

# THE STANDARD BEARER

## EDITORIAL STAFF

Rev. H. Danhof

Rev. H. Hoeksema

Rev. G. Ophof

G. Van Beek

## REFORMED MONTHLY

PUBLISHED BY THE REFORMED FREE  
PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

Communications relative to subscriptions should be addressed to G. Vos, 707 Thomas St., S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Communications relative to contents of Magazine should be addressed to Rev. H. Hoeksema, 524 Eastern Ave., S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Vol. I, No. 1

OCTOBER, 1924

Subscription Price \$1.50

## MEDITATION

### JEHOVAH'S GOODNESS

The Lord is good to all.....but all the wicked will He destroy.

Ps. 145:9a, 20b.

Emphatically, according to the Hebrew original, the poet, who is the inspired author of this psalm, puts it: "Good is Jehovah".

The Lord is goodness essentially.

Apart from any relation to His creatures, conceived all by Himself, in Himself, for Himself, as the absolutely Self-existent, Self-sufficient, Independent One, the Lord is good. His essence is goodness, His eternally adorable Divine Being is only good. Could we enter into the amazing profundity and explore the fathomless depths of His infinite Being, the deepest depths of the incomprehensible divine essence would reveal nothing but goodness.

He is the Light and there is no darkness in Him. He is Truth, Righteousness, Holiness, Purity, Love, Grace, Mercy and Eternal Life, and there is no Lie, Unrighteousness, Defilement, Corruption and Death in Him.

He is Summum Bonum, the Highest Good, not in a mere superlative sense, not in a sense that would compare Him with other goods or goodnesses, that might perhaps be conceived as existing next to Him though in a far inferior degree; but in the sense that He is the Sole Good, that there is no good apart from Him or without Him. He is the ultimate and absolute criterion of all good. He is not good in the sense that He answers to a certain standard of goodness that might be applied to Him, but Himself is the only Standard of all that is called good.

He is good because He is God.

Very perfection in all His adorable virtues.....

Good is Jehovah!

The Lord is good!

And because the very Being of His adorable Godhead is goodness, the Divine Nature in all the glorious attributes thereof is purest perfection and immaculate goodness. Neither is there any reason of want in God why He should need an object unto which to reveal and upon which to lavish His goodness. For as the Triune God He lives from everlasting to everlasting the perfect life of Infinite goodness in and thru Himself. Never there arises from the unfathomable depths of His perfect Essence the slightest thought that is not good, perfect, true. Never the faintest thrill of imperfection there is in the Will of Jehovah. Never the most imperceptible discord there is in His divine feeling. Never there is the tiniest ripple of evil on the stream of life flowing from His divine heart.

No shadow of darkness ever bedims the light of life, perfect and infinite, of the Divine Family. Father, Son and Holy Ghost, each eternally subsisting in the unchangeable Essence of limitless goodness, thinking in the Perfect Mind, willing with the Perfect Will are living in absolute Self-sufficiency an uninterrupted divine life of purest goodness, dwelling in a Light that is never in any wise bedimmed.

Yea, good is Jehovah!

Everlastingly, solely, unchangeably good!

Because the Lord is good, the absolute good in Himself He is also good to all His creatures.

Good is Jehovah to all!

He is the Overflowing Fount of all good.

All the good His creatures ever receive is solely from benevolence which He lavishes in profuse abundance upon all the wide creation. His goodness profuses the silvery lustre thruout the starry heavens and arranges their marvellous harmony night upon night. His goodness decks the sun with that glorious attire of wondrous

## In This Issue

Meditation - Herman Hoeksema	
<b>Jehovah's Goodness .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Editorials - Prof. David J. Engelsma	
<b>The Standard Bearer — Volume</b>	
<b>76 in Prospect .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Happy Birthday,</b>	
<b>the Standard Bearer! .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Go Ye Into All the World —	
<i>Rev. Jason Kortering</i>	
<b>Missions and Polemics — the</b>	
<b>Language to Be Used .....</b>	<b>7</b>
In His Fear — <i>Rev. Daniel Kleyn</i>	
<b>Forgiving One Another .....</b>	<b>10</b>
That They May Teach Them	
to Their Children —	
<i>Miss Agatha Lubbers</i>	
<b>Establishing Schools to Provide</b>	
<b>Reformed Covenant</b>	
<b>Education (4) .....</b>	<b>12</b>
All Around Us —	
<i>Rev. Gise J. VanBaren .....</i>	<b>16</b>
Taking Heed to the Doctrine —	
<i>Rev. Steven R. Key</i>	
<b>The Resurrected Christ .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Contending for the Faith —	
<i>Rev. Bernard Woudenberg</i>	
<b>The Covenant as Law .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Book Reviews .....	<b>22</b>
News From Our Churches —	
<i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger .....</i>	<b>23</b>

gold, day after day. His goodness adorns the lily of the field with purest beauty such as Solomon never possessed and clothes the royal cedars of Lebanon with strength and majesty. His goodness causes the royal eagle to renew its strength as it sweeps the firmament with powerful wing; and it fills the mouth of the young raven crying to Him for food. His goodness remembers the roaring lion and the chirping sparrow on the housetop. His goodness clothes the meadows in velvety green and covers the fields with golden grain. His goodness made man a little lower than the angels, adds keenness to his mind and strength to his arm, and fills his heart with gladness.

Surely, all the works of His hand speak of His goodness.

Good is Jehovah to all!

Nor is this the last word that is to be said about the goodness of Jehovah.

It may be the last in the estimation of a natural religion that knows of no sin and speaks of no grace.

It might be the last word had Paradise not been lost. There in the midst of that Edenic virgin beauty of creation, in that original state of unmarred perfection, where sin had not dropped her stain and misery had not left her scar and the groan of the sufferer was not heard

there God's goodness displayed itself simply as goodness, overflowing riches of benevolence, poured upon every creature according to the measure of its capacity.

The single light-beam of God's goodness had not resolved itself into the many-colored rays of His grace, tender mercy, and loving-kindness in contrast with His holy wrath and faultless justice.

But sin entered. In the wake of sin came death. With death came suffering in all its awful forms, agony of soul and body, pain, sorrow, grief, fear. And the curse of God was pronounced upon the creature and subjected it to vanity; the chilling breath of a good God, maintaining Himself in His goodness over against a sinful world, caused the whole creation to groan and travail together in pain. Even thus, the creature made subject to vanity, and man in his guilt bending under the cruel scourge of suffering and death, are testimonies that the Lord is good and that there is no evil in Him.

But more must be said.

Suffering creation, sin and guilt, misery and death, and all the thick darkness from hell only became the occasion for God to manifest His goodness more abundantly. Darkness was employed by Him as a prism through which to resolve the pure white beam of His goodness into wonderful rays of manifold perfection. First of all there is, on occasion of sin and suffering, the beautiful and rich manifestation of God's wonderful mercy and loving-kindness. His tender mercies are over all

*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.*

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

**Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

### REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

### EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

### EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma  
4949 Ivanrest  
Grandville, MI 49418  
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

### BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
Don Doezeema  
P.O. Box 603  
Grandville, MI  
49468-0603

PH: (616) 531-1490  
(616) 538-1778  
FAX: (616) 531-3033  
(e-mail: doezeema@prca.org)

### CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger  
6597 40th Ave.  
Hudsonville, MI 49426  
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

### NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer  
c/o B. VanHerik  
66 Fraser St.  
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

### UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney  
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.  
Ballymena, Co. Antrim  
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland

### SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

### ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFFA: [www.iserv.net/~rffa](http://www.iserv.net/~rffa)

His works. Radiating from the cross of God's beloved Son this tender mercy beams its warm glory first of all upon His chosen people whom He loved with love everlasting, with a love that is always first. Upon them He lavishes His tender mercy in the blood pouring from the heart of His only begotten, and in these streams of mercy He cleanses them from guilt, heals them from sin, redeems them from the power of death, comforts them forever for their misery, and makes them heirs of a glory unspeakable, of a life incomparably richer, fuller, deeper than ever First Paradise knew. They taste His loving-kindness and tender mercy, speak of it and sing of it, showing forth the praise of Him that called them from darkness into His marvelous light. But even as the awful darkness of sin and misery spread from the first Adam till it enshrouded an entire groaning creation in its horrors, so the glad light of redemption radiates from the Second Adam, falls first upon the elect, thence to spread again over the whole creation. Remembering His groaning creature with bowels of mercy and compassion, the Lord

stretches the rainbow of an everlasting covenant over all. His tender mercies are over all His works.

The creature is made subject to vanity. It is subject to the yoke of bondage. It is travelling in pain together until now.

But in hope!

The whole creation shall be liberated from the bondage of corruption and be made to partake of the glorious liberty of the children of God!

Bowels of mercy!

The Lord is good to all! His tender mercy is over all His works!

Good is Jehovah.

But all the wicked will He destroy.

Seemingly there is irreconcilable conflict here. The Lord is good, and yet He destroys. Many a sinful mind will not have it so. Many would dream of a goodness without righteousness, of a grace without justice, of a benevolence without holy wrath. And yet, upon closer investigation this apparent conflict disappears, dissolves itself into most sublime harmony. He will destroy all the wicked because He is good. The destruction of the wicked, God's wrath upon them, is

but another aspect of His perfect goodness.

The wicked are the vessels of wrath, fitted unto destruction. They are those that love iniquity and hate righteousness. God is not in all their thoughts. They say within their hearts, they express it in their words, they reveal it in their ways that there is no God. They are God's enemies and children of their father the devil. They dwell in darkness and love it. They crucify Christ and persecute His people. They make the measure of their iniquity full.

So are all the wicked.

But the Lord is good. And because He is good and there is no evil in Him, because He is a light and there is no darkness in Him, therefore His soul loves the righteous and loatheth the wicked, His face beams with tender mercy upon those that love Him, but burns with fierce wrath upon them that love iniquity. He preserves the righteous but destroys all the wicked.

The Lord is good. Therefore there are in Him bowels of mercy and consuming fires of holy wrath!

Hallelujah! □

H.H.

## Editorials

# The *Standard Bearer* — Volume 76 in Prospect

At their annual meeting this past July, the staff of the *Standard Bearer*—writers and managing editor—planned volume 76. Volume 76 begins with this issue—October 1, 1999.

Changes from the past year include the following. Rev. James

Laning will co-edit "Taking Heed to the Doctrine" with Rev. Steven Key and Rev. Charles Terpstra. Rev. Laning will also write a new rubric, "All Thy Works shall Praise Thee." These articles will show how creation reflects spiritual realities. Connie Meyer will cooperate with Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma and MaryBeth Lubbers in writing "When Thou Sittest in Thine

House"—the rubric on the Reformed family. Rev. Barrett Gritters will replace Prof. Robert Decker in the rubric "Ministering to the Saints." The other writer for this rubric is Rev. Douglas Kuiper. The two home missionaries of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Rev. Jai Mahtani and Rev. Thomas Miersma, and the foreign missionary, Rev. Richard Moore, will join

Rev. Jason Kortering in writing the missions column, "Go Ye into All the World." A new rubric, directed especially to young people, will be the responsibility of Rev. Mitchell Dick. Replacing Rev. Dick in exposition of Scripture for use particularly by our Bible study societies is Rev. Martin VanderWal.

