

# THE *November 15, 2002* STANDARD BEARER

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# God's Workmanship

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Ephesians 2:10

**W**e are His workmanship. The truth of this text explains the precious truth contained in two previous verses.

Saved by grace. And nothing but grace. "By grace are ye saved through faith" (v. 8a).

Because it is grace, then it cannot be works. At least, not our works — not human works. "And that not of yourself: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (vv. 8b, 9).

Because it is grace, it is God's work. Not only is *salvation* God's work, but those who are saved are God's work — "his workmanship." That the saved ones are God's workmanship explains why salvation is not of us, but of God and of His grace.

It took nothing less than a divine work to save us from death in trespasses and sins (vv. 1-3). It took a divine work to make us alive with Christ, to raise us up with Christ, and to make us sit with Christ in heavenly places (vv. 4-7).

It is only when we realize the greatness of God's work which saved us that we will walk worthy (4:1-3). We do not live the Christian life in the church, in the home, in the work-place, in the midst of this evil world (chapters 4-6), unless we first have a true understanding of what it is that makes us a Christian.



Salvation in Christ is entirely the work of God. The saved ones are "his workmanship." It is a work of God. Not man's work. Not man's decision. Not the result of man's efforts.

In the context the inspired apostle is presenting the reason for the tremendous change in the life of the Ephesians, a change which Paul also had experienced. The Ephesians went from death to life, from being dead in sins to being

alive unto God in Christ — because God did a mighty work in them.

This clearly implies that we do not make ourselves to be Christians. This should be so obvious that it should not have to be said. However, given our human natures, which always want some credit for self, it cannot be said too often. We are not saved as a result of anything we have done. Nothing whatsoever! God alone is the Workman. He is the Potter and we are the clay pots, fashioned by Him.

The word "workmanship" speaks of a forming or fashioning that is in harmony with a plan or purpose. The word always implies a predetermined purpose, which serves as the standard according to which a work is performed and accomplished. Also, this word indicates that God is directly at work, as with His own hand. Each of the vessels of honor are worked on directly by God. He determined a design and purpose for each. And then during their lifetime He continuously works on them. God uses all things to shape and mold the vessels of honor into conformity with the image of His dear Son.

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Think of it! You are God's workmanship. There is no more exalting statement that can be said of you. This is the truth about each Christian and about the church as a whole. The more we think of ourselves in this way, the more we will walk worthy of the name "Christian"!



In order to emphasize that salvation is God's work, the apostle is inspired to use the word "create." Only God creates. No one else can.

The work of making a Christian is nothing less than a creation. A Christian is not just a morally good person. A Christian is not just an improved person. A Christian is a creation of God in Christ Jesus. God came to us when we were spiritually dead, and He put the life of Christ into us. God, the Workman, brought something into being that was not there before. There is nothing more wonderful than realizing that we have been fashioned by God Himself — and that for His glory. And there is no greater travesty than to think that we saved ourselves by something we did.

The first creation — of this universe — was a display of God's power. Our spiritual re-creation is a display of God's grace in addition to His power. The first creation was earthly and serves a temporary purpose (even if it is already 6000 years). The second creation is heavenly and will endure forever.

We are God's creation "in Christ Jesus." Repeatedly Paul uses this brief expression in this epistle to describe the intimate union that exists between believers and Christ. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior are told that they are blessed in Christ (1:3), elected in Christ (1:4), redeemed in Christ (1:7), and have an inheritance in Christ (1:11).

First, our creation is in Christ

Jesus because it is only in Him that we have the right to become new creatures. Through His sacrifice on the cross, He cleanses us from all the guilt and pollution of our sinfulness and of each sin. He who was delivered unto death because of our sin was raised from the dead, because through His death we had been completely justified (Rom. 4:25).

And, second, our creation is in Christ because the essence of this creation is the life of Christ being implanted into us. We who were spiritually dead toward God are made alive toward Him, when the life of His Son is implanted within us. God makes us Christians by applying to us that which He has done for us in Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ which is the instrument God uses to regenerate us, to justify us, and to sanctify us. We receive His very life when His Spirit is given to us. It is all in Christ, so "of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). We receive the benefits of His death and resurrection.

It is all of God in Christ. It is all of grace. It is not of us. It is not our work.



When God performs His work of re-creating someone in Christ Jesus, He has a glorious design. The ultimate design is the gathering together of all things in Christ (1:10). God intends that each re-creation be fitly framed together unto a holy temple, a habitation of God through the Spirit (2:20-22). That is God's *ultimate* design. God's *near* design for each re-creation is the performance of good works. We are created in Christ Jesus "unto good works."

God saves us unto good works. In Adam we were created to do good works in the service of our Creator, but we lost that ability completely. Our fall into sin took from all those who were represented by Adam the right, the ability, and the desire to do good.

Consequently, all of man's works became evil. Everything man does has the goal of bringing all things into the service of self. Nothing man does arises out of faith. Nothing man does is in an effort to obey God's law. And nothing man does is aimed at the glory of God. No human being has the ability anymore to do good works.

What a change God made when He re-created in Christ Jesus! Those who are in Christ are saved from doing only evil! By grace, God has re-created us. This creation is in Christ Jesus. And this creation in Christ is *unto good works*. This clearly implies that our being God's workmanship does not make us stocks and blocks, i.e., inanimate and inactive. Rather, those who are God's workmanship are made active in the performance of good works — because a part of salvation in Christ Jesus is the restoration of the right, the ability, and the desire to do good works. Admittedly, our old man can easily, and quickly, contaminate this desire by twisting us, pretzel-like, so we begin to think that our good works are payment to God or should receive some reward. Nevertheless, the grace of God which creates us in Christ Jesus creates us unto good works; and this grace works in every believer the desire to thank and glorify Him for this salvation.

While man may call good many of the things he and his fellowmen do, only God is the Judge of what is good and what is evil. The good works unto which He created every one of His children are those which arise out of a true faith, are in harmony with God's law, and are unto the goal of the glory of God. These good works are loving God with our all and our neighbor as ourselves. They are acts of repentance and self-denial.

God is interested in good works. Not in man's good works, but in His own good works. The good works which God created us to do are the ones He has "before



ordained." We, as persons, are before ordained (in the divine decree of predestination), but also our good works are before ordained (in the divine decree of providence). God not only decreed predestination, but also providence. In His decree of providence God ordained (or determined) absolutely everything that takes place in the whole of His creation throughout all time. This obviously includes our works. God prepared our good works in His counsel. He chose not only our glorious end in heaven, but also every step of the way to that end. Each step is prepared to fit perfectly in our walk through this life. Between regeneration and glory are good works. While our good works do not save us, they are designed by God to be the fruit of our salvation — of our being created in Christ Jesus.

It is in the way of these before ordained good works that we "walk." This "walk" is the whole of our life from the cradle to the grave. It includes every aspect of our life. We walk in the good works God before ordained for us. We walk in them, not as robots, but

as rational, moral creatures. It is by grace that we are made to respond, but this response is something we willingly and lovingly do because He first loved us and because we are ever so grateful for His great grace.

Each day God sets good works before us. Each day we walk in them.

Of course, the experience is not that we can see ahead what God has before ordained. What do we see? First, we see God's law, commanding us to love Him with our all in absolutely every situation of life and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And we see saving grace (its greatness and its power), which God bestows upon us in Christ. Then the believer is grateful. Tremendously grateful. The believer's gratitude is shown in his praying and by his walking in obedience to his loving Father. The believer is made willing in the day of God's power. He willingly and actively seeks to do God's will in every way.

Then afterward, the believer looks back and realizes that His

sovereign God was working in him both the will and the ability to do good works. This is God's workmanship. The believer obeys in gratitude. And his obedience consists of precisely the good works God ordained that he should walk in them. The believer is ordained (Acts 13:48). And the good works of the believer are ordained.

Paul wants the blessed saints in Ephesus to know this, to be consciously aware of this. The reason he wants them (and us) to be aware of the fact that they (and we) are God's workmanship is so that they (and we) are delivered from ever thinking that they (and we) have to do something — have to be good enough — to be saved. He wants them (and us) to live and walk assured of the fullness of the power and grace of God to save, not in part, but completely. He wants them (and us) never to boast before God of our works. He wants them (and us) to glory only in the Lord.

What a marvelous work of God we are! We are His workmanship! We are His creation in Christ Jesus!



## Editorial

# "He Shines in All That's Fair" (and Curses All That's Foul) (11)

**B**asic to the doctrine of common grace is the notion that God has another purpose with history besides the redemption of the church. That additional purpose is the development of culture by the world of ungodly men and women.

In support of "multiple divine

purposes" with history, Richard J. Mouw intriguingly proposes a new understanding of the infralapsarian order of God's decrees. Infralapsarianism, which places the decree of predestination after the decree of creation, allows for, if it does not require, a purpose of God with history alongside the purpose of

redemption. This is the purpose that the ungodly develop the riches and powers of creation in a culture that pleases God. After the fall, God realizes this purpose by means of common grace ("Infra-' versus 'Supra,'" in *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace*, Eerdmans, 2001, pp. 53-74).

## The One Purpose of God with History

Against this proposal of an independent cultural purpose of God with history, there is a weighty objection. The objection is decisive. Jesus Christ is not behind this cultural purpose! Jesus Christ is not in this cultural purpose as it unfolds in history! Jesus Christ is not the goal of this purpose of God with creation and history!

The proposed cultural purpose, supposedly grounded in infralapsarianism, has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. It leaves Him out. It ignores Him.

The total absence of Jesus Christ from the supposed cultural purpose of God with history is fatal to Dr. Mouw's common grace theory. For God has clearly and emphatically made known in His Word that He has one eternal purpose with creation and history and that this one purpose is Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:9-12 reveals the mystery of the will of God with regard to "all things." The mystery is His one purpose to "gather together in one all things in Christ."

Colossians 1:13-20 is even more pointed and detailed about God's purpose with all things. God's purpose with "all things" is Jesus Christ. "All things were created ... for him," that is, for Jesus Christ (v. 16). The existence and history of all creatures have been subordinated to Jesus Christ and must serve Him. All things cohere in Him (v. 17). In all things, Jesus Christ is to have the preeminence (v. 18). There is no divine purpose with creation and history alongside and independent of Jesus Christ. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is unrelated to Jesus Christ—not Tiger Woods' putts, not Hal Newhouser's fastball, not "the glory that was Greece," not the splendor of American civilization, not the falling of a sparrow from a housetop. The meaning of history is Jesus Christ.

