

Janus, Again: The Most Recent Attack of the Proponents of the Well-Meant Gospel Offer Upon the Doctrines of Grace

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I. Introduction

Janus has raised his two-faced head again.

Janus was a Roman god with two faces, each looking in the opposite direction. Herman Hoeksema famously described the teaching of the well-meant offer as a modern-day Janus:

For, the fact is, that the [first point](#) [of the Synod of Kalamazoo, in which is contained the well-meant offer—JDE] reminds one of the two-faced head of Janus. 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. 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, and Gomarus; but the other shows the unmistakable features of Pelagius, Arminius, and 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.¹

This Janus has a long history.² There were traces of the well-meant offer of the gospel already in the teachings of the Semi-Pelagians of Augustine's day. But the teaching was especially propounded in the seventeenth century in the school of Saumur, France. From there it spread to the British Isles as well as to the Netherlands. In this way the two main branches of Reformed orthodoxy, Presbyterianism and the Dutch Reformed tradition, were affected by this teaching. The idea of the well-meant offer was then carried over to the United States, where it has gained wide acceptance. Today, the notion of a well-meant offer of salvation is generally considered to be a hallmark of Reformed orthodoxy. There remain only a few isolated voices that condemn this teaching. But those voices are virtually drowned out by ardent defenders of the offer.

Especially within the last century much ink has been spilled debating the issue of the well-meant offer of the gospel. The battle has been fierce, and neither side has seemed to budge.

What is the reason, then, for undertaking another study of this issue? Is there something new that can be contributed to the debate?

We believe that there is.

R. Scott Clark, professor of historical and systematic theology at Westminster Seminary (CA) and a noted theologian, has recently proposed a new approach to the debate. In an essay entitled “Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology,” Clark makes an appeal to the distinction made in Reformed theology between *archetypal* and *ectypal* knowledge. On the basis of this distinction, as well as on the underlying view of the believer’s knowledge of God, Clark defends the well-meant offer of the gospel. Clark is convinced that by grounding the offer in this widely-accepted distinction he places the well-meant offer on an unshakeable foundation. He is also convinced that this will lead to more profitable discussions between the two sides in the debate.

Since the nature of divine-human relations is fundamental to the recovery and re-expression of the well-meant offer, a consideration of the rise and function of the basic assumption on which the well-meant offer is based also offers avenues for discussion between the proponents and opponents of the well-meant offer.³

In this essay we take up Clark’s offer. We intend to show that the ground on which Clark builds the well-meant offer is exceedingly shaky. In fact, we are convinced that the foundation is entirely out of line with Scripture and Reformed orthodoxy. We hope to show that Clark’s understanding of the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge is mistaken and that his view of the relationship between the Creator and the creature is incorrect. By pulling out the root of Clark’s argument we intend to pull out also the fruit (the well-meant offer). We intend to show that a denial of the well-meant offer is not a denial of the archetypal/ectypal distinction. Rather, a proper understanding of this distinction is in complete harmony with a denial of the well-meant offer. In conclusion we will affirm the truth that God’s call is general but the promise is particular. This, we are convinced, is Reformed. And this, we believe, is biblical.

II. Theology of the Well-Meant Offer

The well-meant offer of the gospel is considered by most denominations and theologians today to be squarely in keeping with the historic Reformed faith. There are only a few denominations (the Protestant Reformed Churches, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia⁴), groups (the Trinity Foundation), and individuals (John H. Gerstner⁵) who have rejected the free offer. Almost all other denominations adhere to the free offer in their preaching and teaching, if not in their official declarations.⁶

A. The Offer

But what is the well-meant offer of the gospel?

Negatively, the well-meant offer is not simply the teaching that the gospel must be preached to all promiscuously. The promiscuous and indiscriminate preaching of the gospel is not the issue between the defenders of the free offer and those who oppose it. Both sides are agreed that the gospel must be preached to all and sundry. At times this has been understood to be the chief difference between the two sides. We say again, this is *not* the issue in the debate over the well-meant offer. The well-meant offer is not simply a defence of the promiscuous

preaching of the gospel over against those who deny that this must be done. The opponents of the well-meant offer believe emphatically that the gospel must be preached to all and sundry.⁷

They are committed to *Canons II:5*:

... 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.⁸

Very simply, the well-meant offer teaches that in the preaching of the gospel God expresses His earnest and sincere desire to save all who hear. Those to whom the gospel comes are all sinners. We cannot know whether they are elect or reprobate. But to all, both elect and reprobate, the offer comes. In the gospel God invites all men to repent and believe on Jesus Christ and to come to Him for salvation. Behind this invitation or offer is an earnest desire of God that the invitation be accepted by all who hear. God desires that all who hear be saved. In this offer God expresses His love for all who come under the preaching. Although many eventually reject this offer, this does not change the attitude of the loving God who sends it.

B. Starting Points

One of the classic lines of defence for defenders of the well-meant offer of the gospel is an appeal to the theory of common grace. Common grace, it is said, is an expression of God's grace to all His creatures, including all men. He expresses this grace, it is claimed, in sunshine, rain, and all the other good gifts that He gives to men. If it is true that God's grace is revealed to all in the giving of these physical gifts, how much more is His grace revealed in the giving of *spiritual* gifts, not least of which is the preaching of the gospel? The preaching is to everyone who hears what the sunshine and rain are to every farmer: *grace*. This was the argument used by the Synod of Kalamazoo in its [First Point](#). This was also the line of argumentation used by John Murray. The first text that he gave as proof for the well-meant offer was Matthew 5:44-48, which speaks of God sending rain and sunshine upon the earth. Murray admits, "This passage does not indeed deal with the overtures of grace in the gospel. But it does tell us something regarding God's benevolence that has bearing upon all manifestations of divine grace."⁹ Murray goes on to say that this same benevolence that is seen in things like rain and sunshine is also expressed in the preaching of the gospel. Erroll Hulse is correct, therefore, when he writes, "The subject of common grace is inescapably connected with the free offer."¹⁰

Another classic line of defence for many proponents of the free offer has been to ground this teaching in the distinction between the will of God's *decree* and the will of God's *command*.¹¹ This distinction has often been referred to as the distinction between God's *hidden* will and his *revealed* will.¹² Briefly, the will of God's *decree* refers to God's eternal determination of all things that would take place in time and history. The will of God's *command* declares what God will have His rational, moral creatures to do. Those who appeal to this distinction argue in the following manner. They say that according to the will of God's decree He wills that only the elect be saved. However, according to the will of God's command He wills that all those who come under the preaching of the gospel be saved. In this way, they claim, the Reformed doctrine of sovereign, unconditional election and the idea of a well-meant offer of salvation are both maintained.

This was already an argument proposed in favour of the free offer by Amyraut in the Seventeenth Century.¹³ Many modern defenders of the offer have used this same argument also. For example, John Murray writes,

It should have been apparent that the aforesaid Committee [of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the OPC—JDE], in

predicating such 'desire' of God [to save all men—JDE], was not dealing with the decretive will of God; it was dealing with the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction and that surely respects, not the decretive or secret will of God, but the revealed will.

