

# The Free Offer Issue (2)

*H. L. Williams*

Being a critical analysis and review  
of a book by Rev. David Silversides entitled  
*The Free Offer: Biblical And Reformed*  
Marpet Press, 2005, paperback, 128 pp.

## Objectives, Aims, & Foundations

Rev. David Silversides (hereafter DS) outlines his *aims* and *objectives* in a short “Preface” (p. 3) stating that the “booklet” is an expansion of a lecture on this topic he delivered to the Free Church School in Theology at Larbert in Scotland in 2001. He avers that it “presupposes some familiarity with the doctrines of the Reformed faith,” and that his *purpose* in publishing is not “merely to engage in controversy” but also to “advance the preaching of Christ to needy sinners,” and in “establishing weak or doubting Christians in the consolations of the gospel.”

The quotations italicised above indicate his foundational aims and objectives, revealing simultaneously an important insight into the underlying psychology structuring the book. The book itself is thus evinced as the polemical end-result of a desire to protect the factors intrinsic to the foundational aims, viz.:

- 1) To “advance the preaching of Christ to needy sinners.”
- 2) “Establishing weak or doubting Christians in the consolations of the gospel.”

These two factors should figure with priority in any faithful pastor’s ministry. What is important here is that DS evidently conceives that the BRF and PRC position on common grace and the free offer of the gospel threatens, or at least seriously hinders, the efficient pursuance of those objectives in the ministry as he understands it. We might add that the same view appears to be prevalent among DS’s backers, the Revs. J. J. Murray and Malcolm Watts, plus probably the vast bulk of modern British evangelicals and Calvinists.

This explains why DS has spent so much time and energy over the last 15 years or so fighting against the BRF and PRC position on these matters, even to the point of travelling to Adelaide, Australia, to deliver a special lecture on the matter these issues in 1999. It is as if he is conscious of a threatening nemesis to cherished beliefs and long-held practices, not only of himself, but also of much of the modern Calvinist tradition in which he stands.

At a foundational level, DS approaches this whole matter from a radically different epistemological standpoint to that of the BRF and the PRC. Whilst both sides agree on the paramount importance of Scripture as being the infallible, inerrant source of all revealed truth concerning God and His works, nevertheless an important difference exists with respect to the relative stance taken vis-à-vis God and His Word, such that the exegetical labours of the two sides are necessarily divergent on the particular issues addressed in DS's book. This difference in standpoint runs at a deep level, and as such would not strike the average reader as something obvious. But before any further examination of this "free offer" issue can be presented here, it is vitally necessary to examine it carefully, as it is determinative of all subsequent exegetical observations, deductions, and inferences.

Working as he does, in and from a "Westminster" Presbyterian/Puritan tradition, DS understandably, if unconsciously, manifests the underlying dialectic hermeneutic which has marred that tradition for some 300 years, initially and especially in Scotland via the influx of "Marrow" theology, thereon via an accumulative roll of effects that soon infiltrated virtually the whole Calvinistic spectrum.<sup>1</sup> DS does not tell us in his "booklet" about the *massive sea change* that took place in Scottish Calvinist theology as the 18th century emerged.<sup>2</sup> Failure to isolate this historic change, and to critique the same, gives the impression that no change worth mentioning actually took place at all. However, a consultation with Scottish authorities on such topics yields important and relevant information. James Walker can tell us how the rise of "Marrow theology" in Scotland affected deeply

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1974), especially chapter 5 and onwards; James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560-1760* (Edinburgh: The Knox Press, 1982); Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy, Seceders and Subscription in Scottish Presbyterianism* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1990); Nigel M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), articles in loc., and hereafter designated *DSCOT*.

the whole vista of Scottish theology: “a difference between the seventeenth and eighteenth century divines.”<sup>3</sup> This concerns us deeply in the present debate, since it involves the matter of the gospel offer and the common grace theology which underlay the whole issue then, as indeed it does now, 300 years later in DS’s book. In short, DS’s book is conditioned by and permeated with the whole language and methodology of the *later* Scottish theology, which arose with and subsequent to the “Marrow-men.” Walker notes three features in particular which struck him as indicative of the change, two of which are relevant here:

