

# THE Outlook

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## *Abraham Kuyper – His Life and Legacy*





# Abraham Kuyper — His Life and Legacy

## PART ONE: Abraham Kuyper — A Sketch of His Life

CORNELIS P. VENEMA

Reformed Christians are rightly suspicious when certain persons are singled out for inordinate praise. They can appreciate John Calvin's insistence that no church should take the name "Calvinist," since this would detract from the glory that is due alone to God (*soli Deo gloria!*). "Let him who boasts, boast only in the Lord" — this is a motto that holds true not only with respect to our salvation, narrowly considered, but also for life in general. What we are, what we have, and what we have received — all of these are ours by God's grace alone. Consequently, it will not do to give too much attention or emphasis to the praise of men.

Although this is a genuine and properly biblical suspicion, it can lead to an improper reluctance to acknowledge gratefully what the Lord Himself has given to us in the life and labor of His servants. It is instructive to notice how often in the epistles of the New Testament, the apostles single out by name those who labored with them in the cause of the gospel and for whom they give thanks in the Lord (compare Romans 16). The example afforded us by the biblical writers surely warrants our doing likewise with those through whom the Lord continues to accomplish His purposes and to whom we are indebted in many ways. Indeed, a failure to remember the labor and legacy left us by believers who have gone before us, represents a kind of ingratitude to the Lord for what we have received. It also expresses a sort of inattention to history and its lessons that is inconsistent with the

Christian confession of Christ's lordship in His gathering of His people and establishing of His kingdom.

I mention this as a kind of apology for my readiness, at the invitation of the editors of *The Outlook*, to write an article or (as the case turns out, D.V.) a series of articles on the life and contributions of Abraham Kuyper. Actually, I might more accurately speak of my eagerness to do so. No single individual has exercised greater influence or left a more rich legacy to the Reformed churches, particularly those which in God's providence find

*"In these lectures...Kuyper provided a kind of distillation of his central reforming ideas..."*

their historical roots in the Netherlands, than Abraham Kuyper. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kuyper ranks only behind John Calvin as a figure of influence and significance within the Dutch Reformed tradition. Were it only a matter of acknowledging his importance in the history of this tradition, Abraham Kuyper would deserve our attention and interest.

But it is more than that: Kuyper continues to be a figure of great importance for the present life and witness of the Reformed community, not only in the Netherlands where in many places he has been forgotten, but also in North America. Kuyper's influence and legacy deserve our careful evaluation. There is much that the Reformed community can continue to learn from Kuyper's reforming labor.

There is as well an historical occasion for treating the life and contributions of Abraham Kuyper. This year of our Lord, 1998, represents the centennial year of Kuyper's fa-

mous *Stone Lectures* delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary. Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism* comprise a kind of broad-stroked introduction to his distinctive understanding of the world and life view of Calvinism. In these lectures, delivered in English to a North American audience, Kuyper provided a kind of distillation of his central reforming ideas, a distillation that serves as a kind of window into the world of Kuyper's intellectual grasp and vision.<sup>1</sup>

In this first article, I will begin with a brief sketch of Kuyper's life and labors. In subsequent articles, Kuyper's distinctive contributions and views as a churchman, theologian, statesman and advocate of a Calvinist world-view will be considered.

### KUYPER'S EARLY LIFE, EDUCATION, AND "CONVERSION"

Little is known about Kuyper's early life and boyhood years. What we do know is largely based upon Kuyper's own recollections in later years.

Kuyper was born in Maassluis, the Netherlands, on October 29, 1837. His parents were the Reverend Jan Hendrik and Henriette Huber Kuyper. Nurtured in the parsonage, Kuyper received his earliest education from his parents before attending grammar school in Middelburg and Leiden, towns to which his father was called as a minister in the Hervormde Kerk, the state church of the Netherlands.

Upon beginning his formal education in grammar school at Leiden, Kuyper began to evidence the kind of extraordinary intellectual gifts and

breadth of interests that would characterize his adult life and labor. On several occasions, he was granted the privilege of presenting a word of thanks (*Gratis*) to the teachers of his school at the close of the year. During this period of time, he also demonstrated a keen interest in newspapers and politics, an interest that would prove prophetic of his later activities as a journalist and politician. After concluding with excellence his grammar school preparation, Kuyper enrolled in the summer of 1855 as a student of theology at Leiden University, one of the leading schools of theology in the Netherlands. Kuyper's years of study at Leiden reflected many of

the qualities that would distinguish his life thereafter: unstinting dedication to his work, an energetic work ethic that often brought him to the verge of exhaustion and breakdown, and a kind of buoyancy and enthusiasm about his interests and pursuits that was contagious.

By his own account, Kuyper's years at Leiden were ones during which he came under the spell of "modernism." Though his father belonged to the moderate and more "orthodox" wing of the *Hervormde Kerk*,<sup>2</sup> Kuyper was unable to resist the temptation of modernistic and liberal theology which was so ably and compellingly represented at Leiden during this period by such figures as J. H. Scholten, A. Kuenen and L.W.E. Rauwenhoff. By his own testimony later, expressed with regret and sorrow, Kuyper recalled his joining with fellow students in giving Scholten a standing ovation after a lecture in which Scholten had denied the bodily resurrection of Christ. The modernism which Kuyper confronted at Leiden was a form of "mediating theology," one which was not as openly radical in its denial of the faith as some forms of liberalism. Elements of this theology included: a diminishing of the importance of orthodox doctrine, a corresponding emphasis upon the ethical dimensions of the Christian life, and an acceptance of the principles and practice of biblical criticism.

*"Christ  
redeems His  
people for a  
purpose: that  
they might  
serve Him as  
King..."*

Though Kuyper's years of study at Leiden provided much of the intellectual and cultural formation that would undergird his later work as a minister of the gospel, journalist, statesman, educator and advocate of a distinctively Calvinist world and life view, the period of his studies at Leiden and during his first pastorate in Beesd (1863-1867) would

prove to be most decisive because of the "conversion" that he underwent. Though he was enamored for a season with the attraction of modernism and entered the ministry without definite convictions of a distinctively Reformed character, it was during this period, by his own testimony, that a series of events oc-

curred within God's providence that would transform his heart and life.

In a fascinating account of this transformation and his new outlook, Kuyper singled out three events that together brought about, under God's providential working, this shift in his position and allegiance.<sup>3</sup>

The first of these events was a remarkable and extraordinary providence of God that Kuyper experienced during the preparation and writing of his prize-winning essay on John à Lasco, the great Polish Reformer. At the advice of his "loyal counselor and inspiring teacher," Professor De Vries, Kuyper entered a contest sponsored by the University of Groningen. After a disappointing and largely fruitless search for copies of à Lasco's works in the libraries of the Netherlands and Europe, Kuyper reported back to De Vries his findings. Professor De Vries encouraged Kuyper to visit his father, a minister in Haarlem with an extensive library, to inquire whether he had any *Lasciana* or copies of à Lasco's writings. Upon his first visit to the elder De Vries, Kuyper was informed that he would search his library but did not believe that he had much, if anything, to offer Kuyper to pursue his research. Returning a week later by appointment, Kuyper reports as follows what transpired and how it affected him:

You can imagine my feelings when, upon entering the old preacher's home and having been welcomed in a most friendly manner, I heard him say as if it were the simplest thing in the world: "Here's what I've found," pointing to an ample pile of duodecimos waiting for me on a table. Truly, I could hardly believe my eyes. How could this be? To have rummaged through all the libraries in our country. To have gone through the catalogues of the major libraries of Europe. To have found nowhere, not even in some forgotten corner ... the slightest collection of à Lasco's works. In all the anthologies, in all the guides to rare works, in all the literary compendia I had read time and again that people had simply recopied the titles of à Lasco's works without ever seeing the actual volumes; that his works were considered extremely rare; that most were probably lost for good; and that, except for two or three individuals, no one in the last two centuries had actually held them in his hands! Then suddenly, as if by a miracle, to see before me a collection of *Lasciana* more complete than was — and is — to be found in any library in all of Europe. ... In all honesty you must personally experience such a surprise in your own life struggle to know what it is to encounter a miracle of God on life's journey.<sup>4</sup>

Stimulated by the discovery of these works of à Lasco, Kuyper went on to write his essay in Latin, as was required, and won the prize. This work then became the basis for his doctoral dissertation on à Lasco. Kuyper's labors as a student were so intense and exhausting that, before completing his doctoral work, he suffered a breakdown and was required to rest for a period of six months.

The second of these events was Kuyper's reading of a famous English novel by Charlotte Yonge, *The Heir of Radcliffe*. This novel, a gift from his fiancée, Johanna,<sup>5</sup> was written within the context of John Henry Newman's Oxford movement and reflects its high-church concept and emphasis

upon the sacraments. Upon reading this novel, Kuyper recounts that he was deeply moved by the spiritual experiences of its hero, Philip de Morville, especially his deep sorrow for his sin and humility of heart:

At that moment — I was by myself — I felt the scene overwhelm me. I read how Philip wept, and, dear brother, tears welled up in my eyes too. I read that Philip knelt and before I knew it, I was kneeling in front of my chair with folded hands. Oh, what my soul experienced at that moment I fully understood only later. Yet, from that moment on I despised what I used to admire and I sought what I had dared to despise.<sup>6</sup>

Shaken by this experience, Kuyper recognized his own pride and temptation to trust in his own abilities. He also recognized the need for a living church whose ministry and teaching could give birth to and nurture the kind of faith and piety evidenced in the life of Philip, the hero of Charlotte Yonge's novel.

The third and last of these events was Kuyper's experience in his first pastorate in Beesd. There he found himself confronted by a number of parishioners who, in protest against the modernism of the church, refused to attend the services. Though Kuyper was warned to stay away from and ignore these "malcontents," he found himself drawn to them and made it his practice to call upon them in their homes. What Kuyper found among these orthodox believers in the congregation in Beesd surprised and affected him deeply. These church members not only knew the Scriptures, but they were also deeply convicted and committed to their teaching. In their simple, unsophisticated manner, they testified to a profound biblical wealth of conviction, to a "well-ordered world-view." Again, Kuyper's own words well express the significance of this experience:

Here was conviction. Here the topics of conversation went beyond the nice weather and who happened to be ill and who had

dismissed his workman. Here was interest in spiritual matters. Moreover, here was knowledge. With the meager Bible knowledge I had picked up at the university I could not measure up to these simple folk. And not just knowledge of the Bible but also of a well-ordered worldview, be it of the old Reformed type... Furthermore — and for me this was the greatest attraction — here spoke a heart that had a history and life-experience, its own observations and emotions, and that not only had them but knew them.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, these experiences as well as others, in the working of God's providence, proved to be instrumental in changing Kuyper from a proud student and gifted pastor, one whose biblical convictions were meager at best, to a more humble servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, one anxious to use his gifts in the service of the kingdom of God. They also helped to form Kuyper's conviction that the common people with biblical convictions ought to be appealed to and reached with the summons to live before the Lord in obedience to His ordinances. Kuyper's lasting impression of the orthodox believers in his first pastorate in Beesd prompted him throughout the course of his life to appeal broadly to the ordinary Reformed believers of the Netherlands.

## KUYPER AS CHURCH REFORMER AND LEADER

After his first pastorate in Beesd, Kuyper took a call to serve as the pastor of the *Domkerk* in Utrecht (1867), a city that had been a strong-

hold of the orthodox wing of the *Hervormde Kerk*. Kuyper came to Utrecht anxious to fight for the freedom of the church from interference by the state and the restoration of the confessions to their rightful place in the church. He thus embarked upon an ambitious program of reform of the church, something that would remain at the forefront of his interest throughout his life.

Kuyper's first foray into the church struggle occurred in 1867, prior to the beginning of his pastorate in Utrecht, with the publication of a pamphlet on the right of church members to vote on matters such as the appointment of office-bearers. With this pamphlet and a subsequent stream of published pamphlets and sermons, Kuyper threw himself wholly into the struggle to restore the *Hervormde Kerk* to its original position as a free church (free, that is, from the control and superintendence of state authorities) united by its commitment to the confessional standards of the Reformation. Though Kuyper's orthodoxy and zeal to defend the faith within the *Hervormde Kerk* were admirable qualities to many in Utrecht

and the congregation he served, Kuyper's tactics, including direct appeals to the general public and aggressive pursuit of his objectives, were not always appreciated by his parishioners and other members of the church in Utrecht. Many prominent members of the "Ethical" wing of the *Hervormde Kerk* took strong exception to Kuyper's efforts and publicly opposed him.

The difficulties he experienced in Utrecht were partly responsible for Kuyper's decision to take a call to the church in Amsterdam in 1870. Not only was Kuyper involved in the church struggle during this period, but he also was increasingly engaged in the school question and national politics in association with Groen Van Prinsterer and the anti-revolutionary movement.

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*Kuyper at Princeton receiving honorary doctorate in law, 1898.*

Amsterdam provided Kuyper a platform to appeal to a larger and more national audience. This reflected one of the characteristic features of Kuyper's life's work: his organizational ability and deliberate attempt to make his appeal to a wide and popular audience among the Dutch people (among the "*kleine luyden*," the "little people," as Kuyper affectionately termed them). Due to his increased involvements and dedication to a variety of educational, journalistic and political efforts, Kuyper took emeritation as a minister in 1874, though he retained his seat as an elder in the Amsterdam consistory.

Though no longer retaining the status of an active minister, Kuyper did not cease his activities as a church reformer and leader. During the 1880's and 1890's, he published a great number of meditative and devotional works.<sup>8</sup> He also served as *Rector Magnificus* and professor of dogmatic theology at the Free University during this period. However, his most significant involvement in the church struggle occurred in the years 1883-1892.