Murray goes on to say, "It must be admitted that if the expression were intended to apply to the decretive will of God then there would be, at least, implicit contradiction."¹⁴ Erroll Hulse writes similarly,

The scriptures indicate that we are obliged to distinguish carefully between God's revealed will and his decretive or secret will (Deut. 29:29). God's revealed will is that all are to be addressed with the Gospel. The salvation of all without exception is to be attempted.¹⁵

Almost without fail, those who ground the idea of a free offer of the gospel in the two wills of God fall back upon "paradox" or "apparent contradiction." For example, Joseph Hall writes,

Thus when God's Word affirms both election and the well-meant offer of the gospel, proper theological methodology bids us simply to believe God's revelation and act upon these truths according to the measure of revelation given to us. We do not claim to comprehend fully all that his Word teaches us. To fail to proceed along this path is sheer hubris.¹⁶

Cornelis Venema speaks similar language:

The supposed contradiction between God's sovereign decree of election and the well-meant offer of the gospel is what Cornelius Van Til properly termed an 'apparent contradiction,' something mysterious to us but *known by God to be fully harmonious and consistent*.¹⁷

Defenders of the offer sense the difficulty that this argument poses to the human mind. They sense the difficulty that exists in saying that in one sense God desires only the salvation of the elect and in another sense He desires the salvation of all men, both elect and reprobate, who hear the gospel. This difficulty for the human mind is explained as a paradox or apparent contradiction. They are careful to say that the contradiction is only apparent, that it is only paradoxical to us but it is not paradoxical to God. R. B. Kuiper explains that "when two truths, both taught unmistakably in the infallible Word of God, cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason, then you have a paradox."¹⁸ Both ideas must be maintained, even if they are judged to be contradictory before the bar of human reason.

Recently there has been proposed a new line of argumentation in defence of the well-meant offer of the gospel. This new argument has been proposed by R. Scott Clark, professor at Westminster Seminary (CA). To a *festschrift* for Robert Strimple entitled *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine*, Clark contributes an essay on "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology" in which he defends the free offer.

In this essay Clark enters upon new ground in the debate over the well-meant offer. While Clark makes use of the distinction between God's hidden and revealed will, this is not his main line of defence. Instead, Clark grounds the teaching of the well-meant offer in the little-known distinction between archetypal knowledge or theology (*theologia archetypa*) and ectypal knowledge or theology (*theologia ectypa*).

Before going further, we do well to come to a basic understanding of this distinction.¹⁹ The word *archetype* means “pattern in an ultimate sense.”²⁰ Simply put, archetypal knowledge is theology as God knows it. The term refers to God’s infinite, perfect self-knowledge. It is knowledge that the triune God has of Himself apart from any creature. This knowledge of God is the ultimate pattern of all knowledge. The word *ectype* means “copy or reflection of the archetype or ultimate pattern.”²¹ Ectypal knowledge is theology as we know and do it. It is the knowledge that we humans have of God. More specifically, ectypal knowledge is the knowledge that the *believer* and the *church* have of God by means of revelation.

On this archetypal/ectypal distinction Clark builds his defence of the well-meant offer. He writes,

This essay contends that the reason the well-meant offer has not been more persuasive is that its critics [among whom Clark lists Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches, Gordon Clark and his followers, and John Gerstner—JDE] have not understood or sympathized with the fundamental assumption on which the doctrine of the well-meant offer 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*).²²

Clark proceeds to prove his assertion that opponents of the free offer have denied this distinction, thus resulting in a denial also of the free offer. After claiming that Gordon Clark denied this distinction, Clark says something similar regarding Herman Hoeksema: “The best interpretation of Hoeksema’s language is that it was an implicit rejection of the archetypal/ectypal distinction.” Later he writes that Hoeksema “argued against the substance of the archetypal/ectypal distinction.”²³ Clark bases this claim on the fact that Hoeksema made God the *principium cognoscendi*, rather than *Scripture*, as Louis Berkhof did. Clark writes,

This is a significant difference. Berkhof’s doctrine of the knowledge of God began with revelation. Hoeksema, however, began not with revelation, but with God himself as the beginning of knowledge. This move suggests a sort of intellectualism, that is, an intersection between our mind and God’s, in Hoeksema’s theology. At one point he nodded politely to the Creator-creature distinction, but elsewhere he argued against the substance of the archetypal/ectypal distinction, and the historical record is that his rhetoric against the well-meant offer tended to militate against the distinction.²⁴

On this question Clark lumps together the opponents of the free offer and the Arminians. He claims that the issue at Dordt and the issue today is the rejection of this distinction.²⁵ In his conclusion he says, “It would appear that, like the Remonstrants, the critics of the well-meant offer have misunderstood, rejected, or ignored this distinction and its implications for the nature of divine-human relations, biblical revelation, and theological method.”²⁶

According to Clark, the archetypal/ectypal distinction has a long history in the Reformed tradition. There are traces of the distinction already in Luther and his distinction between God hidden (*Deus absconditus*) and God revealed (*Deus revelatus*). There is evidence of this distinction as well in Calvin’s writings, especially when he distinguishes between God’s hidden and revealed will. The Reformed theologian Franciscus Junius (1545-1602) was the first to make this distinction explicitly.²⁷ Other Reformed men such as Amandus Polanus (1561-1610),

Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629), Louis Berkhof (1873-1957), and Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) all held to this distinction as well.

While Berkhof and Van Til both held to the archetypal/ectypal distinction and the free offer of the gospel, Clark is the first to make an explicit connection between the two. He claims that the free offer is the “corollary” of the archetypal/ectypal distinction.²⁸ Although he does not state clearly what he means by this distinction and how it correlates to the well-meant offer, Clark does leave enough clues to form an accurate picture of what he means. It seems that Clark understands the distinction to mean that God’s knowledge of Himself and all things (archetypal knowledge) has no point of contact with our knowledge of Him (ectypal knowledge). What we might know about God may not be what is actually true of God in Himself. What God knows about something may actually be quite different from what we know about the same thing.

It is fairly clear, then, how the well-meant offer fits with this understanding of the archetypal/ectypal distinction. God knows that He has determined to save only the elect (archetypal knowledge). But, according to Clark, God has revealed to us and we know that he desires the salvation of all who hear the gospel (ectypal knowledge). According to Clark this is the orthodox Reformed position. This is one of “the paradoxes of the orthodox Reformed soteriology.”²⁹ Clark writes, “The fact of the decree [of predestination—JDE] is presupposed in and animates the well-meant offer, but since its contents are archetypal, we are shut up to ectypal theology of which the well-meant offer is correlative.”³⁰ We are shut up to the teaching that God desires the salvation of all men who hear the gospel, according to Clark.

