

LOUIS BERKHOF: AN ARDENT APOLOGIST, A PASSIONATE
PASTOR, AND A SCRUPULOUS SCHOLAR

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TH1 – Dr. Stallard
Internal Residency Presentation
October 2009

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Biography

Known by some as *the* theologian of the Christian Reformed Church, Louis Berkhof has left an indelible legacy in the realm of Christian theology. He was a stalwart for the truth. He was a brilliant mind, a philosophical thinker, and a biblical theologian. He preeminently possessed a love for Jesus Christ which is seen through his love for the Word of God and the precise nature of his theology.

Louis Berkhof was born in Emmen, which is in the province of Drenthe in the Netherlands in 1873 to Jan and Geesje (ter Poorten) Berkhof. His parents were members of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk (Christian Reformed Church) which came into existence as a result of a secession from the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk (Netherlands Reformed Church) or the state church in 1834.¹ When Berkhof was nine years old his family moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1882. Very little is known about Berkhof's childhood, his early education, and family relationships aside from a few brief facts. While a teenager, he was an active member (secretary) of the first Reformed Young Men's Society organized in Grand Rapids.² It was here in this society that Berkhof knew that God had gifted him and called him into full time service to labor for the heavenly Kingdom.

After high school Berkhof attended Calvin College where he graduated in 1897. He then attended Calvin Theological Seminary where he graduated in 1900 and upon graduation, he accepted the call to be the pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church in Allendale, Michigan.

¹ See Henry Zwaanstra, "Louis Berkhof," in *Reformed Theology in America: A History of its Modern Development*, ed. by David F. Welles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 154.

² *Ibid.*, 155.

He remained in this pastorate for two years until he gratified his heart's desire to return to school. In 1902, he left the pastorate and went to Princeton Theological Seminary for two years earning his B.D. degree. From 1902-1904 he studied at Princeton. He was under the tutelage of Benjamin Warfield and Geerhaudus Vos. After graduation from Princeton, he traveled back to his hometown of Grand Rapids and accepted the call to be pastor of the Oakdale Park Church. He remained the senior Pastor of Oakdale Park Church for over four years until he began a 38 year teaching career at Calvin Theological Seminary in 1906.

In 1931 Berkhof was honored by serving as the first president of the seminary for 13 years until his retirement from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1944. In God's perfect providence, the time in which Berkhof assumed presidency over Calvin Seminary, social and economic times were severe and troubled during the Great Depression. Berkhof stressed the necessity of seminaries to remain orthodox and doctrinally sound in all matters of theology and practice. In the preface to his *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, Berkhof revealed the heart of a shepherd for his endangered sheep:

[In speaking about the need for good theological books in such a time as] the widespread doctrinal indifference of the present day, of the resulting superficiality and confusion in the minds of many professing Christians of the insidious errors that are zealously propagated even from the pulpits, and of the alarming increase of all kinds of sects that are springing up like mushrooms on every side. If there was ever a time when the Church ought to guard her precious heritage, the deposit of the truth that was entrusted to her care, that time is now.³

The first 20 years of Berkhof's teaching career was devoted to biblical studies in both the Old and New Testaments—though for 14 of these 20 years he focused exclusively on the New Testament studies only. Then, in 1926, Berkhof became professor of dogmatics and systematic

³ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1933; reprint 1981), 5.

theology and taught in this crucial field of theology for the next 18 years. Hence, Berkhof is known preeminently as a systematic theologian. That Berkhof was a masterful mind in theology is no question. What may not be so readily known is Berkhof's pastoral heart for his sheep and his affectionate love for Christ's church. As president of the seminary and professor of theology, Berkhof quietly sought to guide both the seminary and the denomination (the Christian Reformed Church) through different theological controversies that arose during his time.

The personal life of Berkhof must not be overlooked. At the time Berkhof graduated seminary he married Reka Dijkhuis and he had four children with her: Grace Meyer, William, Jean Stuk, and John. They were happily married until her death in 1928. Thereafter, Berkhof married Dena Heyns-Joldersma with whom he had two daughters: Joanne Heyns De Jong and Wilma Heyns Brouwer. Berkhof died in 1957 at the age of 84 years old.

Berkhof authored 22 books in his career. His most famous work is his *Systematic Theology* (1932, revised in 1938) which was supplemented with an *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology* (1932, which is included in the 1996 Eerdman's edition of the *Systematic Theology*) and a separate volume entitled *History of Christian Doctrines* (in 1937). Berkhof also had a heart for taking the depths of theology and making it understandable for younger folks. He wrote a shorter version of his *Systematic Theology* for high school and college students which he called *The Manual of Christian Discipline*. Later, he wrote an even more condensed compilation, *The Summary of Christian Doctrine*.

Finally, that Berkhof was a brilliant scholar in mind and a shepherding pastor at heart is evident from his love for his students at Calvin Seminary. Additionally, Berkhof's commitment to attend conferences on a plethora of subjects shows his broad-sweeping knowledge in education, theology, and homiletics. His heart for men to stand behind the pulpit and preach

God's Word and God's truth fearlessly and faithfully cannot be missed as one reads his lectures. After reading Berkhof's writings, one could almost hear him say to his students the words of the Apostle Paul: "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:27–28).

Hermeneutical Approach

Introductory Presuppositions

I think a proper place to begin when talking about Berkhof's approach to hermeneutics is his work *Introduction to Systematic Theology*. Here, he validates the discipline of systematic theology (=dogma) by delving into the realm of philosophy and science and then he reveals his task, his method, and the proper distribution (or, divisions) of theology. Furthermore, in this work he perspicuously reveals his presuppositions, namely, that God has revealed Himself both in creation and in His infallible Word. God, Berkhof a priori argues, has inspired the Scriptures and that any attempt to discredit the doctrine of inspiration devalues the Scriptures altogether.⁴ Again, he says: "a dogma may be defined as a doctrine, derived from Scripture, officially defined by the Church, and declared to rest upon divine authority. . . Its subject-matter is derived from the Word of God and is therefore authoritative."⁵ Affirming, then, that God has revealed Himself by means of an inspired revelation of Himself, he shows that human beings *can* understand

⁴ Berkhof defines inspiration as: "that supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of which their writings are given divine truthfulness, and constitute an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice" (Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 41).