In 1883, Kuyper published a substantial treatise on the reformation of the church in which he argued for the maintenance of the church confessions, the freedom of the local churches from synodical hierarchy, and the admission of Free University graduates into the ministry of the *Hervormde Kerk*.<sup>7</sup> In the struggle which ensued, a separation occurred from the *Hervormde Kerk* in 1886. This separation which started with the Amsterdam consistory and congregation became known as the *Doleantie* (meaning "Lament" or "Sorrow") and resulted in the formation of a new federation of churches, the *Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerken*. These churches numbered approximately two hundred congregations with 180,000 members by 1889. Though many sympathizers with Kuyper remained within the

*Hervormde Kerk*, most of those who seceded during this period united with those churches which belonged to an earlier secession from the *Hervormde Kerk*, the *Afscheiding* of 1834. The joining together of these two federations of seceding churches took place in 1892, forming the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*.

Though some interpreters of Kuyper might be puzzled by the extent of his interest and involvement in this church struggle — considering the wide diversity and extent of his other involvements during this time — Kuyper was convinced that, unless the church were reformed and preached faithfully the fulness of the biblical gospel, there was no prospect for the renewal of the life of the Dutch people and nation. A strong and faithful church was, in Kuyper's conviction, the divinely appointed instrument for the granting of new life and the nurturing of faith among the people of God. His other activities — in education, politics and culture — could not prosper without a reser-

voir of Calvinist conviction born out of the faithful work of a Reformed and Calvinist church.

## KUYPER AS CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR, JOURNALIST AND STATESMAN

Concurrent with these church developments and activities, Kuyper was increasingly engaged in various efforts as an educator, journalist and statesman. As noted already, Kuyper took emeritation as a minister in order to pursue his work in these areas.

Already during the period of his pastorate in Utrecht, Kuyper had become involved on the national level with issues relating to Christian education and the school struggle in the Netherlands. In May 1860 he had joined Groen Van Prinsterer, senior

statesman and anti-revolutionary, at a conference of the Dutch Society for Christian Education, at which Kuyper presented the opening speech. In his speech, Kuyper articulated his conviction that the school should not be owned and administered by the state but by an association of people adhering to common principles. This meant that Reformed believers should be free to establish schools founded upon principles unique to their confessional position. Other associations could likewise establish schools in keeping with their principles. But, according to Kuyper, it was not the task of the state to establish schools or to determine the common principles which would dictate all state-sponsored education. This speech provoked a strong reaction by many of the "Ethical" or middle party of the *Hervormde Kerk* who advocated state schools whose objective it would be to train all the students in the general principles of Christian culture and morality.

Kuyper's conviction, that Christian education and schools based upon distinctively Christian principles should be free of state ownership and control, culminated in the founding of the "Free University" in 1880. The founding of this university, the first in Dutch history that was not under the authority and control of the state, began with the formation in 1878 of a Society for Higher Education on the basis of Reformed Principles (*Vereniging voor Hooger Onderwijs op Gereformeerden Grondslag*). Though fiercely opposed by many leading figures in Dutch society and in the *Hervormde Kerk*, Kuyper successfully appealed for support to the "kleine luyden," the little people of the Netherlands who cherished the idea of a school free from state control and free to teach in the line of the historic principles of Calvinism. As the first *Rector Magnificus* and professor of dogmatic theology, Kuyper delivered, on the occasion of the opening of the Free University, his famous treatise on the principle of what has come to be known in short-hand as "sphere-sovereignty."<sup>10</sup>

As a means of communicating his vision and principles to a broad and popular audience, Kuyper wielded

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his pen in a powerful and persuasive way. I have already mentioned Kuyper's boyhood fascination with newspapers and his later effective use of published pamphlets and treatises in the context of the church struggle. Each of these was only a promise of what would become a long and distinguished labor as a journalist and publicist. Kuyper's bibliography which includes over 200 entries, many of which are multi-volume works, is comprised of a large number of works that originally flowed from his facile pen as newspaper or journal articles. Nowhere was Kuyper's extraordinary productivity and energy more evident than in his labors as a writer.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after becoming the chief editor of a weekly religious newspaper *De Heraut* in 1871, Kuyper founded and became the chief editor of the daily newspaper *De Standaard* in 1872. By means of his editorship of these publications, Kuyper successfully articulated and communicated to a national audience his convictions with respect to a wide variety of issues. From Kuyper's pen, articles flowed on such matters as the church struggle, the school question, the formation and principles undergirding the Anti-Revolutionary Party, theological and biblical topics, and a broad range of issues addressed from the standpoint of a Calvinistic world and life view.

Both Kuyper's involvement in the school question in the Netherlands and his work as a newspaper journalist were closely linked to his political activity and role in forming the Anti-Revolutionary Party. Together with Groen Van Prinsterer, his political mentor and inspiration, Kuyper entered politics initially to fight for the cause of Christian education and schools free from state control. His journalism was also initially dedicated to communicating many of the social and political ideas that inspired Groen Van Prinsterer and eventually were embodied in the Anti-Revolutionary Party. After his emeritation as a minister in 1874, Kuyper presented himself for the first time as a candidate for parlia-

*"Why was Kuyper so keenly interested in so many things?"*

ment and won by a large margin. At this time, the one issue that galvanized the followers of Van Prinsterer was the school question. However, they were loosely organized and uncertain of the principles that would guide their policies and statecraft. Kuyper's leadership in Parliament in the successful fight for schools free from state control became the occasion for his role as the founder of the Anti-Revolutionary Party in 1879 as the first, formally organized and modern party in Dutch politics. The formation of this party, including the articulation of its first set of principles and program in *De Standaard*, were largely due to Kuyper's unstinting efforts and organizational prowess. As the first chairman and founder of the party, Kuyper served several terms as a member of Parliament and a tenure as Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901-1905.

## THE KEY TO KUYPER'S LIFE AND LABOR

No one reading a brief sketch of the life of Abraham Kuyper can avoid the question — what explains this prodigious effort and activity in such wide and varied areas? What thread could tie together or explain Kuyper's interests in the gospel, the church, and theology, on the one hand, and education, politics, and culture, on the other hand? Why was Kuyper so keenly interested in so many things? And why did he labor in so many areas from the standpoint of what he so characteristically called "Calvinism as a life-system"?

Kuyper's own answer to this question will occupy our attention in subsequent issues in this series on his life and legacy, so I will not attempt to give anything like an adequate or full answer to it here. However, it should be noted that the common thread tying together all

of Kuyper's activities was his conviction regarding the world and life view he preferred to term "Calvinism."<sup>12</sup> This world and life view left no arena untouched or issue unaddressed. Nothing fell outside of its range of vision. Nothing was exempt from its scrutiny, criticism or interest.

Rather than begin to explain this world and life view in this sketch of Kuyper's life, I will close with two well-known statements of Kuyper that express concisely his answer to this question. The first of these is taken from Kuyper's inaugural address on the subject of sphere-sovereignty on the occasion of the founding of the Free University. The second is taken from an editorial in *De Standaard* on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Kuyper's editorship in 1897.

No single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: "Mine!"<sup>13</sup>

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: That in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.<sup>14</sup>

In these statements, Kuyper gave expression to his conviction that

God is the Sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things in Christ. God's sovereignty is the basic principle of Calvinism, not only in mat-

*"Kuyper articulated his conviction that the school should not be owned and administered by the state but by an association of people adhering to common principles."*

ters pertaining narrowly to salvation but also in all matters relating to His creation-kingdom. Christ redeems His people for a purpose: that they might serve Him as King, being restored to their office as servant-stewards within the arena of the creation.

Having filled out the years assigned to him by the Lord he so energetically served throughout his life, Abraham Kuyper fell asleep in the Savior, October 29, 1920. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them!" (Rev. 14:13).

## SELECTED ENGLISH SOURCES ON KUYPER'S LIFE

The following sources in English provide good surveys of Kuyper's life and work, and form the basis for much of my brief sketch of Kuyper's life in this article:

- Bratt, James D. *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Known for his study *Dutch Calvinism in North America*, Bratt has brought together a number of Kuyper's important writings in English translation. This anthology, introduced by a fine essay on "Abraham Kuyper: His World and Work," is an outstanding resource for English readers who wish to sample Kuyper's works (and, hopefully, find their appetite whetted for more), many of which have not been available in English translation. Bratt provides a useful annotated bibliography of primary and secondary sources on Kuyper.

- Heslam, Peter S. *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Heslam's study is a revised version of his doctoral dissertation. He provides a careful study of Kuyper's *Stone Lectures*, placing Kuyper in historical context. Heslam's study is of special

interest, since Heslam writes as a curate in the Anglican church.

- Kuyper, Abraham. *Lectures on Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931. The best single summary of Kuyper's thought available in English.
- Kuyper, Abraham. *To Be Near Unto God*. Trans. with an introduction and biographical sketch by John Hendrik De Vries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans & Sevensma, 1918. A classic example of Kuyper's meditative writing.
- Praamsma, Louis. *Let Christ Be King: Reflections on the Life and Times of Abraham Kuyper*. Jordan Station, Ontario: Paideia, 1985. A sympathetic but not uncritical treatment of Kuyper's life.

- Vanden Berg, Frank. *Abraham Kuyper: A Biography*. St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1978.

Aimed at the general reader, this is the only book-length biography of Kuyper available in English. Vanden Berg writes as an admirer and advocate of Kuyper's position.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Peter Heslam's new study, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, is an outstanding source on these lectures. The lectures themselves are perhaps the best single statement of Kuyper's views available in English. They were first written for and presented to an English-speaking audience and represent, according to Kuyper's own intention, a summary of his understanding of Calvinism as a life-system.
- 2 It is customary to speak of three broad parties of conviction and approach that existed within the Hervormde Kerk. One party was the modernistic or liberal wing of the church. Another was the conservative or orthodox wing. Between these two there was a broad middle or moderate party known as the "Ethicals." This last party, though not abandoning some of the historic convictions of the Christian faith, was marked by an emphasis upon the greater importance of Christian experience and morality than doctrine or confession. Kuyper's father probably belonged to the more conservative party within the Hervormde Kerk, but it was a conservatism moderated by the attraction of the Ethical position.
- 3 Bratt includes a portion of this article in his anthology, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (pp. 45-61), with the title "Confidentially." Originally, Kuyper entitled his treatise, *Confidentie: Schrijven aan den Weled. Heer J. H. van der Linden* (Amsterdam: Hoeveker & Zoon, 1873), and it went on to 114 pages! My refer-

ences in what follows are to the translation in Bratt's anthology.

- 4 "Confidentially," pp. 50-51.
- 5 Kuyper married Johanna Hendrika Schaay on July 1, 1863, a marriage that was blessed with eight children. This marriage occurred just prior to his first pastorate in Beesd where he was ordained on August 9 of the same year.
- 6 "Confidentially," p. 54.
- 7 "Confidentially," pp. 55-56. Among these believers in Beesd, Kuyper later recalled one young woman in particular, Pietje Baltus, whose stubborn resistance to his modernistic sympathies made a profound impression upon him.
- 8 The collection of meditations, *To Be Near Unto God*, is a good example of Kuyper's meditative ability. Written in a style that reflects Kuyper's literary ability and interest (too richly embroidered by our contemporary tastes, I suspect!), these meditations belie any attempt to say that Kuyper was too "worldly" in his interests and inattentive to the cultivation of a true Christian spirituality. Kuyper was many things, chief among them a devout believer who found his comfort in life and in death in belonging to his faithful Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 9 *Tractaat van de reformatie der kerken, aan de zonen der reformatie hier te lande op Luther's vierde eeuwfeest aangeboden* (Amsterdam: Hoeveker, 1883).
- 10 *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring. Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit, den 20sten October 1880 gehouden in het Koor der Nieuwe Kerk te Amsterdam door Dr. A. Kuyper* (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1880). Bratt includes an English translation of this important address in his anthology (pp. 463-490).
- 11 Perhaps this is the place to note that it was during this period that Kuyper suffered his second and last breakdown due to overwork and the stresses of his involvements in church and state struggles. Complicating and perhaps contributing to this breakdown was Kuyper's involvement with and initial enthusiasm for the revivalist and Christian perfectionist movement associated with the names of Dwight L. Moody, Ira D. Sankey and Robert Pearsall Smith. Kuyper, during a particularly stressful period of time (summer of 1875), vacationed in England and attended a series of evangelistic meetings, including a mass rally in Brighton. Though initially enthused with this experience and what he had heard, upon his return to the Netherlands disillusionment with this movement and other pressures led Kuyper to a second breakdown. Thereafter Kuyper sought to discipline his work habits more carefully to avoid exhaustion. He also became a critic of the dangers of the pietism and subjectivism of what he called "methodism."
- 12 Kuyper preferred this term to "Reformed," since the latter term is more restricted in its reference to a particular ecclesiastical confession and communion. Calvinism served his purpose better because it was more easily useful to describe a world and life view that was broader and more embracing than any ecclesiastical confession and communion.
- 13 "Sphere Sovereignty" (in John Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*), p. 488.
- 14 As translated and quoted by J. H. De Vries ("Biographical Note" in *Lectures on Calvinism*), p. iii.

**Dr. Venema teaches Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America Seminary in Dyer, IN.**

"Kuyper gave expression to his conviction that God is the Sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things in Christ."

**CREATING A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism.** Peter S. Heslam. Eerdmans, 1998, \$29.00, 300 pages. Reviewed by **Charles Dunahoo**, editor of *Equip* magazine (PCA).