The other rubrics and writers remain the same.

Welcome to the new men and woman! And thanks to those who continue writing!

There will also be guest articles, contributions, letters, and book reviews.

The staff reappointed the editor, managing editor, and general adjunct. Since Prof. Decker resigned from the staff, he was replaced as staff secretary by Prof. Russell Dykstra. We express our

appreciation to Prof. Decker for his significant contribution to the magazine by writing and in other ways over many years.

It is our intention to remember the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PRC in various ways, in addition to running the announcements of the celebration next June that have already been appearing.

This issue of the *SB* marks the 75th anniversary of the magazine. This accounts for our cover—an exact copy of the original cover of October, 1924. The editorial in this, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue, reflects on the occasion. Seventy-five years of continuous publication of a Reformed periodical is noteworthy.

The next issue of this magazine will be our annual Reformation issue. The subject will be the Reformation and the doctrine of the last things (eschatology).

God be praised for the witness to the Reformed faith in the *SB* these many years!

May He be pleased to privilege us to continue to give this glorious witness to His truth in the coming year!

I remind us all, readers as well as writers, of the purpose of the *SB* as laid down in the constitution of its publisher, the Reformed Free Publishing Association: "1. To witness to the truth contained in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity. 2. To reveal false and deceptive views repugnant thereto." In the constitution of the editorial staff of the *SB* this purpose is stated this way: "the maintenance, development, and promulgation of our distinctively Protestant Reformed principles." ■

— DJE

## Happy Birthday, the *Standard Bearer*!

**A**lthough we will celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Standard Bearer* in connection with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the year 2000, God willing, the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of the *SB* is actually October, 1999. The first issue of the magazine, originally a monthly, appeared in October, 1924. The editors were Rev. H. Danhof, Rev. H. Hoeksema, Rev. G. Ophoff, and a layman, G. Van Beek. In charge of subscriptions was G. Vos. The subscription price was \$1.50.

The very first article was a meditation by H. Hoeksema on Psalm 145:9a, 20b, "Jehovah's Goodness." This was the cover of the first issue. We reprint this meditation as the cover of our anniversary issue, in its original format, complete with glaring typo-

graphical error in the listing of the editorial staff.

From the beginning, the *SB* has been tightly linked with the PRC. The connection has been unusual. The *SB* has had an extraordinary place in the history of the PRC. Whereas most new denominations produce a magazine, there is a sense in which the *SB* produced the PRC.

### Birth of the *SB*

The magazine preceded the formation of the PRC. When Danhof, Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Van Beek wrote the first issues of the *SB* toward the end of 1924, they were still ministers and members in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The occasion for the founding of the magazine was the gathering storm in the CRC over the doctrine of common grace. Already before

the CRC adopted its doctrine of common grace in the summer of 1924, leaders in that church who were committed to a common grace of God both in the gospel and in providence closed the church papers to Danhof and Hoeksema. The CRC had divine grace for everybody, but no church grace for defenders of particular grace. On the evening of April 8, 1924, 15 laymen met with Rev. Danhof and Rev. Hoeksema at the home of Rev. Hoeksema, to arrange for the publishing of the writings of these two ministers. This was the conception of the Reformed periodical that would be born in October, 1924.

At a meeting in Kalamazoo on April 17, 1924, the men formed the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), which would publish the *SB* to the present day.

The original meeting at the



home of Rev. Hoeksema was at the initiative of the 15 laymen, not that of the ministers. Because these laymen were instrumental in the founding of the *SB* and, thus, in the subsequent forming of the PRC, and because laymen tend to be slighted in a denomination's celebration of its anniversary, I give the "honor roll" of these worthies: C. De Young; P. Ezinga; E. Groenhout; J. Koster; J. C. Moerman; E. Onder de Linde; J. Post; R. H. Timmer; J. H. Vander Vennen; O. Van Ellen; J. H. Van Tuinen; W. Verhil; G. Vos; R. Wolthuis; and A. Wyma.

### Free Paper

The origin of the magazine explains, in part, the nature of the *SB* as a "free" paper. This is expressed in the name of the publishing organization, Reformed *Free* Publishing Association. "Free" describes the magazine as non-ecclesiastical. It is not the publication of the instituted church. It is not a "church paper." It was not a "church paper" when it began. Nor did it become the official paper of the PRC, subject to the control of this denomination, after these churches were established. Deliberately, the magazine has been maintained as a free periodical.

As a free publication, the *SB* is allowed and encouraged, if not required, to critique developments within the PRC, as well as without. It is not a tame "house organ," uncritically falling in with and trumpeting the party line.

Also, it is open to contrary opinions. Throughout its history the *SB* has displayed a marked, and remarkable, openness to the placement of articles and letters—often *long* articles and *hostile* letters—that take issue with the *SB* and its contents. The *SB* has always welcomed public debate. Even during the perilous and heated time of the schism in the PRC in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, when it seemed that the very existence of the PRC was in danger, the *SB* pub-

lished many articles against the truth of the covenant of grace that was defended by the editor and staff of the *SB*. These articles were written both by ministers who were at that time in the PRC and by theologians in the Netherlands.

The ultimate commitment of the *SB* is not to the PRC, but to the truth of the Reformed faith.

### The *SB* and the PRC

The extraordinary place of the *SB* in the history of the PRC is not only that the magazine preceded the institution of the churches. The *SB* also played a significant role in the formation of these churches. There was the influence of the writings of Danhof, Hoeksema, and Ophoff upon the eventual organization first of the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches and then of the PRC. More importantly, a ground for the deposition of Rev. H. Danhof, Rev. G. Ophoff, and their consistories by Classis Grand Rapids West of the CRC in January, 1925 was the alleged insubordination of these ministers through their "association" with the *SB*. Although the decision of Classis Grand Rapids East deposing H. Hoeksema did not mention the *SB*, the petition for a special meeting of classis that resulted in the deposition of Hoeksema did mention the magazine by name, as did the advice to the classis from the special committee consisting of the faculty of the seminary of the CRC. These depositions, of course, led inevitably to the formation of the new denomination.

H. Danhof referred to the crucial role of the *SB* in the formation of the PRC in an article in the February, 1925 issue of the *SB*. The title of the article was, "*Ha, Ha, Toch 'The Standard Bearer,' He!*" The English translation is roughly, "Oh, Oh, Really 'The Standard Bearer,' by George!" Danhof pointed to the importance of the *SB* in the deposition of Ophoff and himself by the CR classis. A number of ministers, consistories, and

congregations were put outside the CRC and simply forced to organize a new denomination "because on October 1 our monthly paper, 'The Standard Bearer,' saw the light of day."

As the *SB* was significant for the formation of the PRC, so through the years it has also played a powerful role in the maintenance of the denomination. It has instructed generations of members of the PRC in every aspect of the Reformed faith and life, helping to form a sound and unified mind and walk in the federation of Reformed churches. Especially in the days of the schism of 1953, when the PRC were nearly destroyed by enemies within and without, the *SB* gave the clear, uncompromising trumpet-blast that was used of God, among other means, to preserve the truth of sovereign, particular grace and the denomination itself.

### Witness to the Truth

Witness to the truth of the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ, particularly in the covenant, is the specific purpose of the *SB*. The Constitution of the RFPA states the positive purpose of the Association and, therefore, of the *SB* this way: "To witness to the truth contained in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity." In an address to the annual meeting of the RFPA in 1945, Hoeksema said this about the purpose of the *SB*:

The *Standard Bearer* wants to send forth a trumpet blast of no uncertain sound. It purposes to send forth a testimony that is very specifically Reformed. With regard to this specifically Reformed truth, we may assert that its very heart is found in the idea of the covenant of God. It is true that, in order to give a truly Reformed testimony, this truth concerning the covenant of God dare not be divorced from the doctrine of sovereign predestination. Election has rightly been called the *cor*

*ecclesiae*, the heart of the Church. And yet, fundamental though this truth may be, and though its heart-beat must be discernible in every part of the doctrine proclaimed by one that lays claim to being Reformed, it is not the most peculiar, not the most distinctive of Reformed principles. . . . But the doctrine of the covenant of God is a distinctively Reformed heritage. . . . Especially is this true if the very essence of that covenant is found, not in the idea of a pact or agreement, or in a way of salvation, but in the fellowship of God's friendship, the highest revelation of the covenant-life of the Triune Himself. When, therefore, we say that it is the purpose of the *Standard Bearer* to send forth a specifically Reformed testimony, we mean especially that it purposes to witness concerning the covenant of God, as He Himself realizes it through Jesus Christ our Lord, according to His sovereign good pleasure, in the way of sin and grace, and along the antithetical lines of election and reprobation; and that, too, in connection with the organic development of all things.

In no way does the interest of the *SB* in the covenant of grace restrict the content of the magazine. Fact is, the covenant of grace embraces all of the teachings of Holy Scripture. The scope of the *SB* is as broad as the Bible: doctrine and practice; devotion and church polity; worship and family life; ecumenicity and church/state relations.

But the purpose does make the witness of the *SB* distinctive. Although (contrary to popular opinion) it is not the official church-paper of the PRC, the *SB* teaches and defends the doctrine of the covenant that is confessed by the PRC—a living bond of fellowship with Jesus Christ and the elect church—and all other doctrines in harmony with this one.

### Fresh Development of the Truth

Committed though it is to the "Three Forms of Unity" as the de-

cisive, authoritative statement of the Christian faith, the *SB* has, nevertheless, always proceeded on the conviction that there can still be development of the truth and that this development of the truth is necessary. In his address to the meeting of the RFPA in 1945, Hoeksema urged this development as the work of the *SB*. He warned against a "dead orthodoxy" that would merely "repeat, and rise in defense of, what has been officially laid down in our Standards." He plotted a different course for the *SB*:

Taking our stand on the basis of those Confessions, we make it our aim to continue in the direction plainly indicated by them . . . and, always endeavoring to maintain the very heart of the Reformed faith as our starting point, to advance to a purer and richer development and expression of the truth as such, and its application to every phase of the life of the believer in this present world.

Such development has, in fact, occurred on the pages of the magazine: concerning the grace of God; concerning the covenant; concerning the last things; concerning marriage; concerning church polity; and more.

Conviction that the last word has not been perfectly spoken by the fathers and that the truth must be developed is also evident in the *SB* in another way. The content of the magazine is fresh material by the present generation. This makes for a lively magazine. A religious magazine full of articles and sermons from the hoary past is lifeless.