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 18–19.

God—to be sure, in a finite way.⁶ Nevertheless, he believes that religious intuition, moral consciousness, and a belief in the reality of the one and true God exists within the heart and mind of every single person (cf. Rom 1:19–20; 2:14–15). Therefore, the answer to the need that every human being has before an Almighty and Holy God is found within the pages of God’s divine revelation.

The Validity of Systematizing Theology

Joining the cry of many in church history, Berkhof affirmed that “left to himself, [man] would never have discovered God. We distinguish between God’s revelation in nature and His revelation in Scripture.”⁷ This sets the stage for his convinced stance that systematic theology, as a cohesive system and as an intricate discipline, is a valid—yes, a necessary—practice. I appreciate what Berkhof writes: “Special revelation does not simply serve the purpose of conveying to man some general knowledge of God. It discloses to man specific knowledge of the plan of God for the salvation of sinners, of the reconciliation of God and sinners in Jesus Christ, of the way of salvation opened up by His redemptive work, of the transforming and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, and of the divine requirements for those who share in the life of the Spirit.”⁸ All of this comes together in validating the system of theology. But he acknowledges

⁶ He also affirms that “man cannot discover God, nor can he discover the deep things of God. He can undoubtedly learn something of God from the study of nature and of history, but this is so only in virtue of the general revelation of God in nature. God manifests His eternal power and divinity in the world, and therefore man can obtain knowledge of these things by a careful study of the work of creation (Louis Berkhof, *Textual Aid to Systematic Theology: A Practical Handbook to Professor Berkhof’s Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1942), 15.

⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine for Senior Classes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1969), 13.

⁸ Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 35.

that the “*system* of theology is not found in the Word of God, but it does mean that the Church is fully justified in striving, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for a unified conception of the truth.”⁹

The Inadequacy of Human Philosophy and Speculation

Berkhof goes to great lengths to show that modern theology is based on the data of human experience, on the deliverances of the Christian consciousness, or on the fundamental tenets of secular popular philosophy, all of which furnish but a very inadequate foundation for theological truth.¹⁰ He rightly understands that human philosophy and rational speculations proceed from frail and depraved minds and are, from the outset and throughout the course of the entire process, inadequate and insufficient.

Covenantalism—the Covenant of Grace

Regarding the hermeneutical approach specifically, Berkhof adheres to the covenantal “method” of theology. This is the framework that encapsulates and joins Berkhof’s theology together. He writes:

The fact is that both Testaments are throughout mainly concerned with the administration of the same covenant, namely, the covenant of grace, and therefore also teach the same way of salvation. According to both man owes his redemption to the grace of God; he is saved by grace, that is, by a believing acceptance of the promises of God. The covenant with Abraham carried with it the promise, and that promise was absolute. Its fulfillment was not made contingent on the works of man. That ancient patriarch was justified by faith just as New Testament believers are. He was the exemplary believer, and is even called ‘the father of believers’ (Rom. 4:11).¹¹

⁹ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 57 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

Berkhof rightly notes that the two revelations—that is, the Old and the New Testaments—are not antithetical to one another. Rather, they are essentially one in matters of theology and teaching.

That Berkhof ascertains that Covenantalism includes the covenant of works,¹² the covenant of redemption,¹³ and the covenant of grace is not doubted. Berkhof recognizes that the covenant of works, though, is seldom found in the early Church Fathers yet he believes that Hosea 6:7 points to this covenant.¹⁴

For Berkhof, though, there is only *one* dominant covenant threading its way throughout the entire corpus of the Bible—the covenant of grace. What dispensationalists call the Abrahamic and Mosaic (=the Israelite Covenant) Covenants are, for Berkhof, part and parcel of the Covenant of Grace. Berkhof writes:

[The Covenant of Grace] was not *essentially* changed at Sinai, nor was it superseded by one of an entirely different character. The real nucleus of the Sinaitic covenant was the covenant with Abraham. That covenant now assumed national proportions, and was supplemented by the institution of an elaborate legal service. Some indeed assume that with the giving of the law the Lord introduced a new economy of redemption, in which salvation was made contingent on the keeping of the law. But Scripture points to the fact that the covenant with Abraham remained in force, Ex. 32:13; Lev. 26:42; Deut. 1:8; 4:31; and clearly testifies to their identity in Ps. 105:8-10. Moreover, Paul argues in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 that the promise was not annulled by the giving of the law, but remained in force throughout the old dispensation, and still holds to-day. For him it is utterly unthinkable that God should arbitrarily change His covenant. The law, instead of

¹² The covenant of works is when God entered into a covenant relationship with man. Berkhof believes that the covenant includes “the triune God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, and Adam as the representative of the human race . . . the promise of the covenant was the promise of life in the highest sense, life raised above the possibility of death. . . . the condition was that of absolute obedience. . . . the penalty was death in the most inclusive sense of the word, physical, spiritual, and eternal” (Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 70); cf. Berkhof, *Manual*, 130–34.

¹³ Also known as the “covenant of peace” (cf. Zech 6:13). This covenant of redemption is a “covenant between the Father, representing the Trinity, and the Son as the representative of the elect” (Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 80). Berkhof writes that “it is clear that the plan of redemption was included in God’s eternal decree, Eph 1:4ff; 3:11; II Tim 1:9” (ibid.).