Two books dealing with Abraham Kuyper were placed on my desk recently. One was entitled *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, James D. Bratt, editor, also published by Eerdmans. The *Reader* deals with Kuyper materials not previously available in English and, with a couple of exceptions such as articles on Common Grace, focuses on a slightly earlier period in his life than the one reviewed here. It is worth reading after Heslam's book.

Why two books on Abraham Kuyper at this time? Well, a bit of history is in order. Kuyper's name is familiar to many of us. He was a noted theologian, politician, journalist, educator, and an exceptional thinker. He had tremendous influence on the spread of Calvinism and the Reformed faith in America. It is now one hundred years since Kuyper delivered his famous *Stone Lectures* on Calvinism at Princeton Theological Seminary. In the lectures, he covered a number of topics, but the main thrust of his series was that "there is no area of life over which Christ has not said 'mine.'" *Creating a Christian Worldview* deals with his influence on American thinking and serves as a commentary on those famous *Stone Lectures*.

This is an outstanding book — a book of ideas and a book about the origins of a Christian worldview. Heslam not only sets forth sound ideas relating to a Christian worldview, but prepares the way for us to understand what it means to be Christian in both a modern and postmodern world. The author states in the preface of the book that "worldview belongs to the vocabulary of modernity." He further states "Postmodernity's rejection of ultimate answers is accompanied by a fresh and uninhibited interest in questions of meaning, purpose and identity." Some postmodernists would even agree with his criticism of modernism.

Heslam combines a good history of modern times with his outstanding exposition of a Christian world

and life view. And he presents to us the life and work of a man God used in a tremendous way to challenge modern rationalism whether in the form of anti-Christian philosophies or the rationalism brought into Presbyterian circles from Scottish realism. He also addresses some of the personal aspects of Kuyper's life. I especially appreciated his handling of the relationship between Kuyper and B. B. Warfield of Princeton. Heslam speaks of the strong admiration of the two men for each other, but does not fail to deal with their differences.

In my own life, through the truths set forth in his *Lectures of Calvinism*, Kuyper not only helped me in my development and study of cultural apologetics, but showed me how to blend theological orthodoxy with "cultural progressiveness." Heslam states, "Although he sought a revival of traditional Calvinistic religion, he did not advocate a return to pre-Enlightenment conditions in the hope that this would help the cause of Christian civilization. Kuyper aimed at being a progressive and innovative leader."

Heslam points out that Kuyper was Reformed in doctrine and Calvinistic in his view of life. If there is one thing that is obviously missing from much of contemporary evangelical thought it is a Biblical worldview. We have compartmentalized our Christianity from the rest of life. For Kuyper, Calvinism was the context of truth to see the world through God's eyes. It gave him a broad view of the church and a wholistic, all-inclusive view of the Kingdom of God. As the Apostle Paul stated, "In all things Christ pre-eminent." That was Kuyper's desire.

Heslam writes, "Kuyper's term 'life-system' was intended as an equivalent to the German *Weltanschauung*, usually translated 'worldview' in English." Although, he explained, "'world-and-life-view' was a more accurate term, and preferable to James Orr's 'view of the world,' he had chosen 'life-system' in the title of his lecture..." Kuyper saw Calvinism as a total life-system, not as a narrow set of doctrines or a particular ecclesiology. Heslam is right to point out that Kuyper's thoughts were cast in his opposition to three major troubling elements, namely, the French Revolution, pantheism,

and evolutionism, but the application and challenge of the *Stone Lectures* are much more global than this.

Kuyper's affinity with Calvinism came because, as Calvin had done in his own day, he radically reinterpreted and reapplied the central tenets of Reformed doctrine. For this reason he has been called a Neo-Calvinist. I think he set a pattern that is not only right, but absolutely necessary for us to have a strategic impact on our postmodern world.

Kuyper, in the *Stone Lectures*, set forth an approach to Christianity that was not grasped by the Fundamentalist Movement. Whereas they sought to be Biblically narrow (to the extent of withdrawing from the world), Kuyper wanted us to see that we cannot withdraw from the world. He believed that the Bible is the basic source of God's special revelation and grace. But he also saw the Sovereign God as the author of all truth and all truth as God's truth — following the pattern of Augustine and Anselm. One of Kuyper's best contributions to a Calvinistic view of Christianity is the doctrine of common grace. Not all of God's truth is written in the Bible, nor is fallen, unregenerate man totally devoid of God's truth.

We need to read, study, and discuss this book in the church today. We are so reactionary to the world and so other-worldly that we often are not able to impact the world for the Lord as we otherwise could. Our view of the Christian faith needs to be broadened and extended to all areas of life. Our narrow view of the church must be broadened to reflect not only Reformed doctrines, properly understood and applied, but also Calvinism in the historic sense of the term. That was Abraham Kuyper's great desire.

Kuyper has the clearest concept of Christianity and culture that I have known. He addressed the subject of that relationship from a thoroughly Biblical perspective. He has influenced many of us to develop a Christian world and life view. I agree with Heslam's last statements in the book, "He [Kuyper] provided a solution that was so broad in its scope, distinctive in its influence, and successful in its practical consequences, that it deserves ongoing study and reflection."

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# Please, Fence Me In!

CORNELIA RUFF



It was ten years ago. I was in the midst of finishing out the year as a long term sub at the local Christian high school. My daughter, a freshman, was one of my students. Some of the other students had been intrigued by the fact that she was comfortable having her mom as a teacher. One day, after class, an upperclassman, a capable young lady, seemed to be taking her time putting her things in her backpack. The room had cleared quickly as it had been the last class of the day and she was the only one there in the room. I began to talk with her casually. Before long, she turned to look me straight in the eye.

"Mrs. Ruff," she said, "don't ever buy your daughter a car." I knew that she drove a new sporty red car and was quite the envy of some of her classmates. She went on to explain that ever since she had gotten her car, her grades had dropped; she was distracted by her new-found social freedom, but also by the job which she now needed to maintain an expensive auto insurance policy.

"Well Jennifer, perhaps you should tell your parents what you are telling me," I gently suggested.

"Oh no, I can't do that, because then I would be bored and unhappy and my parents don't ever want me to be unhappy. They can't stand to see me unhappy. And if I didn't have my car I would pout."

She laughed, knowing the inconsistency of what she had just confessed to me. Jennifer left my classroom that day knowing the solution to the slippery slide which she was on, but not self-motivated enough to act.

During the years which have followed that conversation, I have had much opportunity to interact with my teenage students. The most consistent message which I have heard often comes as a surprise to many parents. Teenagers want their parents to be actively involved in their lives; they want established boundaries which give them a sense of security. Teens may protest rigorously that they are almost adults now and don't need their parents setting boundaries for them or establishing a climate of discipline for them. They may protest curfews or questions about their activities. They may cringe when you inquire about their work at school or the subject of last night's youth group discussion. They may even complain that they can't bring their friends to the house because there are just too many people around and it makes their friends uncomfortable. Their body language and their conversation may say loudly that they do not want you as parents interacting with their friends or their plans. Yet when adults are able to catch them in moments of serious reflection, consistently young people will admit that they are eager for adults to play an active role in helping them grow in self-discipline. The protestations of our teens are in keeping with the words of Hebrews 12: 4-9. When God gives us the words of "encouragement...as sons," there is double recognition in this New Testament quote from Proverbs that discipline is difficult ("...do not lose heart...when he rebukes you"), but that it is also a sign that "the Lord disciplines those he loves."

Also, there follows the matter of fact statement: "Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it."

Our own children have consistently had the earliest curfew among their circles of friends. In addition, we expected our children to let us know how and where we could get hold of them if necessary. To some of our children this seemed like an unnecessary burden and frustration. They would vociferously complain that none of their friends had such "unreasonable" curfews - many had none. And they certainly did not have to check in with their parents if plans changed.

Then one Saturday afternoon I received a simple phone call which brought this issue to a sudden halt with my younger daughter. My daughter and her friend Alicia had just left our house to watch our neighbor's two young boys when my phone rang. The caller identified herself as Alicia's mom - the perfect mom as far as my daughter was concerned - and we exchanged brief pleasantries. Then in an embarrassed tone of voice the mom inquired about Alicia.

"Do you know where she is?" After I assured her that Alicia was next door babysitting, she continued, "I'm sorry to bother you this way, but last night Alicia told me that she didn't feel like we really cared very much about her at all because we've never made her check in with us when she's out. She has never had a curfew. You see, we just felt we could trust her and should let her use her own judg-

ment. Please, tell her I called to check on her. I really do want her to know I love her."

We live in an age which rejects boundaries. Our children are growing up watching many adults who are unable to set boundaries for themselves, who, in fact, openly question the value of living disciplined lives. Authority figures too often will not enforce established rules, fearful that they will be seen as intolerant, or worse yet, be sued. Parents resist establishing rules because it requires considerable self-discipline on their part to faithfully and wisely enforce those rules. Consistency in parenting is, after all, an ultimate test in self-discipline. It is so much easier to insist that the children have received twelve solid years of training and now they need to learn to apply that training on their own. Further, many parents believe that by taking a firm stand on issues on which their children are challenging them, they will "lose" their children.

The truth is, however, that young people who themselves have difficulty establishing appropriate boundaries, are looking to their parents and other adult figures for reassurance that someone does know how to set parameters and enforce them. Teenagers need to see adults who are willing to take a stand, who will establish fair rules and maintain them. Then, should the occasion arise that those teenagers fail to abide by the rules, they need parents who love them unconditionally. Parents demonstrate such love to their children by knowing what the standards are that have been set, understanding clearly the purpose for those standards and wisely following through with them. After all, this

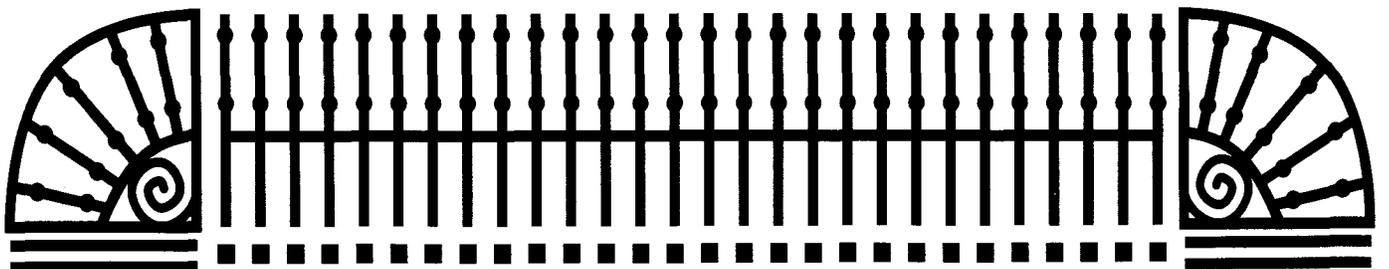
is the task which God has privileged us as parents to accomplish.

In attempting to more clearly understand God's perspective on family relationships, we commonly turn to Ephesians 6: 1-4. Interestingly, only six verses later Paul continues by introducing the subject of the armor of God. "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore..." Spiritual warfare surrounds not only us, but our children. It is by our actively participating in their lives, faithfully role modeling for them by our own lives, that they can begin to be grounded in hope. As they observe their parents living in a moral world under the authority of God, responding in obedience to His authority, and being shaped by His principles, the boundaries set by faithful parents begin to make sense to teenagers. By our willingness to base our life choices on the Word of God, we will more and more mirror the character of God before our children. Through observing our active obedience to God we offer them the opportunity to gradually move away from resisting our parental authority to willingly submitting to the authority of their Father in heaven.

Finally, we are reminded in Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the

joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame..." We are called to "stand," to "run with endurance," to be mindful of the witness which surround us. Our children eagerly watch their parents for assurance that their words are backed by their life choices. Just as we are urged to look to Jesus as our role model in running with endurance and laying aside the sins which ensnare us, so we must continuously direct our children toward the ultimate hope and security which comes from the race which Christ ran, and has won. He was given specific tasks to accomplish by His Father. He was submissive and obedient. He persevered to the end with the great triumph that He is now at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Cornelia Ruth Ruff** was born on the mission field in Eritrea, Ethiopia, where her parents served as missionaries for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. She was raised in the state of Maine, where her parents were used to start over a dozen churches. She received her BA in English from Covenant College in 1970, where she met her husband of 26 years, Lewis. Cornelia has taught in Christian high schools for over 10 years, most of them at Valley Christian High School in Dublin, California, where she presently serves as head of the Social Studies Department and teacher of American History and World History. She and her husband moved to Northern California in 1988 to start Canyon Creek Presbyterian church, a new congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). Lewis, a graduate of Covenant College and Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, presently serves as the Regional Coordinator for PCA church planting in the 13 western US states. The Ruffs have 4 children, aged 17, 19, 21 and 23.



# Calvin Adored and Abhorred

MARK BEACH

“John Calvin,” observes the Reformation historian Lewis W. Spitz, “was one of those strong and consistent men of history whom people either liked or disliked, adored or abhorred.” Some years ago *Christian History* magazine published a special issue on the life and thought of Calvin, noting these verdicts regarding him. Calvin’s critics have run the gamut, from fundamentalist preachers to renowned philosophers. For example, Jimmy Swaggart believes that Calvin’s ideas have “caused untold millions of souls to be damned...” Will Durant writes, “But we shall always find it hard to love the man [Calvin] who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense.” Erich Fromm, the celebrated psychologist, ranks Calvin with “the greatest haters, in history.” Voltaire, the famous French Enlightenment philosopher brands him, “Pope of the Protestants.” Some of his contemporaries insulted him by naming their dogs, Calvin. Calvin now, as then, is truly a man abhorred.

It is comforting to remember Jesus’ words, “Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26). And conversely, “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22, 23). By these standards, John Calvin is a blessed man, indeed.