I have been often struck with the frequency with which the subject of reprobation is introduced into our older theological works, and the almost unkind way in which reprobates are spoken of. Now the Marrow divines, as well as the divines of the second Reformation, believed in the doctrine of reprobation. But they treat it, as it were, with a holy awe, and do not care to thrust it forward. In Rutherford’s work on the Covenant, the word reprobation or reprobate occurs between eighty and ninety times; in Boston on the Covenant it only occurs thrice. There can be little doubt of what that indicates.<sup>4</sup>

One might add to Walker’s insightful statement here, that “reprobation” is a doctrine that has well-nigh disappeared right out of sight in certain modern Calvinist circles that follow on from the Scottish Marrow theology. Indeed, in some modern “Calvinist” quarters it is outright de-

<sup>2</sup>Not only does DS fail to draw attention to this tidal wave of change in his book, but in the 35-page Appendix B entitled “Additional Testimony from Reformed Writers” at the end of his book he also fails to note this factor. There he gives us a concatenation of quotations from Reformed writers and confessions purporting to support his views on the free offer, etc., beginning with Calvin and extending through a phalanx of Puritans and Scottish divines up to the nineteenth century. And at the critical date, about 1700, where the change took place, he passes through the “earthquake” zone as if nothing had ever happened. This is a major fault in his presentation, and gives the reader a distorted view of Calvinist historical theology. And this is particularly so since it is *on this very matter of the free offer* that the great change took place.

<sup>3</sup>Walker, *Op. cit.*, p. 92. Walker is speaking of the Marrow’s gospel preaching in particular here, but the point he makes is relevant also with respect to the total impact of the Marrow.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

nied altogether. One only has to remember what the Banner of Truth did to Arthur Pink's *Sovereignty of God* back in 1962.<sup>5</sup>

But Walker has more to say:

Then, in the Marrow theology, you might say there is more of a desire to put the gospel near to human souls. This is seen in their deed of grant and gift, and, as I think, *often very questionable appliance of texts to the support of that doctrine*. It is also seen in a difference between the seventeenth century and eighteenth century divines, which has perhaps been hardly ever referred to. In the earlier treatises on the Covenant you have generally some discussion of Christ's testament. Indeed, some of the richest and tenderest things are spoken about it. Much, in particular, is said of the legacies and the legatees. Who are the legatees? *In the older works, without apparently any other idea being supposed capable of entertainment, they are the elect - believers.* No, says Boston. To the elect only the testament becomes effectual; but they are not the only persons to whom the legacies are left. The legatees are sinners of mankind indefinitely, and *every mankind sinner is entitled to put in his claim.*<sup>6</sup>

When he wrote that in the mid-19th century, Walker was a Free-Kirker who stood among the major phalanx of Free Kirk "Calvinists" who had appropriated the "Marrow" doctrine as their own, to such a degree that the majority of them could go on to swallow the methods and dogmas of D. L. Moody. More, in the battle for the soul of the Free Kirk in those days, Walker sat on the Free Kirk committee that worked for union with the by-then outright Amyraldian Secession Churches of the Marrowmen. In that battle, Walker arraigned himself against such traditional Calvinist stalwarts as James Begg and Dr. John Kennedy of Dingwall.<sup>7</sup> It is notable

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Ronald Hanko, "The Forgotten Pink," in *British Reformed Journal*, No. 17, Jan.-March 1997, for the details of how the Banner removed almost half of Pink's original text right out of their edition, only alerting readers to any changes under the statement in the publisher's introduction that they had made "certain minor revisions and abridgements." These "minor" changes included the removal of three whole chapters besides much else. One of the chapters excised was the chapter entitled, "The Sovereignty of God in Reprobation."

