



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

—Exodus 20:4–6

Second Commandment

Ah, the graven image! How lovely it is! How appealing it is! How perfectly adapted it is for the church's worship of Jehovah!

Behold the graven image. It is not an idol like the heathen make to worship their false gods. Rather, it is an image that the church makes by which to worship the true God. Egypt's idols were statues by which to worship the false sun god, Amun-Ra. But Aaron's golden calf would be a statue by which to worship the true God, Jehovah, who had led Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Behold the graven image. It is perfectly adapted to man's needs in worship. For man is of the earth earthy. Man is a sensual creature, living his life through his senses. Man has eyes that look and see. Man has hands that touch and feel. Man cannot see or touch his God, for God is a Spirit. But man can see and touch his graven image. Man likes to look. Man likes to touch. How perfectly fit is the graven image for the needs of earthly, sensual man.

Behold the graven image. It pleases man. Its gold shines deep and lustrous. Its form is powerful and appealing. Looking upon his graven image, man receives strong religious feelings. Man feels worshipful toward the God whose splendor outshines even the gold. Man feels awe for the God whose might outstrips even the bullock in the strength of its calf-youth.

Behold the graven image. How good the graven image is! Does it not assist man in his worship?

Does it not raise man's soul to the heights of praise? Man is very pleased with the worship that the graven image produces in him. How pleased God also must be! Who could have anything to say against the graven image?

And so man makes his graven images. A golden calf at Sinai. And then another in Dan and another in Bethel. Man's imagination begins to soar. If the golden calf is so pleasing and worshipful, what else might be pleasing and worshipful for man? Soon golden calves give way to every other thing that pleases sensual man: Ahaz's great altar patterned after one in Damascus; altars upon every high hill, where the view stirs one's religious feeling; altars under every green tree, where the shade invites one's religious rest; the worship of angels in a show of humility; the introduction of the commandments and doctrines of men in a show of wisdom; self-denial as a show of neglecting the body.

Guided by his will and by his internal religious feelings, man invents his own meaningful and spectacular worship of his God. Man's will worship abounds in man's pageantry, man's doctrine, man's songs, man's pleasure, man's entertainment, man's feeling, man's will. A great, glittering graven image! And who will say anything against it?

Who, indeed! Hearken to God: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Ex. 20:4). And hearken to Jesus: "God is a Spirit: and they

that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). And God will not give his glory to an image, for God is a jealous God!

What does it mean that man may make no graven image? It means that man does not know how to worship God. Man has no internal religious feeling that can reveal to him what pleases God. Of himself man only knows what pleases man. And therefore, man must not worship God in any other way than God has commanded in his word (Lord’s Day 35, Q&A 96). For God must not be worshiped according to the will and good pleasure of man; God must be worshiped according to the will and good pleasure of God.

Now behold the good news of the gospel for us will-worshippers: Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the

great worshiper of God. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Ps. 22:22). Jesus Christ is the great revelation of God’s glory, for Jesus is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus Christ is the atonement for all the graven image worshipers. And God shows mercy to the thousands of generations of his elect, for he has sent Jesus Christ to fulfill the second commandment for them by loving God and keeping his commandments in their place.

And how shall we redeemed people give thanks? This way: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.”

—AL

BOOK REVIEW

The Active Obedience of Christ. Patrick Abendroth. Omaha, NE: Pactum Publishing, 2024. 88 pages, paperback, \$10.99. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning]

As the title indicates, this book introduces the reader to the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. The author, Patrick Abendroth, notes that the doctrine of Christ’s active obedience is often overlooked, often opposed, and sometimes misunderstood, with the result that many Christians have not heard of this vital Christian doctrine. Abendroth’s purpose in writing the book was to introduce “the classic Christian doctrine known as the active obedience of Christ. I am compelled to write on the subject because it is vital to the gospel, it is foundational for authentic assurance, many are unfamiliar with it, and some unjustly oppose it” (8).

