

[1958. Review of *Conflict with Rome*, by G.C. Berkouwer. *Christianity Today* 17 Feb.]

GENTLE CONFLICT

Conflict with Rome, by G. C. Berkouwer, transd. By D. H. Freeman, Presbyterian and Reformed, Philadelphia, 1957, 319 pp., \$5.95.

As in *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* so in this volume Berkouwer has given us penetrating analyses on an even more important question with a clarity and ease of expression that leave little to be desired.

The Conflict With Rome never mentions persecutions in Columbia and Spain, avoids all reference to tax support for parochial schools and never raises its voice above a dignified discussion of theology. The subjects are, rather, the Roman claim to all inclusive authority, grace and assurance, Mariolatry, the incarnation, and the witness of the patristic writers.

In an exceptionally interesting and generously informative way Berkouwer shows how the Romish view of sin (which minimizes depravity and speaks well of man) and *infused* grace depends on a theory of the incarnation detached from the specific purpose of redemption and considered as a cosmic principle of union between God and man. The union is now most complete in the *prolongation* of the incarnation which is the body of Christ, to wit, the Roman church. Berkouwer succeeds most admirably in making even the hasty reader understand the coherence of the Roman system.

If it be the duty of a reviewer to search out something for adverse criticism, perhaps a few points may be found:

First, in rejecting Rome's claim that the Reformation, as a revolt against all ecclesiastical authority, was too individualistic, Berkouwer judges that the recent excessive individualism is a departure from Reformation principles. The reviewer agrees that there has been a widespread departure from Reformed principles, but he believes that it has been toward an excessive totalitarianism, and so far forth toward something akin to Romish authoritarianism.

Second, at the end of the chapter on grace, he asserts that "the primacy of the intellect was rejected" by the Reformation and that "the Reformed concept of fiducia was *not in the least*

[italics mine] intellectually founded.” This was not the view of Charles Hodge; and J. Gresham Machen in his *What is Faith* vigorously defended the primacy of the intellect.

Third, although Berkouwer presents some fine exegetical material in defense of the assurance of salvation, it seems that he does not quite answer Rome’s argument for “moral certainty” as opposed to “infallible assurance.”

Fourth and last, the great majority of Berkouwer’s references to contemporary Romish authors, with the exception of Cardinal Newman, are to Dutch writers. This produces the impression, unfounded and unfortunate, that the argument may suffer from a limited viewpoint.

But these criticisms are minor. The long chapter on grace is a masterpiece. One comes to understand why the Romanists were forced to assert the freedom of the will and why Luther and Calvin were compelled to deny it. With great skill in the handling of detail he makes perfectly evident that this is no effete, academic, trivial quarrel about words; but rather that it is at the center of ones’ deepest religious attitudes. On the one hand there is human merit, the insufficiency of God’s power, and the possibility of losing one’s salvation; on the other hand is total depravity, the perseverance of the saints, and the irresistible grace of the Sovereign God.

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