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92; emphasis mine.

that the modern Calvinist stream of theology has a similar disposition, in which Boston and the Marrow are popularly presented as “the high-water mark of Scottish orthodoxy,” whereas Begg and Kennedy barely get a mention. What is important here, however, is that the pro-Marrow Walker could, while eulogising the “Marrow,” yet admit to certain idiosyncrasies in “Marrow” exegesis, and notes that its rise marked a significant change of emphasis and direction in those very aspects of Scottish theology we are concerned with in this controversy with DS. Walker actually tries to downplay this “change” by suggesting that “no doctrinal divergence, however, is implied.”<sup>8</sup> His view cannot be substantiated by the facts, even the facts he himself presents, which we have adumbrated here.

This view is corroborated by the work of Principal John Macleod of the twentieth century. Another “Marrow” sympathiser, he was to conclude that the Marrow “... teaching has left a permanent mark on the *method* of the Scottish Evangelical school.”<sup>9</sup> If that means anything it must mean this, that that “permanent mark” was not evident in Scottish theology pre-Marrow.

Of course, the “mark” did not originate with the “Marrow-men.” They themselves via Boston picked it up from an old Puritan book entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* published in 1645 by an English Presbyterian “barber-surgeon” named Edward Fisher.<sup>10</sup> A work of “popular” divinity, it doubtless reflected much of the conflicting streams of opinion endemic to the era in which it was written, whence, resurrected in early 18th century Scotland, it was to make its enduring “permanent mark.”

So what exactly is the “permanent mark?” On the *surface* of theology it emerges with several innovative emphases. Relevant to our controversy are the following two emphases regarding gospel preaching. First, that in the gospel God expresses himself as desiring the salvation of every sinner, and second that in so doing God puts every sinner in possession of a “warrant” to believe. Practically speaking, in “Marrow” terms, this first enables the

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 91, where Walker asserts that the “Marrow-men” were nearer the right way than their opponents. Also see DSCOT, “Walker, James” in loc.

<sup>8</sup>Walker, *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup>Macleod, *Op. cit.*, p. 166; emphasis mine. On page 145, Macleod characterises Boston of Ettrick, the first Scots “Marrow-man,” as “one of the brightest lights in the firmament of the Reformed Church in Scotland.”

<sup>10</sup>Cf. DSCOT, “Marrow Controversy,” in loc.

preacher to announce that “God promises *every one* of you salvation if you believe.” Second, it means that the “warrant” every hearer has for believing is embodied in the notion that “Christ is a legacy (or deed of gift and grant) for every man,” so “every man” may, on that basis, put in his claim, as it were, and, moreover, be assured that the atoning death covers him by virtue of it being made a “legacy for every man.”<sup>11</sup>

Underlying this dogma, however, is an unseen change in hermeneutic principle. This change seemed to pass into Scottish, and then international Calvinism, without anyone being aware of it, because the whole matter was obscured (camouflaged?) under the debate about the “Marrow.” Via the “Marrow,” *dialecticism* was introduced into the main-stream of Calvinist theological hermeneutics and accepted by a majority without a whimper. The dialectic method not only accepts, but also promotes, the notion that God’s truth is fundamentally beyond human comprehension, and any “truth” which we perceive from the biblical revelation is *conditioned by this limitation*. The result of this limitation is that Scripture truths can and will often emerge to the human mind as internally self-contradictory. The “Marrow” itself shouts such contradictions, but modern Calvinists denominate these contradictions as “paradoxes.” For example, in its principal emphasis, the “Marrow” majors powerfully upholding the doctrine of “limited atonement.” Yet it simultaneously equally emphasises that Christ “is dead for every man.” Again, the “Marrow-men” made bold to attack the Amyraldian system, yet simultaneously practised what was effectively an Amyraldian, nay, even a quasi-Arminian mode of gospel preaching, declaring that God desires to save every man, and that “Christ is dead for every man.” Moreover, when Principal Hadow examined *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* during the original “Marrow” controversy in 1720 and 1722, he took exception to as many as six paradoxes in the work with regard to law and sin alone. By 1939, however, after 200 years of “Marrowization,” Principal Macleod could claim that “three of the six (paradoxes) were but echoes of words of Scripture.”<sup>12</sup> Macleod does not inform us of any details regarding this, but the tone of his sentiments here clearly indicates favour of the “Marrow” and just as clearly in favour of “paradox” as a principle to be found embedded in Scripture itself.

