



# *The Standard Bearer*

***A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine***

There are Bible studies which examine the history, so true; which commend the doctrine, so fair; which are concerned to discern the will of God for godly living, so important. But these same Bible studies may well miss Jesus by their lack of spiritual focus on and devotion to *Him*.

See "Good Bible Study ... and Jesus"—p. 470

**Vol. 73, No. 20  
September 1, 1997**

## CONTENTS:

September 1, 1997

|                                                                      |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Meditation — <i>Rev. Cornelius Hanko</i>                             |     |
| <b>A Hope That Maketh Not Ashamed</b> .....                          | 459 |
| Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i>                           |     |
| <b>"That They All may be One," or</b>                                |     |
| <b>"The Mystery of the Great Whore"?</b> .....                       | 461 |
| A Word Fitly Spoken — <i>Rev. Dale H. Kuiper</i>                     |     |
| <b>Imagination</b> .....                                             | 466 |
| All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise VanBaren</i> .....                      | 467 |
| Special Article — <i>Rev. Douglas J. Kuiper</i>                      |     |
| <b>Many Languages</b> .....                                          | 468 |
| Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i>                 |     |
| <b>Good Bible Study ... and Jesus</b> .....                          | 470 |
| Ministering to the Saints — <i>Prof. Robert D. Decker</i>            |     |
| <b>The Elders and Discipline</b> .....                               | 472 |
| When Thou Sittest in Thine House — <i>Rev. Ronald J. VanOverloop</i> |     |
| <b>Paedobaptism Demands Parental Instruction</b>                     |     |
| <b>and Ecclesiastical Keys</b> .....                                 | 474 |
| Contending for the Faith — <i>Rev. Bernard Woudenberg</i>            |     |
| <b>Bavinck, Hoeksema, and Schilder</b> .....                         | 476 |
| News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i> .....            | 479 |

## In This Issue ...

On the cover we call attention to the provocative article by Rev. Mitchell Dick on the right way of studying the Bible. This article serves as an introduction to the resumption of Rev. Dick's series of articles on the gospel of John. These articles are intended to help our readers with the study of the gospel, especially in the societies and Bible-study classes in the churches. We encourage the societies to study the gospel of John, using Rev. Dick's helpful guides.

In connection with the editorial on the contemporary union of Protestants and Roman Catholics, we publish an excerpt from the introduction to J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston's fine translation of Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (London: James Clarke, 1957). The excerpt shows that the fundamental issue of the Reformation, more central still than justification by faith alone, was "sovereign grace." There is nothing that modern "evangelicals" need to hear more. There is nothing that modern "evangelicals" uniting and cooperating with Rome need to hear more.

The edition of *The Bondage of the Will* containing the introduction from which we quote has been reprinted by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. We hope that some of our readers will want to read the entire introduction and then will be led straight into Luther's great work itself.

With what right may we call ourselves children of the Reformation? Much modern Protestantism would be neither owned nor even recognised by the pioneer Reformers.... We are forced to ask whether Protestant Christendom has not tragically sold its birthright between Luther's day and our own.

Read the "Conclusion" of the "Historical and Theological Introduction" to J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston's translation of Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (p. 464).

—DJE



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# A Hope That Maketh Not Ashamed

*And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

Romans 5:5.

**W**e rejoice in the hope of the glory of God!

In joyful and eager anticipation we look forward to the eternal day when the glory of our God will be fully revealed to us in Christ Jesus, and we with all the saints will reflect that glory and will show forth the praises of Him who is all in all.

Now we still suffer tribulation brought upon us by the surrounding evil world and the wrestling with sin that still wars in our members. Yet we rejoice in the midst of this tribulation, not as if we enjoy suffering, but because we know that tribulation works patience, and patience works experience. Like a well-trained, seasoned soldier we are fitted by our God to oppose all the onslaughts of the powers of darkness. We may waver, may even fall into sin because of the weakness of our sinful flesh, but we can never perish, for we are kept by the power of God through faith unto the very day of our final salvation.

We rejoice in the hope of the saints. This is not a mere "I hope so," such as the world cherishes. The unbeliever can never be sure of the future. His hopes are often shattered. But the hope of the be-

liever is an assured hope rooted in faith which is based on the promises of God's Word that can never fail.

Hope is certainty, but hope is also expectation. We sometimes speak of the departed saints as being dead. There is nothing further from the truth. They are very much alive, even more alive than they ever were while here on earth. We look forward with eager anticipation to a sinless, perfect life in glory that abides forever. The glory of our God will fill us so that we can devote ourselves completely to the praise of His name.

Hope arises from our new life in Christ. That life finds no abiding place here on earth. In faith it reaches out with eager longing for the new Jerusalem, the city of the eternal King. This is the yearning of sons and daughters who love our heavenly Father and desire to dwell in His presence, to see His face in Christ Jesus, to behold His glory, and to tell His praises eternally. It includes a joy unspeakable that is a foretaste of the eternal joy.

As the Dutch poet expressed it:

O, to be there  
Where tears never flow,  
Where the heart knows no  
sorrow, pain nor woe,  
Where neither thorns nor  
thistles grow.  
O, to be there!

But more. Oh, to live fully and eternally in the intimate presence of Father, in the light of His countenance to the praise of His matchless name!

Blessed hope of the saints!

♦♦♦ ♦♦♦ ♦♦♦

What if....

What if our hope proves to be a mere fantasy? What if there is no life hereafter? What if death is final or we end in hell?

There are many who profess to cherish a hope of a great happiness to come, yet for them heaven is nothing more than the Indian's "happy hunting grounds."

What if I have deceived myself into imagining an eternal security that does not even exist? My hope would be put to shame.

Again, what if heaven is indeed a reality, but it does not measure up to my expectation? What if I should discover that all the sacrifices that I have made, all the sufferings I have endured, the battle I have fought, and the reproach I have borne far outweigh my future happiness?

Consider a man who strives for a heaven as the place of perfect retirement, where every duty and responsibility is cast off, where he can spend his leisure hours sitting at the stream of life and eating the fruit of the trees of life.

Or think of the mother who yearns for her beautiful departed daughter with such longing that she has but one desire, that she may die and be with her daughter again in heaven. Imagine her disappointment when she discovers that her mother-daughter relationship is gone forever.

Or imagine the musician who is thrilled with the prospect of developing his voice or musical talent to perfection, so that he can entertain and receive the adulation

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from the multitudes that no man can number.

What if my desire for heaven is all wrong? It is not what I expected and I end up in hell? How ashamed I would be.

Or, once more, suppose that heaven is real and all that we anticipate is true, but that at the last moment it should slip from our grasp.

Jesus warns us in Matthew 7:22, 23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Suppose that at the end of the way we should discover that heaven is not for us! "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:19).

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But *No!* A thousand times *No!* Perish the thought!

Our God assures us: Hope maketh not ashamed! The sincere hope of the believer can never fail him. We have the testimony of the holy Scriptures and of the indwelling Spirit to assure us of that!

Why? Because the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts!

God is love! The love of God is that divine attribute whereby God loves Himself as the ultimate of all perfection. The triune covenant God lives in intimate communion of life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are intimately united with one another by love, the bond of perfection. Together they experience blessed harmony and unity in their thinking and willing and in all their works.

Wonder of wonders—that love includes you and me as "elect in Christ Jesus," beloved of God, chosen from before the foundations of the earth according to His eternal foreknowledge! God has willed to

make His glory known by saving us through the dark way of sin and death, and through the marvelous redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord. God loves us with a love which is higher than the heavens, deeper than the sea, and broader than the universe.

This love of God is as unchangeable as God Himself. We are engraven in the palms of God's hands as His cherished possession. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's love abides forever.

Behold the extent of this love, which is so great that the Father surrendered His Son to the horrible punishment of the death of hell. The Son gave Himself to utter desolation in the torments of divine wrath. The Father gave His Son and the Son gave His life to save us from sin and death and to bring us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We are redeemed, purchased unto God as His peculiar possession, saved from death unto everlasting life by the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

Besides all that, behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us who are justified, declared free from sin and guilt, and assured of our adoption to sons. Even more than that, we are transformed into the likeness of Christ, restored in His image in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, to know God as our God, to love and to serve Him with our whole being. We are *saints* in Christ Jesus, members of the eternal family of God.

All of which means that we are devoted servants in God's house, prophets who proclaim His praises, priests who are devoted with our whole being to our God, and kings to conquer over sin in our own members and to fight the battle of faith in an evil world.

We are servants—yes, even bond-servants, slaves of Jesus Christ, yet more than willing, even happy in and thankful for our lowly position. One can better de-

scribe us as obedient sons and daughters in God's house, who are eager to serve, for it is our joy to do our Father's will.

We love the brethren. Even as we are enemies of all those who hate God, so we also count as father, mother, sister, and brother all those who love the Lord.

Not as if we have attained to perfection. Far from it, for we humbly confess that we are still very sinful with many imperfections. We must still complain that when we will the good, evil is present with us, so that we cry out, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? If our salvation in any way depended upon us, we not only *might* perish, but we certainly would. Yet we rest assured that God who has begun a good work in us will surely finish it.

In one word, we have become pilgrims and strangers on the earth, with our eternal home in the heavens. Here below we have no abiding city, we are only passing through, for we look for the city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. Although our flesh clings to all that is earthy, our eye of faith is fixed upon the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For us to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

More than conquerors are we in Christ Jesus! Nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Added to all that, we have God's sure promises. None has ever failed. None will fail. These we embrace by faith. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

We have the beginning of the eternal joy in our hearts, a joy unspeakable and full of glory!

How can that hope ever put anyone to shame!

To God be the glory! □

# **“That They All may be One,” or “The Mystery of the Great Whore”?**

One of the great signs of the coming of Christ is the uniting of the apostate churches as the false church. This is the beast from the earth of Revelation 13 and the great whore of Revelation 17.

One of the great works of Christ in history is the uniting of His people in manifestation of the oneness of His church. This carries out His purpose, “that they all may be one” (John 17:21).

The Reformed Christian and the Reformed church must be aware of these two great events in history. They must be able to distinguish them. They have a calling to be active with regard to them both. The one they must condemn and stand aloof from. The other they must honor and promote.

“That they all may be one” calls the churches to genuine ecumenicity. “The mystery of the great whore” is Satan’s counterfeit.

