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The Great Profit of Righteousness in the Day of Wrath

Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Proverbs 11:4

There is coming a great day of wrath and destruction.

The prophets often spoke of this day. Zephaniah spoke of a coming day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness (1:14, 15). Malachi spoke of the great and dreadful day of the Lord that shall burn as an oven (4:1, 5). Joel spoke of the great and terrible day of the Lord which shall come after the sun has been turned into darkness and the moon into blood (2:31).

Our proverb speaks of the same day.

This proverb is a Hebrew parallelism, in which we find two thoughts that run parallel to each other in meaning, so that we must

interpret the one in light of the other. When we approach our proverb this way, we find that righteousness and riches are contrasted. We are told that whereas riches do not profit in the day of wrath, righteousness does. For righteousness will deliver from death in this day of wrath.

There is implied here a solemn calling and warning: seek after and obtain righteousness rather than riches.



The day of wrath.

The day of wrath is the day in which God vents His wrath upon man for his sin. Man has sinned. He sinned originally in the Garden of Eden in and through Adam. The result of this original sin is that each generation of mankind sins horribly against God. And God is very displeased with this sin. So much is this true that it brings down upon mankind the wrath of God. And so our proverb speaks of the day of wrath.

In a certain sense every day is a day of wrath. Every day God in wrath brings trouble and sorrow to

mankind as punishment for his sin. We read of this in Romans 1:18: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." However, it is also true that God forbears in His wrath. For a time He holds back the full manifestation of His wrath, reserving the fullness of His wrath for a future day. In this sense our proverb speaks of the day of wrath.

This day of wrath is also a day of death. Notice that our proverb speaks of death. This is because when God vents the fury of His wrath upon man for sin, He brings death to man. The wages of sin is death. The punishment of God upon sin is death.

When is this day of wrath?

We find several outstanding days of wrath in Bible times. In wrath God destroyed the wicked world with a flood in Noah's day. In wrath God also destroyed wicked Sodom and Gomorrah with fire. God's wrath also brought the ten plagues upon hardhearted Egypt in the days of Moses. Terrible days of wrath these were. Nor did the Old Testament church es-

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cape the wrath of God when she became unfaithful. There was a day of wrath for the nation of Israel, when God led her into captivity by the Assyrians. Later Judah experienced the same, when God in His wrath led them into captivity into Babylon.

We also see days of God's wrath in secular history. Repeatedly God brings widespread death through hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, war, and pestilence. These certainly are the visitations of God's wrath to punish an evil society.

All these various days of wrath, however, only anticipate the great and final day of wrath that is coming. This is the day of the coming of Jesus Christ from heaven. In that day God will pour out the fullness of His wrath upon mankind to destroy them. In that day there will be a final and public judgment in which all men will be judged according to their works. The result of this judgment will be that God will in His wrath condemn many (the majority) to the eternal death of hell, never to escape. So great will be the destruction of that day that the entire universe in its present form will be destroyed to make way for a new creation.

Of this final day of judgment our proverb speaks. All the other days of wrath found throughout history are only types and warnings of the great and final day of God's wrath.



The profit of righteousness.

Our proverb contrasts riches and righteousness.

Riches refer to earthly, material abundance. These riches include nice homes, fine clothes, rich food, any luxury you can imagine. Riches also include the life of comfort, pleasure, and prestige which material wealth affords. These riches certainly characterize our society today!

In distinction from that, our proverb speaks of righteousness.

Righteousness has the basic idea of obedience to the law of God. The Bible views righteousness both legally and spiritually. Viewed legally, righteousness is God's verdict as Judge that we are righteous before Him, perfect and without sin. Viewed spiritually, righteousness is righteous living. One has to do with God's verdict upon our lives; the other has to do with how we actually live.

True righteousness is to be found only in Jesus Christ.

Apart from Jesus Christ we are depraved. All we can do is live unrighteously, following every way of sin and disobedience. And that is also the verdict of God upon our lives — unrighteous.

However, in Christ there is found perfect righteousness.

At the cross Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God against the sin of God's elect church, thereby covering their sin. All His life long, but especially at the cross, Jesus also walked in perfect obedience for the church. When God accounts this covering and obedience of the cross to be ours, we are righteous before God. No matter that we have sinned. No matter that we have sinned terribly. We are righteous before God in Christ. God accounts the righteousness of Christ to be ours as we daily cling to Jesus Christ by faith. This is the great truth of justification by faith alone.

But God does not stop there. When God accounts His people righteous before Him by faith in Jesus Christ, He by that same faith also transforms them spiritually so that they begin to live righteously. What motivates them is gratitude to God. This is the truth of sanctification.

Of this twofold righteousness our proverb speaks.

The question we face is, what will profit us in the day of wrath? The answer is quite simple. Whatever will deliver us from the terrible wrath of God that will fall upon mankind is what will profit us in that day.

Riches certainly are of no profit in the day of wrath. Riches cannot deliver us from the wrath of God against sin. If all we have to present to God in that day are earthly riches, we will perish under God's wrath. And many will perish in that day. All they will have to show for their lives are riches or the vain attempt to gain riches.

However, righteousness will profit in the day of wrath. For God is a righteous Judge, who punishes the sinner but blesses the righteous. And those who appear before Him in the day of wrath clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ will be delivered from the wrath of that terrible day. All their sins will be covered by the blood of Christ. On account of Christ's perfect righteousness they will be honored as heirs of God's blessings. God will even reward their works of righteousness with eternal glory.

Oh, the profit of righteousness!



The way of wisdom is clear.

Certainly we must not seek earthly riches.

Many do seek the earthly riches of this life. Their whole life is caught up in the pursuit of earthly wealth. To obtain riches they often turn from the ways of righteousness. They do so because they have been deceived into thinking that riches are the key to all that is good.

But God calls us repeatedly to turn from this seeking of earthly riches. We are not to set our affections on things on the earth (Col. 3:2). We are not to labor for the meat that perishes (John 6:27). And now we know the reason. Riches profit not in the most important day of our lives, the day of wrath.

Wisdom seeks to attain the righteousness which is in Jesus Christ.


Also this is God's call to us. We are to set our affections on and to seek those things which are above (Col. 3:1, 2). We are to seek first

the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

This righteousness of God is a free gift of grace to His people. It is found by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

In faith, seek the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ first, above all. Make the possession of true righteousness in Christ the all-important concern of life. Make sure that earthly, material things become important only insofar as

they are necessary to be found in Christ, clothed with His righteousness in the great day of wrath.

For riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death. 

Editorially Speaking

In this issue of the *Standard Bearer* appears the first installment of our reprinting of Abraham Kuyper's *When Thou Sittest in Thine House*. The work was originally a series of meditations in Kuyper's religious periodical, *De Heraut* (*The Herald*). The articles were published in book form in 1899 with the title, *Als Gij in Uw Huis Zit: Meditatieën voor het Huislijk Saamleven*. In 1929 Eerdmans published an English translation by John Hendrik DeVries with the title, *When Thou Sittest in Thine House: Meditations on Home Life*. The book is out-of-print. It is this translation that we are publishing serially in the *SB*. From magazine to book back to magazine.

As the title indicates, the work is a biblical study of the Christian home. In his "A Word Preliminary," which we include in the first installment, Kuyper mentioned that it was his special purpose that the book "be placed in the hands of those newly married."

We think that this treatment of various aspects of the Christian family is generally sound, insightful, and profitable. It is worthy of being made available again to Reformed Christians. Some of the chapters are powerful and moving. A few references to the times and customs at the end of the nineteenth century do not detract from the book's pertinence to family-life

at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Publication does not, of course, imply agreement with everything Kuyper wrote in the work.

From time to time, therefore, interspersed with the articles by the regular writers of the rubric, our readers will find chapters from Abraham Kuyper's *When Thou Sittest in Thine House* in our rubric (borrowed from the title of the book), "When Thou Sittest in Thine House."

Our intention is to publish the entire work, except for two chapters on servants (31 and 32). Two chapters (22 and 29) will be edited to omit short sections that dis-course of "common grace."

— DJE 

Editorial

"He Shines in All That's Fair" (and Curses All That's Foul)

"He Shines in All That's Fair" is a lovely line in the well-known hymn, "This is My Father's World."

This is my Father's world, the
birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily
white, declare their
Maker's praise.

This is my Father's world: He
shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him
pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.

Dr. Richard J. Mouw has lifted this line from the hymn and made it the title of his recent book (Eerdmans, 2001). The book is of

great interest to readers of the *Standard Bearer*. It is also of importance, as Mouw rightly suggests, not only for the entire Reformed community, but also for the wider circles of evangelicalism and even "segments of mainstream Protestantism": "the underlying issues here are of broad contemporary Christian concern," important for "the

larger Christian theological world" (pp. 3, 4, 8).

This explains the first part of the title of this editorial. The explanation of the second, parenthetical part will become evident in due course.

Common Grace Revisited— by a Non-PR

The book is a reappraisal of certain issues involved in the common grace controversy in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in the early 1920s. The sub-title is "Culture and Common Grace." The sub-title makes plain that the interest of Dr. Mouw is that aspect of common grace that consists of a non-saving love of God for the reprobate wicked in this life. In His common grace love for the non-elect, God is thought to desire their earthly good, to bless them with temporal blessings, to pity them in their earthly woes, and to give them His Holy Spirit, keeping them from being totally depraved and enabling them to perform good works in society. Common grace accounts for the seeming good in unregenerated unbelievers, about whom the Reformed faith confesses in Q. and A. 8 of the Heidelberg Catechism that they are "so corrupt that [they] are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness." Common grace also becomes the basis of friendship between Christian and non-Christian. Especially is common grace put forward as the basis of cooperation between believers and unbelievers in working together for a good culture.

In short, Mouw's interest, in *He Shines in All That's Fair*, is the doctrine of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924, exclusive of the "well-meant offer of the gospel." Basically, this was the theory of common grace that was taught by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck: a non-saving favor of God to all humans; an operation of the Holy Spirit within the reprobate which, without regenerating

them, restrains sin in them so that they are only partially depraved; and the ability of unbelievers, by virtue of this grace of the Holy Spirit, to do good works, especially on behalf of a culture which is truly, though not ultimately, good.