Nor is the Christ of Colossians

1 simply the eternal Son of God, the second person of the blessed Trinity. Rather, He is the *Son in human nature, the child of the virgin, the man who was crucified and who now sits at the right hand of the Trinity as risen from the dead in His human body*. This one is the one purpose of God, for He is the "dear Son in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (vv. 13, 14), the "firstborn from the dead" (v. 18).

## First in the Counsel

The explanation of His being the one purpose of God with all things is that Jesus Christ is first in the counsel of God. Here we enter (with the caution that dreads speculation, but with the boldness that dares to follow where revelation leads) the mysterious, awesome, holy realm of the supra-/intra- debate. It is mysterious, awesome, and holy because this realm is the eternal mind and will of God in their innermost, profoundest secrets. There in the eternal thinking, decreeing counsel of the all-wise God, Jesus Christ is first. He is first, not in any temporal sequence, for there is no time in the eternal counsel. But He is first in that He is the one purpose of God to which all the other decrees of God, for instance, the decree of creation and the decree of providence, including the fall of Adam, are subordinated. Freely, wisely, graciously, the triune God thought and willed Jesus Christ as the object of His love, as the one with whom He would have fellowship, as the one whom He would exalt, and as the one in whom He would glorify Himself.

This is the meaning of the teaching in Colossians 1:15, that Jesus Christ is the "firstborn of every creature." As decreed, the creature Jesus Christ opens the womb of the counsel of God to the decree of all other creatures, they following Him and serving Him in the counsel. In this sense, Jesus Christ is "before all things" (v. 17).

All things must know this! They must know their place! They must know that they are not "before" Jesus Christ, or apart from Him, but after Him and for Him. Gifted, prominent unbelievers, especially the Tiger Woods of this world, arrogantly suppose that they are quite something in themselves, regardless of Jesus Christ. Common grace with its two-purposes-of-God-with-history idea encourages them in this foolishness. The biblical gospel disabuses them of this folly.

That Jesus Christ is first in the counsel of God, even before the decree of the election of the church accompanied by the reprobation of the others, is the teaching of Ephesians 1:4: "he [God] hath chosen us in him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world." If we were chosen in Christ, Christ was before us in the counsel. God chose Him first. Our election was grounded in His election.

## The Foundation of Election

The truth that Jesus Christ is first in the counsel ought to have been the Reformed response to the Arminian challenge to the Reformed faith at Dordt. In the interests of freeing the atonement from the limitation of election, much as Dr. Mouw thinks to free creation and providence from the restriction of election and redemption by placing election after the decree to create, the Arminians placed the decree of election after the decree of the atonement. This, they argued, made Christ the foundation of election as well as the executor of election. Since in the Reformed order of the decrees, Christ did not appear until after the decree of election, as the Mediator who would carry out the decree of election by redeeming the elect, the Arminians charged that the Reformed reduced Christ to the executor of the decree. The Reformed could not honor Christ as also the foundation of the decree of election.

The Reformed at Dordt fell back on Christ's being the decreeing God. But this was to evade the Arminian objection. Christ is indeed the foundation of the decree of election. The elect are chosen "in Him." But this does not refer to His being the electing God, which, of course, He is. Rather, it refers to Him as incarnate, as the head of the church. As incarnate, as the man Jesus, He is the first decree of God. The election of the church is founded upon the election of the man Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is both the foundation and the executor of the decree of election.

### Where is Christ in the Purpose of Common Grace?

The truth that Jesus Christ is first in the counsel as the one purpose of God with all things is the deepest intention of the old, and perennial, dispute among Reformed thinkers between supra- and infralapsarianism. Oddly, however, Reformed theologians often carried on the dispute without any reference whatever to Jesus Christ. It is striking that Jesus Christ does not figure in Richard Mouw's discussion of supra- and infralapsarianism. Mouw leaves the impression that the question is whether the salvation of the elect is the sole purpose of history, or whether the development of culture by the ungodly is also a purpose of God with history, alongside the salvation of the elect. This is not the question, or, at least, the main question. The question is this: Is Jesus Christ the one purpose of God with all things in history, because He is first in the counsel of God?

Scripture's plain teaching that Christ is first in the counsel conclusively rules out the notion that God has a purpose with creation alongside His purpose of redemption in Jesus Christ. God never had an "original purpose with creation," whether grounded in infralapsarianism or anywhere else,

which He carries out after the fall by common grace. The theory of "multiple divine purposes" shatters on the rock of Jesus Christ as first in the eternal counsel. Inasmuch as the idea of two distinct divine purposes of God with history is fundamental for the theory of common grace, the theory of common grace likewise shatters on the rock of Jesus Christ as the one purpose of God.

### "All Things Work Together for Good"

The primacy of Christ in the counsel of God is the Protestant Reformed response to a particular criticism that Mouw makes of their theology. Mouw sharply criticizes the teaching of Herman Hoeksema, which is certainly the teaching of the Protestant Reformed Churches, that all things exist for the sake of the elect.

This is where I find Herman Hoeksema's thought ... most puzzling. Here is a typical Hoeksema comment: "in the counsel of God all other things in heaven and on earth are designed as means to the realization of both election and reprobation, and therefore, of the glory of Christ and His church." Here is another: "All the things of the present life are but means to an eternal end." So the goal of bringing the elect and the reprobate to their eternal destinies, for Hoeksema, is *the* divine goal, and all other seemingly independent goals are really to be viewed as means to the attainment of that one goal. Thus Hoeksema is committed to a perspective in which the paths of the eagle's flight and the ocean's waves are ordained by God simply as means to the goal of bringing human beings to their foreordained destinies, and in which the divine delight in such things is necessarily connected to the role they play in fulfilling the eternal salvific decree. I find this belief no less puzzling when I extend it—as surely it must be extended from Hoeksema's perspective—to the actions of non-elect human beings (p. 36).

Mouw repeats the criticism later, listing a number of events that, according to him, have nothing to do with the decree of predestination: Plato's writing of the *Republic*; Babe Ruth's hitting sixty home runs in a season; Kennedy's approval of the Bay of Pigs invasion; and the decline of the Tokyo stock exchange in 1998 (p. 61).

The criticism is itself puzzling. Hoeksema's doctrine here is the explicit teaching of the Bible. It is the teaching of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." In I Corinthians 3:21, the apostle assures the elect church, "All things are yours." He specifies: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours" (v. 22). He explains: "And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (v. 23).

In addition to overlooking the explicit teaching of Scripture, the criticism fails to recognize that Jesus Christ, who is first in the counsel of God, was chosen as head of the church (Col. 1:18). His election was our election, as His body, with Him and in Him. Therefore, as all things were created for Him, they were also created for us. The providence that carries out the decree that all things are for Christ the head necessarily governs all things also for our advantage, who are His body.

We have not the slightest hesitation to confess that Plato wrote his *Republic*, Babe Ruth hit sixty home runs in one season, and the Tokyo stock exchange suffered declines in 1998, among other subordinate purposes that God was realizing, in the service of Jesus Christ and His church and, thus, for God's glory.

Who can figure this out? Which Reformed Christian is not deeply humbled by this, as well as comforted in his miseries and en-



couraged in the difficulties of the way. But who dares to deny this, since to deny this is to deny that all things serve Christ? And Christ, the elect of God, the crucified Servant of Jehovah and the risen Lord over all, is worthy that this should be.

Once upon a time, the God of history gave remarkable proof in history that the universe exists for the sake of the chosen people of God. For an entire day, God brought the rotating earth, the moving solar system, and the wheeling galaxies to the outermost limits of space to a halt. All waited patiently, as servants, upon Joshua—typical Christ—and Israel—church of the Old Testament. The redemption of the church of Christ—this commands the universe. Joshua had no doubt: “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (Josh. 10:12-14). Neither do we.

#### The “Cultural Mandate”

The truth of God’s one purpose with history sheds light on the “cultural mandate” of Genesis 1:28: “Subdue it [the earth]: and have

dominion.” The mandate is not simply that Adam and Eve exercise rule over the earth. Rather, they are to have dominion *as servants of God*, so that the earthly creation develops *as the kingdom of God*.

Fallen men and women are unable to fulfill the mandate. By the admission of the advocates of common grace themselves, fallen men and women cannot fulfill the “cultural mandate” even with the help of common grace. With the help of common grace, the fallen race develops creation, not as the kingdom of God, but as the kingdom of Man and Satan. According to Abraham Kuyper, father of culture-building common grace, by the help of common grace the ungodly erect the kingdom of Antichrist in history. Not only is common grace a fiction, it is also a failure. It cannot do the job.

The only fulfillment of the “cultural mandate” is by the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, as God intended from the beginning, that is, by the first decree in His counsel. Christ begins to fulfill the mandate now by His regenerating grace in the lives of elect believers. A J. S.

Bach writes lovely music to the glory of God. A Christian writer uses words well to explain, defend, advance, and apply the truth of the gospel. A godly farmer cultivates the ground, a godly businessman conducts his business, and a godly laborer works at his otherwise menial task, as unto the Lord Christ. A covenant mother orders her home and family according to the will of Christ.

This is true culture. This is the only culture that pleases God.

The perfection of the “cultural mandate” by Jesus Christ will be His renewal of all things—elect humanity out of all nations and the creation itself—by His (special) redeeming grace at His coming.

Then we will see how in the vast, complicated panorama of history every creature and every motion of every creature cooperated, wittingly or unwittingly, willingly or unwillingly, in serving Christ and His church.

Until then, we believe and confess it.

Thus honoring Jesus Christ — the fulfillment of the first decree of God.

— DJE 

## All Around Us

Rev. Ken Koole

### ■ Willingly Blind to What’s Really Behind the Scandal

**T**he recent exposure of what Rome’s clergy have been involved in, both in sexual scandal and in hierarchical cover-up, has become a ‘double-exposure.’ What is being exposed (once again) is not only Rome’s scandalous inner workings, but also the bias and sheer hypocrisy of the liberally-trained

news media. There is something that the news media do not want to address, namely, the real sin that has prompted the reprehensible behavior of Rome’s priests. And it is not the sin of pedophilia, defiled as that may be, but the proclivities of homosexuality. The simple fact is that in the vast number of the cases coming to light, the victims are not young children, but post-adolescent, teenage males. It is this (sinful) mentality and behavior that the news media do not want to touch with a ten-foot pole. What! And give homosexuality a bad name? In print? Under the head-

ing of our nationally acclaimed newspaper! Harvard (Yale, Princeton, etc.) forbid!

