

THE *January 1, 2001* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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A Faith Venture

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Hebrews 11:8

The call came to Abraham when he was still in Ur of the Chaldees, in the land of Mesopotamia. The Lord of glory appeared to him and required of him that he leave his home to go to a land that God would show him.

This call meant for Abraham this: Forsake all thy former attachments and come to Me, thy God, in a land that I have set aside as an inheritance for thee and for thy future generations.

It was father Terah who, as head of the family, assumed the responsibility for the journey and led along the way his entire family, consisting of Abraham and Sarah, Nahor and his wife, and his nephew Lot.

This was an act of faith far greater than appears at first glance. There were the six main individuals, but there were also herds of cattle and flocks of sheep to be taken with them. It appears from later history that Abraham had his herd of cattle and flock of sheep, while Lot had his own, and likely Nahor did also. This required a large number of servants, both men and women. When we consider that when Abraham was in Canaan he had 318 trained men, born in his house, who accompanied him to war against the kings that had taken Lot and all his goods captive, besides those who remained at home to care for the household, we realize that they must already have had hundreds of servants.

The obvious route for this nomad group to take ran north-westward along the fertile banks of the Euphrates River, which offered food for a few hundred men and women and grazing for the cattle and the sheep. It was a long, strenuous, and wearisome journey of 650 miles from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran. Such a large company with herds of cattle and

flocks of sheep could travel no more than a few miles each day, since the animals had to be cared for and driven, camp had to be set up each night, and meals had to be prepared for the family and for all the servants. They may even have stopped along the way to raise grain for their food and for fodder.

Therefore, after finally reaching the place that they called Haran, they settled down for a time. It is possible that here Abraham awaited further instructions from the Lord. In any case, it was here that Terah died. Abraham is said to be 75 years old. And God confirms His promise that He will give Abraham an inheritance, make of him a great nation, and make his name great upon the earth. But no mention is made of a son, a direct heir. He and Sarah are still childless.

Now Abraham is told to leave Haran and, possibly more specifically than before, to leave his kindred and his father's house to go to the land of his inheritance. Only Lot accompanies him and Sarah, along with "the substance they had gathered and the souls that they had gotten in Haran" (Gen. 12:5).

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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.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

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

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

Website for RPPA: www.rppa.org

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This involved another long, arduous journey which, according to estimates, must have been about 400 miles. Abraham comes to Shechem, where the Lord assures him that he has arrived in the promised land, the land of his inheritance! In a sense, and only in a sense, his pilgrimage is ended! But his faith venture is not!

Without going into detail concerning the various experiences of the patriarch as he traveled through his inheritance, we see, first, that his inheritance is already occupied. There are no large cities, but throughout the land are numerous settlements, even small kingdoms with their kings. The question must have risen in Abraham's mind, how his descendants could inherit a land that already is occupied by so many inhabitants.

Second, there is a famine in the land of promise. At this time it certainly is not a land flowing with milk and honey. In fact, it actually never was, except for short periods of time when God miraculously caused the land to produce abundantly. Abraham is commanded of God to travel back and forth throughout the land, but is also forced to do so because of lack of pasture for his cattle. Upon his return to Bethel, after having traveled through the south and into Egypt, Abraham and Lot are forced to separate because of the lack of pasture land for their cattle and their sheep.

Here Abraham is assured of his inheritance, but also promised a son and a seed as the dust of the earth. This promise was reaffirmed from time to time. But Abraham still had no direct heir.

Faithful to his calling to be a stranger in the land of promise, Abraham does not ally himself at any time with the inhabitants of the land. He does not even strike up a friendship with Abimelech or Melchisedec, who also knew and served God. He does set up an altar wherever he settles for a time.

And there he calls upon the name of the Lord his God. There he worships with Sarah and his servants. God has made Abraham exceedingly rich, even as a stranger on the earth. God also repeatedly assures His servant that all this land, as far as his eye can see as he looks in every direction, is his. And he will be a "father of many nations."

Only when Abraham is a hundred years old and Sarah is ninety, both of them dead as to being able to produce an offspring, God finally gives them the wonder-child Isaac.

Even as Abraham's life was a venture of faith, so also are the lives of Isaac and Jacob. In fact, Isaac refuses to fight for the wells of water which his servants have dug to supply water for his household and his cattle, and which are stolen by the people of the land. If we consider how difficult it must have been in those days to dig down into the bowels of the earth without our modern equipment, we can only marvel that Isaac is willing to move from place to place, each time digging a new well until the Lord gives him rest. This would almost seem cowardly on the part of Abraham's son, yet we must bear in mind that he was "heir of the same promise," and he must have been well aware of it. Of him it is certainly true that the meek shall inherit the earth.

Jacob spends twenty years outside of Canaan, only to return and to experience that his sons marry daughters of the land, bringing pagan women into his camp. The Lord saves the covenant family by bringing them into Egypt, where Jacob dies, and where Joseph's coffin stands as a silent testimony that God in covenant faithfulness will fulfill His promises to His servants as heirs of the land of promise.

They lived and died, not able to set their foot upon a spot of ground that they could call their own.

These all died as pilgrims and strangers on the earth, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.

They held the unique position of being the friend-servants of God among the people and nations of the earth. In the office of believers they were prophets, priests, and kings under God. True, they did not have the inspired Scriptures as we do, but they did have the tradition handed down from their fathers, which from time to time was enriched by direct revelation or by the Angel of Jehovah and sealed to their hearts by His indwelling Spirit. They gathered their large households about them and as prophets instructed them in the fear of Jehovah. As priests they gathered them all about the altar to worship God in true humility and trust. As shepherd-kings they ruled over their divinely entrusted kingdom.

They knew that the land which was promised to them as an inheritance would not be theirs, but was intended for their future generations. They died in faith, seeing with an eye of faith God's covenant promises realized only in their future generations.

In fact, they saw the day of the coming of the Christ. Even as they laid their bloody sacrifices upon the altar and bowed in worship before them they were reminded by the stench of burning flesh of their sin and misery. But they also saw in the bloody sacrifice the promise of the Savior, whereby God would make atonement for their sins. They saw the sufferings of Christ and the glory that would follow, not only for them, but for the church of all ages that was in their loins. They saw a multitude of believers like the stars of the heavens to be born in their generations. Therefore they could worship in thankfulness, depending on the God of their salvation to strengthen them in their often faltering faith even until their journey was complete.



In all their pilgrimage they experienced their spiritual separation from the world and their covenant fellowship with the only true and living God. By their lives they showed that they looked beyond their earthly inheritance in the land of Canaan, even beyond the coming of the Savior to the day when all God's rich promises are realized in heavenly perfection and in a glorious kingdom in which God will be their all in all.

They sought a city. Not merely a land, a country, but a city! God had included in His repeated promises an intimate covenant life of fellowship with their Shepherd-King and their fellow believers. There in the assembly of the saints they would rejoice in and glorify the God of their salvation even into all eternity. There they would find their inheritance, their rest, their home. That city God was preparing for them and for us in the heavens.




Are you and I pilgrims and strangers on the earth, even as they were? In principle, yes, for God has begun a good work of grace in our hearts. We do experience a small beginning of the new obedience to God and His promises. We are spiritually different from the world round about us. We speak a different language, have different goals and ambitions, live a different life. We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come. We are poor, yet rich; possessing, yet as stewards not possessing; living one day at a time, but absolutely certain of the future. In one word, our hope, our treasure, is in heaven. We have an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, that fadeth not away, kept in store for us in the heavens.

Yet we have but a small begin-

ning of the new obedience. Our flesh still clings to the things of this world. The luxuries round about us attract and weigh us down on our pilgrimage. We are often so complacent in our present situation that we hardly yearn for the eternal city in the heavens. We must be torn up by the roots before we are ready to live in eager expectation and longing for our heavenly home.

We are a separate people, a royal priesthood, called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, to trust in Him, to wait upon Him as watchers wait for the morning. At journey's end is our eternal home. Home at last!

With the church of all ages we sing:

I am a stranger here,
Dependent on Thy grace,
A pilgrim as my fathers were
With no abiding place. 

Editorial

"Behold, He Cometh!"

With the words, "Behold, He cometh," the last book of the Bible begins and ends.

Since these words fix the hope of the church in these last days, and since the church is especially mindful of her one hope at the beginning of the new year, they are fitting for a January 1 editorial.

These words are also the title of Herman Hoeksema's 726-page commentary on the book of Revelation. The work appeared first as articles in the *Standard Bearer*, beginning with the issue of May 15, 1956. The Reformed Free Publishing Association published the commentary in book form in 1969. It

has been reprinted several times. For some time the book has been out-of-print. Our readers are hereby informed that the Reformed Free Publishing Association has again reprinted the book. It is now available with a new, attractive cover. More importantly, the new edition contains both a subject and a textual index. The extensive index of subjects includes all of the symbolical numbers that occur in the book of Revelation and that are treated in the commentary. Some who have one of the earlier editions will want this new edition because of these helpful indices.

It is puzzling that the book is not more widely known and loudly

heralded. *Behold, He Cometh* is one of only very few commentaries on Revelation in English by a Reformed theologian. It is thorough. It is written in a clear style, so that every believer can understand the explanation. The exposition and application of the revelation of the last things are moving. The book reflects Hoeksema's careful study of Revelation over many years. He preached through the book twice during his long ministry in First Church, Grand Rapids. He taught it to adult catechism classes. The book is full of the theological insights of the gifted Reformed theologian. There are brilliant analyses of the development of history

and of contemporary events. It may well be Hoeksema's finest work. I regard it as the commentary on Revelation that Calvin never wrote.

The form is not verse-by-verse exposition. Hoeksema explains whole sections. This still allows him to comment on particular verses, as well as to interpret difficult or important words and phrases. The method of exposition that Hoeksema uses in the book has its advantages. It brings out the Word of God in a passage. It indicates the relations within a passage. And it permits the writer to teach and apply the passage in a spiritual and practical manner.