Calvin, however, is also a man adored. He has his ardent admirers and advocates. Historians, theologians, and churchmen of varying stripes rank him among the giants of the faith. Some view him as one of the most profound theologians in the history of the church. The praise William Cunningham heaps on Calvin is illustrative: “Calvin is the man who, next to St. Paul, has done most good to mankind.” And Philip

Schaff, the great church historian, writes about him, “Taking into account all his failings, he [Calvin] must be reckoned as one of the greatest and best of men whom God raised up in the history of Christianity.”

The church would benefit by studying Calvin’s theology anew. Many lay people have never had any direct exposure to Calvin’s writings. Even many Reformed pastors are ignorant of Calvin’s life and work. Often what people know of Calvin is secondhand and derivative. There is nothing, however, like reading and pondering Calvin firsthand. Calvin’s presentation of Biblical truth has its own unique quality; it displays a power and profundity without equal. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are something of a masterpiece of theological exposition. They are also a work of literary vigor and potency. Add to this the fact that Calvin wrote theology with a practical aim, that is, to foster in believers a genuine life of devotion and surrender to God, and you see why his work could bless the church and reform it, even today. He continues to be God’s mighty instrument.

Obviously, I am not among those who abhor Calvin. While I try to reserve my adoration for God alone, I do genuinely feel that the church should treasure

Calvin. Most of us believe we do. Yet, to prize Calvin while we ignore his theology is akin to a fellow saying he loves pizza, except for the crust, sauce and cheese. We must study Calvin to treasure him and we should start with his *Institutes*. Various sources are available to make the task easier.

Calvin adored, Calvin abhorred — the issue is extraneous. Finally, let us adore the Lord and abhor the theological apathy and senility which reigns in the church today. Calvin is, I think, an antidote to that malady.

**Rev. Beach** teaches Practical Theology at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN.

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John Calvin

Bible Studies on  
**Genesis 1-11**

**LESSON 3: CONSTRUCTING THE CREATION KINGDOM**

**READ GENESIS 1:6-25**

In this lesson we will examine God's handiwork on days two through six. But we will reserve our study of the creation of man (the sixth day) until the following lesson.

The great Creator God created His vast realm in the course of six days, and He reveals that truth to His covenant people through Moses. In telling us the truth God was careful to say it in such a way that we might understand what is critical for Israel and us to be His people, and that we might be even better equipped to serve as the citizens of His kingdom.

**Poetry, science or narrative?**

A question that arises in the study of Genesis 1 regards the kind of literature it is. What type of writing is it? Some say that it is poetry. Others argue for prose narrative (i.e., straightforward story). No one would say that Genesis 1 is a science text, but they might look very carefully for ways in which Genesis 1 fits some modern scientific models or categories. Furthermore, some people ask whether we should take Genesis 1 in a *literal* manner or in a *literary* manner, perhaps posing these as necessarily in opposition to each other. Read Genesis 1 again and listen to its content and its cadences. Look for the repeated phrases in the description of God's creative activity.

After reading Genesis 1 again in its entirety, you will notice several repeated elements as the construction of God's creation-kingdom is described. Not every day has every one of these elements, but many of the days do contain them.

1. God's *speech*: "And God said."
2. The *results* of that speech: "God made . . . and it was so."
3. God *names* what He has made.
4. An *evaluation* of what happened: "God saw that it was good."
5. The "evening and morning" formula, marking the transitions from day to day.

In this way the inspired writer keeps pressing upon the reader certain critical matters. Genesis 1 is not written in classic poetic style, but neither is it a flat, two-dimensional reporting of "just the facts." God speaks, it happens, He gives it an identity, He judges it good, and then He does it again! He is busy putting together His kingdom in place, stage by careful stage.

So should we approach Genesis 1 *literally*, or should the reader simply note the *literary* formulas and little more? Myth, theology or science: what's our category?

We should exercise great caution when we attempt to place relatively modern categories of literature upon the written revelation of God. To be sure, we are able to note the distinctive features of Biblical literature in its various types, but the Biblical types of literature do not always fall into hard and fast, ironclad categories. For example, the history of God's covenant people is told in Psalm 78, part of the praise (i.e., poetic) collection of God's Word. But Psalm 78:1-4 gives us certain descriptive words about what Psalm 78 is. It is "instruction," a "parable" and "dark sayings of old." We would not deny or even discredit the historical record being sung and retold in Psalm 78, but the reader would not be surprised to read the account and notice poetic features (e.g., parallelism, emotive language and more colorful description). Every piece of literature, including the Biblical text, has its own nature, its own genre. But we must clearly remember that the genre (type) of a text does not in itself determine the factual reality of the material in it. Even poetry can tell the reader "what really happened," albeit in the manner of poetry. (Both words *literal* and *literary* come from the same Latin word for "letter," *littera*: what does the text, the letters, say?)

As we noted above, Genesis 1 presses upon us certain things about God and His sovereign, wise manner of constructing the vast realm of His creation. Its measured cadences put this chapter somewhere between a straightforward story narrative and poetry. It is certainly a far cry from the elaborate, polytheistic myths of the Babylonians and the Egyptians. Nor is it simply a theological essay, only a statement of ideas that informs the doctrines of the church, but does not describe what the Creator God did in the beginning. Derek Kidner (*Genesis*, pp. 54-55) says that the "march of the days is too majestic a progress to carry no implication of ordered sequence; it also seems over-subtle to adopt a view of the passage which discounts one of the primary impressions it makes on the ordinary reader. It is a story, not only a statement." In other words, "facts" are presented to the reader in a stylized narrative form: in six days God alone created all that exists; all of it was properly ordered, and all of it was very good.

Science cannot ignore what Genesis 1 says. At the same time, Scripture does not answer all the many questions that we could raise. God's Word "sets its own agenda" for us; we do not put an agenda upon the Word. Science must remain modest in its claims of what "re-

ally happened" in the earliest eras of time because science does not have all the data necessary to draw its own definitive pictures. Because none of us were there, humble students of God's Word must listen to the Author of the Word, God Himself, who was actually there "in the beginning." What He says, we believe, even though many questions may come to mind.

### Day two (1:6-8): the atmosphere

After the creation of the light, God now proceeds on the second day to create the firmament. The word used here is related to a verb that means to stamp out or to stretch. For example, metals can be pressed out or hammered out to form an overlay or covering (gold, Ex. 39:3; silver, Jer. 10:9; bronze, Num. 16:39). If you were to stand outside on a cloudless day, the sky above would look something like an enormous blue bowl, now inverted over the earth. From the vantage point of one who stands on the ground, this expanse is the place where the sun travels in daily regularity and the moon moves in its regular cycles. This "upside-down bowl" looks as if it had been stamped out or stretched out over us.

The firmament is that expanse which covers the earth. It is the atmosphere that, one might say, lifts the sky above the earth and serves as a kind of boundary between the earth and the "beyond." This is not the precise language of science, because Moses is not speaking here as a scientist. He speaks as a prophet, revealing how God is now putting in the necessary spacing in the earth, spacing required for His kingdom elements on the subsequent days. E.J. Young reminds us that the expanse ("firmament") is "not a material substance, but simply a separation of the waters that adhere to the earth from what is beyond. More than that we cannot say" (*In the Beginning*, p. 44).

### Day three (1:9-13): land, seas and vegetation

The third day of kingdom construction has two points of activity or focus. Verses 9 and 11 both record the important words, "God said." If on the second day God separated the waters, on the third day He now gathers them together into distinct bodies. This now allows the dry land to appear, without which of course, no land-based life could exist. The seas may, later in Biblical revelation, come to symbolize the restlessness of the nations, but in the perfect beginning the seas have boundaries, set in place by God.

The various kinds of vegetation (plants, trees and others) are said to be produced by the land, and the plants and trees are made "according to their kinds." Admittedly, the ancient world did not work with the precise categories of species that scientists use today, but the ancient peoples knew, for example, the differences between the palm and the oak, the myrtle and the thorn bush. We should also recognize that diversity and differentiation within God's creation is already in place from

the very start. It is not the case that all life forms (plant, bird, animal) evolved out of one single primitive cell. Many of God's creatures may be like each other in so many different ways (e.g., they breathe oxygen and have two legs). But such similarities do not constitute proof of development from the one to the other. Diversity in the plant and animal realms (1:24,25) of God's creation was from the beginning. "And God saw that it was good" (1:12).

### Day four (1:14-19): the light-bearers

Genesis 1:14-19 records the creation of the sun, moon and stars. But did you notice that the words *sun* and *moon* are not used in this account? There seems to be a reason for such. In the ancient world, the civilization of Moses' day, if you said "sun," the reference would be to the sun god. If one mentioned the "moon," he would be speaking of the moon god. Polytheism (the belief in more than one god) was rampant, and words which to us would not have any association with gods and goddesses, did have such a meaning to the ancients. Perhaps in a very subtle way, God through Moses is pressing an understanding upon us that moves us away from a polytheistic worldview. If the pagans believed in all kinds of myths about their gods and goddesses, then God is giving us a creation account that is very "demythologized." The sun, moon, and stars are not minor deities; they are created by God Himself, and therefore they are His creatures, subject to His control, to His Word, and to His law.

God assigns to the heavenly light-bearers the task of separating day from night and also of governing the day and the night. The sun, moon and stars are signs for marking "seasons and days and years" (1:14). They are celestial clocks or calendars, one might say, to guide the daily and liturgical lives of God's people. The ancient Hebrews observed a lunar month (new moon festivals), and with the passing of the various months, they would know when particular festivals should be celebrated. Not only do the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1), but the sun rules the day and runs like a bridegroom-champion across the sky (Ps. 19:4b-6). The pagan world would turn these heavenly beings into deities and worship them, but God's Word tells us that they were made to regulate our time.

### Day five (1:20-23): creatures of the seas and skies

On the second day of the creation week God formed the expanse which separates the "waters below" from the "waters above." Now He proceeds to fill these areas of His kingdom. The water of the seas now swarms with living creatures (fish, sea mammals and others) while the skies over the earth receive all the varieties of birds. Again we hear the text underscore the fact that God made all these creatures "according to their kind." Plus, God evaluates all that He made as good.

We should also note that the word *create* is used in verse 21. In this context the verb *create* almost certainly does not mean "out of nothing" as it does in verse 1. Later in verse 25 the text says that "God made" the wild animals, and this strongly implies that God used the material of the earth to form these creatures. In a parallel manner, God creates mankind, but Genesis 2 will make clear that the dust of the ground is the raw material, one might say, for making man. In any case, God fills the seas and the skies with their respective populations.

God also creates the sea monsters, the "great creatures of the sea." This is also a significant statement. The pagan world lived in fear of a great sea monster, a monstrous serpent-like creature of the ocean depth. (There is no need to speculate on what species this might be!) Of course, it is true that the oceans and seas contain some remarkable creatures. The blue whale, for example, is the largest mammal in the world, and it is not land-based. But the inspired text confronts us with the truth that all creatures come from the creative and powerful Word of God. Therefore, one should not stand in fear of them. In fact, these creatures are part of the grand chorus of creation that praises the LORD. Psalm 148:7 says, "Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths." Then the Psalm adds this in verse 10, "wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds."

Genesis 1:22 also says that God *blessed* these sea and sky creatures. He even addresses them with a "command" to be fruitful so that they may fill the seas and the earth! We will say more about this in the lesson that deals with the creation of man. It is sufficient to point out here that the statement about God's blessing is that it is the very thing that empowers the crea-

tures to be so fruitful. Without God's blessing nothing can ever prosper. That will be true for humans and all human endeavors; it is also true for the non-human creation. "Thy Spirit, O Lord, makes life to abound" (see Psalm 104:30).

### Day six (1:24-25): all kinds of land creatures

We will, as was said earlier, reserve our study of the creation of man until later. Day six, like day three, records the expression, "God said" more than once (see 1:24,26,29). Thus there seems to be a multiple focus to this day as there was to day three. As day three was concerned with the formation of seas and dry land, so day six is concerned with the *filling* of the dry land, first with the land creatures as well as with man himself.

We note that the various land creatures include everything from the large beasts down to the creeping things. Animals that will later be suitable as clean animals for sacrifice are now made "living beings." But, in addition, beasts not clean in the Old Testament era are made, including the animals that glide and creep over the earth's surface. Nothing is inherently evil or unclean in the beginning. In fact, the inspired writer Moses reminds us that God's own evaluation of all the animals of the dry land is also "good" (1:25).

The stage is now set for the last (but not least!) element to be created and thus complete the creation-kingdom of God. Up to this point the construction work of creation has proceeded without any conflict and without problems. God's words bring about in perfect order all that His sovereign will has desired. He scans His handiwork, and He exclaims, "I really like what I have done. Excellent work!" Certainly the heavenly choirs must have sung out His praises as the appropriate worshipful response.

## POINTS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. Read II Corinthians 12:1-6. Paul speaks of a man (Paul himself?) who is caught up to "the third heaven" (12:2) or "to paradise" (12:4). Where can we say this place is? Does the rest of the Bible give us any insight into what the third heaven or paradise is? For this answer, read also Ephesians 4:10; Hebrews 4:14; 7:26.
2. One frequently hears weather announcers referring to "Mother Nature." Do you ever hear mention of "Father God" on TV or radio weather report? What do people mean by "Mother Nature?" Is this some kind of modern goddess? What should be the attitude or response of Christians to this "Mother Nature" deity?
3. The *Belgic Confession* in Article 2 says that we know God "by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to *see clearly the invisible things of God, even His everlasting power and divinity*, as the apostle Paul says (Rom. 1:20)." Why does the natural man deny this? What kinds of things should a Christian point out to those who do not believe that the creation points to the existence of the Creator God?
4. In the light of what is revealed in Genesis 1 about the creation week, how important are Christian education and a Christian perspective in education and in all the sciences? What can an unbeliever truly "know" about this world which God created?
5. When the Bible says that the various plants and animals were created "according to their various kinds," how is evolution already being implicitly addressed and refuted?
6. From the **orderliness of the creation** account, what things do we **learn about the nature** of our God? See also Psalms 104 and 136; **Isaiah 40:21,22; 45:18** (cf. I Corinthians 14:33,40).