In an article in *Citizen Magazine* (published by Focus on the Family) entitled “The Media’s Pedophile Problem,” Tim Minnery points out this willful blindness.

To be sure, the revelation of sexual abuse by Catholic priests has been a true page-one story. But no less astonishing has been the media’s response, which shows that the morally blind should not try to lead the way.

Early stories about this heart-breaking problem tended to de-

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scribe it vaguely as 'child abuse' or 'pedophilia,' which is a sexual attraction to pre-adolescent children. In a few stories, it was referred to more exotically, as something called 'ephebophilia,' that is, sex with post-adolescent children. There seemed to be a collective reluctance to call this plainly what it is — a homosexual scandal. All the perpetrators are men, and nearly all the victims are boys. By definition, male on male sex is homosexual sex.

It is not hard to speculate why the media have been squeamish. The church is steadfast in its doctrine of sexuality, so there is nothing like a whiff of hypocrisy to make the media wolves ravenous. *But reporting negatively about homosexuality sours the stomach, because in the elite media, homosexuals are a protected class* (emphasis mine — KK). After all, it wasn't too long ago that these same outlets were scorching the Boy Scouts for their firm resolve against hiring homosexuals as Scout leaders.

Some Scout troops have shown signs of caving under pressure from the press and a few politically correct United Way campaigns. One hopes the Catholic Church's experience with boys and homosexual men will encourage these wavering Scout leaders to pay more attention to their moral compasses than to their newspapers.

What's the phrase? "Houston, we have a problem." In other words, how are we as reporters going to appear righteously indignant at the reprehensible behavior of Rome's abusive priests, without at the same time giving the gay-liberation movement (the homosexual lifestyle) bad press! They are desperate enough to all but coin a word, "ephebophilia." (My spell check refuses even to acknowledge it.) Anything to avoid laying this outrage at the door of homosexuality.

The breaking scandal could not come at a more inopportune time for the homosexual population, of course. Just as they have begun to make inroads into obtaining legal-

ization of their unions as state-recognized marriages, with the added right of adopting children as well (in the name of being really quite normal, harmless, and safe), this stink breaks loose. What might this do but lend credence to the notion that the long-standing Judeo-Christian 'tradition' (no one wants to say 'biblical' these days, after all), with its condemnation of homosexuality and the evils to which it leads, might have some basis after all. They can see all their propaganda and relentless public-relations work going up in smoke.

The real scandal becomes the news-media's refusal to label the true nature of the corruption of Rome's priests. The media's willing cover-up can only mean that the gay movement will continue to gain civil acceptance, and vulnerable young boys will end up in homes where sexual abuse is all but guaranteed, and this by the connivance of the state and the press. A deadly duo to be sure.

### ■ Time to Re-Examine That Tune?

According to the *Chimes* (news-paper of the Calvin College campus, Oct. 4 issue), Dr. Richard Mouw (a name with which we 'PRs' are becoming more familiar of late) was on campus to take part in a panel discussion assessing the 'Christian' value of some recent on-campus concert groups. Suffice it to say that one musical group consisted of two lesbians, and the other was a group which did not restrain itself from, nor was asked to evidently, its common practice of lacing its performances with obscenities (one must not suppress true artistry, you know). Calvin College has been uncommonly gracious in hosting such philistines over the years. This goes back to the sixties, when such luminaries as the radical social activist Father Groppi and the profane comedian Dick Gregory were invited to speak on campus. It was at that time also

that blatantly profane films, such as the violent *Clock Work Orange*, began to make their appearance. Dr. Mouw well remembers the stir these events caused in his own denomination.

What does this all have to do with us? This: the recent concerts have served to raise once again the hoarhead of the old, but strangely always relevant, controversy of common grace vs. the antithesis. According to the *Chimes*, Dr. Mouw pointed out:

This is no minor thing that we're talking about, because our souls are at risk.... Ideas can hurt.

The article continues:

Mouw set the stage for the discussion by defining two key beliefs of the Christian Reformed Church about culture that are often in tension with one another: common grace and the antithesis.

"The antithesis in Reformed thought is the difference between the ways of Satan and the ways of God," he said. "This antithesis cuts through all areas of life. God's people represent a radical alternative to the mainstream culture."

Meanwhile, "common grace modifies the antithesis," Mouw said. "It's the attitude of God's favor that is shown on everyone in three ways: natural blessings, restraint of sin, and positive acts of civic virtue."

After the background information was presented, Ken Heffner, director of student activities, said that Calvin "has probably chosen more on the side of common grace."

Probably?? Well, we will not argue that point too strenuously. When entertainment on an avowedly Christian campus consists of a lesbian band and of artists given to obscenities, it cannot be said that one has exactly chosen for Jerusalem over Athens, or for that matter Geneva over Sodom.

How far down the road that 'slouches towards Gomorrah' has



common grace taken the Calvin College community? A panel member, Helen Sterk, professor of communications, in an attempt to justify the campus activities, makes that plain.

Sterk said inviting the Indigo girls (the lesbians - KK) to perform is "a matter of hospitality and it's a communication of hospitality, meaning it goes both ways. If you listen to them, a lot of what they bring us is how to love, and that's probably a good thing."

"If you can identify with the emotions of someone, you can be persuaded by them," she said. "God is behind what is good and what is true and what is loving."

Hospitality? By such reasoning, of course, the angels who visited Lot should have been sent to persuade him to construct a Hospitality Inn in Sodom, instead of being called to drag Lot out with such force, so that the Almighty could proceed to rearrange the landscape in such a violent way.

To his credit Mouw had a different opinion.


"I think we go too far with common grace," he said. "We really do believe that there's a spiritual struggle going on over sexuality. The antithesis is at work there, and to simply cover that with common grace, I think, is wrong."

Well, it is a partial admission at least. The reality is that Dr. Mouw is coming to the realization that common grace has swallowed up the antithesis in his denomination like the seven ill-favored cattle devoured the seven well-favored cattle in Pharaoh's nightmare. What is left? Nothing but stubble, sad to say.

When was the last time the esteemed Dr. heard anyone occupying a role of leadership in his denomination declare concerning some aspect of the world's self-acknowledged immoral entertainment, "This is forbidden us as Christians. It is against the antithesis! It violates the holiness of God" (II Cor. 6:17)? Does it come into play? Ever? A generation has grown up to whom 'living the antithetical life' is a foreign phrase. The truth becomes self-evident: Kuyper's common grace and the

antithesis do not share common ground. It is one or the other; it is *either* wholesome music or two lesbians and the obscene. Do true cross-bearers really have to struggle to choose between two such choices?

Common grace has become the excuse to justify every immoral excess with its corresponding appetite. Aware of what obscenities are now justified in the name of common grace, Dr. Mouw has, apparently, set himself on a mission to compel members of his own churches to revisit the issue of common grace vs. the antithesis once again. We can appreciate that.

However, as should be coming ever more plain, the problem with Kuyper's common grace is not merely that it exists in tension with the antithesis, but that it is opposed to the antithesis. It is like a virus loose, working through the system, until the whole business is destroyed. The screen is going blank. Now what do you have left? Two lesbian performers sharing the spotlight with the obscene. Some grace. Some salt. Some light. 

## Feature Article

Prof. Herman Hanko

# The Publication of Van Zonde en Genade (2)

## Controversy in America

**T**he two different camps found a home in the CRC. Because the followers of Kuyper were among the more educated among the people in the

Netherlands, they soon occupied positions of leadership in the denomination in America and became influential in Calvin College. But the differences between the immigrants from the Secession Churches and the Kuyperian Churches were sharp and deep. The two groups not only did not get along in the Netherlands (even though both churches merged in 1892), but they did not get along within the CRC

either. The antagonisms were so strong that many feared a church split.

I recall that, in my own years in Calvin, one professor especially, strongly Kuyperian in his outlook, spent more time talking about these days of struggle and controversy than he did talking about the material in the course he was supposed to be teaching. He extolled the virtues of Dutch culture, in-

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sisted that this culture was Reformed, and pleaded with his class to do in America what the Dutch had done in the Netherlands. He spoke of the bitterness of the struggle going on in the CRC and reflected in his own critical comments the bitterness in his own soul against the people from the tradition of the Secession Churches.

If I may make a parenthetical remark at this point, it is of interest to observe that this division within the CRC had important repercussions for subsequent history. From the perspective of the CRC and the believers in common grace, the divisions were healed and the unity of the denomination preserved by the three points of 1924. The first point, as I mentioned, was the teaching of the Secession Churches; the second and third points were purely Kuyperian. The breach was healed by the error of common grace.

From the viewpoint of the origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the division was healed by a repudiation of common grace. Herman Hoeksema, over against common grace, taught that God's grace is always saving, always sovereign, and always particular. Throughout the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, there were those in the churches of the Secession and in the followers of Kuyper who never held to any kind of common grace and who insisted on the truths of sovereign and particular grace. These Hoeksema brought together, from both traditions, by repudiating a dangerous innovation and by emphasizing that which the church of Christ had emphasized throughout its history.

The history I just described forms the background to *Sin and Grace*, and the reader must be aware of it if he is to understand the book and its importance. The book played a role in this ultimate union of those who held to sovereign and particular grace, whether

they were from the Secession tradition or the Kuyperian churches.

### The Janssen Controversy

A second important event, this time in the CRC itself, forms part of the historical background of *Sin and Grace*. This is the Janssen controversy.

Dr. Ralph Janssen was professor of Old Testament in Calvin Theological Seminary. In his instruction he introduced higher critical methods of Old Testament exegesis. A few examples will suffice. He held that on the basis of the scientific principle of the conservation of matter and energy (that is, that the amount of matter and energy in the creation is constant) the water which came from the rock in Kadesh was always present in the rock. The miracle did not consist in water being created by God to provide for Israel's thirst. The miracle consisted in Moses' hitting of the rock in just the right place, where the rock was thin. The water gushed out from a rock broken by Moses' blow.