The doctrine of Christ’s active obedience is that Jesus perfectly obeyed God’s law on behalf of his people. Jesus’ obedience includes both his active obedience and his passive obedience, which Abendroth defines as follows:

The passive obedience of Christ is in reference to suffering, and the active obedience of

Christ is in reference to the positive upholding of God’s law. In simplest terms, the active obedience of Christ is the positive and perfect obeying of the law by Jesus on behalf of everyone who would ever believe. As such, it is the basis for justification by faith alone. (13–14; emphasis is Abendroth’s)

Through no fault of Abendroth, he has to devote several precious pages in his small book to explaining away potential misunderstandings of the terms *active obedience* and *passive obedience*. The misunderstandings are not due to the doctrine’s being unclear or complicated. Rather, the misunderstandings are due to the fact that *active obedience* and *passive obedience* are unsatisfactory terms to describe the glorious doctrine of Jesus’ obedience. The fact is that Jesus was active even in his suffering (his “passive obedience”), and Jesus suffered even in his positive obeying (his “active obedience”). By now the

terms *active obedience* and *passive obedience* are so entrenched that it would be virtually impossible to replace them. But this means that every author who writes about this glorious doctrine must begin by clearing up the unnecessary confusion that these terms cause. Better terms would be Christ's *substitutionary atonement* to describe his suffering (his "passive obedience") and Christ's *substitutionary obedience* to describe his positive obeying (his "active obedience").

Strengths

There are several strengths of Abendroth's book. One tremendous strength is that Abendroth ties the truth of Christ's active obedience to the matter of justification. The sinner has no obedience of his own that can answer to the strict demand of God's righteous law. But Jesus has perfectly obeyed God's righteous law. Jesus' perfect obedience in place of the sinner renders that sinner righteous before God.

Distinct from Rome, the Protestants saw Jesus as the very one who vicariously (think "in place of") upheld the divine law so that believing sinners could have Christ's righteousness credited to them and thereby provide the basis for justification. (19)

Another strength of Abendroth's book is that he conclusively demonstrates from scripture that the doctrine of Christ's active obedience is biblical. Even though the term *active obedience* does not appear in scripture, the doctrine is nevertheless found throughout.

Abendroth also devotes a chapter to the witness of history. Not only the reformers but also many since them have taught the substitutionary obedience of Christ as the righteousness of the sinner. This reviewer was thrilled to see the Heidelberg Catechism singled out for special mention, since Q&A 60 is a resounding declaration that my righteousness before God is entirely what Christ has done for me:

God...grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had

nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

Another strength of Abendroth's book is that he addresses several objections to the truth of Christ's active obedience. This reader was struck with how many objections there are. A great host of foes have risen up against the truth of Christ's substitutionary obedience, from Rome to dispensationalism to Richard Baxter to the federal vision and many more. And no wonder that this doctrine has so many foes, for this doctrine honors Christ and abases man. Man will not suffer himself to be abased, and so he must allow his own obedience to have a place alongside Christ's obedience in man's justification. But over against man's exaltation of himself, Jesus alone is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6).

Weaknesses

Abendroth's book also has several weaknesses. One lesser weakness is that Abendroth only skims the surface of the doctrine of Christ's active obedience. This is by design, for the book was intended strictly as an introduction and not a thorough development. The book is very brief. The 84 small pages of large print and wide margins fly past quickly. The brevity is helpful for the reader who is just being introduced to the truth of Christ's active obedience.

Nevertheless, there were some places where this reviewer found the brevity to be extreme and confusing. Especially in the chapter in which Abendroth answers objections to the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ, it would have been helpful for the reader if Abendroth had spelled out exactly what the objection was that he was answering. Often the reader is left to puzzle out for himself from a word or two in the heading what that particular objection might be.

Another place where the brevity hurt the book was in Abendroth's definition of *righteousness*, which definition only partially worked for

one part of the book but could not be carried through the book. After consulting “technical dictionaries,” Abendroth defines righteousness as “*the legal act of doing what God requires*” (32; emphasis is Abendroth’s). Maybe (maybe!) that could describe righteousness for a man. But what could that definition possibly mean when Abendroth later discusses God’s “essential righteousness” (69)? Is God’s essential righteousness God’s “legal act of doing what God requires”? The definition becomes absurd.