# Genesis 1-11

## LESSON 4: CREATION OF THE KINGDOM'S CROWN

### READ GENESIS 1:26-31; PSALM 8; HEBREWS 2:5-9

We give the creation of man in the image of God separate consideration because of the important role that God assigns to man. He alone is made the image-bearer of God! The last creature made is the first citizen of the kingdom of God on earth!

#### The plural of majesty?

The name that is used for God throughout Genesis 1 is 'Elohim. Spelled in this way, it is plural in form (in some contexts the word could even mean "gods"), and this plural form is often described as the "plural of majesty," a kind of divine, imperial word for God (or Deity). This is probably an adequate explanation in most contexts. But in verse 26 we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.'" We note the use of the words *us* and *our*. It is not enough to say that this is simply because the name of God is plural in form. Is God speaking to Himself or to the heavenly court or council?

Some have argued that God is here addressing the angelic council. From other portions of Scripture we read of such a court. Isaiah 6 tells us of the awesome seraphim, the six-winged creatures around the heavenly throne, creatures that perpetually cry out, "Holy, holy, holy, LORD Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!" Ezekiel 1 and other passages in the Old Testament describe the cherubim, composite creatures who both guard the heavenly throne and bear up the heavenly throne. In addition, God's heavenly court contains thousands of archangels and angels, heavenly creatures that adore Almighty God and readily do His will. Is God addressing these creatures when He says, "Let us make man in our image"?

Verses 26 and 27 reveal to us that mankind is made in God's **image**, not in the image or likeness of any other creature. God's statement at this point thus takes us beyond the "plural of majesty" understanding to reveal to us a **statement** within the Godhead. The fuller revelation of **all Scripture** at this point would be needed to flesh out **what this means**. Suffice it at this point to say that we **have here**, already in Genesis 1, a shadow of the Biblical **teaching** regarding the Trinity. God is one Being, **eternally existent** as three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and **Holy Spirit**. Each Person is God, but we do not worship **three gods**. The *Belgic Confession*, Article 9, says, "From this saying, 'Let us make man in our

image,' it appears that there are more persons than one in the Godhead; and when He says, *God* created, He signifies the unity. It is true, He does not say how many persons there are, but that which appears to us somewhat obscure in the Old Testament is very plain in the New." Other portions of Scripture cast their light upon other parts of Scripture, because it is one Word of God. Scripture interprets Scripture.

#### Image and likeness of God

When we reflect upon the nature of the creatures that God has made up to this point, we can observe that there is increasing sophistication and complexity to what God has made. Of course, any cell or molecule is incredibly intricate and complex, as any scientist will admit. But, notice that on the third day, vegetation of all kinds is created, and these plants and trees will produce food for the beasts, the birds, and man himself (1:29-30), those beings created on days five and six. Yet only man is described as being created in the image of God, after His likeness. Whatever image and likeness may mean, man is in this regard a *unique creature*.

Older exegesis of this passage attempted (without success) to draw a distinction between *image* and *likeness*. But this is not warranted. The Hebrew language uses parallelism with great frequency, and the point is not to draw attention to how the two parts of the parallelism are different, but to say something twice (even three times on some occasions!) that reinforces one thought. To be sure, the one part of the parallelism might enhance or amplify the other parallel statement, but the reader is not to dwell on how much distinction can be made. Image and likeness thus together speak of man as fully representative of God the King, his Maker.

An image is a reflection or copy of the original. When God looked upon the man, He saw His own glory and perfections reflected. In the ancient world of Moses' day, when a king would conquer a certain land or territory, the conquering king would often **have statues of himself set up in the conquered land**, to be an abiding statement of who the owner **was** and who was in charge. For example, in the former Soviet Union, statues and pictures of Lenin could be found in all the **major cities** of the Union, mute evidence of whose **philosophy** attempted to rule the people's lives. **Thus**, in making man in His image, according to His **likeness**, God is saying, "This world is My world. The universe and all that is in it is My kingdom. Let no one challenge that!" What a

high position God created us to have in the beginning! This position of man as image-bearer already anticipates the second of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not make for yourself any graven image for worship." Man is already created to be God's image! We are called to bear God's image, not make images of Him.

### "Made lower than angels"

Psalms 8 is one of the few Psalms in the Bible that has no notes of sadness or lament within it. It begins and ends with a ringing doxology of praise to the LORD on account of His majestic name. The inspired psalmist has picked up the revelation of Genesis 1, focused on certain key elements in it, and set the message to music (N.B. "for the director of music"). The majesty of the heavenly King is seen in that He has made a vast universe. The heavens clearly testify to this truth (cf. Psalm 19:1). Yet in the midst of all this is man (8:4-5), a small being when compared to the immensity of the heavenly bodies. Remarkably, the smallest members of the human race ("children and infants") have the capacity to utter praise to God. Even they can silence God's enemies! See how our Lord Jesus Christ recalled this psalm when He is confronted by His enemies after He healed the blind and the lame in the Temple (Matthew 21:16).

But this psalm also points out that man is made "a little lower than the heavenly beings" (the Greek Old Testament translates the Hebrew word here, *Elohim*, as "angels"). God the Creator and man the creature are truly distinct. They are not two separate entities on one grand "chain of Being." Yet the position given to man is critical. Earlier we mentioned the mighty seraphim and cherubim, the obedient archangels and angels. These constitute the powerful "hosts of heaven." But underneath them God has created mankind, male and female, and we are also called to serve as the earthly contingent, a regiment of the Lord's army, that obeys God willingly and readily here. That man is made a "little lower than the angels" is thus not a "put-down," but it is to know where God has placed us in the ranks that serve Him. "Thy will be done, on earth as willingly as the angels obey in heaven," we pray.

### "Yet crowned with glory and honor"

God made mankind to rule the kingdom. Of course, this cannot be understood in an ultimate or absolute sense. God will always remain the Supreme Monarch over His creation. But something of a hierarchy is established here: man is over the fish, the birds, and every beast of the land. Nothing that was made was excluded from man's responsibility in terms of man's calling to govern (Ps. 8:6-8). Creatures are subordinate to mankind, while mankind is subordinate to God Himself. This is God's glorious gift to us in the beginning: He honors us by making us kings and queens on the earth. What a remarkable calling!

This is tied in with the image of God, it seems to me, and so we return to that topic for the moment. Admittedly, much has been written on what the image of God in man means. Space does not allow us to enter into the intricacies of that immense discussion. Two New Testament passages do, however, throw some light on what is associated with the image of God. In Ephesians 4:24 Paul speaks of the new self, "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." God's grace renews what was lost, sinful and dead. In addressing the Colossians about the new self (Col. 3:10), Paul says that this new self is "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." The reader should also reflect on what is said in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 3; *Belgic Confession*, Article 14; *Canons of Dort*, III-VI, Article 1; and *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter IV.2.

Whatever else may be said about the image of God in man, mankind was crowned with *true righteousness*, that is, a perfect relationship with God, one in full conformity with the will and plan of God. Man in the beginning knew what was right, and he could execute what was just. Man was a *king*.

God also crowned man with *holiness*. This means that man was separated away from anything that might be sinful (he was made knowing no sin!), so that he could serve in the very presence of God. Man was a *priest*, and the entire creation was like a glorious temple (cf. Ps. 29:9; Hab. 2:20). Though God be enthroned in heaven, man stood before Him in creation as the high priest would later stand before the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle and then the Temple.

Finally, God honored man in the beginning with *knowledge*. Man knew God, and he had the law of God written in his heart (see Rom. 2:14, 15). In the beginning man possessed the insights to fulfill his calling within the creation-kingdom. Man knew how to rule as king, and he knew how to minister before God's face as a priest. Of course, man's knowledge of reality and God's knowledge of reality are not of the same type. God always knows all things in every perfect way, while man is necessarily limited. But in the beginning man was crowned with the divine gift of understanding and wisdom. Man was a *prophet*.

Thus the original calling of man (king, priest, prophet) anticipates the kind of Savior we would need, the office He would have to fulfill, and the tasks He would be required to accomplish in saving lost humanity and redeeming a fallen world. The first man becomes the "blueprint" for the last Man, Jesus Christ.

### Male and female He created them

Genesis 1 does not go into the particulars of the creation of mankind, the man and the woman. Nor does it elaborate on the relationship between the man and the woman. All this comes in Genesis two, and so we postpone for the moment our discussion of this subject.

Genesis 1:26 and 27, focuses on the relationship of humanity to God. The reader should note the fact that in 1:27 the text gets somewhat lyrical and poetic. The verse has three lines, in which the important operative word *create* is used in each line. Mankind is composed of male and female members, and both are created in the image of God. In the beginning male and female enjoyed the dignity of true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge as they lived in the kingdom of God, seeking to fulfill their calling before His face. In the creation of mankind, God has reached the crowning moment of the week.

### Benediction as the task begins

On the fifth day the fish and birds had received God's blessing in order that they might increase and fill the waters and the skies. Now again God pronounces a benediction, so that, what reads like a command, is in fact a blessing that will enable the image-bearing male and female to accomplish the office and calling at hand. Blessing suggests the gift of fertile power that produces fruitfulness and prosperity. None of God's rich gifts to us will profit us without His blessing (see *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 50). St. Augustine once prayed, "Give, O Lord, what You ask, and then ask whatever You will." What God commands us in the mandates of our office, He first supplies to us in His loving favor.

The blessing of God follows in very logical order: fruitfulness leads to the increase in numbers, which in turn leads to filling of the earth, which in turn enables mankind to subdue and rule all things.

Genesis 1:28 is sometimes called the "cultural mandate." I prefer to call it the "dominion mandate," be-

cause of the call to subdue and rule the whole of the earth. Again, this subject is much discussed, and we will return to it from time to time. But let it be said that mankind is blessed in order that by wise and prudent work and management, he could develop from the resources of this vast creation-kingdom those things that would be beautiful, useful, holy, and wonderful gifts for the Giver; cultural items that could be offered in thanksgiving and gratitude to the God of our creation, the One from whom all blessings flow.

### "But we see Jesus"

Read Hebrews 2:5-9 again. The line from Genesis 1, to Psalm 8, and then to Jesus Christ is made clear, and it needs to be made clear because the high position and marvelous calling given to man in the beginning was lost by the rebellion and sin of our first parents. The gospel message receives its shape from the message of Genesis 1. What man was, what man had, and thus all that man lost, is retrieved by another Man, but One who is more than a mere man. Therefore, Genesis 1 is a very real part of the Gospel. The good news of salvation already begins to be sounded in Genesis 1, long before we arrive at the manger in Bethlehem. The only Man truly in charge of the whole world today is Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 28:16-20). In the gospel, we see Him! He is the One who occupies the threefold office of king, priest, and prophet. The image of God is restored in Him who is the perfect Image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. You will not understand His Person and His work unless you see how God first crowned us with glory and honor in the beginning.

## POINTS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. What can we say from Scripture about when and why the angels were created? See Hebrews 1; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6 (cf. *Belgic Confession*, Article 12).
2. How would you explain the doctrine of the Trinity? What Scriptural support would you point to, if you were asked to defend this Christian belief? (See the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q/A 8-11 [with proof-texts].)
3. Is there a danger of reading too much doctrine or too little doctrine into individual passages? What role should Christian creeds and confessions have when we study the Bible? What wisdom (or danger) is there in taking account of what the Christian church has learned and confessed in the last two thousand years?
4. There have been those who say that the so-called "cultural mandate" has allowed the exploitation of natural resources in the world. In other words, Christians have justified the overuse of the earth's plants, animals, and minerals on the basis of Genesis 1:26-28. Is this true or false? What is the proper attitude, based on Scripture, that we should have toward the resources of God's kingdom? How does Genesis 1:26-28 answer a Hindu (New Age) worldview? a consumerist mentality? a throwaway society?
5. There are modern philosophies and worldviews around which *lower mankind* to the level of an animal while *animals are elevated* to a point of being nearly human (even divine!). **What does God's Word in Genesis 1 say to these perspectives? What happens in a society when the created order is turned on its head** so that animals are as important as, **maybe more** important than, human beings?
6. **Cultural activities are inescapable.** Some Christians **say that the Great Commission** has now taken over the Cultural (Dominion) **Mandate** in importance and priority. Do you agree or **disagree**? Is Genesis 1:28 in any conflict with Matthew 28:18-20? How can Christians sort all of this out in **today's world**?
7. Some **people may wonder occasionally**, "Where did we come from? Why are we here?" **What is the good news answer of Genesis 1? How important is it today to give attention to the Biblical teaching concerning the image of God and our office in God's creation-kingdom?**

# Oppression is Openly Opposed

GARY COX

It looked innocent enough when it began. The oppression is now openly opposed. The disparity shown for the inequality that it is. Yet like hot magma, it soon oozed out of its boundaries to engulf everything in its path. As Mt. Vesuvius, it's a destructive force that is out of control.