## **Recent Ecumenical Events**

Two ecumenical happenings in recent times demand Reformed attention. One is the decision this summer by four large denominations, including the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), to enter into full communion. I intend to examine

this significant ecumenical achievement later. The other is an ecumenical conference that was held in Aiken, South Carolina in May, 1995. The participants in this conference were prominent representatives of two large churches and one large theological group: the Roman Catholic church; the Eastern Orthodox Church; and evangelicalism, especially evangelicalism in North America.

This conference is reported, and its ecumenicity is promoted, in the book, *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics & Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

The question concerning this ecumenical event is, “‘That They All may be One’, or ‘the Mystery of the Great Whore’?”

Let us test this church-uniting activity.

The assumption underlying the conference is that, despite their differences, evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and the Orthodox share a “great tradition.” This “great tradition” is thought to be the essence of the Christian faith. Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and the Orthodox share a common faith. The purpose of the 1995 meeting was

to test whether an ecumenical orthodoxy, solidly based on the classic Christian faith as expressed in

the Scriptures and ecumenical councils, could become the foundation for a unified and transformative witness to the present age. Is it possible, we asked ourselves, for those who are deeply committed to differing theological perspectives to help each other in defending and communicating their common faith? And if so, how? How can Protestants, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians talk to each other so as together to speak with Christ’s mind to the modern world? (*Reclaiming*, p. 8).

The theme of the conference was “An Ecumenical Conference of Traditional Christians.”

The book that reports and promotes the ecumenicity of the conference consists of the six main conference addresses. Peter Kreeft and Richard John Neuhaus (both, it will be noted, defectors to Rome from Protestantism, the former from the Reformed communion, the latter from Lutheranism) speak for Rome. Harold O. J. Brown and J. I. Packer represent evangelicalism. Patrick Henry Reardon and Kallistos Ware are the spokesmen for Eastern Orthodoxy. Each essay is followed by a response from a theologian of one of the other churches or group.

## **A Common Faith?**

All agree that the three bodies represented at the conference do,

in fact, have "the great tradition" in common, much as they may differ on non-essentials. This is the error of the book, as it was the error of the conference. The official, creedal Protestant position is that both Rome and Eastern orthodoxy have corrupted the gospel and, thus, abandoned the essence of the Christian faith. They have done this by denying the truth of salvation by sovereign grace alone. Both Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy teach free will; justification by faith and works; universal, ineffectual atonement; general, resistible grace; and conditional predestination. Of course, most of modern evangelicalism is one with Rome and Orthodoxy in this denial of the gospel, but this only means that most of modern evangelicalism has forfeited all right to the name "evangelical." "Evangelical" means "faithful to the gospel," and the gospel is the message—the truth—of salvation by (sovereign) grace alone.

Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

They do not; for though they boast of him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, that either Jesus is not a complete Savior; or that they, who by a true faith receive this Savior, must find all things in him necessary to their salvation.

Heid. Cat., Q. 30

This issue receives little attention in the book, as, evidently, it received little attention at the conference. The prominent issue in this quest for church union, and the issue that vexes the seekers most sorely, is the relationship between Scripture and extra-biblical tradition. The question for the evangelicals, as for the Roman Catholics and Orthodox who desire evangelical participation in the ecumenical venture, is, "What can we

do with the Reformation's insistence on 'Scripture alone'?" The answer, all across the board, is, "Mute this insistence, and by ambiguous formulas subject Holy Scripture to the authority of Roman and Orthodox church-tradition." The book is worth reading simply for the purpose of discovering what high-powered ecumenicity is doing with the Protestant Reformation's confession of the sole authority of the written Word of God. The title of the book gives the game away. Why is the title not, *Reaffirming and Returning to Sola Scriptura*?

### Distinguished Orthodox

Far and away the most impressive contributors are the Eastern Orthodox. They pull no punches. Bradley Nassif responds to J. I. Packer's cautious, compromising piece by bluntly asserting that the Orthodox Church is the one, true church, so that "authentic Christian unity" requires ecclesiastical and sacramental oneness with her. He states that the united witness to the gospel that Packer thinks is possible will employ icons, that is, material images of God, Christ, Mary, and the other saints. Unabashedly, the Orthodox zealot urges upon evangelical Packer Orthodoxy's mysticism; monasticism; asceticism; and doctrine of deification (salvation's consisting of man's becoming divine).

Patrick Henry Reardon, another Orthodox theologian, annihilates evangelical Donald Bloesch's astonishing concession to feminism, that "in teaching us to call him Father 'God adopted patriarchal concepts in order to reveal his will and purpose to the human race.'" Such teaching, says Reardon rightly, "is to make a claim about God for which there is no warrant in Holy Scripture.... This is purely private theology. It has nothing to do with either the Bible or the church. There is no

theological justification for thus attempting to get beyond the Father. Such an endeavor scarcely differs from Meister Eckhart's (great mystic—DJE) pursuit of a 'God beyond God'" (p. 108).

Orthodox Isaac Melton gets off one of the great lines in the book. Condemning the liberals' perverse explanation of the doctrine of the Incarnation as teaching that "by his incarnation Christ sets his divine seal of approval on the base, the tawdry, the mundane and even the corrupt," Melton tells us, as he told the conference, that

the most extreme but quite revealing example of this I have ever encountered was in a National Public Radio program I heard in 1985. A Roman Catholic priest (who most certainly lacked his bishop's *nihil obstat*) informed his interviewer and his audience that anonymous homosexual "acts of love" in a San Francisco gay bathhouse were for him the apex of incarnational spiritual experience.

Melton then observes, "The only 'incarnational experience' that took place in the baths was the repeated enfleshing of the AIDS virus in the immune cells of its victims" (p. 96).

Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware has a brilliant article on the doctrine of the Trinity. One who might buy the book for its ecumenical theme will find himself amply repaid in another coin by this treatment of the Trinity. Totally ignoring the matter of the coming together of the churches, Ware sets forth "the Trinity as shared love and interpersonal *koinonia* (fellowship)" (p. 134). The address is titled, "The Trinity: Heart of Our Life."

### Ignoble Roman Champion

Distressing to me is the presence in the Roman lists of Peter Kreeft. A classmate of mine at Calvin College in the late 1950s, Kreeft has since apostatized from

the Reformed faith to Roman Catholicism. He is now one of Rome's chief apologists to Protestants.

**"What Doest Thou Here,  
J. I. Packer?"**

More distressing still is the presence, posture, and performance at the conference of renowned evangelical theologian J. I. Packer. Packer tiptoes gingerly through the minefield of evangelical union with the false church of Rome. He affirms that conservative Protestants are able to join together with the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics "in bearing witness to" the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. With Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, evangelicals share an "understanding of ruin, redemption, regeneration and the reality of fellowship with our risen Savior."

Packer then lashes out, with uncharacteristic fury and scorn, against those evangelicals who refuse to join him in his unholy alliance:

To be sure, fundamentalists within our three traditions are unlikely to join us in this, for it is the way of fundamentalists to follow the path of contentious orthodoxy, as if the mercy of God in Christ automatically rests on persons who are notionally correct and is just as automatically withheld from those who fall short of notional correctness on any point of substance. But this concept of, in effect, justification, not by works but by words—words, that is, of notional soundness and precision—is near to being a cultic heresy in its own right and need not detain us further, however much we may regret the fact that some in all our traditions are bogged down in it (p. 174).

Ah, Dr. Packer, what has happened to you since you wrote the grand "Historical and Theological Introduction" to your and O. R. Johnston's translation of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (London:

James Clarke, 1957)? Remember? You said then that the doctrines of "the helplessness of man in sin and (of) the sovereignty of God in grace" are "the very life-blood of the Christian faith" (p. 58). In those days, you taught the children of the Reformation—Protestants, evangelicals—that Arminianism is "a renunciation of New Testament Christianity in favour of New Testament Judaism" and that Arminianism is "in principle a return to Rome," which meant, of course, that Rome is certainly nothing but "New Testament Judaism." No shared "great tradition" in 1957! And you warned Protestants—evangelicals—at that time, warned them sharply, warned them against the very spirit and conduct that you yourself now display in ecumenical conferences and books:

We are forced to ask whether Protestant Christendom has not tragically sold its birthright between Luther's day and our own. Has not Protestantism today become more Erasmian than Lutheran? Do we not too often try to minimise and gloss over doctrinal differences for the sake of inter-party peace? Are we innocent of the doctrinal indifferentism with which Luther charged Erasmus? Do we still believe that doctrine matters? Or do we now, with Erasmus, rate a deceptive appearance of unity as of more importance than truth? Have we not grown used to an Erasmian brand of teaching from our pulpits—a message that rests on the same shallow synergistic conceptions which Luther refuted, picturing God and man approaching each other almost on equal terms, each having his own contribution to make to man's salvation and each depending on the dutiful co-operation of the other for the attainment of that end?—as if God exists for man's convenience, rather than man for God's glory? (p. 60)

I will run the "Conclusion" of your passionate, powerful article of 1957 immediately following this

editorial. Consider that the content of this "Conclusion" is the reason why we Reformed Protestants—the real evangelicals in the world—will not, indeed cannot, join you in your oneness and co-operation with Rome.

To abuse us as "fundamentalists" is unworthy of you. Your fellow conferee chides you: "As the academic world grows ever more hostile to Christianity, anything resembling Christian orthodoxy is now called fundamentalism" (S. M. Hutchens, yet another of the Orthodox participants, "A [Somewhat] Protestant Response to Richard John Neuhaus," in *Reclaiming*, p. 64).

Packer's essay in *Reclaiming* indicates the avowed motivation for the effort to unite evangelicals, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics: only out of this "convergence" can there emerge a "contemporary witness to God that is sufficiently strong and significant" (p. 169). The world has become exceedingly worldly. An effective witness to God demands the size and strength of the union of evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox.

This motivation ignores the biblical injunction that those cooperating in witnessing to God in an idolatrous, immoral world themselves be one in the truth of God. It also ignores the lesson of history that God does not need, and usually does not choose, size and strength for the witness to Himself: Noah; Elijah; the remnant; the apostles; Athanasius; Luther.

**Evangelicalism and C. S. Lewis**

Many evangelicals who are dismayed by these ecumenical developments are going to have to re-evaluate the Anglican author, C. S. Lewis, with whom they are carrying on a torrid love affair. Lewis, though dead, spoke loudly at the conference. The introduction to *Reclaiming*, titled, "Finding the Center," tells us that the conference took its lead from Lewis' well-

known book, *Mere Christianity*. Explicitly in *Mere Christianity* and implicitly in his other writings, Lewis advocated what the editor of *Reclaiming* correctly calls "a most important ecumenical principle" (p. 9). The principle is, as Lewis himself described it, that

it is at her center, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine. And this suggests that at the center of each there is something, or a Someone, who against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks with the same voice (*Mere Christianity*, cited in *Reclaiming*, p. 9).