Hoeksema finds the eschatology in the book of Revelation to be amillennial. The commentary is a presentation, defense, and development of the historic, confessional, Reformed amillennial doctrine of the last things. At the same time, Hoeksema exposes the two main errors in eschatology, premillennialism and postmillennialism. He does not merely condemn these false teachings. He demonstrates their falsehood both from the passage under consideration and from the testimony of other, related passages of Scripture.

It is one of the outstanding virtues of the book that it is the Reformed amillennial interpretation of the book of Revelation. There are bookshelves of premillennial commentaries. Increasingly, postmillennial writers are issuing commentaries that explain the entire book, with the exception of chapter 20, as having been fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem or in the collapse of the Roman empire in the distant past (preterism). These millennial commentaries, whether premillennial or preterist postmillennial, are false and, therefore, virtually worthless. They are worse than worthless. They deceive professing Christians regarding the "revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which

must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1). They deceive professing Christians particularly regarding the persecution of the true church by Antichrist. Both premillennialism and postmillennialism agree that the church does not suffer the great tribulation. Therein lies their appeal. But this is deception.

The deception is deserved by those who are deceived. More than any other book of the Bible, Revelation warns the church of coming conflict with the dragon and his beast. It is full of dreadful enemies of Christ and His kingdom, war, blood, suffering, and death. That the message of this book should be pleasant assurance of the people of God that they will *escape* the tribulation prophesied in the book is false, if not ludicrous, on the face of it.

The theme of the book, Hoeksema points out, is stated in 1:7: "Behold, he cometh."

The Word of God here would have the church conceive of this coming as a present fact: always the church must have the eyes of hope fixed upon that final event. Constantly she must stand in the attitude of expectancy and longing, the attitude of the bride looking for the coming of the Bridegroom, with the prayer on her lips: "Come, Lord Jesus!" ...The words refer to the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, His literal and personal and visible return, the parousia, which will mark the end of all history and usher in the eternal state of heavenly glory in the new creation (p. 27).

This coming of Christ, which controls all of history, involves the warfare of the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan.

The book of Revelation is prophecy of the events connected with Jesus' coming in symbolic (figurative) language.

Of vital importance is one's grasp of the structure of the book. Following the presentation in chapter 1 of the risen Jesus Christ as

almighty Lord over all things on behalf of His church, there are the letters to the seven churches. Hoeksema regards these churches as actual churches at the time of John's writing. They also represent the visible church in all ages, showing the spiritual condition of the church both positively and negatively. Hoeksema's analysis of each of the churches is masterful.

The rest of the book, from chapter 4 to the end, is prophecy of the victory of the glorious kingdom of Christ over the dark kingdom of the beast in a great conflict. This war was typified by the attack on the church by the Roman Empire of John's day, which attack was also itself one phase of the war. The key to chapters 4-22, both as regards structure and content, is the book of chapter 5 with its seven seals.

Hoeksema shows that the book of Revelation is not chronological. The events prophesied in later chapters must not be thought to follow the events of earlier chapters in history. Rather, the later chapters cover the same period of time that was treated in earlier chapters. But now the viewpoint is different. Regarding God's judgments on a wicked world, later chapters not only repeat the prophecy of wrathful punishment but also indicate the increase of judgment as history nears its goal.

Let us hear Hoeksema himself in his commentary on several important and interesting passages of Revelation.

In explanation of the statement in 1:1, that the things prophesied in Revelation must come to pass "shortly," Hoeksema says:

The Lord comes quickly. He does not tarry. He is not slack concerning the promise. And this implies that the things which must come to pass before that final coming and in the process of that coming must also come to pass shortly, or quickly. This may not appear so to us.... But we must remember not only that God's measure of

time differs from ours, but also that tremendous things must come to pass before the end shall be.... If we consider the nature of the things that must come to pass, we begin to see that they do, indeed, occur with astounding rapidity, especially in our own day. However this may be, the Scriptures teach that all things come to pass quickly. There is no delay, so that also the view that God restrains the progress of sin is contrary to this Scriptural teaching. All things hasten unto the end! (p. 9)

Hoeksema's analysis of the church in Thyatira (2:18-29) sees it as a church with a "mystic tendency." This is the occasion for him to praise the "mystic element" in the life of a true church:

In any form of true Christian religion there is a mystic element, resulting from our spiritual communion with Christ our head. And any true child of God will be able to speak of the fact that he experiences moments of sweet communion with the Savior that transcend all analysis and expression in human language. To speak in terms often employed by children of God, there are moments when they have "good times" with the Lord, moments in which we experience the mystical feeling of the bride who is near the bridegroom. Such moments are perfectly normal, and they should constitute an element of our life with God. There is no danger in such mystical communion, if only it is continually subjected to the objective test of the Word of God. And if such a condition is peculiar of an entire church, that church enjoys what may be called a state of healthy mysticism (p. 97).

His exposition of the four horsemen of Revelation 6:1-8 sketches the Christian world-view (which Hoeksema calls "life-view"):

The people of God have their own life-view with regard to every sphere of life and every institution of the world. The home is an

institution existing primarily for the perpetuation of God's covenant in the world. The school is an institution for the purpose of instructing the covenant children according to the principles of Holy Writ for every sphere of life. Society, with business and industry, art and science, and all things that exist, must, according to them, be controlled by the principles of the Word of God and be made subservient to the idea of God's kingdom in the world. In a word, they have a new life-view. They are members of God's covenant, His friends in the world, subjects of His kingdom. And, in principle at least, they want to live the life of that kingdom also in the present world (p. 211).

Although Hoeksema has some sympathy for the view that the Antichrist is the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church, he rejects this interpretation. Commenting on the persecution of the two witnesses by the beast from the abyss (11:1-10), he writes:

It is not true that the pope is the only manifestation of the Antichrist. Nor is it true that he finds his power only in the Roman Catholic Church. This is indeed a dangerous view to maintain.... We would deceive ourselves and please the devil if, to find it, we would merely look at the Romish Church (p. 376).

His subsequent interpretation of chapter 13 identifies Antichrist as a universal, political world-power aided by the false church.

In a lovely—but challenging—description of the singers at the sea of glass (15:2ff.), Hoeksema declares:

They have been in the thickest of the battle. It was for them to live at the time of Antichrist in all his power and fullness. The honor and privilege to live at that time was in store for them. For thus it is in reality: it will be a time of special privilege for the people of God to live at the time of Antichrist. It is much rather a cause

of longing and yearning, than of fear and trembling, for the people of God to live at that time. Is not a soldier in the battle honored by being in the thickest of the battle? And shall not the soldier of the kingdom of Christ by faith deem it an honor to be in the thickest of the fight against the power of Antichrist and to show that he fears nothing even though he be hated of all men and of all nations? And, therefore, it is a special honor to be deemed worthy to live at that time. God shall have His strongest children, His best forces, in the world at that last period. And, therefore, to belong to those picked forces of Christ in the world at the time of Antichrist shall be the greatest honor conceivable (p. 522).

One need not agree with Hoeksema's commentary, or eschatology, in every detail. The strangest, and most objectionable, theory is his notion, repeated again and again in the commentary, that the remaining saints will be taken out of the world shortly before Christ's coming and the end (see pp. 397; 509ff.; 535; 551; 600; 603; 605). The reason for this "Reformed rapture" is not that the saints must escape the great tribulation under Antichrist, for Hoeksema correctly teaches that the full fury of Antichrist will fall upon the true church and her faithful members. Rather, the reason is that the few remaining saints must escape the terrible judgments of God that will fall upon the world-kingdom of the beast immediately before the end.

Nevertheless, this notion of God's taking the church into heaven prior to the coming of Christ and the end is wrong and dangerous. I Corinthians 15:51ff. teaches that some elect believers will be in the world when Christ comes. The notion is dangerous because it compromises the Reformed repudiation of the bizarre fiction of premillennial dispensationalism. This danger is especially pronounced in that

Hoeksema's "rapture" includes the resurrection of the dead saints before the resurrection of the wicked some days, or months, later (p. 397).

The Reformed student of Scripture might also differ with Hoeksema's exegesis of Daniel 9, specifically the cutting off of Messiah according to verse 26. Hoeksema explains the 70 weeks as extending to the reign of Antichrist. The cutting off of Messiah is then the killing of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 (p. 396). But Daniel 9:24 has the 70 weeks terminating upon Messiah Himself, that is, the ministry on earth of Jesus Christ. Verse 26 does not refer to the persecution of the church

under Antichrist, but to the death of Messiah on the cross.

Hoeksema has not spoken the last word on eschatology. In this aspect of biblical truth more than any other, there can and should be development today. This duty rests squarely and exclusively upon Reformed amillennialists.

But Hoeksema has spoken a sound, urgent, and rare word. He has spoken it in this commentary on Revelation, once again made available by the Reformed Free Publishing Association.

In this editorial, he will have the last word. The quotation is his explanation of the words, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come," in Revelation 22:17. What he says is timely at the beginning of a new year.

This [is] ... the spontaneous response of the bride. For the bride receives a picture of the glory of the Bridegroom and of the time when she shall always be with Him. She is conscious all the more, through the prophecy of this book, of her present misery, of her tribulation which she must and does suffer in the midst of the world. She is conscious of her present separation. She is conscious of her sinfulness. And when, through the words of the book of this prophecy, she looks at the glory which shall be revealed to her, she calls out, under the influence of the Spirit of the Bridegroom, "Come; yea, come, Lord Jesus!"

— DJE 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Abelard and the Doctrine of the Atonement (2)

Abelard's Doctrine of the Atonement

As I said earlier, the real issue in the controversy over the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ was concerning the *necessity* of the atonement.

It seems that actually the controversy involved the relation between some of God's attributes and the suffering and death of Christ. For example, the question was asked: If God is omnipotent, could He not simply save men by His power without having to send His Son to the suffering of the cross? Or, if God is indeed a God of mercy,

would it not have been possible for God to forgive sin out of His own mercy, rather than through the means of the death of Christ? (Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 11.)

Abelard answered this question by appealing to God's benevolence. He taught that only God's benevolence was of importance in considering the atonement of Christ. The death of Christ on the cross was not necessary to accomplish salvation. God was sufficiently benevolent simply to forgive sin.