The stories of Samson, Janssen said, were myths invented to illustrate spiritual truths. Just as the Greeks had their heroes and invented mythical stories about them, so did Israel.

The monotheism in which Israel was instructed by Moses was actually learned from surrounding nomadic tribes. Moses, convinced of the truth of this view, conveyed it to Israel.

Now, the important point is that Janssen justified his views on the basis of Kuyperian common grace. He insisted, with obvious justification, that scientific discovery, elemental religion among heathen, and a knowledge of God as the only God could come from unbelievers because of the operations of the Holy Spirit working common grace in the unregenerate. Janssen insisted he was simply applying the doctrine of Kuyperian common grace to biblical studies.

At the synod of the CRC in Or-

ange City, Iowa in 1922 the views of Janssen were condemned, and Janssen was relieved of his position in the seminary. This was done on the basis of a thorough examination of Janssen's teachings by an official committee, in which committee Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema played a leading role.

The interesting part of this committee's work and subsequent synodical decisions was that the issue of common grace was never addressed. The reason for this is undoubtedly that there was disagreement among the committee members and the delegates to synod on the question of common grace, while the condemnation of Janssen's higher critical views was more widely approved.

Nevertheless, many supporters of Dr. Janssen remained in the church. These supporters, in every case strong proponents of Kuyperian common grace, were infuriated at Janssen's condemnation. In their anger, they resolved that the opponents of common grace in general, and Danhof and Hoeksema in particular, would have to follow Janssen out of the church. Common grace was the issue which would serve as an effective tool.

### *Sin and Grace* an Answer to Critics

*Sin and Grace* was written in 1923. No agreement or consensus had been reached on the question of common grace within the church. Many did not even know what the issues were; many were confused over that variety of common grace which was a part of the tradition of the Secession of 1834 and of Kuyperian common grace; many, firmly and unwaveringly committed to the truths of sovereign and particular grace, wanted no part of common grace in any form. The men who attempted to secure the condemnation of Danhof and Hoeksema relied on Kuyperian common grace, and that became the one issue in *Sin and Grace*.



There is no reference in the book to a common favor and the well-meant gospel offer.

Prior to the writing of *Sin and Grace*, the authors of the book were somewhat naïve, it seems. Rev. Jan Karel VanBaalen had opened the controversy soon after the condemnation of Janssen with a book (*De Loochening der Gemeene Gratie: Gereformeerd of Doopersch? [The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or*

*Anabaptistic?]*) in which he charged those who denied common grace with Anabaptism, or world-flight. Danhof and Hoeksema had answered that charge with a brochure with the title *Niet Doopersch Maar Gereformeerd (Not Anabaptistic but Reformed)*. It appears as if the authors of *Sin and Grace* were really convinced that the teachings of Kuyper were so clearly contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions that if a book would be writ-

ten in which Kuyper's views were clearly set down and the biblical teachings set over against these views, everyone would be convinced of Kuyper's errors. So the book contains extensive quotations and a thorough refutation of Kuyper's views. The judgment of the authors was naïve. History proved the judgment wrong. Kuyper prevailed.

... to be continued. 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Gary Lanning

## IVF: Petri-dish Children (2)

**I**n order to understand the *in vitro* fertilization procedure, an understanding of a little embryology is necessary. A woman normally develops one mature egg cell per month. This mature egg is released from an ovary and travels to the Fallopian tube on its way to the uterus. It is in the Fallopian tube that fertilization usually occurs. The egg takes about five days after fertilization to travel from the tube to the uterus. If the egg has been fertilized, and if all the other processes have occurred correctly, then at about day 6 or 7 the fertilized egg will implant in the wall of the uterus, and pregnancy has occurred. While all this moving about has been going on, the egg cell has also been dividing. What started out as a one-celled fertilized egg soon divided to become a two-celled embryo, which divided again to become a four-celled embryo, and so

on until at day 4 the embryo consists of about fifty cells, all bound together in a ball that resembles a mulberry. In fact, this stage is called a morula, which is Latin for mulberry. The cells of this morula continue to divide, and a fluid filled cavity forms in the center, transforming the embryo into a hollow ball called a blastocyst. This blastocyst enters the uterus at about day 5 and soon implants in the uterus to begin pregnancy.

But the process doesn't always occur normally. Sometimes problems in the normal procedure occur and infertility results. The fallopian tubes could be blocked, for example, thus preventing fertilization. Or a woman might suffer from endometriosis. Furthermore, immunologic factors might prevent fertilization. Finally, the cause of infertility might simply be unexplained. IVF can in some instances overcome these problems.

The IVF procedure consists of the following steps:

1. The wife takes fertility drugs to develop multiple mature eggs per month.
2. The eggs are collected in the clinic or hospital by laparoscopy (surgery requiring general anesthesia) or by ultrasound-directed needle aspiration.
3. The eggs are mixed with the husband's sperm in a dish in the laboratory. It is at this stage that fertilization occurs. The fertilized eggs (embryos) are now grown for about three days in the dish in the laboratory. During this time the embryo repeatedly divides to become a small cluster of cells. At the end of two or three days the embryos are examined under a microscope to determine which ones look healthiest.
4. The healthiest looking embryos are transferred to the wife's uterus, where they will implant into the uterus and pregnancy occurs. (This is by no means a sure thing. Although the data are a bit murky, it seems that live births result only about 20% of the time after an IVF procedure. A few things need to be said about "healthy" looking embryos. Just what does an unhealthy looking embryo look like? In the process of dividing, some of the resulting cells do not seem to form properly. For example, if you were to look at a picture of an embryo that

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had divided three times, you would want to see eight uniform looking cells all held closely together. This would be a healthy looking embryo. You might, however, see just seven cells surrounded by some cellular debris. This is an unhealthy looking embryo. However, there is no evidence to suggest that if this unhealthy looking embryo were actually to develop into a baby in the womb that this baby would have any deformities or any other abnormalities whatsoever. The only reason clinics do not like to transfer these embryos to the womb is that they do not produce as high a pregnancy rate as a healthy looking embryo does. Thus the chance of getting pregnant is greater if only healthy looking embryos are used.

If all goes well, a healthy baby will be born in nine months time, much to the rejoicing of the parents and extended family. The only problem with all this is that procreation has occurred by wholly unnatural means. Whether or not this is right in God's eyes is a matter that bears discussion. I have not been able to find very much helpful literature on this aspect of IVF. There are, however, other questions that a Christian couple will face when considering IVF. I believe these are answered much more clearly in Scripture.

The main problem for a couple comes in step 3 of the IVF process as outlined above. In this step the technicians choose the healthiest looking embryo to transfer to the mother. The usual method of IVF is to fertilize a number of eggs and thereby produce more embryos than will be needed. This is done for two reasons. One, this ensures that there will be at least one or two healthy looking embryos to transfer. Second, this allows the parents to preserve, by freezing, several embryos for another pregnancy in the future. In either case, the couple will be spared the invasive procedure and the cost of retrieving more eggs at a later date.

At this point the question of what to do with the extra embryos must be faced. Couples have four choices. One, they can destroy these embryos. Two, they can donate them for research, where they are eventually destroyed. This is where most of the embryos come from for the controversial embryonic stem-cell research partially banned recently by President Bush. Three, they can freeze them until they desire to try for another pregnancy. Four, they can give them up for adoption. I don't believe any of these choices is acceptable to a Christian couple. The problem with the first two options is that they result in the death of the embryo. The third option, while seemingly less offensive, really is not. Statistics show that approximately fifty percent of frozen embryos will die as a result of the freeze/thaw cycle they are subjected to. Is killing one half of your offspring any less offensive than killing all of them? Secondly, even if technology overcomes this problem, do we have the right to conceive covenant seed (albeit in a petri dish) and put it in the freezer until it becomes convenient for us to bear those seed? I think not! The fourth option at least does not involve murder, but is unacceptable in that we have no control over who will raise the seed we have conceived. Surely it would be better to remain barren than to cast our children to the upbringing of the world. These four options present a couple with a very weighty dilemma. Considering the huge monetary expense involved in IVF, not to mention the emotional expense, is a couple willing to tell the IVF clinic that in no circumstances are any embryos to be discarded? All embryos must be transferred to the mother! Even those that look unhealthy must not be destroyed! This stance seriously limits the probability of a successful pregnancy occurring, as it limits to two or three the number of eggs harvested and fertilized. Yet

this must be the stance of a Christian couple contemplating IVF.

But many of these objections are based on the belief that life begins at conception and that the soul enters a person at this time. This is not universally believed, even in the church world. What had for generations been a question debated mainly by scientists and theologians has suddenly become a question of major importance for young couples faced with the prospect of infertility. If life doesn't begin at conception, and if a soul doesn't enter at the joining of the egg and sperm, then maybe there is no offense in discarding or freezing extra embryos. Many theories have been developed as to when an embryo becomes human. Some have argued that life does not begin until the embryo is implanted in the uterus at about day 3 after fertilization. Others have said that life doesn't begin until viability, at approximately twenty-three weeks after conception.

The problem with these various opinions is that they all set an arbitrary time at which life begins. This arbitrary point can be moved at any time to accommodate the whims of the person setting the point. While it is true that an embryo does not function in the same way that an adult functions, neither does a person with a mental or physical handicap function in the same way that an average adult does. While this makes the handicapped person different, it does not make that person less of a person. Nor does anyone have the right to terminate the existence of the handicapped individual just because he or she functions in a manner different from the norm. Man has not been given the right to terminate life based on anatomy ("normal" vs. "abnormal") or placement (in the womb or out of the womb). God alone decides who lives or dies.

It must be admitted that there seem to be no ironclad references in Scripture that teach that life be-



gins at conception. If there were any such texts, I suppose this wouldn't be such an issue today. Nevertheless, Scripture does have something to say about this matter. Scripture surely implies that even in our earliest moments of being we are more than "viable human tissue." Judges 13:6ff. tells us that Samson's mother couldn't eat any unclean thing or drink any wine or strong drink from the *moment of conception*. In Psalm 51:5 David says that he was conceived in sin. Original sin was part and parcel of his being from the very beginning of his being (conception). Furthermore, in Psalm 139:15, 16 David states, "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." A sign in the nation's first IVF clinic in Norfolk, Virginia (now Jones Institute of Reproductive Medicine) sums up the view of many: "They say babies are made in heaven, but we know better." Clever, but not scriptural. Psalm 100:3 states, "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves...."

