

Edited Half Away.

Some further considerations
over
The Banner of Truth Edition of:
Pink's "Sovereignty of God"
by

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In the January-March 1997 issue of the *British Reformed Journal* there appeared an article critical of the Banner of Truth and their edition of Arthur Pink's book, *The Sovereignty of God*. That article was titled, "The Forgotten Pink."¹ In the August-September 1997 issue of *The Banner of Truth* magazine the Banner published a response in defence of itself. Their response is by Iain Murray and carries the title "A.W. Pink's *Sovereignty of God* - Revised or Unrevised?"

That it was a response to the BRJ article was clear from several things: (1) the date of Mr. Murray's article; (2) the fact that eight copies of the issue of the *British Reformed Journal* in which our article appeared were sent to the Banner office at their request; and (3) mention of "one critic" in connection with a quotation from our article (footnote 4, page 15).

Nevertheless, it would not have been evident to most "Banner" readers that Mr. Murray was responding to our article. In the quotation Mr. Murray does not even give a reference to the *British Reformed Journal*, though every other citation in the article is carefully referenced.

One of the British Reformed Fellowship committee members (the organization that publishes the *British Reformed Journal*) wrote to the Banner about this matter. He said:

"It seems clear that the Revd. Iain Murray's article: A.W. PINK'S SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD - REVISED OR UNREVISED? in Issue 407-8 of *The Banner of Truth* August-September 1997 is directed in the main to the Revd. Ronald Hanko's article "The Forgotten Pink" in Issue No. 17 of the

¹ Available in photocopy from the author at:

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British Reformed Journal - March 1997.

There need be no quarrel about such a response. The issues of the Offer of the Gospel and the Love of God are amongst the most complex with which we who are Reformed have to deal. Having written a "Life" of Pink Mr. Murray is probably as well placed as any both to debate the issues and to discuss the changes in Pink's views. Historically theological knowledge has often been advanced by just such discussion and if the *Odium theologicum* which has often characterized theological dissensions in the past can be avoided that is all to the good.

But it is no help to your readers if they are left without any reference to Mr Hanko's article. It might reasonably have been expected at the outset; but not only is it omitted there, but of Mr Murray's 32 footnotes - 31 being carefully referenced - the only omission occurs on p. 15 footnote 4, where Mr. Hanko is being directly quoted.

It would be invidious to speculate on the reason. May I perhaps hope that the publication of this letter will provide the lacuna?"

Murray's only response to this was in an angry letter of reply dated 19th August 1997. In it he explained that his reason for not giving an explicit reference by name to the BRJ article of January-March 1997 was because he wished to avoid the very "*Odium theologicum*" mentioned by the BRJ correspondent in the querying letter printed above. Murray also indicated that he "did not care at all for the manner in which Mr. Henko (sic) conducts controversy..." and expressed surprise that his correspondent "should be supporting the British Reformed Fellowship," and that he had no wish to engage in controversy with the Protestant Reformed Churches because they thrive "on controversy".² It is not our purpose, however, to make an issue of this. We leave further judgment of that to those who have followed the controversy. Our purpose is to examine briefly Mr. Murray's continued attempts to justify what the Banner has done to Pink's book.

In Mr. Murray's article he acknowledges publicly, for the first time in the 36 years that have followed the publication of the Banner edition of Pink's book, that their edition involved more than "minor revisions and abridgements."³

² Mr. Murray appears to have forgotten that he himself engaged in controversy in similar style to that of the BRJ article when, at approx. the same time the BOT so severely edited "Pink", in the Banner of Truth magazine in 1962 he exposed and criticised the Marshall, Morgan & Scott edition of Spurgeon's sermons for having done similarly to Spurgeon as the BOT had done the year previously to Pink. (Ed.)

³ "minor revisions and abridgements" are the very words used by the Banner of Truth in the "Publishers Preface" (pp.2-3) to indicate how they had revised Pink's "*Sovereignty of God*" which they first produced in 1961. No further details were given therein as to the degree of revision. BRJ readers can judge for themselves whether such a phrase can in any remote sense accurately describe a process in which almost half of Pink's original text was hacked out and the tone of the book radically altered. (Ed.)