III. Refutation of R. Scott Clark’s Starting Point

With this view of Clark we cannot agree. Not only are we convinced that the well-meant offer he is defending is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions as well as historic Reformed orthodoxy, we are also convinced that he grounds his view of the offer in a wrong understanding of the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge.

A. Archetypal/Ectypal Distinction

Clark is mistaken when he asserts that opponents of the free offer ignore or deny the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge. This is not the case, at least in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Neither is Clark correct in saying that Herman Hoeksema, by virtue of his rejection of “Janus,” was also rejecting this distinction. What is true is that opponents of the free offer, including the PRC, reject the archetypal/ectypal distinction as Clark presents it. The PRC hold to a distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge, a distinction very different from Clark’s, however. Their understanding of this distinction, we believe, is in harmony with that of historic Reformed orthodoxy. Clark’s is not.

Clark grounds his defence of the well-meant offer of the gospel in a wrong understanding of the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge. Although he does not clearly define what he understands this distinction to mean, it is clear that he believes that the ectype, our knowledge of God, can and must be different from the archetype, God’s knowledge of Himself. For Clark, there is not only a *quantitative* difference between God’s knowledge and ours, there is also a *qualitative* difference. In other words, God not only knows infinitely *more* than we do, but the knowledge God has is entirely *different* from ours. The knowledge that He has of one thing can be completely different from the knowledge that we have of the same thing by means of revelation. Sean Gerety is correct, therefore, when he concludes that “for Clark the archetype/ectype distinction provides a complete break between the content of God’s knowledge and knowledge possible to man.”³¹

This is not the proper understanding of this distinction. The proper understanding of this distinction can be summed up rather briefly: *quantitative* difference. The knowledge that God has is distinguished from the knowledge that we have as regards *quantity*. God is infinite, and so is His knowledge of Himself and all things. Our knowledge, by comparison, is finite. God's knowledge is intuitive. Ours is acquired. There is now and forever shall be in heaven an infinite gulf between the quantity of our knowledge and God's.

But we must not assume that there is a *qualitative* difference between God's knowledge and the knowledge that we have of things. The knowledge that we have is received by revelation. God revealed Himself to us in His Word. That Word is the source of all the believer's knowledge. And that Word is infallible, sufficient, and reliable. God reveals to us in His Word who He really is and what He has sovereignly decreed. We may not know everything there is to know about God, but the knowledge God has given to us in Scripture is identical to the knowledge that God Himself has. If this is not our confession, then we have absolutely no assurance that what we know is the truth. We may think something is true, we may hope that it is true, but we have no certainty that it is actually true. We cannot know whether our knowledge of something is the same as God's knowledge.

The fact that our knowledge is *qualitatively* the same as God's is in harmony with Deuteronomy 29:29, the chief passage on which the archetypal/ectypal distinction is based. There we read, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." This passage is not saying that the ectype is different from the archetype. Rather, Moses is telling the people not to pry into the things that God has not revealed but to observe all that God has revealed in His law. Applied to the call of the gospel, this verse tells us that we are not to pry into the hearts of men to see whether they are elect or not, but we are to confine ourselves to what God has revealed, namely, that all who repent and believe will be saved. And Scripture is clear that only the elect truly repent and believe. There is no antimony or apparent contradiction taught in this passage.

Clark's appeal to other Reformed theologians in support of his view of this distinction is shaky at best. His appeals to Luther and Calvin are not of any weight because neither of them was concerned with this distinction. His quotations from Junius, Polanus, and Wollebius are also inconclusive. All that is clear is that they all made this distinction. What is not clear is that they viewed this distinction exactly as Clark does. Sean Gerety concludes,

Finally, it is not at all clear from Clark's contribution ... 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" ... In virtually all of Clark's discussion of the archetype/ectype distinction, with the possible exception of Junius, 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 though [*sic*] Van Tilian lenses. ... Clark's understanding of the archetype/ectype distinction is an historic novelty.³²

Noted Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper held to the proper view of this distinction. Although he was the one who conceived of the idea of common grace to which many defenders of the free offer appeal, Kuyper himself was vehemently opposed to the idea of the well-meant offer. In his explanation of ectypal knowledge, Kuyper has this to say:

The second point, which must be emphasized in the ectypal character of our knowledge of God, is the *truth* of our knowledge of God. If the ectypal originates by the imprint of the archetypal, the ectypal image is no phantasy, no imagination, but an image *in truth*. Just as we saw in the antithesis between Theology here and hereafter, that our knowledge of God on earth shall then be done away, and rise again in a higher form of a knowledge ‘face to face’; but always such, that the *truth* of our knowledge ‘in part’ shall be the more fully exhibited by the completer knowledge in heaven. Our given knowledge of God derives from this its absolute character, not as to its degree of completeness, but with reference to its connection with its object, i.e. with God. God who is, has knowledge of Himself; and from this self-knowledge God has taken the knowledge given to us. This excludes not only doubt, but also the dilution of subjectivism, as if our formulated statement of the knowledge of God in our confession were unimportant, and *without loss of truth* could be exchanged for every other confession or placed on a line with it.³³

Kuyper makes clear in this quotation that the denial of the truthfulness of our knowledge of God has at least two serious consequences. On the one hand, the child of God will doubt all that Scripture says. On the other hand, the truth becomes subjective, each man claiming for truth that which is right in his own eyes.

Herman Hoeksema was in complete agreement with Kuyper. He did not deny the archetypal/ectypal distinction. Although in his writings he never used those terms, he did nevertheless affirm this distinction. He did so especially in his treatment of the Clark-Van Til controversy in the OPC. Hoeksema saw the main point of difference in the controversy thus:

According to the complainants [Van Til, *et al.*—JDE], it is this, that, while they hold that the difference between the contents of the knowledge of God and the contents of our knowledge is both qualitative and quantitative, Dr. Clark insists that it is only quantitative.

Hoeksema then goes on to list three things for which Clark was condemned by Van Til. First, Clark held that “all truth, in God and in man, is propositional, *i.e.*, assumes the form of propositions.” Second, Clark believes that “man’s knowledge of any proposition is identical with God’s knowledge of the same proposition.” Third, Clark “teaches that God’s knowledge consists of an *infinite number* of propositions, while only a finite number can ever be revealed to man.”³⁴ Van Til and his supporters denied all of these points. Hoeksema rejects Van Til’s position and affirms that which is taught by Clark. He writes that “if the complainants take the stand that Scripture reveals things that are, not above and beyond, but *contrary* to, in conflict with the human mind, it is my conviction that the complainants should be indicted of heterodoxy, and of undermining all sound theology.”³⁵

B. Analogical View

What lies behind Clark’s understanding of the distinction between archetypal and ectypal knowledge is a wrong understanding of the believer’s knowledge in general. As is evident in

his essay, Clark adheres to the view that the believer's knowledge is only *analogically* true rather than *univocally* true.

Robert Reymond explains the difference between analogical and univocal well:

The difference is this: A given predicate applied to separate subjects *univocally* would intend that the subjects possess the predicate in a precisely identical sense. The opposite of univocality is equivocality, which attaches a given predicate to separate subjects in a completely different or unrelated sense. Now lying between univocality and equivocality is analogy. A predicate employed *analogically* intends a relationship between separate objects based upon comparison or proportion.