While these texts do not offer absolute proof of life beginning at

conception, they, along with other texts, at least imply that we became human beings at conception. At the very least we need to admit that Scripture surely leaves the impression that life *might* begin at conception. To the best of my knowledge there are no texts in Scripture that imply otherwise. Because of the possibility, if not the probability, of life beginning at conception, we may not take part in the four options for extra embryos.

There are some further issues surrounding IVF that bear discussion.


1. No one disputes the fact that God allows us to use technology to cure disease. This has been used as an argument for IVF. However, nothing is actually cured by this process. The married couple is still just as infertile after IVF as they were before. In this case, then, technology is not being used to heal but rather to achieve pregnancy.

2. Sexual love is the method God has been pleased to use to bring forth His church. This love between a husband and wife which results in the bringing forth of new covenant seed is a picture of the intense love between Christ and His church. (See Prof. Engelsma's book *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and His Church*, Chapter 5, as well as Song of Solomon 8:6, 7.) This union of Christ and His church is the method God uses to bring forth His sons and daughters.

IVF has nothing to do with sexual love. IVF and other assisted reproductive technologies redesign and redefine procreation as a result not of sexual love but rather of clinical manipulation. IVF relegates conception wholly to the world of technology; there is no act of union between husband and wife. A team of technicians harvests the wife's eggs and fertilizes them with the husband's sperm in a glass dish in a sterile laboratory without the husband or wife present. It has been said that the 1960s gave the world sex without children, while the 1980s gave the world children without sex. May we separate conception from sexual love?

3. What about the sordid history of IVF? Should immoral and unethical practices of the past prevent us from using the fruit of those past events? Time or space does not permit me to detail the wicked experimentation that has led to the relatively successful techniques used today. For a well-documented history of IVF, consult *Without Moral Limits*, by Debra Evans.



I realize I have asked far more questions than I have answered. My hope is that you, the readers, will be able through the searching of Scripture to answer some of these difficult questions. Please share your insights with others, so that we may honor God's name by keeping His commandments. 

A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

## Faith

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**F**aith is a many-splendored thing. The Word of God uses the word faith so often, it has so many meanings and implications, and it is such a power in the Christian's life, that to write a page about faith runs the danger of not doing it justice at all! What

a wonderful gift of God to us unworthy, sinful creatures!

Indeed, faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). And Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Further, as the Canons (III/IV, 14) make clear, faith is the gift of God not in the sense



that He offers it to men, to be accepted or rejected at their pleasure, but in the sense that God works in men both the will to believe and the act of believing. And if one asks who are given this splendid gift, the Scriptures tell us that God is pleased to bestow faith upon the elect (Titus 1:1). When the gospel is preached, as many as were ordained unto eternal life believe its promises: no more and no less (Acts 13:48). Reformed believers know election to be the fountain source of faith and every saving good.

Faith as to its most basic idea is a *bond* that unites the elect to Jesus Christ. It is the living bond of ingrafting, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 7. Christ is the vine and we are the branches (John 15:5); Christ is the olive tree and Gentile generations are the wild olive branches that are grafted into Him (Rom. 11:17). This living union with Christ, by which we draw out of Him all His fullness and benefits, is a bond established in regeneration. This vital truth allows us to see that elect babies who die already in infancy are also saved by faith! So that there are no exceptions at all! God's people are saved by faith!

Faith is also a conscious activity in the hearts and lives of believers. The Bible speaks of trusting in God, relying upon God, believing the promises of God, and having confidence in Him. Lord's Day 7 speaks of faith as a certain knowledge of all that God has revealed to us in His Word, and an assured confidence that the benefits of Christ's cross are not only for others, but also for me, merely of grace, for Christ's sake! This rich answer of the Catechism is based on Paul's words, "For I *know* whom I have believed, and am *persuaded* that he is able to keep that which I

have committed unto him against that day" (II Tim. 1:12).

The activity of faith is worked by the Spirit of Christ in connection with the preaching of the gospel. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18). Faith is worked, brought from potential into activity, through the preaching; faith is strengthened by the use of the sacraments. Hence, we call official preaching and proper administration of sacraments the means of grace.

Faith is the means by which God justifies the ungodly. Abraham believed the promise of God, "and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3-6). God saw that faith that united Abraham to the coming Christ and the righteousness that He would attain for His people; God saw that living bond stretching out between His friend

and His Son — and counted that faith for Abraham's righteousness. A man is justified by faith, without the works of the law (Rom. 3:28; Rom. 5:1; Phil. 3:9; Gal. 3:9). But faith *itself* does not justify a man; then it would be our work. Faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with Christ, the means by which we embrace Christ, the bond through which His merits and benefits (hard won on the cross) become ours, so that they are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins (Belgic Confession, Art. XXII).

Another splendor of faith is that it allows the child of God to see invisible things. If faith is the hand and the mouth of the soul by which we eat and drink Christ, then faith is also the eyes of the soul. Paul explains to us that affliction works for us glory: "While

we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:18). Faith gives substance, or firm ground, to the things hoped for; faith is the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). Hence, we walk by faith, not by sight (II Cor. 5:7), until such time that faith shall be sight.

Although we are justified before God by faith alone, and not by works in any degree or measure, justifying faith brings forth good works. Justified freely of grace, experiencing peace with God, the grateful saint shows his thankfulness by walking according to all of God's good commandments. If he does not, he is not a justified saint, for faith without works is dead, and a dead faith is not faith (James 2:14-17). We were chosen not only unto faith, but also unto the obedience of faith, to perform certain, definite good works which God eternally prepared for us to do (Eph. 2:10). Without Christ we can do nothing; but he that abideth in Christ, and Christ in him, bringeth forth much fruit (John 15:5).

Faith also stands for the body of revealed doctrine that we must believe in order to be saved. We are called to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). With one mind we are to strive together for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27). In these last times, many depart from the faith and are worse than infidels because they deny the faith (I Tim. 4:1; 5:8). The Apostles' Creed is called the catholic, undoubted, Christian faith because it sets forth in simple form the great revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This is necessary for a Christian to believe. This he *does* believe, by the grace and Spirit of Jesus Christ.



*Reformed believers know election to be the fountain source of faith and every saving good.*



# Taking Heed to ... the Minister

In other words, the ruling elders should encourage, advise, and give constructive criticism to the pastor in his role as chief teaching elder for the congregation. The pulpit can be a lonely place. The pastor who stands there from week to week without such support from his fellow elders is called to bear a burden too heavy for one pair of shoulders.

(Lawrence Eyres, in *The Elders of the Church*)

**O**ne great encouragement in my ministry is that there always has been at least one elder in the consistory who makes an effort to stop by my study to see how I am doing. A quick phone call for lunch together, or a short visit over coffee sometime during the week, is appreciated more than any non-pastor will ever know.

Rather than finding this intrusive, nosy, or time-consuming, I have considered this an important aspect of the work of the elder. But more important than the encouragement of the minister is the welfare of the office of the ministry. Elders are called to take heed to the minister of the Word.

Called to this work by Christ Himself, elders oversee the minister for the sake of Christ, out of love for Christ. Because the minister's welfare is inseparable from the welfare of the congregation, elders' care for the minister is a reflection of their love for the church.

Elders are to take heed to the doctrine and walk of the minister.

For the sake of the doctrine, elders take heed to the minister's walk. Out of love for the truth as it is in Christ, the elder watches over the minister's life.

The conduct of the minister will either make or break his ministry.

I note, just in passing, that my search of this magazine over the years has produced no articles on this subject, except for the briefest mention of the calling to oversee the minister's life. Little attention has been given to the vital importance of it, the biblical grounds for it, or the perils of failure. Because we ministers write most of the articles, I understand why. Let this be a beginning, and pray that it be profitable for all our ministries and flocks of Jesus Christ.

## Mandate

In the *Form for Installation of Elders and Deacons*, under the section "the office of elder," the brethren are given this solemn charge: "Thirdly, it is also the duty particularly to have regard to the doctrine and conversation of the minister of the word...." First is mentioned his doctrine. For the sake of the doctrine, they have regard to his conversation.

The *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, Article 23, enjoins the elders "to take heed that the ministers...faithfully discharge their office." In Article 81, in connection with *censura morum*, the officebearers are called to "exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard

to the discharge of their office." Referring to an activity at the council meeting, the article certainly lays out the calling of officebearers to oversee the life and labors of their peers.

The mandate appears also in the questions for Church Visitation where, in the absence of the minister, questions are put to the elders regarding the minister's work and life. Plainly implied is that the elders are observant of the minister in more than a casual and passive manner.

This supervision is one important way in which the elders are "assistant with their good counsel and advice to the minister of the Word..." (see under "secondly" in the "Form for Installation").

In addition to Reformed practice, this is the rule in many Presbyterian denominations. In one of their "Directories for Worship," elders are told that they "should have particular regard to the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word, in order that the church may be edified, and may manifest itself as the pillar and ground of the truth."

## Scripture

These instructions in the Reformed Formulas and Church Order are based on the sound, biblical principle of mutual supervision found in Acts 20:28, where the apostle calls the elders to "take

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heed to yourselves...." In order for the elders (which includes pastors) to take heed to the flock, they must first look to themselves.

There is a walk that adorns the doctrine (Titus 2:10). On the other hand, there is a walk that makes doctrine unattractive. There is even a walk that makes the doctrine utterly repulsive.

Titus 2 records Paul's instructions to a pastor for faithful labors in the congregations. Aged men, aged women, young women, and young men, are all shown "things which become sound doctrine." How they live in the congregation and before the world must correspond to the truth they confess. Before Paul proceeds to teach servants (employees), he says to the preacher, Titus, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works...." Titus' own pastoral life is to be a pattern for the congregation. Then, in a striking phrase, Paul explains that the believer's conduct "adorns the doctrine."

From the word *adorns* we get our word *cosmetics*. However beautiful a young woman may be without cosmetics, doctrine is ugly without the adornment of a godly life. If that is true for servants (Paul's specific point in verse 10), how much more true for the ministers of the gospel, the bearers of the message of grace!

Why? For the sake of the gospel, the precious gospel of grace, the gospel of the beauty and holiness of God, whose children and image-bearers we are.