Nevertheless he still continues to try to justify what appears to us to be the dishonesty and deception that were involved in the Banner's editing and publishing of it.

For the most part Mr. Murray attempts to justify himself and the Banner by insisting again that Pink's views on many matters changed over the years and that, therefore, Pink himself would have made the same changes as the Banner or approved them if he had republished the book later in life:

"There is the strongest possible presumption that Pink would not have allowed *The Sovereignty of God* to stand unaltered had he been re-issuing the book thirty years later"⁴

Whether even this justifies the omission of *half* the book with only a reference to "minor revisions and abridgements" we also leave the reader to judge.

There are, however, several very telling admissions in Mr. Murray's article. For one thing, he as much as admits that the omission of the chapter on reprobation was simply due to the fact that the Banner does not like the Reformed doctrine of reprobation, a doctrine which Pink firmly held and never repudiated.

He describes Pink's view of reprobation thus (p. 7), quoting from Pink himself: "'if there were some of Adam's descendants to whom He purposed not to give faith, it must be because He ordained that *they* should be damned,'" and thus: "the non-elect are 'fitted to destruction' by God - 'objectively *by his eternal decree.*'" He is correct. That is Pink's view of reprobation. It is also Scripture's (I Pet. 2:8, Jude, 4, Rom. 9:22; cf. also Acts 13:48, Jn. 10:26, II Pet. 2:12) and the Reformed creeds.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says that God as well as passing by "*ordained* them (the rest of mankind) to dishonour and wrath for their sin" (III, 7) and quotes Romans 9:22 as proof. The Canons of Dort say: "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not *proceeds from God's eternal decree*" (I, 6).

The Banner does not want the Reformed doctrine of reprobation because of their devotion to the well-meant offer of the gospel and the notion that God loves all men and expresses that love in the gospel as a desire for the salvation of all without exception. As we have pointed out elsewhere:

The teaching that God in the gospel intends and desires the salvation of all who hear is, on the face of it, not compatible with the teaching that God has eternally intended and willed the damnation of some. Now, we believe that the theology of the well-meant offer is also in conflict with such doctrines as the simplicity and immutability of God, total depravity, particular redemp-

⁴ Cf. Iain Murray in Aug.-Sept. 1997 issue of *The Banner of Truth* magazine under the title "A.W. Pink's *Sovereignty of God* - Revised or Unrevised?" and page 16. Hereinafter all references to this article will be via simple page numbers in brackets within the text.

tion, and unconditional election. But it contradicts none of these other doctrines so plainly as it does the doctrine of reprobation. Reprobation means exactly and explicitly the opposite of the well-meant offer.

If you ask: "What should the preacher say concerning God's intention with respect to those who go lost?" the answer of those who teach the well-meant offer is: "God sincerely seeks their salvation through the preaching of the Gospel." The doctrine of reprobation says: "God has eternally and unconditionally determined them to damnation." It ought to be evident that the two cannot possibly be reconciled ("The Well-meant Offer and Reprobation," *British Reformed Journal*, October - November 1997, p. 7).

Mr. Murray suggests that Pink's view does not do justice to the fact that "the condemnation of those finally lost will not be without regard to their guilt" (p. 6). Yet he admits on the other hand that Pink does include the qualification "God has not created sinful creatures in order to destroy them . . . the responsibility and criminality are man's." In fact, Pink spends several pages in the chapter on reprobation insisting on man's responsibility and guilt, and two sections of a further chapter dealing with the same issue,⁵ but that chapter also has been omitted by the Banner.

Thus Mr. Murray is reduced to pleading that Pink's "exposition lacks the clarity which is essential precisely at this point," and *that* becomes the justification for removing the entire chapter. By the same token that gives us right to republish Mr. Murray's essay with all its lack of clarity edited out or changed (as we judge it), though in that case there would probably be little left beside the title and the name of the author.