"My special focus," writes Mouw, early on in the book

will be on the relevance of teachings about common grace for our understanding of *culture* in our contemporary context. Is there a non-saving grace that is at work in the broader reaches of human cultural interaction, a grace that expedites a desire on God's part to bestow certain blessings on all human beings, elect and non-elect alike — blessings that provide the basis for Christians to co-operate with, and learn from, non-Christians? (p. 14)

Significant Issues for the Entire Christian Community

It is Mouw's judgment, and experience, that the controversy over common grace in the CRC was of great importance. "The issues relating to the idea of common grace and the battles that have been waged over those issues have long fascinated me. In a sense, questions about common grace have formed the underlying issues in my own intellectual pilgrimage" (p. vii). Nor are these issues important only for Mouw personally. "The underlying issues here are of broad contemporary Christian concern" (p. 3). Indeed, Mouw is convinced that "much important content in these Calvinist debates has been hidden too long from the larger Christian theological world. My efforts here, then, are an attempt to give Dutch Reformed deliberations about common grace some broader ecumenical exposure" (p. 8).

The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) are likewise convinced of the vital importance of the issues involved in their controversy with the CRC, and now most of the Reformed world, over com-

mon grace. We are delighted that a man of the theological stature of a Richard Mouw opens up a public discussion of these issues. Mouw is a leading figure, not only in Reformed circles but also in the wider evangelical sphere. For many years, he taught philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. At present, he is president of the huge and influential Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Dr. Mouw's revisiting of the common grace controversy in the early 1920s resulting in the formation of the PRC comes hard on the heels of the re-examination of that doctrinal struggle in several articles in the *Calvin Theological Journal* of April and November, 2000. The PRC welcome these fresh analyses and hope for continuing discussion of the issues by these writers and by others.

Civility in Theological Discourse

Richard Mouw is a fair and honest controversialist. He is winsome in debate, practicing the civility that he preaches. Mouw treats the position on common grace of Herman Hoeksema and the PRC at length. In fact, the book is both occasioned by the historical controversy over common grace between the CRC and Herman Hoeksema and structured by Mouw's interaction with the rejection of common grace by Hoeksema and the PRC. *He Shines in All That's Fair* is Richard Mouw's defense and development of common grace on behalf of good culture against the rejection of common grace by Herman Hoeksema. It is amusing that what purported to be a review of the book in a recent issue of *Christian Renewal* managed to avoid mentioning the name of Herman Hoeksema while listing any number of others who are bit players in the book. That reviewer could review Melville's great novel without mentioning Moby Dick.

Mouw is respectful of the position on common grace of its great

adversary, Herman Hoeksema. Mouw admits that common grace is difficult to grasp and describe. Like old Foppe Ten Hoor, Mouw himself is “not very clear about what it is” (p. 13). Mouw freely acknowledges that rejection of common grace would seem to follow from the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and the antithesis. In fact, Mouw puzzles over the passion with which defenders of common grace opposed Hoeksema. In this connection, Mouw deplors the tactic of the defenders of common grace of smearing Hoeksema with the epithet “Anabaptist,” as though Hoeksema’s rejection of common grace amounted to “world flight.” This was an extremely effective tactic at the time of the controversy, and one that is still effectively used against the PRC by the impassioned defenders of common grace.

Mouw quotes approvingly from a letter that Prof. William Heyns of the CRC seminary sent to Rev. J. K. Van Baalen, the most energetic practitioner of the tactic, chiding Van Baalen for calling Hoeksema and his colleagues Anabaptists. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that this letter has surfaced in the literature of the controversy in the CRC over common grace. Heretofore, William Heyns has not received good press in the PRC. Heyns is regarded as the father of the conditional covenant in the CRC and, thus, indirectly, of the “well-meant offer.” Because of his reprimand of Van Baalen in the heat of the battle in the letter from which Mouw quotes, Heyns rises in my estimation. Contending that it was, and is, unfair to label Hoeksema an Anabaptist for his rejection of common grace, Mouw writes:

Calvin Seminary professor William Heyns made a similar point ... in a 1922 letter to Christian Reformed minister J. K. Van Baalen, who had just written a rather inflammatory pamphlet depicting

Hoeksema and his associates as Anabaptists. Heyns endorsed the general thrust of Van Baalen’s critique, but he chided him for his rhetoric, instructing Van Baalen that he “would have done better to leave out that epithet ‘Anabaptist,’ which here can serve only as a scornful word.” Surely, Heyns wrote, Van Baalen was not ignorant of the fact “that all of the same things” he found in Hoeksema’s thinking could “also be said of the old theologians of Reformed scholasticism” (p. 23).

Mouw does justice to Hoeksema’s spiritual, practical concern in the controversy over common grace.

At the heart of Herman Hoeksema’s sustained critique of common grace theology lies a very practical concern about the life of the church. The commonality emphasis in common grace theology, Hoeksema insists, will inevitably result in the “obliteration of the distinction between the Church and the world, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, righteousness and unrighteousness.” Of course, no common grace defender would simply advocate the “obliteration” of the distinctions listed by Hoeksema. But it does seem to be essential to common grace thinking that the distinction between “church and world” is not exactly the same distinction as that which holds between “light and darkness, Christ and Belial, righteousness and unrighteousness” (p. 24).

Mouw even calls attention to the judgment of the present editor of the *Standard Bearer* upon the worldview of common grace, that “the worldview of common grace has proved to be a colossal failure.” Although Mouw thinks that there is another, more favorable judgment that can and should be made, he agrees that

he [the editor of the *SB*] is right to insist that we take an honest look at the failure of common grace thought to stem the tide of wickedness so obvious in places

like the Netherlands and North America. If we are to judge common grace teachings by looking for fruits of righteousness in the larger culture—surely a fair test, given the triumphalist tones in which these teachings have often been proclaimed—then we must admit to some serious shortcomings (p. 27).

Mouw points out, correctly, that occasionally Calvin refers to certain natural abilities in the unregenerated as a “peculiar grace of God.” Nevertheless, on the basis of Calvin’s overall doctrine concerning the total depravity of the ungodly, a depravity that “sullies” all their “virtues” and renders them “worthless,” Mouw concludes that opponents of common grace teachings “can legitimately claim nonetheless to be working within the general contours of Calvin’s thought” (p. 18).

A More Aggressive Practice of Common Grace

On his part, however, Dr. Mouw comes down firmly on the side of common grace. Although Mouw holds the doctrine of predestination set forth in the Canons of Dordt, he believes that God has a non-saving love for all humans. In this love, He blesses all humans with many gifts, including a gracious work of the Holy Spirit within them that restrains their depravity and produces a certain goodness in them and in their works. Richard Mouw sees much in the life of many ungodly people that is fair. All this goodness, truth, and beauty is the shining of God Himself in the lives of the ungodly in His common grace. “He shines in all that’s fair.” This shining of God in His common grace is the basis of legitimate friendship between believer and unbeliever, as it is the basis of cooperation between believer and unbeliever to work for a good culture.

In fact, Mouw faults the three points of common grace adopted by the CRC in 1924 for their pas-

sivity. Mouw calls Christians aggressively to act upon and implement common grace by promoting friendships with the ungodly and cooperative cultural endeavor.

The Christian Reformed Church's Three Points of 1924 certainly seem designed to encourage cultural passivity. They come across as instructions for Christians who are mere observers of the larger

world. Of course, we cannot help being largely passive when it comes to the "natural blessings" — such as sunshine and rain — that are bestowed upon the elect and non-elect alike. But the second and third areas are different. We should not just stand back and watch for signs that God is restraining sin in the world, or hope that we might witness acts of civic righteousness popping up here and there in the lives of the unredeemed. We ought to look for

ways God can use us to restrain the power of sin in the larger human community, and to perform our own works of civic good (p. 81).

Dr. Mouw's reasons for espousing common grace are characteristically candid. They are also interesting. We will look at them in the next issue, God willing.

— DJE 

Letters

"Alone" Amidst the Onslaught

I must send this communication to you to say THANK YOU for your articles, "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism" (*Standard Bearer*, Jan. 1, 1995 – Dec. 15, 1996), which I read on the Internet. After twenty-odd years of being beaten down by those who deride the Reformed faith and use premillennialism, and, sadly, quotations from and references to Spurgeon's affirmation of premillennialism, in order to denigrate anything that might be termed "Reformed" or "Calvinist," I have often begun (having stood apparently alone amidst the onslaught for so long) to doubt even my

own salvation. How can such a mass-appealing fancy as dispensationalism be wrong and I, all alone, be right? One soon forgets the seven thousand that exist elsewhere, and life in the defense of Reformed doctrines such as amillennial eschatology becomes filled with self-doubt and "black" moods. I was, even this morning, feeling the grip of another bout of melancholy, wanting just to "shut up," say nothing, and be left alone to let the modern church do whatever it wishes.

While your articles deal with the subject of postmillennialism, they nevertheless have provided me with a wonderful breath of


"fresh air," which I greatly needed at this time.

Philip Livingstone
Innerleithen, Scottish Borders
Scotland

Response:

Seek out some of the seven thousand in the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

The articles to which you refer, with related articles on the error of preterism, have recently been published in book form under the title, *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom: A Defense of Reformed Amillennialism*. The book is available from The Reformed Witness, 1307 E. Brockton Ave., Redlands, CA 92374 USA.

— Ed. 

All Around Us

Rev. Ken Koole

■ God's Wisdom and the Impaired (or: Living in Gratitude While Raising Children with Genetic Anomalies)

Every now and then one comes across a book that demands attention. One such book is *Genetic*

Ethics: Do the Ends Justify the Genes? This is a book which, because of its relevance to the issue of the day, genetic cloning, deserves a wider reading. The book consists of twenty-three articles, each written by a different author trying to bring his or her Christianity to bear on some facet of the controversy swirling around genetic research and its aims. This is an area about which we must be informed. The practical and ethical

questions that loom here reach into every facet of modern life. This book provides a beginning in educating oneself in the issues involved. It is published by Eerdmans at a very reasonable price. (I assured my wife that they were almost giving it away.)

