

An Adventure in Ecumenicity: A Review Essay of *Berkouwer and Catholicism* by Eduardo Echeverria¹

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Two friends, Two Roads: A Brief Synopsis of a True Story

Two friends, both seminary professors now teaching in the same state (Michigan), one Roman Catholic and the other Reformed, discover through their education at schools in the other's tradition the rich resources for appropriating and renewing or deepening commitment to their own. The Roman Catholic does advanced degree study at the school which represents the crowning achievement of the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition in which his friend is born and raised, and the encounter deepens his understanding of, commitment to, and practice of his Catholic faith. His friend, raised and trained in the schools of the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition, completes doctoral study at a leading Roman Catholic university and gains renewed appreciation for the catholicity of his Reformed faith. This is an entirely true story and the two friends are of course the Roman Catholic author of the volume under review and the Dutch Reformed reviewer.²

1. This review of Eduardo Echeverria's *Berkouwer and Catholicism: Disputed Questions* (Leiden: Brill, 2013; hereafter *BC*) is a slight reworking of the paper I presented at two symposia: the first at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Michigan on 1 March 2014, where the author of the title under review is Professor of Philosophy; and the second at Calvin Theological Seminary on 4 March 2014. In both instances I was joined in response to Professor Echeverria's presentation by one other respondent: by Dr. Francis Beckwith in Detroit and by Fr. John Kelly at Calvin Seminary.

2. This paragraph, with slight modification to fit the occasion, was directly taken from my foreword to Eduardo Echeverria, *Dialogue of Love: Confessions*

G. C. Berkouwer and Me: From Embrace to Dissatisfaction

I ask the reader's indulgence for beginning this review by quoting myself; it is, I admit, a little gauche. I did it for a couple of reasons. First, in the interest of full disclosure, I want to be upfront about a friendship that is important to me; and second, the portrait of the two life journeys I presented is the key to understanding why my engagement with G. C. Berkouwer is different from Prof. Echeverria's. Berkouwer's *Dogmatic Studies* were an important part of my theological coming of age. A number of them were assigned in my systematic theology classes at Calvin Seminary in the 1970s. However, it didn't take long before the numerous ambiguities Echeverria so painstakingly documents, and patiently and generously engages in this book, began to annoy and dissatisfy me. In this, I know I was not alone. It was a sentiment shared by many of my classmates at CTS, and it took me a few decades and the help of Herman Bavinck and Richard Muller before I could name my dissatisfaction more precisely. But, to tell the truth, I have really paid Berkouwer only cursory, and then mostly critical, attention in the last twenty years or so. Berkouwer's failure as I see it, and Echeverria's book confirms it in spades, is an absence of Christian metaphysics and an unclear and inadequate commitment to epistemological and linguistic realism. As I moved away from Berkouwer I found guidance in precisely those aspects of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* that Berkouwer and others dismissed as "scholastic": in the seventeenth-century Protestant Orthodox, in Thomas Aquinas, and in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*. All of this is interesting because, with this study, my Roman Catholic friend has challenged me to take another look at Berkouwer. I trust that the reader will sense the charming irony of this.

Reformed Misunderstanding of Roman Catholic (Thomistic) Thought

To put the achievement of this book into perspective, let me compare it with Arvin Vos's 1985 book, *Aquinas, Calvin & Contem-*

of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), ix–xi.

*porary Protestant Thought*³ which challenged a long-standing and widely-accepted Protestant, particularly Reformed, portrait of Roman Catholic thought. Rome, so this view holds, does not believe in the first letter of the famous TULIP acronym: total depravity. In fact, so it is then alleged, even after the Fall into sin and quite apart from special revelation and grace, there remains a pure human nature, including a self-sufficient reason, that is quite capable of truly knowing God. Admittedly this natural reason cannot know supernatural truths about God such as the doctrine of the Trinity, but it does a pretty good job on its own of perceiving the important higher goods of moral and religious truths. There exists, in other words, a *duplex ordo* of natural knowledge and supernatural knowledge; Rome operates in a two-story epistemological universe. Grace elevates but does not transform nature.

