

THE *December 1, 2002* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

In This Issue:

MEDITATION

Rev. Steven R. Houck

The Way to God 98

EDITORIAL

Prof. David J. Engelsma

"He Shines in All That's Fair" (concl.) 101

ADDRESS AT ANNUAL RFPA MEETING

Prof. Herman C. Hanko

The Publication of Van Zonde en Genade (3) 104

ALL AROUND US

Rev. Gise VanBaren

106

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

Mrs. Connie Meyer

The Division 108

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek

Western Ideas (4) 110

IN HIS FEAR

Rev. Garrett J. Eriks

God's Hatred of Pride 113

MARKING THE BULWARKS OF ZION

Prof. Herman C. Hanko

The Nicodemites 116

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

118

The Way to God

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 14:6

In the first part of this chapter, Jesus tells His disciples about His Father's house. Jesus is going to that house to prepare a place for each of His people. But Thomas does not understand what Jesus is talking about. He declares to Jesus that he does not know where the Lord is going and he does not know the way to get there. Thomas knows that Jesus' Father is God Almighty Himself, but he does not know where He is and how to get to Him. That is the question that has plagued mankind from the beginning of the world. Men from all over the world and throughout history have asked, "Where is God, and how do I go to Him?"

That question has been answered in many different ways.

Each answer has brought about the invention of a different god and a new religion. In the ancient world of the Bible, each nation or territory had its own gods. There were hundreds of them. Each one of these gods was held up as the true God, and the service and rites of each were the way to the true God.

In our modern world there are many world religions that claim to have the true God or gods and the way to them. The following are the religions listed in a book on world religions: Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Buddhism, Jains, Hinduism, Sikhs, Parsis, Zoroastrianism, Baha'i, Islam, Judaism, and ethnic religions. Most of these religions proclaim that they are the true religion and the only way to the true God.

Today, however, we see something that is relatively new. In the spirit of ecumenism, we are told that it does not matter which religion we embrace because they all lead to the true God. A Protestant minister, a Roman Catholic priest, a holy man of Islam, and a Buddhist monk can all participate in a united worship service because

they all serve the same god. We are told that there are many ways to God. Pick the way that suits you best. They will all lead you to God. This philosophy is not only the view of modernists, but many in "Reformed churches" embrace this idea. Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists are all going to heaven. They will all find the true God.

The answer to the question, "Where is God and how do I go to Him?" is found in the words, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life...." Jesus is the way. He is the way to God. He is the road that leads to God. Look at verse 9: "Jesus saith unto him ...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father...." Look at verse 11, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me...." Jesus is so much the way to God, that when we see Jesus we see the Father. Jesus is in the Father, and the Father is in Him.

This truth is found in many other passages of Scripture. Jesus says in Matthew 11:27, "...no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Fa-

Rev. Houck is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

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

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

REPRINT POLICY

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

EDITORIAL POLICY

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE

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

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezenia
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezenia@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: sean67@cpfbbookstore.fsnet.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

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

ADVERTISING POLICY

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

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

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRCA: www.prca.org

ther, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Concerning Christ the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2:18, "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

Jesus makes it clear in this text that He is the *only* way to God: "...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus does not say that there are many ways to God and He is one of them. He does not encourage us to pick any religion and be faithful to its teaching and we will find God. Jesus says, "I am the *only* way to God. There is no other way. No one will find God unless he goes through Me." Thus we read concerning the name Jesus in Acts 4:12: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

This truth has something very important to say about the modern religious scene. It teaches us that Jews do not know the true God and are not going to heaven. Muslims have not found the way to God. They are lost. Those who adhere to Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha'i, even though they may be very religious, are under the condemnation of God and will spend eternity in hell. Why? None of them embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

That brings us to the question, "How is Jesus Christ the way to God?" He is in two ways. First of all, He is the way to God because of what He has done *for* us. We read in Hebrews 9:12, "...by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He shed the blood of atonement. He shed the blood that alone satisfies the justice of God and makes us acceptable in God's sight. After dying for us, Christ took that blood which He had shed, entered into the real temple of God in heaven, and presented the blood of atone-

ment to the Father. By that action He obtained eternal redemption. He opened the way into the most holy place, where God dwells. The veil that blocked the way has been rent from top to bottom. Jesus Christ has made a road to God for us by suffering and dying for us. That is how He is *the way*.

Christ is the way to God also from the point of view of His work *in* us. We by nature are totally depraved. We not only do not know the way to God, we don't even want to know the way. We are not even looking for Him. We read in Romans 3:11, "...there is none that seeketh after God." We seek God only when Christ opens our hearts, regenerates us, and gives us faith and repentance. Christ must put the love of God within us, before we will desire God. Christ must irresistibly call us out of darkness into His marvelous light, if we are to seek God and His salvation. Jesus puts it this way in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me..." Only Christ can bring a person to God, because only Christ, by His Spirit, renews the heart and gives faith in God.



Jesus not only professes to be the Way, but He also proclaims that He is the Truth. Before we consider that matter, let us notice, negatively, that all other religions are the lie rather than the truth. Judaism is the Lie. Islam is the Lie. Buddhism is the Lie. Confucianism is the Lie. Taoism is the Lie. All non-Christian religions are the Lie. They tell us that their teachings and rites will lead a person to God, but they do not. They lead us away from God. All non-Christian religions lead us to idols. Their gods are not the true God. They are nothing. The apostle says in 1 Corinthians 8:4, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."

That non-Christian religions are

the *lie* means that they are of the *devil*. They are the devil's counterfeits. The devil does not want man to find the true God. Therefore he devised something that appears to be the way to God, but that is instead the worship of the devil. Thus we read in 1 Corinthians 10:20: "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God..." When the adherents to false religion go through their rituals and ceremonies, they worship the devil, not the true God.

That means that billions of people have been deceived. There are countless numbers of people who embrace the teachings of non-Christian religions. They think that they are serving the true God or gods. But they have been deceived. The devil has tricked them, just as he tricked Eve in the Garden of Eden. They have embraced the Lie rather than the Truth.

But notice what Jesus says in this text, "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life..." Jesus is the Truth. He does not say, "I have the Truth," or "I give you the truth." He says, "I *am* the Truth." There are many other passages in the Bible that teach that Jesus is the Truth. In the first chapter of John we have verses 14 and 17, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, ...full of grace and truth." We read in John 1:17, "...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the Truth. He is all Truth. Outside of Jesus Christ there is only the Lie.

Jesus is the Truth because He is *God*, and God is Truth. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:18, "But as God is true..." God is True. That is the nature of His very being. The psalmist says in Psalm 108:4, "Thy truth reacheth unto the clouds."

Not only is Jesus the Truth because He is God, but He reveals to us the God of all Truth. When the eternal Son of God came into this world, He revealed the Truth. He brought Truth with Him and

showed it to His elect people. He revealed the truth to us when He preached and taught. He revealed the truth to us when He performed miracles. He revealed the truth to us by His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. He reveals the truth to us by His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, whom He poured out upon His church on the day of Pentecost. Thus we read in 1 John 5:20, "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true...." Because Jesus came and worked in our hearts an understanding of the truth, we know the true God.

That Jesus is the Truth is related to His being the Way. He is the Way because He is the Truth. Jesus Christ is the Way that leads to God because, as the Truth, He is the revelation of God. When someone has Christ, he has God. That is exactly what Jesus told Philip. We read in John 14:9, "...He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"

That Jesus Christ is the Truth who reveals God to us implies something very important about Christianity. True Christianity is *not* a religion of feeling and doing, first of all. That is the emphasis of the non-Christian religions of the world and of false Christianity. Eastern religions are pantheistic in nature. They believe that everything is god. What we have to do is get in harmony with the universe and then we will be in harmony with god. Thus we have to feel right with the world. We have to let our inner nature lead us. "Follow your heart," they say. World religions tell us that our beliefs are not nearly as important as doing service to our God and getting that good feeling when we do it. That is why there can be so much cooperation between religions. Differences in beliefs are minimized so that we can all work together doing what has to be done.

But true Christianity is not that

way. It puts the emphasis on belief. A Christian is someone who believes the truth. The Christian knows that there is truth. That truth is revealed in Christ and Christ is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Thus Scripture is the truth. The Christian does not go to human sources to try to find the truth. The Christian goes to Holy Scripture to find God, Christ, and the truth.

That is so true, that when a Christian believes on Christ for salvation, he believes what the Bible says about Christ. A person cannot be a true Christian unless he believes the truth that is in Holy Scripture. There is no other way of believing in Jesus. A true Christian believes all that is written in the Word of God. By believing the truth written down in Holy Scriptures, we believe in Christ who is Himself the truth. Thus we learn the Way to God.



That brings us to the last point, which has to do with *life*. Jesus says, "I am the life." Before we look at that, let us notice that there is no life in the non-Christian religions of the world. All the great religions of the world hold out to their people some kind of wonderful life to come. The Muslim is told that if he lives a good life or gives his life for the cause of the faith, he will enter paradise. In paradise he will lie on soft couches and drink cups of wine handed to him by beautiful maidens. The Hindu is promised nirvana. First he must go through a series of incarnations. If he is good in this life, he is incarnated as a higher being until he finally becomes one with the universe.

All of this, however, is nothing but the lie. The non-Christian religions of the world cannot give life. Not in this lifetime or in one to come. The religions of the world can give only one thing, and that is death. They give death in this life. An idolater knows nothing of

peace, joy, and satisfaction. His life is nothing but death. In the life to come he will be cast into the lake of fire, which burns with fire and brimstone. That is the second death. Thus we read in Revelation 21:8, "Idolaters...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." What is more, the non-Christian religions of the world are nothing but death, because they do not have Jesus Christ. We read in John 3:36, "...he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."


But for the Christian it is different. Jesus proclaims, "I am the way, the truth, and the life...." Jesus is life. He doesn't just have life. It is not simply that life is in His possession or that He is the source of all life. Jesus Christ *is* life. We read in John 5:26, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." Jesus says in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection, and the life...." Jesus has life in Himself. He is eternal life. There is no life apart from Him.