There is one article in particular that caught my attention, Chapter 3, entitled "God's Sovereignty and Genetic Anomalies." This chapter in itself is worth the price

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of the book. What the writer says about God's sovereignty as it affects our lives is solid. How he brings it to bear on the matter of "genetic anomalies" (i.e., genetic disorders that result in impairments, often of the severest sort) is moving and full of insight. The author himself is the father of a severely impaired child.

My eldest daughter, now 14, was born with a genetic anomaly termed 8p +. She is profoundly disabled and will require lifelong care. Her condition is so rare that we do not even know what her life expectancy is. Though life with our daughter has been extremely difficult (and expensive) at times, we have learned important lessons about life and the value of life from her (p. 53).

What is the value of such a God-given child? It is exactly such a child that those enamored with genetic manipulation seek to prevent. Their perspective is, having the basic knowledge of the human genome, we must now vigorously pursue the technology necessary to protect individuals from having to suffer such things, no matter what the cost. The author, a believer who can speak from firsthand experience, full of compassion for the daughter God gave to him and his wife, begs to differ. Having stated that "the comfort is that when we embrace the truth that God will glorify himself through everything that happens, we know that in the providence of God nothing is lost or in vain," the writer goes on to say:

Nothing we experience is meaningless; everything is significant, the bitter and sweet. We may not be able to say at the time of the death of loved ones that their death glorifies God. However, we can rest absolutely certain that such things are not mistakes nor do they happen by chance. We can also be certain that even such awful things will glorify God, because he has said so, and he keeps his promise.

Second, God creates some people with genetic anomalies not only for the sake of his glory, but also to show us our own brokenness and our need of his grace. The disabled among us, whether genetically disabled or otherwise, remind us of our own inherent disabilities. When we see them with their limitations, we can begin to see ourselves in a new, more honest manner as broken men and women before God in need of redemption, body and soul....

We recently received a letter from a friend that captures well this idea of seeing our own brokenness in those with genetic disabilities. In the course of her letter, Nancy Jensen writes the following:

"As a daughter of the King, I am of worth beyond my capacity to perform. I am measured in worth by God's love for me, not by my love toward Him. There is nothing I could perform that would fill a service to Him, nothing. Yet He loves me....

"Then I thought of Jessica. She is loved by our family and given a worth beyond her capacity to perform. Her place in your home is ensured by your love for her, not by her ability to be loving, or helpful, or to achieve anything. I realized with humility that I am just like her in God's family, only far more handicapped. In the spiritual realm, I can't move right — much less walk or anything wonderful, can't feed myself or dress myself.... And I don't even see how handicapped I am, thinking I'm fine and strong and competent. Still, God loves me, His crippled child, His own chosen special treasure. Just like you two have built your house to accommodate Jessica's needs so God has ordered all of creation and redemption to accommodate us.

"So the Lord used your precious Jessica to show me who I really am to Him. It's humbling, true, but still a great comfort, because it's right" (pp. 53-54).

Talk about insight.

Continuing on, the author points out:

Healthy "normal" people (one author has insightfully referred to

this broad class of people as "the temporarily able-bodies") tend to avoid people with disabilities and to feel uncomfortable around them when avoidance is not possible. This reaction is due primarily to the hubris of our day that sees ourselves as beautiful, whole, perfect people. When we encounter someone who is broken in body, it reminds us that we are much more like this disabled person than we would like to admit. Our differences are not differences of kind, only differences of degree. Such a realization humbles us, and humility is not a virtue cultivated in the contemporary western world. As one writer recently put it, "Humility has a dank and shameful smell to the worldly, the scent of failure, lowliness, and obscurity."

Third, God creates some people with genetic anomalies not only for his own glory and to show us our own brokenness, but also because such disabled people present the church with the gift of allowing followers of Christ to serve them unconditionally, without expectation of receiving back. In this way they help us to mirror God and to experience forgiving grace to another as God does to us (p. 54).

Yes, a rather long quote. Strictly speaking, the question could be raised, I suppose, whether this all fits under the rubric "All Around Us." Just keep in mind that families with children impaired by genetic disorders are all around us, fellow saints bound to children with severe disabilities making great demands on their energy and time. These are the children whom genetic testing could diagnose in the womb, and whose parents would be advised to terminate their life. These are the children that those promoting genetic experimentation and engineering want to prevent or deliver us from. Such children are a great burden. What can be the good of such?

To this Mr. Michael S. Beates gives an eloquent answer.

When we are faced with excruciatingly painful life situations

brought on by genetic anomalies, we ask (and rightfully so), "If this is from God, how can this be good?"

But if such hardship causes the believer to long more deeply for God's presence and to look forward to his making all things new, then it has meaning and purpose. If such trials beckon followers of Christ to love the Lord our God rather than this world, then he is glorified in such circumstances (p. 55).

Now, for the sake of argument, let us suppose that man by genetic engineering, after who knows how many failures and experiments gone awry (because it will take that, be assured), at last breaks through the barriers and is able to deliver society from all sorts of impaired and diseased children. In light of the above, what are we going to gain? There is nothing to lose? Really? Perhaps we ought to read the above quotes once again.

And, should science ever cross the threshold and be able to alter genetically the fetus in the womb to prevent impairment after impairment, do you seriously think they will allow a couple the choice of bringing such children into the world? The Insurance Companies? You know, the "good hands" people? You think they are going to bear such costs? Well, then I have a bridge in Brooklyn I would like to

sell you. You can contact me at.... But read the book for yourself.

■ The Old Word Game Again


You know the approach. If one phrase sets off alarms and causes bells to ring, say it in another way. Use euphemisms. You may be able to sell it to the public that way. "Cloning," even when described as "therapeutic," is a word that sets off such alarms. So what to do? Cal Thomas, in *World Magazine* (Feb. 2, p. 29), alerts us that they are up to their old games again ("they" referring to the National Academy of Sciences or NAS). As Thomas points out, the NAS wants the government to outlaw reproductive cloning — for now. Thomas goes on to say:

How appropriate in the 29th anniversary month of *Roe vs. Wade*, which effectively declassified human beings as unique compared to other living things, that an influential scientific body should take one more step away from a model of humanity based on intrinsic value and toward a utilitarian model which says that humans, like everything else, have only the value assigned them by society.

The language used by the NAS in a report released on Jan. 18 reveals the group's moral emptiness. Clon-

ing for research is referred to not as "therapeutic cloning" but "nuclear transplantation to produce stem cells" (sic! — KK). Perhaps "cloning" was not testing well in focus groups, so advocates had to come up with more acceptable words. This is nothing new. The Third Reich employed euphemisms to anesthetize any latent German moral consciousness. "Transportation Company for the Sick" was a sign placed on trucks that rolled through German streets carrying human cargo to their final earthly destinations. America long ago moved from "abortion" to "pregnancy termination." It sounds nicer.

Be on the lookout. "Nuclear transplantation to produce stem cells"? Just another way for talking about cloning human cells for research. As Thomas astutely points out, in our day and age, "One's comfort level is now the standard by which people determine moral truth. 'If it feels good, do it' was unsophisticated and sounded self-centered. 'Nuclear transplantation' sounds scientific, trendy, even ennobling."

So another phrase is born to deceive twenty-first century society, which, sad to say, much like German society of Hitler's day, really does not care to know exactly what is going on anyway. This way we can sleep better. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Luther and the Right Wing of the Reformation (2)

Introduction

In the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the reformers had the unenviable task of battling Rome on the left and the radicals on the right. They were required to fight on two fronts, no easy task. That they steered, for

the most part, a middle course for the most part between these two extremes is a monument to the power of the grace of God. When on God's clock the time comes for church reformation, nothing can prevent it from happening — though it may seem to be ever so hopeless.

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Looking at it from our point of view, the radicals almost succeeded in stealing the Reformation. In the early history, when Luther was really only feeling his way, uncertain what direction to follow in the work of reform, the radicals struck with force and fury at the heart of the reformatory movement — in Wittenberg itself. No one was there to resist them. Carlstadt had joined their forces; Melancthon was too timid; others, men faithful to Lutheran principles, stood wringing their hands but totally at a loss as to what to do. And Luther was in hiding in Wartburg. From Wartburg he came, by his own decision, against the wishes of the prince who had specifically forbid him to leave the castle. He stood alone in the gap. For perhaps the one and only time in his life, he did not come roaring out of Wartburg to unleash all his heavy artillery. He came secretly, spent three days incognito, and only then assumed the responsibilities of stopping the radicals in their tracks. And he did it simply by *preaching*, nothing more, but also nothing less.

We may be thankful that God gave the church this man Luther, for if the radicals had succeeded in stealing the Reformation, the new edifice, so carefully and painstakingly being built, would have gone up in the smoke of the battlefield soaked with the blood of all those desiring reform.

One characteristic of the radicals, though not of all the Anabaptists, was their mysticism. They built their theology and their Christian morals on direct and immediate revelation to them by the Spirit through dreams, visions, and private inner conversations between the human heart and God. As is so often the case with those who think they are specially favored with revelations through special divine illumination and inner light, these Spiritualists became more and more radical. Some began to teach that no education was

necessary, for all the Christian needed to know was in the Bible. Others became increasingly persuaded that they represented the kingdom of Christ and had to bring about the realization of that kingdom, even if force was necessary. They opposed earthly government, military service, private property, the oath, infant baptism, and all externals in worship.

But all these radicals had in common the notion that Christ was about to return to establish His kingdom here on earth, and these radicals had been entrusted with the obligation to prepare the way by establishing that kingdom prior to Christ's coming, so that it would be there ready for Christ when He actually came. They were premilenarian. They looked for Christ to establish an earthly kingdom. They would have it ready and waiting when Christ came.

We shall discuss the lives of two of these radicals in this article. Agreeing in the fundamentals of their position, they nevertheless went different ways.

Thomas Münzer

Thomas Münzer was born in 1490 (it seemed to be the year for the birth of radicals, for several of them came into the world in this year) in the German town of Stolberg. He studied in Leipzig and Frankfurt and became a gifted linguist, a literary scholar, and a learned theologian. He early came to appreciate and believe the ideas developed by Martin Luther, and received a pastorate in the city of Zwickau (1520). When Carlstadt made his move to assume the leadership of the reformation in Wittenberg (while Luther was hiding in a castle in Wartburg), two radicals, Nicholas Storck, a weaver, and Marcus Stübner, who had studied under Melancthon, came from Zwickau, attracted by the possibility of mischief. Already by 1520 Zwickau was a hotbed of mysticism, and the radicals in Germany became known as the Zwickau

prophets. Thomas was one of them. He too paid a visit to Wittenberg during the iconoclastic riots, but fled when Luther appeared on the scene.