¹⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (reprint, 1958; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 211.

supplanting the promise, became subservient to it by deepening the consciousness of sin, and by acting as a schoolmaster to lead men to Christ.¹⁵

Berkhof equates the Covenant of Grace with the Abrahamic Covenant. Quoting Berkhof again proves to be beneficial:

Take, for instance, the subject of the covenant of grace. The formal establishment of it is recorded in Gen. 15-17, and its development into a national covenant in Ex. 19. The praise of this covenant is recorded in Ps.105. A new element was added to the covenant when the first theocratic king appeared upon the scene, and of this repeated mention is made in Ps. 89. In Jer. 31:31-34 the Lord predicts the establishment of a new covenant with the house of Israel, and according to Heb.8:8-12; 10:15-18 that covenant is now in operation. This covenant is new, not from a temporal point of view (*neos*), but in quality (*kainos*), characterized by better promises and by greater inwardness. It is in reality the old covenant in a new form, Rom. 4 and Gal. 3.¹⁶

It seems that for Berkhof, the law says, Do this and thou shalt live; but the gospel offers salvation only by faith in Jesus Christ . . . It remains true that, if a man keep the commandments of the Lord, he shall live in them (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12).¹⁷ He sees the offers of “life” in the Torah (e.g., Lev. 18:5) as that of spiritual life whereas most dispensationalists would see this as the offer referring to the length of physical life the covenant nation will enjoy in the land of Israel as a result of their obedience to Yahweh.¹⁸

Noteworthy to mention, however, is that Berkhof rightly acknowledges that the Hebrew word for covenant is *always* בְּרִית. Most theologians think that the Hebrew word may be related

¹⁵ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 32–33; cf. Berkhof, *Manual*, 151–54, 157–71.

¹⁶ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 50.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁸ Eugene Merrill notes (in a legitimate parallel passage, Deut 4:40: "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."): If they [obey], they can expect blessing and longevity in the land for both themselves and their descendants after them" (*Deuteronomy*, NAC [Nashville: Broadman & Holman 2004], 133).

to Semitic roots meaning “to cut.”¹⁹ The “covenant ceremony” was generally confirmed by a solemn ceremony as in the presence of God, and thereby obtains an inviolable character. Each one of the parties binds himself to the fulfilment [*sic*] of certain promises on the basis of stipulated conditions.²⁰ The first occurrence of בְּרִית in the Hebrew Bible is Genesis 6:18 referring to the Noahic covenant, yet Berkhof believes: “covenants among men had been made long before God established His covenant with Noah and with Abraham, and this prepared men to understand the significance of a covenant in a world divided by sin, and helped them to understand the divine revelation, when it presented man’s relation to God as a covenant relation.”²¹ Consequently, Berkhof is forced to jump endlessly in the Scriptures for verses which seem to *allude* to a pact in eternity past since there is not one Scripture that clearly states a covenant being enacted by the Father and the Son.²² This is finally evidenced in an article he wrote in a book he coauthored with Cornelius van Til, *Foundations of Christian Education*. In an article entitled: “*Covenant: The Covenant of Grace and Its Significance for Christian Education*,” Berkhof gave no Scriptures to support his viewpoint at all—which is rare for Berkhof and his writings. In the article, after a section defining what a “covenant” is, he identifies the “covenant of grace” and gives no Scriptures to support this at all (I note the exception when he references Job 41 and Ex 15 regarding the holiness of God and the awesome character of this great God

¹⁹ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. by M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:157.

²⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 264.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

²² E.g., Gen 17:7; Jer 31:33; Ezek 34:23–25, 30, 31; John 1:16; Rom 4:9–25; 2 Cor 6:16–18; Eph 1:1–14; Heb 8:10. Dispensationalists would respond that [some of] these verses are *distinct* covenants whereas Berkhof seems to mesh them all together under one *overarching* covenant.

who is offended by our sin but my point remains that there is no passage on the covenant).²³

Therefore, by Berkhof's own pattern of supporting nearly everything he says with a myriad of Scriptures, the covenant of grace falls outside this pattern in the present chapter.²⁴

Amillennialism

Berkhof adheres to the eschatological camp of the amillennialists in that he believes that Jesus Christ is currently reigning in His messianic Kingdom now, spiritually, residing in His people. In talking about the Old Testament Prophets (i.e., where many OT prophecies may be found regarding the future, physical, literal kingdom of the Messiah), Berkhof states:

When we say that the Old Testament and the New are related to each other as prophecy and fulfillment, we do not mean to deny that some of the separate predictions of the prophets were fulfilled during the old dispensation, but simply desire to stress the fact that prophecy as an organic whole, of which the center and core is the future realization of the Kingdom of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, finds its realization and fulfillment in the *spiritual realities of the New Testament*.²⁵

More explicitly, Berkhof elsewhere writes that “this kingdom of God is on the one hand a *present*, spiritual reality in the hearts and lives of men, Matt.12:28; Luke 17:21; Col.1:13; but on the other hand a *future* hope, which will not be realized until the return of Jesus Christ. . . . The future kingdom will be essentially the same as the present, namely, the rule of God established and acknowledged in the hearts of men.” It will differ, however, in that it will be *visible* and *perfect*. Some are of the opinion that this kingship of Christ will cease at His return, but the Bible

²³ See Louis Berkhof, “Covenant: The Covenant of Grace and Its Significance for Christian Education,” in *Foundations of Christian Education: Addresses to Christian Teachers*, ed. by Dennis E. Johnson (reprint, 1953; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1990), 68–71.

²⁴ Of course, in his large *Systematic Theology* he has a whole section devoted to the covenantal framework with scattered Scriptures.

²⁵ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 43 (emphasis added).

would seem to teach explicitly that it will endure forever, Ps. 45:6; 72:17; 89:36, 37; Isa. 9:6; Dan. 2:44; II Sam. 7:13, 16; Luke 1:33; II Pet. 1:11.²⁶

Soteriology

Berkhof's soteriology is at times swayed by his Covenantalism. The covenant of grace does creep in periodically with reference to infants entering the covenant of grace which is understandable regarding his presuppositions but, nevertheless, it is discouraging. In an article, Berkhof writes that "people enter the covenant relationship either by birth from Christian parents, or, if they are not born within the pale of the church, by a profession of faith in Christ."²⁷ This steers awfully close to intimating that some are "born" into the covenant of grace (i.e., salvation)—though Berkhof would never state this, his writings can appear too close to this erroneous belief.

When it comes to the death of Jesus Christ and his substitutionary atonement for sinners, I believe Berkhof is at his best. His constant cry for men to preach the depravity of man and the deliverance of Christ is evident in his writings. For Berkhof, the death of Jesus Christ in the place of sinners who believe is the climax of redemption and the high point of his theology.