A much more serious weakness of the book is that it does not deal with election. If this reviewer is not mistaken, Abendroth does not mention the truth of election even once. Abendroth does not even mention election by implication. For example, Abendroth consistently refers to those for whom Christ obeyed as “believers” but not as “God’s people” or “Christ’s people.” There is nothing in the book to indicate, whether explicitly or implicitly, that election has anything to do with Christ’s active obedience for his people.

But the truth of election is all-important for the doctrine of Christ’s active obedience. The truth of election answers the problem of how Christ’s righteousness can be imputed to the sinner. How could the just and righteous God count what Christ did to the sinner’s account? This was Rome’s great objection to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is the federal vision’s objection to the obedience of Christ counting for the sinner, especially at the last day. The answer to this objection is that God chose his people *in Christ* and that God appointed Christ from all eternity to be the *head* and *mediator* of his elect people. As our head, what Christ did, he did for us. And being in Christ, we really have as ours all that is Christ’s.

Another serious weakness of Abendroth’s book is that it grounds Christ’s active obedience in the so-called covenant of works. Although Abendroth does not develop the idea of the covenant of works at all, the covenant of works makes its appearance in Abendroth’s book. Today, those who defend the doctrine of Christ’s active obedience often ground Christ’s active

obedience in a supposed covenant of works—God’s conditional covenant with Adam, by which Adam could earn heaven by his obedient works. The thinking goes that whereas Adam failed in the covenant of works, Christ replaced Adam and succeeded. Christ’s active obedience fulfilled the condition that Adam failed to fulfill.

Abendroth’s error is twofold. First, God’s covenant with Adam was not a conditional covenant of works. Adam was God’s friend-servant but not as one who sought the possibility of advancement. Adam already had God in paradise. Adam owed God obedience but not as part of a bargain by which he could merit heaven. Rather, Adam owed God obedience as the creature to the creator. There was nothing further for Adam to gain than the bliss of Eden in which he already lived.

Second, Abendroth’s error is that Christ’s active obedience can never be grounded in a supposed bargain between God and man. How cheap and mercenary Christ’s obedience would be if it were merely Christ’s holding up his end of the bargain. Rather, the ground of Christ’s active obedience is found in eternity, where Christ is the head and mediator of his people.

Though more work needs to be done to flesh out the truth, it can be stated simply. Christ’s substitutionary obedience for his people is not grounded in God’s supposed covenant of works with Adam; rather, Christ’s substitutionary obedience for his people is grounded in God’s eternal election of Christ as the head and mediator of his people. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:1).

Conclusion

This reviewer’s reaction to Abendroth’s book is mixed. The book could serve as a very basic introduction to the concept of Christ’s active obedience. And Abendroth is right on the main issue in Christ’s active obedience: Jesus obeyed God’s law on behalf of God’s people as the foundation of their righteousness before God.

However, Abendroth's book is missing vital doctrines (election) that are essential to Christ's active obedience, and Abendroth is wrong on other doctrines (covenant of works). Add to the doctrinal weaknesses the fact that Abendroth's skimming style often leaves the reader wondering what exactly the author means.

The doctrine of Christ's active obedience is a glorious, refreshing, clarion call of the gospel. And a Reformed reader can appreciate an author who is willing to explain that gospel. Nevertheless, Abendroth's book falls short of doing justice to the doctrine that it intends to teach.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article LXXXII. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)

In addition to the simple fact that Adam and Eve did not perish immediately after their bold disobedience and rebellion against their rightful Sovereign, there are other evidences of the presence of grace operating instantly upon the fall of man.

