

# **PROTESTANT REFORMED THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL**



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**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL  
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## EDITORIAL NOTES

We have included in this issue for our *Journal* two papers of our Senior Seminary students. One, by Seminarian Steven Key, was prepared for Prof. Decker's Liturgics class and deals with the subject of a Reformed liturgy. The other, by Seminarian Chuck Terpstra, was prepared for Prof. Decker's Poimenics class and deals with the importance of the pastoral work of the ministry. We believe these papers will be of interest to our readers.

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Because of these two papers, we are interrupting Prof. Hoeksema's translation of his father's work on the simplicity of God's will. The other two series on Pastoral work and the history of the doctrine appear.

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# Pastoral Care of Children

Prof. Robert D. Decker

In these latter days of the new dispensation, we live in an undisciplined society. Anything and everything goes. There are, so it would seem, no restrictions. It is the day of the sexual revolution. Hardly anything is considered sinful. Much of the church approves of all this. Church discipline is a relic of the past. Anything is acceptable in the pursuit of pleasure and happiness, which is to say, anything is acceptable in the pursuit of the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life (cf. I John 2:15-17).

All of this has affected Christian, covenant families. The watchword for parents and educators these days is "self-expression." The child must be allowed to develop his potential without restraint, without correction, without limits imposed by his parents or teachers. The child must be free to express his own individuality. Some of this influence has affected Christian families too, perhaps more than we care to admit. Our children today, it seems to me, are not as disciplined as children of a generation or two ago. The fault lies partly (probably primarily) in the home, but partly in the Christian schools as well. We simply do not discipline our children as consistently and strictly as we ought.

For these reasons it is well that we examine in the light of Scripture questions such as: Who or what is the covenant child? How must the covenant child be reared? How ought pastors in Christ's church care for the lambs of the flock?

Who and what is the child of God's covenant? First it ought to be remembered that the child is an imagebearer of God. The child has been created in the image of and after the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7). This means that the child is able to bear the image of God and he actually possesses the true knowledge of God, the righteousness and holiness of God. As imagebearer the child is also an officebearer before God. He has been anointed a prophet to know and speak God's praises. He is a priest consecrated in God's service. He is also a king appointed to rule over the works of God's hands. As imagebearer, officebearer, the child is fallen into sin and death. The child has an evil nature. The Bible calls this our "flesh" or "the old man of sin." According to that nature the child is totally depraved. And, total depravity means that the child is incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Scripture teaches

that those who are "after the flesh" mind the things of the flesh. To be carnally minded is death (Rom. 8:5, 6). Why is this the case? Holy Scripture answers: "Because the carnal mind (literally, 'the mind of the flesh,' R.D.D.) is enmity ('hatred') against God: for it is not subject to God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Notice, according to this verse, the natural mind is not only not subject to God's law, it cannot be subject to that law. It lacks the ability to be subject to the law of God. This is the doctrine of total depravity. Our children are totally depraved by nature. We must never forget that! Those children with whom we deal every day as parents, teachers, or pastors are depraved, sinful. Foolishness is bound in their very hearts.

This, however, is not the whole story. Those children have a small beginning of the new life and obedience of Christ. By the grace of God and on the basis of the shed blood of Christ they have been redeemed from sin and death. They have been made citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus our children have a small beginning of the new life and obedience of Christ. Even though that remains a small beginning the child does "... with sincere resolution begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 44). This factor is terribly important for a proper understanding of the children of God's church and has crucial bearing on the rearing and discipline of those children. There is a constant tension within the child, a struggle between the old and the new man. It is that same fierce struggle so vividly described by the apostle Paul in the latter part of his letter to the Romans, chapter seven. Apart from an understanding of this truth one simply cannot discipline the child properly and effectively. What the child needs is understanding, patient, consistent, loving correction, and encouragement to live in obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture and summed in the decalogue.

In sum what this means is that the child is a child of God's covenant. Scripture teaches: "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). The child belongs to the heritage of the Lord according to Psalm 127. This means that the child is very precious in God's sight. He is bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The child is a lamb of God's beloved flock. It should be noted that not all children born to believers are saved. It is true, however, that God saves in the lines of generations of believers and their children. God calls His elect children from among the children of believers. Parents must never forget this. When we discipline our children, train them in the way in which they ought to go, bring them up in God's fear, we must remember they are God's children.