He adheres to the dual imputation of Christ's death. In other words, the death of Christ included Christ's active and passive obedience. His active obedience consists in all that He did to observe the law on behalf of sinners, as a condition for obtaining eternal life. His passive

²⁶ Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 109.

²⁷ Berkhof, "Covenant," 74.

obedience refers to all that He suffered in paying the penalty of sin and discharging the debt of His people.²⁸

Another essential that Berkhof goes to great lengths to support is the reality that Christ's death actually secured the salvation for the elect. "Christ not merely made salvation possible but really saves to the uttermost every one of those for whom he laid down His life, Luke 19:10; Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7."²⁹ He goes to great lengths to show the biblical support of this position rather than that of others who deny this viewpoint. In the doctrines of grace terminology, this is called definite atonement or particular redemption.³⁰ Berkhof defines this concept in his own terms:

In opposition to all [other] theories the Calvinist holds that the design of the atonement was limited, that is, that God sent His Son into the world for the purpose of atoning for the sins of the elect; and that Christ gave His life only for those who were given Him by the Father. Moreover, they believe that the atonement is effectual in the lives of all those for whom it is made. It necessarily carries with it all that is needed for the application of the work of redemption. Christ not only made salvation possible, but actually saves, and saves to the uttermost, every one for whom He has made atonement. God's designs do not fail through the failure of men to meet the requirements of the gospel.³¹

Affirming the doctrines of grace, Berkhof believes that the internal call is really the "external call made effective by the operation of the Holy Spirit."³² This call from the Holy

²⁸ Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 114. Importantly, he insists that "while we may distinguish these two, we should never separate them" (ibid.).

²⁹ Ibid., 115. He elaborates: "If the Bible sometimes says that Christ died *for the world*, John 1:29; 1 John 2:2; 4:14, or *for all*, 1 Tim 2:6; Tit. 2:11; Heb 2:9, this evidently means that He died for people of all nations of the world, or (in some instances) for all kinds or classes of people (ibid., emphasis original).

³⁰ See David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2d ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 39–40.

³¹ Louis Berkhof, *Vicarious Atonement Through Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1936), 156.

³² Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 126.

Spirit to the heart of the sinner *always* comes to the sinner through the Word of God which is *always* soteriologically applied by the operation of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 1:23–24).³³

Ecclesiology

Much could be said in relation to Berkhof's views on ecclesiology, suffice it to say that he firmly believed that the marks of a true church are (primarily) threefold.

First, there must be the true preaching of the Word of God. This, according to Berkhof, is *the* most important mark in the Church.³⁴ Rightly, he acknowledges that the preaching does not have to be perfect, but it must unequivocally affirm the fundamentals of true Christian religion in addition to having a controlling influence on faith and practice.³⁵

Second, the church must have a right administration of the sacraments. I think this is a severely missing ingredient in our churches today. That churches practice the Lord's Supper regularly and baptism is not the issue. Rather, he argues that the weightiness and importance of unifying the sacraments with the Word of God and the importance of self-examination for Communion and obedience for baptism is nonnegotiable.

Third, and far less commonly found today in churches, is the faithful exercise of church discipline. Interestingly, this is on the top three marks of a true church and yet this Christian discipline is almost extinct in modern ecclesiology. One of the reasons discipline is indispensable

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 153.

³⁵ Ibid.

is because it maintains purity of doctrine, the purity of conduct, and it safeguards the holiness of the sacraments.³⁶

Relating to Berkhof's discussion on sacraments, his view on infant baptism is pertinent. Shockingly, Berkhof admits immediately after the heading *the Scriptural basis for infant baptism* with "infant baptism is not based on a single passage of Scripture, but on a series of considerations."³⁷ As noted previously in the paper, Berkhof normally saturates his theological assertions with Scripture, but here he does not because (I believe) he *cannot*.

The origin of the Church, according to Berkhof, must be properly understood. He believes that the Church has been in existence from the moment that God set enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, but it did not always assume the same form.³⁸ Specifically, in the patriarchal period the Church was represented in the "pious households, where the fathers served as priests . . . [and] at the time of the flood the Church was saved in the family of Noah."³⁹ He sees Jerusalem, in the OT, as a type of the NT Church of God (cf. Gal. 4:25, 26; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2, 9, 10).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he states that the primary Scriptural data

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 170.

³⁸ Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 283. This, then, would result in a belief that the Church has *always* existed yet it "evolves" or "changes" over time. In this section, he seems to believe in three different "phases" of the Church throughout history: 1) Church in the patriarchal period; 2) Church in the Mosaic period; and 3) Church in the New Testament period (ibid.). A question sparked with this viewpoint is what sort of break or change occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2) or when the Gentiles entered the "Church" (Acts 10)?

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 37. For instance, in Berkhof's work, *The Assurance of Faith*, the verse used to support this concept of the believer's assurance on the first page of the book is Ps 125:1 – "They that trust in Jehovah are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth forever" ([Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939], 3).

for the doctrine of the Church resides not in the Old Testament, but in the New, and more particularly in some of the Epistles of Paul.⁴¹

Analogy of Scripture and the Analogy of Faith

One thing no one can fault Berkhof for is his vigorous commitment to the scriptures as *the* source of theology. He demands that every interpreter and theologian must derive the truths from the Word of God.⁴² Though the analogy of Scripture and the analogy of faith are similar, they must not be equated as identical. There is a slight distinction. Though Berkhof is committed to the Scriptures (the analogy of Scripture), his analogy of faith plays a large part in the formation of his theology (=Covenantalism).⁴³ Berkhof writes:

The term “Analogy of Faith” is derived from Rom. 12:6 when we read: “Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith (*kata ten analogian tes pisteos*).” Some commentators mistakenly interpreted “faith” objectively here, in the sense of *doctrine*, and looked upon *analogian* as the designation of an external standard. Correctly interpreted, however, the whole expression simply means, *according to the measure of your subjective faith*. Hence the term, as derived from this passage, is based on a misunderstanding.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 25.