I must interject at this point another aspect of the reformation in Germany which is important for an understanding of what follows.

I refer to the fact that Luther's doctrines and reforms had a special appeal to the peasants in Germany. There were, I think, especially three reasons for this. Luther, though an educated man, nevertheless could talk in the language of the peasants and easily bring himself down to their level. He was their man, one of them who understood them and spoke to them in their own coarse and uninhibited German. The second reason was that a keystone in Luther's thought was the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The lowest peasant, when he believed, Luther said, became a prophet, a priest, and a king in his own life. This was heady tonic if the true nature of such an office were not clearly understood. In the third place, the peasants in Germany, as well as most other places in Europe, were terribly oppressed. The remnants of the old feudal system gave princes enormous powers to exercise over the peasants, and these poor struggling people had all they could do to keep body and soul together for 35 or 40 years, when they died a premature death.

Put all those things together and one has a huge pile of tinder-dry brush. Add the spark of Anabaptist fire and you have a conflagration. When the radicals preached their inner-revelation doctrine and scorned learning, when they spoke of the peasants as being closer to God than the princes because the peasants lacked learning, when they were convinced that their calling was to prepare the way for Christ by establishing His kingdom here in the world, and when thousands upon thousands of peasants, moved by

the rhetoric of a Luther, looked upon the Reformation as an opportunity to overthrow the princes' power and rule themselves, all Germany burst into one mighty holocaust — a tragedy known in history as the Peasants' War.

While first the peasants were successful in their rampaging, rioting, and slaughter, soon the princes organized their armies, united their forces, and with Luther at their backs urging them to restore order, they destroyed the peasants in the Battle of Frankenhausen on May 15, 1525. Luther hated disorder, had preached for years that the Word of God was the power of reformation, and clearly understood that no matter how much one could sympathize with the terrible plight of the peasants, rebellion against authority was contrary to the will of God. It was a sad day in the history of the Reformation. The peasants lost confidence in Luther, and Luther lost confidence in the peasants. This never changed in Luther's lifetime.

Münzer was the chief architect of the revolution. With his fiery preaching, promises of a high place in the kingdom of Christ, and with his vision of deliverance from the oppression of greedy princes, he stirred up the people to a frenzy.

Thomas Münzer was captured, tortured until he recanted his heretical views, and then unceremoniously put to death. He was 35 years old.

John of Leyden

There were other radicals who left their imprint on Europe. Hans Hut engaged in that favorite pastime of radicals: the prediction of the date of the Lord's return. He claimed that this momentous event would take place on Pentecost Sunday, 1528. He was imprisoned for leading people astray, and was burned alive when he set the prison on fire in an effort to escape.

Melchior Hoffmann was another such radical, but his story is

intertwined with that of John of Leyden.

John of Leyden was much like Thomas Münzer in his beliefs. He was also a radical of the worst stripe and firmly believed not only that the kingdom of Christ was to be established on earth, but that it was the solemn responsibility of those belonging to that kingdom to overthrow existing kingdoms, by force if necessary. John was from the Lowlands and remains a blot on the history of that country to this day.

John was born in 1509. He soon turned to the most radical teachings of the radical reformation. He gathered a circle of people about him who were persuaded by his fiery style and somewhat charismatic personality. The establishment of Christ's kingdom here on earth in anticipation of the Lord's coming required that the true believers go back to early apostolic Christianity and practice religion according to the early church.

John had learned his lessons well, for he had learned them at the feet of Melchior Hoffmann. Hoffmann believed himself to be one of the two witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11, and claimed to be Elijah of whom the prophet Malachi had spoken in the last words of his prophecy. He also believed that Strasburg was to be the new Jerusalem and the seat of Christ's universal kingdom. Direct revelation was to be the pipeline through which the citizens knew the will of God. Hoffmann asked to be imprisoned, thinking that this would make a greater impression on Christ, who was to return at any moment. He died in prison. John of Leyden, whose actual name was John Matthys, a baker from Holland, seized the opportunity. If Hoffmann was the first witness, then he, John, was the second. If Hoffmann was Elijah, then he was Enoch. He moved into Strasburg and took Melchior's place, but soon moved the "new Jerusalem" from Strasburg to Münster.

There John set up his kingdom. And he was king. He called himself "King of Righteousness" and proceeded to set up a theocracy in Münster. Three times weekly he appeared in the market place in royal robes to converse with his subjects, receive their homage, and direct their lives by means of the revelations given him by God. He established a communism, for this is what the early church practiced. He introduced polygamy and took the lead himself in marrying a number of women. The excesses which went on in that city under the guise of its being the kingdom of Christ are beyond telling.

Spain was still the ruling power in the Lowlands, but in this instance Spanish and Protestant forces joined to dig out this rot from the nation. The city held out for a long time, but was taken when some of its own citizens betrayed it. The carnage unleashed by the capture of the city cannot be told. John himself was caught and tortured beyond endurance until at last death rescued him from his tormentors. The year was 1535. John was 26 years old.

Conclusion

It seems to me that two remarks are necessary to bring this article on the radical movement in the Reformation to a close.


The first remark is that the radical movement had a profound effect on Luther. Earlier I mentioned that the Peasants' War brought about a break between Luther and the common people which was not healed in Luther's lifetime. But Luther's commitment to the objective Word of God was unwavering. Because these radicals, who had all but destroyed Wittenberg and who had stirred up the peasants to war, proclaimed a despised gospel of subjective illumination, Luther's hatred of their views was fierce and unmitigated. He despised all subjectivism and took every opportunity to oppose it.

But I refer to something else. Some scholars contend that Luther's own wrong view of the Lord's Supper and his cold rejection of the Zwinglians and Calvinists, who differed from him, was due to the lessons he had learned of the dangers of mysticism. Let me explain. Luther wanted the objective Word of Christ to be not only the content but also the power of all preaching. He wanted the same for the sacraments and therefore clung to an objective presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament. Hence his consubstantiation. Luther studied the views of the Swiss theologians, saw that they made the statement of the

Lord "This is my body" a metaphorical expression, realized that the Swiss theologians made Christ's presence in the bread and wine a spiritual presence, and concluded that they too were guilty of the same subjectivizing of the Word of Christ as the radicals. Fearful of where such theology would lead, he rejected their position out of hand.

The second remark that needs to be made is that there is a reference to these radical Anabaptists in our own Confession of Faith. Although this confession was written in 1561, nearly thirty years after the debacle at Münster, the Roman Catholic authorities were

painting all protestants with the same brush and insisting that all protestants were as rebellious and politically treacherous as John of Leiden and his followers. They should, therefore, be eradicated.

To distinguish between these radicals and the true Calvinistic protestants in the Lowlands, Guido deBrès added to Article 36 these words: "Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods, and confound that decency and good order which God hath established among men." 

That They May Teach Them to Their Children

Miss Agatha Lubbers

The Antithesis and Teaching Literature (1)

American literature is one of the required courses for students who graduate from high school. This was true when I taught literature at Covenant Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Michigan in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and it is true today. One of the main reasons that schools teach American literature is that citizens of the USA, who ought to know the history of their country, should also study the literature of their country. In a certain sense the literature of a country is the result of the historical development of that country. Dr. Henry Zylstra wrote in an article for the *Reformed Journal*, March 1955 the following:

If you really want to get at the spirit of an age and the soul of a time, you can hardly do better than to consult the literature of that time and that age. In the novels and stories and poems and plays of a period you have a good indication of what, deep down, that period was about. I am thinking now, of course, of the real literature, the valid and undissimulating literature. I am not thinking of the quantities of drugstore fiction, surefire Broadway hits, "slick" magazine stories, or of the tons of synthetic entertainment and pastime books in which people in our time seem determined to hide from themselves and their problems (*Testament of Vision*, p. 5, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1965).

Although it is certainly appropriate that one adopt the position

that American literature is taught to students because they should study and know the literature of their country, there is a more fundamental reason for teaching literature. A parent led me into thinking about this more fundamental question when he asked the probing question whether I could teach the antithesis in literature. I believe the question deserves an answer. The responsible and thoughtful teacher ought to ask, "How can I do more than merely teach literature? How can I use literature, both Christian and secular, to teach transformed young Christians to read and study literature from a Reformed and Christian perspective — one that is distinct from the philosophy and ideology of the world? Because I do not believe in world flight (*een boekje in een hoekje* mentality or, lit-

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erally, a little book in a little corner mentality), how can I use literature, both Christian and secular, to teach young Christian students to understand the antithesis and to think antithetically?"

Although some literature is so immoral that it ought to be censored and avoided, antithetical teaching cannot be identified or equated with mere avoidance of non-Christian literature. If one were to use this approach, it would not be possible to have an authentic course in literature. R.C. Sproul stated that "the school cannot have an authentic course in American literature if non-Christian books are excluded. If a student is to become knowledgeable of American literature, he cannot completely bypass Steinbeck or Hemingway or a host of other authors who are not Christian For a student to understand major themes of literature that shape the American culture, he must be able to study them" (R.C. Sproul, *Pleasing God*, p. 66, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1944).

It must be observed in the first place that *formally* the study of literature in the Reformed Christian classroom will not be different from the study of the literature in the secular classroom. When Christian school students, who are new creatures in Christ, study the literature written by the American authors, they will attempt to understand the content and comprehend the craft and style of the writers. Students in literature classes must be taught to identify and explain such poetic and literary qualities as alliteration, consonance, assonance, and onomatopoeia. Students must also be aware of the philosophic bias of the writers. They should understand the difference between the writer who is a Calvinist, and the writer who is a Transcendentalist, a Deist, a Pantheist, a Romanticist, a Realist, or a Naturalist.