Because Jesus Christ is life itself, He is the only source of life. All life that there is came from Jesus Christ. The natural life of this world came from Christ, for He created the world. Jesus Christ gives life to the angels and to devils. He gives life to plants and trees, to birds and bees, to fish and animals, and even to man. Jesus gives spiritual life to man. That anyone knows God, trusts in Him, and loves Him is because Jesus Christ gives that person life. Regeneration is the giving of life. It is the giving of eternal life, resurrection life, the life of Christ. The Scriptures are filled with passages that teach us this. We read in John 1:4, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." In John 6:35 we read, "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life...."

What is this life that Jesus gives to those who believe on Him? It is

the life of fellowship with God. God's life is the covenant relationship of love that exists between the three persons of the Trinity. The Father knows and loves the Son and the Spirit. They know and love Him. They are friends who walk and talk together. They have communion with one another. Christ's life is the very same. It is His cov-


enant relationship with the triune God. He knows and loves God. He walks and talks with God. He has communion with God. That is the life He gives to us who believe on Him. Eternal life is the life of fellowship and friendship with God in Christ. Because Christ has given us life, we know God. We love God. We know God's love of

us. We are the friends of God. We have communion and fellowship with God, all because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the way to God because He reveals the truth to us, and gives to us eternal life. That is why we are Christians, not Muslims, Jews, or Buddhists. Jesus Christ is the *only* way to God. 

Editorial

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

Summing Up

ur opposition to the teaching of a common grace of God notwithstanding—opposition that has hardened through a careful study of the recent book by Dr. Mouw—we have enthusiastically welcomed Richard J. Mouw's defense of common grace, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2001).

The Christian Reformed theologian and evangelical leader renews discussion of the widely, but often uncritically, accepted doctrine of common grace. He affirms the great importance of the doctrine, not only for Reformed Christians in the Dutch tradition, but also for all Christians. He expresses the wish that others take up the discussion: "Perhaps what I have said here will revive a discussion of a topic that has received little attention in recent years on the part of mainstream Reformed theologians" (pp. 89, 90).

We endorse this wish, but not because we think that lively discussion will promote the doctrine of common grace. Rather, we are convinced that more careful scru-

tiny of common grace will reveal to many that the doctrine is without basis in Scripture, is contrary to the fundamentals of the Reformed faith as set forth in the confessions, and is destructive of both the faith and walk of the Reformed church.

In the course of his defense of common grace, Dr. Mouw acknowledges the opposition to common grace by Herman Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed Churches. Mouw states the Protestant Reformed objection fairly, even respectfully. He is surprised that the Reformed community has been so passionate — one might honestly say bitter — in its condemnation of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) for their repudiation of common grace. Mouw understands well that the PRC are deeply concerned to maintain the antithesis — the spiritual separation of church and world — so solidly founded on Scripture and so vital to the church's very life.

At the heart of Herman Hoeksema's sustained critique of common grace theology lies a very practical concern about the life of

the church. The commonality emphasis in common grace theology, Hoeksema insists, will inevitably result in the "obliteration of the distinction between the Church and the world, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, righteousness and unrighteousness" (p. 24).

Although here and there Calvin speaks of a "peculiar grace of God" to the unregenerated wicked, in their opposition to "common grace teachings" the PRC "can legitimately claim ... to be working within the general contours of Calvin's thought" (p. 18). Such a champion of common grace as Richard Mouw gently reminds the rabid defenders of the doctrine that denial of common grace does not, in fact, put a church or a theologian outside the pale of orthodox Calvinism.

Nevertheless, Dr. Mouw is a studied and enthusiastic advocate of common grace. Indeed, he desires to develop the doctrine both as regards the theory and as regards its practice. *He Shines* intends far more than only a defense of traditional common grace. The book urges a more expansive role for common grace than has been

recognized hitherto. It calls Christians to implement common grace more aggressively than has been done in the past. Common grace must become the spiritual glue — the superglue — that holds together our fragmented and fragmenting society and world. In cooperation with the ungodly, Christians must exert themselves to see to it that common grace carries out its great work of creating a unified, decent, peaceful, and even God-glorifying and God-pleasing culture. Christians must institute and labor in “common grace ministries.”

We admit to surprise at this vehement, not to say reckless, promotion of common grace. The grave threat to the churches, to evangelical and Reformed Christians, and to covenant children and young people at the present hour is the worldliness that, at the very least, is the definite risk of common grace. Mouw recognizes both the threat and the risk. Still he calls for more common grace. It seems to us that he allows his concern for the troubles of the world of ungodly men and women (which he thinks can be alleviated by vast doses of common grace) to override his concern for the perils of the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ.

In any case, *He Shines* demonstrates that the theory of common grace is not content merely to hold its own, much less to occupy a relatively insignificant place in the Reformed faith and life. Common grace is bound and determined to develop, to expand, to dominate.

Starkly outlined in Richard Mouw’s advocacy of common grace are the importance of the divine work of common grace, on the one hand, and the complete absence of any witness to this work in Scripture and the confessions, on the other hand.

According to our contemporary defender of common grace, following his mentor Abraham Kuyper, the common grace of God governs

the entire life of the Christian in relation to the world. Common grace delivers the ungodly from total depravity. Common grace achieves one of the two great purposes of God with history: the production of good, God-pleasing culture. Common grace binds Christians and non-Christians together in their mutual calling to build a better, God-glorifying, Christianized world.

These are not minor accomplishments. If real, they are mighty works of God in men and history worthy of clear, repeated celebration in the gospel of Scripture.

But Scripture does not teach these mighty works of common grace. The gospel does not celebrate them. *He Shines* admits as much in that it offers one text, and one text only, in support of common grace and its wonders: Luke 6:35. But this text says nothing about culture on anyone’s interpretation. As an earlier installment in this series painstakingly showed, the text does not even teach that God is favorable to the reprobate unthankful and evil.

This is not an implied criticism of Dr. Mouw for failing to adduce more texts. It is simply the observation that Mouw himself is well aware that his enthusiasm for “culture,” for the ability of those who are under the wrath of God to produce a culture that pleases God, and for the union of believers and unbelievers to work together for good culture does not derive from the Bible.

For this reason, there is not one word about common grace and its highly touted achievements in any of the Reformed confessions.

Like all defenders of common grace, from Abraham Kuyper to the Christian Reformed Church, Richard Mouw confuses providence with grace. Even Calvin was guilty of this confusion on occasion. His few, incidental ascriptions of grace to the pagans were a mistaking of providence for grace. The abilities of the heathen in the arts and sci-

ences, as also the regard for virtue by certain of the “noble pagans,” which Calvin sometimes attributed to a grace of God in them, are the effects of providence. And Calvin himself on other occasions explained these abilities and this morality in terms of providence, not grace.

A Misleading Title

Mouw’s error of confusing providence and grace appears glaringly already in the title of his book: *He Shines in All That’s Fair*. Mouw has borrowed the title from the second stanza of the hymn, “This is My Father’s World.”

This is my Father’s world, the
birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
declare their Maker’s praise.
This is my Father’s world: He
shines in all that’s fair;
In the rustling grass I hear Him
pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.

In the hymn, God’s shining in all that’s fair refers to the beauty, power, and glory of God in the inanimate and brute creation. The world of the hymn is “the music of the spheres,” “rocks and trees . . . skies and seas,” and “rustling grass.” Even though Christ is mentioned, there is nothing in the hymn about fallen mankind and their depravity. The hymn does not even notice, amid the “morning light” and the “lily white,” the curse of God upon the creation subjecting the creation to the “vanity” of the “bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:20, 21). As is characteristic of hymns in comparison with the psalter, the hymn is superficial. To be sure, “He shines in all that’s fair” in nature. But it is unrealistic and misleading to ignore that even in nature He curses all that’s foul. What of storm and earthquake, of decay and death, of “nature red in tooth and claw”?

Nevertheless, there is in the creation of azure skies and white-flecked seas, of great gray moun-

tains and gold-leafed trees, a fairness that is the shining of the Creator. What is illegitimate is the application of the shining of the Creator in a fair creation through the work of creation and providence to an alleged shining of God in the lives of guilty, totally depraved, and unregenerated sinners by a work of common grace. Rocks and trees are one thing. Fallen, spiritually dead sinners are quite another. It is one thing for God to take delight in the great sea creature's playing in the depths. It is quite another thing to declare that God takes delight in the activities of reprobate, corrupt sinners outside of Jesus Christ, who do not seek the glory of God.

God shines in the remaining splendor of His creation and in the holy life of the redeemed. The life of the ungodly is foul, and He curses it: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18).

From "Common Grace" to Universal Saving Grace

Confusing providence and grace is serious error. Far worse is the use of the theory of a common grace of God to introduce the doctrine of universal saving grace. History shows that this is unavoidable. The Arminians at the time of the Synod of Dordt employed common grace on behalf of their doctrine of universal, resistible saving grace (see the Canons, III, IV, Rejection of Errors/5). Claiming to confess the Kuyperian common grace of rain and sunshine, the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 adopted the doctrine of a universal, resistible saving grace of God in the preaching of the gospel. This is the "well-mean gospel offer" of its first point of common grace. The Presbyterian John Murray likewise moves from common grace to universal saving grace in his booklet, "The Free Offer of the Gospel."

Richard Mouw does the same

in *He Shines*. He wrote the book, as he himself tells us, to defend and promote culture-forming common grace. We find him concluding that common grace may well be universal saving grace. He ascribes common grace to the "Spirit of the reigning Lamb":

But we also know — and this is an important message for common grace theology — that the Spirit of the reigning Lamb is indeed active in our world, not only in gathering the company of the redeemed from the tribes and nations of the earth, but also in working mysteriously to restrain sin in the lives of those who continue in their rebellion, and even in stimulating works of righteousness in surprising places. And so, while we proceed with caution, we also go about our business in hope (pp. 86, 87).

Hope of what? Hope for whom?

It comes as no surprise then that on the last full page of the book, Dr. Mouw allows for the transformation of his — and Kuyper's — common grace into universal saving grace.

I do want to make it clear that while I am no universalist, my own inclination is to emphasize the "wideness in God's mercy" rather than the "small number of the elect" motif that has often dominated the Calvinist outlook. I take seriously the Bible's vision of the final gathering-in of the elect, of that "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages," who shout the victory cry, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10). *For all I know — and for all any of us can know — much of what we now think of as common grace may in the end time be revealed to be saving grace* (p. 100; emphasis added).