### Controversial

The *SB*'s witness to the truth has always been polemical. It has exposed, refuted, and condemned errors that oppose the Reformed faith. The *SB* has never been a nice paper—only positive, broad-mindedly tolerant, all sweetness and light. One would not think of

symbolizing the *SB* with a smiling face. The magazine has faithfully carried out the negative aspect of its purpose as this is stated in the constitution of the RFPA: "To reveal false and deceptive views repugnant [to the Word of God as expressed in the Reformed creeds]."

This has offended many, as it offends many still today. But the fault lies with those who are offended, not with the *SB*, apart from the very real possibility that the editor and other writers may be guilty of *unjust* polemics. Controversy is necessary. It is more necessary today than ever before. The *SB* was conceived in controversy. Like Jacob, it came out of the womb fighting for the covenant of God. It must engage in controversy: "Contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). It must engage in controversy with vehemence: Cursed be the religious periodical that does the work of the LORD negligently, and cursed be the editor of such a paper that keeps back his pen (which is sharper than a sword) from blood (see Jer. 48:10).

The worth and power of the witness of the *SB* in the new millennium will, in large measure, depend upon its vigorous controversy with every false teaching and all ungodly ways of life, which dishonor the triune God and threaten the church of Jesus Christ.

If ever the *SB* becomes another nice, friendly, inoffensive, and harmless religious rag, may the God of truth and righteousness put it out of its misery quickly. And raise up another that will bear the standard!

### Fruitful?

Is the witness of the *SB* effective?

Who can say?

After 75 years, subscriptions are at an all-time high. The magazine goes all over the world. It is widely read both within and without the PRC. Half of the subscrip-

tions are to people outside the PRC. As the letters regularly show, theologians and church members of differing views read and pay attention to the *SB*.

On the other hand, the number of subscriptions is fewer than 3,000, a humbling fact. The magazine has its critics. And there are reasons to wonder how carefully each issue is read by some who do subscribe, including members of the PRC. The present age is one of mindless viewing and frenzied amusement. The love of many is

cooling. They are lovers of pleasures. This age favors the religious magazine of colored pictures, news stories, and light pieces on being nice to everybody. It does not bode well for the *SB*. Too bad for the present age!

But the fruitfulness of our labors we must leave to God. Our calling is simply to do the work faithfully and to the best of our ability.

God has had a place for the *SB* for 75 successive years, a notable

distinction for a religious magazine.

May especially the members of the PRC continue loyally to support the witness of the *SB*.

May we who write have the Spirit of truth, to be wise, diligent, faithful, and courageous.

Thus, may the *SB* persevere in its fervent witness to the glory of God in Jesus Christ according to the Reformed faith until the beast out of the abyss, silencing the two witnesses, puts a stop to our publication. □ — DJE

**Go Ye Into All the World**

**Rev. Jason Kortering**

## Missions and Polemics — the Language to Be Used

**P**olemics is the activity of Christians and the Christian church in which they expose errors which may be within the local church, in the church-world in general, or even among the heathen. It always concerns itself with differing viewpoints and calls the attention of the Christians to the seriousness of errors that may be present. It is to be distinguished from apologetics in that the latter is the science of developing proper biblical answers to wrong teachings and carefully defending the faith from error. Polemics focuses upon the actual activity of doing this. Apologetics is theory, and polemics is practice.

This activity takes on a great urgency in mission work. There is a real temptation to go soft on differences in order to increase in number and to remove the offense

of the gospel. Because of this, polemics may be entirely lacking on the mission field. It may also be that, where it is present, it is compromised.

### The Offense of Polemics Today

Our readers are acquainted with the general atmosphere in the church-world today, which opposes any criticism of others and emphasizes instead ecumenism, a coming together of all faiths. A good example of this is the present discussion on "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and, more recently, "The Gift of Salvation." Robert M. Zins describes his attendance at a recent conference of Roman Catholics and Evangelical leaders:

This meeting did not approach the expressed intent of the cover letter. It was an announcement of acceptance. It was not a dialogue to consider the merits of E.C.T. Needless to say, we felt like the proverbial jilted lover who went expecting to dialogue with his sweetheart over some flirtations

from other boys only to find himself in the middle of her wedding reception. He never knew she was seeing anyone else, let alone getting married. Such is the case with Vision New England (the group working to unite Catholics and Protestants in the eastern USA). ("Anatomy of Apostasy," in the quarterly, *Theo-Logical*.)

In this atmosphere, we can enumerate a few reasons why polemics is taboo and hence polemical language is despised.

1. There is a horrible ignorance which pervades the church-world today. One would think that with all the theological schools scattered throughout the world, the church would be at its zenith in theologizing. Fact is that our age despises careful study of God's Word. In evangelical circles there is so much emphasis on psychology (counseling) and action programs that a careful articulation of the gospel falls into the background. People do not even know biblical terminology and do not care about carefully defined con-

---

*Rev. Kortering is a Protestant Reformed minister-on-loan to Singapore.*

cepts. We live in an age of easy religion. It takes too much effort to expose error and defend the truth against heresy.

2. It follows from this that doctrine is also despised. The emphasis within the evangelical church world is morality and action. The church needs ministries for homosexuals, drug addicts, divorcees, and a whole list of others. Worship is coming together for "praise," and in that context the preaching of the Word of God that sets forth the doctrines and practices of the Bible is minimized. Add to this mixture the appeal of the charismatics and you have a recipe for ignorance. They avoid polemics like a plague, for it will offend people, and their megachurches require more numbers.

3. The shibboleth of our day is "tolerance." All criticism of others is viewed as unkind and un-Christian. We must be positive in our outlook, they say. Hence polemics is viewed as an enemy of the Christian gospel. J. Gresham Machen contended with this already in his day.

Presenting an issue sharply is indeed by no means a popular business at the present time. ...clear cut definition of terms in religious matters, bold facing of the logical implications of religious views, is by many persons regarded as an impious proceeding. But with such persons we cannot possibly bring ourselves to agree. Light may seem at times to be an impertinent intruder, but it is always beneficial in the end. The type of religion which rejoices in the pious sound of traditional phrases, regardless of their meanings, or shrinks from "controversial" matters, will never stand amid the shocks of life. (*Christianity and Liberalism*)

4. The language of polemics is necessarily pointed and usually sharp. True, polemics can be done in a wrong and offensive way. Sometimes it is this fact which

causes missionaries to shrink from it entirely. Most of the time, however, the offense of polemics lies in the fact that one cannot do it without criticizing another's position, and this is not acceptable in today's society. All such criticism, such exposing of error, such discernment of unfaithfulness to the Scripture itself is offensive to many.

### **Biblical Guidance in Our Language of Polemics**

As always, we should turn to Scripture to distill from its riches some guiding principles which can help us engage in polemics with proper language.

1. There is obvious use of sharp language in exposing error within the pages of the Bible. Nothing can quite match the scorching words of our Lord Jesus that were reserved for the Pharisees.

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.... Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matt. 23:13-33)

Similar to this is the language of so many of the Old Testament prophets.

Now will I rise, saith the Lord; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble; your breath as fire shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burning of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. (Is. 33:10-12)

No doubt we must exercise caution in making such references. Jesus

knew the heart of His opponents. The prophets received direct revelation from God to speak as they did. We do not. But the point is that we must recognize that there is a place for such language when we are in similar circumstances.

2. It follows from this that we must be controlled by love in all our polemical dealings with others. This will have a huge impact on our language as well. Extreme and harsh language will not be the norm, but the exception, reserved for certain special circumstances when we deal with "mad dogs," that is, unregenerate who oppose the truth. The reason for this is that our goal is not to destroy our opponent but to convince the gainsayers and to convert the brother who may err in his doctrine or practice. Harsh and offensive language seldom gains this end. Jesus used quite different language when he was ministering to a Pharisee who gave evidence of the grace of God (John 4). The words of the Holy Spirit through Paul remind us of this when he said, "admonish him as a brother" (II Thess. 3:15). Such love impels us to implement the words of the Wise, "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

3. As we engage in our polemical writings and discussions, we ought to use such language and conduct ourselves in such a way that we do it as convincingly as possible. Our goal in polemics is not simply to propagate our position in a public forum. Rather, it is to convince. This will affect our language in two ways. First, we will set forth our position as clearly as possible based upon the interpretation of the Bible and our confessions. Jesus emphasized the need for the Holy Spirit: "If ye love me, keep my commandments (Word). And I will pray the Father and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive,



because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you" (John 14:15-17). With the Holy Spirit's presence we must set forth evidence of clear thinking and well-developed argumentation. Second, in upholding the truth, preserving it, developing it, and defending it, we must maintain such a manner that those who have erred will listen to these reasonings. If we use judgmental words, if we attack their person or that of their leaders, we will not convince them, we will only alienate them. If we speak out of our heart in such a manner that they know from our language that we do this in love, our writings will be taken seriously.

4. All polemics must further missions by edifying and building up the church spiritually. Defense of the faith or exposing error which generates hypocrisy among the people is obviously wrong. Such language generates a proud attitude that I or my church is right and others are wrong. Even worse, it leads to such pride that we think we are the *only* ones who are right. This kind of polemics does not edify. The standard test of all our activity as Christians is that we must do everything unto the edification of the brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the point Paul made in opposing excessive use of tongue speaking in I Corinthians 14:26: "Let all things be done unto edifying." That was his measure of usefulness and faithfulness in the church. If the activity did not build up the church spiritually, it was called into question. Thus with our polemics as well, if it breaks the spirit of the church because of the constant in-fighting or out-fighting, something is wrong. Polemics does not build up the church by itself. Edification comes by the faithful preaching of the gospel, which includes both instruction and comfort to God's people as well as the exposure of error. Polemics must serve the gospel

preaching, not take precedence over it. It buttresses the Word preached by defending it and explaining its truth over against anyone who would find fault. This makes the believer strong in his own convictions. This helps the church understand and maintain her confession.

### Conclusions to Draw

What can we learn in a practical way from these biblical principles that may guide us in our polemical style, including the language we use.

1. All errors and wrong doctrines which creep into the church are serious and threatening. There are, nonetheless, differences among these. History shows that leaders of the past have correctly engaged in heavy and solemn polemical debate with those who advocate doctrines and practices which are inconsistent with the Christian faith. Alongside of these are other disagreements which have been discussed among Christians themselves, also among Reformed believers, yet not resolved. Differences concerning baptism, hyper-Calvinism, and our understanding of the covenant are very important and must never be set aside as insignificant. Yet in our polemics we ought to realize that it is different when we engage in debate and discussion with those who want to be Christian or Reformed as much as we do, yet interpret the Bible differently. These are brothers and sisters in Christ and our polemical language must reflect this fact. We will engage in our debate by manifesting to the persons involved and to all the readers that we recognize each other as brothers in Christ and use language that demonstrates this.