⁴² Relating to this, Berkhof writes: “Modern liberal theologians, of course, do not admit this and, as a matter of fact, make very little use of the Bible. If they do still employ it, they follow what a certain writer has called the ‘cafeteria system.’ ‘Help yourself to what you like and leave the rest.’ Strictly speaking, they have no theology. For God as the object of theology they substituted religion, and recognized as the source of their religious knowledge human reason, or human experience, or the Christian consciousness. In most cases their so-called theology is merely a species of anthropology, — a study of man from the religious point of view” (ibid., 55).

⁴³ For example, the eschatological system of Covenantalism demands that he see “all Israel” in Rom 11:26 as referring to the full number of the elect out of the ancient covenant people (Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 187–88). Additionally, he notes that “the true Israelites in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, are not the natural descendants of Abraham as such, but only they who share his faith” (Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 135–36).

⁴⁴ Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 163–64 (emphasis original).

So when the early Church fathers spoke of the *Analogia or Regula Fidei*, they meant the generally accepted principles of faith.⁴⁵ However, this must not be the subjective standard—as many would think. The solution for the objective, concrete, and divine standard for the analogy of faith comes from the Bible itself.⁴⁶

In Berkhof's thinking, the analogy of Scripture was the umbrella under which two headings existed: positive analogy and general analogy. Each must be considered in turn. First, by positive analogy, Berkhof means that which is immediately founded upon Scriptural passages (=analogy of *Scripture*).⁴⁷ That is to say, it consists of those teachings of the Bible that are so undeniably stated that no one may doubt the meaning and value of them. For instance, the existence of an infinitely perfect, holy, righteous, merciful, gracious, providential, and sovereign God is undeniable from the Bible. That Jesus Christ is the Savior offered to sinners is another example is clearly proven in the Bible. Second, general analogy does not rest on the explicit statements of the Bible, but on the obvious scope and import of its teachings as a whole, and on the religious impressions they leave on mankind (=the analogy of *faith*).⁴⁸

Having defined both degrees of the analogy of faith, one must remember that the general analogy will not always have the same degree of evidential value and authority. One may decipher this from four factors: (1) the number of passages that contain the same doctrine (that is, more weight is given to a doctrine with 25 verses referencing it as opposed to 3 verses); (2) the unanimity or correspondence of the different passages; (3) the clearness of the passage; and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 164.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 165.

(4) the distribution of the passages (that is, if it is drawn from a single book or a single chapter as opposed to the entire corpus of the Bible, it should be held loosely).

His view that the analogy of Scripture must be maintained rests upon many different facts, a few of which are: (1) the veracity of God; (2) the purpose of God's revelation to glorify Himself and redeem sinners; (3) the necessary congruity between the revelation of the Logos in the mind of man and his revelation in nature and in Scripture; and (4) the character of human language, in which the Bible is written.⁴⁹

Progressive Revelation

To be sure, Berkhof affirms the progression of revelation as portrayed in Scripture. "The Bible was not made, but grew, and the composition of its several books marks the stages of its progressive development. It is, in the last analysis, the product of a single mind, the embodiment of a single fruitful principle, branching out in various directions. The different parts of it are mutually dependent, and are all together subservient to the organism as a whole."⁵⁰ One could picture this idea of general revelation as "the bud of the divine promises gradually opening into a beautiful flower."⁵¹ For instance, he writes that the Old Testament contains some intimations of more than one person in God (e.g., Gen 1:26; Isa 61:6). However, he regards the New Testament as containing clearer proofs of many doctrines—the clearest of which is the doctrine of redemption.⁵²

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 57–58.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵² Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine for Senior Classes*, 42–43.

With regard to how one interprets the NT in light of the OT, Berkhof interestingly holds to some guiding principles that the interpreter must bear in mind: (1) the OT offers the key to the right interpretation of the New; (2) the New Testament is a commentary on the Old; (3) the interpreter should beware of minimizing the Old Testament; and (4) he should guard against reading too much into the Old Testament.⁵³

Eschatology

Berkhof ties all of the Scriptures together—both Old and New Testaments—relating to the coming of Jesus Christ to earth as referring to one and the same coming. He sees Psalm 102:25–26, Daniel 12:2, Matthew 22, 24, and 25, the epistles of I and II Thessalonians, the book of Revelation, John 5 and 6, and 1 Corinthians 15 all together as referring to the final eschatological events before the eternal state.⁵⁴ Much of his eschatological thought may be derived from his *Systematic Theology*, but he also has a wealth of material (and apologetical argumentation) in his work, *The Second Coming of Christ*.⁵⁵ The importance of eschatology in Berkhof's estimation was severely minimized in his time. As he reveals in the introduction of the book: "the main purpose in writing it is to call attention to a very important scriptural truth which does not always receive due attention in the preaching of the Word of God."⁵⁶

In his honest exegesis, Berkhof sees a tension that dispensationalists have long recognized regarding the differences noted in Christ's "coming." In his own words:

⁵³ Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 137–38.

⁵⁴ See Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 54.

⁵⁵ Louis Berkhof, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1953).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

There are two seemingly contradictory lines of thought in Scripture (some speak of imminency [Phil 4:5; James 5:9] and others speak of a short delay [Matt 25:5; Luke 19:11; Matt 25:19]) respecting the time of the second coming of Christ, both of which come to us with the same authority. We must accept both of them as equally true; we cannot resolve the difficulty by denying either the one or the other without infringing on the absolute authority of the Word of God.⁵⁷

After rightly seeing the tension here between what dispensationalists call the rapture and the second coming, Berkhof (sadly) concludes: “but the only trouble is that this invention of a twofold coming of the Lord in order to solve the difficulty finds no basis in Scripture. This is explicitly stated by some who are themselves dispensationalists.”⁵⁸ So he sees the order of eschatological events laid out as follows: Christ will come again at the end of the world, and his coming will at once be followed by the general resurrection, the final judgment, and the renewal of heaven and earth.⁵⁹

Regarding the book of Revelation, Berkhof states that it is “largely clothed in symbolic language derived from some of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Hence its correct understanding is greatly facilitated by studying the writer’s Old Testament sources.”⁶⁰ He continues: “the symbolic numbers 3, 4, 7, 10, 12 and their multiples also play an important part in the book.”⁶¹ Unwilling to give a full-blown treatise of his interpretive method of Revelation, he says: “though all these views [the historicist, futurist, and preterist interpretations] must be

⁵⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 27. One of his primary arguments here is 2 Thess 1 regarding the timing of Christ’s coming.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁰ Louis Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1915), 341.