It is impossible to restrict a favorable attitude of God towards men to this life. It is impossible to confine a divine power that deliv-

ers from sin and produces good works to the life of earthly culture. Such a favorable attitude and divine power — grace — demands to be viewed, and proclaimed, as saving grace — *universal* saving grace. And this is the destruction of the Reformed faith, either in the direction of universalism, or in the direction of conditional salvation.

An Afterword

Two recent developments illustrate the deadly consequences of the doctrine of common grace that Richard J. Mouw defends in *He Shines in All That's Fair*. Virtually all Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical churches embrace, confess, and practice this doctrine. One development has to do with the Christian life. Calvin College, the college of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, sponsored a concert by notorious lesbians. The lesbians sang to the Calvin students of "love, romance, and relationships." Hosting the concert by the lesbians and another concert by a band that uses obscenities is part of "Calvin's mission," according to Calvin's director of student activities, by virtue of God's "common grace." The title of the article in the Calvin College student paper, *Chimes*, that reports on the concerts and on a panel discussion about the concerts is "Calvin debates common grace in music." Defending the college-sponsored concert on "love" by the lesbians, a Calvin professor argued, publicly, "God is behind what is good and what is true and what is loving" (*Chimes*, Oct. 4, 2002, p. 3).

Common grace and therefore God Himself is crooning to Reformed college students of lesbian love. The common grace god is thus wooing and winning Reformed college students to lesbian and homosexual love. Of course, he must be allowed to do so. Who may resist God?

The other development corrupts Christian doctrine, and is

worse. Writing in the Spring 2002 *Westminster Theological Journal* (WTJ), Dennis E. Johnson contends that the one speaking in Romans 7:7-25 is an unregenerated man. This unregenerated man possesses the significant spiritual ability and goodness that he claims in the passage, by virtue of God's common grace. Romans 7 "attests the way in which God, in his common grace, grants ethical insight and sensitivity even to the unregenerate." The title of Johnson's article is "Spiritual Antithesis: Common Grace, and Practical Theology" (WTJ 64, no. 1 [Spring 2002]: 73-94).

Since the man of Romans 7 claims a will that chooses the good and hates the evil, even to the point of delighting in the law of God, Johnson teaches the free will of the unregenerated man by virtue of common grace. This was exactly the doctrine of the Arminians at Dordt. Upon the exercise of the will that has been freed by common grace, then, depends the offered salvation. This is the death of the Reformed system of doctrine as set down in the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The *Westminster Theological Journal* is the journal of Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. Dennis E. Johnson is professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in California.

This is where common grace brings the churches, schools, theologians, and young people who believe and practice this pernicious doctrine.

By the one, sovereign, particular grace of God in Jesus Christ, the Protestant Reformed congregations, schools, ministers, and young people are *not* going there.

— DJE 

Address at Annual RFPA Meeting

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Publication of *Van Zonde en Genade* (3)

Outstanding Features of the Book

While other volumes can be found with extensive quotes from Kuyper's untranslated work on common grace, *Sin and Grace* contains the largest number of quotations of the as-yet-untranslated three-volume work which Kuyper wrote in defense of his views. Thus, the book has historical value because anyone who wishes to know what Kuyper actually taught on the subject of common grace can find it in this book in English in copious quotes and in Kuyper's own language.

In close connection with the ready reference the book provides to Kuyper's views, the book con-

tains the most extensive analysis of this doctrine that is to be found anywhere in the English language.

The authors of *Sin and Grace* go to great lengths to show that Kuyper's views were not only innovative and new to Reformed theology, but that in fact they were contrary to the historic Reformed position as outlined in the Reformed confessions. The authors show beyond doubt that Kuyperian common grace is contrary to Scripture above all. They do this by pointing out how few are the texts to which Kuyper appeals in support of his doctrine; and they do this by offering the correct exegesis of the few texts to which Kuyper appealed. There is much historical material in the book. There is also important exegetical material.

In proving the fact that the Reformed churches since the time of the sixteenth century Reformation held firmly to sovereign and par-

ticular grace, the authors give a ringing endorsement of the Secession of 1834. This is heart-warming, because even in Reformed circles the Secession is openly criticized. This endorsement is found, to cite but one example, in the following quote in which the Secession is referred to.

We learned to marvel at and regard Mother Church highly for her repeated effort to guard the principle of election by grace, regardless of disapproval, mockery, and scorn. At the roots of their spiritual life, the churches of the Secession, in our estimation, were thoroughly sound although they were limited in gifts, manpower, and means. They walked in the footsteps of Augustine, the Reformers, and the fathers of Dordt, according to the demands of their time, revering the gospel in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

The authors refer to two characteristics in this endorsement. They refer to the strong emphasis on sovereign and particular grace found among most of the leaders of the Secession. And they refer to the fact that the Secession shook free from a State Church and established a free church within the Netherlands, i.e., free from government control. By this latter, the fathers of the Secession rooted the antithesis in sovereign election and reprobation, a decree of God which cut through the citizenry of the Netherlands itself and was such a high wall of separation that cooperation between the wicked and the righteous in that country was impossible. Kuyper broke down that wall and paved the way for cooperation between all the Dutch.

The book shows that even in Kuyper's early days the doctrine of sovereign and particular grace was preserved. It was set down powerfully in Kuyper's own book, *Particular Grace*, and was even originally the foundation for the establishment of the Free University in Amsterdam.

It is interesting that already in a book written in 1923 Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema prophesied that if Kuyperian common grace became the teaching of the church, worldliness would be the result.

[Common grace] brings the church and the world into mutual fellowship.

And, the authors claim, this is the intended purpose of common grace.

The very purpose of common grace is to maintain the relation between God's people and the world. It directs itself toward the life of that world. It upholds the glory of God's work of creation in that world. And it cooperates with particular grace to make possible the penetration of the Kingdom into that world.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book (and for PR

readers, the most important) is the clear statement of the authors' positive view of God's purpose in creation and history. Although the book was written by men who had never given separation from the CRC a thought, the fundamentals of Herman Hoeksema's theology are all to be found in a chapter in which the positive truth of particular grace is developed. All that the PRC have confessed in the seventy-five years of their existence, all these churches have maintained as a distinct and separate denomination, all is found in seminal form in this book. If anyone wishes to know what is distinctively PR, this book is must reading.

It is impossible to set down what that important chapter contains in a few brief paragraphs. Nevertheless, the heart and soul of the positive teachings of Herman Hoeksema are all there.

Hoeksema proceeds from the viewpoint that Scripture teaches that God's purpose from the very outset of creation was the glory of His own name through the work of His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He points out that all history, including the fall of our first parents, is subordinate to that one purpose. The glory of God through Christ is realized through the salvation of a church chosen from all eternity out of free grace, redeemed through the blood of the cross, rescued from this present evil world by irresistible grace merited on the cross and sovereignly given, and called to live in the world a life of the antithesis by spiritual separation from the wicked world. This antithesis is a separation expressed in a life lived out of regeneration by grace and manifested in a witness to the cause of God's truth as revealed in sacred Scripture. To accomplish this, God makes His people His own covenant people, whom He forms through the Mediator of the covenant, whom He takes into his own covenant fellowship, and whom He calls to walk as His covenant people.

This is the explanation of history: Not a realization of the original cultural mandate through common grace in the world, but the final redemption of the whole creation through the work of Christ in the salvation of the elect by sovereign and particular grace. This world-and-life view is thoroughly biblical, reaches back into eternity, spans the centuries, giving meaning to all that happens, and carries us into the final perfection of heaven itself, where all shall be to God's glory forever. This world-and-life view puts steel in the spines of those who suffer persecution for the cause of God, gives courage to those who seek to live an antithetical life, and demolishes every charge of Anabaptism.

Concluding Observations

There are many places in which the authors add spice to the book. One or two instances will suffice.

Hoeksema's denial of common grace was well known in the churches and, even before the book was written, attracted criticism. Two critics are dealt with in the book.

The first critic was the editor of *De Wachter*, the Dutch denominational weekly paper. The editor criticized Hoeksema's denial of common grace by attempting to show that Hoeksema was holding a position contrary to the fathers at Dordt. In support of this contention, the editor quoted from the opinions of various foreign delegates who submitted their opinions to the synod. These opinions "proved" that the fathers of Dordt believed that God's common grace gave all men the light of nature, by which they were able to do good in the sight of God.

The trouble was that the editor quoted from foreign delegates, those chiefly from the province of Bremen, who were sympathetic to the Arminians and who did all they could to support the Arminian position. Their position was emphatically rejected by the synod itself.

But this the editor did not tell his readers.

The second critic was Dr. V. Hepp from the Netherlands. A minister in the CRC had written Dr. Hepp (who held the chair of theology in the Free University) asking his advice on how to deal with a minister in the CRC, Hoeksema by name, who denied common grace.

Hepp's suggestion was that the writer of the letter deal patiently with Hoeksema, because apparently Hoeksema had little knowledge of the Reformed faith as developed in the Netherlands over the centuries, Hoeksema was himself relatively young and did not yet know very much, and given time he would mature and learn


more about these things and modify his views.

As Hoeksema recounts this, one can sense how he restrained himself and wrote only: "Dr. Hepp will excuse us if we say that this brought a smile to our faces."

There are times when the book is eloquent in its defense of sovereign and particular grace; there are times when the book is intensely moving. Consider this paragraph:

It must not surprise us at all that throughout the ages it is precisely the doctrine of grace that has been contradicted. If we have learned from experience to taste that eternal election is meant for us, that we are God's children, and that God wills to be our Friend; if we

have learned that the bonds of God's covenantal mercy have drawn us out of the estrangement and the bondage of sin and out of all the power of the enemy; then we have discovered indeed that the mystery of election is great. Then the humbled heart praises God's mercies, and the mouth rejoices: "I am once again the possession of the Lord." Then the Pelagian in us dies, and we, as far as we are concerned, desire to be saved only by grace. Then we understand men like David, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Ursinus, the Reformers, and the true martyrs. Then the doctrine of grace is indispensable for us but also gloriously pleasant.

Be sure to add this book to your library. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ The "Good News?"

It is sad but true that increasingly there are those within the churches who insist that the "Good News" is that God is pleased to save by means of most or even all of the differing religions. (Is He not the God of love—love for all men?) The "Good News" is that the cross of Christ is not really necessary for salvation. The "Good News" is that the churches need not use money and manpower to proclaim the cross and seek repentance among the heathen.