2. We will recognize that there may be inclinations to err in connection with polemics, especially when we first come to the faith. First, there is the temptation to be preoccupied with polemics and to have an over-critical men-

tal. It is exciting to come to the faith, especially for a person to come to the Reformed faith. Suddenly everything falls into place. Many questions are answered, and it can be very heady and satisfying. This exposes a person to the danger of wanting to debate, to argue, to put down everyone. Such a person is able to quote the Bible and understand it. He has answers for every argument that anyone might put forth. He sees clearly that his former church did all sorts of things wrong and he feeds on criticism. He is quick to judge and to have no toleration for the slightest differences. Sometimes this leads to a person leaving a church or even to a church split. We know, however, that there are risks involved. Negative criticism cannot sustain a proper relationship with God. Secondly, and closely connected to the above, is what I call "the first love radicalism." I have seen this in those who come to the Reformed faith from Arminianism. I have shuddered to see how they treated their home church in the process of leaving. No language was too strong, no judgment too severe. At the same time they boast about their newfound faith and about their new church, which is so wonderful. Unless we counsel them that such behavior is reason for admonition, they will quickly take this wrong behavior into their new church home and we will rue the day we never warned them. Radicalism has no tolerance for anything except that which such individuals consider to be right. Their language is abusive and they have no sensitivity. Their skin is as thick as the shell of a turtle. In the long run they become an offense to Christ and His church. Their polemical language will ultimately betray them.

3. Polemics within the local church ought to have as its goal the removal of any wrong, whether doctrine or life. Hence, there is no place in such a setting for public

polemics unless one is willing to walk in the proper way of Matthew 18 and follow Christ's instruction for leading the erring brother to see and confess his wrong. I remember a time when I had a young man in my congregation who thought himself to be a modern-day Luther. He poured out all his gall against our church in public writing. At the same time he refused to walk the orderly way of protest and appeal. As a result he was excommunicated from the church for the sin of schism. Polemics and its language must always seek to correct, heal, and reconcile brothers in the church.

4. Also concerning polemics which are directed to people outside the local church communion, both public writing and speaking ought to have as its goal a personal face-to-face discussion. If we keep this goal before us, it will control our language and keep it within

biblical dimensions. It is easy to write about a person in a public journal and criticize his view, but never intend to discuss it with him. The same is true with a public debate through writings. It accomplishes very little as far as reconciliation is concerned. It is far more biblical that we set as our goal that if we write about another person from another church or from a different theological perspective, that we offer sincerely to discuss this with him personally. This will be very helpful to resolve issues, or at least to demonstrate a charitable attitude that polemics is more than an impersonal debate, but should always include working at better understanding through personal discussion. This is elemental to Christianity. This will help restrain us, so that the language we use in exposing error and defending the truth will be what Christ wants it to be.

Let me close with this quote from the great polemicist J. Gresham Machen:

If the Word of God be heeded, the Christian battle will be fought both with love and with faithfulness. Party passions and personal animosities will be put away, but on the other hand, even angels from heaven will be rejected if they preach a gospel different from the blessed gospel of the Cross. Every man must decide upon which side he will stand. God grant that we may decide aright! (Address given in London entitled, "The Importance of Christian Scholarship in the Defense of the Faith.")

We trust that these few thoughts will challenge all of us, whether within the church or on the mission field, to be faithful in polemics and engage in it in the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. □

**In His Fear**

**Rev. Daniel Kleyn**

## Forgiving One Another

**A**gain and again the Scriptures remind us that we are to forgive the sins of our fellow saints. This is our sacred duty and responsibility. Christ, for example, states it very emphatically when He says to His disciples: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt

forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4). "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). And in the Lord's Prayer we confess that we obey this command when we pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

The unbeliever does not have a forgiving spirit. Very often he openly and stubbornly refuses to forgive. He convinces himself that he does not have to forgive the sins of others, especially if they have repeatedly sinned against him. They deserve, not his forgiveness, but his hatred. Or perhaps at times he may seem to forgive, but really

he does not. Secretly he holds a grudge and seeks revenge. His intention is to make life miserable for the one who sinned against him. He does not forgive and forget. Or if he does actually forgive, he does so only because he is motivated by selfish concerns, considering that forgiving this or that person is to his own advantage. Such forgiveness is no forgiveness at all.

Only the child of God is able, by God's grace, to have a forgiving spirit. And yet sometimes we, too, think and act as the unbeliever. We do not forgive each other as we ought. Husbands and wives fail to do so in their marriages. Instead they allow the sun to go

*Rev. Kleyn is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota*

down on their wrath. The same happens in many other relationships in the home and among fellow saints. Either we reluctantly and halfheartedly forgive (which is no forgiveness at all), or we completely fail or refuse to do it. We have our excuses, of course. But in reality we are following the ways and actions of the ungodly. A grudge instead of forgiveness. A desire for revenge instead of forgetting. We say we forgive, but then still tell others of how that person has sinned against us. It all amounts to hatred instead of love.

In order to understand what true forgiveness is we must consider and then imitate God's forgiveness of us. Ephesians 4:32 admonishes us to forgive one another *even as* God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. This obviously means that we are to forgive one another *in the same way* that God forgives us. Or, as the very next verse of the book of Ephesians puts it, we must be "followers" (that is, "imitators") of God.

God is a forgiving God. His grace in forgiving His people knows no bounds.

God's gracious forgiveness is characterized, first of all, by the fact that God forgives the sins of His people unconditionally. God does not demand that we fulfill a certain condition before He forgives. He does not say, "I'll forgive you, but only if you first do this or that." There is no basis of forgiveness in anything that we must do or do do. The only basis for our forgiveness is the cross of Christ. God forgives us "for Christ's sake" (Eph. 4:32), or because of what Christ has done. God had to do that. We ourselves are incapable of fulfilling any condition. We are forgiven only because of what God Himself has done in and through Jesus Christ. On the basis of the finished work of Christ, and on that basis alone, God unconditionally forgives our sins.

Now it is certainly true that the Scriptures teach us that we must repent of our sins in order to be forgiven. But that repentance is not a condition. It cannot be. Repentance is itself a work of God's grace in our hearts. Rather, Scripture teaches that repentance is the means God provides by which we consciously experience His forgiveness. Only when we are sorry for those sins, repent of them, and no longer walk in them can we experience forgiveness.

As those who must be imitators of God, our forgiveness of one another must also be unconditional. Never must we imagine that the brother or sister who has sinned against us must first fulfill certain conditions before we will forgive. God does not do that with us. And yet it seems that we often say, "I'll forgive you, but first you have to make up for what you did. I'll forgive you, but you had better first compensate for all the damage you've done." Such an approach is not Christian. We may not say that we forgive while at the same time we place all kinds of demands on the repentant sinner.

It is certainly true that the one who has sinned against us must be sorrowful for the sin and must repent of it (Luke 17:3, 4). But that is not to be a condition. Such repentance is the way or manner in which the brother becomes conscious of our forgiving him. Yes, the brother must show a true repentance, which includes forsaking that sin. But when he or she comes to us with true sorrow and repentance, we must not hesitate even for a moment to forgive. In fact, even before he repents and seeks forgiveness, we must be willing to forgive. We want to forgive. We cannot wait, as it were, to let him know that he is forgiven.

But we have to do more. We must actually seek out those who have sinned against us. In this too we must reflect God's dealings with us.

God, in His forgiveness, lov-

ingly seeks us out and leads us to repentance. We, by nature, are blinded to our sins. We sin and do not even recognize what we have done. Blindly we continue in sin. We fail to realize that our sins cause separation between us and God. But as the parable of the one lost sheep in Luke 15 illustrates, it is God who, through His Spirit and Word, causes us to see our sins and brings us to repentance. He seeks us out. He pricks our conscience. He makes us conscious of how greatly we have offended Him. And He leads us to true sorrow and repentance.

Such must characterize the forgiving spirit we have toward each other. So willing and ready must we be to forgive that we actually seek out the repentance of our fellow saint. We want to see him repent because we want him to know as soon as possible that we have forgiven him. It troubles us that this sin stands between us. We desire the removal of that sin so that true Christian fellowship can be again restored and enjoyed. In humility and love, therefore, we seek the repentance of the sinner.

Sadly, we often fail to do this. The words of Christ in Matthew 18 are all too often ignored. There Christ instructs us to speak with the brother privately in order lovingly to admonish him so that, by God's grace, he may repent. We, however, usually decide that he should first come to us. After all, he is the one who has sinned against us. And so we seek everyone else but the one who has sinned against us. We want others to know what so and so has done. Do we really imagine that this will lead to the brother's repentance and forgiveness?

A Christian who is an imitator of God will do all he can to lead a sinning brother or sister to true sorrow and repentance. He will do so in love. And rather than thinking that it is only the sinning brother who must show humility, he himself will be humble. Hum-

bly he will confess that he by nature is no better than the erring brother. For he realizes that apart from God's grace he would commit those very same sins. He too, by nature, is just as likely to commit adultery, to kill, and to covet. Thus, in the spirit of humility he will seek the restoration of the sinner.

God's forgiveness is also characterized by the fact that He forgives and forgets. God remembers our sins no more. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). Though our "sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Is. 1:18). Always our heavenly Father views us as white and clean, clothed in the garments of the perfect righteousness of Christ. As He Himself says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Is. 43:25).

For us this means that when one repents of a sin, we ought gladly to accept his repentance and confession and from then on put

the sin forever behind us and out of our minds. Never again should we bring up the sin — either to the one who committed it or to others. We should forgive and forget. This is perhaps the aspect of God's forgiveness that we find most difficult to imitate. Not only do we delight in keeping a tally in our own minds of how many times one has offended us, but we also delight in frequently informing others of this record. Even after we have (supposedly) forgiven that person, we do this. We enjoy sharing with others how a certain individual has done us wrong. Forgiven and not forgotten — that is, forgiven, but not forgotten. That is not how God forgives our sins. He forgives and remembers them no more. So ought we to do to one another.

Finally, God's forgiveness of the sins of His people is endless. Again and again we sin against Him. And again and again we commit the very same sins. Yet God never says, "I've had enough. That's it. I refuse to forgive you again." Always He graciously par-

dons, giving us the assurance that our sins are forever gone.

This must be the way in which we forgive each other. As Christ said, up to seventy times seven. That does not mean that we quit when we get to 490 times. It indicates, rather, that we must never quit forgiving. The fact that God has forgiven us so much ought to motivate us to do likewise to our fellow saints. Filled with gratitude for what He has done, and seeking to imitate Him, we cheerfully and endlessly forgive our sorrowing and repentant brother in Christ.

There is great blessedness in forgiving one another. The main blessing is that our forgiveness of one another is the means by which God works in our hearts the assurance that He has forgiven us. If we do not forgive one another, we will not know the joy of God's forgiveness of us. That is the meaning of the petition in the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." We forgive and are thereby assured that we ourselves are forgiven.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. □

**That They Teach Them to Their Children**

**Miss Agatha Lubbers**

## **Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (4)**

**T**hree articles (cf. Nov. 15, 1998, Feb. 15, 1999, and March 15, 1999) have summarized and reviewed some of the early significant writings by Herman Hoeksema and George M.

