are perishing, the Gospel comes as the rancid smell of death and both aromas, sweet and foul, are pleasing to God. This is true whether the Gospel is preached to all men everywhere or is limited geographically to the confines of that small speck of a country, Israel.

Consider the following from Calvin’s commentary on 2 *Corinthians* 2:15, 16:

Here we have a remarkable passage, by which we are taught, that, whatever may be the issue of our preaching, it is, notwithstanding, well pleasing to God, if the Gospel is preached, and our service will be acceptable to him; and also, that it does not detract in any degree from the dignity of the Gospel, that it does not do good to all; for God is glorified even in this, that the Gospel becomes an occasion of ruin to the wicked, nay, it must turn out so. If, however, this is a *sweet odor* to God, it ought to be so to us also, or in other words, it does not become us to be offended, if the preaching of the Gospel is not salutary to all; but on the contrary, let us reckon, that it is quite enough, if it advance the glory of God by bringing just condemnation upon the wicked. If, however, the heralds of the Gospel are in bad odor in the world, because their success does not in all respects come up to their desires, they have this choice consolation, that they waft to God the perfume of a sweet fragrance, and what is to the world an offensive smell, is a *sweet odor* to God and angels.

According to Calvin the universal proclamation of the Gospel “is not salutary” or beneficial to all and this too is pleasing to God. Further, even in those cases where the preaching of the Gospel does not result in the salvation of those who come under it, and consequently “does not in all respects come up to” the desires or expectations of the one proclaiming God’s message of mercy and reconciliation, the preacher is to be greatly consoled knowing that his faithful preaching, even to the condemnation and judgment of his listeners, is still a sweet fragrance to God. And, if a pleasing and sweet fragrance to God, how could God possibly desire that which would be displeasing to him? Hence it follows that God does not desire the salvation of all men through the universal preaching of the Gospel, for if he did he could not also be pleased when the Gospel comes to those who are perishing as the stench of judgment and death. While I am confident this simple logic will be lost on most well-meant offer advocates (as must all applications of logic that threaten the illogic of their doctrinal formulations

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18 Dr. Elihu Carranza is also the author of the companion workbook to Gordon Clark’s *Logic*: [www.logic-classroom.info/intro.htm](http://www.logic-classroom.info/intro.htm).

and which they attack as sinful expressions of “rationalism”), this also explains why they are wrong when they insist their doctrine is necessary for evangelism and missions. As should be clear from Calvin above, their understanding of the role of the preacher and the purpose of missions is different from God’s.

Ironically, and in spite of Calvin’s clear teaching above, Clark also appeals to Calvin in support of his understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction:

According to Calvin, religion is either true or false. That which is according to the Bible is true; that which is not according to the Bible is false. We only know what God has willed to reveal to us, and all revelation is necessarily accommodated to our weakness: it is “baby talk.” Despite the fact that all revelation is necessarily accommodated and analogical, it is nevertheless true that the theology that conforms to Holy Scripture is also true.<sup>19</sup>

While I certainly agree what is according to the Bible is true and what is not is false, and that God’s revelation is accommodated to his creatures, after all the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture requires it, Clark begs the question when he asserts that for Calvin “all revelation is necessarily...analogical.” The reference Clark cites from Calvin’s *Institutes* simply does not support his claim. That’s because when Calvin speaks about God “lispering” or condescending to our creaturely limitations through “baby talk,” he is referring to the anthropomorphic language in Scripture where God is said to have things like eyes, ears, hands, and even repenting. Calvin writes concerning the passage Clark only references:

The Anthropomorphites, also, who imagined a corporeal God from the fact that Scripture often ascribes to him a mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet, are easily refuted. For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to “lisp” in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness. [*Institutes*: 1.13.1]

Matthew Winzer in his review of John Murray’s defense of the so-called “well-meant offer” argues in much the same way:

It is the covenantal nature of these speeches which required the adoption (ad extra) of human thoughts and affections on the part of God in condescension to His people. In the covenant, God identifies Himself and His cause with the welfare and cause of His people. The enemies of His people become His enemies, the successes of His people become His successes, and the failures of His people become His failures, as the language of Deut. 32:27 signifies. The Almighty power of God becomes conditioned on the people’s obedience or disobedience. At the building of the tabernacle, and later of the temple, His omnipresence becomes confined to the place where He puts His Name. Even His knowledge is sometimes represented as being limited to this special relationship which He has established with His people, and He is portrayed as repenting and changing His mind when He discovers that His people have acted in this or that way.