I discovered an old newspaper article (about two years old) that treats of this growing evil. The article is from the *Rocky Mountain News*, October 28, 2000 (thanks to a *Standard Bearer* reader in Loveland who sent it). The writer is Terry Mattingly. The article was found in the paper's religion section.

Every summer, lots of religious people sit in lots of national con-

ventions and hear lots of leaders with impressive titles deliver lots of long speeches about complicated theological issues.

After a few weeks, people forget 99 percent of what's said during this siege.

But people are still talking about the Rev. Dirk Ficca's "Uncommon Ground" sermon at the Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference in Orange, Calif. It has sparked something unusual: a hot mainline Protestant story that isn't about sex.

The sound bite was a stunner: "What's the big deal about Jesus?"

Why do so many Christians, asked Ficca, think they need to convert people in other religions to Christianity? Don't they believe their God is powerful enough to work however he sees fit, even through other faiths? Don't they believe in the "sovereignty of God?"

"God's ability to work in our life is not determined by being a Christian," said Ficca, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) minister who directs the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. "OK ... if God is at work in our lives whether we're Christian or not, what's the big deal about Jesus?"

Ficca has seen traditional Chris-

tian missionary work and he rejects it, outright. Members of other faiths, he said, testify "that when Christians approach them with the sole purpose of converting them to Christianity, it feels like ... a kind of ethnic cleansing. What (missionaries) are saying is: Your religious identity is not acceptable and my job is to eliminate it from the face of the earth."

Presbyterian evangelicals are crying "foul" — early and often.

The result has been a clash between traditionalists and leaders of the denomination's progressive establishment. Much of the heat is in cyberspace, but there have been flare-ups in public meetings. Many documents linked to the July 29 sermon can be found through the "Jesus Debate" link at the <http://www.presbyweb.com> news site.

Conservatives are quoting centuries of doctrine and catechisms, such as the Scots Confession, which proclaims: "...For there is neither life nor salvation without Christ Jesus; so shall none have part therein but those whom the Father has given unto his Son Jesus Christ, and those who in time come to him, avow his doctrine, and believe in him." And,

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

of course, they are quoting the Gospel of John: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Ficca reads those passages differently. He dedicated much of his address to undermining what he called the "instrumental view" of Jesus and salvation.

It teaches that "Jesus is the sole and only instrument of God's salvation — through one person at a certain point in history, who lived and died in a certain way, only through this person does God's salvation come into the world," he said. "Here the Gospel is about Jesus; Jesus, himself, is the Good News. ...And if Jesus is the sole instrument of God — if it is only through Jesus that salvation comes — then the only way for the world to be saved is for everyone to become a Christian."

In place of this view, Ficca advocated a "revelatory view." It teaches that the "Good News is not the good news so much about Jesus, but the good news of Jesus: The Good News that Jesus preached. What this view says is that Jesus reveals how God has been at work in all times in all places throughout history in all people to bring about salvation."

Thus, Christians no longer have to engage in "proselytizing ... for the purpose of converting people to Christianity." God offers believers many religious paths to reach one eternal destination, said Ficca.

Presbyterian evangelicals are urging their denomination to publicly reject this approach — doctrinally and financially — as soon as possible....

It's amazing that within the Presbyterian Church USA there would be such a great stir about the views of Ficca — but evidently this created some unrest and disagreement. But little has changed since Ficca made his public statement.

One can also recognize this as the ultimate and logical conclusion from two prior errors. The first is that commonly proclaimed statement that God loves all men without exception, head-for-head. If He loves all, then

surely God will see that all or most will be saved — by whatever means. Would God cast into hell the heathen who never heard God's Word — but who worship "god" in their own native religion?

The second basic error producing the above fruit is that Scripture is not infallible nor inspired. The Scriptures are clear about the only way of salvation. The only way to maintain what Ficca teaches would be on the basis that Scripture is not true when it speaks of Jesus as the only way of salvation.

And the fruit of Ficca's teaching is that the church need not do mission work. If it nevertheless does, it is insulting to those of other religions. Heresy has its consequences — and the consequences are devastating in the life and duties of the "church."

■ Turmoil in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

Some 25 years ago the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) went through a sort of reformation. At that time, as a consequence of their highest ruling body's decision, many left to form a new (liberal) seminary (Seminex) and a new denomination (Evangelical Lutheran Synod). At that time this event was cited as the first real instance of a denomination reforming itself. Usually those who leave, or are forced to leave, do so in order to establish a continuing faithful church. It seemed that the LCMS would retain its character of a conservative (possibly most conservative) Lutheran denomination. It opposed evolutionism and maintained a literal, six-day creation. It opposed women serving as pastors — and presumably still does.

But all was not well. Herman Otten, pastor of a LCMS congregation (though to the present date the LCMS refuses to accept him as a pastor on its denominational roster of pastors), edits a paper we have quoted before, *The Christian News*. He has been reporting sad

things taking place in the LCMS. Though many left some 25 years ago, he claims that an equal number of liberals remained in the LCMS. Now these appear to be gaining some control in the denomination. He reports of pastors who deny the deity of Christ; deny His physical resurrection; and deny the bodily resurrection of the children of God. Two of these have been either suspended or resigned recently after being charged with false doctrine.

The latest uproar came when a district president, (Rev.) David Benke, participated in a multi-religion memorial service at Yankee Stadium after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center. After protests against this action, the Rev. Wallace Schulz, radio minister on the weekly Lutheran Hour, was instrumental in suspending Benke. That created a stir which resulted in Schulz being relieved of his position as radio pastor. *World* in its October 5, 2002 issue reports:

It's final: Rev. Wallace Schulz won't be returning to the microphone as speaker on the popular weekly Lutheran Hour radio broadcast. The radio ministry is affiliated with the discord-ridden Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (LCMS), which Rev. Schulz serves as second vice president. His dismissal last month ratcheted up the tension over theological and polity issues in the largely conservative LCMS....

He "would not agree to stipulations deemed necessary for his return to service," said Rodger Hebermehl, executive director of Lutheran Hour Ministries. He declined to describe the nature of the stipulations or discuss Rev. Schulz's severance package. It is generally believed the stipulations would have isolated Rev. Schulz from some of his duties and prerogatives as an elected officer of the LCMS. Reached by *WORLD*, Rev. Schulz politely declined comment.

Rev. Schulz rejected a Lutheran Hour request last February to recuse himself from voting on dis-

cipline charges against LCMS district president David Benke for his participation in a multi-religion memorial service at Yankee Stadium following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. When Rev. Schulz suspended Rev. Benke last June, he "polarized" and "negatively affected" the Lutheran Hour ministry, Mr. Hebermehl claimed. In turn, the ministry suspended Rev. Schulz as broadcast speaker, but offered to reinstate him provided he agreed to the stipulations.

In a letter to the editor in the magazine mentioned above, it was stated, "Rev. Benke said at the event, following prayers from leaders from other religions, that 'the strength we have is the power of love. And the power of love you have received is from God, for God is love. So take the hand of one next to you now and join me in


prayer on this "field of dreams" turned into God's house of prayer.'"

The Christian News, October 7, 2002, reports also on a resolution of the Council of the City of New York:

The Council of the City of New York passed this resolution on September 25, 2002: "Resolved, that the Council of the City of New York supports Reverend David Benke, president of the Atlantic District, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and pastor of St. Peter's Church in Brooklyn, who was recently suspended from his denomination's clergy roster for participating in the patriotic civic event at Yankee Stadium on September 23, 2001.

The "civic event" was also referred to as a "prayer service" when it first took place. It was

both. Benke prayed with Sikhs, Muslims, Jews and other non-Christians. He gave the impression that all religions worship the same God. While he as a Christian prays in the name of Jesus the prayers of those who pray to other gods are also heard and answered by the truth (sic) God was the message he gave at Yankee Stadium. The Council of the City of New York appreciates such a message."

So Dr. Schulz is severed from his position as radio minister for the Lutheran Hour. The governing body of the Lutheran Hour radio ministry would allow him to continue only after he would sign some seemingly impossible stipulations. It will be of great interest to see what now develops in what was once a conservative Lutheran denomination. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Connie Meyer

The Division

There is a lie about which we as parents must warn our children. It is a lie that is increasingly and blatantly set before us in a myriad of tantalizing, appealing, and high-pressured ways. It is the fundamental lie of the Antichristian kingdom, the threat of which continues to increase against us both in time and magnitude. In these last days it is imperative that we see the difference, and that our children know, from little on, of which kingdom they are citizens.

The picture was vividly painted for the children of Israel, literally so. Some 430 years had passed in Egypt. The bondage and

slavery they endured was terrible. The groan of the people was clearly audible, especially to their covenant God. From a human point of view, unless something miraculous would happen, the people would perish in their plight — which was exactly the design of the Egyptians. But the miracle was sure to come. Already from the beginning, that Israel was seen as a reproach to the Egyptians exactly spelled their preservation. The shepherders remained a separate people in the land of Goshen. Though there was a certain "mixed multitude," and though the Israelites worked for the Egyptians day in and day out, their generations were not swallowed up by mingling with the generations of the Egyptians. God was working His division even then.

But the difference between Is-

rael and Egypt became increasingly apparent as their deliverance drew near. God brought His ten plagues upon Egypt (complete destruction), hardening Pharaoh's heart with each one. But only the first three plagues were upon the whole land. With the fourth plague, there would be a glaring difference set forth: "And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to morrow shall this sign be" (Ex. 8:23). Swarms of flies flooded the Egyptians' houses and lands, their pots and pans, their eyes, their ears, and their noses. But not one buzz bothered the Israelites. The difference continued. Darkness was in Egypt — darkness that could be felt. But light shone in Israel's camp. Locusts devoured every green and growing square inch of vegetation — whatever little was left after fireballs and

Mrs. Meyer is a wife and mother in Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan.

hail. But the pastures of Goshen flourished. The difference would further be made conspicuously and abundantly clear to all: "And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel" (Ex. 11:6, 7). *That ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.* God intends for us to see the difference. God's love and grace was for Israel alone.

But what exactly was the basis for this division? The final plague, unleashed in all its horror and woe, revealed what it was that came between Israel and her enemies, even between Israel and death. It was blood. Blood brushed upon the doorposts and lintels of Israel's houses. Blood of a freshly killed, unblemished kid or lamb. Blood that sealed the promises made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. What a picture. Blood that atoned for the sins of His people, drawing them out of the slavery and bondage of sin. That was the real Egypt they were saved out of.