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Walker, *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Macleod, *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

It is notable that DS in his book makes absolutely no use at all of the word “paradox”—not once at all in its 128 pages. Yet, in all the logic of his exegetical stance, “paradox” runs through it, as positive as it is hidden. Right at the end of his last main chapter, chapter 5, DS closes his arguments by quoting *with approval* from Charles Haddon Spurgeon:

If I preach Christ as he would have me preach, he will certainly own his own word; he will never leave it without his own living witness. But let me imagine I can improve the Gospel, that *I can make it consistent*, that I can dress it up and make it look finer, I shall find that my Master is departed, and that Ichabod is written on the walls of the sanctuary. How many are kept in bondage through neglect of Gospel invitations.<sup>13</sup>

One should note the italicised phrase in the above quotation, and how it begs the question: “Is the pure gospel *inconsistent* then?” Obviously, in the eyes of Spurgeon it must have been! Otherwise his statement above would make no sense! But note also, how Spurgeon considers it wrong to attempt to make the inconsistencies consistent! That to do so was to part company with “my Master!”

To this staggering degree, then, dialecticism had permeated and mollified Reformed theology by the nineteenth century, that the world’s acknowledged greatest Calvinist preacher of those times could articulate himself in such terms. And thus we see “dialecticism” in the guise of “paradox” theology fully permeating this little book of DS. The poison is there, but it is never drawn to one’s attention. We doubt not that the good DS does not in all sincerity even regard it as poison.

By the time Principal Macleod was delivering his lectures on “Scottish Theology” to Westminster Theological Seminary in 1939, the “paradox principle” of dialecticism had made great strides in the Presbyterian tradition. Cornelius Van Til was already well ensconced at Westminster Seminary, and in the twentieth century he was probably the world’s leading advocate of “paradox” as being a salient and ineluctable feature of Scrip-

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Silversides, *The Free Offer*, p. 80, quoting from Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1995), p. 157, quoting from Spurgeon’s *New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 6, p. 29; emphasis mine.

ture. Van Til, need it be said, was a thorough “Marrow-man” on the free offer and on common grace.<sup>14</sup> But unlike most “Marrow-men,” Van Til, with his immense philosophical learning, was conscious of the epistemological foundations which undergird the dialecticism intrinsic to the “Marrow.” These foundations he explored extensively, and in his writings made bold to claim that

*All the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory ... we do not fear to accept that which has the appearance of being contradictory.*<sup>15</sup>

Van Til, unlike Barth and the phalanx of dialectic, neo-orthodox theologians, would not countenance the idea that the “contradictions” are real.<sup>16</sup> What differentiates him from these latter is one word, that word “appearance.” But this difference is effectively negated by the phrase “have of necessity.” By this phrase Van Til lands himself in the same position as Barth et al for all practical intents and purposes. For what is the practical difference between a “real contradiction” and an “apparent contradiction” when the latter is emergent as of “necessity,” and is of necessity unresolvable to human minds, and is therefore indistinguishable from “real”? How might one distinguish between “real” and “apparent” contradictions? In secular life, one might at times be able to differentiate, but then only if one is “in the know” about some significant something-or-other that necessarily stands as a vital qualifying factor in the “apparent” dichotomy. Then one can see that the “contradiction” was only “apparent.” But to both Barth and Van Til being “in the know” is out of the question. Both men base their theology on the same epistemological foundation, that is, that God and His thoughts are necessarily beyond the ability of human minds to comprehend. Both men emphasise to the point of absoluteness the Creator-creature distinction such that communication from Creator to creature in a logically comprehensible way is effectively rendered impossible.