Echeverria's Accomplishment: Bringing the Argument Up To Date

This familiar portrait, effectively propagated by Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, and their numerous disciples, is now discredited among those who have taken the time to read Arvin Vos's careful rebuttal. Where Vos concentrated on Aquinas, Echeverria has extended the argument by bringing into it the vast riches of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman Catholic magisterial, conciliar, and theological teaching and discussion, including the important *nouvelle theologie* that also engaged and intrigued Berkouwer. By carefully analyzing and assessing Berkouwer's engagement Echeverria has brought the discussion to a deeper level and higher plane and opened up new possibilities for an enriched and more fruitful ecumenical conversation between Rome and the Reformed/Protestant world, especially in an area—human nature, reason and revelation—that was for a long time a continental divide.

The Question: Why Does Dutch Reformed Theology and Philosophy Persist in Rejecting Natural Theology and Insist that the Reformed

3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

View Is Incompatible with the Roman Catholic View?

Let's now go to the heart of the matter: Why this persistence in Dutch Reformed theology and philosophy? Why reject what seems, on the face of it, the clear implication of Romans 1:20 and conclude, counter intuitively, that the "real Pauline doctrine is that the [unregenerate] do not know God at all"? (*BC*, 167; citing Berkouwer's *General Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 139). I shall first provide a partial answer and then a more complete one.

A Partial Answer

1. Herman Bavinck's Surprising Misreading of Rome

The rejection of natural theology comes from two quarters, theology and philosophy. What the two have in common, unfortunately, is an affinity with Herman Bavinck who doesn't get Roman Catholic theology, in particular, Thomas Aquinas, quite right either. In Bavinck's case this is rather remarkable since his own epistemology is quite Thomistic⁴ and it is precisely this "scholastic" dimension that Berkouwer, Dooyeweerd, and their followers, repudiate in Bavinck. Furthermore, a close look at Bavinck's anthropology, particularly his understanding of the eschatological destiny for which humans were created, shows that it is formally identical to Thomas's. The best one can say here is that on this point Bavinck too was a child of his time, falling into the trap of reading Thomas and the entire Roman Catholic tradition through the lens of its sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and especially nineteenth-century neo-scholastic advocates who *did* express themselves in terms that legitimately led to the Reformed critique. Undoubtedly, Bavinck and those who followed him also over-read Vatican I's declaration *Dei Filius*, taking the positive affirmation of reason as a comprehensive theology of nature and grace, reason and revelation. What Echeverria makes clear, however, is that Thomistic neo-scholasticism was

4. See David S. Sytsma, "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: The Argument and Sources of his *Principia* of Science," in John Bolt, ed., *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 1–56.

also severely criticized from within the Roman Catholic world by the *nouvelle theologie* theologians who insisted that human reason always operates within a teleology of belief and unbelief. What is more remarkable is that Berkouwer is aware of this and yet persists in his characterization. I hope to shed some light on this in what follows.

2. Concern about the “Hellenizing” of the Gospel

Echeverria helpfully distinguishes a variety of objections to natural theology. The one that comes from the philosophic side, in this case from Dooyeweerd, fits Echeverria’s “hellenization” objection like a glove: “The concept of God acquired through the medium of created reality is empty, abstract, and formal, leaving us with an idea of God that is an intellectual idol of the philosophers rather than the God of the Bible” (*BC*, 116). Listen to how Dooyeweerd frames the question about Romans 1:20: “Does Paul really want to say here that God can be known from his creatures purely by drawing theoretical conclusions” (*BC*, 170)? No, he does not, but Echeverria convincingly demonstrates that not only did Thomas not say that but also neither did Vatican I, nor Cardinal Newman, nor Etienne Gilson, nor Jacques Maritain, nor Henri De Lubac, and so forth. Furthermore, Dooyeweerd fails to do justice to the way in which Thomas himself attends to the noetic effects of sin in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.4–5 as well as in his commentary on Romans 1:20. According to Eugene F. Rogers Jr.,

in his Commentary on Romans, Aquinas portrayed natural law as an injured and therefore ineffective party in a story of decline and fall. . . . So bound, natural knowledge could not exercise the office of true cognition of God, which is “to lead human beings to the good.” It became a failed knowledge of God, an instance of ignorance rather than knowledge, an ignorance brought about by injustice and therefore culpable. Aquinas made the story a subplot in the larger narrative of the gospel grace of Christ, which first reveals the bondage of natural law in freeing for renewed effectiveness in a life of grace-sustained justice and gratitude. . . .⁵

John Calvin could not have said it better.