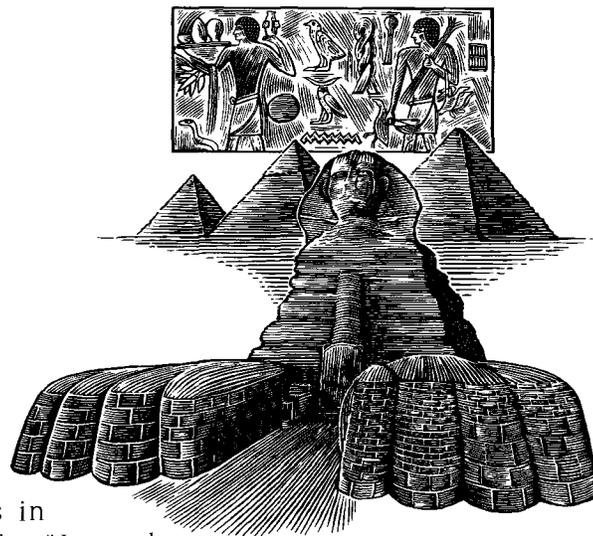
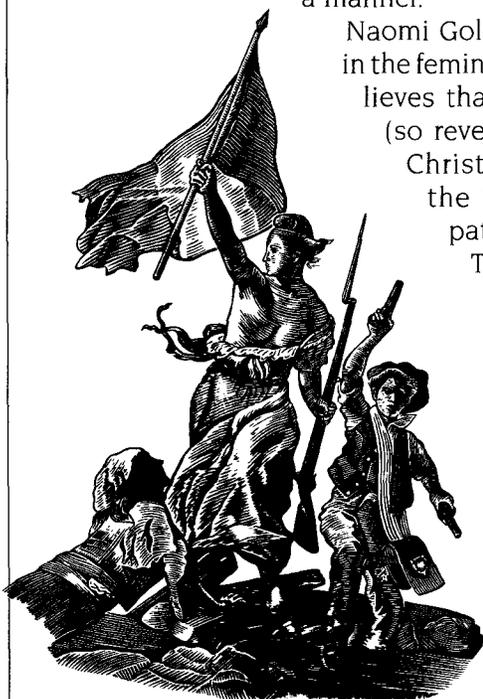
I speak of the radical feminist movement. Behind the slaughter of the innocent and the destruction of the family lies the hissing lava of radical feminism. But is this simply the rantings of a frightened and insecure man or can I back any of this up? Well, you decide for yourself.

In his book, *Spirit Wars*, Dr. Peter Jones writes: "The sexuality of Western civilization has been deconstructed in just one generation. The role of women has changed drastically, representing a megashift in the perceptions of human sexuality. Feminism has opened doors to many other changes."

According to the National Organization of Women, the arch-enemy which every self-respecting woman must vehemently oppose is "patriarchy." This includes but is not limited to the reduction of the role of the man in the home and the church. It also rejects understanding God in the masculine form — even though He chose to reveal Himself in such a manner.

Naomi Goldenberg, a leader in the feminist movement, believes that God the Father (so revered in the Judeo-Christian Scripture) is the "architect of the patriarchal society."

This God must be jettisoned. She writes in her book, *Changing of the Gods*, that "the new wave of feminism desperately needs to be not only many-faceted, but cosmic and ultimately reli-



gious in its vision." In speaking of the God of the Bible she said, "We women are going to bring an end to God." This is nothing less than "Eve" gone berserk.

A practicing lesbian, Virginia Mollenkott believes that "compulsory heterosexuality" (with one man and one woman in one home) "is the very backbone that holds patriarchy together." Kate Millet, another radical feminist, says, "A woman is called lesbian when she functions autonomously. Women's autonomy is what women's liberation is all about." It's also what both the man and the woman decided to try in the Garden of Eden and ended up in anything but Paradise.

Dr. Radford Ruether is professor of applied theology at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, IL. In his mind, patriarchy has replaced sin. According to Ruether, patriarchy is the work of the devil, the mark of the beast, the great Babylon, the evil land of Egyptian slavery from which the church should organize one modern-day exodus.

Now you know why the liberal church, buying into this hideous heresy, has pushed for the ordination of women even though God's Word clearly forbids that in 1 Timothy 2:12, not based on the supposed superiority of the man but on the basis of function — God having the right to establish roles and order. Jesus was not less than the Father because He was under the Father's authority, was He? I am not less than my wife because God did not give me the function of birthing children, am I?

By the way, I am in no way excusing the sin of the male gender down through history. But the Scriptures do not change with the winds of changing culture or even because of the sinfulness of man (we haven't done away with pastors because some have shamefully failed in that high office). The bottom line is that your local feminist is not just laboring for equal pay, but for revolution that is demonic at its core, and we are just now beginning to reap the whirlwind. Stay tuned!

**Rev. Gary Cox** is senior pastor of Meadowview Reformed Presbyterian Church (PCA), Lexington, NC.

# Acceptable Worship

D.G. HART and JOHN R. MUETHER

**Q**uestion: *What is the acceptable way of worshiping the only true God?*

**A**nswer: *The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.* (Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.1)

**H**ow do we know that we have worshiped well? Did we find the Sunday morning service "meaningful" or "dynamic" or "exhilarating"? Or what about the visitors? Was it warm and accomodating? Despite what the current literature on worship might suggest, none of the criteria implicit in these questions establishes the acceptable way of worshiping God because they deflect us away from the Biblical standard for worship. Scripture insists that we must worship in a way that is acceptable to God. The simple test for acceptable worship is this: does it conform to the Bible? This standard has become known in Reformed churches as the "regulative principle."

## REFORMED ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE

The essence of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was to turn away from medieval Catholic abuses and to return to the simplicity of Christian worship. The goal of all the Reformers was to be Reformed "according to the Word of

God." Submission to the rule of Scripture is the essence of the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*. It is found, for example, in the sixth of the *Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England*: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite as necessary to salvation." Similarly, the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* condemned the Roman Catholic mass because "its traditions were preferred far above the commandments of God."

More specifically, the authority of Scripture in worship is a logical consequence of the teaching of the second commandment. There are two ways of offering false worship, according to the Ten Commandments.

*"For Calvinists, sola scriptura meant the reformation of doctrine, polity, and worship."*

**First**, one worships a false God, which is a violation of the first commandment. **Second**, one worships the true God in a false way. This is a violation of the second commandment. Among the duties of the second commandment

are "the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his Word," including "the disapproving, detesting, [and] opposing all false worship" which are "monuments of idolatry" (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, 108).

To be Reformed in worship, however, is to go beyond the Lutheran and Anglican teaching and to restrict

the elements of worship only to what God has prescribed in His word and nothing more. The Reformed saw other Protestants as inconsistent in their submission to the authority of Scripture. For Lutherans and Anglicans, the Bible was the sole authority for doctrine, but not for the government or the worship of the church. They affirmed in worship what has been called the "normative principle": whatever Scripture does not forbid is permissible. Thus, they bar from worship only what is specifically condemned in Scripture.

For Calvinists, *sola scriptura* meant the reformation of doctrine, polity and worship. All three of these legs were necessary to undergird the ministry of the church. And so in submitting to the regulative principle of worship, the Reformed only includes in worship what God prescribed in the Bible, believing that Scripture forbids whatever God does not expressly, or by good and necessary consequence, command. In contrast to the "normative principle," the *silence* of Scripture regarding a specific practice in worship, such as lighting candles or burning incense, is just as much a prohibition as a direct condemnation of such a practice.

Some Presbyterian churches have recently added dance and drama to their worship. However, Presbyterians who are self-consciously Reformed contend that there must be clear warrant in Scripture for these innovations. Moreover, if that warrant is found, then these elements are required for all churches, and not merely permissible for those who prefer them.

For this reason, simplicity characterizes Reformed worship. The Reformed worship without candles, liturgical vestments, or highly ornamented sanctuaries. While Luther argued that God had given man five senses to use in worship, Calvin argued that we worship for God's glory, only secondarily for our edification, and not in the least for our pleasure.

In sum, the regulative principle simply states that whatever we do in worship must have support from the Bible. As we shall see, this is not to say that we have a proof-text for everything we do in worship. Scripture gives the church no exact order of worship. But by good and necessary consequence we may deduce from God's Word the necessary "parts of the ordinary religious worship" of God.

## A PURITAN INVENTION?

Some historians have described the regulative principle as a "puritan" invention. By this they mean that it is specific to the Anglo-American Reformed tradition, to Presbyterians who subscribe to *Westminster Standards*. On the other hand, this argument continues, the Reformed tradition that developed on the European continent, as in the Dutch, French, German, Hungarian and Swiss Reformed churches, have no counterpart to this peculiar teaching of the *Westminster Standards*.

But a study of the continental Reformed creeds and confessions will quickly expose this as a false claim. For example, question and answer 96 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* instructs us that the regulative principle is the explicit consequence of the second commandment, which requires "that we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word." Similarly, the *Belgic Confession* states in Article 32:

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the

body of the Church, yet that they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted. And therefore we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God. For this purpose, excommunication or church discipline is requisite, with all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God.

When we look beyond the Reformed confessions, we can find evidence that John Calvin himself clearly espoused the regulative principle of worship. In *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, he wrote:

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all mode of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct. "Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (1 Sam. 15:22; Mt. 15:9). Every addition to his word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere "will worship" (Col. 2:23)... is vanity. This

is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.

So, if the regulative principle is so firmly established in the Reformed tradition, why are Presbyterian and Reformed churches abandoning it? An objection that is unhappily gaining ascendancy in Reformed circles

contends that the regulative principle is a hyper-scrupulous and narrow-minded rule that robs Christians of the freedom that God would have them express in worship. But ironically, it is the regulative principle that is the surest guarantor of Christian freedom, not the notion that we may do whatever Scripture does not forbid.

*"...the regulative principle simply states that whatever we do in worship must have support from the Bible."*

## THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE AND REFORMED DOCTRINE

One typical objection to the regulative principle is that it is an Old Covenant idea, and it is illegitimate to import it into the New Covenant, where the ceremonial law — including the Levitical restrictions on worship — have been fulfilled in Christ. Yet there is ample New Testament evidence for the regulative principle. In the quote above from Calvin we find from the words of Jesus a reiteration of the prophet Isaiah's invocation of the regulative principle: "But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:9; see Isa. 29:13). Calvin also cites Paul's condemnation of "will worship": the will of God, not the will of man, is the rule of worship for the New Testament church (Col. 2:22-23).

Jesus further invokes the regulative principle in the Great Commission, when He directs the ministry of the church "to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). There is no other authority for the church — including her worship — beside the teaching of Christ, who in His of-

fice as prophet reveals God's will by His Word and His Spirit. To observe the Lord's authority is to worship as He has commanded. So the very charter for the New Testament church is expressed in the same terms of the law of Moses, namely to exclude human invention from her teaching and worship.

Thus, the New Testament itself refutes the claim that the regulative principle is a ceremonial burden from which the church, come of age in Christ, is now at liberty to worship as she sees fit. It is not a principle that can be abandoned by appealing to the discontinuities between the Old and New Covenants. Instead, the principle abides because it is premised on such unchanging truths as the character of God, the extent of human depravity,

*"Because of the doctrine of total depravity, Calvin taught that the regulative principle is essential to true worship."*

and the command for us to love our neighbor. These three truths all inform the New Covenant observance of the regulative principle.

It is obvious that the Bible reveals God to be a jealous God. His very name is "Jealous," according to Exodus 34:13. This feature of His character is specifically revealed in the prohibitions against false worship. The *Westminster Larger Catechism*, cited above, goes on to give these reasons for the regulative principle from the second commandment: "his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom" (110). Because God is a jealous God, He does not welcome forms of worship that men and women may devise, even if they are believers or sincere. Instead, He insists that He be worshiped only as He commands (Ex. 34:13-15). Thus the Bible describes as wicked, irreverent, and profane not only those who contradict God's will, but also those who do what is beside His will.

The regulative principle is also a consequence of the doctrine of to-

tal depravity. Paul teaches in Romans 1 that the entire human race is in rebellion against God. This rebellious spirit, of course, extends to worship and makes it false. Paul writes that the worship of unbelievers is false not because of ignorance but rather moral turpitude: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God" (v. 20). Calvinists believe that depravity extends beyond the reprobate, and includes even the regenerate who still bear the corruption of sin. For this reason we are incompetent to devise by our own imagination, even if it is pious, any sort of worship that is appropriate or pleasing to God.

Consider, further, how the *Westminster Confession* describes good works. After we have done our duty toward God, we are "still unprofitable servants," and our good works are "defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection" (16:6). What the *Confession* says here of good works is certainly true of our best efforts at worship. If we are incapable of doing good works untainted by corruption, how can we be able to devise worship that is pleasing to God solely on the basis of our own wisdom or desires?

Because of the doctrine of total depravity, Calvin taught that the regulative principle is essential to true worship. Because all men possess the depraved inclination to suppress the truth and to worship idols, Calvin concluded that "experience teaches us how fertile is the field of falsehood in the human mind, and that the smallest of grains, when sown there, will grow to yield an immense harvest." This idolatrous propensity remained strong even in believers, Calvin insisted, which is why he called the mind a "factory of idols," and wrote that "everyone of us is, even from his mother's womb, a master craftsman of idols."

## THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE AND CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

When we focus on the jealousy of God and the depravity of man, we have ample reason to be aware of the sinful impulses that still influence believers in worship. But restraint of sin is not to be confused with restraint of liberty. Contrary to the modern mindset that prizes unfettered freedom, the regulative principle is the very guardian, not the enemy of Christian liberty in public worship. This follows from Paul's teaching on the conscience of a weaker brother (see Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8). Out of love for our neighbor, Paul requires that we must not wound the conscience of a weaker brother, even when that conscience is an errant conscience.