---

*Miss Lubbers is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Ophoff concerning Christian education and Christian schools.

I have contended that the articles respecting Christian education and Christian schools during the earliest years of the publication of the *Standard Bearer* influenced profoundly the development and formation of the Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. I believe that it can be demonstrated that those articles, written seven de-

cades ago by the early leaders of the PR churches, convinced members of the fledgling denomination to organize their own PR Christian schools. These early articles both influenced and reflected the thinking of parents and others who organized and developed good PR Christian schools.

We begin in this article a review of the analysis and critique written by Hoeksema and Ophoff

regarding the six "Specific Principles" for Christian education which were part of the booklet *Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America*, published July 1925 by the National Union of Christian Schools (NUCS), now Christian Schools International (CSI).

### **An Examination of the Review, Critique, and Restatement of the Specific Principles**

It is important to note the date (July 1925) of the publication of the six "Specific Principles." July 1925 was one year after the significant decision of the 1924 synod of Kalamazoo. This synod of the Christian Reformed Church produced and adopted the well-known Three Points, which became the theological cause for the organization of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The Three Points taught a common grace of God to the reprobate, i.e., a restraining of sin in the reprobate because of common grace, and the ability of unregenerate man to do civic righteousness because of common grace. Hoeksema and Ophoff were deposed from office and forced out of the CRC because they would not agree with the false doctrine taught by these Three Points.

Herman Hoeksema summarized five of the six Specific Principles as follows:

a. The Bible is the book of books.

b. God is triune, transcendent, and immanent, creator and sustainer, the loving sovereign of all.

c. Man is fallen but can be saved through faith in Christ; fallen, he is still God's image bearer and able to do civic good; saved he can do spiritual good.

d. The world is steeped in sin; the beauty, order, and virtue of the world is a manifestation of God's goodness.

e. The task of the school is to enable the pupil to realize himself as God's image bearer; to equip him for this calling; and to recon-

stitute a sin-perfected world by realizing the kingdom of God. (Cf. *Standard Bearer*, Feb. 15, 1932, Volume 8, p. 223.)

You may read the complete text of the six Specific Principles in the March 15, 1999 issue.

Following is a complete statement of "Principle a":

The Bible is the Book of books. By virtue of its divine organic inspiration (2 Peter 1:21) it is unique among all books. The Bible is not only the infallible rule of faith and conduct, but also the infallible guide of truth and righteousness. All school administration, instruction, and discipline should be motivated by biblical principles.

Concerning "Principle a" both Hoeksema and Ophoff expressed significant concerns. Both contended that the statements "The Bible is the Book of books" and "the Bible is not only the infallible rule of faith and conduct but also the infallible guide of truth and righteousness" were vague and left room for many interpretations. Both contended that because "Principle a" lacked specificity, modernists and higher critics could agree with it.

Ophoff wrote that "Principle a" is too brief and too indefinite (cf. *Standard Bearer*, Nov. 15, 1926, Vol. 3, pp. 80-85). It does not say enough. It has too many "loop-holes." He asserted that many writers on comparative religions would not object to endorsing the assertion that the Bible is "an infallible rule of faith and conduct" and "the infallible guide of truth and righteousness." He contended that the statement is of doubtful significance and could not be quoted in support of the proposition that the entire content of the Bible, in all its minutest details, is God-inspired, and hence the infallible Word of God. He wrote as follows:

...Inspiration must be made to apply to the chronology of Scripture,

and to the historical data as well as to the ethical-religious truths. It is a noteworthy matter that the article only asserts that the religious-ethical truths are infallible (*Ibid.*, p. 80).

Regarding the statement that the "Bible is the book of books," Hoeksema wrote:

The first declaration has it that the Bible is the book of books. Perhaps it is, although it is never quite clear to me what is meant by the expression. Does it imply a comparison with other books? Does it mean that it is superior to other books? Does it place the Bible on the shelf with other books, only to mark it as the best among them all? The authors of this platform would, perhaps, reply that they added to this definition of the Bible that it is unique among all books by virtue of its divine organic inspiration. That sounds very good. And a platform of specific principles, let me add, must sound good, for if it does not it is in danger of being repudiated. Yet, it may not be as good as it sounds. What I want to know, in order to be very specific, is whether the Bible is from beginning to end the inspired Word of God. You say, That is exactly what we mean? Splendid! Let us express ourselves just in that way, then! (*SB*, Vol. 8, pp. 223, 224).

A lengthy section of the analysis by GMO quotes Articles 3-7 of the Belgic Confession. Ophoff contended that these articles from the Belgic Confession are much more specific than the Specific Principles. He summarized and identified in what he called nine "vital statements" the instruction and confession in Articles 3-7 concerning the Word of God — the Holy Scriptures.

a. These articles denominate the Bible the Word of God.

b. It is declared that this Word was not sent, nor delivered by the will of man.

c. Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy



Ghost. Hence, the Bible is in the absolute sense the Word of God. The prophets and the apostles were so many mouthpieces of God.

d. God commanded His servants, the prophets and the apostles, to put His revealed Word to writing.

e. Against the Holy Scriptures, contained in two books, the Old and New Testaments, which are canonical, nothing can be alleged.

f. We receive all these books and these only as holy and canonical ... believing without any doubt all things contained in them.

g. It is unlawful for anyone, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are taught in the Holy Scriptures; nay, though it were an angel from heaven.

h. It is forbidden to take away or add anything to the Word of God.

i. We reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule (*ibid.*, p. 81).

Ophoff contended that "Principle a" was a weak and unsatisfactory statement of the truth concerning the Holy Scriptures as the foundation of all instruction in the Christian school. The conclusion of his analysis and critique of "Principle a" affirmed that the articles of the Belgic Confession should not have been ignored and avoided nor ought they to have been replaced by "Principle a." Ophoff wrote:

It appears that these particular articles of the Confession are clear-cut and unequivocal statements of what the Church, a few centuries back, thought of the Bible. Any one endorsing these articles will not and cannot submit the Bible to a scientific test. That is to say he will not do so if he is bent on playing fair. Such a one will not attempt to rearrange the data of Scripture, nor will he place a question mark behind this or that historical event. In a word, he will leave the Bible alone. This man will bow before the entire book, not only as a believer but

also as a man of science and even as a polemic or disputant (*SB*, Vol. 3, p. 81).

GMO contended that Dr. C. Bouma recommended "Principle a" because he wanted to make the Christian schools palatable to all "Christians," not merely for those who are Reformed. Therefore GMO asked and answered the following question:

What could have induced Dr. C. Bouma to set aside these articles (Belgic Confession, Arts. 3-7, AL) and recommend as a substitute the weak and equivocal so-called interpretation of the Union (NUCS)? The reason given is that these articles are deliverances of an ecclesiastical body. In other words, they are church creeds. We don't believe that this is the reason. What may it be? (*Ibid.*, p. 81).

Herman Hoeksema believed that he could see in "Principle a" evidences of the higher criticism taught by Dr. Ralph Janssen to the students in Calvin Seminary in the 1920s. Those who are familiar with this history will know that Hoeksema had opposed this form of higher criticism, i.e., Janssenism. During the years prior to his deposition in 1924-25 Hoeksema had opposed the theory of common grace that was adopted as doctrine in the Three Points of 1924.

... when Herman Hoeksema had been a member in good standing in the Christian Reformed Church, when he was looked to as a brilliant young leader, he wrote in *The Witness*: "I would not even want to live in a denomination in which they raise the conception of Rev. Groen (on common grace) to official status. That conception leads us right into the world..." He said at that time that he saw the connection between Rev. Groen's theory and Dr. Janssen's teaching. (Cf. Gertrude Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken*, p. 154.)

Hoeksema contended that the language of higher criticism is evident in the language of "Principle

a" that refers to the Bible as "the book of books although unique because of its organic inspiration." In addition, Hoeksema failed to understand the meaning of the statement that described the Bible as follows: "not only the infallible rule of faith and conduct, but also the infallible guide of truth and righteousness."

Hoeksema wrote:

Let us say: "We believe that the Bible is given by plenary inspiration (complete, full inspiration, AL), and that it, therefore, is from beginning to end the Word of God." There are many that would subscribe to the statement that the Bible is the book of books, that they believe in organic inspiration, that it is the infallible rule for faith and life, and that yet agree with the higher critics to a large extent and have no scruples to reject large and small portions of this book of books as not so organically inspired (*SB*, Vol. 8, p. 224).

Hoeksema continued as follows:

I know not, whether the authors of this platform expressed themselves intentionally in this indefinite manner. Fact is, of course, that the expression: The Bible is the written Word of God, is common enough among us, and was known also to the writers of these "specific principles." However this may be, especially in our time it is better to be specific on this point. The expression: The Bible is the book of Books, is not definite, leaves plenty of room for many heresies, even though you add that it is given by organic inspiration. In the form suggested by the platform the definition frankly smacks of Janssenism (*ibid.*, p. 224).

Concerning the phrase, "not only the infallible rule of faith and conduct, but also the infallible guide of truth and righteousness," Hoeksema wrote:

This "not only ... but also" I fail to understand. Perhaps, the writ-

ers could elucidate the statement. A guide of truth? A guide of righteousness: In distinction from being a rule of faith and life? Not only the latter ... but also the former? Frankly, I do not understand what this means. It surely is not very specific (*ibid.*, p. 224).

Hoeksema concluded his analysis and critique of "Principle a" as follows:

Probably, what the writers of this basis for Christian instruction intended to convey is the idea, that all the instruction that is given in the Christian schools should be based on the Scriptures, should be permeated with the truth of the Word of God; that Scripture should absolutely be the criterion of all that is taught, so that no instruction shall be either "neutral" or in conflict with the Word of God. This must not only be the case with the instruction that is given in the Bible as such, with the Bible lesson, but as much as possible with all other subjects taught in the Christian school. History, for instance, not only sacred but secular, is according to Scripture the realization of the eternal counsel of God and its course tends to the ultimate realization of the Kingdom of God. In a Christian school it must be taught emphatically in this light. It surely cannot use the material that is offered in our modern textbooks, which are all based on and proceed from the theory of evolution.... And as it is with the instruction proper, so it is with the management of the school, the relation of teacher to pupil, and discipline. The appearance and conduct of the teacher, the language he or she employs, the attitude assumed, it shall all be in harmony with the Word of God. ...school discipline should not follow every whim and fancy of modern pedagogy. The fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom and which is objectively revealed in the Bible should reign supreme and dominate in the instruction and life of the Christian school.

Perhaps it was the intention of the authors of "specific principles" to express this.

But why not be definite? Why this studied attempt to be vague and general?