Univocal means that the content of God's knowledge about a certain thing is the *same* as the content of the believer's knowledge of the same thing. Analogical means that the content of our knowledge is partly like and partly not like the content of God's knowledge.³⁶

Clark believes that the believer's knowledge of a certain thing (ectypal knowledge) is *analogically* true. Our knowledge (ectypal) is analogical to God's knowledge (archetypal). That is, our knowledge of a certain proposition is analogous to God's knowledge but cannot be the same. This means that God's knowledge is qualitatively different than our knowledge. What God knows about a certain thing is different from what we know about that same thing by means of revelation. There is, ultimately, no point of contact between God's knowledge and the believer's.

In his essay Clark equates this analogical view of knowledge with the traditional archetypal/ectypal distinction. He writes, "While those who accepted the archetypal/ectypal distinction tended to favor the well-meant offer, those who rejected the analogical model of theology also rejected the well-meant offer."³⁷ Later he says,

In order to understand the Reformed orthodox insistence on analogical theology, that is, the archetypal/ectypal distinction and its corollary, the well-meant offer, it is useful to consider how the Remonstrants applied evangelical intellectualism to their soteriology.³⁸

He claims that "the distance between God's theology and ours, the analogical nature of our theology relative to God's, necessarily creates tension in all our speech about God."³⁹

Clark claims that he is only following the line of Reformed orthodoxy. He even claims that "Luther and Calvin established and maintained assiduously a strict analogy between theology as God knows it and as he reveals it to us."⁴⁰ Clark lists the names of Junius, Polanus, and Wollebius as well. However, all Clark proves is that these men held either implicitly or explicitly to a form of the archetypal/ectypal distinction. He fails to prove that they understood this distinction in the same way he does. He also fails to prove that they based their view on an analogical view of knowledge.

The only theologian whom Clark mentions that is in clear agreement with him is Cornelius Van Til. Clark essentially proposes the same view that Van Til defended years before. In his response to the charges levelled against him by Van Til, Gordon Clark quoted from what Van Til had written:

The view of the *Complaint* [of Van Til—JDE] is that "God because of his very nature must remain incomprehensible to

man”; it is “not the doctrine that God can be known only if he makes himself known and in so far as he makes himself known.” Moreover, all knowledge which man can attain differs from the knowledge of God “in a qualitative sense and not merely in degree.” Thus God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge do not “coincide at a single point.” A proposition does not “have the same meaning for man as for God.” Man’s knowledge is “analogical to the knowledge God possesses, but it can never be identified with the knowledge” which God “possesses of the same proposition.”⁴¹

At the time of the Clark-Van Til controversy, Herman Hoeksema saw that this understanding of analogical knowledge would be used in defence of the well-meant offer. He wrote that if the idea that “a proposition does not have the same meaning for God as for man” is introduced here as a basis for what follows, and if it was the real purpose of the complainants to persuade the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to adopt the Arminian doctrine of the Christian Reformed Church as expressed by the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924, particularly the view that God is gracious to the reprobate, and that the preaching of the Gospel is a well-meaning offer of salvation on the part of God to all men—in other words, the doctrine that God sincerely seeks the salvation of those whom He will not save—this first point is quite important.⁴²

This is exactly the use to which Clark puts this analogical idea. Clark claims this analogical idea to be equivalent to the archetypal/ectypal distinction, and on the basis of that he defends the well-meant offer. To God, salvation is only for the elect. But this proposition that God knows is not the same as the one we know. We know that God desires the salvation of all men who hear the gospel.

The claim that our knowledge is only analogical to God’s is erroneous. The analogical idea essentially means that the believer can have no truth at all. The best that we can hope for is an analogy to the truth, but the truth will forever escape us. In this case the truth is that God desires the salvation only of the elect. But all we can know is that God desires the salvation of all men who come under the preaching of the gospel. The truth is not something we can know and ought not be something we are concerned with. Gordon Clark writes, “If God knows all truths 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 man can have no truth at all.”⁴³

We confess that the truth must be the same for us as it is for God. We do not know everything that God knows, nor do we know in the same way that God knows, but what we *do* know to be true is the same as God knows it. That is to say, the quantity of our knowledge and the way in which we know is different. It must be, for God is the infinite God and we are but finite creatures. But the *quality* of the knowledge that we do have is identical with that which God has. What we know about a certain proposition is identical to what God knows about that same proposition. Revelation requires that this be true. God’s revelation to us is a revelation that is reliable and accurate. He reveals Himself to us as He actually is. He reveals in His Word to us the truth about the way He works. Faith requires that this be true as well.

Accordingly, since the Scriptures require that saving faith be grounded in true knowledge (see Rom. 10:13-14), the church must vigorously oppose any linguistic or revelational theory, however well-intended, that would take from men and women the only ground of their knowledge of God and, accordingly, their only hope of salvation.⁴⁴

IV. The Knowledge of God and the Gospel

A. The Incomprehensibility and Knowability of God

We confess with the Reformed standards that God is incomprehensible.⁴⁵ That is, He cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind. God is infinite; we are finite. He is transcendent; we are but creatures of the dust. He is spiritual; we are psychical. This means that no man can ever know God exhaustively. There are depths and heights and breadths to God that we will never comprehend. Even in heaven we will never exhaust the knowledge of God but will continue ever to grow.

God is incomprehensible, but He is not unknowable. We cannot fully comprehend God, but we can and do know God. We can know God only because God has made Himself known to us. We have not ascended to Him, but He has stooped down to us and revealed Himself to us. The only possibility for the knowledge of God is God's own revelation of Himself. Apart from that revelation God is unknowable. *Belgic Confession*, Article 7 makes this fact plain. We know God because He has revealed Himself first of all in creation, but more clearly and fully in Holy Writ. Especially in God's Word do we know Him.

This knowledge that we have of God is and must be a *true* knowledge. We confess that what God has revealed to us in His Word must be true. By the knowledge we have through revelation we know God truly and accurately. If this were not true, we could have no faith. Question and Answer 21 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* defines one aspect of true faith as "a *certain* knowledge whereby I hold for *truth* all that God has revealed to us in His Word."⁴⁶ Our knowledge is certain. We hold for truth all that God has revealed. We have no doubts about what He has revealed. We are not confronted with paradoxes or contradictions in His Word.

The fact that our knowledge of God is *true* means that we must conceive of the archetypal/ectypal distinction differently than Clark does. Ectypal knowledge is the knowledge that the believer has of God as He has revealed Himself. This knowledge is qualitatively the same as archetypal knowledge. This understanding of the distinction includes the fact that there is a difference between how God knows and how we know. Archetypal knowledge is intuitive; ectypal knowledge is derived. This understanding also acknowledges that there is a difference in quantity between archetypal and ectypal knowledge. Archetypal knowledge is infinite and boundless; ectypal knowledge is finite and limited. In these ways the two are distinguished. Nevertheless, there is no difference in the *quality* of knowledge. What God has revealed to us and what we know is true. What we know about a certain proposition is identical to God's knowledge of that same proposition as far as quality of knowledge.