T. David Gordon has applied this Pauline principle well to worship. When the elders of the church call the people of God to worship, they are necessarily and unavoidably binding the conscience of worshipers (because Christians are forbidden to forsake the worship of God). This is not a problem if the church is worshiping Biblically, because the elders of the church are binding consciences according to the Word of God as they are called to do in the Great Commission. But imagine a worship service that involves something without Biblical warrant, such as the lighting of an advent wreath. If a believer finds this practice objectionable, what can he or she do? Either one must not participate (which sinfully breaks a divine command to worship God with the rest of the saints assembled) or one must participate (which sinfully violates one's conscience).

Seen in this light, as Gordon tellingly argues, the regulative principle of worship, far from restricting Christian liberty, serves instead to protect it. The only way in which a church can worship God and protect liberty of conscience is to observe the regulative principle. Properly observed, it liberates worshipers

from the tyranny of churches that impose on their people elements of public worship that have no Biblical warrant. When churches engage in unbiblical practices (whether for the sake of tradition or innovation), they usurp the Lordship of Christ. The sad and nearly inevitable result is the outbreak of controversy and disharmony in the church.

## ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP IS NOT BIBLICISM

Although the confessions of our churches are explicit about the regulative principle, a moment's reflection reveals that every consistory or session of Reformed churches makes certain decisions about worship that have no direct warrant from Scripture whatsoever. For example, many churches have determined to call the people of God to worship at 1am and 6pm on the Lord's Day. Why not 10am and 7pm? Or why not all day? It would not be unbiblical to worship from dawn to dusk. Moreover, churches have also determined that the ministry of the Word is more effective with certain lighting, climate control, and voice amplification, and Scripture warrants none of this. And how do we determine how many psalms and hymns to sing in worship? What is too few and what is too many, and where do we find that in the Bible?

To answer these questions the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition offers another useful distinction, between the "elements" of worship and "circumstances" of worship. The *elements* of worship are the "what" of worship, the fixed and unchanging parts of the worship service. These include prayer, the reading and preaching of the Word, singing, and the sacraments.

The *circumstances* are the "how" of worship. These are the conditions that are most conducive to worship, including time and place. These are described in the *Westminster Confession* when it states: "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions

and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (1:6). Thus, while there is no Biblical reason not to worship from dawn to dusk on the Lord's Day, such would be imprudent, a "circumstance concerning the worship of God" that in our culture would put an onerous burden on believers.

More needs to and will be said about the elements and circumstances of worship. But for now the point is a simple one: far from loosening the strength of the regulative principle, this distinction between elements (the "what") and circumstances (the "how") *clarifies* the regulative principle. Further, it allows that there will be some variety in churches that are committed to Reformed worship.

## THE BLESSINGS OF THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

We must not forget that the second commandment reveals not only a God of wrath but also a God who is infinite in His mercy. The very passage that warned of a jealous God's judgment on false worship also promised God's "lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:6). Only the faithful observance of the regulative principle enables Christians to claim this promise. In his book, *Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture*, Hughes Oliphant Old drew the following conclusion about the distinctiveness of Reformed worship:

This program for the renewal of worship in American Protestant churches of today may not be just exactly what everyone is looking for. In our evangelistic zeal we are looking for programs that will attract people. We think we have put honey on the lip of

the bitter cup of salvation. It is the story of the wedding of Cana all over again but with this difference. At the crucial moment when the wine failed, we took matters into our own hands and used those five stone jars to mix up a batch of Kool-Aid instead. It seemed like a good solution in terms of our American culture. Unfortunately, all too soon the guests discovered the fraud. Alas! What are we to do now? How can we possibly minister to those who thirst for the real thing? There is but one thing to do, as Mary the mother of Jesus, understood so very well. You remember how the story goes. After presenting the problem to Jesus, Mary turned to the servants and said to them, "Do whatever he tells you." The servants did just that and the water was turned to wine, wine rich and mellow beyond anything they had ever tasted before.

*"The elements of worship are the 'what' of worship...The circumstances are the 'how' of worship."*

The challenge for the church today is precisely the dilemma that Mary faced. If we desire worship that is pleasing and acceptable to God, we must put aside "the imaginations and devices of men." In the words of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, "we should not be wiser than God" (Q & A 98). Instead, let us follow the regulative principle of worship, and "do whatever he tells you."

**D.G. Hart** is librarian and associate professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, PA), and is an elder at Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Glenside, Pennsylvania. **John R. Muether** is library director at Reformed Theological Seminary and an elder at Lake Sherwood Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Orlando, FL. They are co-authors of *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (1995).



# Sugar & Spice Girls

CAL THOMAS

People looking for causes of the cultural decline — including why girls are engaging in sexual activity at ever-younger ages — might wish to consider the Spice Girls.

At a recent Washington-area appearance of the four (formerly five) women, a near-capacity crowd — including mostly female children, some as young as 4 — dressed up in leopard-print miniskirts, platform shoes, midriff-baring tops and hairdos that emulated the performers on stage.

The stage names, even the real names, of the Spice Girls are less important than the messages they send to the mostly pre-pubescent audience. Even more disturbing is what is going on in the minds of parents and other relatives who take them to the concerts.

I called my 13-year-old granddaughter to see what she thinks of the Spice Girls. "I don't like them," she said, "because of the way they dress and how I hear they behave offstage." Suddenly the cost of private school and the benefit of parents who provide direction and don't let her follow wherever her glands might lead appear to be paying off.

One of this minimally talented group's popular songs is called "Naked." The women sit behind four chairs and perform in a way that suggests they are wearing no clothing. Do parents think this is cute? Other songs, such as "Do It" and "2 Become 1," have sexual overtones. Still others, such as "Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves," have feminist connotations.

A *Washington Post* story on the group's appearance mentions 20-year-old Lisa Pillow, who apparently suffers from acute maturation disorder. She calls herself "Kitty Spice" and is dressed in baby-blue fur panties and matching cropped top, white fishnet pantyhose and a white marabou boa. She has brought her 5-year-old niece, who is similarly dressed, to the affair. A reporter says Pillow's outfit might be cute if she were 10, but on the 20-year-old, "one can't help think centerfold, centerfold, do you have a coat?" Someone should have arrested this woman for contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Spice Girls are a long way from "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" and similar wholesome entertainment

available for people of this age group when I was a child. But then our generation mostly stayed together as families, only one parent worked outside the home, drugs were bought at the local pharmacy with a doctor's prescription, and sex was too private to be talked about outside the locker room where more fiction than fact was told.

Also attending the performance were an assortment of drag queens and other adults adorned in various costumes so that an uninformed observer might take the event for a Halloween party. How did parents explain that? One writer said that "adults transform the Spice Girls from earnest representatives of young girls' need to feel powerful, appreciated and cool into high camp." I don't know about the powerful and cool parts, but children used to count on appreciation coming from their parents. Apparently this is another privilege that has been ceded to culture and day-care workers because two-income households no longer have the time and lack the moral authority to properly train their children.

We increasingly teach young girls to adopt the culture's image of what they should be, judging themselves by their level of coolness, attractiveness and ability to sexually manipulate boys. Parents who are co-conspirators in this cultural rape of their daughters ought to be ashamed of themselves, but they obviously have no shame or they wouldn't take their kids to see the Spice Girls.

Too many parents have surrendered their child-rearing responsibilities. They think that having a pouty face and a bad attitude are the worst things that can happen to their daughters. They aren't. Out-of-wedlock pregnancy, STDs and broken homes are far worse. Parents who take their young daughters to see such things as the Spice Girls are accessories in eroding their daughters' innocence, in complicity with the sex educators in many of the government schools.

Girls are being herded at earlier ages into attitudes and practices far from the "sugar and spice and everything nice" we used to think, or at least wished, that little girls were made of.



Los Angeles Times Syndicate

# APOLOGIA

RICHARD SMITH

Apologia. Apologetic(s). The word and its derivatives appear nineteen times in the New Testament. It means literally "to take oneself off a charge" or "to defend oneself." In nearly every instance in the New Testament it refers to a Christian's response to legal prosecution, persecution or inquiry. For this reason the word is rendered variously as answer, defense, excuse or explanation. It was also in this narrow and technical sense that the early church fathers wrote many "Apologies" for Christianity against the slander of unbelievers, persecution and legal oppression.

The concept and practice of apologetics slowly evolved, however, into a much broader application. In the fourth century, for example, Augustine defended Christianity against pagan accusations concerning Rome's demise. In the eleventh century Anselm attempted to explain the irrationality of unbelief and also to vindicate God's purpose in the incarnation. In the centuries thereafter, great intellects such as Aquinas, Butler, Locke, Hodge, Orr, and C.S. Lewis all sought in various ways to stem the tide of unbelief and to illustrate the reasonableness of Christianity. Today we still face intellectual challenges that are very grave. What are these "charges" that confront contemporary Christianity?

## CHARGES AGAINST CHRISTIANITY

First, for many, *Christianity seems irrelevant*. It is not germane for daily life. It is not "politically correct." It is not intellectually tenable. It is, in short, perceived as inherently unrea-

sonable, divisive, obscurant and toxic. (In this day and age, who *needs* God anyway?) Ben Meyer wrote recently: "For the heritage of Christian belief affirms as indispensable what the heritage of modern culture excludes as impossible."<sup>1</sup> The "modern Christian dilemma" is the "incompatibility between intellectual honesty and traditional Christian belief."<sup>2</sup> Or, as J. Gresham Machen proclaimed earlier in this century: "False ideas are the greatest obstacle to the reception of the gospel."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, "false ideas" are a great hindrance in evangelism. As a result, in our secular, materialistic world, Christianity no longer compels. It simply does not "make sense" anymore.

Perhaps this explains why the majority of converts in the West are young people and why so many abdicate their faith after entering college. Perhaps this explains as well why Christians, particularly evangelicals, have so little influence in academia and other places of power. It is ironic, therefore, that some in the economically devastated, former Communist East appeal to *us*, saying: "...the greatest problem is *not* that we don't have enough sausages. Far worse, we don't have enough *ideas*. We don't know what to think. The ground has been pulled out from under us" (italics mine). It is unfortunate that in these prosperous economic times in America, the "greatest problem" sometimes still appears to *us* to be the dearth of "sausages" and *not* ideas. As Christians, the intellectual ground has been "pulled out from

under us" as well, but many do not seem to realize this or care.

Secondly, *Christianity is viewed by many as merely one variety of generic religion*. For various reasons, religion today in general is quite amorphous and pluralistic. Devotees approach the sacred realm as a sort of experiential smorgasbord. In such a syncretistic milieu, beliefs are mixed and matched according to fad, fashion and psychic need. Tolerance and relativism are credal assumptions. Christianity is no longer viewed as justifiably unique or exclusive. Cynics charge: Christianity is merely another, particularly noxious "weed" in the "garden of god."

What, then, is the reason for this lamentable perception of our faith? Why is Christianity perceived as irrelevant? Why is it viewed by many as merely one variety of generic religion? One explanation is that, sadly, evangelical Christianity *itself*, as a reluctant and imperfect cultural mirror, suffers from a virile subjectivism, docile anti-intellectualism, and syncretistic tendency which often causes it to appear irrelevant and implausible. We see this malaise reflected in the church where New Age ideas are infringing on the doctrine of God, Christology, and spiritual guidance.

"...beliefs are mixed and matched according to fad, fashion and psychic need."

We see it in deviations from the Biblical doctrine of man. There is, for example, an overemphasis on self-image, victimization and unbiblical (psycho-logic) counseling. We see it also in

the uncritical acquiescence to consumerism and the passive, undiscriminating acceptance of much that the media serves up. We see it in the quality of preaching. There is too little scholarship and too much emphasis on application, on addressing faddish "felt needs" rather than the ever present "unfelt needs" for insight and instruction. In other words, preaching today often neglects the "indicative" of Scripture while stressing the "imperative," with the result that sermons do not

often challenge our minds or our cherished cultural assumptions. We see it also in the burgeoning "feel good" small-group movement, which unfortunately does "little to increase the Biblical knowledge of their members...[and where] many of the groups encourage faith to be subjective and pragmatic."<sup>4</sup> Finally, we witness in particular an anti-intellectualism manifested in evangelism training. The emphasis today is on one-on-one, "life-style" evangelism. But, where is the content? How are we to answer the objections we encounter? In short, where is our apologetic (I Pet. 3:15, Phil. 1:7)?

Could it be that we have forgotten how to love God with our minds? We have a religion of the heart, but have we stopped thinking? In fact, it seems we are afraid of thinking, of being "intellectual." Have we forgotten that since the advent of the New Testament, our "Holy War" is fought now with prayer and persuasion? Have we forgotten that Paul *debated* with his opponents in order to confute and convert them? Have we forgotten that many of our greatest church leaders throughout Christian history were highly educated? Is it any coincidence that the Reformation and

many revivals resulted from the impact of new (Biblically informed) ideas upon the intelligentsia?

## REMEDIES

Finally, how can this sad situation be remedied? How can we overcome the many "false ideas" today which hinder our evangelism, plague our churches, and stunt our apologetics? How can we forsake anti-intellectualism? How can we regain the cognitive "high ground"? One way is to foster Christian scholarship in order to purge false ideas from the church, and to reassert our intellectual credibility. For, if our weapons truly are prayer and persuasion, then our battlefields are *not only* the prayer meeting, but also evangelism, apologetics and education. We must devote ourselves anew to the effort to eradicate the "incompatibility between intellectual honesty and traditional Christian belief" and

*"...in order to move forward, we must first alter the way we think, the way we speak, and, not least of all, the way we give."*

"take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). For this reason we should invest *much more* money in our future leaders, their ideas, and Christian educational institutions. Christian elementary and secondary schools languish for lack of resources. Christian colleges and seminaries often are underfunded. As for advanced study at the masters or doctoral level, there is precious little scholarship money, especially for the study of apologetics. This ought not to be. We should be seeking and cultivating the next Jonathan Edwards, Francis Schaeffer, C. S. Lewis and Cornelius Van Til.