The Reformed Christian teacher must, in the second place, understand that the antithesis

comes to expression in the life of believers (both the writers and readers), because they have been spiritually changed from those who serve Satan to those who serve God. Redeemed Christians have died unto the world and live unto God (cf. Rom. 14:8). Redeemed Christians are new creatures in Christ, and as new creatures they are called to read, to play, to work, to marry, to write, to read, and to study in a world of sin, chaos, apostasy, and error. God's people do the same things as the reprobate wicked but with a different purpose. Formally there is no difference, but *essentially* and *materially* there is a great difference. Grace and regeneration have made all the difference. Because the natural man is not changed from darkness to light, he can understand only the horizontal relationships of man to man and man to the creature. Even this understanding is inaccurate and perverted because he does not have the key of knowledge to understand even the horizontal relationships correctly. It is absolutely impossible for the natural man to understand the most important relationship — the vertical relationship of the man to God. This is impossible because he hates God. The new man in Christ who has experienced a spiritual change of heart can understand correctly both the horizontal and vertical relationships. This understanding will have an effect on the basic attitude toward life. The attitude toward life and the interpretation of life by God's people will be radically different, because they are not conformed to this world but are transformed by the renewing of their minds (cf. Rom. 12:2).

It is important to note that the renewal of the mind is to be distinguished from the current emphasis on the part of many that Christians are commanded to make all things new and engage in the renewal of the world. There are those who teach that, because God speaks of

renewing all things, it is the task of Christians to make all things new. The Bible does not teach that man must renew all things. This is impossible for man, and it is not the responsibility and calling of the Christian. In Christ all things have been made new. In principle Christ has saved the entire creation (i.e., cosmic redemption).

To teach that man cannot contribute to the recreation of all things and that he is not commanded to contribute to the recreation and renewal of all things is not to teach that man is passive and inactive. Although man is not required to redeem all things, he is required to live an active life in obedience to God.

World flight is not the correct response of the Christian. The Scriptures do not teach world flight. The child of God is in the world and must live as a Christian in the world. The creation is ours and we may use it and enjoy it. We may live in it and work with it in such a way that we rule it under Christ to the glory of God.

Redeemed Christians will not serve God perfectly but they will fall into sin in their activities. Nonetheless, it is impossible for them to sin as those who do not love God. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that "it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness" (Lord's Day 24). The child of God has been turned from sin, he is sorry for his sin, he confesses his sin, and by grace he willingly walks in all the good works which God hath before ordained (Eph. 2:10). II Timothy 2:21 speaks of one who is sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. God wills that those who are consecrated to Him shall be diligent and faithful and be good stewards. We are commanded to wake up and work before the face of God in God's world with God's talents.

The Word of God teaches that

the man of God is a new creature, and therefore old things have passed away and all things have become new. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature (creation); old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (II Cor. 5:17). The saved and regenerated Christian possesses a new desire, and he has a new goal in life. His goal is to live unto Christ, to fight against sin. He prays for the coming of the kingdom. The coming of the kingdom — the spiritual kingdom of Christ — means that all things of this present time will pass away. All things will become eternally and perfectly new in the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. The Christian yearns for, earnestly seeks, and prays for the coming of the spiritual kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, when Christ with His redeemed church shall be all in all (cf. Rev. 21:4).

David Engelsma identifies and explains the Reformed view of the antithesis in *Reformed Education*, Chapter 3, "Reformed Education and Culture," pp. 56, 57, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000.

In the world, the Reformed man lives the antithesis. God has established the antithesis between His people, chosen out of the world, and the reprobate wicked. God calls His people to live antithetically. This is the deathblow to the theory of common grace.

The life in the world of the regenerated elect has its source in the new life of Christ and is directed by the power of God's grace in Christ.... Advising God's people to find the source and power of life elsewhere, as, for example, in common grace, is intolerable, is attempted murder of the Christian life. It is exactly the struggle, day in and day out, of the child of God to think, will, feel, speak, and act out of Christ Jesus by the power of the grace of the Spirit.

The life of the unregenerated unbeliever, in contrast, has its source in the flesh, that is, depraved human nature, and is di-

rected by the power of sin. It is a living and walking in sin.

Therefore, the life of the believer and the life of the unbeliever are in opposition.

This radical, spiritual difference shows itself in all of life. First, the life of the believer is subject to the Word of God, whereas the unbeliever's life is independent of the Word and in rebellion against it. Second, the goal of life is different. The believer directs his life towards God. His life is God-centered. The unbeliever leaves God out. His life is man-centered.

Herman Hanko summarizes the antithesis in *For Thy Truth's Sake*, Chapter 13, p. 257, Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000. "The antithesis between the people of God and the wicked is an antithesis which comes to expression in all of life."

With respect to the application of the principle of the antithesis to the teaching of literature, it is imperative that teachers and students understand that the approach and method of the Reformed Christian must be rooted in and based upon the radical spiritual difference between the believer and the unbeliever. Although the Reformed Christian teacher uses the same literary works as the secular teacher, the Christian student must study and analyze these works from the Reformed Christian perspective, the biblical and confessional perspective. The student must most certainly be taught to develop an appreciation for the message, the form, and the style of "good" literature. However, the Reformed Christian instructor must emphasize that an antithesis, a fundamental difference, exists between the elect chosen people of God and the reprobate wicked. This difference will come to expression in the literary works of the unbeliever and the believer, and Christian students must be challenged to recognize and identify this difference in the analysis and evaluation of the writings. Reformed Christian students are com-

manded to recognize and identify the unbelieving response, a response of rebellion and rejection of the truth of God's Word in the literary productions of unbelievers, and the believing response of glad acceptance of the truth of God's Word in the writings of believers.

The literature teacher in the Christian school must expose students in Christian schools to the ideas of non-Christian writers and Christian writers. In the school that honors and acknowledges God, students and teachers must examine the antithesis that exists between the perspective of this world and the Word of God. To teach antithetically is to teach the truth as it is founded upon the Scriptures and Reformed confessions. Covenant youth in their interpretation of life and their interpretation of the products of men must be led to use the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. It is crucial that covenant youth be given an opportunity to manifest that they are not of this world but belong to a new humanity. Students must not only be given the opportunity, but they must be urged to examine the antithesis that exists between the perspective of this world and the perspective of the Word of God. Reformed Christian students should use correctly the many opportunities they are given to interpret what men and women say in their writings about life, death, and the world in which we live. The Christian world-and-life view must come to expression. This world-and-life view is rooted in an allegiance to the inspired and infallible Word of God. The response of the believer must be such that it indicates that he thinks, wills, feels, speaks, and acts out of Christ Jesus by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

(I hope to demonstrate in the next article how the teacher can help students, who are commanded to live antithetically, to explain and react to a specific literary work.)



Introduction (2)

Contemporary Errors in Eschatology

If eschatology has been somewhat neglected by the church in the past, this is not, and may not be, the case today. Eschatology is forced upon the church's attention by erroneous teachings about the last things. Some of these teachings are enormously popular among Protestants. Certain of them make inroads into Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

The Optimism of Liberalism

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, theological liberalism optimistically proclaimed the gradual perfection of the human race and its world by means of natural human goodness and the improvement of social conditions. Liberalism heralded this utopia as the coming of the kingdom of God in the biblical millennium. Cried Walter Rauschenbusch in his influential *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Macmillan, 1917), "We need a restoration of the millennial hope."

In the twentieth century, liberals in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have grafted this hope of the natural perfecting of man, social relations, and nature itself deeply into evolutionary theory. Man and the universe are steadily evolving, onwards and upwards, to perfection. Inherent in this theory is the notion that God and the world are essentially one (pantheism). God and the world are developing unto perfection together.

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Universalism

The teaching of universal salvation becomes increasingly prominent in liberal and neo-orthodox theologians and their disciples. Karl Barth taught the eventual salvation of all men, even though he was curiously hesitant to admit it. The final "restoration of all" for Barth is grounded in his doctrine of God's election of all without exception and in his doctrine that the cross was Jesus Christ's becoming the reprobate in the place of every human. In Barth's theology is continued the stubborn strain of universalism that has afflicted the church through the ages, appearing first in Origen.

Barth's disciples push universalism even more aggressively. The German Protestant theologian Jurgen Moltmann envisions the salvation, not only of all humans without exception but also of Satan and the devils:

In the divine Judgment all sinners, the wicked and the violent, the murderers and the children of Satan, the Devil and the fallen angels will be liberated and saved from their deadly perdition through transformation into their true, created being, because God remains true to himself, and does not give up what he has once created and affirmed, or allow it to be lost (Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, Fortress, 1996, p. 255).

Universalism now appears also in more conservative, Reformed quarters. Arguing from his conviction that the Bible teaches a desire, or purpose, of God to save all

men without exception, especially in I Timothy 2:4, the Dutch Reformed theologian Jan Bonda has written advocating the eventual salvation of all men without exception (*The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment*, Eerdmans, 1998). The foreword to this book is an enthusiastic approval and recommendation of Bonda's universalism by Christian Reformed theologian Sierd Woudstra.

Harry R. Boer proposed the possibility, not only of the salvation of those who live and die without ever having heard the gospel but also of the salvation of every human without exception on the basis of the image of God in man. According to Boer all men retain the image of God in part, regardless of the fall. Since God will not allow any part of His image to perish, it may be hoped that He will save all without exception, if not in this life then after their death (Harry R. Boer, *An Ember Still Glowing: Humankind as the Image of God* (Eerdmans, 1990).

Denial of Hell

Closely related to universalism is the rejection of the everlasting punishment of reprobate ungodly men and women, which also surfaces today in evangelical circles. John R. W. Stott and Philip E. Hughes are prominent evangelicals who deny hell by teaching that any obstinate unbeliever will be annihilated. In this rejection of everlasting punishment, these men express agreement with the cults, which also deny the eternal punishment of those who die in unbelief.

Millennialism

Another grievous eschatological error that is found among those who claim to be conservative Christians is dispensational premillennialism. Originating with the nineteenth century British preachers Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby, this heresy holds that Christ can come at any moment to take the church into the clouds for seven years—the “rapture.” His purpose with the rapturing of the church is that He may again deal savingly with the Jews. According to this teaching, the Jews remain Christ’s kingdom people. During the seven years of the church’s rapture, Christ will convert the majority of the Jews. He will then return bodily and visibly to restore the Old Testament nation of Israel as the Messianic kingdom of God for one thousand years. He Himself will reign over this carnal kingdom from Jerusalem. Only after the thousand years of this glorious, earthly, Jewish kingdom will the end come.