For Barth, this emerges at a practical level in his insistence that Scripture and theology, all “words-about-God,” can contain intrinsically no real information about God at all, but can only act basically in two ways. First,

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1972).

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165; emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165.

as a “John the Baptist’s finger” pointing to the Divine.<sup>17</sup> The Infinite One cannot possibly be expressed in finite terms, but only “pointed to.” Second, as the “water in the pool at Bethesda,”<sup>18</sup> the Scriptures await the coming of the indescribable “divine event” that, as it were, “troubles the waters of the pool,” whereon the “sick” may be dipped for “healing,” becoming subjects then of the mystic “experience” of “God with us.” In such an “event,” the fallible human scriptures “become” the “Word of God” in that existential moment for those who are touched by the Divine influence. Afterwards, they recede to being but fallible human words again, like the “waters of the pool” after the “troubling” ceases. They can then only be but a “pointing finger” of *fallible* human testimony to the miracles that took place there. As such, Scripture cannot but be an amalgam of inadequate, stumbling human words, in which the writers not only can but do err in every word, manifesting a multiplicity of logical contradictions.<sup>19</sup> But Barth is not bothered about such contradictions. For him there is no need of any “infallible Scripture.” For him, “the Word of God” is not Scripture, it is the indescribable “event” of God by which He freely and sovereignly manifests himself *through* Scripture, thereby making Scripture at that particular point, and at that particular time only, coincident with the Word of God in some mystic, indescribable way. Barth defines this event solely in terms of Jesus Christ as “Immanuel—God with us.” In some way or other, all of modern dialectical neo-orthodoxy follows this basic set of principles one finds in Barth. And fundamental to it all is the philosophical presupposition of the nature-grace dichotomy taken up from Thomas Aquinas, that is, that the gulf betwixt the natural creation and the divine is unbridgeable except via the indescribable existential “flash,” or the sudden “troubling of the waters,” so to speak. Indeed, dialectical theology as a whole has learned via the writings of Kierkegaard

... to affirm the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity; between eternity and time, infinite and finite.

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<sup>17</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936) vol. 1, part 1, p. 127.

<sup>18</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), vol. 1, part 2, p. 530.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 529-530. Barth here also refers to the scriptural witness about man as being fallible, sinful, and far from God, and he insists that this applies to the prophets and apostles too.

It is these opposites which dialectical theologians claim have come together in an *absolutely paradoxical* way in Jesus Christ. There is no higher synthesis of the two sides, for the two poles remain in creative tension.<sup>20</sup>

Shockingly, Van Til comes across as so similar to Barth that he has to take pains to try and dismiss the similarity. If Barth could speak of Scripture as being but like “John the Baptist’s pointing finger,” or the “waters of the pool at Bethesda,” Van Til could speak of it as but “touching the hem of His garment.”<sup>21</sup> Like Barth and the Dialectics, he

... always made it his goal to be true to a single and initial ontological vision—the distinction between the Creator and the creature. Throughout his writings Van Til insisted again and again that human knowledge is and can only be analogical to divine knowledge. *What this means for Van Til is the express rejection of any and all qualitative coincidence between the content of God's mind and the content of man's mind ...* for Van Til this means that man qualitatively knows nothing as God knows a thing.<sup>22</sup>

A moment’s examination of the above yields indubitably the fact that for Van Til, as for Barth et al., the “distinction between the Creator and the creature,” itself intrinsically a valid distinction, has been pressed to the extreme of *denying any logical continuity* between the Creator and the creation. Barth says that the divine “revelation” is “indescribable” in human words, and can speak of God as being “wholly other.” Van Til, whilst having the Archimedean point of his philosophy founded on the Bible as the infallible Word of God, *nevertheless* denies to the Scriptures any rev-

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<sup>20</sup>C. A. Baxter, “Dialectical Theology,” in Sinclair B. Ferguson et al (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester, UK, and Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), p. 198; emphasis mine. Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish theologian of the early nineteenth century.