Of course Dutch Reformed philosophers and theologians were hardly the first or even the only early twentieth-century folk occu-

5. Eugene F. Rogers Jr., “The Narrative of Natural Law in Aquinas’s Commentary on Romans 1,” *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 254–76.

pied with the issue of “hellenization.” A line of luminaries committed to de-hellenizing Christian doctrine can be traced from Unitarians such as Michael Servetus to the influential historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who claimed that “dogma in its conception and development is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel.”⁶ Part of Berkouwer’s opposition to natural theology includes elements of the “hellenization” objection to scholasticism, but Echeverria concentrates on what he calls the “anthropological” objection: “Reason’s truth-attaining capacity has been corrupted by sin and hence, being crippled, is incapable of attaining true knowledge, though imperfect, of God” (*BC*, 116). I must confess that Echeverria’s patient, generous, and scrupulously fair detailed analysis of Berkouwer’s writings surprised me in pointing out how much more nuanced Berkouwer’s lifelong engagement with Rome was than I had previously thought. Echeverria deserves a lot of credit for taking Berkouwer seriously as a conversation-partner with Rome, even though Berkouwer finally, and exasperatingly, refuses to budge in his opposition on this crucial point. Considering Berkouwer’s awareness of the self-critique within Roman Catholic twentieth-century theology, a less patient person might be less generous and inclined to attribute this to stubbornness and confusion.

In this review I cannot add anything substantive to Echeverria’s meticulous engagement with Berkouwer and his careful, judicious refutations of the charges against Roman Catholic notions of natural theology. Taken together with Arvin Vos’s book, we have I believe a convincing case for saying that Reformed people can be comfortable with the Roman Catholic understanding of natural theology. Think of the Vos-Echeverria combination as a solid one-two punch, even a knockout.

In the remainder of this review essay I will try as best as I can to answer the “why?” question; to provide additional insight into the reason why, after the deaths of Abraham Kuyper in 1920 and Herman Bavinck in 1921, Dutch Reformed theology (and philosophy) became and stayed so aggressively passionate in its objections to natural law and natural theology in its public denunciations of “scholasticism.” The final two points in my partial answer reflect my

6. *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 1:17.

own changed perspective on Berkouwer thanks to Echeverria's work.

3. Karl Barth? Berkouwer's Passion for the Other "Other"

What I mean by the other "other" is that Berkouwer's occupation with Karl Barth rivals that of his attention to Roman Catholicism. In addition to his 1936 book *Karl Barth*, he also published *Karl Barth en de kinderdoop* (1947; Karl Barth and infant baptism) and *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (1954).⁷ His essay and article file on topics such as "Karl Barth and Ethics" is lengthy and goes back to 1926. And take note of the title of his inaugural address as Extraordinary Professor of Theology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, on 11 October 1947: "Barthianism and Catholicism."⁸

4. Berkouwer's Correlation Method

For a long time I was convinced that going back as far as his dissertation, *Geloof en openbaring in de nieuwere Duitse theologie* (1932; Faith and revelation in recent German theology⁹), and continuing in the first volumes of his *Dogmatic Studies* in which the method of correlation dominates ("faith and justification"; "faith and sanctification"; and "faith and perseverance"), Berkouwer had himself been captured by the attempt to transcend the subject/object relation (the knowing human subject and the objective revealing God). After all, he hints at this in the closing pages of the dissertation where he seems to speak appreciatively of the efforts to move to a "living, personal, truthful relation" between human beings and God. From this it was easy to move to the development in the Dutch Reformed Church where truth was understood as "relation" or "encounter" rather than propositional. However, Echever-

7. *De triomf der genade in de theologie van Karl Barth* (Kampen: Kok, 1954); ET: *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Harry Boer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956). Both *Karl Barth* and *Karl Barth en de kinderdoop* were also published by J. H. Kok in Kampen.

8. *Barthianisme en Katholicisme: rede gehorden bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van buitengewoon hoogeleeraar in de Faculteit der Godgeleerheid aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam am op Vrijdag 11 October 1940* (Kampen: Kok, 1940).

9. Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon.

ria alertly picked up Berkouwer's insistence that dialectical theologians such as Barth, Brunner, and Heim failed to overcome the problem of subjectivizing faith altogether because, in Berkouwer's view, "God in his revelation does not abandon the work of his hands in creation."¹⁰ A realist epistemology, in other words, still obtains for Berkouwer. While there are dimensions of Berkouwer's use of a correlation method that invite further study, for now I accept this judgment and will look elsewhere for an answer to the "Why?" question.

A Fuller Answer: Biblicism

Valentijn Hepp, Bavinck's successor in the chair of dogmatics at the Vrije Universiteit, published a series of four polemical brochures in the 1930s under the general title *Dreigende deformatie* (Threatening deformation).¹¹ In them he describes a new movement in the post-World War I Dutch Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland*; hereafter *GKN*) that he characterizes broadly as "progressive biblicism." Unlike Bavinck, who repeatedly expressed criticism of what he dismissively described as "so-called biblical theology," this new movement embraces, celebrates, and takes pride in its *biblical, reformational* identity. Its chief targets? Scholasticism and dualism, particularly the doctrines of common grace and natural theology.¹²

10. *Geloof en openbaring*, 241 (translation mine).

11. *Dreigende deformatie*, 4 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1936–37); the four volumes are subtitled: 1. Diagnose (Diagnosis); 2. Symptomen A: Het voortbestaan, de onsterfelijkheid en de substantialiteit van de ziel (Symptoms A: The Pre-existence, Immortality, and Substantiality of the Soul); 3. Symptomen B: *De vereeniging van de beide naturen van Christus* (Symptoms B: The Unification of the Two Natures of Christ); 4. Symptomen C: De algemeene genade (Symptoms C: Common Grace).

12. There is an interesting connection between Hepp's brochures and the Christian Reformed Church. In 1953 the Rev. William Masselink, a Christian Reformed minister, published his *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) with the telling subtitle "A Defense of the Historic Reformed Faith Over Against the Theology and Philosophy of the So-Called 'Reconstructionist' Movement." He openly indicates his debt to Hepp and continues the exposé as it applied to the North American context.

Remarkably, in four volumes and nearly 300 pages Hepp never names the targets of his critique and provides no citations for the numerous passages to which he calls attention. He did this, he says, to remove all *ad hominem* elements from his efforts and keep the matter in the realm of ideas.¹³ He also wanted to avoid ecclesiastical conflict, a wish tragically not granted when the Dutch Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland; [GKN]*) initiated disciplinary measures against Klaas Schilder in 1944.¹⁴

Without going into elaborate detail about this development, we need to mention the key figures in this new movement. First in prominence were three academics, the philosophers Dirk Th. Vollenhoven (1892–1978) and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), and the theologian Klaas Schilder (1890–1952). We also need to mention here two prominent Amsterdam preachers in the *GKN*, J. C. Sikkel (1855–1920) and S. G. De Graaf (1889–1955), both renowned and lauded for their fresh biblical preaching. De Graaf's influential biblical-theological guide for those who provided Bible instruction in church and school to children, his two-volume *Verbondsgeschiedenis* (covenant history), it is worth noting, was translated into English by Calvin College philosophy professor H. Evan Runner and his wife Elizabeth and published in four volumes.¹⁵ In his introduction to the project, Prof. Runner talks about “an evangelical awakening” that was concerned “for what the Word of God has to say about man's life in society, about man as a complete being.” “The sermons of Sikkel and De Graaf,” he adds, “which steer clear of theological speculation and unfounded doctrine,

13. It is not difficult, however, for knowledgeable readers to discern Hepp's targets and even locate key references. At the same time that Hepp's four volumes appeared, another GKN minister, Hendrik Steen also directly challenged the new Reformational philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven in his *Philosophia deformata* (Kampen: Kok, 1937). Unlike Hepp, Steen did not hesitate to name names and cite chapter and verse from published material.

14. One way to understand the ecclesiastical schism of 1944 is to think of it as the end result of warring biblicisms all in search of a pure biblical theology untainted by alien philosophical elements.

15. *Promise and Deliverance*, 4 vols., trans. H. Evan Runner and Elisabeth Wichers Runner (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1977–81).

brought believers in the Netherlands close to the Word of the living God. The light of that Word lit up the entire life of man in society.”¹⁶

I refer to Sikkel and De Graaf here as symbolic representatives of a larger phenomenon in the Dutch Reformed Church, a revitalization of biblical studies that was not just academic but filtered down to the pulpits and pews. Not only did it produce a brand new New Testament commentary series for serious exegetes, *Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament*,¹⁷ it also led to a popular series on the entire Scripture, the *Korte verklaring* (concise explanation).¹⁸ There was a significant revitalization of Scripture study in the Dutch Reformed Church in the twentieth century.