It was a picture painted with poignantly precise detail and strikingly astonishing contrast. They knew who was who and who was where. But now we are tempted to align ourselves with this Egypt. Blur the lines. Smear the contrast. Make things muddy and gray. Israel was tempted to go back, and so are we. Oh, for the leeks and onions of that land!

There's some good in everyone, you know. The world is not so bad. Look at the value of culture. A little grace is there. There is a little bit of truth in it all. There is some truth in all religions. Who dares to say that only one monopolizes the truth? We are all brothers on this earth. We are all created in

the image of God. We are, in fact, all one.

That is the lie. We are, in fact, all two. We either possess the image of God or the image of the devil (Lord's Day 3, Q. & A. 6; John 8:44). It's a world of two seeds set apart by an irrevocable enmity that God established already in Eden (Gen. 3:15). It's a world nourished by two different trees that grew already in that perfect garden. It's a world to which some belong as citizens, and to which others are pilgrims and strangers.

Our children must know that they are not of this world. In it, yes, but not of it. As real as the parting of the Red Sea was for the children of Israel (just think of what that must have been like to walk between those walls of water!), just as real is the sprinkling of water in baptism for us. The deliverance is the same. So when the questions come — "why mayn't I go here, why mayn't I go there, why mayn't I do this or that?" — the answer is clear. God brought you through the Red Sea. You are a citizen of heaven and you are not of this world. We must act, and do, and live, therefore, as the holy, peculiar, set-apart people that we are. God has done this. He has separated us and made the division. And He does so for our salvation. Do not wish to be part of Egypt. "But it's so hard to be holy and different!" Yes, it's hard. It's hard as being broken upon a rock. "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:44). But it's nothing compared to the utter destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts — and of the world.

"It is a night to be much

observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt..." (Ex. 12:42).



God Divides

Against the night, the black of night,
A white horse rides
In measured strides
And He divides
The dark apart from light,
The day apart from night,
Two seeds by enmity,
The tiller from the tree,
And He divides
The killer's head by mark,
All flesh not in the ark,
The nations from among
The sting of Babel's tongue,
And He divides
The house of Abram's kin,
And Jacob from his twin,
The foreskin ripped in stress —
Zipporah's bloody mess,
And He divides
By Red Sea water walls,
The children whom He calls,
By crevice Korah's clans,
The children whom He damns,
And He divides
The rock to quench the dearth,
The Son
From heav'n and earth,
His fellowship unmeshed,
His soul from His own flesh,
And He divides
The grave an open door,
The veil in two He tore,
The new man from the old,
No more in sin to hold,
And He divides
Each layer of the lie,
Revealing truth as high,
For when His work is done,
Then all things
Shall be
One.

Against the night, the black of night,
A white horse rides
In measured strides
And He divides.

C.L. Meyer

Western Ideas (4) Chameleon-Christianity

And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do: the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.

I Chronicles 12:32

Why Christianity Must Change or Die!

With that as his title, retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong writes:

I am increasingly unimpressed with what people call "orthodox" Christianity.... I am convinced that the future of the Christian faith rests not on reasserting those words of antiquity, but on our ability to refashion the symbols by which Christianity is to be understood in our time.

I think the time has come for the Church to invite its people into a frightening journey into the mystery of God and to stop proclaiming that somehow the truth of God is still bound by either our literal scriptures or our literal creeds.¹

Regrettably Bishop Spong is no longer on the fringe of "Christian" thinking in Western society. He and many others who have their

roots in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century have rejected the precious truth that the Lord has privileged the West to proclaim. Instead they present a Chameleon-Christianity: A Christianity that sometimes *presents* herself to the world as the bride of Christ, but more and more reveals her true colors as the enemy of Christ.

Of course, this has not happened overnight. Step by unrelenting step these denominations have gone deeper and deeper into the abyss of apostasy, to the point that today man's "wisdom" has replaced almost entirely both Scripture and the creeds. Solomon informs Issachar that she should learn from their example. He writes:

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction (Prov. 24:30-32).

Thus as children of Issachar we are enjoined by Solomon to "consider well" and "receive instruction" from the sluggard's garden as represented by the chameleon-like church of our day.

What Can Be Seen in the Garden

"Considering well" the mainline Protestant denominations of our day reveals that which looks

less and less like the bride of Christ and more and more like the scarlet whore of Babylon (Rev. 17). Examples abound.

Much of Western Christianity is turning "green." She is caving in to accusers who charge her with being anti-environment. It is alleged that since Scripture places man over the creation, the church is guilty of excusing, if not promoting, the destruction of the planet.

...some scholars contend that the seeds of the West's exploitation of nature can be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition itself ... cultural historian Lynn White, Jr. made the case that the Bible gives humans license to exploit nature because it sets man above nature. Genesis holds that man was made in God's image and that man named the animals, White wrote, establishing dominance over them. This covenant between God and man implies that the world was made expressly for the benefit of human beings: Because humans consider themselves superior to natural processes, they are willing to exploit the earth's resources to satisfy every whim.²

In response to charges like this, many churches are joining the ranks of those who celebrate Earth Day worship services and preach

1. John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 19-20.

2. Betsy Carpenter, "The Greening of the Church." *U.S. News & World Report* Nov. 27, 1989: 66-67.

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

environmental protection from their pulpits.

Also, much of Western Christianity, previously strongly opposed to it, has been changing color on the abortion issue. A typical example is reported in the August 2002 *AFA Journal* as follows:

During its annual meeting, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the nation's largest Presbyterian denomination, OK'd a woman's right to abort her child.

The PCUSA said abortion was acceptable as long as an unborn child is not "viable," meaning that it could not survive outside the mother's womb, even with medical help. Even after that, however, delegates said a woman could still abort her child after what it calls "prayer and pastoral consultation."

The decision, passed by an overwhelming 394-112 margin, took place at the PCUSA's annual General Assembly, held in Columbus, Ohio.

...delegates also voted to retain payment for late-term abortions in the denomination's medical benefits plan.

Neither has the sexual revolution that has conquered the West left Protestant Christianity untouched. Notice how rapidly mainline Protestantism is surrendering to the homosexual agenda. They justify it by following the lead of Bishop Spong, who says that the truth of God is no longer bound by the Scriptures. As reported in the *AFA Journal*:

Those promoting what is called "gay" theology ... actively reinterpret Scripture so that, instead of condemning homosexuality as sin, the Bible is said to approve of it.

The "gay theology" ... has not stayed within the walls of purely homosexual religious entities, however. Instead, it has been sown with evangelistic fervor into mainstream Protestant denominations which had already been struggling for decades to come to terms with the vociferous liberal elements within.³

Is it any wonder, then, that practicing homosexuals, and even transsexuals, are being accepted not only as members, but also as ministers in good standing in some of these churches?

Even worse, Chameleon-Christianity has begun to *celebrate* the dissolution of marriage, that most intimate relationship which pictures the bond between Christ and His church. While God says "that he hateth putting away" (Mal. 2:16), that which calls itself church will institute ceremonies to administer what God hates.⁴

How the sluggard's garden came to be that way

Many more examples of disarray in the garden of Chameleon-Christianity could be presented, but we must move on to the *how*: How did it come to look that way? Dr. Ken Ham, in an article titled "Eisegesis: A Genesis Virus," explains it this way:

WORLD ALERT: A deadly virus is sweeping through the church members worldwide. Investigators have found that the reason this virus is fairly specific to church attendees is that it has found safe harbor in many seminaries and Bible colleges. In these institutions, the virus is transmitted to students who eventually pass it on to the unsuspecting church members (especially if they become pastors).... The virus has been called "The Eisegesis Virus," and has been found responsible for the "death" of many church members.

This report summarizes the nature of this "virus" that does not affect a person's physical body, but infects their thinking in such a way that people are no longer able to consistently determine absolute truth. I consider this virus to be one of the most dangerous in the world today....

Now I am not referring to a biological virus... but to what I could call a "spiritual virus" — a way of thinking that has taken over the minds of many church leaders and most church members. This has

caused them to incorrectly interpret God's Holy Word. This often results in doubt about, or even unbelief in, Biblical doctrines....

...*Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* defines "eisegesis" as: "an interpretation, esp. of Scripture, that expresses the interpreter's own ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the meaning of the text."

Thus when someone reads something *into* Scripture — this would be an example of eisegesis. For instance, nowhere does the Bible ever speak of billions of years. In Genesis 1, the word day (yom) in context, as used for the six Days of Creation (with a number and the phrase *evening and morning*), means these days are approximately 24-hour periods — ordinary days.

However, probably the majority of church leaders insist these days could represent billions of years — this is "eisegesis," as the billions of years is a belief from outside of Scripture that is read *into* Scripture (resulting in the clear word of Scripture being interpreted on the basis of these outside ideas)....

Many church members (and particularly their children and subsequent generations) recognize that if the Bible has to be reinterpreted on the basis of the "world's" teachings, then the Bible is not absolute truth. When they are taught to use eisegesis in Genesis, they begin to consistently apply this same interpretation method to the rest of the Bible. Ultimately, they stop taking the Bible seriously, and within a generation or two, people begin to reject the Christian faith and stop attending church. Thus we see the "death" of many church members.⁵

If Ham is correct, it should not be surprising that Chameleon-Christianity keeps changing color.

3. Tim Wilkins, "The Gospel of Disgrace: 'Gay' Theology Comes to Church," *AFA Journal* August, 2002:10.

4. Marvin Olasky, *The Washington Times*, June 9, 2001:10.

5. Ken Ham, "Eisegesis: A Genesis Virus," *Creation* June-August, 2002:16-17.

Removing herself from the unchanging environment of Scripture, she leaves herself open to "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart," which in God's evaluation is "only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Chameleon-Christianity is left with "relative truth," which changes as the imagination of the thoughts of man's heart changes.

Results for the Sluggard's Garden

Is it any wonder that mainline Christianity is in disarray? Bishop Spong says Christianity must change or die, but the truth is that Christianity is dying *because* it is changing!