In other words, evangelicals, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics are, in reality, one in God Himself.

But the same C. S. Lewis, it should be noted, taught that all religions are essentially one. In *The Last Battle*, concluding volume in the Narnia series, Lewis has Aslan, symbol of Christ, inform Emeth (significantly, the Hebrew word for truth), a lifelong worshiper of the heathen god, Tash, and a lifelong hater of Aslan, that "all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me." By his noble seeking and honest service of the idol, Emeth is saved at death (*The Last Battle*, London: The Bodley Head, p. 166). Worshipers of the God of Jesus Christ and worshipers of the Allah of Mohammed alike inherit the new world. Taking Lewis as their ecumenical mentor, those who planned the conference in South Carolina might have invited the noble pagans to participate.

#### Ecumenicity of the Lie

"That They All may be One," or 'the Mystery of the Great Whore'?"

Working for church union while rejecting the truth of the sole authority of Scripture and ignor-

ing the Reformation gospel of salvation by (sovereign) grace alone, the "Ecumenical Conference of Traditional Christians" was further unfolding of the mystery of the great whore. ■

— DJE

#### "Conclusion" of the "Historical and Theological Introduction" to J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston's translation of Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*.

—J.I. Packer

The following is an excerpt from J.I. Packer's "Historical and Theological Introduction" to his and O.R. Johnston's translation of Martin Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* (London: James Clarke, 1957), pp. 57-61. The section published forms the conclusion of the "Introduction."

It sets forth the message of the Reformation: "sovereign grace."

It demands that this be our witness in the world.

It warns against compromise of this message in the interests of "in-ter-party peace."

By implication, it insists that this gospel be the basis of all ecumenical union and cooperation.

In all of this, the "Introduction" is right. This was the stand of the Reformers. This is the position of the Reformation creeds. This is the testimony of Scripture.

— Ed.

What is the modern reader to make of *The Bondage of the Will*? That it is a brilliant and exhilarating performance, a masterpiece of the controversialist's difficult art, he will no doubt readily admit; but now comes the question, is Luther's case any part of God's truth? and, if so, has it a message for Christians to-day? No doubt the reader will find the way by which Luther leads him to be a strange new road, an approach which in all probability he has never considered, a line of thought which he would nor-

mally label "Calvinistic" and hastily pass by. This is what Lutheran orthodoxy itself has done; and the present-day Evangelical Christian (who has semi-Pelagianism in his blood) will be inclined to do the same. But both history and Scripture, if allowed to speak, counsel otherwise.

Historically, it is a simple matter of fact that Martin Luther and John Calvin, and, for that matter, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and all the leading Protestant theologians of the first epoch of the Reformation, stood on precisely the same ground here. On other points, they had their differences; but in asserting the helplessness of man in sin, and the sovereignty of God in grace, they were entirely at one. To all of them, these doctrines were the very life-blood of the Christian faith. A modern editor of Luther's great work underscores this fact: "Whoever puts this book down without having realised that evangelical theology stands or falls with the doctrine of bondage of the will has read it in vain." The doctrine of free justification by faith only, which became the storm-centre of so much controversy during the Reformation period, is often regarded as the heart of the Reformers' theology, but this is hardly accurate. The truth is that their thinking was really centred upon the contention of Paul, echoed with varying degrees of adequacy by Augustine, and Gottschalk, and Bradwardine, and Wycliffe, that the sinner's entire salvation is by free and sovereign grace only. The doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace; but it actually expressed for them only one aspect of this principle, and that not its deepest aspect. The sovereignty of grace found expression in their thinking at a profounder level still, in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration — the doctrine, that is, that the faith which receives Christ for justification is itself the free gift

of a sovereign God, bestowed by spiritual regeneration in the act of effectual calling. To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith. Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort. "Justification by faith only" is a truth that needs interpretation. The principle of *sola fide* is not rightly understood till it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of *sola gratia*. What is the source and status of faith? Is it the God-given means whereby the God-given justification is received, or is it a condition of justification which it is left to man to fulfil? Is it a part of God's gift of salvation, or is it man's own contribution to salvation? Is our salvation wholly of God, or does it ultimately depend on something that we do for ourselves? Those who say the latter (as the Arminians later did) thereby deny man's utter helplessness in sin, and affirm that a form of semi-Pelagianism is true after all. It is no wonder, then, that later Reformed theology condemned Arminianism as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work) and a betrayal of the Reformation (because it denied the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, which was the deepest religious and theological principle of the Reformers' thought). Arminianism was, indeed, in Reformed eyes a renunciation of New Testament

Christianity in favour of New Testament Judaism; for to rely on oneself for faith is no different in principle from relying on oneself for works, and the one is as un-Christian and anti-Christian as the other. In the light of what Luther says to Erasmus, there is no doubt that he would have endorsed this judgment.

These things need to be pondered by Protestants to-day. With what right may we call ourselves children of the Reformation? Much modern Protestantism would be neither owned nor even recognised by the pioneer Reformers. *The Bondage of the Will* fairly sets before us what they believed about the salvation of lost mankind. In the light of it, we are forced to ask whether Protestant Christendom has not tragically sold its birthright between Luther's day and our own. Has not Protestantism to-day become more Erasmian than Lutheran? Do we not too often try to minimise and gloss over doctrinal differences for the sake of inter-party peace? Are we innocent of the doctrinal indifferentism with which Luther charged Erasmus? Do we still believe that doctrine matters? Or do we now, with Erasmus, rate a deceptive appearance of unity as of more importance than truth? Have we not grown used to an Erasmian brand of teaching from our pulpits—a message that rests on the same shallow synergistic conceptions which Luther refuted, picturing God and man approaching each other almost on equal terms, each having his own contribution to make to man's salvation and each depending on the dutiful co-operation of the other for the attainment of that end?—as if God exists for man's convenience, rather than man for God's glory? Is it not true, conversely, that it is rare to-day to hear proclaimed the diagnosis of our predicament which Luther—and Scripture—put forward: that man is hopeless and helpless in sin, fast bound in Satan's slavery, at en-

mity with God, blind and dead to the things of the Spirit? And hence, how rarely do we hear faith spoken of as Scripture depicts it—as it is expressed in the cry of self-committal with which the contrite heart, humbled to see its need and made conscious of its own utter helplessness even to trust, casts itself in the God-given confidence of self-despair upon the mercy of Christ Jesus—"Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief!" Can we deny the essential rightness of Luther's exegesis of the texts? And if not, dare we ignore the implications of his exposition?

To accept the principles which Martin Luther vindicates in *The Bondage of the Will* would certainly involve a mental and spiritual revolution for many Christians at the present time. It would involve a radically different approach to preaching and the practice of evangelism, and to most other departments of theology and pastoral work as well. God-centered thinking is out of fashion to-day, and its recovery will involve something of a Copernican revolution in our outlook on many matters. But ought we to shrink from this? Do we not stand in urgent need of such teaching as Luther here gives us—teaching which humbles man, strengthens faith, and glorifies God—and is not the contemporary Church weak for the lack of it? The issue is clear. We are compelled to ask ourselves: If the Almighty God of the Bible is to be our God, if the New Testament gospel is to be our message, if Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever—is any other position than Luther's possible? Are we not in all honesty bound to stand with him in ascribing all might, and majesty, and dominion, and power, and all the glory of our salvation to God alone? Surely no more important or far-reaching question confronts the Church today.

Sola fide

Sola gratia

SOLI DEO GLORIA. □

# Imagination

**T**he word *imagination* occurs thirty-six times in Holy Scripture. It is striking that every occurrence of this word, with one exception, is in the evil sense; and almost every use of the word is found in context with the words "evil heart." God makes plain in His Word that He does not think much of the imaginations of men!

Just before the flood, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). One of the things which the Lord hates is "an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations" (Prov. 6:18). When God called Judah to conversion of life, their response was, "There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imaginations of his evil heart" (Jer. 18:12). These imaginations are first and foremost against the Lord God Himself (Lam. 3:60, 61). After Peter and John had been released from prison, they prayed to God, quoting Psalm 2, "Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things?" (Acts 4:25), observing that Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and Israel were gathered against the child Jesus. Natural man is without excuse because, knowing God, they refuse to glorify and thank Him, being vain in their imaginations and having foolish, darkened hearts (Rom. 1:21). The only hope for this universal depravity of mankind is the holy gospel which is able "to cast down imaginations, and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (II Cor. 10:5).

What is the imagination? It is the ability and power to form a mental image of something not present to the senses. The imagination is the creation of the mind as that mind is given spiritual direction by the heart. An evil heart can only inspire the mind to imagine vain, corrupt things. In fact, without the imagination it is not even possible to sin. Sin is that a person imagines things better than the way that God has willed and or-

dained them for him. Thus the devil imagined it were better that he were God, rather than being one of God's holy servants. Thus the devil dangled before the imagination of Eve and Adam the attractiveness that they could be God themselves, determining what is good and what is evil. Thus, through the fall of our first parents, every man comes into the world imagining vain, evil, corrupt things.

The only cure for the wicked imagination is regeneration of the heart, so that the thoughts of the heart are in harmony with the revelation of God in His Word. In that Word the truth and reality of all things is to be found: the truth of God, creation, the fall, Jesus Christ, salvation by faith in Him. Our imaginations are not to be given free rein; our meditations and musings are always to be subject to, and in harmony with, the truth of the Word of God.

Little children have strong, vivid imaginations. They pretend to be driving the car like dad. Or they imagine that they are housewives and mothers. Nothing wrong there. Occasionally it happens that the imagination of children becomes too strong and controlling so that they are out of touch with reality. They imagine they have a playmate who makes them do evil things. They imagine that they never do anything wrong. They refuse to take responsibility for their own sins. This requires discipline. This requires careful instruction by the parents and teachers, who know both the power of the sinful imagination and the power of the Word and Spirit of God to set forth the truth of all things.