First of all there are facts which reveal that the power of grace operated directly in man's soul. He does not sink into the depth of degradation, neither does he reveal himself as a hardened sinner, deprived of all sense of shame and guilt. The contrary is true. In the first place, there is the fact that Adam and Eve are conscious of their nakedness the moment they have sinned. This is the very first fact narrated of our first parents after they fell. When they had both eaten of the forbidden fruit, evidently at that very moment, "the eyes of them both were opened and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3:7). Explicitly it is said that their eyes were opened. Now, this may mean either of two things. The evolution theory must be true, which looks upon the fall of man as a step in the right direction, as an inevitable incident leading toward the development and final perfection of man. In the light of that theory the meaning of these words is evident. Man lived in childlike innocence, in a half-conscious

state before the fall. He had not reached self-consciousness. He led a sort of animal life. His bliss was his ignorance. But through the fall he reaches a higher state of self-consciousness. His eyes are opened. He becomes a truly moral being. He is surprised, ashamed that for some time he walked about publicly without garments. He now notices his shame. And the first thing he naturally does is that he sews fig-leaves together for a covering for his shame. But, of course, this theory cannot be accepted and is not in harmony with the narrative of Scripture. Man was not created without self-consciousness, but in the image of God, in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. He was conscious of his own relation to God. He was perfectly self-conscious. Sin was not an ascension to a higher state of development, but a descension into the depth of death. Hence, we must clearly bear in mind that man's eyes were not opened for his nakedness as such, as if he had not been conscious of this before. But he was given to see the shame of his nakedness. That shame did not objectively exist before he fell. He was pure. Adam and Eve were sinless also in their relation to each other. There was no objective reason to be ashamed of their nakedness. But now there was. They had reason to be filled with a disgust because of their ignominy. It had been conceivable,

however, that although this reason existed, they had never noticed their shame. We read that they did. Their eyes were opened. Not by the power of sin were their eyes opened, for this is impossible. Sin was the cause of their actual ignominy, not of their sense of it. It was the fact of grace, operating immediately upon the fall in their hearts, that caused them to feel their sinfulness, to realize their shame over against each other.

This is emphasized by the other fact that they are ashamed and afraid to meet their God. “And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of day: and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God amongst the trees of the garden.” Of course, it may be admitted at once that the foolishness of a heart and mind darkened and corrupted by sin is also revealed in this act. That they make the attempt to hide away from God amongst the trees of the garden shows their foolish sinfulness. Nevertheless, the fact remains that they do not boldly go out to meet Jehovah God as they become aware of His presence in the garden. Not as if they had already come to the full consciousness of their sin and guilt and to true repentance. The rest of the narrative does not leave that impression. But there is knowledge of sin. There is consciousness of shame before Jehovah. They do realize that, even with their aprons of fig leaves, they cannot appear before their God against whom they have sinned. Hence, the attempt to hide themselves. And in this consciousness of sin and shame, in this foolish attempt to conceal themselves amongst the trees of the garden there is a manifestation of grace operating in the heart of sinful man.

Neither is this all.

There is even a faint manifestation of faith on the part of Adam, of faith in the Word and promise of God. We read: “And the man called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.” Eve means life-spring. And the fact that Adam called his wife’s name Eve is interpreted by the text when it says: “because she was the mother of all living.” Now, we must

observe two things. In the first place that Adam thus named his wife before there was any tangible evidence that the hope thus expressed would be realized. No son was born to them as yet. It was a clinging to things unseen. And in the second place it must be remembered that Adam thus named his wife after the fall, more particularly after the mother-promise had been given. It was evidently an act based solely on the promise of God. He did not wait till there would be evidence that the hope of seed would be realized. Basing his hope on the promises of God, and therefore, in faith, Adam calls his wife Eve, life-spring, because she was the mother of all living.

But there is also an objective revelation of grace on the part of Jehovah God, as will readily be seen. First of all the fact must be mentioned that the Lord came to seek Adam and Eve in the garden. There was grace in this. Grace as could ultimately flow only from Him who was to be the future King and Redeemer. It is, of course, inconceivable that God could deal with sinners in themselves. All that could possibly be expected by sinners and rebels was that the holiness of the highest Majesty would reveal itself against them and curse them into deepest death and hell. This, however, does not happen. God comes to seek them and that evidently with the purpose to save. And in this seeking of God, in this renewal of communion with man who had become His enemy and the friend of the devil, there is a manifestation of divine grace.