They must, for that reason, be handled with extreme care. The child needs to be disciplined in the love of God as revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. About this the Bible has a good deal to say. What is discipline according to Scripture? There are several passages to which we direct our attention.

The first of these is found in Proverbs 13:24:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

It will be noted that this passage prescribes the use of the rod. This is not to be taken figuratively but literally. Chastening is not sparing the rod. It is clear as well from this text that discipline is motivated by love, the love of God. Sparing the rod is evidence of hatred of one's son. The one who loves his son will chasten him from time to time. It may also be said on the basis of this text that discipline is not punishment. It is not a negative reaction by the parent to wrong doing on the part of a child. Discipline is positive correction or chastening.

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying (Proverbs 19:18).

The term "chasten" in this text is rather strong and has a broad connotation. It means "to correct by blows or stripes, to chastise, to correct by words." It is variously translated as admonish, exhort, instruct, teach. The text teaches that there is hope for the child while he is young, i.e., while he is still under the care of his parents. That hope is based on the promise of God: "I will be thy God and the God of thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). For this reason we must not spare for his crying, but must chasten him and correct him by both words and blows.

Foolishness is bound in the heart of the child; but the rod of correction will drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15).

This text speaks of the necessity of discipline. It is necessary because foolishness is bound in the child's heart. This is not merely a natural foolishness, a lack of experience, or a lack of maturity. All of this is true enough of the child. Spiritual foolishness is meant, the lack of ability to see and understand reality and live in harmony with that reality. And, reality is God as revealed in Jesus Christ. That foolishness is deep-seated. It affects the entire life of the child for it is bound in the very heart of the child. The heart of man, according to Scripture, is the very core of his being out of which are all the issues of life. This foolishness is the depravity of the child's sinful nature. We must remember this. Our children, our little boys and girls, those whom we as pastors meet in the catechism classes, have foolishness bound in their very hearts. This is why they need

the rod of correction. Note that the text speaks of discipline in terms not of punishment but of correction. Discipline has the positive fruit that it drives foolishness out of the child's heart, far from him.

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell (Proverbs 23:13, 14).

Again, let us note, discipline is correction which is defined as "beating him with the rod." This is not harmful to the child at all. Many in today's world think it is. Beating the child with the rod warps his personality, frustrates him, and does much damage to the child, damage the effects of which often last a lifetime. This is simply not true according to God's inspired and infallible Word. The plain word of God is: correct the child by beating him with the rod. If this is done properly the child will not die. Positively the proper application of discipline delivers the child's soul from hell, it saves him from eternal death. There can be, therefore, no doubt about the fact that the Bible calls for corporal chastisement. Parents not only make a foolish mistake when they fail to use the rod, they disobey the Word of God. That is sin.

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. Correct thy son and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul (Proverbs 29:15, 17).

Three terms are used in this passage to refer to discipline: rod, reproof, and correction. All three obviously imply sin as that which needs correction. The fruit of correction is wisdom. The opposite of foolishness, wisdom is the knowledge of and adaptation to reality or the knowledge of reality and the will and the ability to live in harmony with that reality. As noted earlier, reality is God as revealed in Jesus Christ by means of His Word and Spirit. This, wisdom, is the fruit of the rod and reproof. Failure to use the rod and reproof is "leaving the child to himself." This is precisely what contemporary, worldly educators advocate. Leave the child to himself, they say. Allow the child to develop at his or her own pace. Do not attempt to force the child into some preconceived mold. The Bible teaches otherwise. Leaving the child to himself yields shame to the child's mother. Correct the child and he will give his parents rest and bring delight to their souls. Let it be understood this is an unalterable rule of the Word of God. Failing to reprove and correct the child, leaving the child to himself yields the bitter fruit of shame to his mother. This is inevitably the result of the failure of parents to discipline their children.