As our delight is in the law of the Lord, as we meditate in that law day and night, we are set free from vain imaginations and the curse that comes upon them. Jehovah is God alone. We are His people for Christ's sake. Let God be God! And let His Word be true! □

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## ■ "Prom birth... just plain wicked"

So wrote George Will of the *Washington Post* as printed in the *Loveland, CO Reporter-Herald*, June 12, 1997. We have all read of the horrific crimes of young girls who give birth to a child and promptly kill that child. George Will makes some very valid and moving points—based not on Scripture or a specific religion, but upon biological facts. Listen:

According to a friend, 18-year-old Melissa Drexler paused in front of the mirror in the bathroom to touch up her makeup before re-joining her date on the dance floor at the prom. She had just tossed her 6-pound, 6-ounce baby boy into a trash bin next to the blood-stained stall in the restroom where she had given birth. "She seemed to be enjoying herself," said a classmate about Drexler's postpartum dancing.

Medical examiners have determined that the baby was alive during the birthing process, which occurred early in the prom. He was soon discovered by a maintenance worker who thought the trash bag was unusually heavy. Unsuccessful attempts were made to resuscitate him.

Believe it or not, much may depend on whether it can be determined that the baby died before the umbilical cord was cut. Or whether the air sacs in his lungs inflated, indicating that he breathed, however briefly, independent of his mother. Ms. Drexler may be charged with something. Maybe murder. Maybe endangering a child. [Maybe conducting a partial-birth abortion at a prom without a license?]

Who taught Ms. Drexler to think, or not think, in a way that caused her to regard her newborn baby as disposable trash? Many people and things, no doubt.

...If she is like millions of other young adults, she has spent thousands of hours watching movies and television programs not designed to encourage delicacy of feelings or to suggest that sexuality has morally complex dimensions and serious consequences. If she is like millions of other young adults, she has pumped into her ears thousands of hours of the coarsening lyrics of popular music. And she certainly has grown up in a social atmosphere saturated with opinion leaders' approbation of, and collaboration with, the political program of reducing abortion—the killing of something—to a mere "choice," like choosing to smoke a cigarette, only not nearly that serious.

However, foremost among the moral tutors who prepared Ms. Drexler to act as she did is the Supreme Court. By pretending in *Roe v. Wade* not to know when life begins, the Court encouraged looking away from the stark fact that abortion kills something. Ignoring elementary science, the Court said, preposterously, that a fetus is "potential life."

...The barbarism at the prom is being termed a "tragedy" calling for "compassion" all around. No, an earthquake is a tragedy. This was an act of wickedness—a wicked choice—and a society incapable of anger about it is simply decadent....

George Will is correct: this is not a "tragedy," it is "just plain wicked."

Having said that, however, one cannot help but note the hypocrisy of our society. This young girl will likely, and justly, be charged with murder. But had she been a bit more clever, had she followed the instructions of the teachers of our day, she would have gone to an abortion clinic the day before the prom. She would have had a doc-

tor, one trained in the arts of healing, to carry out a "partial birth abortion." The doctor could have induced labor. He could have assisted in the partial birth of the babe—making sure, however, that the baby's head did not come out of the birth canal. He could have inserted a scissors into the baby's brain and then suctioned it out. The young girl, if she felt up to it, could have then gone to her prom. Few would criticize her. She then, with the doctor's assistance, would merely have been removing "unwanted tissue." A few might look askance at the doctor—but he would have been acting within the law. What a difference just one day would have made! Now the girl is likely to be charged with murder—a day earlier, a different procedure, and she would be home scot-free. How hypocritical! Surely all of this is also "just plain wicked." It all represents what one writer called a "moral meltdown," not just on the part of one young girl, but on the part of the nation as a whole.

## ■ "That They May Be One"

So Jesus prayed in John 17:11. His reference was His church. It is a prayer for unity on the basis of truth—for it was to be a oneness as Christ was one with His Father.

But there have been devilish imitations of that oneness throughout history. It was seen at the time before the flood. It was evident again at the Tower of Babel. But now, in these last days, it is being seen again. There is the sense that the world *must* unite. We have a global economy. The environment is affected by what all of the nations of the world do. Diseases can no longer be limited to some isolated area. So there is some urgency, it seems, for nations not only to cooperate, but to work under some supra-national authority.

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This fact was pointed out in a paper, *Pro-Farmer*, March 15, 1997, given to me by an Iowa farmer. In it there was a reminder of what is taking place today:

As you read this, 450 powerful delegates of governments, world environmental groups, universities and banks are meeting in Rio de Janeiro to map your future under a master environmental plan called "Agenda 21."

The conference, dubbed "Rio+5" is a follow-up to the 1992 U.N. Earth Summit. The 1992 Summit spawned several treaties aimed at transcending national sovereignty, including the "biodiversity Treaty." This treaty calls for global "eco regions" controlled by "Non-Governmental Organizations" (NGOs), a code word for environmental organizations working in concert with the United Nations.

The biodiversity Treaty's view of individual property rights, for example, is that your rights "are not unchanging, but rather a complex, dynamic and shifting relationship between two or more parties, over space and time."

U.S. government delegates signed the Summit treaty in 1992. But a wary Congress has so far refused to ratify it, which would place the Biodiversity Treaty above U.S. law.

It is a chilling reminder of what

is taking place in our day. The world, of course, has no alternative but to unite and try to solve its problems. With modern technology and current development, such union is inevitable. But it is not being carried out in obedience to God's Word and law. Rather, it has the clear marks of the developing anti-Christian world power. It surely is fulfillment of Revelation 13—the beast that arises out of the sea. It is but another reminder to watch and pray.

[A post-script: My thanks to those who send in materials they consider might be of interest in this rubric. Though I do not respond to those who send such materials, I do greatly appreciate this assistance. And if I cannot make use of all the materials sent in, I trust the senders will understand.]

### ■ "El Niño 'blockbuster' brewing, scientists warn"

"Unpredictable phenomenon could bring drought or deluge." This was the headline in the *Denver Post*, Saturday, July 26, 1997. The article went on to state:

It's too early to tell if the intensifying El Niño in the Pacific Ocean will mean snow dumps or droughts in Colorado this winter, an atmospheric scientist says of the weather phenomenon.

El Niño is blamed for Denver's infamous Christmas blizzard of 1982.

...El Niño is a periodic warming of water temperatures in the tropical areas of the Pacific along the equator near South America. It is named after baby Jesus, or "El Niño" in Spanish, since the warm pool of water usually reaches South America near Christmas....

...This year, early signals suggest a major event is brewing. In June, the last full month for which there are data, trade winds changed direction for several days, and the water temperatures in the eastern Pacific rose more than 3 degrees Celsius. Usually, the water temperature increases 1 or 2 degrees.

So, the scientists are already alerting us of disasters which may befall this coming season. These have already a natural explanation for whatever may come. But again, Scripture reminds us too of those things which shall fall upon the earth near the end of this age. We ought ever to remember that the explanation of the disasters that come, whatever the "scientific" explanation, is finally the fulfillment of Scripture. Indeed, it is "El Niño," or Baby Jesus, but now resurrected and ascended, who causes all these things to be. It is preparation for His glorious return! □

## Special Article

Rev. Doug Kuiper

# Many Languages!

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

In previous articles we saw that language is both God's creation and His gift to the human race. God created Adam able to speak and understand language—one language. For many years that language was the only language any

human knew. Today, however, there are *many* languages: English, Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Chinese, to name only a few. In this article we will examine how so many languages came into existence.

Those who deny that God cre-

ated language also deny, for the most part, that there was one original language. G. Revesz denies, for two reasons, that there was one original language. First, he argues that if all men spoke the same language, they would also have lived in the same geographic area; however, the fact that human remains from prehistoric times have been found in all parts of the earth indicates that men did not all live in the same geographic area. Second, we have no knowledge of one original language, or even of a few original languages, and "there is no hope that historical or comparative linguistic science will ever be in a position to throw light on them."<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that Mr. Revesz disregards Scripture and considers the physical and linguistic sciences to be his authority. We, however, turn to Scripture, which makes clear in Genesis 11:1, 6 that before the confusion of tongues there was but one language in existence.

What was this language? Many Jews and Christians have held to the idea that Adam and Eve spoke Hebrew. Paul Isaac Hershon, a rabbinical commentator, says:

The sacred tongue, Hebrew, was spoken by all till the generation of the Confusion of Tongues, for the world was created with the sacred tongue; but now each of the 70 angels took one nation and instructed it in a new language; but God instructed Israel in the Hebrew tongue.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Constance says that

rabbinical commentators, early Christian writers, and, until comparatively recently, modern Christian scholars generally accepted the view that this original language was Hebrew. It is true that a few of the early Church Fathers challenged this, but such great names as those of Augustine, Jerome, and Origin can be quoted in support of it; the few like Gregory of Nyssa who argued against it failed to influence the

general Christian public, so that it became the accepted opinion throughout the Middle Ages and to the recent past.<sup>3</sup>

Scripture does not tell us what language Adam and Eve spoke. We know only that after the confusion of tongues the church, especially the covenant seed of the line of Abraham, spoke Hebrew or Aramaic (the latter being closely related to the Hebrew language). We know this from the fact that the Old Testament was written primarily in the Hebrew language. Furthermore, Abraham is called "the Hebrew" in Genesis 14:13. The point of this text is certainly not that Abraham spoke Hebrew; but by saying that Abraham was a Hebrew, even "the" Hebrew in the midst of the native inhabitants of Canaan, the text does imply that Abraham spoke the Hebrew language.

That Adam and Eve spoke Hebrew is, therefore, a reasonable assumption, though it cannot be proven to be true beyond all doubt.

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God created one language. Today there are many languages. Scripture tells us these many languages came about in the way of the confusion of tongues at Babel, recorded in Genesis 11:1-9. The narrative teaches us that not simply language, but languages, are the creation of God.

In the years before the confusion of tongues, the world had banded itself together in opposition to God's command to replenish the earth (Gen. 9:1). In the land of Shinar the children of men (that is, the spiritual seed of the serpent, not of the woman) began to build a city and a tower whose top would reach unto heaven. Their motive for this undertaking was to make for themselves a name, and their purpose was that they might not be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:4). The Lord's stated reason why the men were succeeding in their en-

deavor is that "the people is one, and they have all one language" (Gen. 11:6).

This manifestation of rebellion against Jehovah's command was the historical occasion for God to scatter the people over the face of the whole earth by confounding their speech. That their speech was confounded means that at that moment in history new languages were created. Genesis 10:5, 20, 31, and 32 show that God confounded the languages in such a way that extended families spoke the same language.

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Remembering that language enables us to have fellowship with God and with other humans, we must examine the effect which this confusion of tongues had on the church's relationship with God, with fellow saints, and with the world.