Not necessary it is again to call your attention to what is known beautifully and quite correctly as the mother-promise: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.” In an earlier part of our discussion we have already elaborated upon this prophecy. We may now call your attention to three things that are implied in this promise and which are flashes of light in the darkness of sin. In the first place, there is here the promise that the human race shall continue to develop organically. The woman shall have seed. In the rest of the narrative this is repeated when it is told the woman that her pains shall be greatly

increased because of sin. Also in this announcement of punishment there is the promise that the woman shall bring forth children and that, therefore, the human race shall be continued. In the second place, there is in this promise the announcement that the alliance between man and the devil shall be broken and, undoubtedly, is broken right on the spot. Man, the friend of God, had become the friend and ally of the devil. He had turned in wanton rebellion against God. Now God announces that this enmity against Him shall be changed once more into enmity against the devil. Nothing but the power of grace, of saving grace, of grace as it flows from Jesus Christ, is able to make this change. And, therefore, the positive promise of grace, the power that shall change man from an enemy of God into His friend, is given in paradise. And, lastly, in this same mother-promise there is implied the clear announcement of victory. The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent. Surely, it must be admitted, all is still vague and undefined. There is no definite promise of the Mediator, of the personal Redeemer, in these words. The promise simply speaks of the seed of the woman. But the fact is plain that the promise contains the announcement of final victory, for when the head of the serpent is crushed the enemy is overcome. Perpetuation of the human race, enmity against the devil, and final victory over him, — it is all implied in that mother of all promises that faintly outlines before our vision the future development of the race along the lines of election and reprobation.

To two more facts the attention must be called in this connection. The first is that Jehovah God makes for Adam and Eve coats of skins. “And Jehovah God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skins and he clothed them,” vs. 21. It is in itself an act of mercy and grace that God Himself provides a better covering for their shame. But we cannot refrain from thinking that this brief passage speaks of a higher manifestation of grace. That God made for Adam and Eve coats of skins presupposes that He showed them the way of blood. He must have taught

them right there to bring the sacrifice of blood, and thus faintly foreshadowed that permanent covering for sin and shame there is in the blood of the Seed of the woman that was to come in the distant future. If we bear in mind that soon after this we actually read that bloody sacrifices are offered to Jehovah God by the second son of Adam and Eve, we cannot but draw the conclusion that right there in the garden Jehovah taught Adam to follow the way of blood. And the second fact to which we must call your attention is that Adam and Eve are removed from the tree of life, in order that they might not eat from it and live forever. “And Jehovah God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil, and now, lest he put forth his hand and eat also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—therefore Jehovah sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (22, 23). Whatever may be our conception of the tree of life and its specific significance, so much is clear from the text that God had connected immortality with eating of its fruit. Why otherwise this sentence? Certainly, it cannot be conceived that God would employ irony, bitter sarcasm in these circumstances. The entire context is against this view. The fact is, therefore, clearly expressed that man would have lived forever, that is, that he would have continued his earthly existence, that he would not have died the physical death, if he had been allowed to eat from the tree of life. That existence had become miserable. Moreover, if all men had been allowed to exist through the history of the world, sin and misery would have developed with astounding rapidity. Now this is prevented. Man may not continue to exist in the world. He must die the physical death. A new life must be instilled into him, that is, not connected with the tree of life in paradise, but that flows from the Redeemer that is to come. To realize this he must die. The old man must be put off in every way. He is, therefore, separated from the tree of life, in order that he may not perpetuate the condition into which he has fallen because of sin. Also in this separation there is an act of grace.

Thus, there is light in the darkness. The light is faint, yet brighter than we would expect at that earliest period of history. And so much is certain, that grace was revealed immediately after the fall. The stream of grace flowing from

Immanuel is plainly visible in paradise. The power of the New King operates at once and the New Kingdom is instantly commencing to battle against the usurpation of the power of darkness.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.



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