Such language does not reflect upon the nature of God, but only indicates the nature of the covenant relation with which God condescends to act in accord. Given the unchangeable and unconditional perfection of the Almighty, it is obvious that these types of Scriptural references are to be understood as His condescension to the weakness of man’s capacity, as when the apostle spoke after the manner of men because of the infirmity of his hearers’ flesh, Rom. 6:19. Thus, when God represents Himself as repenting, or of being unable to do anything more to procure the people’s obedience, or expresses a desire for that which is contrary to His purpose, the language is to be understood anthropomorphically, not literally.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, where Calvin and Winzer limit God’s “lispering” or “baby talk” to places where God condescend to man’s weakness and limitation through the use of anthropomorphic language, Clark’s reduces all of God’s self-revelation to an anthropomorphism. Winzer provides another good example of an opponent of the well-meant offer who understands and accepts the historic Reformed archetype/ectype distinction while rejecting Clark’s understanding and application of it. Echoing one of Clark’s earlier thoughts, Clark’s mishandling of the archetype/ectype distinction makes me wonder if the proponents of the so-called “well-meant offer” ever read anything but their own in-house stuff?

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19 “Janus,” 157.

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20 [www.fpcr.org/blue\\_banner\\_articles/murray-free-offer-review.htm](http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/murray-free-offer-review.htm).



Clark also misapplies the archetype/ectype distinction in his discussion of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*. He writes:

Luther's entire argument with Erasmus...was grounded in this distinction. God as he is *in se*, is hidden to us. We only know God as he is revealed to us (*erga nos*).... Against Erasmus's rationalism and in the midst of explaining the distinction between law and gospel in Ezekiel 18:23, 32, Luther developed the Scotist distinction between God *in se* and *erga nos* in dramatic and definite way for Protestant theology. He wrote:

"For he is here speaking of the preached and offered mercy of God, not that hidden awful will of God whereby he ordains by his own counsel which and what sort of persons he wills to be recipients and partakers of his preached and offered mercy... we have to argue in one way about God or the will of God as preached, revealed, offered and worshiped, and in another way about God as he is not preached, not revealed not offered, not worshiped. To the extent, therefore, that God hides himself and wills to be unknown to us. It is no business of ours..."<sup>21</sup>

What opponent of the well-meant offer would take issue with Luther's statement above? All agree that God's mercy is held forth in the preaching of the Gospel and throughout Scripture. All agree that all who are heavy laden will find rest should they turn from their sins and turn to Christ. All agree that many are called, but few are chosen. Luther is interpreting these verses in *Ezekiel* the same way Calvin does above and in terms of the general call of the Gospel. Luther writes:

*I desire not the death of a sinner*, is concerned only to proclaim and offer to the world the mercy of God. None receive it with joy and gratitude but those who are distressed and troubled at death, those in whom the law has already completed its work, that is, given knowledge of sin. Those that have not yet experienced the work of the law, who do not recognize their sin and have no sense of death, scorn the mercy promised by that word.<sup>22</sup>

While we may not know who God "wills to be recipients and partakers of his preached and offered mercy," the imperative of the Gospel remains the same for all to

repent and believe for the promised mercy of God is assured to all who do and without reservation. Besides, if all that was meant by the archetype/ectype distinction is that there a difference between God's revealed and secret will then Clark's point is trivial. Known to God alone are all His elect and that should never stop a preacher from proclaiming the Gospel message to all men without distinction or exception. However, it doesn't follow from this that God desires the salvation of the reprobate even through the preaching of the Gospel. As Luther argues:

For this also must be noted: that as the voice of the law is brought to bear only upon those who neither feel nor know their sins, as Paul says in *Romans 3* ("By the law is the knowledge of sin" [v. 20]), *so the word of grace comes only to those who are distressed by a sense of sin and tempted to despair.*<sup>23</sup>

Advocates of the well-meant offer need to take an elementary course in logic. Nowhere in Luther's entire discussion of *Ezekiel 18:23, 32*, not to mention *Zechariah 1:3* and *Jeremiah 15:19* also covered in the section of his *Bondage of the Will* that Clark cites, does he support the idea that God "expresses an ardent desire for the fulfillment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass." And, while Luther demonstrates that "'free-will' is not proved from any of the other words of mercy or promise or comfort, so neither is it proved by this: 'I desire not the death of a sinner,'"<sup>24</sup> the exact same can be said of the belief that in God there is an unfulfilled desire for the salvation of the reprobate. The reason is simple, since you cannot infer an "is" from an "ought," you cannot infer the notion that God *is* desirous for the salvation of the reprobate from his command that all *ought* to turn and live. As Luther argues elsewhere:

Even grammarians and schoolboy at street corners know that nothing more is signified by verbs in the imperative mood that what ought to be done, and that what is done or can be done should be expressed by verbs in the indicative. How is it that you theologians are twice as stupid as schoolboys, in that as soon as you get hold of a single imperative verb you infer an indicative meaning?<sup>25</sup>

This same question needs to be asked of well-meant offer advocates who make the exact same error as Erasmus only in a slightly different direction. To put the

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21 "Janus," 155.