With regard to the church's relationship with God, this confusion had no real effect. God's people could continue to have fellowship with God, because God does not understand only one language, or a few languages. He who created language can speak to His people and can be spoken to by His people, no matter what language they speak.

The effect of this confusion of tongues on the church itself was that the saints were drawn together in unity. This was true in a physical way; God scattered the enemies of the church, so that the church would be preserved. I will not go so far as to say that every individual person who left the area of Shinar was not a child of God; Scripture does not say that. How-

1 G. Revesz, *The Origins and Prehistory of Language*, translated by J. Butler, New York (Philosophical Library 1956), 89.

2 Quoted by Arthur C. Constance, "The Confusion of Languages," *Doorway Papers*, vol. VI: "Time and Eternity," Grand Rapids (Zondervan, 1997), page 194.

3 *Ibid.*, page 192.

ever, Scripture does make clear in Genesis 11:8 that it was the sons of men who were scattered, and in Genesis 11:10ff. that the church was found in the generations of Shem. The genealogy recorded in Genesis 11:10ff. ends in Abraham, who was only five generations down from Peleg, in whose days the earth was divided (Gen. 10:25, a reference to the confusion of tongues).

Two things become clear therefore. First, if any of those who left the area of Shinar at the time of the confusion of tongues were God's children, they were soon cut off from God's covenant in their generations. Second, those in the line of the covenant (Shem's line, through Peleg, to Abraham) spoke the *same* language! That they spoke the same language was also an outward form of unity, and it made possible the fellowship of the saints which the church has always enjoyed. Further, that they spoke the same language was a reflection of the true doctrinal and spiritual unity of the church. The saints could understand each other, and they could understand God, be-

cause they knew the truth.

This confusion of tongues also had an effect on the church's relationship with the world. We know that God has commanded His church to be separate from, and have no fellowship with, the world. By confusing the tongues, and calling the church out of Abraham's line which spoke one language, God made it impossible for the church and the world to have fellowship with each other. They could not understand each other's speech! The church was forced to live *antithetically* with respect to the wicked world, in accordance with her calling. In this sense, the confusion of tongues was the church's salvation.

This separation of the church and world did not last long. The language barrier was eventually broken. This opened the way for some in the line of the covenant to fellowship with the world, and fall away from the church. It also opened the way, particularly in the new dispensation, for the church to go into the world with the gos-

pel of Jesus Christ, so that the church might be gathered from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

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Knowing that the confusion of tongues effected a separation between the church and the world, in that the people of God could communicate only with fellow saints, we are led to face this question: how does our language today compare with the world's? Is it the same, or is it different? Of course, our physical language is not different. We can, and do, converse with other people we meet, whether they are members of the church or not. However, what of our *spiritual* language? The *world's* spiritual language is that of the *lie*. The *church's* spiritual language is that of the *truth*. The latter language is that which God speaks — indeed it is that which God *gave*. Which language do *you* speak?

We will return to this question in the next two articles, as we consider what effect the fall had on language, and what effect redemption in Christ has on the language of God's people. □

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# Good Bible Study ... and Jesus

**G**ood Bible study is the study of Jesus.

Jesus, He and no other, is the eternal, living Word of God. Jesus, He and no other, is the name, the revelation of God, whom to know is to know the Father, whom to call upon is to call upon the Father, whom to praise is to honor the Father.

Jesus, the Word, the communication of God given among men.

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Come, He is, *incarnate*. In flesh!

He is also *in ink*! Not that Jesus is John 1 verse 29. Or that Jesus is the Bible on your shelf. But Jesus is the *truth* of the Scriptures. He is all that it says. And all that it says is one Word: Jesus.

This is because the Spirit of Jesus authored the Scriptures (II Tim. 3:16,17; I Pet. 1:11; II Pet. 1:20,21). And the Spirit *always* testifies of Jesus (John 15:26; cf. John 5:39!).

Good Bible study will, therefore, be *focused* on Jesus. What do we look for in Bible reading? Jesus!

About whom do we talk in our Bible studies? Jesus!

What, therefore, does Genesis 1 mean to us, but Jesus? For by Him and for Him all things were created (Col. 1:16). Why the fall into sin? Jesus! For His coming to save us from it. To the praise of the glory of grace and gospel truth come by Him (John 1:16,17; Eph. 1:4-6). Who is the seed of the woman, and of Abraham, and of David? Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man (Gen. 3:15; 17:7; Ps. 89:3,4,29; Gal. 3:16)! What are the Old Testament sacrifices all about? Jesus,

the pure, atoning Lamb! Who spoke through the prophets, was prefigured by priests, and reigned through kings? Jesus, the officer in God's covenant! Of whom do the gospel accounts testify? The historical Jesus! Of whom and what does Paul write? Jesus and justification through His blood! Whose coming does the Revelation depict? Jesus'!

Good Bible study, focused on Jesus!

Good Bible study, focused on Jesus, will be done *in the Spirit of Jesus*.

Good Bible study will be in the Spirit who makes special students. He makes children-of-the-Father students. These cling to Scripture as the loving, Holy Word of the Father. These come to Scripture desirous of hearing Father speak in and through the Mediator. These are humble to submit to His will revealed to them, and even to His rebuke sounding forth to them from His Word. These believe the Bible. These have the mind of the Spirit to receive truth profitably. These are encouraged and comforted by the promises of the Word. These delight in the promises and blessings of the Word more than in all the riches of the world.

Good Bible study, focused on Jesus, in the Spirit of Jesus, *is rich and enriching!*

We study one subject, Jesus.

Just Jesus is our study, but *never dull*.

For Jesus is the Star out of Jacob! He is the only Mediator and name of God given among men whereby we must be saved! This Jesus! Sun of God! God's Man! He shines brighter, once in humiliation, and now forever in glory, than the most brilliant star in the heavens.

He goes out—in hell's black hole! But no! He shines brightest there! Bearing our sins on Calvary's tree, enduring God's wrath.... He is brilliant in love, in passion, in power!

He then rises! He ascends! To

the zenith of God's right hand! To the glory He had with the Father before the worlds were framed. In Him, from there, we see the light of God's own countenance shining upon us.

He is *our* Man! *Our* Sun! *Our* light forever!

Jesus! Our light and joy!

Study of Jesus: truly *enlightening and enriching!*

One subject, also *inexhaustible*—for Jesus is the eternal and infinite Son of God come in the flesh. Jesus, Man. And Jesus, God. Scripture study, the study of Jesus, is the study of God.

Christology ... is theology!

Scripture. Jesus there. God in Him revealed. There is eternity about Him. There is infinity about Him. There is pure goodness in Him. There is Godness, fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him. There is communication of essence, from eternal Father to eternal Son. There is communion of love in eternal divine Spirit. There is Trinity....

Oh, who can search the depths?!

Good Bible study is one study. One subject. One end: knowledge of Jesus. Knowledge of God in Jesus. Theology!

Never poor knowledge.

For *believing* knowledge is not cold. It is not abstract. It is not outside of our life. For to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent is *life eternal*. Such Scripture knowledge, therefore, is fellowship with God. It is the blessed life of holy intimacy with God and things of heaven. Forever.

Good Bible study...and Jesus!

Focused on Him.

In His Spirit.

Rich!

◆◆◆ ◆◆◆ ◆◆◆

Much Bible study today is not good.

There are other spirits. They are from the devil. All are anti-Jesus. They are, therefore, anti-Bible. They seek to hinder and stop altogether good Bible study. And

these spirits have a willing ally: weak flesh.

The spirits of Satan would divert our focus. They would have us focus, even in Bible study, on everything *but* Jesus, or at best on Jesus and other things. Indeed! There are Bible studies which examine the history, so true; which commend the doctrine, so fair; which are concerned to discern the will of God for godly living, so important. But these same Bible studies may well miss Jesus by their lack of spiritual focus on and devotion to *Him*.

These other spirits would ruin the way we study. They would turn our study from deep red to deep blue, from heartfelt to heartless, from contemplation to computation, from hot to lukewarm or cold. They would make us lazy, easygoing, and casual about our approach to Scripture. They would make us proud and critical of Scripture. They would make us worldly and indifferent to Scripture.

The result of the anti-Jesus spirits' work is seen today. There are still many Bible studies, and Bible students. There are some even learned in the truth and able to refute all comers with a single diatribe. But there are very few who, through their studies, and in their knowledge of sacred truth, grow closer to Jesus and to God.

Bible study: to make us poor!

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Who will have good Bible study? Who will search the Word written to investigate the truth as it is in Jesus? Who will scan the Book to survey the cross? Who will love the message loving the love of God? Who will seriously, intensely, and devoutly engage in believing, Berean Bible study, studying the Word written in order to commune with the Word who lives and abides for ever?

Pray for the Spirit of Jesus and the grace of Jesus.

Good Bible study ... and Jesus!

□

# The Elders and Discipline

In previous articles we have discussed the elders' calling to shepherd the flock of God. In this and succeeding articles we will consider the more specific calling of the elders to exercise church discipline with respect to those in the congregation who impenitently walk in sin.

The seriousness of this matter of Christian discipline is obvious from the emphasis placed upon it in Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and the Church Order. We have in previous articles repeatedly called attention to the various Scripture passages which speak of the elders' calling to exercise Christian discipline in the church. We will not repeat these.

We do wish to remind the reader, however, that this is a confessional matter. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the preaching of the Word and Christian discipline as the two keys of the kingdom of heaven by which the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut against unbelievers. The elders are called to exercise Christian discipline by brotherly admonishing those who maintain doctrines or practices inconsistent with the command of Christ. They must also forbid the impenitent the use of the sacraments, and by this the impenitent are excluded from the Christian church, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ (Q. 83, 85). The Belgic Con-

fession speaks of Christian discipline as the third mark, by which "the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has the right to separate himself" (Art. 29). The Confession also stipulates that the elders must punish transgressors, be called by Christ through the church, and exercise good order among themselves and in God's church (Articles 30 -32).

The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches likewise carefully presents the calling of the elders to exercise discipline in the church. The elders and ministers of the Word are "to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order" (Art. 16). The elders are called to apply the various steps of censure which culminate in the "last remedy," excommunication, and they are to supervise the reconciliation of repentant sinners (Arts. 71 - 78).