⁶¹ Ibid.

regarded as one-sided, each one contains an element of truth that must be taken in consideration in the interpretation of the book.”⁶²

When Berkhof approached Revelation 20, he revealed his viewpoint because he knew all too well that premillennial theologians propose that “one thousand years” occurs six times between verses two through seven. He said that Revelation 20:4–6 should be interpreted according to the analogy of the *New Testament* (!). In one lecture, he stated: “by insisting on a literal fulfillment of prophecy the premillennialists got involved in all kinds of contradictions and bound God in fulfilling prophecies to conditions and situations that existed when the predictions were first given.”⁶³ It may be profitable to hear Berkhof speak his viewpoint at some length:

In view of all this it is a conundrum to me how they who belong to the Church, for whom the promises given to Israel do NOT at all apply, can derive special comfort from the fact that Jesus at his return will establish a temporal Jewish kingdom on earth; how they can find it a specially consoling thought that Jesus, who after his resurrection was already endowed as Mediator with an endless life and as such could not remain in this sinful world, but had to ascend to heaven, will after his return again dwell on earth for a thousand years in a world in which sin and death still hold sway; and how they can find it a cause for special rejoicing that Christ will again have to descend from his heavenly throne for a prolonged stay on earth, which is still under the curse of sin and death and still a scene of wickedness and lawlessness, of sickness and sorrows; and that with him his saints will also for a thousand years have to exchange their heavenly bliss and glory for an environment that is not at all suited to their glorified conditions. In the light of all these considerations it becomes very difficult to explain the supposedly unique comfort of the dispensationalists.⁶⁴

In the Scriptures, Berkhof says that “the New Testament never says anything about the restoration to that ancient covenant people. Peter in his first epistle, after referring to the rejection of Israel, applied to the Church all the epithets which were once used to describe the

⁶² Ibid., 351.

⁶³ Zwaanstra, “Louis Berkhof,” 160.

⁶⁴ Berkhof, *Second Coming*, 93.

ancient covenant people. . . He thus virtually said of the Church that it was now in reality what Israel was once called to be.”⁶⁵ So he concludes his apologetical defense against the dispensationalists by affirming that “according to our confessional standards we believe that the Church existed from the beginning. We reject the idea that Israel and the Church constitute two different peoples of God and believe that the whole Bible is the book of the Church as well as of the Kingdom.”⁶⁶

To conclude this section, I think it is apropos to give Berkhof’s rules in interpreting Scripture employing the analogy of faith: (1) a doctrine that is clearly supported by the analogy of faith cannot be contradicted by a contrary and obscure passage (2) a passage that is neither supported nor contradicted by the analogy of faith may serve as the positive foundation for a doctrine, provided it is clear in its teaching. Yet the doctrine so established will not have the same force as one that is founded on the analogy of faith; (3) when a doctrine is supported by an obscure passage of Scripture only, and finds no support in the analogy of faith, it can only be accepted with great reserve; and (4) in cases where the analogy of Scripture leads to the establishment of two doctrines that appear contradictory, both doctrines should be accepted as Scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves into a higher unity.⁶⁷

Biblical Truth with other Academic Disciplines

I admire Berkhof’s passion when he upholds biblical truth against all human speculations. In his work, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Berkhof hits this very issue head

⁶⁵ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁷ Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, 166.

on for nearly two hundred pages. He affirms biblical truth and the Word of God against the human speculations of the Roman Catholic Church, Kant, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and other rationalistic thoughts that have arisen in church history. From this work, it is abundantly clear that Berkhof's primary and sole authority for finding truth resides in the Word of God. When attempting to integrate truth from other disciplines together with biblical truth, I see Berkhof having a skeptical yet discerning eye, since, as Berkhof would most probably confirm, only if truth from other disciplines aligns with what God's Word says is it allowable. And though there may be "truth" in other disciplines, essentially all truth ultimately comes from God who is the source of truth. I appreciate what Berkhof states:

All our knowledge of God has its origin in God Himself. God possesses a complete and in every way perfect knowledge of Himself. He knows Himself in the absolute sense of the word, not only as He is related to His creatures, nor merely in His diversified activities and their controlling motives, but also in the unfathomable depths of His essential Being. His self-consciousness is perfect and infinite; there is no sub-conscious life in Him, no subliminal region of unconscious mentality. And of that absolute, perfectly conscious self-knowledge of God, the knowledge which man has of the divine Being [and of other disciplines] is but a faint and creaturely copy or imprint. All human knowledge . . . is derived from Him.⁶⁸

Bibliology

In noting Semler's *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Kanons* ("Treatise about the free investigation of the Canon") (1771-75), he broke with the (traditional) doctrine of inspiration and held that the Bible *was* not, but *contained* the Word of God, which could be discovered only by the inner light.⁶⁹ All questions of authenticity and credibility had to be investigated *voraussetzungslos* ("before the setting of results"). Then, the Tübingen school of OT

⁶⁸ Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 95–96.