Thus, Abelard said, no satisfaction for sin is necessary, with its fruits of pardon. Pardon was granted to a man on the basis of repentance alone. When a man turned from his sin, showed proper sorrow for his sin, and resolved to walk in obedience before God, he

was pardoned from his wrong.

One could ask, of course: Well then, what about Christ's death? If it is true that Christ did not have to die to obtain salvation, why in fact did He die? Abelard's answer was that the death of Christ on the cross was intended only to have a beneficial moral influence and to produce sorrow for sin. The love revealed by Christ in His willingness to suffer on the cross was intended to awaken in us a similar love. This love, awakened in us by the example of the love of Christ, liberates us from the power of sin so that we can walk in obedience.

Abelard's position, completely the contrary of the position of Anselm, sparked great controversy in the church.

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It was immediately apparent to many that Abelard's position would not do. It was a complete repudiation of the significance of the cross of Christ. If Christ died as an example only, the cross of Christ has no saving value.

What was the church to do about this?

Very obviously, it was important that the church adopt Anselm's position that salvation could be given only through a cross which satisfied for sin. Christ's suffering and death had to have propitiatory value. That is, the suffering and death of Christ had to be a satisfaction for sin if it was truly to redeem.

The word "satisfaction" is the key word here. It is impossible to stress that strongly enough. It was later to become a key word in the doctrine of the Reformers and in the Reformation confessions (see Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 5 & 6).

Yet (and here is an interesting thing), the Romish Church could not swallow the doctrine of satisfaction either. The theologians were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. They were trapped between two "impossible" positions.

I think it worthwhile to understand this as clearly as we possibly can because the issues here lie at the heart of all controversies in our day as well over the extent of the atonement.

The Romish theologians (and let this be clearly understood) could not accept Anselm's doctrine of an absolute necessity to the atonement because the Roman Church was totally and fatally committed to the doctrine of human merit. This commitment to the doctrine of human merit had been adopted officially at the synod of Orange when pure Augustinianism was repudiated. It had been sealed when Gottschalk, an ardent defender of Augustinianism, was martyred. It was now part and parcel of Romish theology.

But the doctrine of the absolute

necessity of the atonement ruled out human merit entirely. Perhaps this is not evident immediately. But a little thought about the matter will make that clear. To the extent that man is able in some measure to contribute to his own salvation and to earn merit with God, the atoning sacrifice of Christ is not needed. If man contributes, say 10% to his salvation, that 10% is not found in the atoning death of Christ, but in the will of man and his ability to do something to save himself.

The Arminians at a later date understood this all too well. Because salvation hinged finally on the free will of man, that salvation was not efficaciously earned in the cross of Christ. And so the Arminians developed a theory of the atonement much like that of Abelard.

But the opposite is true as well. If Christ's suffering and death are *absolutely necessary* for salvation, this can be true only because all the salvation of all the elect church is to be found in Christ alone. This leaves no room for human endeavor or a human contribution, for a free will of man upon which hangs the efficacy of salvation. So all human merit is expunged from the records.

We may carry this another step. If Christ's death on the cross is for all men, and yet all men are not saved, the cross of Christ has no saving power. Then the cross is ineffective for salvation in every respect. Then there is no *necessity* for Christ's suffering and death.

So Roman theologians were caught between the obvious doctrine of the absolute necessity of Christ's death and the church's teaching of merit. The only way to extricate themselves from this dilemma was to teach a *relative necessity*. Yes, they said, the atonement is necessary, but only relatively so.

And so Rome's theologians set about that difficult task of defining what they meant by "relative

merit." We may mention a few examples here.

One theologian, Bonaventura by name, declared that Christ's atonement was a satisfaction because such an atonement was the most fitting way to restore the sinner. It was most in keeping with God's attributes, and most calculated to arouse sorrow for sin. Thus, though necessary, it was only relatively so.

Even the great theologian Thomas Aquinas did not want an absolute necessity to the atonement of Christ because of his commitment to the doctrine of merit. He spoke of the atonement as being necessary in a relative way because it was in keeping with God's justice. This was an important point, because when one speaks of satisfaction, the question is: satisfaction of what? The answer has got to be: God's justice. But Aquinas also hedged, because he taught that God could save in a different way if He wished by overlooking His justice.

And so it went on. One theologian opted for so much necessity; another speaking of this much necessity; but all denying an absolute necessity. Anselm stood alone.

Anselm's doctrine is clear and biblical. Whether he understood that his doctrine necessarily ruled out all human merit is another question. He was a man of his times. He also lived within the church of his day and its teachings on merit. Nevertheless, he was right on Christ's atonement.

He believed that God's attributes are one in God. He insisted that the cross of Christ, if it revealed God's mercy, had also to reveal God's justice. God's justice requires *satisfaction* for sin. God, if He overlooks His justice, denies Himself. He cannot do that.

Sin is of infinite demerit. An infinite price is required to pay an infinite debt. That price cannot be paid by a man. He is a sinner who increases his debt to God rather than being in a position to pay for


it. He is like a man who owes \$50,000 on his credit card (not, of course, Anselm's figure). His monthly payments are \$1000.00. If he could pay at all, he could pay only \$100.00. Every month his debt gets bigger, not smaller.

But man cannot pay at all. The

debt becomes infinite. Therefore only He who is both man and God can pay that awful debt.

We cannot enter into the whole argument here. Nor is it necessary. It is all found in our own Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Days 4 - 7. It is the doctrine of the reform-

ers and of the Reformed churches to the present. It was Anselm's doctrine. Abelard, the heretic, paved the way for many heresies.

If we are to be saved, the atonement is an *absolute necessity*. But then, all human merit is excluded. We are saved by grace. 

Regeneration (2)

We have considered the necessity of being born again, and have seen it as a wonder work of divine grace. The question now becomes, also as a matter of personal importance: How is that wonder of regeneration brought to consciousness with all that it includes? How do I know that I am regenerated?

That is an urgent question, as you who are elect strangers can certainly sense. We have seen that the Holy Spirit works the wonder of regeneration by implanting the incorruptible seed of Christ's life in us, to use the figure of I Peter 1:23. But we need to know that *we* are regenerated, that *we* are partakers of the life of Christ. How, then, does seed develop into the living plant that is seen and that bears fruits to the glory of its Creator? How does that regenerated life come into our conscious activity, so that we consciously lay hold upon Christ? That is the question.

A Living Seed Brought to Living Expression

An illustration may help us to understand this. When the gifted

Protestant musician Johan Sebastian Bach lay in the cradle as an infant, he had all the talent of the musician that he would later become within the church. He had all the gifts necessary to make that substantial contribution to music which recognizes God as God, majestic and holy. But that does not mean that he could play and compose when he was in the cradle. To continue with the figure of the *seed* that we have been considering from I Peter 1:23, that natural seed of the gift of music that was in the infant Bach had yet to be developed in his own consciousness. In a sense, that is true with us all. When we are born, we are born with the power of speech; but we cannot speak. We are born with the power of sight; but we cannot immediately see. The same is true of regeneration.

As long as that seed is simply a seed, it is not a matter of the consciousness of that man in whom God has placed that seed. The *life* is there, but it is not yet a matter of the man's experience.

Scripture makes clear that God often regenerates an elect child already in the womb, likely at conception. That is revealed in the inspired record of Jeremiah 1:5, as well as that of John, who leaped in the womb in the presence of his

Savior. Those are just two scriptural evidences of regeneration occurring already before birth.

Now, let's apply that. That means that, if you were regenerated in that way, you received all the blessings of salvation. But you did not know it. That regeneration is the source of all Christian activity, the source of every aspect of our spiritual sojourn toward our heavenly inheritance. But until you become conscious of it, you are not an active participant in that heavenward sojourn. Until that seed of regeneration is called to activity, you do not lay hold of Christ nor draw from Him the blessings of grace and salvation.

Now, I would have you remember, I am only making a distinction between the seed and what follows. It is the distinction made in I Peter 1:23-25. You must not get the impression that the seed of God's divine work may lie dormant for many years. We must not think that a regenerated child of God might walk in ungodliness for many years after his regeneration. There is no indication whatsoever for that in the Bible. The indication is that when a person continues to walk ungodly, in disobedience to God and in dishonor of God's holy name, that person reveals himself or herself as

unregenerated, unconverted. We would urgently call such to repentance and faith.

So again, the question is: How does that wonder work of regeneration become active in us, so that we are conscious of it? How is that work of regeneration confirmed to us, that we may know that we are the sons of God, that we are of Christ?

I Peter 1:23 says, "through the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

Man has nothing to do with it! That is the emphasis of what follows: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away."

As flesh, we are marked as weak and frail, perishing. So God looks upon us, according to Psalm 78:39: "For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." The nature of grass is that it lasts but a very brief time and then it withers. "For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Ps. 103:16).

Such is the nature of man. He boasts of his glory. He may appear to stand in power. He may have riches and honor and rule the lives of many men. He may be having all kinds of worldly fun, soaking in pleasure and enjoying all his earthly toys. But our life is but a vapor, says James, a passing mist in the valley. The Lord blows upon us and we are gone, and people no longer remember the place that we occupied.

Scripture points at the contrast between flesh and God as the contrast between weakness and strength: "For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?" said Moses to the children of Israel (Deut. 5:26).

But that contrast is also a contrast between man's unholiness and God's holiness. Don't forget that.

Hear the Word of God from Zechariah 2:13: "Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation."

Because the nature of man is so weak, so passing, it follows that his word is the same. As man dies, so does his word. That is not just the case with some men, but with all men. Any human attempt at salvation is absolutely futile! Man is powerless to save himself! He cannot get that incorruptible seed of regeneration to develop any more than he can implant that seed in the first place. Nor can he resist that wonder work of God. But God must bring that work to fruition in our consciousness.

The Life-Giving Word

That *living and abiding word of God* is not the Bible. The Bible is not living; the Bible shall not abide forever. The Bible itself cannot give you life, any more than it can kill you.

That living and abiding Word of God is the *eternal* Word, of whom we read in John 1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Christ is the living and abiding Word, by whom all things were made. Christ, the Word, the Logos, is the creative Word of God who calls the light out of darkness, who makes alive the dead sinner, bringing the seed of regeneration into action.