Articles 71-78 lay down the general and fundamental rules of discipline as these are rooted in the principles of discipline revealed in Holy Scripture. The Church Order does not give a detailed list of rules to be followed rigidly in every case of discipline. Such would be impossible, for each case is unique. This means, therefore, that consistories must determine how to apply the basic rules in each instance. While each case is unique, and while the rules may, for that reason, be applied differently in each case, the rules or principles remain the same. Those rules, furthermore, do apply in each case. The fundamental, basic rules set

forth in this section of the Church Order are: 1) Every attempt must be made to save the erring member; 2) The sin must be confessed and left by the erring member; 3) There must be, in the way of the confession of the sin, reconciliation with God and with his church; and 4) The church of Jesus Christ must be kept pure by way of the removal of the offense which sin causes.

Article 71 distinguishes Christian discipline from civil punishments. Christian discipline, the article maintains, is "of a spiritual nature." This means Christian discipline has to do with one's place in the church and kingdom of God. Civil punishment has to do with one's conduct as a citizen of the state and with maintaining good order in society. These two spheres must always be kept distinct. Even if the individual, guilty of but one sin, falls under the jurisdiction of both the civil magistrate and the elders of the church, the two spheres of authority must be kept separate. The sinner may be reconciled with God and his church in the way of repentance of his sin, but he is not by this exempt from the penalties the state is obligated to impose on him. A person may have committed the sin of stealing. He may have confessed that sin and been in this way restored to good standing in the church. But this does not mean that he is exempt from serving time in prison.

Article 71 also speaks of the twofold purpose of Christian discipline. One purpose of Christian discipline, and this purpose has been lost sight of in our day, is "to

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remove offense out of the church of Christ." The church of Christ is a manifestation of the body of Christ. Christ is her Head. Where sin is allowed to remain in the church there is offense. It becomes the occasion for the world to speak evil of Christ and His church. The offense must be removed. Not only so, but when sin appears in the body of Christ, reproach, confusion, separation, offense, evil speaking disrupt the communion and fellowship of the people of God. The offense must be removed both for the sake of the church as a whole and for the sake of the individual members of the church. The sin is removed and fellowship is restored when the sinner is brought to repentance and is reconciled with God and his church by means of Christian discipline. Sometimes it is necessary to remove the offense by excluding the impenitent sinner. By one's refusal to repent after being repeatedly admonished by the elders and the people of God, the sinner reveals that he is not a member of Christ's body. This sinner must be cut off lest the whole body become infected with his evil. The table of the Lord must not be profaned by an impenitent sinner. This, then, is the negative aspect of the purpose of Christian discipline. Offense must be removed from the church of Christ.

The other purpose of Christian discipline is the salvation of the sinner. This is the purpose of the preaching of the Word as the chief key of the kingdom. Preaching aims at preserving the purity of the church by removing offense and by saving the sinner in the way of repentance. This is the purpose of the individual application of Christian discipline by the elders of the church as well. This is true in the objective sense, but it must also be true subjectively. The elders must, in the exercise of censure, be motivated exclusively by the desire to save the sinner. Never must their motive be to "get rid of" an undesirable member of the church. The

salvation of the sinner must be their aim. Only when it becomes clear that the Word of God which the elders are bringing is hardening the sinner must they apply the "last remedy," excommunication itself. Even when that last step is taken, it is taken with the prayer that God will use excommunication to bring the sinner to repentance and reconciliation.

In this connection it is extremely important to be reminded that the power of the keys of the kingdom and the authority of the elders of the church lie in the Word of God. The elders have no authority of their own to exercise the keys of the kingdom. When God binds in heaven what is bound on earth, this is not because God is concurring in the decisions of men. It is because the Word of God has had its effect either in saving or in hardening the sinner. The elders must be men who are steeped in Scripture. They must be men who have the ability, the gift from God, which enables them to bring the appropriate Word of God to the sinner. The elders must always, in all the exercise of Christian discipline, come with nothing more or less than the Word of God. And when the elders do this, they may be confident that God's Word will never return void. It will always accomplish God's purpose. The Word of God will work repentance in the godly and it will harden the ungodly. In both, God's church will be kept holy and God's name will be praised.

The Church Order speaks of two types of sins for which discipline is applied, error in doctrine and offense in conduct (Article 72). The idea of the Church Order certainly is not that all sins become the object of ecclesiastical discipline. God's people have daily to put off the old man and put on the new. God's people sin constantly according to the flesh. But the saints confess these sins both to God and to one another. And in the church where the love of God

flourishes the saints assume of one another that each is confessing his or her sins and fighting against them (cf. James 5:16 and I Peter 4:8). These sins do not, in themselves, create offense in the church.

The Church Order is speaking of sins which cause offense in the church because the sinner refuses to repent of them. These sins are either sins in which the truth of the Word of God is denied or sins which transgress God's holy law. They would, if allowed to remain in the church, destroy the communion of the saints and mar the holiness of the church. They might very well become the occasion for the unbelieving world to blaspheme the name of God and his Christ (cf. II Sam. 12:14).

But in the last analysis there is only one sin worthy of censure and excommunication, and that one sin is the sin of *impenitence*. All sins are equally serious and offensive to our holy, righteous God. All sin must be confessed and left. All sins may be forgiven in the way of the sinner's repenting. This, after all, is the wonderful assurance of God's Word, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:8-10). It is only when the sinner refuses to repent of an error in doctrine or of an offense in conduct that Christian discipline is applied. □

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\* Among the Scripture passages which form the basis for Christian discipline and which we have examined in some detail in previous articles are: Matthew 16:16-19; 18:15-20; John 20:23; Romans 16:17; I Thessalonians 5:12-15; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14; I Timothy 5:17-20; Hebrews 13:7, 8, 17.

# Paedobaptism Demands Parental Instruction and Ecclesiastical Keys

**C**hildren and young people must expect it. Parents and consistories must insist on it.

Instruction and discipline by parents and by the church must follow the administration of the sacrament of baptism to the infant children of professing believers. Instruction and discipline are a necessary part of the concept of infant baptism.

The infant children of believers also must be baptized because God graciously promises to gather in generations (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). But a charge has been brought against paedobaptism. It is the charge that baptizing infants results in a church full of hypocrites or a membership roll that far exceeds attendance at worship services.

Sadly it must be admitted that this charge seems to be true when we look at some churches of the past and of today. But I contend that whenever this charge seems to be true it is because parental instruction and church instruction and discipline have been neglected. The practice of baptism has become a habit or custom in such a church. Parents bring their recently born babies to the church of which they

are members and have them baptized, desiring this for their children because they think there is some security for eternity in mere church membership. They do not know the biblical reasons for infant baptism except in some vague way. They still desire it, but only because the church is the one in which they, their parents, and grandparents were baptized.

We say sadly, and we add, erroneously. Such is not the correct, the biblical, setting in which the sacrament of baptism is to be administered. What is to be the correct and biblical setting?

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First, the Scriptures are clear that not all infants are to be baptized.

We can learn this from the incident in the life of Jesus when He blessed the children. First, notice that the parents were bringing "infants" to Jesus (Luke 18:15). Second, notice that it was the desire of these parents that Jesus "touch" them, i.e., "bless" them (Mark 10:13, 16). Third, it is noteworthy that the original text emphasizes that in order to reach Jesus these parents made repeated efforts to get past the rebuking disciples. We conclude that these parents were very zealous to have Jesus bless their children. Not all parents in Jesus' day wanted Jesus to bless their children. Today, too, not all

parents want Jesus' blessing upon their children. Most parents desire that many other things influence their children, but they care little about the blessing of the Son of God. But the parents in Mark 10, notwithstanding the criticisms of the religious leaders and the rebukes of the disciples, were persistent in fulfilling their desire to have the Savior bless their children. They wanted salvation for their children. Notice, in the fourth place, that the Lord's response to the disciples' rebuking of the parents was that "He was much displeased" (Mark 10:14). Any effort to prevent from reaching the Savior those who desire the Lord's blessing makes one worthy of the Lord's great displeasure. Finally, notice that Christ explains His displeasure to the disciples by declaring that the kingdom of God is "of such" (Mark 10:14), i.e., of those whose parents earnestly desire the Savior's blessing on them. Jesus did not say this of all infants, but only of the infant children of this kind of parents.

The church which seeks to be faithful to the Word of God does not baptize all the infants they can find on the streets. First, such a church would baptize only the children of members of their congregation. Second, they would not automatically baptize all the infant children of those who are members. Rather they would exercise care to baptize the children of members

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who are in good standing and who are willing to make a vow.

First the parents must be members in good standing, i.e., faithful to their confession of faith. To put it negatively, good standing means that they have said or done nothing which contradicts the faith and godliness required by Scripture. Second, they must vow to accept the responsibility of rearing their children in the truth of God's Word. The faithful church demands of the parents a vow that they will seek the Savior's blessing upon their child in the way of their prayerfully instructing that child to the utmost of their power in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The demand for this vow and the demands of the vow show that there is a great responsibility implied in infant baptism.

The concept of infant baptism would be destroyed if we would not include this responsibility. It is always the case that God's grace gives responsibility (cf. Gen. 17:1). When God graciously establishes His covenant with us and our children, He says, "Therefore, show them the fear of the Lord, instructing them in God's law and demanding they conform to that law." Children must be shown that their baptism places upon them the responsibility to walk in godliness. The form for baptism used in the Protestant Reformed Churches clearly shows this responsibility: We are "by God admonished of and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God...; that we trust in Him and love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life."

It is the responsibility of the parents and of the church to keep this obligation always before the consciousness of these children. Parents vow to bring up their children, to the utmost of their power,

in the doctrines taught in that church. Baptism implies the responsibility to rear our children in the truth in order to bring them to conscious faith. Their conscious faith consists in daily repentance and conversion and a walk of obedience. The parents accept the primary responsibility of rearing their children. The church also has a duty toward the child, but it is the parents which make the church's instruction effective.

What is the parents' responsibility of rearing their children?

It is *not* to save them. First, only God can save by opening a heart. And second, godly parents know experientially that if their children's salvation depended on them, then none would be saved. The comfort of the covenant promise is that God saves our children, and that His grace is the only hope.

Reformed believing parents accept the duty of teaching the Word of God (Ps. 78:4; Eph. 6:4). We teach our children with the prayer that God will work faith in their hearts. We constantly pray that God will use our instruction in His Word to make faith in them. Under the constant presentation of the truth and demands of God's Word, faith and a walk of faith develop by the grace of the Spirit.

God created the family as the most powerful agent for the instruction of children. Therefore, we must live as a family so this instruction can take place: Be with the children. Have a home life. Use the various situations that arise in the home as God-given opportunities to instruct. Speak of God's judgment and of Christ's coming in tragic news events. Allay their fears by speaking of their safety in Jesus. Parents must teach about all of life in the light of the Bible: work, play, marriage, government, church, modest clothing, true beauty, and real strength.