There is talk around our town of a local congregation which has an inordinate number of unhappy people "asking for their papers." They are unhappy with the minister. Why? Not his preaching, but his life. His bad conduct (in their estimation) makes so much noise that the people cannot hear his sermons.

Elders must take heed to ... the minister. Elders can help immensely to guard from his life becoming an offense to the flock.

## Fear

One great obstacle to this work is the fear that an elder would naturally have to interfere in the life of the *dominee*. In addition to the proper sense of respect for the office that an elder has, any man hesitates to involve himself in another man's life.

Two things help an elder overcome such fear. First, the right attitude will carry him along. He loves the minister as a brother in Christ, recognizing that the minister's calling is heavy; he has confidence in his calling as overseer, which *requires* him to oversee the minister; he seeks the glory of Christ through a healthy flock, cared for by an honorable man of God.

Second, he may overcome his hesitation and fear by the right preparation: get to know the minister in casual, informal ways. When he does this, the natural hesitations will evaporate quickly.

Indeed, we ministers must be approachable, open, with the genuinely humble opinion of ourselves that oversight is necessary. May God deliver the churches from ministers who will not learn from anyone else. May God give the ministers hearts that are receptive to the rule of Christ in their elders.

Elders do not want to think about the consequences of missing a fatal flaw in the minister. For the sake of the gospel, they must.

## Practice

On a Monday morning, when the minister is recovering from a hard week and a long Sunday, a phone call to meet for lunch is a great help for a pastor. No agenda needs to be determined beforehand. Simply a casual visit to see how the man is doing, and talk about the work generally, indicates a care for the man and an interest in the ministry. If that is all the fellowship becomes, it will be profitable for the gospel. At the same time, the elder becomes familiar in a good way with the minister's

strengths and weaknesses, his struggles and joys, his burdens and difficulties. Knowing them, he can help with his "good counsel and advice" in many ways.

A minister (in most cases) has a wife, too. The confession of most ministers I know is that their wife is a mainstay of their ministry. How important that the elders see to this, too. An elder and his wife, visiting over dinner or after church some Sunday evening, will see how the man interacts with his wife, will get a feel for the strength of his marriage, and will be able then to give help where that's needed. Who will pastor the pastor? Who needs this oversight more than the most visible member of the congregation?

If an elder hesitates to pastor the pastor, he feels this hesitation never more strongly than at family visitation. Thankfully, there are elders who, with great grace, conduct the family visitation at the minister's home as they would in any other home. They understand that the minister's marriage is like any other. They see his children are in need of counsel like all the others. A good pastor welcomes this as much as anything. He'll try to remember to tell the elders this, too.

"For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" is a question that applies to the teaching elders as much as to the ruling elders. At family visitation, a faithful minister welcomes a question about his own prayer life. He is willing to speak of his prayers with his wife. He is not afraid of questions put to his children about their entertainment, their devotions. He graciously invites the elders' inquiry about family worship, television and music in the home, and whether the children submit to the parents. When he does this in patience and kindness, every elder may be bold in Christ to prepare for visits with the pastor's family in such a way. The members of the pastor's family will grow in re-



spect for the kingly office of Jesus Christ in their life.

In all these ways, elders can see what needs may be addressed in the pastor's life. Encouragements can be given. Corrections applied. Warnings wisely administered.

Then, when God grants such grace, the minister will come to him for advice, because he has seen the elder to be a man with wisdom to give counsel in need.

"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"


How wise the man who watches over the gospel preachers.

Thomas Boston (Scottish Presbyterian minister, 1676-1732) spoke fondly of an old elder who had accompanied him on a trip, but who took ill and died at his side during the work:

Among his last words were, "Farewell, sun, moon, and stars! Farewell, dear minister! And farewell the Bible!" He blessed God that ever he had seen my face. Thus the Lord pulled from me a good man, a comfortable fellow-laborer, and a supporter, or rather *the* supporter, of me in my troubles in this place. He was always a friend to ministers. Though he was a poor man, yet

he had always a brow for a good cause, and was a faithful, useful elder; and as he was very ready to reprove sin, so he had a singular dexterity, in the matter of admonition and reproof, to speak a word with a certain sweetness, that it was hard to take his reproofs ill. He was a most kindly, pious, good man. May the blessing of God, whose I am and whom I serve, rest on that family from generation to generation!

Thank God for faithful elders! For the sake of God's beautiful gospel of grace!

(Next time: Oversight of the minister's *doctrine*.) 

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. James Laning

# The Full Assurance of Faith (1)

or

## Warning Against the Doubts of the Papist

**A**ccording to Scripture and our confessions, true faith consists not only of knowledge but also of confidence. One who has such a faith not only holds for truth all that God has revealed in Scripture, but also is assured that the promised blessings of salvation are not only for others, but also for him personally (Lord's Day 7).

There are many, however, who would strip faith of this element of confidence, and would maintain that the believer in this life rarely, if ever, comes to the full assurance that he is in fact a child of God. Some of these people teach that for one to be sure that he is a child of God, he must have some kind of mystical experience, an experience

that really amounts to a special revelation from God.

Although some of those holding to this view claim to be Reformed, their position is explicitly condemned in our creeds. It is condemned as being essentially the same as the error of the Romish church. In the fifth head of the Canons of Dordt, in paragraph five of the section on the rejection of errors, we who are truly Reformed confess that we wholeheartedly reject the errors of those

Who teach: That without a special revelation we can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life. For by this doctrine the sure comfort of the true believers is taken away in this life, and the doubts of the papist are again introduced into the church....

The "doubts of the papist"\* —that is what our fathers said this error

would bring into the church. Knowing this, they warned us of this error, and devoted a number of articles to proving that true believers, who are old enough consciously to believe, do indeed obtain this assurance in this life. The Canons of Dordrecht set forth clearly the fact that true believers can obtain this assurance. They also go on to state the source of this assurance, as well as the fruit that it bears.

We begin in this article to consider, first of all, the fact that God does give His people the full assurance of faith in this life.

### Obtaining This Assurance: A Reality in This Life

The subject of the assurance of salvation is referred to in a number of ways in the Canons of Dordt.

\* A papist is one who adheres to the Roman Catholic Church and the authority of the pope.

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It is sometimes called the “certainty of persevering,” or “the full assurance of faith,” and is treated especially in the following articles:

First Head of Doctrine: Articles 12, 13, 16; and Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 7.

Fifth Head of Doctrine: Articles 9-13; and Rejection of Errors, Paragraphs 5 and 6.

A number of these articles clearly and explicitly state that it is common for the child of God to arrive at this certainty of persevering in this life. We see this, for example, in the following articles:

The elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election... (Canons I, 12).

Of this preservation of the elect to salvation, and of their perseverance in the faith, true believers for themselves may and ought to obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith, whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion that they ever will continue true and living members of the church, and that they experience forgiveness of sins, and will at last inherit eternal life (Canons V, 9).

These articles prove that it is confessionally Reformed to maintain that the elect believer in this life commonly obtains the assurance that he is right now and forever shall remain a child of God. We obtain this “in due time,” as conscious faith is worked in us by the preaching of the gospel. We do not, of course, consciously know this when we are born. But as we come under the efficacious preaching of God’s particular grace, we do indeed come to this assurance, and often at a rather young age.

There are those who would point to the fact that the first article quoted above says that we obtain this assurance “in various degrees and in different measures,” and would say that this means that although we can obtain this assurance to a certain degree, we can-

not come to the full assurance of faith in this life. This, however, is not what this phrase means. That our fathers did not mean this is evident from the second article quoted above. There they confess, and we confess with them, that true believers “may and ought to obtain assurance ... whereby they arrive at the certain persuasion, that they ever will continue true and living members of the church.” From this it is plain that our fathers did confess the truth that we believers, in this life, can draw near to God “with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:12).

The reason why they said that believers obtain this assurance “in various degrees and in different measures” and “according to the measure of their faith” is that there are some true believers who go through a time in which they do not experience this full assurance. It can happen that a true child of God goes through a time in his or her life in which he doubts whether he really is a child of God. This is mentioned in Article 11 of the Fifth Head of the Canons, which reads:

The Scripture moreover testifies that believers in this life have to struggle with various carnal doubts, and that under grievous temptations they are not always sensible of this full assurance of faith and certainty of persevering. But God, who is the Father of all consolation, does not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it, I Corinthians 10:13, and by the Holy Spirit again inspires them with the comfortable assurance of persevering.

Sometimes the reason why a child of God is not experiencing this full assurance of faith is that he is walking in a certain sin. Perhaps he is hating a brother or sister in Christ, or perhaps he is having fellowship with someone else who is walking in sin. God lov-

ingly disciplines His people when they fall into these and other sins, and does so by withdrawing Himself from them. Although He never completely takes His Holy Spirit from them, He does indeed withdraw His Spirit from them to a certain degree (Canons, V, 6), so that they experience, for a time, what it is like to be apart from God. During such a time, the child of God who is presently being chastened by His heavenly Father may descend so low spiritually that he doubts whether he truly is a child of God. This discipline continues until, by the grace of God, he cries out to God, confessing his sin, and pleads for forgiveness, asking God also to deliver him from the sin into which he has fallen.

Our creeds maintain that, although there may be times in which a true believer doubts whether he is a child of God, the believer who is walking by faith commonly comes to the certain conviction that he will forever dwell in the house of his heavenly Father. Such assurance belongs to the faith that God works in our heart.

### **Defending Against the Doubts of the Papists**

Our fathers recognized how important it is for us to know and to confess the truth concerning the full assurance of faith. They rightly warned us, their children, that we would be guilty of allowing the doubts of the papists to be again introduced into the church, if we tolerated either of the following teachings (Canons V, B, 5):

1. We can have no certainty of future perseverance in this life.
2. We can arrive at this certainty, but only by means of some special revelation from God.

The latter error would include the false teaching, common in some churches that claim to be Reformed, that a person has to have some kind of mystical experience,



to know for sure that he is in fact a child of God, and thus to be able to come to the table of the Lord. Such teachings are not Reformed; they are papist. They promote in the churches not faith, but doubt.

Over against this false teaching, we must set forth clearly the truth that God, in this life, does really work conscious faith in our hearts, and that that faith is not only knowledge, but also an assured confidence that the promises of salvation are not only to others, but also to us (Lord's Day 7). If this were not the case, how could

we sing from the heart the following passages from the psalms?