⁶⁹ Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction*, 14–15.

criticism took its rise with F. C. Bauer (1792-1860) who applied the Hegelian principle of development to the literature of the NT.⁷⁰ According to him, then, the origin of the NT finds its explanation in the three-fold process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Bauer (and his predecessors) saw that many of the writings in the NT were written by others than their reputed authors in the interest of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, Berkhof has been critiqued for using the Bible as simply a book of “proof texts”—as a timeless and authoritative book (!).⁷¹ Yet when one understands the knowledge Berkhof possessed and the desire he had to integrate truth from other disciplines to the Scriptures *only* when the truths aligned with what God’s authoritative word says, he could say with Kallenberg: “Berkhof cannot be blamed for attempting to make a bridge between theology and other disciplines.”⁷²

Psychology, Sociology, and Philosophy

Kallenberg writes along these lines: “But it is instructive to note that he sees psychology (which in 1939 is primarily the study of the psyche of individual subjects) as the discipline which provides the most promising corroboration for his doctrine.”⁷³ To be more specific in terms of the human psyche, Kallenberg states: “Berkhof recognizes that these secular thinkers find correlation between the frequency of conversion and factors such as environment, education, and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁷¹ Charles M. Cameron, “The Reformation Continues: A Study in Twentieth Century Reformed Theology,” *Evangel* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 82.

⁷² Brad J. Kallenberg, “Conversion Converted: A Postmodern Formulation of the Doctrine of Conversion,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (Oct 1995): 339.

⁷³ Ibid.

religious training but he dismisses these factors to reassert what is ‘the theological conviction that conversion is rooted in the subconscious life’ of the individual.”⁷⁴ Lest one think, however, that Berkhof affirms every aspect of psychology (especially modern *secularist* psychological affirmations), he writes:

The doctrine of conversion is, of course, like all other doctrines, based upon Scripture and should be accepted on that ground. Since conversion is a conscious experience in the lives of many, the testimony of experience can be added to that of the Word of God, but this testimony, however valuable it may be, does not add to the certainty of the doctrine taught in the Word of God.⁷⁵

According to Berkhof, effectually called humans obviously experience conversion but conversion is never *based upon* that (or any) experience. This proves to be Berkhof’s argument, and I would affirm, a right emphasis to underline. So, the modern psychological, sociological, and philosophical approaches to religion, for Berkhof, could never satisfy the demands for genuine theological inquiry and statement. They would always leave one empty, hungry, and speculating whereas when he contrasted these with the “dogma” of the Scriptures, one is left filled and hungry for more knowledge to be gained from God the Spirit.⁷⁶

Archaeology

Berkhof sees biblical archaeology as an indispensable part of biblical study. The science of digging in the land of Israel, collaborating those finds together, and connecting the finds with the proper time period is an effective science to supplement the Scriptures. Though that is important, Berkhof’s work, *Biblical Archaeology* proves to reveal the geography of the land of

⁷⁴ Ibid., 339–40.

⁷⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 482.

⁷⁶ See Zwaanstra, “Louis Berkhof,” 164.

Israel (=Palestine) and the secular life including both domestic and social relations among people of ancient Israel. Included also in the study is a brief section on the religious life of those living in ancient Israel. This study is important “since it gives a description of Bible lands and of the social, civil and religious customs of the people among whom God’s revelation was given, especially of Israel, which was pre-eminently the people of God.”⁷⁷

Creationism

Berkhof unashamedly believes that God is the creator of the world and all it contains. He observes how the question often is debated as to whether the days of creation were “ordinary” (twenty-four hour) days or not. To this, he affirms that

The literal interpretation of the word ‘day’ in the narrative of creation is favored by the following considerations: (a) The Hebrew word *yom* (day) primarily denotes an ordinary day, and should be so understood unless the context demands another interpretation. (b) The repeated mention of morning and evening favors this interpretation. (c) It was evidently an ordinary day which Jehovah set aside and hallowed as a day of rest. (d) In Ex. 20:9-11 Israel is commanded to labor six days and to rest on the seventh, because Jehovah made heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. (e) The last three days were evidently ordinary days, for they were determined by the earth’s relation to the sun. And if they were ordinary days, why not the others?⁷⁸

The prevailing view throughout the history of the church has been that the days of Genesis 1 are to be understood as literal days.⁷⁹ Therefore, science which purports evolutionary suppositions for the origin of the universe is false and unbiblical.

⁷⁷ Louis Berkhof, *Biblical Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Smither Book Company, 1928), 17.

⁷⁸ Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine for Senior Classes*, 54–55.

⁷⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 153.

The Social Gospel

Berkhof is quick to assert that the social Gospel which was prevalent during his day (and has taken different shapes since then in our day) is a naturalistic cult which puts Christianity on a level with the religions of the Gentiles.⁸⁰ Indeed, this social gospel is not derived from the Word of God but is a human, subjective invention. Sadly, “the picture it presents to us, is that of a man groping about in uncertainty, groping after God, if haply he might find him. He is left to His own resources for the improvement of his life, and strives to develop into perfection by a perfectly natural process.”⁸¹ Because of this, Berkhof rejects the social gospel which ultimately has its source in cultural relativism and subjective rationalism and says that “it is absolutely misleading and therefore cruel.”⁸²

To conclude this section on Berkhof’s view of biblical truth with the truth of other academic disciplines, I must note that watershed issue for Berkhof resides in his commitment to the Word of God. And other academic disciplines that do not have the Word of God as the fundamental and authoritative source of truth are flawed from the outset. “The fundamental cause of [cultural confusion] lies in the widespread denial and absolute authority of the Word of God, and in the substitution for it of the fallible authority of human reason which has been darkened by sin.”⁸³ His words are a fitting summary:

The Word of God determines with absolute certainty and authority what our religion should be, and how we should worship and serve our God. It is pre-eminently the self revelation of God, the revelation of Christ and the way of redemption, and the revelation

⁸⁰ Louis Berkhof, *Aspects of Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1951), 32.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71–72.

of the will of God for the regulation of our moral and religious life. It is a light upon our path, and a lamp unto our feet. This being so, we need not turn to Modernism in the hope that it will lead us out of the labyrinth. It is exactly Modernism with its enthronement of human reason that is one of the main causes of the existing confusion. The word of the Lord once spoken to Israel also applies to them: “Lo, they have rejected the word of Jehovah; and what manner of wisdom is in them?” Jer. 8:9.⁸⁴

Central Interpretive Motif

As I read Berkhof’s writings and considered his interpretive motif, I see three primary motifs guiding his interpretive method. First, Covenantalism and, specifically, the covenant of grace plays a dominant role in his hermeneutical motif. To begin, he writes:

The fact is that both Testaments are throughout mainly concerned with the administration of the same covenant, namely, the covenant of grace, and therefore also teach the same way of salvation. According to both man owes his redemption to the grace of God; he is saved by grace, that is, by a believing acceptance of the promises of God. The covenant with Abraham carried with it the promise, and that promise was absolute. Its fulfillment was not made contingent on the works of man. That ancient patriarch was justified by faith just as New Testament believers are. He was the exemplary believer, and is even called “the father of believers” (Rom. 4:11).⁸⁵

But I wonder if Berkhof’s thinking is not a bit confused here. He brings up the contrast between law and gospel repeatedly and argues that “[Paul teaches that] the law says, Do this and thou shalt live; but the gospel offers salvation only by faith in Jesus Christ. Cf. Rom. 10. . . . It remains true that, if a man keep the commandments of the Lord, he shall live in them, Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12.”⁸⁶

Not surprisingly, then, the Kingdom of God plays an important role in his theology. He sees that the OT prophecies and predictions stressed the fact that “prophecy as an organic whole,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁸⁵ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 32.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 33. To his credit, Berkhof continues: “But man has become so corrupt by sin, that he can no more keep the commandments of God, and therefore cannot obtain the blessing of eternal life along that way, and because of his inevitable failure, the law can only condemn him to death (ibid., 33–34).”

of which the center and core is the future realization of the Kingdom of God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, finds its realization and fulfillment in the *spiritual realities* of the New Testament.”⁸⁷ I wonder if this is how the OT prophets meant it, however. Did they see the prophecies and predictions as *spiritual realities* which would be *spiritually* fulfilled in the future? Did they not think of a literal, physical, national Kingdom (cp. Isa 2, 11)?

Second, the sovereignty of God also functions as a dominant theme in his hermeneutics.⁸⁸ Not only does Berkhof begin his theological works with the doctrine of God and, specifically, he begins with the noncommunicable attributes including the sovereignty of God. Berkhof affirms this essential underlying theme behind the doctrines of grace when he purports “the decree of God is His eternal plan or purpose, in which He has foreordained all things that come to pass. Since it includes many particulars, we often speak of the divine decrees in the plural, though in reality there is but a single decree. It covers all the works of God in creation and redemption, and also embraced the actions of men, not excluding their sinful deeds.”⁸⁹

That Berkhof’s foundational belief in the sovereignty of God is evident, especially as he upholds the doctrine of God’s providence. He defines providence as “that work of God in which

⁸⁷ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 43 (emphasis added).

⁸⁸ George Mavrodes also recognizes this central motif in Berkhof’s theology and critiques him sharply regarding this viewpoint (see “Adopting a Different Model of Sovereignty,” *Perspectives* 12, no. 3 (March 1997): 12–15).

⁸⁹ Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine for Senior Classes*, 46. Elsewhere, he accentuates the doctrine of providence which he defines as “that work of God in which He preserves all His creatures [which] is active in all that happens in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end. It includes three elements, of which the first pertains primarily to the *being*, the second to the *activity*, and the third to the *purpose* of all things” (ibid., 59).

He preserves all His creatures is active in all that happens in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.”⁹⁰

Finally, the comprehensive whole of systematic theology is another dominant aspect in his hermeneutics. The order in which Berkhof divides his theology is informative.⁹¹

1. The Existence, Knowability and Names of God
2. The Attributes of God
3. The Trinity
4. The Divine Decrees
5. Creation and Providence
6. Man in His Original State
7. Man in the State of Sin
8. Man in the Covenant of Grace
9. The Person of Christ
10. The States of Christ
11. The Offices of Christ
12. Common Grace
13. Calling and Regeneration
14. Conversion and Faith
15. Justification
16. Sanctification and Perseverance
17. The Nature of the Church
18. The Government and Power of the Church
19. The Means of Grace in General
20. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
21. Physical Death and the Intermediate State
22. The Second Coming of Christ
23. The Resurrection, Final Judgment, and Final State

Berkhof logically divides up his theologies into logical parts as is clearly seen in his theological works.⁹² This logical format comes out in Berkhof’s overall purpose and method for teaching his students. Zwaanstra writes:

⁹⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁹¹ Berkhof, *Textual Aid*, 62–122.

⁹² See Berkhof’s logical and similar layout for his *Systematic Theology*, 7–16.

Berkhof believed his primary task was to present scriptural truth comprehensively and in logical order and to do so in a manner compatible with historical Reformed theology. He further sought to illuminate Reformed thought by contrasting it with what he considered aberrant doctrinal positions. In treating a doctrine, Berkhof ordinarily defined and presented the Reformed view, commented briefly on the history of the doctrine, then indicated the scriptural basis for the Reformed position, and finally discussed and critiqued alternative views.⁹³

In conclusion, that Berkhof was a scrupulous scholar is not in question; that Berkhof was an ardent apologist is confirmed; that Berkhof's heart was fundamentally driven toward the glory of God and for the glory of Christ as revealed in His Church. If I may show, yet again, how this is evidenced in one of his lectures he gave in Flagstaff at a conference centered around the theme "Paul, the Missionary Man:"

There is to-day a wide-spread conviction in evangelical circles that the pulpit is deteriorating, and is no more the living force that it was, when the mighty voices of Luther and Zwingli, of Calvin and Knox, of Wesley and Whitefield, of Jonathan Edwards and Thomas Chalmers were heard. Many a preacher of the present time forgets to deliver the message that was entrusted to him by his King. Instead of the heavenly manna, in place of the water of life, the God-given nourishment for hungry and thirsty souls, he offers a substitute wick [*sic*] he considers just as good, a substitute of human invention. Instead of bread he offers stones that terribly derange the digestive organs of the spiritual man.⁹⁴

I think this is no better realized than in his lectures when he was known for often quoting well-known hymns to drive home his point. One of his favorites is apropos to conclude this paper on Berkhof as it reveals the driving stake of Berkhof's theology:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

⁹³ Zwaanstra, "Louis Berkhof," 164.

⁹⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Paul the Missionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1937), 41.

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

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