This teaching of children by believing parents must be done constantly, always. This shows the tremendous importance of our ex-

ample, for we are always teaching, whether we intend to be doing so or not. If we are worldly in our homes, seeking personal pleasures, then our children will likely be worldly. If we constantly criticize or gossip, then we are teaching our children to be slanderers. If we show contempt for those in authority, then we are teaching our children to be rebels.

The purpose of all parental instruction is that our children learn how to live godly in this world.

All of the instruction of godly parents has the nature of commanding, not giving options (Gen. 18:19). Children must see that as God's children they are required to keep His ways. The purpose of this instruction is to order and direct their whole life, i.e., to be disciplined or to live a self-disciplined life.

One of the effects of this kind of instruction is that some of our children grow up and show themselves to be unrepentant and ungodly. Then we must not despair. If they are rebellious and unrepentant when they are chastised, we must go to the elders (cf. Deut. 21:18-21). The elders will then work with them; and if they are still unrepentant, then the whole church must excommunicate them.



The church also has a responsibility toward the child to which it administers the sacrament of baptism. That responsibility is primarily that of the elders of the church. They accept that child also into their care. This is a spiritual care, a care for the soul, the spiritual life of the child. In Hebrews 13:17 we read that there are those who "have the rule over you, ... for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account." This states clearly that the elders have to give an answer to God for how they watched over and ruled that soul.

The "watch" the elders perform

is not mere observation, but is an active "watch." This watch is the exercise of "keys of the kingdom." Jesus gave those keys to His apostles (Matt. 16:18, 19; 18:17-20). The keys are the preaching of the Word (particularly catechism instruction) and Christian discipline. This is discipline in the general sense, that which comes through preaching and teaching. For years in catechism classes (beginning in the child's life as soon as possible) the church instructs the children it baptizes in Bible history and doctrine with the goal of teaching the church to be disciplined, i.e., to be obedient, in what they believe and in how they live, to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Parental demands and Christian discipline must accompany and follow baptism. This is an answer to those who object that infant baptism corrupts the church. Discipline causes the church to be preserved, because all the members

see and hear, and fear. In this way the children and young people get the message that membership in the church is not for every physical child of believing parents, but for believers and their spiritual seed. Then they see the calling to believe or perish, for baptism and faith are inseparably connected.

Parental instruction and the church's exercise of the keys of the kingdom go hand in hand. Faithful parental instruction must be accompanied by faithful exercise of the key of pure preaching and proper discipline by the church. The preaching of the gospel and Christian discipline open the kingdom to believers and shut it to unbelievers. As difficult as the latter may be, it must be done. God requires it of the watchmen He places on the walls of Zion.

The kingdom of heaven is shut and opened by the key of Christian discipline. This occurs upon

those who, having the name Christian, maintain doctrines or practices inconsistent with what the Bible describes as Christian. These people are often admonished in a brotherly manner, but refuse to renounce their errors and wicked practices. First the church must forbid them the use of the sacraments, and finally the church excludes them from their membership. This also is the answer to the charge that infant baptism corrupts the church.

Infant baptism is properly administered in the church where parents are constantly reminded of Scriptures' demands to teach their baptized children God's Word and to show their children the responsibility to repent and believe, and where the elders lovingly administer Christian discipline. May God give us such churches!

Parents must instruct their children. Churches must truly disciple their children. □

**Contending for the Faith**

**Rev. Bernard Woudenberg**

## Bavinck, Hoeksema, and Schilder

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

Colossians 2:8

**F**ew things enable us to understand better what happened between the Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Dr. Klaas Schilder during the decade of the forties than the realization of the close

similarity of the covenant view of Rev. Hoeksema to that of Dr. Herman Bavinck, by every measure the greatest and most balanced scholar of the Secession, if not of all Dutch Reformed theology, and the prime example of what has been called the "confessional Reformed mentality."<sup>1</sup> Not to be forgotten in this is the contribution of Prof. Foppe M. Ten Hoor, professor of Dogmatics at Calvin Seminary, under whom Herman Hoeksema studied, and who perhaps more than any other was his theological mentor.<sup>2</sup>

Foppe Ten Hoor and Herman Bavinck had been classmates in school, and shared basically the

same theological positions, but with a difference. Bavinck went on to study in several major European universities, and in time became a close friend of Dr. Abraham Kuyper, working with him to bring together the *Afscheiding* (Secessionists) and the *Doleantie* (Aggrieved) into the new Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) denomination. Their theological backgrounds and outlooks were different, but Bavinck was convinced that they could work together for the good of the Reformed faith, and to the glory of God.

This conviction, however, was not shared by Ten Hoor. Already in the Netherlands, and even more

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after he moved to the United States to teach and write as a professor at Calvin Seminary, he was deeply disturbed by much of what Kuyper was bringing into the churches. It was not so much what Kuyper taught as it was the way in which he approached it. Rather than extracting his views from the confessions and Scripture, Kuyper—by every measure an academician—sought to take the learning of worldly scholars, including their speculative philosophies, and use it to develop the Reformed faith. This Ten Hoor rejected—as in principle did also Bavinck. Ten Hoor constantly spoke out against it, warning that this could only end in molding the church after the image of this sinful world, as indeed it has come to do.<sup>3</sup>

It was under this influence that Herman Hoeksema received his theological education, and Ten Hoor's warning he believed to be true. It was only that, with his clear and analytic mind, he came to focus on what he considered to be the underlying fault in it all, namely, Kuyper's theory of common grace, by which he was excusing this bringing of the thinking of the world into the church of God.<sup>4</sup>



It was against this background that Schilder and Hoeksema met in 1939 and developed an immediate rapport. Schilder, after all, had grown up amid the results of what Kuyper had done, and he had witnessed firsthand the growing intellectualism which was enveloping the churches, as their pulpits were being filled with philosophical discourses rather than preaching from the Word. As editor of *The Reformation* (*De Reformatie*) he was writing against it, even as in his preaching he made a point of speaking to the people directly with the promises and demands of Scripture. And it was having its effect. His paper became the best read in the land, and the services at which he

preached were always thronged—while to the intelligentsia which controlled the churches he had become the most *non grata* (unwanted) of all. In fact, even as he traveled to America the word had gone before that his speeches should be ignored, and his presence shunned.

So it was that, in their meeting, Hoeksema and Schilder were drawn together as brothers. There were differences, to be sure, in their theological viewpoints and methods; but with their mutually affirmed commitment to the confessions and Scripture, they were confident that as time went on they would be able to work constructively together—until, that is, the Second World War intervened.

The cloud of that war hung dark, long, and silent over the churches, and little was known of Schilder other than that he, as one of the few who had the courage to speak out against the Nazis, was in danger for his life. The wait was long, but finally word came through that Schilder still lived—but that under the cover of that war, when a popular uprising could hardly take place, the leaders of the churches had deposed Schilder from his office. It was hard to believe that Christians could actually do such a thing under circumstances like that; and all sympathy went out to him for that. But there was another side to the controversy in the doctrinal issue at stake. The debate was over the covenant of grace; and in it Schilder and his supporters appeared to be taking a position remarkably reminiscent of that of Prof. W. Heyns.

With this Hoeksema was familiar, for he had studied under Heyns even as he had under Ten Hoor; and the difference he knew well. Ten Hoor, like Bavinck, had always sought to remain faithful to the teachings of the confessions, including the Canons of Dordt, while the views of Heyns stood out in contrast—as can be seen still in a

quick comparison between his *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* and Bavinck's *Our Reasonable Faith*.

Bavinck's book, in its original Dutch version, was entitled, *Magnalia Dei* (*The Wonderful Works of God*), which represented exactly what it sought to be. While covering all of the basic doctrines of Christianity, it focused on what God does, or, as expressed in its opening line, "God, and God alone, is the Highest good." Nowhere does that become more evident than in his great chapter on "The Covenant of Grace."<sup>5</sup> There, after pointing out the futility of all human attempts to escape judgment by man's own works, Bavinck looks upon the covenant as God's wonderful provision of grace by which He takes those whom He has chosen in Christ and establishes an organic relationship of fellowship

1 Prof. Henry Zwaanstra distinguishes this as a category of early CRC theologians, over against two other groups, the "Separatist Calvinists" and the "American Calvinists," in his book *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World*, J. H. Kok, Kampen, 1973, pp. 68-70

2 A copy of the unpublished thesis has been sent us by Rev. Cornelis Pronk, entitled, *F. M. Ten Hoor, Defender of Reformed Principles Against Abraham Kuyper's Doleantie Views*, which sheds some very interesting light on this matter.

3 There is a story carried on by the descendants of Ten Hoor to the effect that shortly before Abraham Kuyper died he was visited by J. H. Kok, the famous Dutch publisher, to whom he is reported to have said as they discussed the state of the churches, "Ten Hoor had toch gelijk," or, "Ten Hoor had it right after all."

4 Rev. Hoeksema would often tell the story of how, at the Synod of 1924, Ten Hoor remarked, "I have studied common grace for forty years and, although I believe there is such a thing, I still do not know what it could be." Just what he meant by this it is hard to say, but it would seem to imply that he had a great deal more sympathy for Hoeksema's position than he dared say at that time.

5 As we mentioned in our last articles, we have been granted permission by the Eerdmans Publishing Co. to distribute a limited number of copies of this chapter to those who request them by calling 616-345-4556, by writing me at 1355 Bretton Dr. Kalamazoo, MI 49006, or by e-mail, Bwoudenberg@CompuServe.com.

with them, without any dependence upon the works which man by himself can never fulfill. It is *Soli Deo Gloria* throughout, just as Hoeksema had learned from Ten Hoor and continued to develop and defend in all that he did.

It was exactly that which was missing in Heyns' *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*,<sup>6</sup> opening as it does with this drab and academic question, "What is Reformed Doctrine?—By a doctrine of faith is meant a compendium of the truths concerning salvation which are revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, and which we have to know and believe as participants in the Covenant of Grace, since this knowledge is indispensable in order to walk in the way of the Covenant, and to inherit its benefits."<sup>7</sup> But the message is there. Heyns' concern is with the works of man, not those of God, and everything is focused toward that. Thus, when he comes to his treatment of the covenant, where Bavinck had sought to establish a close unity between it and God's counsel, Heyns seeks to drive a wedge between them: "The Covenant of Grace and that of Redemption are not one and the same, but two Covenants, differing essentially from one another."