Under cover of this language the historicity of the first three chapters of the book of Genesis is denied, the narrative of creation is harmonized with the theory of evolution, the history of Adam and Eve, Paradise, the Fall, etc., receive a new meaning. Yet, we still speak of the Bible as given by organic inspiration and as the infallible rule of faith and life!

I do not accuse the writers of this basis of Christian instruction of such intentions.

But as far as the terminology is concerned, they may have been Janssen-men.

Why not express ourselves definitely and in a much simpler form? Why not simply say:

The Bible is from beginning to end the written Word of God, given by infallible inspiration. All school administration, instruction, and discipline shall be based on it and permeated by its teachings, for we acknowledge that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (*ibid.*, p. 224).

The suggested restatement, by Herman Hoeksema, of the first "Specific Principle," i.e., "Principle a" in the booklet *Basic Principles of Christian Schools of America*, has become more than a first suggestion. The truth of this statement has become a permanent idea and a statement of truth used in the Constitu-

tions and the By-laws of the Articles of Incorporation of the school societies that have been organized to provide distinctively Protestant Reformed Christian Education.

Seventy years ago men of God critiqued, analyzed, corrected, and restated the "Specific Principles" composed to help the NUCS schools provide direction in the Christian training and instruction of the youth.

Today the Protestant Reformed Christian schools are the beneficiaries of the noble and diligent efforts of Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff. We who benefit from these faithful efforts ought to be thankful that God gave the churches leaders whose writings demonstrated that they believed fervently that it was the calling of the church through the consistories to see to it that there are good Christian schools and good Christian school teachers.

The consistories everywhere shall see to it that there are good Christian schools (good school teachers) not only to teach the children reading, writing, languages, and the liberal arts, but also to instruct them in godliness and in the Catechism (cf. Article 21, Church Order of Dordt).

To God is all the glory!

... to be continued. □

*Since thy Father's arm sustains thee,*

*Peaceful be;*

*When a chastening hand restrains thee,*

*It is He.*

*Know His love in full completeness*

*Fills the measure of thy weakness;*

*If He wound thy spirit sore,*

*Trust Him more.*

*Standard Bearer,*  
*Vol. I, No. 1 (October, 1924)*

## ■ "Change of Earth's Orbit"

One reads often of theories concerning events which occurred on the earth thousands (some say millions) of years ago. Occasionally an article appears which causes one to sit up and take note. One such article appeared in the *Denver Post*, August 12, 1999:

The Sahara stretches across northern Africa, a vast wasteland devoid of vegetation. But thousands of years ago the area was rich with vegetation, covered in grass and shrubs.

Now a team of German researchers has concluded that this dramatic transformation was triggered by subtle changes in Earth's orbit, which resulted in changes in the planet's atmosphere, sea, ice and vegetation.

Martin Claussen of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and colleagues used a computer model to analyze the effects of climate changes over the past several thousand years.

The researchers conclude that the transformation occurred in two major episodes. The first less severe episode began between 6,700 and 5,000 years ago, while the second much more severe episode lasted from about 4,000 to about 3,600 years ago. Summer temperatures increased sharply and precipitation dropped.

The changes were initiated by alterations in Earth's tilt, which went from 24.14 degrees to 23.34 degrees, and in Earth's perihelion, the point in orbit closest to the sun, which shifted from the end of July to today's early January.

"Our simulations suggest that Saharan desertification, the largest change in land cover during the last 6,000 years, was a natural phenomenon as it can be de-

scribed in terms of climate-system dynamics only," the researchers wrote....

This struck my attention especially because I recall discussions, many years ago, concerning a tilting of the earth's axis at the time of the flood. The discussions included the changing climatic conditions which would result. Now this study points to two episodes within the past 6,000 or 7,000 years which would do exactly that. One episode is close to the time of man's fall as presented in Scripture. The other could be close to the time of the flood. Could there be some connection between the computer conclusions and the testimony of the fall and flood in Scripture?

## ■ Government and Cultural Ills

Cal Thomas, writer of editorial comments in various newspapers, and often quoted by the current writer, presents again some valuable commentary concerning government and its "power" to cure the ills of society. In the *Denver Post*, August 19, 1999, he makes some remarkable and true claims:

The common theme heard in remarks by the Republican presidential candidates in Iowa last Saturday was how broken America has become. Not broken in the theological sense that can lead to confession and repentance, but, depending on the candidate, a brokenness reflected in school shootings, or abortion, or incivility, or even bad TV and movies.

What none of the candidates acknowledged was that government, even if it might be headed by one of them, mostly lacks the power to substantially right those wrongs. For conservatives to suggest that it does aligns them with the misplaced faith of liberals.

The powerlessness of politics to reach into the heart was trumpeted by news that former House Speaker Newt Gingrich is divorcing his second wife. Reports say he has been having an affair with a congressional aide young enough to be his daughter.

Gingrich and other members of Congress won a Republican majority in 1994 by touting "family values." How can people who want credit for honoring the Contract With America be taken seriously when they violate a contract with their wives? If they won't impose "family values" on themselves, why should the rest of the nation accept them trickling down from Washington?

Conservatives, especially those whose views are shaped in part or in whole by religious notions, are placing too much faith in the state for deliverance. Politicians are happy to have their votes and will make religious-sounding grunts in attempts to win them. This is why it should give pause when Gov. George W. Bush tells a journalist he has "accepted Jesus" and then uses language normally associated with the unredeemed.

... According to a recent survey published in the *Los Angeles Times*, many people lack some important basics, even while they lament the absence of such things in the politicians who have failed to meet their expectations. While more than 90 percent of households keep at least three copies of the Bible, which even politicians are now quoting (and often misquoting), two-thirds of them do not regularly read it. More than half cannot even name five of the Ten Commandments or know the names of the four Gospels, yet most of them want the commandments hanging on public school walls. /Perhaps they should first hang them at home.

How can a sick and biblically illiterate society be healed if those who profess to have the answer similarly suffer from illiteracy?

---

*Rev. VanBaren is minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

Real power is tossed aside, or paid lip service, in favor of political power, which is not power but illusion. Like illicit sex, faith in politics can only make one feel good for the moment.

Thomas then points to that which he considers proper emphasis:

True power remains with individuals. Ultimately we have the power to shape and even change lives. It is unleashed when families with young children control access to or eliminate television in their homes; when those children are educated at home or in private schools where their family's beliefs are upheld, not in state schools where the values of the state are taught; when people stay married in good times and in bad; when quality time with children is quality time; when people are valued more than things; and when parents, not children rule....

Thomas is correct. There are, of course, a number of other things which ought to be mentioned. Government can not compel change—and certainly not when those who govern themselves willfully violate the laws of God and even the laws of the land. True change must begin in the heart and under the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. True change follows from the call of the gospel in the preaching of the Word. But, as Thomas points out, few even know what the Bible teaches. He calls this a "sick and biblically illiterate society." And sadly, government, which deplores the moral evils which abounds, increasing through law and court decree, seeks to reduce the presence of true religion in society. Truly society has become ripe for the coming of the Antichrist.

## ■ Warning about Excessive TV Viewing

The *Christian News*, August 9, 1999, quotes an interesting ar-

ticle from the *Washington Times*, June 29, 1999, about some of the dangers of television viewing for children. Often we are reminded of the moral corruption which is presented—and children often watch. It seems, however, that even within the circles of unbelievers there is growing recognition of the dangers.

Nearly half of all children age two to 17 have a television set in their bedroom, and they now spend more than three hours a day in front of the tube—both all-time highs, according to new studies released yesterday.

As a result, more children age 10 to 17 recognize the Budweiser frogs and lizards than know the name of the vice-president of the United States. Even Dennis Rodman, professional basket-ball's bad boy, and the Simpsons fared better than Al Gore.

The studies, conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, also found that children spend more than four hours a day watching TV, playing video games or tooling around on a home computer.

"Although television is still dominant, with the introduction of new media, young people are now spending an average of 4 ½ hours every day in front of a screen of some kind," said Jeffrey D. Stranger, Washington director of the policy center.

The studies included even more disturbing findings. Twenty-eight percent of children's shows contain four or more acts of violence, and three-fourths of those do not carry appropriate parental warning.

The same *Christian News* contains another quote taken from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 4, 1999:

Children under 2 years old should not watch television, older children should not have television sets in their bedrooms, and pediatricians should have parents fill out a "media history," along

with a medical history, on office visits, according to recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Saying that television viewing can affect the mental, social and physical health of young people, the academy for the first time has laid out a plan for how pediatricians and parents can deal with television....

These are conclusions by those who claim no religious ties. If such recognize dangers in TV, what ought to be the attitude of the Christian? And how would your home compare with the statistics given in the quotes? □

### Isn't It Wonderful

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
how the creeping grasses grow,  
High on the mountain's rocky brink,  
in the valley down below?  
A common thing is a grass-blade  
small,  
crushed by the feet that pass;  
But all the dwarfs and giants tall,  
working till doomsday's shadows  
fall,  
Can't make a blade of grass.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
how the wild bird sings his song,  
Weaving melodies, link by link,  
the whole sweet summer long?  
Commonplace is the bird, always,  
everywhere seen and heard;  
But all the engines of earth, I say,  
working on till Judgment Day,  
Never could make a bird.

Isn't it wonderful, when you think,  
how a little seed asleep,  
Out of the earth new life will drink,  
and carefully upward creep?  
A seed, we say, is a simple thing,  
The germ of a flower or weed;  
But all earth's laborers laboring,  
with all the help that wealth could  
bring,  
Never could make a seed.

J.S. Cuyler

*Standard Bearer*,  
Vol. I, No. 1 (October 1924)

# The Resurrected Christ

**H**aving considered Christ's names and work, we are left to consider His exaltation. He who perfectly satisfied God's justice was then exalted to the highest place of glory.

The exaltation of Christ is revealed to us as having taken place in steps. The first step was His resurrection from the dead; the second, His ascension into heaven; the third, His sitting at God's right hand; and that which is yet to be seen, His final coming again in judgment, when He will also take His people to Himself in the perfection of God's tabernacle.

The truth of our Lord's resurrection from the dead is the heart of the gospel of our salvation. For us who are in Christ Jesus, His resurrection means *righteousness*. His resurrection means *life everlasting*. His resurrection means a *living hope*. It is good news!

But before we consider the benefits of Christ's resurrection, we ought at least review the *fact* of that wonderful event.

## The Fact

Jesus' resurrection from the dead was a resurrection unlike any previous resurrection. There were a few instances, you remember, where those who had died were raised from the dead as demonstrations of the wonder work of God's grace and power. But Christ's resurrection was unique.

That Jesus arose from the dead

on the third day is well testified by many infallible proofs.

In the first place, although no man could see the actual event of the resurrection, many were witnesses of the wonder of that resurrection. They were witnesses of such things that proved to them that the Lord had risen indeed, and had conquered death and the grave.