Further Mr. Murray charges Pink with "leaving out of view" "God's holy justice in all his dealings with men." He says, "this consideration Pink ignores" (p. 7). If it is left out of view that is the case only because the Banner has omitted the chapters on reprobation and responsibility. Several times in the chapter on reprobation Pink makes a point of establishing God's justice in connection with reprobation. He says, for example, in his fine exposition of Romans 9:

Finally, it is worthy of careful consideration to note how the *vindication* of God in His dealings with Pharaoh has been fully attested. Most remarkable it is to discover that we have Pharaoh's

⁵ The chapter referred to is Chapter 8, "God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility." The two sections are: "III. How is it possible for God to DECREE that men SHOULD commit certain sins, hold them RESPONSIBLE in the committal of them, and adjudge them GUILTY because they committed them?" and "IV. How can the sinner be held responsible to receive Christ, and be damned for rejecting Him, when God FOREORDAINED him TO condemnation?"

own testimony in favour of God and against himself! In Exodus 9:15 and 16 we learn how God had told Pharaoh for what purpose He had raised him up, and in verse 27 of the same chapter we are told that Pharaoh said, "I have sinned this time: *the Lord is righteous*, and I and my people are wicked." Mark that this was said by Pharaoh *after* he knew that God had raised him up in order to "cut him off", *after* his severe judgments had been sent upon him, *after* he had hardened his own heart. By this time Pharaoh was fairly ripened for judgment, and fully prepared to decide whether God had injured him, or whether he had sought to injure God; and he fully acknowledged that he had "sinned" and that God was "righteous" (p. 89).

The second damaging admission by Mr. Murray is made in the footnote on page 15 where he quotes from our original article. He says:

One critic of the Banner's revised edition of *Sovereignty* claims that the revisers disagreed with Pink's belief in the sovereignty of divine love and edited him accordingly. But there is no disagreement over whether the saving love of God is sovereign and effective. The question is whether there is any love for any apart from the elect. Pink's 1921 statements that asserted that there is no such love were omitted by the revisers and this was, in my belief, the only omission which occurred in editing which could not be justified from his later writings. But no view contrary to Pink's was introduced into the revision, and to allege, as the critic to which we have referred has alleged, "that it was not Pink's views that changed, but the Banner that has changed Pink", is absurd.

This is blatantly incorrect. First, we never claimed that the issue was simply "the sovereignty of divine love" and whether "the saving love of God is sovereign and effective." We insisted that the issue was that of *particular* love, i.e., whether there is love of God for all men, the kind of love the Banner insists is expressed in the preaching of the gospel. This should be abundantly clear from our article.

Second, Mr. Murray's statement that nothing contrary to Pink's views was introduced is nothing more than a smokescreen. Does the fact that an editor introduces nothing contrary to the author's views *really* justify the complete removal of his views on a certain subject and that without any notice given to the reader? Surely even Murray himself does not believe that!

Third, the charge that the Banner changed Pink is *not* absurd. If we remove from Mr. Murray's collected writings every reference to a universal

(though non-saving) love of God, he will be the first to charge me with changing his teaching and that with perfect justice.

Indeed, we find on examination that Mr. Murray's whole article contains a hodge-podge of insinuations, half-truths, and evasions. Let us note a few more.

First, he suggests that the last Pink had to do with *Sovereignty* was in 1921 when the second edition was published. This is not true. In 1929, *eight years later*, Pink wrote a "Foreword" to the third edition (really only a reprint, as Mr. Murray correctly points out). Pink himself says there:

It is with unfeigned thanksgiving that we find it unnecessary to either change or modify any doctrine contained in the former editions. Yea, as time goes by, we realise (by Divine grace) with ever-increasing force, the truth, the importance, and the value of the Sovereignty of God as it pertains to every branch of our lives (p. 9).