His intent is clear: Heyns wants a separation between the elective decrees of God and the covenant of grace, so that the latter may be applied to each and every one of the "natural seed."<sup>8</sup> So he proceeds, in the form of a continuing scholastic disputation, to mark out various aspects of the covenant which are recognized as Reformed, only to twist them around to include the opposite as well. He acknowledges, for example, that the covenant is "one-sided," but in such a way that it depends on man accepting it "believingly."<sup>9</sup> He admits the covenant to be "unbreakable," but not so that "it is impossible to break it, i.e., to break our personal covenant relation."<sup>10</sup> And so, "likewise it is to be designated as an Uncondi-

tional Covenant, although there are what are usually called 'conditions' in it."<sup>11</sup> All this has as its end "that Covenant salvation can be given, not only to the elect, but to the non-elect."<sup>12</sup> Step by step, rather than seeking out the unity of God's working as in the confessions and Scripture, Heyns was fragmenting these teachings so as to set the doctrines of Dordt aside and make room for the works of man.<sup>13</sup> This Hoeksema had seen, and the fact that it was included in the three points of common grace in 1924 was what had made them particularly unacceptable to him.

But now the same sound was being heard, if not clearly from Klaas Schilder himself, certainly from those who were with him. It was distinctly disconcerting to Hoeksema, who did not want to believe it, as he carefully held final judgment in abeyance in the hope that something would come up to change this. And something did, but in a way that made it even more confusing. A report was received concerning a speech Schilder had given at Kampen in which he stated that he no longer held to common grace. But how could that be? If his covenant views were as much like Heyns' as they appeared to be, how could he repudiate common grace? And, if he was indeed rejecting common grace, why did he not reject the views of Heyns as well? The whole thing did not come together; and in a determined effort to resolve the impasse, Hoeksema invited Schilder to the United States once again, confident that they would be able to sit down together and determine where they actually stood over against each other.

Schilder came, but not with the results Hoeksema had planned. For the first time in his life his strong physique was left totally incapacitated by a massive stroke. Alone, therefore, Schilder traveled the length and the breadth of our little denomination, holding extensive conversations with nearly ev-

ery one of our clergy — except Hoeksema himself. Only at the very end, as Schilder was about to leave, was Hoeksema recovered sufficiently to attend a special conference set up to discuss the covenant of grace. Hoeksema actually was able to read a paper, and Schilder spoke. But the hard questions were not met. Rather, Schilder simply assured everyone that, having considered our positions, he could assure us that he did not share the views of Heyns, and that the differences between his views and ours were for the most part only a matter of terminology and emphasis due to our varied histories. The meeting was pleasant; and all parted as friends. But the real purpose of his coming had not been achieved.

Still there was hope; and Schilder's writings were followed in the expectation that now he would begin to draw out the similarities he had found between our views and his. But nothing came.<sup>14</sup> In turn, it began to come out that what Schilder had said in public was not always the same as he had expressed to individuals alone, as the time, when in the midst of a friendly but determined discussion, he exclaimed, "I loathe your covenant view."<sup>15</sup> But his influence had been felt; and voices were beginning to be heard echoing his thoughts that prominence should not be given to election in our doctrinal positions, and place should be found for conditionality in all aspects of Christian life. In turn, from the Netherlands we were informed that, regardless of what Schilder had said, most of the Liberated ministers were quite in agreement with Heyns regarding the covenant.

Then came the letter of Prof. Holwerda, written to those who were joining our churches in Canada, instructing them never to accept Hoeksema's theology, but instead, inasmuch as assurance had been given that many of our ministers were sympathetic to Liber-

ated thought, they should join our churches and get their material circulated among us. Next came Dr. C. Veenhof's brochure, "Appeal!," so filled with common grace that even those most sympathetic to the Liberated were embarrassed. And finally it was learned that a Rev. Hettinga was going about in our Canadian churches encouraging members to leave us and form their own Liberated churches (in Liberated terms, a *de facto* declaration that we were a "false church"). Clearly matters were not being treated in the open, but underneath.

So it was, when at the Synod of 1950 a request came from the Mission Committee for a clear declaration as to our covenant view, it was concluded that the time had come to lay out distinctly where we

stood. Thus the "Declaration of Principles" was born, a direct statement of the fact that we had always considered common grace to be contrary to the confessions, along with all views of the covenant of grace in which it was implied. Then Schilder began to write, pouring out a series of ill-tempered articles which have now been published in the book, *Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger*. This we appreciate, for it provides us with one of the clearest indications of the difference between Hoeksema and Schilder which we are seeking to understand. □

6 Heyns, W., *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, 1926.

7 *Ibid.* p. 123

8 *Ibid.* p. 124

9 *Ibid.* p. 128

10 *Ibid.* p. 130

11 *Ibid.* p. 131

12 *Ibid.* p. 133

13 In all of which his arguments hold a close parallel to the approach used by Arminius in his debate with Junius, where he repeatedly would affirm accepted doctrines of the Reformed faith, only to contradict them completely by proceeding to affirm the opposite as well.

14 We may note that in the publisher's preface to the book, *Secession Theologians...*, Mr. R. Janssen writes, "Rev. B. Woudenberg has written several articles in the *Standard Bearer* in which he repeatedly stated that Schilder was not inclined to give definite answers on the differences between Hoeksema and himself." My reference, however, was to this period before relationships had broken down and there was still hope of working together, while Schilder's writing did not come until this was no longer so.

15 Literally what Schilder said was, "Ik walg jullie verbonds beschouwing."

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### School Activities

After a year and a half of planning, East Side Christian School emerges at 2800 Michigan NE in Grand Rapids, MI. This pre-K—9<sup>th</sup> grade facility will open its doors for the first time in September at its temporary home, the lower level of First PRC.

East Side School Board and parents are excited with the group of educators that have committed themselves with their varied talents to this effort. The four teachers and one administrator who begin this inaugural year at East Side have nearly 100 years of combined classroom experience, which should provide an enviable learning environment.

We take this opportunity to remind each one of us to continue to pray for all those devoted to edu-

cating our covenant children and young people, and to pray for the students as well, that the lessons learned may serve to prepare the church of the future.

The Hope Foundation, of the Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI, sponsored their Second Annual Perch Fishing Tournament on Saturday, July 26, at South Haven, MI. The day included perch fishing from 7:00 A.M. until 12:00 noon; lunch of hot dogs, chips, and pop; and special prizes and awards.

### Minister Activities

Candidate James Laning received two calls to serve as pastor: from the South Holland, IL PRC, and from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. We can now report that Mr. Laning has accepted the call extended from the Hope PRC.

The Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ has been blessed this summer with the presence of Candidate Martin VanderWal and his family. In July the consistory presented to

their congregation a trio consisting of Rev. K. Koole, Rev. S. Houck, and Candidate M. VanderWal. The call was extended to Mr. VanderWal.

### Mission Activities

Candidate Daniel Kleyn and his wife were laboring for several weeks in the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, while Missionary R. Hanko and his family were on furlough. Plans also called for Candidate Kleyn later to devote some time in August and September helping Rev. Hanko with mission work in the British Isles.

From our PRC in Hull, IA we learn that Rev. Jai Mahtani was spending July 29 through August 15 in Ghana as he continues to look into all aspects of his call to be missionary to Ghana. Rev. Mahtani was told that "if he decides to take the call to Ghana, Hull would give him time (through May '98) to finish graduate school studies in multicultural missions before he

*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

leaves. These studies serve his preparation for the labor and field if he were to take the call. Also, the brother minister and his wife are expecting their eighth child in February of '98, and it would not be good for him to go before this blessed time. This will also give the Hull Council and FMC the time to arrange for and obtain the volunteers, as well as help with their preparation for the labor in Ghana."

We ask you to remember the Mahtanis in your prayers as they continue to consider this awesome and blessed call to be our missionary.

#### **Congregational Activities**

The congregation of our Loveland, CO PRC took time this summer, and maybe longer, to commit a proof text a week to memory. Each week there was listed on the bulletin one text and what it proved (e.g., Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord," proving the oneness of God). It was even suggested that, as the list continued to grow, individuals could set aside weekly time to test each other—perhaps even scheduling a three-on-three competition later to determine the over-all winners.

In our ongoing futile attempt to keep up with the building progress of our Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, we can report that the last word we had was that the carpenters had finished, the shingles were on, the electricians and plumbers could start with their work, and the stucco was scheduled to go on.

#### **Evangelism Activities**

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB,

Canada set aside a Saturday earlier this summer to distribute their "Welcome" brochures and magnets in mailboxes in the Mayfield neighborhood. Approximately 900 were distributed.

The Evangelism Committee of the Grandville, MI PRC sponsored a series entitled, "The Reformed Faith on Civil Government." This series included a special worship service the morning of July 6 and a lecture at 8:00 P.M. on July 10 at their church.

The Evangelism Committee of

the Hudsonville, MI PRC is making Ezra study guides and sermon tapes available for the upcoming society season. They may be used together or separately, and are also helpful for one's own personal study. If interested, please contact Hudsonville's Evangelism Committee or Rev. Gritters at 5101 Beechtree St., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

#### *Food For Thought*

"Christ and we will never be one until we and our sins are two."

— C.H. Spurgeon □

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The council and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their Christian sympathy to Miss Esther Bleyenburch and to Mr. and Mrs. Denny Bleyenburch and family in the loss of their mother/grandmother,

#### **MRS. CORA BLEYENBURG.**

May their comfort and confidence be in the Lord, as expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 121:1, 2, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Allen Brummel, Pres.

John Hilton, Clerk

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Ladies' Aid Society Ruth express their deepest Christian sympathy to our fellow member, Mrs. Johanna Bomers, in the death of her daughter,

#### **HEIDI BAAS.**

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:14, 18).

Mr. Jim Laning (Pres.)

Melva Mastbergen (Sec'y.)

#### **CHANGES!!!**

As of July, 1997, the area code for our Randolph people has changed. New area code is 920. And the address of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, AB, Canada, as well as that of its pastor, Rev. Rodney Miersma, is now:

1 Sunset Way

Rosedale Valley, AB T4L 1X8

Canada.

Please make note of these changes.

#### **TAPES AVAILABLE**

Tapes and Videos  
of the

Summer Seminar

"The Rock Whence We Are Hewn"

by Rev. Ron Cammenga

are available from

Southwest Protestant Reformed

Evangelism Committee

4875 Ivanrest Ave.

Grandville, MI 49418

Cost: \$12.00 for the set of 4 audio,

\$24.00 for the set of 4 video.