I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD (Ps. 118:17).

By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me (Ps. 41:11).

When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me (Ps. 56:9).

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (Ps. 23:6).

These psalms can rightly be sung only by faith. We can and do sing these psalms to our God because He produces this faith in our hearts. We can obey our Lord when He commands us to sing these psalms, and we can submit to His will when He exhorts us to rejoice, knowing that our "names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

But how does one obtain this assurance? What arises out of this assurance? Lord willing, the answers to these questions will be considered next time. 

*That They May Teach Them to Their Children*

*Miss Agatha Lubbers*

# *The Christian Story and the Christian School (1)*

## *A Defense of the Narrative Approach in Reformed Christian Education*

**T**he Christian faith is a gift of God that in a very real sense is a story—the true story of the triune God and His people. Thinking about Christian education in narrative terms or in terms of the Christian story causes one to ask the question, how does the Christian school fit into the story of God and His people, and the question really becomes, how does the Christian school serve the mission of God. The story of God and His people is the story of the triune God's mission—commissioned by the Father, accomplished by Christ, applied by the Holy

Spirit, and still in process until the end comes and God is "all in all" (I Corinthians 15:28).

It ought to be obvious to all who have an understanding of the Christian religion—specifically the Reformed Christian religion, in which context Reformed Christian schools and more specifically the Protestant Reformed Christian schools were formed—that the Christian school has a story to tell. In a certain sense the school is a part of the story, a part of the narrative that the school through its teachers must tell.

It is in this context and for this reason that John Bolt wrote the volume *The Christian Story and the Christian School* (Christian Schools International, 1993). Dr. Bolt dedicates his book to the many visionary pioneers—parents, teachers,

and students—who believed that the Christian story also had to be told in the schools.

Dr. Bolt states that his book, which joins a growing list of books about Christian education, is written from within a decidedly Reformed theological and confessional tradition. He asserts that this tradition has in the past century in North America enjoyed a successful and impressive track record in Christian education from the elementary to the college and university level.

The writer believes that it is important for all those involved in Christian education, and those who support it, to reflect on the changed center of education. This is necessary if the education is to be relevant and true to the vision that gave rise to Reformed Christian

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schools, and if that education will be faithful to the Lord.

The author notes that in the changed cultural and social context, questions are being raised by some of the supporting constituency concerning the legitimacy of the Christian school enterprise. For this reason, among others, an apology (defense) for Christian schools is necessary. However, Bolt notes that those involved in the enterprise ought to believe that Christian education is needed today more than ever.

The writer indicates that he has written the book as a defense of the project of separate and distinct Christian schools. Therefore the first half of the book is devoted to exploring the cultural and social forces that impact education. The second half of the book addresses the issue of the Reformed identity of the Christian schools that he supports.

Those who support the Protestant Reformed Christian schools also have this concern, because there has been an explosion in the number of Christian schools in recent years. It is necessary to reflect on what is distinctive about Reformed Christian education and how it is different from other Christian schools such as the Roman Catholic schools or the fundamentalistic schools.

An important reason for the writing and publication of this volume was the personal conviction of Dr. Bolt and his interest in what he calls the "notion of narrative." He argues that the account in *The Christian Story and The Christian School* is built on the foundation of a "narrative understanding of the Christian faith and provides a narrative interpretation of Christian education." Bolt writes,

It would be easy to dismiss this phenomenon as simply the latest in a long series of educational fads that have bedeviled North American education in the twentieth century, but this time I am con-

vinced that something significant—and even promising—is afoot (Bolt, p. 10).

The final reason given for the book arises from concerns about the current crisis in North American education reflecting broader uncertainties about Western civilization. Dr. Bolt writes as follows:

Faced with a growing diversity of populations and religious-cultural visions, North America is becoming increasingly pluralistic. Accompanying this pluralism is a growing hostility toward the legacy of Western civilization informed and shaped by Christianity. Whereas the public school system of education was originally designed to enfold and incorporate immigrants into the American melting pot, multicultural education today rejects the melting pot notion in favor of a pluralist mosaic. On the face of it, pluralism promises a more just vision of society. In practice, however, multiculturalism tends to be critical of and hostile to the Christian religion and to the Christian character of Western civilization. However, the structures of Western religious, political, cultural, and economic freedom have been shaped by Christianity and are in some sense dependent upon it, so the suppression of the Christian story may ultimately jeopardize the possibility of pluralism itself. Thus, Christian schools where the Christian story is told and the Christian tradition is celebrated serve a public, national, and social good. The Christian school is not just for the Christian community (p. 11).

The author asserts that throughout the volume he tried to keep the public role of the Christian school before the reader.

Although it is true that the Christian school, i.e., the truly Reformed Christian school, is a public institution, one wonders why it would be the case that the Christian school must serve the public, national, and social good. Why is the Christian school not just for the

Christian community? Could it not be the case that the Christian school, existing within the context of the national and social order, serves for the good of Reformed Christians who have been called to live as those that are in this world and not of it. This does not mean that the Christian school is subversive—an institution that exists to undermine the national and social order. Christians are not revolutionary in that sense of the word. Therefore I would contend that the Christian school is not for the preservation of the national and social order but to train Reformed Christians to live in this world as those who are transformed (cf. Rom. 12:1-3). Therefore they live unto God, who has redeemed them for time and for all eternity.

The book consists of six chapters. The first chapter deals with critical questions about contemporary education. Chapter two discusses the critical questions about our culture. The third chapter cites "Christian" threats to Christian education. Chapter four states that the Christian mind is necessary but not sufficient. The fifth chapter relates the rediscovery of the narrative method for instruction. The sixth and final chapter summarizes the data concerning the Christian story and the Christian school.

### Critical Questions About Contemporary Education

The introduction to chapter one focuses attention on contemporary public school issues, a focus, according to Bolt, that is both necessary and risky.

Bolt sees this as necessary because Christian education is directly influenced by what happens in public school education. The concerns about issues in the public schools have served as the reason for the existence of many Christian schools. For good or for ill, trends in educational practices, methods, and curricula find their way into Christian schools.



Bolt believes that the result is that Christian schools either become preoccupied with being different from the public school or they fear being left behind the cutting edge.

Bolt quotes Steven Vryhof, who writes in an article "Christian Schools: Ripe for Change" (*The Banner*, Sept. 9, 1991, pp. 6, 7) as follows: "Historically Reformed Christian Schools have tended to isolate and protect.... To maintain doctrinal and ethnic purity, they segregated Dutch immigrant children from the rest of society" (quoted by Bolt, p. 16). This practice and tendency can be understood and appreciated because it was rooted in the concern of Reformed Christian parents to keep the promises they made when children are baptized, i.e., to see to the pious and religious education of their children. However, after some years of Americanization, a hankering after the public school mindset has developed.

Bolt correctly asserts that the growth in recent years of independent Christian schools has resulted from increasing dissatisfaction with public school education by evangelical Christians. They formerly could tolerate the public school, but decline in academic standards, the exclusion of prayer and Scripture, the valueless approach to sex education, and an aggressive secular and humanistic orientation influenced parents to choose Christian schools or home schooling.

The growth of Christian schools, says Bolt, entails two major risks. The first risk involves the negative attitude toward public education—something that is not sufficient for building solid Christian schools. Bolt argues that if the primary reason for Christian education is to keep children out of the hands of Satan, it is difficult to equip children positively for a life of joyful discipleship in God's world. The author condemns the hope for the failure of the public

school as the way for the Christian school to thrive as a "profoundly unchristian posture." Bolt asserts that good public schools are essential to the common good and that the supporting of Christian education does not imply "studied indifference or open hostility to public education."

### A Crisis?

In a section concerning crisis in education, the writer notes that the word *crisis* appears with monotonous regularity in tandem with *education*. Bolt cites the following eight forms of crisis: 1/ crisis in academic standards, 2/ literary crisis, 3/ a cultural literary crisis, 4/ crisis in behavior and discipline, 5/ a crisis in moral values, 6/ a racial crisis, 7/ monetary crisis, 8/ a teacher crisis.

Concerning the issue of crisis Bolt makes three important observations to keep a balanced perspective. These are: 1/ The crisis in education is a reflection of society's uncertainty about values and goals, i.e., a crisis in confidence. 2/ A balanced assessment of the nature of the crisis demands a certain historical distance. It seems from this perspective that the crisis is a continuing and recurring crisis. 3/ One must understand that the educational crisis identified today is caused by reliance on expectations from "reforms" that were unrealistic and destined to disappoint.

Concerning the observation about disappointment with expectations for reform, Bolt quotes at some length from the volume *The Schools We Deserve: Reflections on the Educational Crises of our Time*, by Diane Ravitch (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 27.

One important difference [in today's crisis] is that so much of the past agenda of educational reformers has been largely fulfilled. In one sense, the educational enterprise is the victim of its own successes, since new problems have arisen from the long-sought

solutions to earlier problems. Idealistic reformers, eager to improve the schools and to extend their promise to all children, sought the appropriate level of change. If only teachers had college degrees and pedagogical training; if only teachers would band together to form a powerful teachers' union; if only there were federal aid to schools; if only all children were admitted to school regardless of race or national origin; if only all students of high ability were admitted to college; if only colleges could accommodate everyone who wanted to attend; if only students had more choices and fewer requirements in their course work; if only schools were open to educational experimentations; if only there were a federal department of education.... The "if only" list could be extended, but the point should be clear by now. All these "if onlies" have been put into effect, some entirely and others at least partially, and rarely have the results been equal to the hopes invested.

Ravitch concludes:

Paradoxically, the achievements of the recent past seem to have exhausted the usually ready stock of prescriptions for school reform and to have raised once again the most basic questions of educational purpose.

### Educational Reform

The author correctly cites the fact that during the past fifty years the "field of education has been a battleground for competing educational philosophies broadly described as *progressive* and *traditional*." Many can remember with me that these were times when the pendulum swung back and forth between the progressive and the traditional approach.

In *The Schools We Deserve*, pages 80, 81, Ravitch describes the swing between these two opposing approaches to educational philosophy and policy.