The popularity of this view of the last things is evident from the vast numbers of fundamentalist and evangelical churches that espouse it. This view becomes more popular still at the present time, and spreads even in secular circles, by means of the wildly successful series of fiction by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins known as “Left Behind” (the first volume in the series, published by Tyndale House in 1995, was titled *Left Behind*). Some twenty-five years before the publication of the first volume in the “Left Behind” series, the theology of dispensational premillennialism, which undergirds the novels in the series “Left Behind,” was popularized by the equally fictitious work by Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Zondervan, 1970).

Postmillennialism is also a threat. It is more of a threat to Reformed churches than is dispensational premillennialism simply because postmillennialism claims to

be in harmony with the Reformed faith, as dispensationalism obviously is not. Postmillennialism teaches that in the future, before the bodily coming of Christ and the end of all things, the Spirit of Christ will convert and save the majority of mankind. Some go so far as to prophesy that *all* humans then living will be saved. The result will be the “Christianizing” of the entire world and a “golden age” of earthly peace, prosperity, and power for the church. This thousand-year, earthly triumph of the gospel will be the kingdom of Christ in a special way.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritans were inclined toward postmillennialism. This Puritan thinking about the last days found expression in the Savoy Declaration of 1658, an emendation of the earlier Westminster Confession of Faith, which had refused to adopt the postmillennial eschatology.

According to his [God’s] promise, we expect that in the latter days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable, and glorious condition than they have enjoyed (26.5, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, Harper & Brothers, 1877, p. 723).

This brand of postmillennialism is vigorously promoted today by the Banner of Truth, headquartered in Edinburgh, Scotland. This organization has powerful, worldwide influence by its publication and distribution of Reformed books and other literature. It emphasizes the inauguration of the millennial “golden age” through revivals, by which is meant sudden, extraordinary workings of the Spirit upon multitudes over large areas. These outbursts

of the Spirit are supposed to produce large numbers of conversions, an increase of godliness and spirituality, and a corresponding improvement—“Christianizing”—of society. Iain H. Murray of the Banner of Truth has both described the Puritan doctrine of the last days and defended it as the hope of the church in his *The Puritan Hope*, significantly sub-titled, *Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (The Banner of Truth, 1971).

Much more radical and aggressive is the postmillennialism of the movement in Reformed and Presbyterian churches that calls itself Christian Reconstruction. The founder was the Presbyterian theologian Rousas J. Rushdoony. His disciples, able, literate, and prolific of books and articles, include Gary North, Greg Bahnsen, Gary DeMar, and Kenneth Gentry (see Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, Ross House, repr. 2001; North, *Unconditional Surrender: God’s Program for Victory*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1988; Bahnsen, “The *Prima Facie* Acceptability of Postmillennialism,” in *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on the Millennium*, 3, no. 2, Winter 1976-77; DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, American Vision, 1994; Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1992).

Encouraged by their expectation of the coming “golden age,” these men call on the church to preach the earthly dominion of the saints in the world. They urge all Christians to strive for this dominion over culture and nations. They castigate those Christians and churches that fail to do so as losers and, worse, as blasphemers.

So much is this coming dominion of Christians the fullest and best form of the kingdom of Christ for Christian Reconstruction that it teaches that the “Christianized” nation, or nations, of the world will then be governed by the civil law

that bound Old Testament Israel. The future, earthly, political world-power of the saints will be the fulfillment of the Old Testament nation of Israel—the real Messianic kingdom in the fullness of its power, prosperity, peace, and glory.

Development of the Truth

The effect of all these errors in eschatology upon Reformed churches must be that the churches search Scripture more diligently than ever before regarding Scripture's teaching on the last things. The result will be, not only that the churches will maintain the fundamental truths of eschatology against the abounding and popular errors but also that the churches will develop eschatology. Indeed, this has always been the purpose of the sovereign God with false doctrine. He has used the heretics and their heresies for the development of the truth in His church. The church has come to clearer and fuller understanding of the truth of Scripture as she has been compelled to struggle with error. Often she expressed her better understanding of the truth in a creed.

By way of the struggle against Arius' denial of the deity of Jesus,


the church developed the truth of the divine and human natures of Jesus in one divine person. She confessed this truth about Jesus in the Nicene Creed. The Arminian heresy of universal grace conditioned on the free will of the sinner occasioned the Reformed churches' confession of particular, sovereign grace in the Canons of Dordt.

Similarly, the welter of eschatological errors at the present time, with the fulfillment in history of the events that signal the nearness of the end, requires the church to come to a clearer and fuller understanding of the Bible's teaching on the last things than she has had before. It is conceivable that she will express her development of eschatology in a confession, or in a declaration that clarifies and expands her existing confessions. This confession, or authoritative declaration, would have a negative as well as a positive section, a rejection of eschatological errors as well as a pointed affirmation of the truth of eschatology.

There is reason to think that, of all the main topics revealed in Holy Scripture, the truth of the end is least developed in the church.

No creed is devoted to eschatology. With the possible exception of the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, the Reformation creeds are comparatively brief and general in their treatment of eschatology. They limit themselves to a positive statement of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith regarding eschatology. Nor is this surprising. Most of the errors in eschatology that now trouble the church arose after the Reformation and its confessional documents.

As Reformed theologians apply themselves to the study, defense, and development of eschatology, they must remember that they have sure guidelines in the creeds, particularly the Reformation creeds, and to some extent in the tradition of the church, especially the tradition of the Reformed church. In their study, they must be fully aware of the erroneous views. And their study must consist of work with the biblical teaching. Exegesis is demanded.

Herman Hoeksema has done significant, ground-breaking work in eschatology in his commentary on Revelation, *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969; 2nd ed., 2000). 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

A Word Preliminary

The family is the wondrous creation of God, from which all our human social life has of itself unfolded.

Compare national existence in Israel with that in Rome and Greece, and nothing is more strik-

ingly evident, than the far higher place of honor which the family in Israel occupies.

From Israel this beautiful trait has passed over into the church of Christ, and in every land where the Cross has been planted, family life has made gains in loving tenderness and uniting power.

Among the Christian nations family-life is of higher repute among Protestant than Romish nations. Prussia is ahead of Austria, England of France, the Netherlands of Belgium.

But the sense of home-life was most strong among the nations of

the Reformation in Switzerland, Scotland, Netherlands, and in America.

Even among these our Netherlands was in the front rank from of old.

In our quiet, substantial domestic social life was the strength of our middle classes and the nerve of strength in our national life.

At present there is less to boast of, however, along this line. Awayness from home has increased. Life in public interests and by night sitting in the club-house and bar-room has gained ground.

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest in Thine House, by Abraham Kuiper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. (Pp. v, vi, 1-8.) Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

And therefore the confessors of Christ in the land are called of God, by heroic confession and seriousness of life to save the security once confided to our keeping, and which threatens to be lost, for our own circles, and thereby for the fatherland.

Hence the wish, so frequently expressed, that some volume might

be written, suitable at the beginnings of new homes to be placed in the hands of those newly married.

Even church authorities felt the need of this at the solemnities of weddings.

As a sample I wrote and gathered the meditations which are contained in this volume.

The wondrous Creator of the Family command His blessing upon it, that reading and rereading in many a home might sanctify domestic life, heighten the tone of life, and make you sit down in your house, ever richer and happier in the treasure which in that glorious fellowship God gave you.

Amsterdam, July 1, 1899

In the Beginning The New Household

Already in the first word with which Holy Scripture begins, there is a far deeper significance than the superficial reader thinks. "In the beginning" narrates not merely that first the world was *not*, but only afterward *came* into being because God created it, but it also implies that God *has made a beginning*, and thereby has appointed in all His creation the distinction between the beginning of a matter and its *further course*.

This distinction is familiar to us, and we well understand that one's birth is different from his further life, and likewise that one's *conversion* is something else than his later life of *faith and sanctification*. To us this distinction between the beginning and the further course of a matter is as clear as day in all our ways. Yet this deeply penetrating and all our life dominating distinction is not come of itself, but has been appointed of God, and therefore there is so much more in it than we commonly think.

For this patent fact, that all things on earth have not merely their career but also their beginning, is important in this way, that the wise of the world have long tried to demonstrate that the world has had *no beginning*. Yea, it is of such great importance, that to the man of deeper insight, all the dif-

ference between the wisdom of the world and Holy Scripture is that Holy Scripture always points again to that beginning, puts all the emphasis upon that beginning, and from that beginning derives every further progress, while on the other hand the wisdom of the world is ever bent upon obliterating that beginning, to bring it to naught and to deny it, in order to proclaim the *lie*, that the world has *always* been and is as *eternal* as God.

When you take a grain of corn in your hand, there is in that small grain the capacity to develop itself into a blade and to produce the ear of corn. But so long as you hold that grain of seed in your hand, nothing comes of it. Only when that seed is dropped into the furrowed earth and is buried, the working begins. So by casting that seed into the earth you yourself appoint the *beginning* of its development. If you do not do this, but leave it lying on your table, there is no *beginning*. This only comes when you do something to that seed, which happens only once, and therewith is ended. But if the beginning is once made, the further course follows of itself.

Jesus Himself has outlined this so strikingly in the parable of St. Mark 4:26, when He spoke of that man "who first cast seed into the earth"; and afterward "slept and rose night and day, the whiles the

seed sprang up and grew, he himself not knowing how."

Here too that selfsame deepgoing distinction is sharply and clearly indicated. The beginning is that that man "casts the seed into the earth"; and the further course follows of itself, without the man knowing how.



What is true of all the world, and in all nature, is also true in our human life.

We look forward with concern to many things, but experience teaches that all goes well, when once the beginning is made.

The first step, says the proverb, costs, but the further steps follow of themselves.

He who has to make up a document, or write an important letter, feels how difficult it is to make a beginning, but also how much easier it succeeds, after he has begun.

He who is not accustomed to speak, and must appear in public, feels his heart beat when he must begin, but after he is once started, he comes to himself, and all feeling of apprehension leaves him.

When ten together must do something, the question always is, who shall be the first to put his hand to it, and when he is but begun, following and coming after on the part of the others is so much easier.

So we feel and observe time and again, how much more there is to the beginning of a matter than to its further course.