First of all, this is true numerically. Some news article titles tell the grim story: "Fewer Americans in Church: Lack of Relevance Cited," and "Hollow Halls in Europe's Churches." The contents of the articles are even grimmer:

In Britain and France, less than 10 percent of the population attends church as often as once a month. In Scandinavia, the handsome high-steepled churches that mark every city and village attract less than 3 percent of the people.⁶

...About 40 percent of Americans and 20 percent of Canadians say they go to church regularly — and probably at least half of them are telling the truth.⁷

The above-mentioned articles also present some of the most common reasons people are deserting their churches. They include: "hypocrisy," "non-compelling messages from the pulpit," and the complaint that "Churches offer musical productions and food, but they are not answering the questions." Questions, by the way, which can only be answered meaningfully by Scripture and the creeds.

Second, Christianity is dying theologically. It seems that all the cardinal doctrines of Scripture, for which faithful saints of the past have given their lives, are being rejected as old-fashioned. When the

church stops proclaiming that "the truth of God is still bound by either our literal scriptures or our creeds," as Bishop Spong says it should, there is no foundation upon which the church can stand. Little wonder then, that in our day Chameleon-Christianity is espousing "openness of God theology": A theology that on the one hand states that God "...in almighty power, created all that is and is sovereign over all..." and on the other hand can say,

...God has chosen not to control every detail that happens in our lives. Moreover, God has flexible strategies. Though the divine nature does not change, God reacts to contingencies, even adjusting his plans if necessary, to take into account the decisions of his free creatures.⁸

Any rational person can see the glaring contradiction of those statements of "openness theology," yet they are accepted because liberal Christianity is no longer bound by Scripture and the creeds. Instead she is left to her own corrupt, changing imaginations.

Another reason why the sluggard's garden looks the way it does is that the good plants have been tossed out or have been uprooted and left to die. There is a growing intolerance for those who are not inclined to adopt the chameleon agenda. Following is just one example of how pressure is applied to non-conformists:

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) convened its annual National Black Religious Summit on Sexuality in the nation's capital in July. Once again, socially conservative black churches were chided for adhering to traditional Christian teachings against abortion, homosexuality and nonmarital sex.

"Claim your dream... don't let anything get in the way!" exclaimed RCRC Chairwoman Imogene Bigham Stewart....⁹

Some "Instruction" from the Sluggard's Garden for Issachar

Spong is wrong! Issachar must cling ever so tightly to the Scriptures and creeds. Otherwise she with Chameleon-Christianity will be "...tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive..." (Eph. 4:14). For some, that may mean being labeled "intolerant," for others it may result in their being removed from the church, and for others it may necessitate leaving the church of their family and friends.

But where should one go? Some are listening to false prophet Harold Camping (see his book, 1994), who tells true Christians not to go to church. Rather he advises them to "...drop their church memberships, leave their congregations, and just listen to the radio."¹⁰ The Holy Scriptures lead modern-day Issachar in a different direction: "the wilderness (Rev. 12:14)." Rev. Herman Hoeksema explains the meaning of this wilderness-refuge for God's people as follows:

The church as such is a separate institution in the world. She has her own king. And as an institution the church does not recognize any other ruler.... From this it follows that the church has its own laws.... The church as an institute is a separate institution. She has her own King, her own laws, her own life. She does not

6. T.R. Reid, "Hollow Halls in Europe's Churches," *The Washington Post* May 6, 2001.

7. John O'Sullivan, "Is Europe Losing Its Faith?" *Insight* August 26, 2002:27.

8. Christopher A. Hall and John Sanders, "Your Next Move? Openness Theology," *Christianity Today* May 21, 2001:40.

9. Mark Tooley, "A 'Sex God' in the Most Traditional of Senses," *Insight* September 30, 2002:46.

10. Gene Edward Veith, "Camping Out," *World* April 20, 2002:14.

mingle in politics as such.... She lives in separation. Even as the children of Israel in the desert lived in separation... so also the church of the New Testament is in the wilderness with regard to the world and its power and its life.... The church as an institution is separate from the life of the world. She has received a God-prepared place in the wilderness.¹¹

Within the instituted, true church there is safety and comfort for faithful Issachar. This is not world-flight, as some would allege. Rather, this is the life of the antithesis. Within the instituted church the Lord is pleased to preserve His truth. By means of the instituted church God's people are nourished! Out of the instituted church Chameleon-Christianity is admonished.


Also, Issachar should "consider well" that Chameleon-Christianity

did not change color overnight. Where she is today is the culmination of many "small" departures from the truth over many generations.

Because her members have corrupt, sinful natures, Issachar is always susceptible to similar departures. Thus she must be "reformed and always reforming." She must self-evaluate: Does she have some skeletons in her closet that will come to haunt her and her future generations? For example, does she claim a sovereign, predestinating God and at the same time teach that God *offers* salvation to *all*? Does she claim a sovereign, predestinating God and at the same time argue for a *conditional* covenant? Or can she simply accept these as "paradoxes"? And if she can, is not "openness of God theology" just a little more of the same?

And what about the practical implications of her doctrine? Consider just one example: Can Issachar accept as "good" even one of the dramatic productions of Hollywood, and at the same time maintain the biblical truth of natural man's total depravity? And if she can, how long will it be before Issachar's children see the inconsistency and decide that the natural man is not totally depraved after all?

Indeed, much can be learned from Chameleon-Christianity's garden!

Sons of Issachar, let us grow in our understanding of the times and live! 

11. Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 444-445.

In His Fear

Rev. Garry Eriks

God's Hatred of Pride

The first sin committed by Satan in heaven and the first sin committed on earth by Eve were motivated by pride. In this sinful world, we continue to find pride at the root of sinful activity. If we are honest with ourselves, we confess that we find this sinful pride also in ourselves, which makes our consideration of pride so important.

We must identify pride for what it is. Pride is not the character flaw of being overconfident, which simply cannot be helped. Pride is sin. And God detests it. God warns us often in Scripture of

the sin of pride. If you look in Nave's Topical Bible, you will find over 100 entries under the word "pride." Many of these passages declare how much God detests this sin. One such passage is Proverbs 6:16, 17a: "These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look...." Because pride is sin, we must no longer be proud. Instead, we must be humble.



Pride manifests itself in man's relationship to God. Pride is the sin of man presuming he is greater than he really is *before God*. A proud man presumes that he is able to take care of himself. He thinks he is so important in the world that things should revolve around him.

In pride, man convinces himself that he is good of himself. Scripture plainly reveals how "great" man really is. Man is nothing of himself. He is like a speck of dust in comparison to the universe. Man is as important as one pine tree in all of the forests of the Rocky Mountains. God does not need man, for He is complete of Himself as the triune God. Man is not great, for he is completely dependent on God for all things. God provides men with the necessities of life. Spiritually, man is able to do no good of himself. If man is to have eternal life, God must save him. But the proud man rejects reality, believing his own proud distortion of himself. Those who are proud believe a lie about themselves.

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

The proud man foolishly says, "I don't need God. I have what I have because of my own efforts." This was the sinful pride of wicked King Nebuchadnezzar when he said in Daniel 4:30, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" God made him live as a wild beast, to show us that what Nebuchadnezzar said was not true. The Pharisees of Jesus' day lived out of this same pride, foolishly thinking that because of their own ability to do good they did not need Jesus for their salvation. The prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus' parable in Luke 18:11, 12 reveals the sinful pride of the Pharisees: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." This is the prayer of a man who thinks he does not need God.

This same sinful pride is found in the world today. Ungodly scientists study the creation apart from God and His Word, presuming they can understand the truth about the creation apart from God. Pride is behind the Arminian errors in all of their different forms. The Arminian foolishly believes man is able to contribute something to his own salvation by accepting Christ. This is nothing but pride. The proud believe that man deserves something from God.

The proud man trusts in himself and not in God. Through his own efforts, the proud man thinks he can provide for himself and his family a good life on this earth. Because the one who is proud thinks so much of himself and thinks he is above the Word of God, he lives as he pleases in the world. He refuses to be subject to the law of God.

Not only do we find pride in the world and in the church world around us, but also we find pride in our own hearts. Although God

powerfully works humility in us, we still fight against the sin of pride. If we have a successful business, or if we have been promoted at work, how quickly we may think this happened because of our own efforts. When problems arise in our homes or in the church, foolishly we assume we can solve that problem without God and His Word. Sinful pride manifests itself in failing to pray and study the Word of God with urgency. These important activities wane because we are not living in the consciousness that we need God.



Pride also manifests itself in relationship to the neighbor. The proud look down their noses at others. Scripture identifies pride this way when it warns of "a proud look" (Prov. 6:17). Literally, the phrase means, "haughty eyes." The man with haughty eyes looks down on others, believing the lie that he is greater than his neighbor. Because of superior knowledge, a more pleasing physical appearance, or special skills he might have, the proud man determines he is better than his neighbor.

This pride in relationship to the neighbor often results in a rejection of authority in the world. For example, look at the sin of Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Eve's sin, we see that pride went before the fall. She proudly rejected the authority of her husband by thinking she could battle against Satan herself without the leadership of her head.

Any man who thinks he is better than his neighbor believes a lie. Scripture clearly teaches us that all men are totally depraved. No matter how well one can shoot a basketball, no matter how much knowledge one has, no matter how rich one may be, he is no better than anyone else because before God's law all men are totally depraved sinners. Even as Christians, it is true that not one of us is better than the worst criminal on

death row. With the apostle Paul, we confess, "I am the chief of sinners." No one man is better than another. Who we are as Christians and what we have in this earth cannot be credited to our abilities. We sing in Psalter #383, "All that I am I owe to Thee...." Who we are and what we have is all the work of God! God is the One who makes us different from the wicked.

Although we sing these words and know they are true, yet we struggle with this sinful pride because of our sinful natures. Sadly, in the church we find many instances of sinful pride. Office-bearers may easily think more of themselves than they ought because of their office in the church. Because they are officebearers, they think, no one should question their work. If a concerned member comes to them, they proudly defend actions that may be wrong without confessing sin. This pride is also found in the members of the church in relationship to the consistory. When the elders come to their homes to admonish them, these members try immediately to defend their actions instead of humbly confessing sin. This is the reaction of pride. But this is more serious than merely being proud before other men. It is a rejection of Christ and His Word.