B. Scripture on the Offer

This has implications for the idea of the well-meant offer that Clark propounds. The notion of a well-meant offer falls with Clark's understanding of the archetypal/ectypal distinction. Clark is correct in stating that the well-meant offer is a corollary to the archetypal/ectypal distinction—that is, *his* understanding of this distinction. The fact that Scripture and Reformed orthodoxy have *rejected* the well-meant offer of the gospel is an implicit denial of Clark's view of the archetypal/ectypal distinction.

Scripture does not permit any idea of a desire of God to save all who come under the preaching of the gospel. Instead, Scripture teaches that God's Word must be preached to all and sundry, but that gospel is intended to and actually does have a *twofold effect*. The command to repent and believe is general, but the promise is particular. By means of the preaching, God brings the elect believer to salvation. By means of that same preaching, God hardens the reprobate unbeliever in his sin and unbelief and leaves him further without excuse in the judgment day. This is the teaching of Scripture in Isaiah 6:9-12:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

God is here commissioning the prophet Isaiah to speak to the nation of Judah, which had gone astray into the worship of other gods. God is telling Isaiah to preach to these people and to call them to repentance. The people are to understand clearly what God is commanding them to do. God says “hear ye indeed” and “see ye indeed.” God’s purpose is that they clearly understand but reject that which they are called to do. They are to hear the command to repent. But God’s purpose is that that preaching be a means to harden them in their sin. And this is to continue until God judges them: “Until the cities be wasted ...” God’s intention in the preaching is not that the unbelieving people of Israel be saved, but His purpose is to harden them.

The same idea is found in II Corinthians 2:15-16. There Paul writes, “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: 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?” Paul is writing here about himself and all other preachers of the gospel. Those who faithfully proclaim the gospel are “unto God a sweet savour of Christ.” They are a sweet savour to God in those that repent, believe the gospel, and are saved. But they are also a sweet savour in those who reject the Word, refuse to repent, and perish in their unbelief. Both are according to God’s good purpose. The minister must understand that God uses him to be a savour of death unto death to some and a savour of life unto life to others. Through a man’s preaching, God saves His people and hardens the unbelievers. In both cases a man is a sweet savour to God.

The idea of the well-meant offer is smashed on the rocks of Scripture’s teaching in Matthew 22:1-14. There Jesus preaches the parable of the marriage feast. In the parable the king sends out his servants to call the people to the wedding feast of the king’s son. Many refused to heed this call, so the king had his servants gather all whom they could find to the marriage feast. One who is brought to the feast is not clothed as he ought to be. He has not truly heeded the call to come prepared to the supper, so he is cast out. Jesus ends the parable with these words: “For many are called, but few are chosen (ἐκλεκτοί).” We see here the fact that God calls all and sundry through the preaching to repent and believe in the name of Jesus Christ. But only a few of those who were called externally are actually chosen. The man without the wedding garment was called, but he was not chosen. The call to repent and believe is general; the promise is particular, that is, only for the elect.

C. The Canons on the Offer

Try as they might to twist the creeds to teach a well-meant offer, the Reformed confessions do not teach such a doctrine. The *Canons of Dordt* especially are opposed to the idea of the well-meant offer of the gospel. This is true, first of all, from a historical perspective. The *Canons* were written against the Arminians who promoted a well-meant offer of the gospel themselves. The “Opinions of the Remonstrants” make this clear.

8. Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that

God calls certain ones externally whom he does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.

9. There is not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word that according to it (that is, the secret will) he does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom he seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel and by his revealed will; and we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.

10. Nor do we believe that God calls the reprobate, as they are called, to these ends: that he should the more harden them, or take away excuse, or punish them the more severely, or display their inability; nor, however, that they should be converted, should believe, and should be saved.⁴⁷

That the *Canons* do not teach a well-meant offer of the gospel is also evident from an examination of the three most frequently cited articles. First, there is *Canons* II:5:

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.⁴⁸

The proponents of the free offer find in this article proof positive that the *Canons* teach the offer. They refer particularly to the fact that the promise of the gospel must 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.” They read into this that there is a desire on the part of God to give the fulfilment of this promise to all who hear. This is not, however, what Article 5 teaches. Article 5 is simply saying that the gospel, which includes the call to repent and believe as well as the promise that all who repent and believe will be saved, must be proclaimed promiscuously. The article says nothing about God’s intention or desire in such preaching. It simply calls the preacher to proclaim these words: “Everyone listening today, repent and believe in the crucified Christ! To all who repent and believe God will give everlasting life!” Nowhere is there expressed a desire on the part of God to give everlasting life to all who hear. The command comes to all in general. The promise is for all who repent and believe. And the only ones who repent and believe are the elect.

The proponents of the offer often refer to *Canons* III/IV:8:

As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him.⁴⁹

A careful reading of this article will reveal that the Reformed fathers were not teaching the free offer of the gospel here. We are met here with the will of God’s decree. God decrees in the gospel that all men repent and believe. Thus, all men are unfeignedly called (*serio vocantur*). This is a serious command that comes to all men who hear the gospel. And God reveals in His Word what all men are to do: they are to come to God. The activity of coming to God in Jesus

Christ is the command that comes to all in the preaching. And God declares that this act is pleasing to Him. What this article does not teach is that it is pleasing to God that *all men* come to Him. The activity of coming to Him is pleasing to Him because it is according to His will. But we have here no expression of God's earnest desire to save all who hear. He is pleased only with those who do come to Him. To them—the elect—He gives eternal life and rest.

Finally, we have *Canons III/IV:9*:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered (*oblato*) therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted. The fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the Word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the Word by perplexing cares and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Saviour teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. xiii).⁵⁰

The proponents of the free offer contend that the word “offer” used in this article has the meaning of a well-meant offer of God to all men. R. Scott Clark suggests that the word means “to offer with the intention that the offer should be fulfilled if the recipients meet the condition of trust in Christ.”⁵¹ The Latin word *oblato*, however, means first of all “to present” or “to set forth.” Christ crucified is presented or set forth in the preaching of the gospel. To say that Christ is *offered* to all men who hear the gospel implies that Christ atoned for all. But that is the teaching of the Arminians that the Reformed fathers repudiated, particularly in the Second Head of the *Canons*. The meaning must, therefore, be that Christ is *presented* in the gospel.⁵²

D. Reformed Theologians on the Offer

Reformed theologians of high standing have rejected the free offer. There is space only to list some of their names. Most notably men such as John Calvin,⁵³ Francis Turretin,⁵⁴ Simon Van Velzen,⁵⁵ Abraham Kuyper,⁵⁶ and Herman Hoeksema⁵⁷ all rejected the free offer. The opponents of the free offer are in good standing historically.