The beginning is of so much greater importance, demands so much more exertion, asks of us so much more. And is not this the case because that single beginning properly contains the propelling power for all the further course?

He who builds an house must first lay the foundation on which further building can proceed, and knows that order and solidity of foundation guarantees the entire further construction.

So is all beginning the laying of foundation on which further building can proceed; and for this reason all beginning is so difficult.

He who is godly, senses therefore so deeply how much hangs on it whether he makes that beginning *with* or *without* God. Hence the solemn word of consecration that lies in the soul or on the lips of God's child at the moment of every beginning: "*Our beginning* (help) is in the Name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 124:8).

God appointed the beginning of all beginning, when "in the *beginning*" He made heaven and earth. And so he who is godly seeks for every beginning he has to make, his power and strength in Him who became the origin of all beginnings when He created heaven and earth.

This implies not merely that all power is with God, but also that from God is all beginning, and that God's child will make no beginning of anything without God.



It cannot be sufficiently deplored, that so frequently most important beginnings are made so thoughtlessly and without God.

This is especially noticeable at the beginning of a *household*.

Two people fall in love with each other and propose to marry;

and after they are married, to begin a household.

One may say that few things can be begun of so preponderant and so all dominating an importance. Founding a household is instituting a family; laying the foundation for common living together until death; the creation, if you will, of a small domestic circle in life of one's own, of which everything is to be expected, and by which the future of man and wife, and presently of children and children's children, is governed.

The importance of this matter is so commonly realized that it is made the occasion of feasting, for which long preparations are made and large sums of money expended, such as no one thinks of doing at other times. And we grant that he who lives a consecrated and godly life will not make so important a beginning without God.

As a rule the happy couple present themselves in the midst of the congregation, to invoke the prayers of all and to hear the blessing of the Lord pronounced upon their marriage. They who are married without this can be counted.

But when you ask whether in such days or at such moments it is sensed, felt, and realized what it means to make such an extremely important, all one's future dominating beginning, we put an interrogation mark, upon which all too frequently follows a disappointing answer.

On such days one is so busy. There is so much diversion and distraction. The urge of enjoyment is so strong. And when in the sanctuary they kneel side by side and plight each other their troth, alas, how few they are who at that moment did anything else than take part in a solemnity, of which they thought it so wonderful to be the central figures.

Alas, of how many it must be deplored that they *let* themselves be married more for the sake of others and after the rules of tradition, than that they themselves

made a *beginning*, the beginning of a new life, of an altogether new future.



This premeditated acting, such doing in which the deeper consciousness has no voice, the heart no part, and God no recognition, is bound to bring its own pitiful consequences.

The beginning is there, the new life begins, and to this too applies the rule that it will be as the pace was set.

It is of exceeding importance, therefore, that husband and wife, already on the first day of their living together, give themselves account of their new future which they face, and therefore not let themselves thoughtlessly be carried along, but so to appoint things that a happy life together, consecrated to God, can grow out of it.

For from that first beginning that is formed on the day of marriage flow all sorts of other beginnings. A beginning is made with the household; a beginning of the life of the husband with respect to his wife; a beginning of the life of the wife with respect to her husband; a beginning of their living together with respect to their several relatives; a beginning with the way in which together they shall serve God; together will care for the poor; together will order their day's work; together will act on occasion of difference of insight; together direct their finance; together take measure with respect to their servants; together regulate the style of their life.

Much of this begins on the very first day; while in the days that come after, ever and again they face new choices, new crises, the adoption of new habits and usages which, once begun, presently become silent law and order.

And can it be acceptable to God, when all this is left to chance, when all this is done without thought, when half playfully and sportively the household and the

domestic life are left to make of themselves what they will, rather than that consciously, as result of counsel and forethought, everything is regulated according to God's Word and according to the standard of His holy gospel?

But this is what happens when no heed is taken of the difference between the beginning of a matter and its further course.

For though blessing is invoked, how can that blessing come when such important moments and days are spent, not as by two human beings who take thought and accept God's Word as rule, but as by two birds that together build their nest.


Seek the blessing, it is well, but seek it from Him who Himself has

appointed a beginning to all things when He made heaven and earth, and for this reason called you, as created after His Image, to the sacred task of appointing, in a human way, a beginning in your life, to form it, and to do it with all the seriousness which so holy a matter demands.

Who will be to blame when presently the consequences of the unmeditated and playful beginning bring their bitter regrets? When there is confusion instead of order. Waste instead of stewardship. Anger and ennui where there might be happiness and domestic joy. And where in this way, far from building you up, edifying, comforting, and sanctifying you, the home-life spoils your character, inflames

your passion, and quickly ruins your heart.

In case of conversion at a later day, much of what was spoiled can be righted; but is it not far more joyous and beautiful, from the beginning to have chosen the right path?

And would not father and mother take a nobler stand and go out more free before God if, when their children are married, they would provide not merely clothing and furniture, but would also urge upon them the one importance, of making the beginning of their marriage in the name of the Lord, i.e., by the appointment of all things according to the closely thought-out demand of His holy Word? 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Reward of Using the Office of Deacon Well

The explicit teaching of Scripture regarding the office of deacon is limited to four areas: a *history* of the origin of the office (Acts 6:1-6), the *qualifications* for the office (Acts 6:3, 5; I Tim. 3:8-12), a few brief and scattered references to the *work* of the office (Acts 6:1-3, Rom. 12:8, as well as other passages which state general principles), and an encouraging *promise* to the deacons that in the way of using the office well they will enjoy a reward (I Tim. 3:13).

Having finished our examination of the qualifications for the office of deacon, and before turning to other aspects of the office, we

will examine this encouraging promise.

Let us have it before us: "For they that have used the office of deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 3:13).



I find it rather striking that this encouraging promise is found in God's Word.

Striking, first, because of the relative scarcity of instruction regarding the office of deacon in Scripture, as noted above. For the instruction regarding the history of the office and the qualifications for the office we are grateful. Surely the church of Jesus Christ needed that instruction, in order to see the need to have this office in her

midst, and to hold the office in high esteem. Regarding the work of the office, one might wish that Scripture said more. God determined that what was said was sufficient, of course. But He left it to the church, guided by the Spirit of truth, to come to a deeper understanding of the work of the office, based on scriptural principles, and to express that understanding in a minor confession, as we have done in our Church Order and Form for Installation. The inclusion of this encouraging promise is striking because, while God thought it not necessary to give more instruction regarding the office, He did think it important to give a word of encouragement for deacons in their work.

Striking this word is also because in the earlier verses of the

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chapter, in which the qualifications for office of elder are given, no exact parallel to this encouraging word can be found. Granted, the office of elder is said to be "a good work" (v. 1). That the work is a good work will and must encourage elders in their task. But it is not explicitly stated as encouragement to the elders. In this classic and foundational passage in Scripture in which the church is instructed how to behave in God's house, there is an explicit word of encouragement directed only to the deacons.

Lastly, it is striking because the reward of which it speaks is different in character from any reward mentioned in Scripture in connection with the work of elders. Paul writes, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17). But I Timothy 5:17 is primarily intended to instruct the church how to view the elders, not to encourage the elders as such. Our text's primary intent is to encourage the deacons. Through Peter, God also encourages elders who faithfully feed God's flock, willingly taking its oversight and being examples to it: "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Pet. 5:4). But while this text just quoted stimulates the elder's hope for a heavenly reward when Christ returns, our text has the present life, not the future, in mind. Also in heaven, faithful deacons will receive their reward — that is true. But the text speaks to their reward in this life.

It is as though God made provision at the very beginning of the history of the church in the New Testament for countering any notion that the office of deacon is inferior to that of elder or pastor. It is as though He knew (of course He did!) that the common perception of the people, and maybe even of the officebearers themselves,

would be that one who holds the office of elder in the church is truly someone, but to be a deacon is nothing special. All men love to rule; but servants are generally looked down upon.



Why, then, do deacons need encouragement?

Partly because of this wrong conception of their office that has infiltrated the church.

Even more, because their work is a hard work, and at the same time a very important work.

That it is a hard work is implied in the text. It is so hard, that only qualified men may hold the office and do the work. It is so hard, that none will be able to do the work well in his own strength.

It is hard for deacons to know what is the wisest route to follow in a particular situation. It is hard to bring God's Word to people who do not want to hear it — some who need a word of comfort, but do not want to be comforted in their affliction; others, who need a word of admonition, but do not want to heed one. However, the deacons are called to do this hard work — not merely to administer material gifts, but also spiritual blessings. Bring the Word of God!

How important this work is! That church which has no deacons, or whose deacons do not do this work well, is spiritually impoverished. The mercy of Christ toward His church and saints is pictured, and administered, through the work of the deacons. Important work!

Let the deacons be encouraged to do it well.



The encouragement is for those deacons, and those deacons only, who use the office well. How does one use the office well?

We might immediately say that the deacon uses his office well who does his work diligently and faithfully; is compassionate toward the

poor and truly loving and caring for them in their need; and brings them Scripture, as required. Those who do these things use the office well, and those who fail to do these things fail to use the office well.

While all of this is true, it is not enough.

Remember that this encouraging word of God concludes the section of Scripture which most fully sets forth the qualifications for the office of deacon. It does not conclude the section treating the qualifications of the diaconate as an appendix, as an unrelated idea, but as very related. It concludes the section treating the qualifications of the diaconate by giving a *reason* why the deacon must be all these things. It begins with "for," that is, "because." Why must deacons meet the high standard which God sets forth? Because they that have used the office well....

Also the word "well" indicates that he who uses the office well is not merely one who does the work of the office well, but one who is qualified. The word "well" has the idea of "beautifully, honorably, without blame." And blame can fall upon a deacon, not just for how he carries out his work formally, but for what kind of man he is, or is not. He must be a blameless man (I Tim. 3:10).

So he who uses the office well is not only one who does the work well, but one who maintains his qualifications for office, who takes heed to his personal and family life, and who remains blameless. Even when not doing the official work of the office, the deacon is still a deacon, and must still conduct himself as such. He uses the office well who remembers these things; he does not use it well who acts like a deacon only on Sundays when taking collection and at the official meetings of the diaconate and its committees.

Those who use the office well may be encouraged. They will have their reward.