Another way to remedy the situation is to recapture the apologetic and eclectic thrust of the *Mission Dei*. We must recognize that our apologetic is associated with and vitalized by God's indictment, or apologetic, against humanity (Rom. 1:18). According to Romans 1:20 mankind is "without an apologetic"

(*anapologetos*). Mankind is, in fact, "without an excuse" for its impiety, given the revelation of God within man and nature (Rom. 1:19,20). For this reason, then, we should view our apologetic, as did Paul, not merely as the *defense* of the faith, but as part and parcel of God's polemic, or *offensive*, against all forms of idolatry (Rom. 1:25; I Thes. 1:9,10).

A *third* way is to rediscover the *transcendental* and *presuppositional* nature of the Biblical apologetic as exemplified in the work of Cornelius Van Til, protege of Machen and late professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Van Til sought to reconstruct and reform apologetics and epistemology in light of the Biblical notions of the creator-creature distinction, common grace and the noetic effects of sin. Put simply, Van Til asked and answered these three questions: What kind of reasoning is fitting for a creature? What kind of reasoning is typical of a sinner? What kind of method is proper in apologetics?

Obviously this essay is itself an *apologia*. It is an apologetic for apologetics. We need apologetics today more than ever to foster evangelism and to defend Christianity against the "charges" and "slander" (even oppression) inherent in modernity and post-modern relativistic pluralism. But in order to move forward we must first alter the way we think, the way we speak, and, not least of all, the way we give. We should become like the Sons of Issachar (Chron. 12:32), who in their time discerned what God was doing and offered themselves and their resources in that hour of opportunity.

## FOOTNOTES

1. *The Aims of Jesus*. (London: SCM Press, 1979), 15.
2. *Ibid.*
3. "Christianity and Culture," (an address at the opening of the one hundred and first session of Princeton Theological Seminary, 9/20/1912), 5.
4. Robert Wuthnow. *Christianity Today*, 38. (No. 2, 2/7/1994), 23.

**Dr. Smith** is a Teaching Fellow for International Institute for Christian Studies.

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# For Christ's Crown and Covenant

W. ROBERT GODFREY

This year the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America celebrates the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding in America. For two hundred years this small denomination with strong Scottish roots has faithfully ministered and borne its testimony to Christ and the Reformed faith. Unlike many other Reformed denominations of such age in this country, it has successfully resisted the inroads of liberalism and has maintained a robust orthodoxy.

Those who become acquainted with the Reformed Presbyterian Church for the first time will probably first notice its worship practices. Reformed Presbyterians (RPs) follow the old Reformed practice - dating back to John Calvin - of only singing Psalms in public worship and singing those Psalms without any instrumental accompaniment. They believe that the Scriptures do not authorize any other form of singing in public worship.

The worship practices of the Reformed Presbyterians were the practices of most Calvinists in the sixteenth century including the Scots and the Dutch. In the middle of the seventeenth century the organ gradually was reintroduced into Dutch Reformed worship, but only appeared in some Scottish denominations much later. To this day most of the conservative Dutch Reformed denominations sing only Psalms.

The worship of the Reformed Presbyterians is not precisely the same as that of John Calvin. Calvin's Genevan liturgy was more complex than that of most congregations in the RPCNA. Calvin also did not permit the singing of parts, which the

RPs delight to do and do beautifully in their singing.

The visitor to an RP church might well see their worship practices as the most distinctive aspect of that denomination. But such an observation would not be correct. RPs in worship believe that they simply maintain what was once the nearly universal Reformed practice. Their real distinctive as a denomination is found in the nickname often given to them: the Covenanters. It is in their understanding of Christ and His covenant that their particular historical witness is found.

To explore that witness we need to go back further than 200 years to Scotland in the seventeenth century. Indeed we should start with another anniversary, the 360<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *National Covenant* in Scotland. The *National Covenant* was a document signed in Scotland in 1638. It was a reaction to the efforts of King Charles I (king of England and Scotland) in 1637 to force the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to move toward the practices of the Anglican Church of England. Charles wanted to impose bishops and a prayerbook upon the Scottish churches. In Scotland an amazing outcry spread among ministers, noblemen and common folk. A document called the *National Covenant* was written that was very widely signed by all sorts of people throughout Scotland.

The *National Covenant* pledged the nation and people of Scotland to maintain and defend the true Reformed religion in its confession,

polity and worship: "To the which Confession and form of Religion we willingly agree in our conscience in all points, as unto God's undoubted truth and verity grounded only upon His written Word." More specifically the passion of the Covenant can be seen in the declaration: "And, finally, we detest all his [the Pope's] vain allegories, rites, signs, and traditions brought in the Kirk, without or against the Word of God, and doctrine of this true reformed Kirk; to the which we join ourselves willingly, in doctrine, faith, religion, discipline, and use of the holy Sacraments, as lively members of the same in Christ our Head; promising and swearing by the Great Name of the Lord our God, that we shall continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this Kirk, and shall defend the same, according to our vocation and power, all the days of our lives; under the pains contained in the law, and danger both of body and soul in the day of God's merciful judgment."

In light of the *National Covenant* and the massive resistance to his decisions on the church in Scotland, King Charles invaded Scotland in 1639 to suppress opposition. In one

battle there appeared a banner among the troops defending the position of the *National Covenant*. It was a blue banner with the inscription in gold letters, "For Christ's Crown and Covenant." That inscription became a rallying cry for "covenanters." To this day in most Reformed Presbyterian churches

you can find a replica of that banner.

The slogan aptly summed up the passion and concern of those early covenanters. They believed that Scotland had properly and solemnly covenanted as a nation with God to serve Christ and maintain His true religion. Christ's crown represented His kingship over individual consciences and Christian churches, but

*"RPs in worship believe that they simply maintain what was once the nearly universal Reformed practice."*

also over Christian countries. Christ is now king of kings and lord of lords and should be so honored by Christian nations.

The struggle over the *National Covenant* continued after King Charles I had been defeated in the British civil war and executed in 1649. His son, Charles II, was recognized as king in Scotland only after he had signed the *National Covenant*. But when Charles II was restored to the English throne in 1660, he repudiated the *National Covenant*. Over time he managed to wear down the support of many Scots for the covenant. The "covenanters" no longer were the majority of the nation, but became

eventually a much smaller movement. They were cruelly persecuted during the "killing time" (1684-1688). But they continued to cling to their ideal that a Christian nation should covenant together to honor Christ as King.

The covenanting ideal in America meant that for many years the Covenanters labored to amend the American constitution to have Christ formally recognized as lord. It also meant that the Covenanters were eager to see the kingship of Christ practiced in the life of the country. One application of that principle was that in 1800 the Reformed Presbyterian Church became the second de-

nomination in America to rule that slave owners could not be members of the church.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church continues its historic work and testimony today in many ways. It has faithful congregations where the Gospel of Christ's grace is preached. It owns Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. It calls all of us to think carefully as to how we should live out the kingship of Jesus Christ.

**Dr. Godfrey** is Professor of Church History and President of Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA.

## OPC 65TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETS IN GRAND RAPIDS, MI

The Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, MI was host to the 65th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, May 27 to June 2. The Assembly decided to revisit the same site for its general assembly next year, June 2 through June 9 of 1999.

The opening roll call revealed 81 ministers and 50 elders enrolled as commissioners (sometimes called "delegates" in other communions). Ross Graham, a minister from the Presbytery of New Jersey and general secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, was given the gavel, leading the assembly to complete its business a day ahead of schedule.

Encouraging statistics revealed that church membership grew in 1997 by more than 6%, continuing a trend of the last three years. The Committee on Christian Education reported on its joint curriculum preparation with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) through Great Commission Publications. A new revision of the primary Sunday school curriculum is available for this September and a new quarterly guide for family devotions entitled *As for My House*, will become available this October. The OPC also adopted an official presence on the World Wide Web.

New sites for Home Missions were announced for Ada, Michigan, Bentonville, Arkansas and Salt Lake City. Foreign Missions reported the planting of a new church in Ethiopia which is working more and more closely together with the Christians in Eritrea. The writing and translation work of Hailu Mekonnen is having a large impact in Ethiopia. In general, Foreign Missions observed that, as in Home Missions, missions' policy is shifting away from direct evangelism to the training and preparing of native pastors. This amplifies the effectiveness of personal witnessing and the work of missionaries.

The assembly responded affirmatively to the request of the Chaplains' Committee that it erect a special committee to study the Biblical principles related to the issues of women in combat and in the military.

Greetings were received from a number of fraternal delegates from other Reformed bodies. The assembly also debated and finally approved a recommendation that the OPC approve the suspension of the Christian Reformed Church of North America from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). A year ago the OPC severed fraternal relations with the CRCNA because it had approved the ordination of women elders and ministers. The vote to support the suspension of the CRCNA from NAPARC was based on the same grounds.

One veteran commissioner remarked: "This is the most pacific assembly in memory!"

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

## THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA MEETS IN ST. LOUIS, MO

This year's General Assembly celebrated twenty-five years of God's goodness to the Presbyterian Church in America. The 1,293 commissioners (sometimes called delegates in other communions - some teaching elders [ministers] and some ruling elders) elected one of the PCA's founding pastors and favorite "down-home" speakers to be its moderator. The Rev. Kennedy Smartt who served in the infantry during WWII and was awarded the bronze star and a purple heart, previously served as senior pastor in a number of PCA congregations, and as associate coordinator of Mission to the World. Prior to the founding of the PCA, Rev. Smartt served on the board of the *Presbyterian Journal* magazine which served as a catalyst for the founding of the denomination. He was involved with Presbyterian Churchmen United, a group which battled against creeping liberalism in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Rev. Smartt was also part of the steering committee for a continuing Presbyterian church which later came to be known as the Presbyterian Church in America.

Three evenings of General Assembly consisted of worship services with spirited singing, intensive prayer and Biblical proclamation. The Rev. Dr. James Montgomery Boice addressed the Tuesday evening service in the first of its series on "True to the Scriptures." In speaking of the Christian world, Boice said, "We're always in danger of falling away little by little from that high standard we profess. The elements of worship are falling away, especially the centrality of the Scriptures...We end up with short, chummy sermons filled with stories." Boice pointed out that Scripture is under attack for its authority, its truthfulness, and its sufficiency. "Is it adequate?" he asked, saying that we tend to add human methodology and techniques to supplement God's ways. "Is the Word of God adequate for evangelism? Do we need psychology and psychiatry for sermons? Do we need signs and wonders for guidance?" Even in politics, he said, we try to "force people to conform to Christian morality. But laws don't change people.

Things change when people are changed by the gospel of salvation."

The assembly gave a rousing farewell to Dr. Paul Gilchrist who has served the denomination in its highest office, that of stated clerk, for the past ten years. Several standing ovations and a large monetary gift was given in appreciation for all that Dr. Gilchrist has accomplished with dignity and grace. Dr. L. Roy Taylor, a professor of practical theology at Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, was elected without contest as the new stated clerk of the PCA. Dr. Taylor is 53 and has been a member of the PCA since its founding in 1973. Priorities for Taylor as stated clerk include the maintaining of doctrinal purity and the "peace and harmony" of the PCA. When asked what challenges lie ahead, Taylor said, "...to maintain a balance of speaking the truth in love, of focusing on the Lord's majesty in worship yet at the same time not becoming ingrown and failing to fulfill our mission in evangelism."

The length of creation days came up for discussion relative to the judgment of a presbytery which has stated that it will not accept men as pastors who take exception to 24-hour creation days. The general assembly voted to form an advisory committee on the account of the creation of the world in the first chapters of Genesis, particularly the length of the six days of creation. The advisory committee will have 11 members and its report will be non-binding. The committee will be funded through designated gifts only.

The subject of worship also came up at the assembly meeting in connection with the New Song church in Salt Lake City, a congregation consisting of mostly new Christians. The members have been responsive to illumination on the matter of worship given to them by denominational officials. The PCA holds to the "Regulative Principle" of worship which means that the proper forms of worship are regulated by what God has commanded in Scripture. Some define this narrowly while others see it more broadly. The assembly was asked to investigate the practices of the New Song Church.

The assembly approved a proposal from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) that the Christian Reformed Church be suspended from membership in NAPARC. The PCA had previously severed fraternal relations with the CRC over the CRC's acceptance of ordination of women as pastors and elders, something the PCA holds to be unbiblical. The assembly also decided to form a study committee on the issue of women serving in the military. This committee will consider a statement from the Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel which says:

Whereas, for the first time in our nation's history, women are being increasingly used as military combatants, potentially without restriction, and whereas the General Assemblies of the PCA and Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America have not adopted a position on this matter, nor given counsel to their military chaplains, military members, nor our daughters and sons who may potentially serve in the military, voluntarily or by conscription...we in the Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel respectfully request that the General Assemblies of those denominations provide Biblical counsel on this matter to the PRJC and the chaplains it endorses and oversees; to the members, sessions (known as consistories in some communions), and churches of each assembly; and if it deems appropriate, to speak by way of humble petition to the leaders of the nation.

Moderator Kennedy Smartt commended the PCA which has "demonstrated encouraging growth and development in its 25-year history...Historically, the PCA has made tremendous strides in church planting and overseas missions. I anticipate the PCA experiencing a renewal of its commitment to evangelism, prayer, church planting, discipleship and world evangelism. Being tremendously encouraged over what God has done for the past 25 years, I eagerly anticipate what God will do in the next 25 years."

Laurie Vanden Heuvel