The truth of that is seen clearly in the original Greek when we study I Peter 1:23-25. You can see that, too, with a little study in a good concordance. In verse 23 the word is *logos*, as in John 1. The word is the Word of God who became flesh. In verse 25, a different word is used, though also translated word. It is a *word spoken*. The living and abiding Word of God *speaks*!

The Spirit plants the seed. But the Spirit doesn't work alone. The Spirit of God and the Word of God

always go together.

And when the Spirit plants that seed of regeneration in the heart of God's elect, in your heart, the Word of God addresses you with power, just as He did the creation, saying, "Let there be light," and there was light. He says, "Let there be sight," and He gives you spiritual sight to stand in awe of His holiness and to see all His glory in your salvation. He says, "Let there be hearing," and He gives you the spiritual ears to hear the gospel that will bring all the blessings of regeneration to your own consciousness and life.

The Application by Gospel Preaching

Finally, that Word is brought powerfully to our hearts and minds by the gospel.

"But the word of Lord (i.e., now, the spoken word) endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

That spoken word, which endures forever, comes to you through gospel preaching. That is the importance of preaching. That is exactly why it is such a sad thing today, when many churches forsake the preaching of the gospel and substitute all kinds of entertainment, or Bible studies and all the rest. Preaching is not merely the word of a man. But Christ speaks by His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel.

That is why there is a connection between the last verses of I Peter 1, and what follows in the opening verses of the next chapter. The preacher is the ambassador of Christ, commissioned by Christ through His church, to proclaim the word of the Lord. And when Christ so speaks by His Holy Spirit, the preaching of the gospel is like the rain which soaks into the soil and into the seed. By means of the rain that living seed sprouts and develops into a plant which bears fruit.

The rain is worthless, if the

seed isn't there. So with preaching, if the seed of regeneration is not there, there is nothing in that gospel except condemnation, hardening. Then the gospel is nothing but a savor of death unto death.

But God has chosen the means of preaching to bring the seed of regeneration into that living consciousness which is our enjoyment of salvation.

Through the preaching of the gospel, He causes the incorruptible seed of regeneration to sprout and develop into a fruitful tree which reflects His glory — all because Christ speaks powerfully by His Holy Spirit through the preaching.

The spoken word of Christ shall endure forever. It will not forever take the form of "the foolishness of preaching." But even when Christ returns to establish His heavenly kingdom and we dwell as the glorified citizens of that kingdom, we will continue to stand in total dependence upon the spoken Word of Christ to sustain within us that heavenly life.

But the text speaks emphatically: "This is the Word which by the gospel has been preached unto you."

Has that Word preached penetrated your soul, has it sunk into your heart, and brought forth from you the response of grace?

Through the preaching of the Word, Christ speaks to bring the life of regeneration into our consciousness, and to make the life of spiritual rebirth a life of activity, a life of faith. So beautiful is that work of God's grace, that it bears its influence in a large area, over every sphere of our life.


Under the influence of the preaching of the gospel, by which God the Holy Spirit works powerfully, the power of that gospel spreads through the church, and reaches into our homes. It affects our marriages and our family life. The power of that gospel preaching works when you sit with your little ones teaching them to pray, when you bring the gospel to your children, when you live in accordance to the will of God. The power of gospel preaching brings to you the good news for your daily life, the comfort that is found only in belonging to such a faithful Savior. The influence of the preaching works contentment and peace, humility and love.

Even the struggle of the Chris-

tian against the sins of his own nature, the struggle testified to by the apostle Paul in Romans 7, is an evidence of regeneration and the fruit of gospel preaching bringing the life of Christ to our consciousness.

All those experiences of the Christian life are the effects of being born again out of incorruptible seed, through the living and abiding Word of God, with the preaching of the gospel applying it to your heart. That is the truth of regeneration, the power of being born again, as seen in Christ's church.

So Christ says, through the preaching of the Word to you, His elect strangers, regenerated by the Holy Spirit: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:14-16).

Hearing that Word as a regenerated child of God, you are blessed. You bear evidence of God's wonder work of grace, the work begun in your new birth. For by that birth from above you have life everlasting. 

Contribution

Rev. Barry Gritters

Shall We Dance, Rock, and Play?

Or: How Shall We Judge Contemporary Worship? (1)

The Protestant Reformed Churches have never been accused of being innovative in their worship practices. They have never had the reputation for modernizing their

liturgy. They refuse to follow the latest trendy practices.

The reason for this is not that we want to be stuffy traditionalists. Simply put: the PRC desire to be obedient to Jesus Christ. They are opposed to the modern forms of worship because they believe them to be disobedient to Jesus Christ. If worship were a

matter of personal preference, no critique of modern worship would be permitted. Since Christ regulates worship, Christ requires us, and will help us, to judge all forms of worship.

Contemporary worship, as opposed to traditional worship, is all the rage. Go into most bookstores and you will not miss the wall of

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glitzy-covered books explaining and defending this new way of worshiping God. Some of them are intelligent, articulate, and scholarly. Others are less reasoned but impassioned defenses.

The authors are all sure of one thing. God likes what they are doing.

Convinced that God is pleased with what we are doing in worship, we give *our* voice to a defense of Reformed, biblical, covenantal worship. Let us not call it *traditional*. Let us call it *Reformed, biblical, covenantal worship*. And let us analyze the admittedly new forms of worship in the light of Scripture, by which everything must be tested.

It is no light matter, the form and manner of our worship of God. In His treatise: *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, Calvin made this judgment of the importance of *proper* worship:

If it be asked, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them, all the other parts, and consequently *the whole substance of Christianity*, viz., a knowledge first of the right way to worship God; and secondly of the source from which salvation is to be sought. When these are kept out of view, though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain.

By saying this, Calvin not only asserts that one cannot be a Christian without a proper knowledge of worship, but he ranks the importance of the knowledge of proper worship *higher than* knowledge of salvation by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone! (See also his *Institutes*: II.8.11; everyone ought to read Calvin's treatment on worship!)

Again, according to Calvin, the Christian's primary duty is to maintain pure worship:

There is nothing to which all men should pay more attention, nothing in which God wishes us to exhibit a more intense eagerness than in endeavoring that the glory of his name may remain undiminished, his kingdom be advanced, and the pure doctrine, which alone can guide us to true worship, flourish in full strength.

Here, Calvin shows his opinion of the proper *relation* between pure doctrine and proper worship. Read that last quote again. Pure doctrine ... *guides* us to true worship. Doctrine is worship's servant.

There was as much controversy at the time of the Reformation about pure worship as there was about true doctrine. To misuse an old line: "The times, they aren't a changing."

Calvin is not mistaken in his assessment of the importance of worship. The reason for our very existence, in time and eternity, is to bring worship to our great and good redeemer God in Jesus Christ. As God, God requires His people to bring Him *united* praise. Bodies of believers in local congregations assemble on the special day of worship to give honor to their Lord.

So both the Old Testament and the New Testament record the primary place of the worship of God by God's redeemed people. Psalm 122 reflects the believer's attitude to this requirement of God: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." He sings: "With joy and gladness in my soul, I hear the call to prayer. Let us go up to God's own house, and bow before Him there." This call to worship was echoed in Psalm 95: "O come, let us worship, and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."

The new covenant church carries on this calling, joyfully. And it's a good thing we can do it with joy, because that's what we'll be busy with *world without end* in God's eternal kingdom—worshiping God! "And I saw another angel (says John) fly in the midst of

heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Rev. 14:6,7; see also Rev. 22:9). The everlasting gospel is: "Worship God."

What Is Contemporary Worship?

Have you seen the ads in the newspaper and on the restaurant place mats: "Worship with us this week! 8:30A.M. Traditional; 10:00A.M. Contemporary"? What would you find if you visited the 10:00A.M. service?

There are probably three main kinds of contemporary worship. Each goes off in a different direction, but all go away from biblical, Reformed, covenantal worship.

First, there is the loose, unplanned, uncontrolled, wild and woolly worship of the charismatics (Assemblies of God, a.k.a. "happy-clappies"). It has foot stomping and hand clapping, waving of arms and swaying of bodies, speaking in tongues and healing of sick and paralyzed, falling on the floors and, sometimes, uncontrolled laughter. Included in these services is almost always drama and contemporary (read: "rock with a band") music.

Second, there is the relatively new "seeker-service," carefully crafted to appeal to the boomer generation and the unchurched. Willow Creek Church in Illinois, Calvary Undenominational of Grand Rapids, and Mars Hill, a daughter of Calvary, are representative of this kind of service (though there are a hundred copycats that you will recognize in your part of the country or world). The service is determinedly casual, includes contemporary music (usually rock and with a band), and almost always drama—plays.

Then there is the "High-Church," or "liturgical" service

(with many variations) of some Reformed and Presbyterian churches. *Liturgical* is a word that simply means "service." It is used in Scripture to describe the work of the priests in the temple. Today, it refers to the elements of our worship. Historically, it has described a kind of service that emphasizes ceremony and solemnity. This is the worship of the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans. The new "liturgical" services are also characterized by much formal ceremony. They have banners and pictures (projected or hung), clerical robes, gowns, and, by all means, candles. Symbolism is emphasized. Also these services, although not always with rock music, almost always include drama—plays.

Now, these three cannot be lumped into one category for analysis. Nor does a particular service necessarily have only the elements of one kind of service; some have an eclectic taste. But three elements appear in almost all of them: They dance (in one way or another); they have rock music (some kind of modern music); they have drama—plays. Hence, the question: "Shall we dance, rock, and play?"

We are concerned primarily with the Calvary type "seeker-services" and the high church "litur-

gical services"—not because the charismatic service is not an error, but because it is not as immediately a threat to the Reformed faith.

The Seeker-Services

By "seeker-service" is meant a service of worship designed to appeal to those who are probably not members of any church, but are "seeking" something in a church, or perhaps are even "seeking" God. What do we know about the seeker services?

We know what they *don't* want as much as we know what they want. They don't want anything that sounds or looks "churchy." They don't want a typical church building style. They don't want a pulpit from which something is declared to them. They don't want an organ. They don't want old songs. They assuredly don't want formal dress.