That He arose on the third day according to the prophecy of the Scriptures was confirmed by many who were not at all expecting such a wonder. And the evidence was concrete and infallible. That was according to God's purpose. We must be *assured* of the truth of the resurrection. As we read in I Corinthians 15:17, "if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." So we must *know*.

That knowledge is applied to our hearts by the Spirit through the testimony of the apostles, as they proclaimed what they had seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead!

The evidence proved it already at the sepulcher. The empty grave, and more especially the empty linen clothes in the tomb, served as a strong testimony of Christ's resurrection. More emphatically is that the case when you realize that those linen clothes in the open tomb (John 20) lay there just as they had been wrapped around the body of Jesus. If not for the fact that the head napkin lay apart from the linen clothes, one could not even know that the linens were empty of Jesus' body! But the disciples, Peter and John, as well as the women, saw that evidence.

In addition, the fact of the res-

urrection was testified to by the angels whom God sent to the grave as the first preachers of the resurrection gospel. They proclaimed, "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6).

Still more, that historic event is also established as a fact by the several appearances of the Lord to His own, appearances which number at least ten, and that to several hundred of God's people (see I Cor. 15:4-8).

## The Wonder

But the testimony concerning Jesus' resurrection is a demonstration not only of the fact, but also of the wonder. That is also necessary for our faith. It is necessary in order that we might understand why the resurrection of Christ proclaimed a righteousness and life and hope that had never been seen before. His people before had enjoyed such benefits only by way of promise. We have that which has become the reality of the Christian life!

It is true that God's people had always believed in the resurrection of the dead. Job, one of the earliest Old Testament patriarchs, testified of that in Job 19:25,26, when he said, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." He had faith in the promise. And the wonder of the resurrection was even pointed toward by many miracles, as recorded in the Bible.

But it is necessary that we understand that the resurrection of

*Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin.*



Jesus was entirely different from any other. It was a wonder that was unique.

That is also attested to by the linen clothes in the sepulcher. You will recall that when Jesus performed the miracle of raising His friend Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus came forth "bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44). Jesus' resurrection was entirely different. He arose a spiritual body, not bound by the linens, not bound by the tomb, not bound by anything earthly.

That wonder of the resurrection was also manifested by the same appearances of Christ which testified to the fact of the resurrection. They also testified to the wonder. Because the appearances themselves belonged to the wonder. Now in one form, then in another, the Lord appeared. Always the same Lord, always the same person. But He appeared in different forms, so that the disciples wondered whether it was really He who was with them — wondered, that is, until He spoke and identified Himself as their risen Lord.

This means that Jesus did not merely come back. That is not the meaning of the resurrection. But He went on. He who entered the grave in His corruptible body arose in incorruption, so that corruption could never again touch Him. He went into the grave in His body of weakness. But He arose in power, never again to die. He arose in power that could never be touched by death again. He who entered that grave in dishonor because of His body in the likeness of our sinful flesh, arose in glory, radiating the glory of God.

All that belongs to the wonder of the resurrection. And all is clearly confirmed by the infallible proofs and testimony revealed in Holy Scripture. Christ is risen from the dead!

### The Benefits

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the pronouncement of victory for us!

The resurrection gospel proclaims to us that Christ overcame the power of death! He did so for us! You and I could never do that. For us there was no way out. Apart from His death, you and I would have had to bear the infinite wrath of God into all eternity. But Christ bore that curse for us. His resurrection from the dead proclaims that He has overcome death, and made us partakers of His righteousness. What a tremendous treasure is that righteousness! All the more so, because we had none. By raising His Son from the dead, God gave His attesting and visible seal that Jesus was what He had declared Himself to be, the eternal Son of God, and that He had accomplished the work which the Father had given Him to do. He had fulfilled all righteousness. As we read in Romans 4:25, He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for (i.e., *because of*) our justification." Christ's resurrection is, as it were, the *receipt* that God has given us and His whole church — "Paid in full!"

But Christ also arose to make us partakers of that righteousness. His resurrection is also the power of our new life.

From beyond the power of death and the bondage of sin, Christ now stands and proclaims the gospel. Even through weak and sinful men, those preachers of His choosing, Christ speaks. That, after all, is the proclamation of the gospel. Christ calls powerfully and efficaciously. He calls unto *life*. We preach the resurrection gospel. We do so eagerly, fervently, with the words of the apostle Paul upon our lips: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

By His gospel He raises His people from their spiritual death and embraces them with His life!

How amazing is the description that Scripture gives this wonder work of God's grace! The inspired apostle put it this way in Ephesians 2:4-6: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

When Jesus was raised by God from the dead, all the elect were raised with Him. From Adam to that last elect to be born just before Christ comes again, *all* of them have been taken to heaven in Christ. We can't even comprehend the significance of that truth. But that is the gospel, good news! We who are in Christ Jesus by a true and living faith, we in whose hearts Christ has shed abroad His love by His Spirit who lives in us — we have the *resurrection life*, the life of Christ.

That certainly means that we have a life that is free from the bondage of sin.

We have a new life, a *new man*, as Scripture speaks of it. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

No, this doesn't mean that we are without sin. We know from bitter experience that we have a daily battle with our sinful nature, our "old man." But what this means is that when we are freed from sin's bondage unto that new life in Christ, that new life manifests itself in our mortal flesh and in this old world of corruption by crying out daily, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Is that your cry? Do you long for spiritual growth, and for grace to flee from sin and to walk in godliness? If so, that is the resurrection life of Christ in you. Yours is the power of the new life.

And that life can never die.

For the resurrection of our Savior is also the promise and surety

of our own blessed resurrection.

Jesus spoke of this very truth, as recorded in John 11:25,26, when He said to Lazarus' sister Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in

me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

So also the apostle wrote in I Thessalonians 4:14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

We who are in Christ have a

glorious life, a life of righteousness, a life that cannot be touched by the power of death anymore. We have that life that reaches toward heaven, and that final resurrection that can never fail.

That is the gospel, the resurrection gospel. □

Contending for the Faith

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

## The Covenant as Law

*And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

Romans 11:6

As we have seen, Dr. Klaas Schilder considered the covenant to be a legal or forensic relationship between God and all the baptized children of believers. Emphasis was placed by him on the promises of the covenant, but never apart from its demands and its threats. If anyone fails to meet these demands, he must always be warned, he thereby becomes a covenant-breaker, and his right to the promises which once he had is lost. In the end, the covenant was to Schilder a very special, forensic statement of law which comes to all those who through baptism enter the covenant of grace. God is their God, and at baptism He speaks His promises to every child individually and personally, but also conditionally, with

the requirement that the covenantal conditions be met.

As we have noted in the past, there is an element of truth to all of this. Those who are baptized are certainly set before the promises of God in many different ways: by the sign which they received at baptism and through which they were given a place within the body of the true church of God, with the result that they are "instructed and brought up under the aforesaid doctrines" (as their parents vow they shall be), participate in the worship of the people of God when they gather in the church, and grow up with a distinct knowledge of Christian life in response to the teachings of God's law and the duties they will ever be responsible to keep. These are important and most precious privileges, which those who are born and raised in a sinful world apart from the covenant of God never know. The possession of them lays a particular responsibility upon those who have them, and for it they will be required to give answer in the final day.

But our question remains, is this the essence of the covenant of grace, or is there something more than that?

-----

To answer our question there

is of course but one place to go, God's Word as found in the Bible, there to gather those principles upon which God's covenant is built. There are a number of very pertinent passages which speak to that which we want to know.

Of these, possibly the most basic is Romans 4:9-11, "For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." Here Paul speaks directly to our problem, for he is dealing with the institution of the sacrament of circumcision, the Old Testament sign and seal of the covenant of grace — now replaced by the New Testament equivalent, baptism (Col. 2:11,12). According to Paul, that which this sign sealed was "the righteousness of the faith," and he adds, significantly, "which he had yet being uncircumcised." What Paul clearly intends to point out is that this sign of circumcision was not the means by which Abraham

*Rev. Woudenberg is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

came to righteousness, but rather it was given as a seal upon the righteousness that Abraham through faith had already come to possess. And that was with a purpose. By giving it in that order, Paul underscores the truth that Abraham's righteousness had not come by means of any outward work wrought by man, but through faith alone. And accordingly it also follows that such righteousness, along with all the covenant blessings that follow from it, is not confined to those who have received this sign as physical descendants of Abraham, but is rightfully given to all who follow in that same faith, whether they have received that sign or not. To receive the sign, with all of the special privileges it brings, is a great blessing, but only when it is received with the same faith possessed by Abraham, who is therefore called the father of all true covenant seed.

As it was, of course, already by the time that this happened Abraham had been promised a seed, which in the first place was realized in the birth of Isaac — a miracle child born out of due time to Abraham's covenant wife, Sarah. But Isaac was only a visible type, a picture of the true seed to come, Jesus Christ, who in His day would say, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). In some amazing way, Abraham was able through those vague Old Testament types and shadows to discern the essential elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to the point that through that faith he was joined to that Christ, and received His righteousness to himself. So it has been for everyone since who has shared the same faith he had, with the result that they are accounted by God to be Abraham's spiritual children, whether physical descendants or not (Gal. 3:29).

With that in mind, then, we can move on to understand the original passage on which this was built, "And I will establish my cov-

enant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.... Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised" (Gen. 17:7-10). Here we have the actual institution of the sacrament of circumcision to which Paul was referring, and what it tells us about the covenant of grace, in connection with what we have just seen Paul to have said. Circumcision was, of course, a sign that was to be placed on the organ of procreation of every male member of Abraham's house — whether born from his flesh or brought into his household by some other way — as a sign of the covenant of grace, or, as Paul points out, of the righteousness of faith, the two in Scripture being identified as essentially one.

Moreover, when we go back a few verses, we find what this identity meant. There we read of God's promise to establish a *covenant* with Abraham and with his seed after him. What we have is one of the earliest uses of the word *covenant* in the Bible — it having been used prior to this only in regard to Noah — and from this we learn most distinctly what is the essence of this covenant established with man by God. The text explains it to mean, "to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." It is a profound and beautiful expression by which God indicates what His covenant is about, and this in turn is used in the rest of Scripture over and over again. We find it, for example, already when Jehovah meets Jacob at Bethel, "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of

Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed" (Gen. 28:12,13). God introduces Himself as the God of Abraham, and of Jacob's father Isaac, even as He would be of Jacob as well. It was in much the same way that Jehovah instructed Moses at the burning bush to introduce Himself to Israel; "... I AM THAT I AM: ... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.... The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Ex. 3:14,15). And to this Moses returned when instructing Israel in the law: "I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you.... And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:9-12). What was indicated in each of these cases was that closest of spiritual bonds, which is known by all who share in the same righteousness that Abraham possessed through faith.