22 Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, J.I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, trans. (Baker Book House Company, 1994), 169.

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23 *The Bondage of the Will*, 168. (Emphasis added.)

24 *The Bondage of the Will*, 167.

25 *The Bondage of the Will*, 159.

problem another way, if Luther's use of the archetype/ectype distinction justifies the contradictory notion of the well-meant offer as Clark maintains, then it also justifies Erasmus' defense of free will.

Now, the one person apart from modern irrationalists like Van Til who may in fact support Clark's understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction, is found in his brief discussion of Franciscus Junius (the elder), but even here this isn't clear. Clark notes that Junius

distinguishes between "true theology" and "false theology." The latter is that which does not come from God and does not conform to his accommodated self-revelation.... He distinguishes theology into two types, archetypal theology, that is, theology as God knows it in himself, and ectypal theology as he reveals it to creatures. *Theologia archetypa* is the "divine understanding (*sapientia*) of divine matters, such things we adore but do not investigate."<sup>26</sup>

It would seem that the distinction being drawn is between speculative theology which "does not come from God and does not confirm to his...self-revelation," and that which does. Consequently, speculations concerning God's secret will, for example why God chose to save one sinner and not another, is to attempt to plumb the depths of archetypal theology quite apart from what God has revealed or made known to us through "ectypal theology." As Luther says above: "It is no business of ours." Obviously, there are things that God does for his own inscrutable reasons that He has seen fit not to reveal to his creatures and it would seem Junius' point is that all such speculations amount to "false theology." So far, so good. However, Clark infers from this: "Indeed, Junius was careful to stress that this is not even a definition, since it is impossible for humans to define divine knowledge. Rather it is an analogical account of it."<sup>27</sup>

The problem here is that "accommodated self-revelation" is not the equivalent of an "analogical revelation," but for Clark it is. More importantly, if Clark is correct and for Junius the archetype/ectype distinction is such that it is impossible for humans to even define divine knowledge, then why call it knowledge? If theology as God knows it differs from theology as we know it, to the point where even the word *knowledge* cannot even be defined as it is applied to God, then how can even sound theology done by man (*theologia ectypa*) also be called knowledge? Clark is guilty of equivocation. Besides, if

all of Scripture were analogous and there were no univocal, unambiguous and shared meaning between the truths God has revealed to us in Scripture and truths as He knows them within himself, even as he condescends to us, then not only would it be meaningless to say God knows and man knows, but knowledge of anything at all would be impossible. As Gordon Clark observed long ago, if there is no univocal point of contact between God's knowledge and knowledge possible to man, and all of God's revelation is analogical, then it follows man could not even know the univocal truth that all revelation is analogical.

Finally, it is not at all clear from Clark's contribution to the Strimple *festschrift* that he even understands the archetype/ectype distinction as it has been understood throughout Reformed history, simply because, and at least in light of the citations he provides from Calvin, Luther, and others, there is nothing in these early expressions of the archetype/ectype distinction that is at all at odds with the views of Gordon Clark, Herman Hoeksema, or other opponents of the so-called "well-meant offer." Instead, there appears to be a significant *a priori* shift in how the archetype/ectype distinction has been understood throughout Reformed history and how modern Reformed theologians from Cornelius Van Til to John Murray to R. Scott Clark and beyond have understood it. In virtually all of Clark's discussion of the archetype/ectype distinction, with the possible exception of Junius,<sup>28</sup> Reformed theologians clearly had something entirely different in mind from what we find expressed in Van Til's Creator/creature distinction and his complete denial of any univocal point of contact between God's thoughts and man's even as we find them revealed in Scripture. Clark is reading Reformed history through Van Tilian lenses.

Consequently, Clark has failed to support his claim that the "underlying assumption" governing the well-meant offer, along with a whole host of other irreconcilable paradoxes he tells us are found throughout Scripture, has a long history in Reformed theology specifically as it relates to the archetype/ectype distinction. Clark's understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction is an historic novelty.

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28 The only published work I could find of Franciscus Junius' major work, *Opera Theologica*, is in Latin and I can't read Latin. Besides, Junius is hardly a major figure in Reformed history so it is certainly suspect when Clark claims his understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction, one that informs not just ontology but epistemology as well, has the long tradition in Reformed theology.

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26 "Janus," 157, 158.

27 "Janus," 158.