V. Conclusion

In this essay we have attempted to respond to the position put forth by R. Scott Clark. We have attempted first of all to evaluate and critique the foundation on which Clark has built his teaching of the well-meant offer. We are convinced that Clark holds a wrong understanding of the archetypal/ectypal distinction. He believes that there is no point of contact between the two, between God's knowledge and the knowledge we have by revelation. He makes a separation between the *quality* of God's knowledge and the *quality* of our knowledge. For our part, we believe that the distinction ought to be made between the *quantity* of our knowledge and God's knowledge and the way in which we know and God knows. The quantity of God's knowledge is infinite while ours is finite. God knows intuitively while our knowledge is derived. But the quality of the knowledge we have by revelation is not different from God's knowledge. What we know from God's Word is true and is not in any way contradictory.

We have also attempted to show that behind Clark's wrong view of this distinction is a wrong view of knowledge. Following the lead of Cornelius Van Til, Clark argues that our knowledge is only *analogically* true. But doing this leaves the door open for contradictions and paradoxes

in our knowledge. What we know is essentially different from the way things actually are. We are convinced that this undermines the very existence of systematic theology. We are also convinced that this is perilous for the faith and salvation of the child of God. If we are unsure of the truthfulness of our knowledge, our faith and salvation are unsure.

Finally, we have attempted to prove that the house that Clark builds on his shaky foundation is contrary to Scripture and Reformed orthodoxy. The idea of a well-meant offer in which the sovereign God tries to woo sinners to accept His love is entirely out of keeping with God's Word. It is a repudiation of all of the doctrines of grace. Election becomes conditional or non-existent. Christ's atoning work is made universal. Total depravity is scuttled in defence of man's free will. Grace is made resistible. The preservation of the saints is uncertain. Yet all the while this view is proclaimed to be a precious heritage of Reformed orthodoxy. One face looks Reformed. But more and more the face that appears Arminian is clearly seen.

A Janus, for sure.

We reject this Janus. We are convinced by Scripture and the Reformed tradition that the well-meant offer has no place in the orthodox camp. God's Word clearly teaches that the call is promiscuous, but the promise is particular. In faithfulness to God, therefore, we sound forth the call to repent and believe to the ends of the earth. And we are confident knowing that by such preaching God will gather His elect out of the nations, to the glory of His name.

* * * * *

APPENDIX:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FREE OFFER

A. Moïse Amyraut

Although the idea of a well-meant offer of the gospel has its roots in earlier periods of the church's history,⁵⁸ the *offer* is found clearly in the teachings of the French theologian Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664). One historian says that "Amyraut is the first to set forth a clear and clearly worked out conception of the free offer of the gospel."⁵⁹ Amyraut received his training in the university at Saumur in western France at the feet of the Scottish theologian John Cameron. Amyraut was appointed to teach at Saumur in 1633, a position he held until his death in 1664.⁶⁰

The idea of the free offer really has its beginnings in Cameron, Amyraut's mentor. From him Amyraut learned what he would later develop into his doctrine of hypothetical universalism. Amyraut taught that Christ died for all men and that God well-meaningly offers salvation to all men on the condition of faith. "The cloak under which Amyraut thought to smuggle this Arminian contraband into the Reformed churches was his profession of double predestination."⁶¹ But Amyraut conceived of predestination as subsequent to universal atonement, thus making predestination conditional. Amyraut also defended his doctrine on the basis of a distinction in the will of God. Really he posited two wills in God. The one will of God was particular and unconditional, that is, God willed only the salvation of the elect. The other will of God was universal and conditional, that is, God willed to save all men on condition of faith.⁶²

B. The Marrow Controversy

The teachings promoted by Amyraut were carried over to the British Isles. John Cameron, after finishing his labours in Saumur, returned to Scotland to teach at Glasgow. One of his students was John Davenant, who was influential among many of the delegates to the Westminster Assembly.⁶³

These views, which were spreading among Scottish theologians, came to expression in the Marrow Controversy. The controversy arose out of the Auchterarder Presbytery. The Presbytery refused to license Candidate William Craig because he rejected the statement “It is not sound and orthodox doctrine to teach that we must forsake sin, in order to our coming to Christ.”⁶⁴ There was an appeal to the General Assembly of 1717, which upheld Craig and condemned the Presbytery of Auchterarder. At that meeting Thomas Boston recommended the book *Marrow of Modern Divinity* written by Edward Fisher. This book was condemned in 1720 by the General Assembly, one of the reasons being that it taught the free offer and universal atonement.⁶⁵

Men such as Thomas Boston, Ebenezer Erskine, and Ralph Erskine opposed this decision of the General Assembly and defended the free offer. For example, Ralph Erskine said the following in a sermon: “You may say, What shall I do then that I may be married to Christ? In one Word, if you would have Christ as your husband, O then entertain his suit, and hearken to his wooing and courting motions.”⁶⁶ These men became known as “The Marrow Men” and eventually they split off and formed their own denomination.

C. Among the Dutch

The idea of the well-meant offer also had an influence on developments in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The idea of the free offer came to the Netherlands from two sources. First, it came directly from France, as persecuted Huguenots fled from France to the Netherlands. Many carried with them the thinking of Saumur.⁶⁷ Second, there was a connection between the British and the Dutch. The Dutch received many ministers from Britain and also sent many of their own ministers to be trained in the Isles. Some of these men were enamored by the idea of the free offer and introduced it into the Netherlands. Also, there were many Puritan books that found their way into the homes of the Dutch people. Often the Dutch would meet in conventicles and read the writings of older theologians, including Puritan authors who taught the free offer.⁶⁸

The free offer, which spread throughout the Netherlands during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, became an issue at the time of the *Afscheiding*. The *Afscheiding* was largely a movement among the common people, people who had been influenced by the writings of the Puritans. Eventually there was a rift in the *Afscheiding* churches, the churches in the northern provinces being more orthodox and those in the southern provinces being more liberal-minded. The free offer was espoused by such men as Anthony Brummelkamp and Helenius de Cock, both professors at the *Afscheiding* seminary at Kampen. It was openly taught by J. R. Kreulen, who also introduced a conditional view of the covenant into the churches of the *Afscheiding*. Kreulen wrote that in the preaching there is “a well-meant offer of the grace of God in Christ to all who live under the gospel, with the purpose that they all would accept and obtain possession of that salvation, only on the ground of that offer which comes to them as sinners.” He went on to say that this well-meant offer is “a declaration made by the truthful and holy God and that He earnestly, truthfully, and well-meaningly goes out offering His grace in Christ to all who live under the preaching of the gospel, without deceit, insincerity, and dissembling.”⁶⁹ From here it would spread throughout the Netherlands and even into America.⁷⁰

D. The Christian Reformed Church

The well-meant offer of the gospel was a crucial issue in the controversy in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in the early 1920s, which resulted in the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).⁷¹ One Protestant Reformed historian has said that “this question of the gracious offer of the gospel became the chief point of controversy.”⁷²