From the mid-1940s until the mid-1950s, the "good school" fol-

lowed progressive practices; from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s, the "good school" emphasized the study of science, mathematics, and foreign languages and insisted on high academic standards; from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s, the "good school" installed open classrooms, eliminated course requirements, and experimented with mini-courses and electives; since the mid-1970s, the "good school" has been eliminating frivolous courses, reinstating curriculum requirements, and restoring academic standards.

In an insightful paragraph Dr. Bolt clarifies and reduces the complexity of the terms "traditional" and "progressive."

A traditionalist approach focuses on subject content and mastery of basic knowledge and skills and insists on clearly defined and rigorous standards of excellence. Progressivism is primarily concerned with active, experientially based learning, creativity, originality, critical thinking, and cooperative learning for "the whole child." Much of the current debate oscillates between these two general poles (Bolt, p. 22).

Bolt correctly indicates that the "life adjustment education" of the late 1940s and early 1950s, with an emphasis on student needs, on practical, vocational, and how-to courses, along with "socio-personal adjustment" (health and guidance), went out of favor for two reasons. Hostile traditional critics faulted it for debasing academic standards, and the Sputnik crisis of 1957 gave rise to a high level of public indignation about the failure of American schools to train students for world-class performance in math,

science, and engineering. The public demanded excellence and academic rigor.

Bolt continues his assessment, and, citing Ravitch again, he states that in the mid-1960s the hope and optimism had disappeared and complaints were being raised about the competitiveness and joylessness of American schools. Counter-cultural turmoil on university campuses, protests against the establishment, and middle-class values of success and achievement dominated public attention. The school was seen by many as an instrument to achieve broader social reform. Bolt quotes the summary of Diane Ravitch—a summary that is clear and to the point.


The informal approach was typified by individualized learning activities, rather than group instruction; by emphasis on play, experience, and concrete activities, rather than reading and listening; by an informal relationship between the teacher and the student; by student participation in selecting the day's activities; and by informal arrangement of classroom time, space, and materials to encourage student choice. Behind such practices was the belief that children develop and learn at different rates; that the best way to learn is through activity and experience, motivated by interest; and that children are by nature eager to learn. Some advocates went so far as to insist that the child had to be free to decide what to learn, when to learn, and how to learn, with the goal being not to "educate" the child in the traditional sense of filling him up with knowledge, but to free him from his dependence on teachers, schools, and books.

The open education philosophy answered perfectly the need for a set of educational values to fit the countercultural mood of the late 1960s; it stimulated participatory democracy; it justified the equal sharing of power between the authority figure (the teacher) and the students; it made a positive virtue of nonassertive leadership; and it implied that children should study only what they wanted. At the high school level, the philosophy led to dropping of requirements, adoption of minicourses, creation of schools-without-walls, and alternative schools. (Quoted by Bolt, p. 24.)

The results of these "reforms" have been judged by many to be less than satisfactory, and some have said these changes are totally unsatisfactory. Concerns about educational mediocrity have focused on such indicators of eroding academic achievement as declining SAT scores. Fears are expressed about America's ability to compete in the international area of commerce if skills of American workers are inferior to those of Europeans and Asians. The cry is once again "return to the basics."

Those familiar with the educational scene will agree with the correct and concise conclusion of Ravitch that American educational policy in recent decades has been pulled from extreme to extreme every ten years or so in response to the changes in the social and political climate.

John Bolt concludes the section on educational reform by saying that this brings us to the current crisis of the last decade—1990-2000. Exactly where are we now in the great school debate?

...to be continued. 

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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### Congregation Activities

**L**adies from both the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada and the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe

were invited by the Covenant Ladies' Circle of First to a Festive Fall Fellowship on September 25 at their church. Rev. R. Miersma, pastor at



Immanuel, spoke on the theme "The Woman's Spiritual Beauty," based on God's Word found in I Peter 3:1-12. In addition to a worthwhile and challenging speech, the ladies also had the opportunity to enjoy a time of Psalm singing, a delicious lunch, a good cup of coffee, and good fellowship with like-minded Christian women.

In September our churches were blessed with the addition of two new pastors. Rev. Rodney Kleyn took up his labors as the first pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI with an installation service on September 18. Rev. R. Cammenga conducted the service and preached the sermon, while Rev. Kleyn's brother, Rev. Daniel Kleyn, officiated at the ordination and installation. About ten days later Rev. David Overway was ordained and installed, by Rev. J. Slopsema, as the fifth pastor of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ. Both these congregations have been without a pastor for some time now, so it is not difficult to imagine the thankfulness and joy with which these men, with their wives and children, are being received.

The Lord's Day following Rev. R. Kleyn's installation and ordination, he chose to address his congregation by preaching from II Corinthians 2:14-16 on the theme "Who Is Sufficient for These Things," and on October 6 Rev. D. Overway brought the Word of God to his congregation in New Jersey for the first time by preaching from II Chronicles 18:13, under the theme, "The Prophet's Oath."

From time to time members of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL meet together, usually on a Saturday morning, to discuss a book that they have read. This group is loosely known as, "Bring the Books." Their last meeting was held on September 21, and Seminarian Paul Goh led a discussion on the book "With Reverence and Awe, Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship."

### Mission Activities

Rev. A. Spriensma, our missionary to the Philippines, along with his wife and daughter, traveled on October 5 by plane from Manila to Bacolod City. Rev. Spriensma preached to a group of our contacts there on Sunday. The family returned home to Cainta on Monday evening. On November 3 the Berean group in Manila celebrated their second anniversary as an organized church group.

Rev. J. Mahtani's voice is once again on WORD 101.5 FM in Pittsburgh, PA — this time promoting the Pittsburgh mission group's new study season. Plans are for seven different promos to be on the air throughout the remainder of this year, emphasizing major events in their Mission, such as the new study season, Reformation celebrations, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc. It is their prayer that through such advertising, and especially through the personal witness of the mission members, God may be pleased to gather His people in the Pittsburgh area. Their latest promo, which was broadcast through October 1, invited interested parties to come to their Orientation Night on October 2.

Rev. C. Haak was scheduled to bring the lively preaching of the Word to the PR Fellowship in Fayetteville, NC September 29 and October 6. During the week between the two Lord's Days he was also able to give a public lecture for Fayetteville's second annual Reformation celebration on the theme, "The Need for the Recovery of the Biblical Gospel." He also used the time in North Carolina to be interviewed for the Reformed Witness Hour on two local radio stations.

### School News

The PTA of Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI invited Prof. H. Hanko to speak to them for their annual Fall gathering. Prof. Hanko spoke on the topic, "What We Don't Teach Our Children About Prayer."

On September 9 & 10 the jun-

ior high students of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA made their yearly trek to Warm Beach Camp. They enjoyed the marine life on the hike to mud flats. They were able to swim, play miniature golf, tennis, and volleyball, and enjoy games around the campfire. They also sang and had a good discussion on their duties as Christians towards "the higher powers" in our land.

### Young People's Activities


The Young People of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL invited their congregation to an old-fashioned spelling bee on Saturday, October 19. All ages were able to compete in a spell-down, with a champion for each age group. Refreshments were made-to-order ice cream sundaes, with proceeds going to defray the anticipated travel and lodging expenses for the youth trip to the Pittsburgh Reformation Celebration.

October was "Christian Service Month" for the young people of Grace PRC in Standale, MI. Plans called for the young people to dedicate time that month to help the elderly of their congregation who needed help with fall cleaning, etc.

The young people of First PRC in Holland, MI met recently for their first special discussion meeting of the society season. The topic that night was "Missions: How Should We Bring the Gospel to the Nations, Including Our Own?"

The Young Adult Group of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA sponsored a Family Soccer Night on September 27. Families were teamed against families for an entertaining game of soccer. Adults or children unwilling or unable to play could cheer the rest of their family on.

### Minister Activities

The council of Southeast PRC formed the following trio to call for a pastor when their pastor, Rev. Dale Kuiper, retires in January: Revs. W. Bruinsma, B. Gritters, and C. Haak. They planned to call on November 3. 



## Announcements

### REMINDER:

Heritage Christian High School in South Holland, IL is now in its second year of operation, teaching freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. As we plan for the addition of a senior class for 2003-2004, we ask qualified Protestant Reformed teachers to consider our need of two additional staff members. Interested individuals, please contact our Administrator, Ralph Medema, at (708) 339-1733 [rmedema@earthlink.net] or Education Committee Chairman, Bill DeJong, at (708) 946-6126 [bill@dejongequipment.com].

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 23, 2002, our parents, **JOHN and MARGARET FABER**, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to our Father in heaven for giving them these many years together. Their love for each other and their love for God has been a good example to us. As their children we are grateful for everything they have done for us. They have taught us to fear God and walk in His ways. They have nurtured us and loved us unconditionally. We are thankful to God for such parents.

Our prayer for them is that God may continue to bless them in their remaining years. May the promise of Isaiah 40:31 be theirs: "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

❖ Michael Faber  
❖ Lisa Faber

Byron Center, Michigan

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Southeast PRC extend their sympathy to Mrs. Dale Kuiper and family in the passing into glory of her father,

**MR. HENRY MIERSMA.**

May they be comforted with the words of I Corinthians 15:51, 52: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Tim Pipe, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Southeast PRC extends its Christian sympathy to the family and friends in the death of

**DEWEY LONT.**

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Dale Kuiper, President  
Tim Pipe, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and consistory of Hope PRC (Walker, MI) express their Christian sympathy to elder David Moelker and his family at the death of his mother,

**MARIE MOELKER,**

and his step-father,

**GERALD DEVRIES.**

May they find comfort in the words of Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Rev. James Laning, President  
Harry Langerak, Clerk

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and consistory of Hope PRC (Walker, MI) extend their Christian sympathy to elder David Kamps and his family in the death of his father,

**CORNELIUS KAMPS.**

May they be comforted with the words of Scripture, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Rev. James Laning, President  
Harry Langerak, Clerk

The 22 chapters of *Christ's Spiritual Kingdom* appeared originally as a series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer*. The Evangelism Committee of Redlands PRC has undertaken the publication of these articles in book form, out of the conviction that it will be useful in the defense and promotion of the Reformed faith, fundamental to which is a sound doctrine of the end-times.

Vigorous defense of amillennialism as God's own truth is rare today. This little book provides it. It's an attractive 168-page, soft-cover book, available from Redlands at cost: \$6.00 plus \$3.00 postage.

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