The visitor must feel comfortable. He is not accustomed to "church." The whole atmosphere must be "normal, natural, and pleasant."

In order to create an atmosphere as un-church-like as possible, they want a theater-like building. They often want lights—percussive lights, colored lights, all kinds of lights sweeping the audi-

ence. They call for guitars—usually amplified, loud, electric guitars playing rock music or country, if not hip-hop and pop. The assembled multitude is "warmed up" by the praise band for 45 minutes or so. Then the worship leader (notice he is not called a "preacher") takes his place on his stool and begins his chat. There are banners, pictures, video-projectors. Casual dress—blue-jeans and tennis shoes—are the dress-code in some places. And by all means, drama!

For all their differences, these seeker-services almost all have in common that there is little preaching. Emphasis falls on the aesthetic. What pleases and attracts the eye?

The people of God should not be naïve regarding the popularity of the "seeker-service." The young people must be informed of them. Pastors and elders, but especially parents, must show that the present worship of God in the congregations pleases Him. And why. But most important is the need that in our worship services the young people and adults worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and find all their needs met in the simple, unadorned gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

... to be continued 

Go Ye into All the World

Rev. Richard Moore

From the Mission House in Ghana



Greetings in the name of our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

Rev. Moore is foreign missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I have been asked to write several articles during the year for the *Standard Bearer* on the work here in Ghana. In many ways I find this difficult. The reason for this is that it is much easier to write about the news of the work here, and I do so regularly in the newsletters and in

the e-mail messages that go out to many.

However, for the *Standard Bearer* articles I was asked to write more about the methods and other such aspects of the labor. I find this somewhat difficult because I do not consider myself any kind of

an expert on missions in a foreign land. Basically I am a preacher and pastor also here on the field in Ghana. And this is the way the labor is carried forth. The primary means of gathering the church is to be found in the faithful preaching of the Word. This has ever been the case in the church of Christ as it has brought the gospel to the nations. The preaching is the power of God unto salvation, as Paul says more than once in his epistles. We take note of Romans 1:13-17: "Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Paul states that the fruit that he had among the Gentiles came through the preaching of the gospel, for he finds in it the power of God unto salvation, both to the Jews and Greeks. This has been our conviction here on the field in Ghana as well.

It is clear that when Paul preached that word he did not soften the gospel, nor did he change the gospel wherever the Lord led him to preach the Word. This is obvious from the content of the various epistles that he wrote to the churches. The word was always brought antithetically and always condemned the errors of the day, and set forth salvation as being by faith in Christ Jesus, as that faith is the gift of God's grace. It is true that he applied that word to the various attacks of Satan upon the church. In the book of

Galatians he preached the truth especially over against the error of those who would bring the church again under the law that can only condemn. In the books to the Corinthians it is obvious that Paul in his preaching applied the word over against many errors that were found within the new congregation. And so it is from epistle to epistle. But always it was a sharp, clear, antithetical preaching of the full gospel of Christ that was brought to the people.

Thus, in our labor here on the field we began, as we have stated before, preaching the Word, at first to only three, and then to four people, including my wife and me. But God was pleased to bring others under the gospel, so that, in the year and a half since we came, we have probably had well over two hundred and fifty come to worship services. Of course, many came only for a while and then left. This is to be expected. Jesus preached to over five thousand men plus women and children, and fed them all with five loaves and two fishes, and yet when it became plain through His preaching that His was a heavenly kingdom and not an earthly one, only a few remained with Him. Yet it has pleased the Lord that on Sunday mornings we normally now are preaching the gospel to nearly a hundred souls. And we have had as high as one hundred thirty sit in our house to hear the Word proclaimed. Further, the evening services are being, by little steps, attended with more frequency by many. And in the last months we have averaged over fifty present. We are grateful to God for this, especially in light of the fact that for those coming to our fellowship there has been little earthly reward. The reward is almost exclusively the spiritual reward of hearing the Word of God proclaimed.

Thus if you were to ask me what methods I use to bring the gospel to the people of Ghana, my answer would be rather simple,

that I preach the Word, preach all the Word, and preach the Word over against error. Really this is no different than in the States in a well-established congregation. If anything, the preaching is even more pointed here in Ghana — the reason being that there are many erroneous ideas of the Scriptures that have been foisted upon the people by false prophets. And the "custom" of the land is basically fetish-orientated, and has been taught to the people from birth upward. Thus, rather than make allowances for the customs of the land, one must often point out how those customs or traditions are often contrary to the Word, and that that which appears to be differences because of culture are really antichristian, unbiblical, and destructive of the Christian faith of the Scripture. This does not mean that all the customs or cultural things are unbiblical; but many, if not most, are. The customs that are in harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures may be practiced and are practiced by the people.

One of the large tasks of Paul and of the missionary in Ghana has been to lead the people by the Word to see that the Word of God is the only standard for faith and life. This we repeatedly bring to mind in the preaching, making many references to the Bible to show that the truth is the truth of the Scriptures. We also show very clearly that the Heidelberg Catechism is a setting forth of the Scriptures by showing that the confession is built upon the Word of God, and expresses it faithfully. The Catechism has been a blessed means on the mission field to lead the people into the understanding of all the fullness of the Scriptures. The Catechism was written to express the personal confession of the believer. It leads us personally to the answers of Scripture, as we experience the need to know what the Word says, and it addresses these answers to us in a manner that leads us practically to confess that

our salvation is of grace alone. Thus also God's children are led into true comfort.

The methods that we use in bringing the gospel to the attention of the people of Ghana are also basically the same as we would do in our own communities in the States and Canada. The principal means for the gathering of the people under the preaching is the faithful preaching itself. For as God's children come under the preaching they speak of the Word that they have heard to others, and bring others to come and hear. However, we have also used sign boards to inform the people where we are located and where we preach the Word. This has brought quite a few into our midst to hear the Word, and in turn has led to others coming. We have handed out many pamphlets which explain who we are and when we meet for worship and Bible Study. This means has also by the grace of God brought many to come and hear. We have the radio program that airs over Radio Universe, the University of Ghana's radio station. In this program we antithetically, and even at times polemically, bring forth the truth of Scripture. Through this means we have also had many inquire further of our teaching, sometimes on the air and sometimes by visits to our house. Also a fair number of people have been led to come to one of our worship services to find out more of the work that God is doing in our midst. Further, I would mention that we stop and talk to people on the streets of Accra about our faith. When we do this we direct them to our radio program and often hand out a pamphlet with our beliefs, telephone numbers, and location. This too is a means that has led some to come and visit our worship services. Finally, we have taken speaking engagements in the schools of the land, and also at certain Bible Fellowships, which we would call Bible Societies. This gives us opportunity to bring the

gospel that teaches us that it is by grace alone, which is sovereignly bestowed upon God's chosen in Christ, that we are saved. Because many in this country do not hold to this gospel of sovereign, gracious salvation, the gospel, no matter by what means we bring it or introduce it, is unique. One thing the radio program has made clear is that sound exposition of Scripture is not often heard in this land. We are encouraged by listeners often to continue to bring the Word "because it is something that we do not hear much of in our country."

Our joy on the field in Ghana is not the numbers that attend our worship services and Bible Studies as such. But our joy is in the way in which the Word is received. We have witnessed a real spiritual growth on the part of those that have come under the preaching. This we have seen in two main ways. First, we have seen a growth in the true understanding of the distinctive gospel of salvation by grace alone. When I first came and asked the question of our people, "Did Jesus die intending to save every man, woman, and child that was ever born?" we would here a chorus of yeas. Now when this question is set before the people there is a resounding no. Further, they are able to explain why it cannot be that God loves every man head for head, and why Jesus when He died on the cross covered the sins of those alone whom the Father had given to Him. They are able to point to the Scriptures to defend this truth, and they are aware of the rich blessings that accompany the truth that God sovereignly saves His church. They do understand that when Paul says, All things work together for our good, for the good of them who are called according to God's purpose, this means all things, also the trials that are the portion of God's people in this life. Now this truth is embraced by most who come to worship with us. However, there


are also the infants in the faith and those that slowly are becoming more mature in their confession of these things.

The second way in which we see the fruit of Christ's preaching in our midst in the spiritual strengthening of the people is that they are striving to bring their lives more into conformity with the teaching they receive through the preaching. This is true in the area of their understanding of the proper use of the Sabbath Day, although this is hard for them, as they must trust that the Lord will provide them sufficiently even though they do not labor on the Lord's Day. When they have only enough food for each day, this is a trial for them. But we are pleased that many do see that they can get by without the Sabbath labor. Also, there are more (not all, by any means) who see the blessing of gathering together twice on the Lord's Day for worship and fellowship with the saints. We rejoice in this manifestation of the understanding of the truth of the Scriptures. This is true, also, in their seeing the calling that they have as covenant families. In the first place, they desire to be properly married before the Lord. Many have performed a part of the customary rite of marriage but have not completed it, and thus are living together as husband and wife even for many years without having been formally married. They now realize that this really is a living in fornication, and seeing this they desire to be right before God also in their marriages. This has been occupying a considerable amount of time in teaching and instructing the people about the true nature of marriage and our calling within it. We are thankful that the Word is leading them to seek to change these things in their lives. Finally, in this connection, we see more and more families in attendance at worship services, and hear that there is a greater attempt to spend time together as families in

discussion of spiritual things and in instruction of the children in the things of God's kingdom. Again, there are those who are just beginning to see these things aright, and others who are coming to a much more mature understanding of the covenant and our covenant calling as God's people.

In the end it is as it was in the days of Paul, as we read in Acts

13:48: "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Here also, when the children of God hear the preaching, they are glad and glorify the Word of the Lord. It is not our labor or our methods that bring souls to salvation, but it is God

who gathers those whom He has ordained unto eternal life. And whether it is many souls or a few souls, He shall determine. Ours is but to preach the Word faithfully. This, by the grace of God, we attempt to do from Sabbath to Sabbath and from day to day. Let us give all the glory to God also in this labor of bringing the Word to Ghana. 