<sup>21</sup>Van Til, *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN, 1998), pp. 97–98; emphasis mine. This quotation is taken from chapter 4, entitled “The Nature of Biblical Truth,” in which the author explores the logical nature of revelation and thoroughly critiques and refutes the notion of paradox as a legitimate factor of hermeneutical science. This chapter alone is worth the price of the whole book.

elation which at any point is “coincident” with the “content of God’s mind.” Like Barth, and Aquinas, he regards human “words-about-God” as being only “analogical” to the truth as it really is in God. Now, in human speaking, an analogy is an illustration of a certain aspect of a matter under consideration. It “parallels” the real thing, but *only* in the specified illustrative aspect. As such, the analogical language is at that one point “univocal,” that is, it coincides exactly with the reality of the matter under consideration. But for Van Til, the “Creator-creature” or “Infinite-finite” gulf will actually put such a strain on all human “words-about-God” that no univocity is possible at “any point” at all. As such, his notion of even “analogical” language breaks down, for as we have just seen above, even “analogical” language *must* contain a “univocal” element in it somewhere whereby there is correspondence to the reality the analogy is intended to illustrate. Thus Van Til leaves us with a divinely inspired, infallible Scripture which bears no relation to truth in the Divine mind whatsoever! Yet, for all this, Van Til simultaneously and persistently insists on venerating Scripture as God’s words of truth to mankind. How? Again, by invoking, like the Dialectics, the notion of “paradox” as a valid hermeneutical principle. In his introduction to Warfield’s famous *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, Van Til writes,

When the Christian restates the content of Scriptural revelation in the form of a “system,” such a system is based upon and therefore analogous to the “existential system” that God himself possesses. Being based upon God’s revelation it is on the one hand, fully true, and, on the other hand, *at no point identical* with the content of the divine mind.<sup>23</sup>

One asks, how can anything be “on the one hand *fully true*” and simultaneously on the other hand “*at no point identical*” with the content of the Divine mind? What is it, is it that the mind of the Infinite and Holy One is full of Truth but yet, when He speaks, He can only articulate lies, or is His revelation “fully true” and His mind packed solid with lies? Which blasphemy are we to choose? But right here Van Til flies to “paradox” as

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 98; emphasis Reymond’s, citing Van Til’s “Introduction” to B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1948), p. 33.

the way out of such an impasse. Both sides of the dichotomy are to him simultaneously equally true.

The inescapable conclusion is that “scriptural revelation” and its exegesis is not in any way truly connected to the Divine or in any way expressive of information in the Divine mind. In which case how is it a “revelation” of the Divine?

But as we have seen, for Van Til all such “contradictions” are to be regarded as only “apparent” even if the human mind can never resolve them. More. Because, he argues, human theological language is “only analogical,” then *all* Christian truth will finally and ultimately appear to be contradictory to the believer. Far from this being an embarrassment, for Van Til and all dialectical thinkers, it is a manifestation of reality to be gladly embraced. Thus he argues,

Faith abhors the really contradictory; to maintain the really contradictory is to deny God. Faith *adores* the apparently contradictory; *to adore the apparently contradictory is to adore God* as one’s creator and final interpreter.<sup>24</sup>

In this mind-numbing tension between the two polar opposites, Van Til finds the supreme moment of adoration of the Divine. This is pure dialecticism, and its similarity to Barth’s “polar tension” is marked. But Van Til emphasises this:

... while we shun as poison the idea of the really contradictory *we embrace with passion* the idea of the apparently contradictory ... To seek to present the Christian position as rationally explicable in the sense of being comprehensible to the mind of man is to defeat our own purposes.<sup>25</sup>

These “apparent contradictions” are denominated “paradoxes,” or sometimes “antinomies”<sup>26</sup> by the modern Calvinist dialectics in order to distinguish them from “real contradictions.”

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67; emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup>Van Til, *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup>“Antinomies” is the word used to denote the paradoxes by James I. Packer, in his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (IVP, 1961), pp. 18-25.