In pride, church members look down on other church members. We may find ourselves talking to others about the sins of another member in the church instead of speaking to the one who has sinned. As parents, we look down on other parents, in the church and outside of the church, because of the way they rear their children. When we do actually talk to another member about his or her sin, we may speak in a condescending way to him. When someone approaches us about our sin, instantly we become defensive, justifying what we have done without truly examining it. Why do we do this? Pride! We think we are better than others.

In these ways and in many others, pride can destroy the church of Jesus Christ. Pride creates disharmony and division in the church. Satan loves to see pride and the manifestation of pride in the church.

Satan also loves to see this sinful pride in our covenant homes. Pride is destructive in our homes. In pride, parents are unwilling to confess their sins to their children, provoking their children to anger. In pride, children think they know better than their parents, and reject the instruction and rules of the home. The sin of pride is the root of fighting between children in the home. Selfishly each child thinks that what he or she wants comes first. This pride destroys marriages. Instead of humbly confessing sin to each other, each spouse holds the other responsible for the problems they are having. Even if a husband has sinned against his wife, he will blame his wife for provoking him. Proud parents, children, husbands, wives point fingers at others instead of themselves.

We must repent of our sinful pride!



We must repent of our sinful pride because God hates pride. Proverbs 6:16, 17a states this: "These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look...." Proverbs 6:16-19 describes a seven-sin monster. God hates and detests the seven sins listed. But there is one sin God especially hates. This one sin that God hates leads a man to commit the other six sins. At the head of this monster is the sin of pride! Especially this sin stokes up the fury of His wrath!

Because God hates and detests the sin of pride, He will punish those who continue to walk therein. God declares in Psalm 101:5, "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud

heart will not I suffer." God will punish eternally those who continue to walk in this sin in the hardness of their hearts.

Why does God hate this sin so much? First, God hates this sin because man in pride believes a lie about himself in relationship to God and his neighbor. Secondly, God hates this sin because it leads to many other sins. The proud man does not trust in God or obey God. The proud man manifests his pride in hatred to the neighbor. Thirdly, God hates this sin because pride robs God of the glory due to His name. The proud man shakes his fist in the face of God, declaring boldly, "I don't need you or your salvation! I am fine on my own!" The proud man robs God of the glory and praise He deserves and gives it to himself. God will not allow such an attack on His name and glory to go unpunished.

Therefore, we must repent and turn from sinful pride. Pride has no place in our lives as children of God because God has graciously revealed to us what we are: weak and sinful. No matter how strong we are, no matter how long we can work each day, the truth is that we are weak. We cannot provide for ourselves any of the things of this earth. In relationship to God, we are sinners. We are conceived and born in sin. Because of our sins, we are the proper objects of His eternal wrath. We can do absolutely nothing to earn eternal life. As those who are totally depraved by nature, we also realize that we are no better than anyone else. What good we are able to do is only because of the grace of God. Although we can do some good, there are still many sins cleaving to us.

Only by the grace of God can we have this knowledge. Only by the grace of God can we repent of and put away sinful pride.



As those enabled by the grace of God to put away sinful pride,

we must, then, live positively in humility. The opposite of pride is humility. God calls us to live according to the humility of Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:3-5: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...." In Matthew 5:5, Jesus reveals that one of the spiritual characteristics of those who are citizens of God's kingdom is meekness, or humility: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Christians must be humble in relationship to God and in relationship to their neighbors.

True humility is based on the knowledge of faith. The man who is humble not only knows his weakness and sinfulness, but he also understands his complete dependence on God. The humble man knows that God provides his daily food and all the things he possesses on this earth. The humble man knows God is the source of his salvation in Jesus Christ. *Saved by grace alone!* is the humble confession of the child of God, for he knows that the only way to be delivered from the punishment of all his sins (including the sin of pride) is the cross of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit must apply this salvation to the one for whom Christ died. The humble man confesses always that every good work he performs is the work of God's grace.


Just as the proud man manifests his pride in life, so also the humble manifests his humility in life. The humble man trusts and obeys. Because he trusts in God, he prays fervently to God and studies diligently His Word in the consciousness of His need for God's grace and guidance. The humble man submits to the will of God by obeying His commandments. When he misses the mark of obedience, the humble man readily

confesses his sin to God. The humble man fears God.

The humble man also manifests his humility in relationship to his neighbor. He asks the question, "What is best spiritually for my neighbor? What is best for my wife, my husband, my parents, my

children, my fellow church member...?" He shows his care and concern for the neighbor by listening and responding in humility, esteeming the brother better than himself.

God will bless humility. In the way of humility, we can be assured

that God will bless our homes and our churches with peace and unity. Let us put away all sinful pride and live humbly before Him in the strength of God's grace. Let us pray in humble dependence on God for the grace to do this. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Nicodemites

Introduction

We devoted the last several articles to examinations of heresies which Luther faced in the course of his reformatory work in Germany. With this article we turn to Calvin's struggle against heretics of different kinds. Calvin was subject to countless attacks in the course of his work in Geneva and Strasburg, and in his defending of the faith he became a formidable polemicist.

Because of Calvin's influence throughout Europe and because the Reformation knew no more able defender of the faith, Calvin was subject to almost continuous attacks. It sometimes seemed that every enemy of the truth considered it his solemn duty to attack Calvin. If ever a man's life was filled with controversy, it was Calvin's; although we might add immediately that the devil well understands those who are particularly important in the defense of the cause of God, and they soon become the objects of the devil's attacks.

Without doubt, the Romish Church was Calvin's chief enemy, and Rome would have given much to silence his powerful pen. It was in the nature of Calvin's reformatory work that much of his polemical writings should be directed against the false doctrines and abuses of the church from which all the reformers parted ways. It is not, however, our intent to go into the errors of Rome and the answers to these errors which the reformers made. That would require too many articles in this rubric. Our readers are, however, urged to read Sadolet's letter to the citizens of Geneva. This Romish prelate tried to lure the people of Geneva back to the Romish fold while Calvin lived in banishment from the city in Strasburg. And, having read that letter, one must also read Calvin's answer to Sadolet. It is far and away the clearest, most forceful, and most powerful defense of the entire Reformation which came from any of the reformers, either on the continent or in the British Isles. It is a masterpiece of the first sort. It can be found in Volume I of Calvin's *Tracts and Treatises*, and it has been published in a separate volume.

There were various heretics who barked at Calvin and nipped at his heels with whom we want to

deal, but in this first article I have chosen to deal with a group of people, primarily to be found in France, who have come to be called Nicodemites. These people were of concern to Calvin throughout most of his lifetime; in fact, he wrote no fewer than six treatises against them. The most popular and best known of these six is one with the imposing title: "On Shunning the Unlawful Rites of the Ungodly and Preserving the Purity of the Christian Religion: A Letter by John Calvin to his Dear and Very Excellent Friend N.S." In fact, the letter was written to Nicholas Chemin, with whom Calvin had stayed for a time and whose hospitality Calvin had enjoyed in Orleans. The tract was written in 1537 and can also be found in Calvin's *Tracts and Treatises*, Volume III.

The Error of the Nicodemites

These people, mainly in France, were not, strictly speaking, heretics. They taught no heresy but rather expressed agreement with Calvin in all his teachings.

To understand the position of these people we must know, first of all, that the Calvin Reformation had had great influence in France. The Lutheran Reformation had touched the French people only

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

slightly, but, partly because Geneva itself was of French-speaking Switzerland, partly because Geneva sent preachers into France, and partly because Calvin himself was from France, Calvin's teachings had sunk deep roots and had produced, by God's work of gathering the church, an abundant harvest.

At the same time, Rome was firmly in control of France. The strongest and best Romish universities were in France, and the monarchy was under the control of powerful French prelates. The result was fierce persecution. With the possible exception of the Lowlands, no country in Europe knew such terrible persecution as the French Protestants. Every form of torture and cruel death was inflicted on them in a vain effort to destroy those who held to Calvin's teachings.

Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor, describes the Nicodemites in these words:

At this time also there were some persons in France, who, having fallen away at first from fear of persecution, had afterwards begun to be satisfied with their conduct as to deny that there was any sin in giving bodily attendance on popish rites, provided their minds were devoted to true religion. This most pernicious error, which had been condemned of old by the Fathers, Calvin refuted with the greatest clearness ... the consequence was that from that time, the name of Nicodemite was applied to those who pretended a sanction for their misconduct in the example of the holy man Nicodemus.

Calvin, in the tract mentioned above, says this about them:

When those who live in the difficult position which you now occupy perceive that they can neither maintain their tranquillity, nor live on harmonious terms with their neighbours, unless they make a pretence of indulging in Idolatry — amid the difficulties

which thus beset and perplex them, they attend more to what may be expedient for themselves than pleasing to God — more to what may gain human favour than secure Divine approbation. Meanwhile they devise a defence by which they may keep their consciences at ease in the view of the Divine tribunal, pretending that they are far from giving an internal heartfelt assent to any kind of impiety, but only have recourse to a little harmless pretence as a necessary concession to the ignorant, and also as the most promising means of gaining over persons who it were foolish to irritate by a course which could not lead to any beneficial result, and would be attended with the greatest danger.

In brief, the Nicodemites, fearful of persecution, took the position that God was pleased if they confessed His truth in their minds and with their hearts, while they outwardly conformed to all the practices of the Romish Church. Thus they received the name Nicodemites, because they were said to hide their faith, as Nicodemus ostensibly did when he came to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews.

They defended their position with various arguments. They claimed that many of the Romish rites that they attended were indifferent matters, which could be observed without sin. They argued that God looks on the heart and not on the outward appearance. They maintained, somewhat ridiculously, that they could be better witnesses to other Roman Catholics when they were not hounded and persecuted. And they appealed to the case of Naaman, who received permission from Elisha to enter the temple of Rimmon with his king and bow before the idol. (Calvin has a powerful refutation of this appeal to Naaman in his tract mentioned earlier.)

There were different kinds of Nicodemites. There were some who, though they agreed with

Calvin's teachings, stayed in the Romish Church (as many today remain in apostatizing churches) and, for the most part, kept silence. There were some, like some of the Humanists (Erasmus, d' Etaples, Thomas More, etc.) who wanted reform in the Romish Church and who even expressed agreement with some of the teachings of the reformers, but who never left their church. But Calvin's attention was especially fixed on these folk in France who found the way of Nicodemus to be the better way to live their Christian life.