The verse teaches us a general

principle, which applies to everyone, not only to deacons. That general principle is this: those who do their work well will receive a reward. We know that whenever we speak of a reward for faithful service to God, that reward is one of grace, not of merit. We are sinners; we do not deserve a reward. Christ earned it for us, and God graciously gives it to us on the basis of Christ's merits.

The same is true of the reward of the deacon who does his work well. Let not that deacon think that he has earned this reward, that it is a right which he has due to his own faithfulness and diligence. It is not. The faithfulness to his office and calling is not his own work, but God's work in him. And the reward which God gives is therefore also not one he has earned, but one which God freely gives him, of grace, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Granted, the text does say that deacons who do their work well "purchase to themselves" this reward. This means simply that they will possess and enjoy that reward personally — not that they enjoy it on the basis of their own merits.

Let the deacon who receives his reward be humbled, and let God be glorified.

But receive a reward he shall.



What is this reward of which the text speaks? The text states it explicitly: "a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The word translated "degree" has the idea of a step on a staircase. Some have therefore interpreted the passage to mean that the deacon who uses the office well will be given a promotion, he purchases to himself a higher office, that of elder or pastor. Matthew Henry, commenting on this passage, takes this position: "And the reason why the deacons must be thus qualified is (v. 13) because, though the office of a deacon be of an inferior degree, yet it is a step towards the

higher degree; and those who had served tables well the church might see cause to discharge from that service, and prefer to serve in preaching the word and in prayer."

Immediately one senses that this explanation proceeds from a view that the offices are hierarchical, with the office of deacon being an inferior one. However, neither Reformed church polity nor Scripture support this view. Rather, they teach that the special offices in the church are all equal. I Timothy 3 shows that the offices are equal, in that it holds deacons to the same high standard to which it holds elders. It also shows that both offices are necessary and important in the church. Even verse 13 will not admit of this hierarchical view, for the word "good" is not a comparative, having the idea of "better," with the implication that the position of a deacon is "bad" or at least "not as good." Rather, it says "good." The word says something about the quality of the reward, not about the office of deacon as such.

Others consider this reward to be one which is enjoyed in heaven. The faithful deacon can expect a blessed position in the new and perfected heavens and earth. Though perhaps it is true that the faithful deacon will be given a higher position in heaven, that is not the idea of this text. Nothing in the text indicates that this reward will be enjoyed in life after death; we are instead to think that it is enjoyed in this life.

The text itself says what the reward is. It is characterized as a good degree, that is, a good standing. The word "degree" has the idea of a "step," remember, not to indicate that one will ascend the ladder, but rather that one will stand on that step firmly. Having so characterized this reward, the text goes on to say exactly what that good standing is: "and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." A good degree, namely, great boldness in the faith.

The reward is enjoyed in this life, and has to do with a spiritual blessing the deacon himself, personally, receives and enjoys.

Another principle is demonstrated: not only that those who do their work well receive a reward, but that the reward consists of a spiritual blessing which enables one to serve God all the more diligently! Not very many verses earlier, the same principle was applied to women, and particularly to those women whom God called to be mothers in the church: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." In the way of faithfulness and diligence in one's work as a mother, a woman will be "saved," which means at least in part that she will grow in spiritual graces, and be all the more equipped to be a godly mother and woman in the church.

Now that principle is applied to deacons. In the way of faithful diligence in their work, they will receive, as one aspect of God's reward of grace, great boldness in the faith.

Such boldness a deacon will need as he goes about his work, fraught with its difficulties. A coward will not deal with hardship to the glory of God, as will a bold man! And God promises to give him boldness.

Deacons, are you impressed with the great responsibility which your office places on you? Do you see how hard it is, of yourself, to do the work? And do you wonder, perhaps at times even worry, how the Word will be received when you bring it?

Fear not. Just be faithful and diligent in doing your work well, and God will give you boldness.

That boldness will be an inner boldness, first of all: a stronger confidence that our faith is, in fact, truth. The mystery of the faith which you hold will be held even more strongly, in the way of diligently carrying out your task in the fear of the Lord.

But that boldness will also manifest itself in how you do your work, in what you say as you do your work, and in all your life. In your prayer life, you will be more bold. In comforting, admonishing, and instructing God's saints, you will be more bold. In making decisions as deacons, you will be more bold.

To those who do not use their office well, no such boldness will be given. Conscious of the impurity of their conscience and of the

weakness of their own faith, and conscious that they have not served well in the office, they will not have boldness to speak. That does not mean God will never or can never give them such boldness; but let them use the office well, if they still hold the office.




As a result of this using of the office well, and of the great boldness in the faith which God gives,

the saints of God will honor and esteem the deacons more highly.

Do you esteem them highly, congregations and saints? And do you pray that God would give them such boldness? And that He will work in them to use the office well? And that by their good work, the church might be blessed?

And do you remind them of this encouraging promise of God when it is needed?

Deacons, may you be encouraged in your work. Do it well. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Byron Center, MI PRC recently informed their congregation of plans to proceed with the printing of two new pamphlets in the next few weeks. These include "The Sin of Gambling," by Rev. Douglas Kuiper, and "Genesis 1-11: Myth or History," by Prof. D. Engelsma. We believe that both of these pamphlets deal with issues to which the church must give a clear and biblical response, so we are thankful that Byron Center has taken it upon themselves to provide that response. We hope that we will all have an opportunity to read these pamphlets soon.

This past February 8 and 9 the Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored their 4th annual "Winter Conference." As in the past three conferences, First chose a subject that could not help but stir the interest of church members in the area, choosing this year to address the subject of creation, under the theme, "God's Creation — Theater of His Glory." Prof. H. Hanko spoke Friday evening on the theme,

"Creation versus Evolution." This was followed on Saturday with three speeches. Mr. Joel Minderhoud, a science teacher at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, spoke on "Man — God's Unique Creation," after which Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on "Man — Spiritual Image Bearer." Rev. C. Terpstra concluded the conference by addressing the subject of "Creation's Relation to Christ."

Mission Activities

Rev. M. Dick continues to be busy with the work in Fayetteville, NC. In addition to the work with the core group, plans include also mailing out a newsletter to various contacts in the area to invite them to attend their worship services and meetings. Rev. Dick also decided to begin some discussions on various matters of doctrine and life on a regular basis with the Fellowship. These are planned for two or three Saturday mornings a month at 7 A.M. at the church. The first of these meetings was scheduled for March 2 and was to consider "The Millennial Views." We will also add here that Rev. and Mrs. Dick recently invited the entire Fayetteville Fellowship to their home, after an evening service, for singing and fellowship. Rev. Dick planned on videotaping

the group singing a few numbers, and then showing this at the Grace PRC in Standale, MI when he and his family return there for the dedication of their new building.

Congregation Activities

In connection with the above reference to a dedication at Grace, we also note that in early February Grace was scheduled to hold worship services at Hope PR Christian School while their sanctuary was under construction. We can only assume that the construction project is nearing completion. Perhaps we will have more about a dedication program next time.

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA officially welcomed their new pastor and his family by way of a welcome program on Sunday, January 27. This program included numbers from a male chorus, the Sunday School, a piano and organ duet, an instrumental ensemble, and audience singing.

The Contact Committee of our churches sent a delegation of Rev. K. Koole and Rev. R. VanOverloop to the Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland. They left on Wednesday, February 13 and planned to return the following Tuesday. The purpose of this trip was to conduct church visitation with the church

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

there. You might also be interested to know that in July the Contact Committee will be sending a delegation to Australia to participate in a conference with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, D.V. Prof. R. Decker and Rev. R. Cammenga are scheduled to go.

Young People's Activities

Recent bulletins indicate that our churches' young people's societies are gearing up for this summer's convention. By gearing up, we mean fund-raising, and, like everything else today, the cost of conventions keeps going up.

The young people of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada recently sponsored a sledding party with a bon-

fire afterwards. The young people both of our Hope PRC in Redlands, CA and of Byron Center, MI recently hosted pancake breakfasts for their respective congregations, and the young people of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a "Burger Bash" for their supporters on a recent Saturday night. So if you get the opportunity to help your congregation's young people raise some money, we remind you it's a good cause — and it may also give you an excuse for a meal out.

Minister Activities

Rev. C. Haak declined the call he had been considering to serve as pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC. The congregation of

the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ extended a call to Rev. M. DeVries, currently pastor of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada, to serve as their next pastor. The Lynden, WA PRC called Rev. J. Slopsma.

Rev. N. Brummel, pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN, was able to speak at two chapel services lately — one at Illiana Chr. High School, and the other at Mid-America Seminary. In mid-January, Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, spoke at a chapel service for the students of Adams PR Christian School. He asked the students, "How do others know you are a Christian?" and he based his answer on John 13: 34, 35. Good advice for all of us.



Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to the families of Larry and Tillie Nelson, Rolly and Nola Griess, and to Hugo and Elizabeth Schwarz, Art and Florence Schwarz, and Gilbert and Luella Griess in the death of their mother, grandmother, and sister,

MRS. LOUISE GRIESS.

May their comfort be in this: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:24).

Rev. Garry Eriks, President
Mr. R. Brands, Clerk

NOTICE

The RFPA is considering the publication of a book of the shorter works of Herman Hoeksema. Anyone who has relevant materials (speeches, old pamphlets, notes, etc.) is asked to contact: **David Kregel** at

6244 Ivanrest SW
Byron Center, MI 49315
FAX (616) 531-9241
e-mail: dkregel@iserv.net
Phone: (616) 532-9076

Rev. and Mrs. Arie denHartog now reside at 28 Countryside View, Singapore 789742. E-mail address: arieden@singnet.com.sg. Phone (from US): 011-65-552-3940.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of Hudsonville PRC expresses Christian sympathy to fellow-member Mrs. Grace Kamps, in the death of her mother,

MRS. IRENE (Vegter) KOOPMAN.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

Rev. R. Hanko, president
Freda Zwak, secretary

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address synod 2002, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 1. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

TEACHER NEEDED

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications for a teacher for the 2002-2003 school year. Subject areas of need include English and vocal music (choir). Applicants should be certified for the secondary level. Applicants should contact either Mr. Rick Noorman (616) 453-5048, or Mr. John VanUffelen (616) 396-8498.