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Supreme Court Majority Bans Student-Led Prayers at High School Sports Events

In light of the school's history of regular delivery of student-led prayers at athletic events, it is reasonable to infer that the specific purpose of the policy was to preserve a popular state-sponsored religious practice. The delivery of such a message — over the school's public address system, by a speaker representing the student body, under the supervision of school faculty, and pursuant to a school policy that explicitly and implicitly encourages prayer — is not properly characterized as "private speech."

The common purpose of the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment is to "secure religious liberty." Thus, nothing in the Constitution prohibits any public school student from voluntarily praying at any time before, during, or after the school day. But the religious liberty protected by the Constitution is abridged when the State affirmatively sponsors the particular religious practice of prayer.

Majority Opinion, *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*
(U.S. Supreme Court, June 19, 2000)

The Court [majority opinion] distorts existing precedent to conclude that the school district's student message program is [unconstitutional]. But even more disturbing than its holding is the tone of the Court's opinion: it bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life. It is recalled that George Washington himself, at the request of the very Congress which passed the Bill of Rights, proclaimed a day of "public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God."

Minority Dissenting Opinion, *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*
(U.S. Supreme Court, June 19, 2000)

Public School Prayer

Early this summer the U.S. Supreme Court revisited the politically divisive controversy over prayers in public schools, an enduring religious freedom issue that has plagued the Court for the last forty years. In

its most definitive ruling on public school prayer in the last decade, a bitterly divided court (6-3) refused to approve a carefully crafted Texas high school "prayer policy" that permitted the student body to elect a student to "deliver a brief invocation and/or message" dur-

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ing pre-game ceremonies for varsity football games. In a previous ruling, the Supreme Court in 1992 had held that a prayer delivered by a rabbi at a middle school graduation ceremony also violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

This recent ruling outlawing student-led prayers at football games was, of course, not well received in Texas, where in the Republican primary last March, 94% of voters approved a non-binding resolution backing student-initiated prayer at school sporting events. Texas Governor and presidential candidate George W. Bush had filed a brief in this case urging the Supreme Court to approve the controversial student prayer policy. An ABC news poll in March of this year said two-thirds of Americans thought students should be allowed to lead voluntary prayers at such events.

The Prayer Policy at Issue

Four students and their parents represented by the ACLU sued the Santa Fe Independent School District, alleging that the District had engaged in several proselytizing practices, such as promoting attendance at Baptist revival meetings, encouraging membership in religious clubs, and distributing Gideon Bibles on school premises. They also alleged the District allowed students to read Christian invocations and benedictions at graduation ceremonies, and to deliver overtly Christian prayers over the public address system at home football games.

In 1995 the District adopted, after several revisions, a "prayer policy" that allowed the high school students to elect a student volunteer who "may decide what message and/or invocation to deliver at pre-game ceremonies at varsity football games." The stated purpose for such a "message and/or invocation" at football games was "to solemnize the event, to promote good sportsmanship and

student safety, and to establish the appropriate environment for competition." The Supreme Court, upholding the federal appellate court, ruled that such student-led "messages and/or invocations" violated the Constitution, which prohibits government from activities resulting in an establishment of religion.

A lower federal appellate court had ruled last year that school officials must instruct students to keep their graduation ceremony prayers "nonsectarian and non-proselytizing," but also held that student-led prayers at school sporting events are always unconstitutional. The District appealed both issues, but the U.S. Supreme Court chose to address only the student-led prayers at football games, ignoring the graduation ceremony invocations also challenged by the plaintiffs.

Government Speech or Private Speech?

In reviewing the District's policy permitting student-led "messages" or "invocations" at sports events, the Supreme Court noted that "there is a crucial difference between *government* speech endorsing religion, which the Establishment Clause forbids, and *private* speech endorsing religion, which the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses protect." The Court found that the pre-game prayers were *not* private speech deserving protection. Rather, "these invocations are authorized by a government policy and take place on government property at government-sponsored school-related events." Moreover, the Court argued that the majoritarian election of one student to deliver such prayers only assured that "minority candidates will never prevail and that their views will be effectively silenced."

In addition, the Court held that the District had failed to "disentangle itself from the religious messages" merely by adopting the student election process. The Court also held that the written policy it-

self impermissibly "invites and encourages a religious message" and an "appeal for divine assistance."

The Court was not impressed by the District's argument that the pre-game prayers had a secular purpose because they were necessary to "solemnize sporting events." The Court, in an obviously cynical tone, held:

The District asks us to pretend that we do not recognize what every Santa Fe student understands clearly — that this policy is about prayer. The District further asks us to accept what is obviously untrue: that these messages are necessary to "solemnize" a football game and that this single-student year-long position [of student chaplain] is essential to the protection of student speech. We refuse to turn a blind eye to the context in which this policy arises....

Dissent

Chief Justice Rehnquist (joined by Justice Scalia and Justice Thomas) dissented, arguing that the District's policy did have a "secular purpose" of solemnizing the football games. Rehnquist argued that "it is easy to think of solemn messages that are not religious in nature, for example, urging that a game be fought fairly." In the dissents' view, such a "message and/or prayer" policy by a public high school "that tolerates religion does not mean it improperly endorses it." Finally, in the dissents' view, the contemplated "message" or "invocation" selected and delivered by a single elected student would not be *government* speech, but *private* speech entitled to constitutional protection.

Comment

Because the Court's majority opinion refused to address the collateral issue of the District's written policy on graduation prayers, constitutional scholars are now unsure of the Court's posture regarding student-led prayers in settings

other than pre-game ceremonies at public school sporting events.

The majority's opinion is, however, distressing to the extent that it seems to hold that any governmental policy that only *accommodates* religious speech is necessarily an unconstitutional *endorsement* of religion. As the dissent convincingly argued, our Constitution does not "require complete separation of church and state: it affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance, of all religions and forbids hostility toward any."


But perhaps more troubling than the Court's arguable hostility toward accommodation of public prayers is the District's corresponding trivialization of prayer. The District was represented by the American Center for Law and Justice, an evangelical organization devoted to protecting religious freedoms. In its zeal to prevail in this case, the Center (and its attorney Jay Sekulow) made several ingenuous and perhaps indefensible arguments.

First, the District urged the Court to approve prayers at public school football games because such prayers would arguably serve *secular* purposes: to "solemnize" the game; to promote "good sportsmanship"; and to "establish the appropriate environment for competition." Public prayers are necessary to "solemnize" a high school

football game? This is a ludicrous notion, which only demeans and trivializes authentic Christian prayers. This specious suggestion that public prayers at high school sporting events have a secular purpose was rejected vehemently by the Court, and perhaps accounted for some of its cynicism and hostility toward the District's contrived position.

Secondly, the District and its attorney Jay Sekulow vainly attempted to assure the Court that these suggested student-led prayers would be "nonsectarian and non-proselytizing." This is code for saying that these challenged prayers would presumably not refer to Jesus Christ or even the Christian faith, but would be a generic and vague invocation inoffensive to a Jew, Muslim, or Buddhist. But Mr. Sekulow and the Center for Law and Justice should know better; such a concession is perhaps inexcusable. An amorphous invocation to some cosmic deity may pass constitutional muster and be inoffensive to a Jew, but would nonetheless be blasphemous to the Christian triune God who requires His children to pray only in Jesus' name. The Supreme Court Justices are no fools, and they were not amused by the suggestion that the Southern Baptists in control of the Santa Fe public school district would offer "nonsectarian and non-

proselytizing" prayers (an oxymoron?).

Finally, one is tempted to remind the Santa Fe Christians who insist on sending their children to public schools that they are inexcusably ignoring the more fundamental issue at stake, and it is not solemn, generic invocations at Texas football games. These Christian parents ought to expend their time and energy, not on litigating the constitutionality of pre-game ceremonies at football games, but rather on establishing their own parental, Christian schools where prayers before class, chapels, and student activities would be legal, appropriate, and biblical. They seemingly refuse to understand that the state government has no right, duty, or obligation to educate their children. Compared to this great mandate for Christian parents to educate their own children, invocations at football games are inconsequential and perhaps meaningless concerns. Although the constitutional protection of religious speech in the public arena is of paramount importance for evangelical Christians, given the facts of this case, one wonders why the Center for Law & Justice pursued this case to the highest court in our land. There is an old constitutional lawyers' adage that "bad facts make bad law," and the Santa Fe football prayer case is a disappointing example. 

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

Establishing Schools to Provide Reformed Covenant Education (6)

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

This series has reviewed articles written about seventy years ago in the *Standard Bearer* by Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. George Ophoff. We have

stated that the ideas and concerns expressed in these articles written during the first decade of the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches have provided some of

the direction and incentive that have served to promote the development of the Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

It may seem strange and out of place to some of our readers that we should spend so much time on these writings. One might ask, "Isn't there something more current that could be considered? Why should it be the case that the pages of the *Standard Bearer* should be filled with quotations from writings that have become yellowed with age?" Although to some these objections may seem legitimate, we should not be among those who have forgotten the past.

This is especially true if one considers that it took approximately twenty years after these articles were written to establish the first PR schools in the Grand Rapids area (Hope and Adams). Nonetheless, Christian schools based upon the fundamental thinking of these articles did come into existence and still exist. They are giving distinctive and God-centered instruction to the covenant youth. Because the Protestant Reformed Christian schools that were established were based on the ideas and concepts advocated and developed through the early writings of the earliest leaders of the churches, a review of the writings of George M. Ophoff and Herman Hoeksema is, in my opinion, important and necessary. The PRC schools must continue to adhere to the fundamental principles that brought the schools into existence.

The first two of the Specific Principles were reviewed in the October 1, 1999 and the April 1, 2000 issues of the *Standard Bearer*. The articles reviewed the analysis by Hoeksema and Ophoff of the first two Specific Principles advocated by Dr. C. Bouma and published in 1925 by the National Union of Christian Schools (now Christian Schools International).

This article is an examination of the third of the Specific Principles. It reads as follows:

Man is a fallen creature (Genesis 3). Though depraved, man is nevertheless an image bearer of God (Ephesians 2:5), and through restraining grace he is able to do civil good (Romans 2:14). Though lost in sin, man can be saved through faith in Christ (John 3:16); and through restoring grace, in principle, is able to do spiritual good (I John 3:9).