When we come into the New Testament, while finding the same expression, we see that it takes on a much more precise significance, as in Hebrews 8:10: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." These words were first spoken to Israel amid the shadows of the Old Testament age, but now in New Testament light they can be applied to "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23). To be in the covenant of God is explained as having the



law of God, not imposed from without, but written within the mind and heart. In New Testament light, that which was spoken to Abraham, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people," takes on a new dimension of thought. To have God as one's God is to have His Word, His revelation, and His truth implanted within the depths of one's heart. It is the realization of that righteousness which by faith Abraham knew.

And it was of this, accordingly, that the sacrament of circumcision was given to be a sign. As the word circumcision indicates, it consisted of a circular cut or incision upon the male organ of procreation by means of a very bloody operation. This then left a circular scar, made by blood, through which the seed of conception would have to pass for every child born in Israel — a reminder that the righteousness of faith to which this sacrament pointed could be obtained only through the shedding of blood. This, in Israel, no child was allowed to forget, for the sacrament that separated them as a nation always pointed to that. Abraham had seen that in his Old Testament way, and had come thereby to the joy of true righteousness; and every believing child in Israel saw it in his way as well, as do all who have followed in that faith ever since. In Israel it was by the sacramental sign of a circular cutting which joined them to the nation, even as today it is by the cleansing

water of baptism through which every member of the Christian church must pass. But, in every instance, what it points to is the fact that righteousness is only by faith.

There is more. If we move on to the epistle of James, we find the same reference to Abraham picked up, but described with yet a different term: "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God" (James 2:23). James develops the idea of righteousness in terms of friendship. Few things speak more vividly to us than that, for friendship is often what we desire in life almost more than anything else. We all, it seems, have a deep underlying desire to have true and lasting friends. But what is a friend?

Often what we call a friend is simply someone with whom we interact socially; but there are few who have not been betrayed by one they thought was a friend (Ps. 41:9). That of which true friendship consists is perhaps best described by Jesus to His disciples just before His death: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15, 16). Here Jesus

describes friendship in contrast to the relationship between a master and his servant. In such instances there is on the master's part no interest in explaining to his servant or slave why he is telling him to do what he does. He simply tells him what he wants done, and expects that servant to do it whether or not he understands the master's reasons or is in agreement with what he requires. But not so, says Jesus, with a friend. With a friend one explains the inmost thoughts and desires of the heart, so that the friend may with understanding respond to this in love. And so, says Jesus, does He do with those who belong to Him. He reveals to them the full purpose of the Father, as He has received it from Him, so that we may respond to His desire with a service of gratitude and love. It is essentially different from what we noted in Hebrews. In the new covenant the law is not imposed upon us from without as it was in the old external covenant with Israel, but the law is written in the heart and becomes the motive of a willing response of love.

-----

So we are left with the question: what is the essence of the covenant of grace? Is it simply to be exposed to the word of promise, and to bear the responsibility of meeting it; or is it through faith to have entered that righteousness which Abraham knew, thus to dwell with God as our Friend, hearing Him speak and responding in love to what we hear? □

## Book Reviews

*In the Company of Angels: What the Bible Teaches What You Need to Know*, by Andrew J. Bandstra. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1995. 133 pp., no price given (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. Robert D. Decker.]

**I**n general this book by Andrew Bandstra, Professor of New Testament Emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary, contains many helpful insights into the subject of Angels. The points made are tightly argued and based on careful exegesis of Scripture. This is a very welcome contrast to the speculation one finds in so much

of what's written on the angels.

Upon reading this little book one will be impressed not by how little about the angels there is in Scripture, but by how much. One will also, as was the reviewer, be chagrined by how little thought he/she gives to the role God assigns to the angels in His work of saving His church in Jesus Christ.

The book is written in a very readable and popular style, consistent with the author's impish sense of humor (the reviewer took two courses with Dr. Bandstra at Calvin College). An example of this can be found on page 23, where Bandstra writes, "'We confess that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present.' By way of contrast, angels are created beings and therefore not all-knowing or all-powerful or everywhere present. But the Bible doesn't directly speak about these limitations, so we had best be careful here lest Barth and Calvin clobber us for idle speculation about the 'nature' of angels."

In this same connection one wishes Bandstra had written more forthrightly and with authority based on the biblical givens. There is overuse of the words "seem" and "may" and "probably" and the like.

Now to some specifics. The first chapter is introductory in nature. Here Bandstra tells us that he wrote the book because he wanted to examine what the Bible teaches us concerning the angels. In chapter two Bandstra shows how Scripture describes the nature of angels in the context of what they do. Angels are spiritual be-

ings, created beings, and, therefore, limited beings. Further, they are holy beings and individualistic beings. By this latter designation Bandstra means that, according to Scripture, angels are not organically related, as are humans, who are all descendants of Adam (Acts 17:26, Romans 12:12-21). In chapter three the author discusses the biblical names given: angels, sons of God, spirits. In this chapter, Bandstra also discusses the special groups of angels: the cherubim, seraphim, and archangels.

In chapters 4-10 Bandstra deals with the role or function of the angels. Bandstra shows from Scripture that angels are "messengers of God, those who praise God, guardians of believers, those who encourage obedience, and ministers of justice." In this section Bandstra contends that the Old Testament "Angel of the Lord" is not some kind of "temporary pre-Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity," but only one of several ways in which Christ was present in the Old Testament (cf. pp. 48-50). Bandstra presents a compelling argument in chapter 6 for the truth that "God provides *his* care for us *through* angels" (p. 64). There's a fascinating discussion of the third

petition of the Lord's Prayer, especially the phrase, "as it is in heaven," in chapter 7 (pp. 71ff.). The author calls attention to various passages of Scripture where God uses angels to execute his righteous judgments both positively and negatively (chapter 8). Bandstra continues this theme in chapter 9 but concentrates on the role of angels in God's giving of His law. Bandstra presents an interesting discussion of "some disputed issues about angels" in chapter 10. This reviewer found himself in disagreement with Bandstra's interpretation of "the angels of the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20) and his interpretation of the twenty-four elders described in Revelation 4 and 5. The former, Bandstra contends are literally angels who watch over the church and not the ministers of the churches, and the latter in Bandstra's view are a special class of angels and not representatives of the church universal, both Jew and Gentile.

Bandstra concludes this good little book by affirming the existence of angels and with a discussion of "the benefit of believing in angels." Angels, Bandstra says, "help us to think more theistically about God." □

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Congregational Activities

Progress continues to be made on the sanctuary of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Construction has now gotten to the point that the building committee is asking for volunteer help from the congregation. It appears that there are now many opportunities for Georgetown's members to help with some free time spent on

48<sup>th</sup> Ave., cleaning, sweeping, scraping, vacuuming, or dusting on the inside, as well as helping with landscaping and underground sprinkling on the outside. As many of our readers know from personal experience, this is a great way to contribute and to have good fellowship. After all, many hands make light work.

The consistory of the Edgerton, MN PRC called a special congregational meeting for mid-August, to approve the purchase of a new piano for their sanctuary. That proposal passed.

### Denominational Activities

The Hope Heralds, an all male chorus which draws its membership from many of our west Michigan churches, presented a concert of sacred music on August 29 at the Grandville, MI PRC.

All past and present officebearers in our churches were invited to an Officebearers Conference on August 31 at the South Holland, IL PRC, the site of the meeting of Classis West the following day. The general theme of the conference was "Fully Equipped for the Work: A Conference for Elders and Deacons."

---

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



Over 500 PR young people and chaperons gathered together in Redlands, CA the week of August 16-20 for the annual Young People's Convention. This year's convention looked at the theme, "Ready To Give An Answer." Young people coming back home to west Michigan report that it was a week for a blessed time of spiritual refreshment, fellowship, and fun in southern California. We thank God for His evident blessings among the young people of our churches, and we thank the congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA for serving as such gracious hosts. We appreciate all their efforts toward our young people and young adults. Full reports of this year's convention should follow in one of the future issues of the *Beacon Lights*.

#### **Mission Activities**

**M**issionary Rev. J. Mahtani was back in West Michigan in late August to make his quarterly visit to the council of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. Besides reporting to Southwest's council, Rev. Mahtani was able to preach for the congregation on August 29 and give an update on the mission work in Pittsburgh following the evening service.

Rev. R. Moore, our churches' missionary to Ghana, West Africa, reported that their work with the government is progressing nicely. They recently received a letter recognizing them as a legitimate religious organization. They are also registered with the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Ministry as a legitimate employer in Ghana. They recently received information that their application for visa extension has

cleared. This means that they now have a six-month extension, rather than having to take the time to renew their visa every 30 or 60 days.

The Evangelism Committee of the South Holland, IL PRC recently received a letter from the Philippines. "You have mentioned a while ago that there would be some of your staff who will be visiting our country. I am happy to tell you that I have been given a chance to meet them. Although I had to travel for almost 8 hours in a bus just to meet them, it was worthwhile. I personally met Rev. Jason Kortering and Rev. Daniel Kleyn, with their wives, at Lava Camarines Norte, Bicol."

Rev. Kleyn and Rev. R. Miersma plan to visit the contacts in the Philippines October 5 - 19.

#### **Minister Activities**

**R**ev. James and Mrs. Margaret Laning were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Olivia Joy, on August 17.

After nearly 43 years of active ministry, Rev. G. VanBaren preached his farewell sermon to the congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC on August 29. Plans called for him and his wife to move later that week to Hudsonville, MI, where he will continue to serve our churches as an emeritus minister. We give thanks to God for His provision of faithful servants to do His will in the church of Christ.

#### *Food For Thought*

"No one ever graduates from Bible study until he meets the Author face to face."

— Everett T. Harris □

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **WEDDING ANNIVERSARY**

On September 4, 1999, our parents,  
**GEORGE and JAYNE BODBYL,**

celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We, their children, would like to thank them for their years of Christian love, guidance, and godly instruction they have given us. We are thankful for Christian parents who have fulfilled their covenant vows in raising us with His Word and by their faithful example. We pray that God will continue to bless them and keep them in His care. "... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15b).

- ❖ George and Michelle Bodbyl
  - ❖ Marcella, Monica, and Emily Bodbyl
- Hudsonville, Michigan

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The consistory and congregation of the Randolph PRC extends Christian sympathy to Henry and Barbara DeVries and family in the death of her father,

#### **CORNELIUS AALSMA.**

May the grieving family be comforted in the words of Psalm 34:22: "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants and none

of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

Rev. S. Key, Pres.  
Gary C. Buteyn, Clerk

#### **LECTURE/PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

Sponsored by Faith and Grace PRC  
Evangelism Committees

**October 28, 29**  
at Faith PRC

October 28: 8:00 P.M.

**Rev. Mitchell Dick**

"Reformation and Evangelism"

October 29: follow-up panel discussions  
7:30 P.M.

"Pamphleteering and the Circular File"

**Rev. James Slopsema**, leader

8:30 P.M.

"From the Weather to the Water of Life"

**Rev. Ron VanOverloop**, leader

Refreshments and fellowship will be each evening.