This is significant in that the lengthy quotation that Mr. Murray uses to prove a supposed change in Pink's views on human responsibility, a change that to his mind justifies the omission of so much material from *Sovereignty*, is a quote that *predates* what Pink says in the 1929 "Foreword to the Third Edition." Mr. Murray's quote is from Pink's *Studies in the Scriptures*, 1927, pp. 260-261.

Second, Mr. Murray implies in the article that it was only later that Pink came into contact with hyper-Calvinism and that this was a major factor in his supposed change of views. This, too, is false. There are a number of references in *Sovereignty* to hyper-Calvinism that make it clear that Pink not only knew of it, but rejected it. Already in *Sovereignty* he asserts plainly over against the error of hyper-Calvinism that it is the duty of every sinner to repent and believe and search the Scriptures (pp. 158, 159 - again part of the chapter on human responsibility omitted by the Banner). He asserts this already in the 1921 edition of *Sovereignty* in spite of Mr. Murray's misleading statements that "by 1936 he speaks very fully and pointedly of the error of hyper-Calvinism and especially its denial of the truth that 'it is the bounden duty of all who hear the Gospel to savingly trust in Christ'" (p. 12); and that "an unrevised edition was calculated in places to enforce the very hyper-Calvinism which he came to regard as a serious danger" (p. 18).

Third, both in his biography of Pink and in his article, Mr. Murray makes much of Pink's distinction between natural and moral inability and suggests that this is a major theme in *Sovereignty* and therefore a justification for leaving out half of the book. The fact is that Pink mentions the matter only a few times (we counted six). Now it so happens that we agree with Mr. Murray on this point and think Pink wrong, but we cannot see that a few references warrant what the Banner has done.

Mr. Murray also suggests that Pink's views on the "offer" of the gospel changed (we have already discussed whether or not they did). The fact is that there

is *one* reference from *Sovereignty* in which Pink explicitly rejects the “offer” of the gospel. He only says there that it is “not an offer to be bandied about by evangelistic peddlers.” (in Chapt. 11, wholly left out in the BOT edition). For the rest he is only rejecting the *theology* of the well-meant offer - a love of God for all and a desire on God’s part to save all.

Remember now that, according to Mr. Murray, the supposed changes in Pink’s thinking on these two matters is justification for the kind of “editing” that the Banner has done to Pink’s book. Mr. Murray will recognize, we think, that we would not be writing if the Banner had omitted *a few paragraphs or references* from *Sovereignty*. But they have in fact omitted **almost half the book**.

It is, therefore, pure supposition on the part of Mr. Murray to say that Pink would himself have made a number of changes in *Sovereignty* if he were to re-write it today. The evidence really points in the other direction. In a 1943 letter to Robert C. Harbach (later a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches) Pink speaks of his earlier works. The only book he does not recommend is “*The Antichrist*.” He says:

Most of my earlier works are out of print, but a few may still be had from the B.T.D. Swengel (Union Co.), Pa. I would not recommend my book on “The Antichrist” which was written twenty years ago (about the same time as *Sovereignty*) (*Letters to a Young Pastor*, Grandville, MI, 1993, p. 6).

No suggestion that he was so unhappy with *Sovereignty* as Mr. Murray seems to think.

We are not saying that Mr. Murray and the Banner do not have a perfect right to their views on the love and will of God and the gospel. They are free to disagree with us on these matters as they surely will do. Nor are we denying them the right to promote their views. We are only protesting what we see as the dishonesty that is involved in editing a book that does not agree with their views on these issues in order to bring it in line with their teaching.

If Pink’s views as expressed in *Sovereignty* are so out of line with Reformed theology and with his own later views, as understood by Mr. Murray and the Banner, that *half of the book* had to be removed, then the book would better have been left unpublished. We believe, in fact, that the Banner ought to cease publishing it and selling it in its present form.

“A perusal of it should show that what the present writer has advanced in this chapter is *not* ‘Hyper-Calvinism’ but *real* Calvinism, pure and simple”.

A.W. Pink in “*The Sovereignty of God*” Chapter 5 on “Reprobation” which was left out of the “Banner” edition.