Both Herman Hoeksema and George M. Ophoff subjected this third principle to analysis and criticism — Rev. Ophoff in his series of articles entitled "Dr. Bouma's New Platform" (*Standard Bearer*, Volume 3, pp. 83-85, November 15, 1926), and Rev. Hoeksema in the series of articles "The Christian School Movement Why a Failure?" (*Standard Bearer*, March 15, 1932 and April 15, 1932; Volume 8, pp. 271-273, 318, 319).

Rev. Ophoff, in his critique of the first two sentences ("Man is a fallen creature. Though depraved, man is nevertheless an image bearer of God") used the same approach that he employed in his critique of the second Specific Principle. His method at the outset was to refer to pertinent sections of the Reformed confessions. He quoted the following:

We believe that God created man out of the dust of earth, and made and formed him after his own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God, who was his true life. But being in honor he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life which he had received, he transgressed, and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts, which he

had received from God, and only retained a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us.... We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind... (Belgic Confession, Articles 14, 15).

Rev. Ophoff then turned to the Canons of Dordt:

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation (III/IV, 3).

Ophoff declared that these articles of the Reformed confessions emphatically assert the following: (a) Man subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse; (b) Man has corrupted his whole nature; (c) Man is perverse and corrupt in all his way; (d) All the light which is in man is changed into darkness; (e) Sin produces in man all sorts of sin; (f) Man is neither willing nor able to reform the depravity of his nature, nor is he willing to dispose himself to reformation (p. 83).

The chief concern of Rev. Ophoff was to demonstrate and prove that schools which are distinctively and specifically Christian and Reformed cannot be what they claim to be unless the basic and specific principles of these schools are upheld and supported by the

official confessions of the church. Rev. Ophoff opposed the claim of those who assert that the ecclesiastical creeds should only be used in the church and should not be used to give direction to the schools.

Herman Hoeksema stated that he was trying to find an answer to the question why the Christian school in our country was, as yet, a failure. He contended that an important part of the answer is that "the movement cannot stand on the basis that by the operation of a common grace upon a fallen creature that remains the image-bearer of God he is able to do civil good" (p. 319).

The proponents of the theory of common grace insisted that the doctrine of total depravity and the theory of common grace went very well together. Those who advocated the theory of common grace said that common grace was one of the elements constituting the Reformed or Calvinistic system of thought from the very outset. They denied that the presence of the theory of common grace in the theology of the Reformed theologian gave the appearance that it was a collection of contradictory statements.

In distinction from this position Rev. Ophoff contended that the doctrine of total depravity and the theory of common grace are mutually exclusive.

Herman Hoeksema at the outset of two articles on this third principle asserted that, although he had characterized and described the Specific Principles in previous articles as being vague and too general, they were in this instance very specific. He said the authors had taken pains to incorporate in them the errors and the corruption of Reformed doctrine that had been adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in the three points and common grace theory of 1924 (p. 271).

Hoeksema elaborated as follows:

We must give the authors of this declaration credit, that they surely succeeded to crowd all the errors of the Three Points of 1924 into one brief article. This article makes it absolutely impossible for any true member of the Protestant Reformed Churches to be a member of the Union (NUCS) or to support its movement. It is also the deathblow to all specific Christian instruction. For, if a Protestant Reformed person would subscribe to this declaration, he would thereby most emphatically deny the confession of his own church; disavow the very principles for the maintenance of which we were expelled from the fellowship of the Christian Reformed Church. And, if this were true, if this second declaration were in harmony with Scripture and the Confessions, there would be absolutely no reason for the costly maintenance of our Christian schools (p. 272).

Having made this initial statement concerning the third principle, Hoeksema suggested that we pay closer attention to what he called this "travesty of Reformed truth." He described the first part of the third Specific Principle as an "apology" for the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. His chief concern was that this "apology" for the Reformed doctrine of total depravity was not an orthodox and correct statement of the condition of fallen man. He said that the statement merely says that man is a fallen creature. It concedes that man is depraved but then qualifies and modifies the complete depravity of man by never stating that man is by nature totally depraved. This, he declared, is a striking weakness in the third specific principle. Hoeksema wrote as follows:

I am rather safe in concluding, that it is intentionally avoided here. Were the authors afraid? Were they ashamed of their own principles? Or do they not believe in total depravity? Or, perhaps, did they feel that the general public would immediately detect the

contradiction, if they would speak of a totally depraved man that is still an image-bearer of God and is able to do good in civil matters? (p. 272).

Ophoff compared the statements taken from the confessions with the statement made by the NUCS that man is a fallen and depraved creature. Ophoff wrote:

There is a remarkable difference between what is asserted by the Union and the plain teachings of the Confession. The Confession maintains that by nature man is dead in sin and totally depraved. In vain do we search the so-called Specific Principles of the Union for a clause that asserts that natural man is dead in sin. Nor do these Principles state that man is totally depraved. It is merely asserted that man is depraved and fallen. A statement of this kind in no wise militates against the semi-pelagian doctrine that man is capable of performing spiritual good in virtue of the fact that there is in him a spark of holy life. In other words the semi-pelagian will subscribe to the statement that man is a fallen and depraved creature. The question is to what extent is man depraved. And the answer of the Confession is that man is totally depraved. The NUCS failed to answer the question at all and contents itself with the mere statement that man is fallen and depraved (p. 83).

Both Ophoff and Hoeksema addressed the veracity of the statement "that man is still an image-bearer of God." The fundamental question for both is the following: "Is the statement that man is still an image bearer of God true without further elucidation?"

Rev. Hoeksema admitted that the fall had not deprived man of his rational and moral nature. He also affirmed that one could see very plainly that according to his nature he should be God's image-bearer. There is a sense, says Hoeksema, that one may call this rational-moral nature of man "the

image of God in a wider sense."

Concerning this aspect of the issue Ref. Ophoff wrote,

The distinction image of God in the wider sense and image of God in the narrower sense is well known. The term image of God in the narrower sense is made to apply to the holiness of man while in the state of righteousness, while the expression image of God in the broader sense is a term signifying man's rationality and morality minus holiness. This image is depraved, unholy. It is the carnal man, the old man of sin (p. 84).

Hoeksema preferred different terminology than image of God in the broader and narrower sense. He wrote that it is better to distinguish between the image of God in "a formal and material sense." By the *formal*, Hoeksema meant the peculiar and distinct nature of man, according to which he is so constituted as to be able to bear the image of God and to reflect the life of God in his own image. This distinguishes him from the animal. By the *material*, Hoeksema referred to the proper operation of the nature of the regenerated man and woman so that they actually reflect God's image. This is the true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness that man lost in the fall and which was restored in principle in regeneration (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day III, Question and Answer 6, Eph. 4:24, and Col. 3:10).

Hoeksema continued his argument by stating that there is no question that man has retained a few remains of his natural gifts. He has not ceased to be the creature that ought to be the image-bearer of God. He is still a moral-rational creature, though wholly corrupt. He remained a human being. But he does not actually bear God's image. He is just the opposite. He bears the image of the devil.

The Canons of Dordt use the same language.

There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God (Canons of Dordt, III/IV, 4).

But as man by the fall did not cease to be a creature, endowed with understanding and will, nor did sin which pervaded the whole race of mankind, deprive him of the human nature, but brought upon him depravity and spiritual death (Canons of Dordt III/IV, 16).

Hoeksema continued by saying that it is not correct to say that man only partly lost God's image, while he retained it partly. Hoeksema wrote:

Nowhere do you read such philosophy, either in Scripture or in the Reformed Confessions. It is not even sufficient to say that he merely lost the image of God; if I lose something I have nothing of that something left, the result is zero. It is correct to say, that the image of God in man changed into the very opposite; the result is not zero but minus. That operation of the image of God whereby man stood in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge of God was wholly perverted. He did not merely lose his knowledge, but his knowledge became darkness; he did not merely lose his righteousness, but his righteousness changed into unrighteousness; after the fall he was not merely without holiness but he was filled with corruption and enmity of God (p. 272).

Hoeksema continued his argument by stating that, because man retains the image of God in the purely formal sense, he is so constituted that he must be either righteous or perverse, holy or evil, a lover of the truth of God or a lover of the lie. He must be a friend of God or an enemy of God. He cannot be neutral.

Hoeksema contended that those who wrote the third Specific Principle had distorted and corrupted the truth of total depravity. They do that by asserting "... that there is something left in man, some knowledge, some righteousness, some holiness which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is preserved and is able to bear fruit in so-called civil good" (p. 272).

George Ophoff wrote that it is this image of God in the broader sense in man that the authors of the Specific Principles had in mind when they asserted that man, though depraved, is nevertheless an image bearer of God. It is the supreme task of the child to realize this image. The child can do this because, according to the authors of the Specific Principles, this image is not totally depraved. Ophoff believes that it is not accidental that the term total depravity is not found in the Specific Principles. It is the view of the authors of these principles that the depraved sinner is not totally depraved. The totally depraved and spiritually dead sinner, revived by common grace, is to a degree good, virtuous, and noble. The child that is not regenerated is good material with which to work. Properly trained, he would develop into a useful, peace-loving, and law-abiding citizen, with the ambition to reconstitute the sin-perverted world (p. 84).

Concerning this so-called civil good that man is able to do, Hoeksema wrote as follows:

To do civil good can only mean, that the natural man is able to do good before God in every sphere

of civil life, the home, the society, the state, the school. He is, therefore, able to do good before God in the sphere of education, not merely formally, as far as methods of education are concerned, but also materially, as far as the contents of the instruction are concerned and this also in an ethical, moral sense. The conclusion is that public education is well able to prepare the child for a good life in this world (p. 319).

Preparing the child for a good life in this world, said Hoeksema, is exactly what the school ought to do. The purpose of the school is not to prepare the child to make confession of faith in the church or to appropriate the blessings of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is the domain of the preaching of the gospel and the church. Concerning the purpose of the school Hoeksema wrote as follows:

The purpose of the (Christian) school is to prepare him for a life in the world that is good before God, to give him sound instruction in the various subjects he must know to assume his place in the different domains of this present life. Is it not the distinctive Reformed, Calvinistic conception of life, that life belongs to God in its entirety; that nothing may be excluded from the service of the living God; that His glory

is the chief purpose of all? (p. 319).