Calvin's Condemnation of Nicodemites

Calvin had little patience with these people and condemned them in no uncertain terms. Take, for example, what Calvin writes immediately after the quotation given above in which he summarizes their position: "By such beginnings they commence their own ruin." It was not as if Calvin did not appreciate the sufferings to which the French Protestants were subjected. Never, so far as I know, did he ever mention one of these people by name — as if to spare them shame. And when Calvin did write to those who were imprisoned and awaiting death for the cause of the gospel, he wrote in the most tender way, fully aware of the agony of suffering martyrdom. Some of his most poignant letters are written to these persecuted saints.

But such deception as was practiced by these Nicodemites was, for Calvin, intolerable. He insisted that, however unimportant Romish rites might seem to some (worship of relics, adoring images, and the like), all these rites were in one way or another bound up in the mass; and the mass was an idolatry of the worst sort. Anyone who even outwardly engaged in these rituals was guilty of idolatry.

Calvin also maintained that the motive of these people was simply fear of persecution. And while he

could understand this fear, nevertheless, he pointed out that such fear drowned the fear of God by which Christians are to live. People who were threatened with suffering for Christ's sake had two options: they could either flee their land and live in exile — as Calvin himself had done and as the French refugee church in Geneva urged persecuted Protestants to do; or they could stay where they were, maintaining their faith, and dying for it if that was required of them.

A major point which Calvin made in his condemnation of the behavior of the Nicodemites was that, whether they liked it or not, they were approving the wrong and condemning the right in the eyes of all who knew them. Thus they were unfaithful witnesses to their faith and came under the ter-


rible judgment of Christ Himself, who said, "He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father in heaven."

In other words, Calvin took the firm position that one cannot separate what one believes in his heart from what one confesses in the whole of his life by his words and conduct. If one hides his faith from others, especially when the occasion demands a firm and clear testimony to the truth, one does not really believe in his heart what he claims to believe.

And cowardice with respect to persecution is in flat contradiction to the words of the apostles after they had been beaten by the Sanhedrin. They considered it an honor and a singular favor of God that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

Conclusion

It seems to me that there are many instances when the term Nicodemites could, with justice, be applied to us. Even in our daily contacts with the world about us we are hesitant to confess what we believe and to live as Scripture requires, because we fear the hatred, mockery, and laughter of wicked men. We justify our conduct before our own consciences, if not before God. It all comes down to cowardice.

Because much of the church today already lives in persecution and because persecution is right around the corner for us all, it is well that we read what Calvin has to say about these people who in their own day denied their Lord because they were unwilling to suffer for His sake. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC, declined the call extended to him by the Hull, IA PRC to serve as our churches' second missionary to Ghana. As a result of that decline by Rev. Bruinsma, the council of the Hull, IA PRC formed another trio from which their congregation was to call a second missionary to Ghana. That trio was made up of the Revs. M. DeVries, K. Koole, and D. Kleyn.

Rev. K. Koole, pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI for some thirteen years, has accepted the call he received from the Grandville, MI PRC to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. B. Gritters was extended the call from the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to serve as their next pastor, after their current pas-

tor, Rev. Dale Kuiper, retires January 1, 2003.

Rev. A. Brummel, serving our churches as pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, declined the call extended to him by the Byron Center, MI PRC to serve them as their next pastor.

Mission Activities

In news from the Covenant PR Fellowship of Northern Ireland we find that Rev. Angus Stewart has had contact with a man and his family in Portadown, below Lough Neagh, or about 45 minutes south of Ballymena. He gets the Covenant Reformed News that the Fellowship regularly sends out each month. He and his family attend a Presbyterian Church, and he holds his own little meeting every Thursday in Portadown and has asked Rev. Stewart to come down and speak for the group at the end of November. Hopefully this will give the Fellowship an opportunity to make more contacts.

The PR Fellowship in North Carolina has been blessed with the lively preaching of the Word this fall. Rev. C. Haak was there for two Sundays in October, followed by Rev. D. Kleyn October 27 and November 3, and Rev. Doug Kuiper November 17-24. In each visit the pastors preach both Sundays, conduct catechism classes for the children, and hold a mid-week Bible Study.

Our denomination's work in Ghana continues as well. In recent news from Ghana, we read that the Fellowship there has purchased equipment for recording their Sunday sermons for use on the radio. They plan to record the evening service each Lord's Day. They decided to try a practice run on Sunday morning, November 3, to see how everything was working. Rev. W. Bekkering got started with the sermon ... and the electricity went out. They were happy it was the morning service. Hopefully the electricity stayed on in the evening.

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

They concluded that God was working His work in this too. His Word never returns to Him empty.

The work in the Philippines also continues to go well. Rev. A. Spriensma writes that he has begun catechism classes as well as Saturday lectures on Church History and Reformed Church Government. Many attend all of these classes as families. In December the Spriensmas also hope to host a conference at their home for pastors and leaders who will come from various areas of the Philippines. There could be from 20 to 25 attending. Rev. Spriensma is also still teaching two Bible classes at Faith Academy.

Rev. A. denHartog, our churches' minister-on-loan to our sister churches in Singapore, was in Myanmar from October 8 to the 23rd, along with a few men from our sister churches in Singapore, for a special teaching seminar for pastors in that country. Morning sessions were on the theme "All of Grace" (covering the doctrine of salvation) and afternoon sessions were on the theme "The Reformed Pastor."

On Friday, Saturday, and Sun-

day, November 1, 2 and 3, our churches' Mission in Pittsburgh, PA hosted their fifth Annual Reformation Celebration. In preparation, the group sent out some 1,200 flyers and also promoted this event through radio promos. Our Western Home Missionary, Rev. T. Miersma, spoke on the theme "The Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man" for Friday evening's lecture. Saturday afternoon Rev. C. Haak, of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, led the Fellowship, at the Mission office, in a Bible Study/Discussion on "The Antithetical Life Lived Out." A number of young people accompanied Rev. Haak from Bethel. In addition to enjoying the sights and sounds of Pittsburgh and the good Christian fellowship of the group, these young people also provided special music the night of the lecture. On Sunday Rev. Miersma was also able to preach for the group both services.


Evangelism Activities

This time of year the evangelism efforts of many of our churches center in sponsoring a Reformation

celebration. It seems that more and more of our congregations are doing this, a fact that should make us all thankful. This year we counted some nine celebrations. Space does not permit us to include all of them in this issue. What does not fit will find its way into the "News" next time.

The Randolph, WI PRC invited their community to a Reformation speech by Prof. R. Dykstra entitled "Reformation and the Covenant of Grace." This speech was given in the Second Randolph Christian Reformed Church on October 28.

The congregation of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL sponsored their annual Reformation Celebration on Thursday evening, October 31, at their church. Rev. C. Haak, their pastor, spoke on the "History of the Reformation." The evening was intended to be instruction on the great events and issues in the Reformation of the church.

The Evangelism Committee of Grandville, MI PRC sponsored a Reformation Day lecture on October 25 at their church. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on the topic, "The Reformation's Influence on the Family: Blessing and Bane." 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC (Walker) express their Christian sympathy to Dave Moelker and Gary Moelker in the death of their mother,

MRS. MARIE MOELKER.

May they find strength and comfort in God's Word, "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54).

John Buiter, President
Gary Nienhuis, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Hope PRC (Walker) express their Christian sympathy to Carlyle Miersma in the death of his father,

MR. HENRY MIERSMA.

In his loss, may he be comforted by God's Word: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14: 13b).

John Buiter, President
Gary Nienhuis, Secretary

YEARBOOK CHANGE

E-mail address
for bulletin announcements
for Faith PRC:
bulletin@faithprc.org.
for SW PRC:
ekswbltn@altelco.net.

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

With much gratitude to God we announce that

GORD and JUNE VAN OVERLOOP

will celebrate their 55th wedding anniversary on December 4, 2002.

We, their six children, twenty-seven grandchildren, and eighteen great-grandchildren rejoice with them at what God has wrought. We rejoice that their marriage is in the Lord and we thank God for the blessings they have together. We are especially grateful to God for the training they gave us in the Word and in the Reformed faith. And we thank God for the example they gave and give to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

Our prayer is that God will continue to bless them, sustaining them by His grace in their remaining time together. "For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Rev. Ron and Sue
Kevin and Leesa
Brantley, Brice, Brittney
Ronda and Travis VanBemmel
Mason, Calvin, Emma
Jared and Mary
Tyler, Logan, Ethan
Suzanne and Scott Koole
Charity, Trenton, Olivia
Bill and Danielle
Katie and fiancé
Chad Mingerink
Michelle
- * Jim and Linda (in glory)
Matt and Jodee
Colin, Annika
Jon and Katie
Ryan and Marijo
Trevor, RYANNE, Caleb
Nathan and Tracy
Bailey
Sherry and John Pipe
Joe
Jordan

- * Tom and Vicky
Brandon
Heidi and fiancé Eric Mowery
Heather
Hillary
- * Greg and Vicki
Ross
Bryant and fiancée
Dee Poortenga
Alyssa
- * Randy and Ellen
Amber
Marissa
- * David and Julie
Nicole
Jeff
Andrew
Alaina

Hudsonville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and council of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church extend Christian sympathies to Mr. & Mrs. Jon Meulenberg and family in the death of Jon's step-father,

MR. GERALD J. DEVRIES;

and to Mr. & Mrs. Jim Vander Kolk and family in the death of Jim's father,

MR. HENRY VANDERKOLK.

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

T. Bodbyl, vice president
K. G. Vink, asst. clerk

NOTICE!

Rev. Ron VanOverloop was ordained into the ministry of the gospel on October 5, 1972. We are grateful to God for the 30 years which he has now given to the ministry. We pray God's continued blessing upon him and his family as he continues to serve in Georgetown PRC and in the broader work of the denomination. "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15).

Council of Georgetown PRC

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 8, 2003, at the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 7, 2002.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and council of Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada extend their Christian sympathy to their pastor, Rev. Rodney Miersma, in the death of his father,

HENRY MIERSMA.

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

Brian Tolsma, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for December

Series on Ruth

Date	Topic	Text
December 1	"Under His Wings"	Ruth 1:7-18
December 8	"Seeking Rest"	Ruth 3
December 15	"I Will Redeem Her"	Ruth 4:1-12
December 22	"His Name Shall Endure Forever"	Ruth 4:13-22
December 29	"I Will Build My Church"	Matthew 16:18