Obviously, on the face of it, how could this be problematic? Who could be opposed to the desire to have the “light of the Word of God light up the entire life of man in society”? Very briefly, let me summarize what Hepp means by “progressive biblicism” and why he is so critical. Hepp observes that biblicism comes in different shapes and degrees. There is first of all the simple “back-to-the-Bible” posture that regards all creeds, confessions, and church dogma as mere human products to be rejected. A second form of biblicism acknowledges the legitimacy of creeds, confessions, and dogmas but emphasizes their relativity so strongly that it continually calls for their revision. This posture does not reject church formulations but places them under a cloud of suspicion and doubt. Finally, the most gentle and kind of the three types gives full respect to the confessions in general but bypasses them on a few key doctrines where it judges to have found a more biblical approach. It appeals to the Bible but does not take very seriously the full tradition of the church on these points, preferring to go its own way. Included among these doctrines are the body/soul duality and the continued existence of the soul after death. In Hepp’s judgment, it is this third

16. Translator’s introduction to *Promise and Deliverance*, 1:11.

17. A total of nineteen volumes were published by the Amsterdam publisher H.A. van Bottenburg between 1922 and 1950.

18. By my best count more than seventy volumes of the *Korte verklaring* were published by Kok (Kampen) in the twentieth century in two distinct series. Seven volumes of the series (Genesis; Exodus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, and Ruth; Isaiah; Matthew) were also translated into English and published by Zondervan from 1981–87.

form that is dominant in the *GKN* of his day. Though it is the gentlest of the three, he says, “it does not escape biblicism’s fundamental flaw” which is an “individualistic approach to Scripture.” This form of biblicism, he adds, “fosters dormant gravamina.”¹⁹

The biblicism that Hepp identifies was closely aligned with Karl Barth’s Christomonistic theology. In the first issue of *Philosophia Reformata*, the new organ of the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy (now the Association for Reformational Philosophy) founded by D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and Herman Dooyeweerd, S. G. De Graaf published an article that presented a Christological reading of the creation account.²⁰ We have already taken note of Berkouwer’s lifelong occupation with Barth, and we see here in De Graaf’s essay a clear affinity with Barth’s own Christological reading of creation.

What about Hepp’s charge of “Biblicism”? I have already taken note of the revival of biblical studies in the Dutch Reformed Church during the twentieth century. As someone who has benefitted directly from this scholarship, I want to note it here with gratitude. If Hepp’s accusation of biblicism is correct, it is an accidental by-product of this renewal of biblical scholarship, not intrinsic to it. As we consider Berkouwer’s place in this portrait, it seems to me that much of Hepp’s critique fits the tradition of reformational philosophy better than it does Berkouwer, though he was not entirely immune to its charms.²¹

The biblicism Hepp referred to as his third type and believed was prominent in the *GKN* of his day gave full respect to the confessions in general as a formal matter but chose to bypass them on key doctrines such as the duality of body and soul where it judged to have discovered a more biblical approach. As it operated in the circles of the new reformational philosophy, one could describe it as the biblicism of infinite regress. In practice it unfolds like this:

1. An earlier Reformed thinker like Abraham Kuyper or Herman Bavinck is praised by a subsequent generation, let’s say by

19. *Dreigende deformatie*, 1:19.

20. S. G. de Graaf, “De Genade Gods en de Structuur der Gansche Schepping,” *Philosophia Reformata* 1 (1936): 17–29. (“The Grace of God and the Structure of the Whole Creation”—Ed.)

21. See the conclusion of this essay below.

Herman Dooyeweerd, for some of his solid, biblical, reformational insights that break away from Roman Catholic “synthesis thinking” (i.e., the wrongheaded attempt to mix pagan Greek thought with Christian biblical thought, the climax of which appears in medieval scholasticism’s chief synthesizer: Thomas Aquinas).

2. Dooyeweerd determines lamentably that the earlier generation’s break from synthesis thinking was not complete and that the vestiges that remain need to be purged. A revision of philosophical thinking and language is proposed that ostensibly takes the reformational project one step closer to a pure biblical philosophy or theology.