The notion of a well-meant offer had entered the thinking of the CRC through her connection to the Dutch motherland. Many of those who emigrated from the Netherlands to America in the late nineteenth century had been convinced of the truth of the well-meant offer by *Afscheiding* ministers. The free offer was transplanted then into the CRC, because many of these immigrants joined the CRC upon their arrival in the States.⁷³ The offer was taught by such early CRC theologians as M. J. Bosma (1874-1912) and William Heyns. In his answer to the question “Is the doctrine of the particular election of some consistent with the general offer of the gospel to all?” Bosma writes, “Yes; indeed it is. The gospel offers salvation to all ... The non-elect may come if they will ... God is sincere in offering salvation to all ...”⁷⁴ Heyns held to “the external call of the Gospel as a free, wellmeant [*sic*] offer of salvation.” It is “a well-meant invitation from God to sinners to receive a portion in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” Heyns says the external call “comes to the sinner with an offer of grace.”⁷⁵

The controversy raged over the theory of common grace, which was raised to the level of an official dogma by the CRC Synod of Kalamazoo that met in 1924. The Synod of Kalamazoo set forth her understanding of common grace in what are called “The Three Points of Common Grace.”⁷⁶ It was particularly the first point that established the idea of a well-meant offer:

Concerning the first point, with regard to the favourable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect, Synod declares that according to the Scripture and the confessions it is determined that besides the saving grace of God, shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is a certain kind of favour, or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evidenced by the quoted Scripture passages and from the *Canons of Dort* II:5 and III/IV:8-9, which deals with the general offer of the Gospel; whereas the quoted declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology, also give evidence that our Reformed fathers from of old have advocated these opinions.⁷⁷

The idea of a general or well-meant offer embedded in this point became known as “*het puntje van het eerste punt* (the little point of the first point).”

Among others, prominent CRC theologian Louis Berkhof used this occasion to defend the well-meant offer.⁷⁸ The idea of a well-meant offer was denied by then CRC ministers Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, and George M. Ophoff. Eventually these three men were deposed, whereupon they formed a new denomination, the PRC. The PRC have officially condemned the teaching of the well-meant offer in a document entitled “The Declaration of Principles.”⁷⁹

The issue of the well-meant offer was raised in the later history of the CRC as well. In the 1960s, when Prof. Harold Dekker defended the notion of universal atonement, appeal was made to the doctrine of the well-meant offer as proof of Christ’s death for all men.⁸⁰ Dekker asked, “[Is] the salvation which the atonement provides *available* to all men?” His answer was, “Indeed it is. Otherwise the well-meant offer of the gospel is a farce, for it then offers sincerely to all men what cannot be sincerely said to be available to all.”⁸¹

The well-meant offer also arose in the case of Dekker’s friend Harry Boer. In the 1970s Boer wrote publicly in opposition to the doctrine of reprobation. In 1977 he served a gravamen to the CRC Synod in which he based his denial of reprobation in part on the well-meant offer.⁸²

The universal atonement taught by Dekker and the denial of reprobation by Boer were rejected, but neither man was disciplined.

In the year 2000, the issue was raised again by CRC minister Raymond A. Blacketer.⁸³ In an essay entitled “The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation” Blacketer rejected the well-meant offer as unbiblical and un-Reformed. The CRC, however, continues to maintain the position of 1924.

E. The Clark Case in the OPC

The well-meant offer was also an issue in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1944. This came up in connection with the ordination of Dr. Gordon H. Clark to the ministry in the OPC.⁸⁴ Among other things, complaints were lodged against Clark’s denial of the well-meant offer. The complainants said,

In the course of Dr. Clark’s examination by Presbytery it became abundantly clear that his rationalism keeps him from doing justice to the precious teaching of Scripture that in the gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect, and that he has no pleasure in any one’s rejecting this offer but, contrariwise, would have all who hear accept it and be saved.⁸⁵

The issue was finally resolved a few years later. In 1948, John Murray, professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, submitted a report to the 15th General Assembly of the OPC in which he defended the free offer of the gospel. This report was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly and remains the official position of the OPC on the issue of the well-meant offer.⁸⁶

There seems to be an interesting connection between the offer as it was affirmed in the OPC and developments in the CRC. It is interesting that men who came to teach at Westminster Seminary from the CRC were some of the most ardent defenders of the free offer. These were men such as R. B. Kuiper, Ned Stonehouse, and particularly Cornelius Van Til. It is likely that these men introduced into the OPC the free offer that was affirmed by the CRC in 1924.⁸⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. Herman Hoeksema, [*A Triple Breach in the Foundation of the Reformed Truth: A Critical Treatise on the “Three Points” Adopted by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Churches in 1924*](#) (Grandville, MI: Evangelism Committee of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, 2001), 24.

2. Cf. the Appendix, which gives a brief history of the free offer.

3. R. Scott Clark, “Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David Van Drunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R), 154.

4. Cf. their [*Universalism and the Reformed Churches: A Defense of Calvin’s Calvinism*](#) (Launceston, Tasmania: Magazine and Literature Committee of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, 1997) and Christopher J. Connors, [*The Biblical Offer of the Gospel: Analysis and Answer to Rev. K.W. Stebbins’ Book “Christ Greely Offered” in the Light of Scripture and the Confessions*](#) (Launceston, Tasmania, n.d.) for the EPC’s rejection of the free offer.

5. John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), 125-131.

6. The following are works in which the notion of the free offer is defended: Clark, "Janus"; A. C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1954); Joseph H. Hall, "The Marrow Controversy: A Defense of Grace and the Free Offer of the Gospel," in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 10 (1999): 239-257; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Erroll Hulse, *The Free Offer: An Exposition of Common Grace and the Free Invitation of the Gospel* (Sussex: Carey Publications, 1973); Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995); David Silversides, *The Free Offer: Biblical and Reformed* (Kilsyth, Scotland: Marpet Press, 2005); K.W. Stebbins, *Christ Freely Offered: A Discussion of the General Offer of Salvation in the Light of Particular Atonement* (Strathpine, Australia: Covenant Press, 1978); Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1974); Cornelius P. Venema, "The Doctrine of Preaching According to the Reformed Confessions," in *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 10 (1999): 135-183.

7. Cf. David J. Engelsma, [*Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the "Well-Meant Offer" of the Gospel*](#), rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: RFP, 1994), 120ff.; Herman Hoeksema, [*A Power of God Unto Salvation or Grace Not an Offer*](#), trans. Homer C. Hoeksema and Cornelius Hanko (Grandville, MI: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1996), 5-6, 60ff., 74ff.

8. Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:586.

9. Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4:114-5.

10. Hulse, *Free Offer*, 4-5.

11. Cf. Raymond A. Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation," in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 35, n. 1 (April 2000): 42-3; A. C. DeJong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, 127-8; Hulse, *Free Offer*, 8; Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4:113; Stebbins, *Christ Freely Offered*, 13ff.