“... I abhor paradox,” wrote John Calvin.<sup>27</sup> He would turn in his grave if he knew that modern Calvinist exegesis *expects as a matter of theological principle* to find material embedded in the Word of God which emerges to our consciousness *necessarily* as sets of simultaneous mutual contradictions. Worse. Contra Calvin, the modern Calvinist phalanx, headed by Van Til, “loves” the paradoxes, “cherishes” them, insists on them, and saliently promotes them. And insists that it is in the “paradox” that we fully worship God.

A salient example of the appeal to “paradox” current in the modern British Calvinistic world emerged in the Calvinistic Baptist journal, *Reformation Today* (November-December, 1998). Therein a modern “Reformed Baptist” and Banner of Truth man, Rev. Geoffrey Thomas, gave a eulogy of the late Prof. John Murray of Westminster Seminary. Thomas noted, with evident sympathy, Murray’s position on the “free offer” issue in which he had responded against Gordon H. Clark with a booklet teaching that:

... “there was a sincere love in God for every single sinner, insomuch that in the preaching of the church God came and had a message of good news for every person” such that “I have a Saviour for you to take—Christ crucified FOR YOU to believe upon. God loves you so much that he has brought this message and this offer of forgiveness and eternal life to you ...”

This “offer,” Thomas says, was to be accompanied by urgent beseeching and entreaty ... and “God alone knows,” he says, how such a conviction can be reconciled to the doctrines of election and limited atonement.

And now, the “paradox” dialectic emerges too, in DS’s little book, though not so blatantly as in Van Til and Murray. In fact, nowhere in his book does DS so much as use the word “paradox.” But “paradox” is in the life-blood of his hermeneutic, albeit not openly expressed. For DS upholds “5-point Calvinism,”<sup>28</sup> and yet simultaneously he upholds the notion that God in the gospel expresses His desire to save all men.<sup>29</sup> He insists that God can

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<sup>27</sup>John Calvin, “Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote,” in his *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), p. 149.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Silversides: “This study is written from the standpoint of commitment to the ‘five points of Calvinism,’ otherwise known as the doctrines of grace” (*Op. Cit.*, p. 8).

simultaneously love and hate the same persons.<sup>30</sup> All these, though at this last point DS openly and unsatisfactorily equivocates, are “paradoxes,” or “apparent contradictions,” that is, dialecticism pure and simple. And as such DS but reflects the hermeneutic logic of the modern Calvinist world. Yet there are salient indications in his book that he is not by any means as comfortable with it all, as was Van Til! But of this, more anon, DV.

*to be continued (DV)*

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*John Owen:* “They [the Remonstrants or Arminians] affirm that God is said properly to expect and desire divers things which yet never come to pass. ‘We grant,’ saith Corvinus, ‘that there are desires in God that never are fulfilled.’ Now, surely, to desire what one is sure will never come to pass is not an act regulated by wisdom or counsel; and, therefore, they must grant that before he did not know but perhaps so it might be. ‘God wisheth and desireth some good things, which yet come not to pass,’ say they, in their Confession; whence one of these two things must need follow, - either, first, that there is a great deal of imperfection in his nature, to desire and expect what he knows shall never come to pass; or else he did not know but it might, which overthrows his prescience” (*Works*, vol. 10, pp. 25-26).

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<sup>29</sup>In John J. Murray’s “Foreword” to DS’s book, he asserts that the BRF denies “God’s offer of mercy to all sinners as an expression of his loving kindness” (p. 4). DS himself says, “It is crucial to the issue of the free offer that the question of whether God shows love to the non-elect in this life be addressed. We contend that he does ...” (p. 12). “But [God] has also eternally decreed to manifest his love for a time in this world even to the reprobate” (p. 31). Though this love initially according to DS is the basis for “common grace” only, yet within it he finds the basis for his notion of the “free offer.”

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 41. It should be noted here that DS tries to explain away this “contradiction” by insisting that God “loves” and “hates” in two different senses in this matter. This is pure equivocation and will not escape the logical tension that his theology in fact demands.