3. However, the reform proposal itself then becomes the target for further critique. Another thinker, let’s say Cornelius Van Til, steps forth, praises Dooyeweerd for his efforts in purging Bavinck and Kuyper, but laments that he has not yet finished the job because remnants of alien thought also persist in his reform. Hence additional reformation is proposed.

4. But then Dooyeweerd returns the favor, and the disciples of the two men continue the process *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseum*, all in the name of finding *the* true, biblical or reformational philosophy.

What I have just described is in fact the outline, played in a hundred variations, of the reformational philosophy movement in the twentieth century.

Here I do need to insert a caution, lest I be misunderstood. All intellectual work, whether it be theology or philosophy, is and always will be imperfect and incomplete. Even the greatest Christian thinkers in the church’s history can and must be subjected to the careful scrutiny of biblically-informed subsequent thinkers. The work of reformation, including the renewal of our minds, is an ongoing requirement of Christian discipleship. Jesus is Lord also of our heads. In principle, therefore, I have no objection to someone at any given time raising good questions about someone else’s thought. There are, however, two reasons I resonate so well with Hepp’s concern about biblicism. First, the regressive criticism I described above strikes me as lacking the most basic level of Christian humility. To think that in the past everyone had it wrong to some degree or other and that I and my group are going to set it straight for good is arrogant and uncharitable. Second, while the Bible must of course inform our theology and our philosophy and all our sci-

entific work, it is a serious epistemological blunder to try and produce a pure biblical philosophy or a pure biblical chemistry or mathematics or whatever. The Bible may not be used in such a way; that is not its purpose or its authority. It seems to me far better to say that a particular philosophy or view of the human person reflected in a particular psychology is appropriately *consistent with* or *at odds with* biblical teaching about the image of God. Claims by philosophers or psychologists who are Christians need to be modest and intentionally open to correction and revision.

Let me return now to Berkouwer. He needs to be considered on his own apart from the group I have just considered, for he is a theologian not a philosopher, and he concentrates on classic dogmatic-theological questions and problems rather than metatheoretical ones. At the same time I believe one might with justification speak of him as a “biblicist.” At this point I offer this as a *suggestion*. I need to do more research myself on Berkouwer’s relation to the biblical theology movement in the Dutch Reformed Church during the twentieth century, and I am not yet finished with the truth question that comes out of his method of correlation. I will suggest that thinking of Berkouwer as a biblicist does help explain his method in the *Dogmatic Studies*. One of the features of Berkouwer’s method—that exasperated many of us in the 1970s was his habit of trying to overcome classic dilemmas and distinctions in orthodox Reformed theology with exegesis. Time and again Berkouwer seems to pull back from distinctions and explanations found in the Reformed Orthodoxy of the sixteenth- and seventeenth- centuries, and the reader is presented with a series of biblical reflections on puzzling texts, on texts that seem to suggest tension or contradiction; and when it is all done, we are frustrated because there seems to be no resolution. Instead of careful theological analysis we were given homilies that often left us begging for an *answer* which was not forthcoming. Two examples come immediately to mind: Berkouwer’s treatment of reprobation in his book *Divine Election* and his treatment of the immortality of the soul in his *Man the Image of God*. At first glance, this extensive biblical, exegetical work appears as a virtue; when systematic clarity is lost, however, it is less appealing.

Echeverria’s examination of Berkouwer’s ecumenical engagement with Roman Catholic theology inspired me to take another look at Berkouwer. I am grateful for that gift of friendship that has deepened my own understanding of important theological and

philosophical roots of my own intellectual formation. Because of that gift and what it entails I have come to the following conclusion, one which might seem startling for a Protestant, and a Reformed one to boot:

A key to good ecumenical conversation between Reformed thought and the Roman Catholic tradition is the necessity for Reformed people to get beyond their biblicism. This means: (a) aligning oneself philosophically with the Augustinian/Thomistic tradition of Christian metaphysics, and (b) carrying on the conversation in the light of the great ecumenical consensus of Christian dogma and liturgical practice.²²

22. Without necessarily endorsing everything in it, I consider the 1982 Faith and Order Paper No. 111 of the World Council of Churches, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry," to be exemplary in this regard; see <http://goo.gl/uwNly3>.