12. In my opinion this is a faulty designation for this distinction. The distinction here is not that one will is hidden to us and the other is revealed to us. The distinction is between what God has decreed will take place and what He commands.

13. Cf. the Appendix.

14. Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4:113.

15. Hulse, *Free Offer*, 8.

16. Hall, "The Marrow Controversy," 257.

17. Venema, "The Doctrine of Preaching," 167, n. 26. Cf. also Hoekema, *Saved By Grace*, 5-7, 78-79; Clark, "Janus," 156, 163-4; I. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hypercalvinism*, xiv, 117-9; Hulse, *Free Offer*, 14, 19-20; J. Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4:113, 131; Stebbins, *Christ Freely Offered*, 24.

18. Quoted in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 95, n. 1.

19. For a more detailed discussion, cf. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy*, ca. 1527 to ca. 1725, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:225-238; William J. van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, no. 2 (Fall, 2002), 319-335.

20. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 44. Cf. also pp. 299-300.
21. Muller, *Dictionary*, 101. Cf. also pp. 300-301.
22. Clark, "Janus," 152.
23. Clark, "Janus," 153.
24. Clark, "Janus," 161.
25. Clark, "Janus," 154. Clark is correct in stating that the Arminians rejected this distinction. Cf. van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology," 334-5.
26. Clark, "Janus," 174.
27. This is confirmed by Muller, *PRRD*, 1:222; van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology," 321.
28. Clark, "Janus," 176.
29. Clark, "Janus," 163-4.
30. Clark, "Janus," 175.
31. Sean Gerety, "Janus Alive and Well: Dr. R. Scott Clark and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel (Part 1)," *The Trinity Review* 300a (June 2011): 3.
32. Sean Gerety, "Janus Alive and Well: Dr. R. Scott Clark and the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel (Part 2)," *The Trinity Review* 300b-301 (July-August 2011): 6.
33. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik DeVries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 254-5. Emphasis is Kuyper's.
34. Hoeksema, *Clark-VanTil*, 7.
35. Hoeksema, *Clark-Van Til*, 8.
36. Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 96.
37. Clark, "Janus," 160.
38. Clark, "Janus," 163.
39. Clark, "Janus," 177.
40. Clark, "Janus," 161.

41. Hoeksema, *Clark-Van Til*, 9-10. Cf. Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 33ff., 177ff., 324; Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 97-102.

42. Hoeksema, *Clark-Van Til*, 11.

43. Quoted in Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 99.

44. Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 102.

45. Belgic Confession, Art. 1 in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:383; Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. 2.1 in *The Subordinate Standards and Other Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Offices of the Free Church of Scotland, 1955), 6.

46. Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:313.

47. P. Y. DeJong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2008), 265-266.

48. Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:586.

49. *Confessions of the PRC*, 168. We have quoted from this source rather than from Schaff because the latter gives an inaccurate translation of this article. Cf. Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:565-7, 589.

50. Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:589.

51. Clark, "Janus," 169.

52. Cf. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 48, 108.

53. Cf. *Institutes* 3.22, 24; Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 141-149; Engelsma, [The Reformed Faith of John Calvin: The Institutes in Summary](#) (Jenison, MI RFPFA, 2009), 281ff.

54. Cf. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 151-172. Turretin co-authored the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* in 1675 in opposition to the hypothetical universalism of Amyraut. In this document he rejects the free offer. The *Formula* is found in A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 656-663.

55. Cf. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 106-107.

56. Cf. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 173-192.

57. Cf. Hoeksema, [Calvin, Berkhof and H. J. Kuiper: A Comparison](#) (Grand Rapids, 1930); Hoeksema, [The Gospel, Or, The Most Recent Attack Upon the Truth of Sovereign Grace](#) (Grand Rapids: Mission Committee of the Protestant Reformed churches, 1933); Hoeksema, [A Power of God Unto Salvation, Or, Grace Not an Offer](#); Hoeksema, [A Triple Breach](#).

58. In his work [The History of the Free Offer](#) (Grandville, MI: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1989) Herman Hanko traces the roots of the free offer all the way to the Semi-Pelagian controversy in the fifth century. He finds traces as well in the Arminians at the Synod of Dort.

59. Hanko, *History*, 68.
60. *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnals, 1908), 1:160-1.
61. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 167.
62. Hanko, *History*, 63.
63. Hanko, *History*, 82-5.
64. Joseph H. Hall, "The Marrow Controversy: A Defense of Grace and the Free Offer of the Gospel," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 10 (1999): 242.
65. Hanko, *History*, 101.
66. Quoted in Hall, "The Marrow Controversy," 255.
67. Hanko, *History*, 158-60.
68. Hanko, [*Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth*](#) (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2010), 348; Hanko, *History*, 163-4.
69. Quoted in Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 105-6.
70. Hanko, "The Afscheiding and the Well-Meant Gospel Offer," in [*Always Reforming: Continuation of the Sixteenth-Century Reformation*](#), ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2009), 74-78.
71. For accounts of this history see among others James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 110-115; Hanko, [*For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches*](#) (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2000), 47-66; Hoeksema, [*The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*](#) (Grand Rapids: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1936).
72. Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 53.
73. Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 348-9.
74. M. J. Bosma, *Exposition of Reformed Doctrine: A Popular Explanation of the Most Essential Teachings of the Reformed Churches*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Smitten Book Company, 1927), 56-7.
75. William Heyns, *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1926), 239, 243.
76. For the Three Points, see *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church, 1924*, trans. Henry DeMots (Grand Rapids: Archives of the Christian Reformed Church, 2000), 145-7. Cf. also Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, 85-6.
77. *Acts of Synod of the CRC, 1924*, 145-6. Emphasis mine.

78. Louis Berkhof, *De Drie Punten in Alle Deelen Gereformeerd* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1925).

79. The Declaration is found in [*The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*](#) (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 412-431. The rejection of the free offer is found on pp. 412-6.

80. Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake*, 83-4.

81. Harold Dekker, "God So Loved—ALL Men!" in *The Best of The Reformed Journal*, ed. James D. Bratt and Ronald A. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 57.

82. For Boer's gravamen see *Acts of Synod of the CRC, 1977* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1977), 665-679. Cf. also Boer's account of this history in his *The Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

83. Blacketer, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed," 37-65.

84. For more on this history consult Michael A. Hakkenberg, "The Battle over the Ordination of Gordon H. Clark," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 329-350; and Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy* (Hobbs, NM: Trinity Foundation, 1995).

85. Hoeksema, *Clark-Van Til*, 33-4.

86. John Murray, "The Free Offer of the Gospel," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 4:113-132. In a footnote we read that this report "was subsequently reprinted in booklet form under the names of John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse but although Dr. Stonehouse, as a member of the committee, offered editorial suggestions, the material was written by Professor Murray: (p. 113, n. 1). Murray also discusses the free offer in "The Atonement and the Free Offer," in *Collected Writings*, 1:59-85; and in *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 134ff.

87. Hanko, *History*, 136; Hoeksema, *Clark-Van Til*, 11, 33.