Hoeksema asked, "Is it not exactly on this basis that a need is expressed for an education that may prepare the child for such a life?" (p. 319).

Hoeksema brought his argument to a close by considering the second half of the third principle: "Though lost in sin man can be saved through faith in Christ; and through restoring grace he is able to do spiritual good." Hoeksema cannot see that one can build a Christian school on the basis of this statement. He wrote: "First, this possibility is left universal: man may come to the state in which he can do spiritual good. Secondly, spiritual good according to the interpretation of the common grace adherents is limited to such things as faith, hope, love, etc. What does this have to do with reading, writing, arithmetic, civics, history, physical geography, etc., etc.?" (p. 319).

Once again he said, "Why this lame, vague statement, that is as far from the central line of truth as the poles are from the equator?" He pleads for a distinct statement and recommended that the third Specific Principle be written as follows:

From the fallen and wholly de-

praved human race and in the midst of a world that lieth in darkness, a crooked and perverse generation, God saves His elect, establishing His covenant with them and their children in the line of continued generation, forming them by His sovereign grace in Christ into a people of Himself, that they might be His friends, and, living in every sphere of life from the principle of regeneration through faith, they should show forth His praises and walk as children of light in the world (p. 319).

As we have indicated in previous articles, this restatement of one of the Specific Principles is more than a last paragraph in an article written nearly seventy years ago. The basic truth of Hoeksema's restatement of this third Specific Principle is found in the section called "The Basis" of many of the Constitutions adopted by the Protestant Reformed Christian schools. The following is an example taken from one such Constitution:

Our Sovereign, Triune, Covenant God has from eternity chosen and in time forms a people unto Himself, that they may stand in Covenant relationship to Him, and live to His praise in friendship and loving service in all spheres of life, in the midst of a sinful world.

... to be continued 

Book Reviews



Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century. Ed. Luis E. Lugo. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. xviii + 385. \$28 (paper). [Reviewed by the editor.]

We are seeing a renewal of interest in the life and thought of Abraham Kuyper. That aspect of his thought that receives attention is his theory of the Calvinistic Christianizing of society. The Kuyper that is resurrected is the Kuyper of common grace and the Stone lectures on Calvinism.

Religion, Pluralism, and Public

Life is part of this Kuyper-renaissance. A number of scholars examine Kuyper's thought with a view to applying it to today's world. Included are informative explanations of Kuyper's theory of sphere sovereignty.

Some of the essays are sharply critical of the Dutch thinker. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen castigates Kuyper for his patriarchal view of women ("The Carrot and the Stick: Kuyper on Gender, Family, and Class"), never noticing that Kuyper's prohibition of women's ordination in the church is the


Word of God in Holy Scripture. Peter J. Paris roundly condemns Kuyper for racism ("The African and African-American Understanding of Our Common Humanity: A Critique of Abraham Kuyper's Anthropology"). H. Russel Botman gives a fairer analysis of Kuyper's influence on the apartheid policy of the Dutch Reformed in South Africa ("Is Blood Thicker than Justice? The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for Southern Africa").

Critical as the scholars are of virtually all elements of Kuyper's social teaching, they uncritically

accept Kuyper's assertion that the foundation of a distinctively Christian worldview is common grace. In the preface to the book, Max Stackhouse writes:

What keeps persons from being pulled apart in this complex world

of multiple practices and institutions, and what keeps society from fragmenting into totally autonomous realms where each sphere becomes its own principality or power, is the recognition of a deep moral and spiritual fabric—constituted by a God-given common grace—that undergirds all that is (p. xvi).

The articles that make up the book are the speeches that were given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1998 in observance of the 100th anniversary of Kuyper's Stone lectures on Calvinism as a worldview. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young People's Activities

In early November the Young People's Society of the First PRC in Holland, MI met for one of their special monthly meetings. Mr. Paul Goh, a student in our seminary from our sister churches in Singapore, and his wife Suet Yin, gave a slide presentation of the churches there. Some of our readers may also know that First in Holland is this year's host church for our denomination's annual Young People's Convention. Since August 13-17 is now only eight months away, you can imagine that First is very busy with the planning stage of this year's convention. Three speakers have been chosen and have agreed to speak. They are Rev. W. Bekkering (Pella, IA), Rev. G. Eriks (Loveland, CO), and Rev. R. Van Overloop (Georgetown PRC Hudsonville, MI). A theme in harmony with First's lake shore location has also been adopted, "Christ Our Guiding Light on the Sea of Life." The theme passage and song are Psalm 27:1 and Psalter #71. We should also add that this year's convention will be held at Lake Ann Baptist Camp near Traverse City, MI. Now I have never been to that camp, but my wife and I have spent a couple of weeks of vacation on Lake Ann, and let me assure you that the scenery in that part of northern Michigan is reason enough to make plans to attend.

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Mission Activities

Our Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI and our denomination's Domestic Mission Committee have approved another six months of supply for the saints in Fayetteville, NC. Rev. J. Mahtani, our missionary to the Eastern United States, laboring in Pittsburgh, PA, will return there to preach three out of those six months. Various ministers from the Grand Rapids, MI area will be going there to preach the other three months for two Lord's Days each month. Let us remember to pray for God's saints there, as well as our other mission fields, but especially as it appears that this particular mission field is beginning to prosper.

This past Thanksgiving Day the members of our mission in Pittsburgh, PA were encouraged to invite friends and colleagues to join them in a time of thanksgiving and worship. After the service all were invited to proceed to the home of our missionary, Rev. J. Mahtani, his wife Esther, and their family, for a Thanksgiving meal, followed by a fun time of games and fellowship, including a table tennis tournament to try and beat our missionary. Sunday morning, December 3, Rev. R. Moore, our churches' missionary to Ghana, was privileged to be part of what I believe was his first wedding since arriving there as missionary. We, along with the saints there in Ghana, rejoice that God has led this couple to see the blessings of the covenant and that they desire to be married in the Lord.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI continues to see positive fruit on their on-going Spanish ministry. A recent issue of their monthly newsletter, "The Tulip," included a translation of two e-mails they received from a man in Spain who has an interest in our churches and doctrine. First will soon be forwarding these to our Domestic Mission Committee for their consideration. One e-mail said in part, "Spain is not a 3rd world country, but there are few believers.... We live in the south of Spain and there exists much idolatry. They come out with multitudes of idols to the streets and the people adorn them. We are a small group of believers who are beginning to start work and meetings. Almost all of us have been believers for a year and we need the help of the church."

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC has been busy this past year duplicating the entire series of sermons their pastor, Rev. B. Gritters, preached on the end times at the end of 1999. A donation was given to make this set available for every household in their congregation. There was a total of 18 sermons preached, and it was the committee's hope and prayer that the Hudsonville congregation would use the tapes for themselves or pass them on to neighbors who may be interested in the biblical teaching of the Lord Jesus' second coming.

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Congregation Activities

While Rev. R. Miersma was filling a recent classical appointment at the Randolph, WI PRC, he was also able to lead a combined Men's and Ladies' Society meeting. The topic for discussion that night was "Activities Within the Church." On November 26 the Choral Society for the

Peace PRC in Lansing, IL presented a combined program and Singspiration centered in the theme of Thanksgiving. The Choir of the Hudsonville, MI PRC presented a concert of songs centered in Thanksgiving and the birth of Jesus Christ for their congregation on December 3.

Food For Thought

"God created time and gave it to us. It is His fundamental gift, for all other gifts are conditioned upon it. Why should we give it so grudgingly to His service. Why should we not lavish time upon the things God knows and we know are the vital things?"

—E.A. Rountree

Announcements

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 5

**MR. and MRS. CHESTER EDWARD
HUNTER, SR.**

celebrate the fifty-fifth year of their marriage. We, their children and grandchildren, thank God that He brought them together and led them in His truth. We thank them for the spiritual instruction they have given us and continue to do so by their words and example. Our prayer is that God will greatly bless their last years together.

"Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing. To shew that the Lord is upright. He is my rock, and their is no unrighteousness in him" (Psalm 92:13-15).

Their children and grandchildren

Doon, Iowa

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Brian and Rajini VanFarowe in the passing of Brian's mother,

EMALINE VAN FAROWE.

May they find comfort in the words of Romans 6:22, 23, "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Ed Hekstra, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

December 12, 2000 marked the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

MAX and VIRGINIA MOORE.

We are thankful to our Lord for the many years He has given them together, and for the instruction and guidance they have given to us. Our prayer for them is that God will bless them with many more years together.

"I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart; and I will glorify thy name evermore" (Psalm 86:12).

- * Daniel Moore
- * John and Lara Moore
- * Matthew and Heidi Moore
- * Duane and Cindy Reinhardt
- * Mark Moore
- * William and Rebecca Moore
- * Thomas Moore

15 grandchildren

Loveland, Colorado

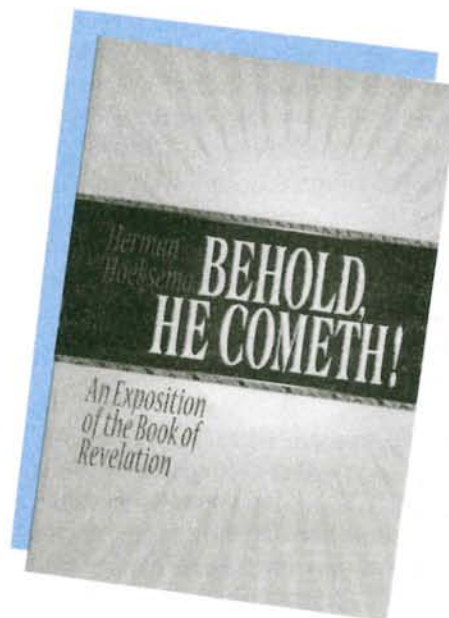
RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA expresses its sympathy to one of its members, Mr. Jake Jabaay, and his family in the death of his father,

MR. JOHN JABAAY.

"For this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

Pastor Arie denHartog, Pres.
Henry Meelker, Sec'y.



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