From the New Testament Scriptures we call attention to just two passages. The first is Ephesians 6:4:

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The terms here are important. The verb which is translated “bring up” means to nourish up to maturity. This refers to the entire process of rearing the child from the moment of his birth until he reaches maturity or adulthood. The noun “nurture” is quite broad in scope. It too refers to the entire process of rearing the child. It involves the cultivation of mind and morals and for this purpose employs commands, admonitions, reproof. It also means instruction which aims at the increase of virtue. Finally “nurture” can mean to warn, reprove, exhort. Once more, this is necessary because of sin. The child must be warned against disobedience and an evil walk of life. When that child falls into sin he must be reproved.

Discipline, therefore, according to this text involves chastening and admonition. It includes reproof and correction. In the light of the other Scriptures we have cited this certainly involves the use of the rod. But discipline also involves the positive “bringing up and nurture.” This means, as we have noted repeatedly, more, much more than a mere negative reaction of the parent to an incident of wrongdoing on the part of the child. Discipline is that, to be sure. But it is more than that. From a positive point of view, discipline is a process which includes the molding and preparing of a child for his place and calling as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven in the midst of this world. The opposite of this is to “provoke the children to wrath.” This refers to parents making their children angry. In a parallel passage Scripture teaches “Fathers provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Col. 3:21). To do this, i.e., to make one’s child angry is bad, very bad. In that event one frustrates and discourages his children. The implication is that the parent is unjust in his dealings with the child.

The second New Testament passage to which we call attention may be found in Hebrews 12:4-11:

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holi-

ness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

It is perfectly clear that this passage does not refer to the chastening of children by their parents, but to the chastening of the people of God by their heavenly Father. Nevertheless, even if only by implication, the passage has a good deal to say concerning the discipline of the children of God's covenant. In the way that God, our Father, disciplines or chastens us we must discipline or chasten our children. God's chastening of His children is the pattern which Christian parents must follow in the discipline of their children.

There are several important principles taught in this passage which must govern Christian parents in the discipline of their children. First, and this is *the* fundamental principle which governs all proper discipline, God chastens those whom He *loves!* Chastening, therefore, is proof or evidence of the fact that one is a son of God and loved by the Lord. God does not chasten those whom He hates. He punishes these in His just and holy wrath, but God does not chasten or discipline them. If, therefore, one is without chastisement he is illegitimate. He is not a true son of God. This certainly and emphatically means that the discipline of the children of the covenant must be motivated by the love of God. One must never discipline out of a desire for revenge or out of unholy anger and certainly not out of hatred for the child. Godly parents must chasten their children out of the love of God and that love of God always seeks the child's eternal welfare, his salvation. Second, God chastens us out of His love for our profit. The purpose is that we might be partakers (sharers) of His holiness. God's chastening of His children yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. This must be the aim of Christian parents too. They must discipline their children in order that those children might be righteous and holy. Holiness is separation from sin and consecration to God and His service. Righteousness is to meet the standard of God. It is to do God's will as that is revealed in Holy Scripture and summed in the Ten Commandments. With this purpose in view, the Christian parent must discipline his child out of the love of God in the same way that God chastens His children in Christ Jesus.

If we take the above passages together we are able to gain an idea of what the discipline of covenant children is. Almost all of the passages either explicitly or at least by implication make plain that discipline is not a negative reaction to incidental wrongdoing on the part of the child. Discipline must not be construed to be something the parent applies only occasionally as necessity arises. Discipline must not be understood in

terms of a reaction on the part of the parent to incidents of poor behavior on the part of the child. We tend to think of discipline in these terms. The child does something wrong and the parent reacts with some form of discipline which is appropriate to the evil deed of the child. Because the child did this evil deed or spoke this evil word he is "taken to the woodshed" or some activity is restricted. This becomes discipline in our minds. This is not discipline. To be sure this is part of what discipline is all about, but there is much more to it.

Nor is discipline punishment. This needs to be stressed. It is common to hear people speak of discipline as punishment. Children must be punished when they do wrong. Christians ought not speak this way! Discipline according to Scripture is *not* punishment. All of the punishment which the people of God deserved on account of their sins and sinful natures was borne by the Lord Jesus Christ Who said from His cross: "It is finished." There is no more punishment for the believer. God tries His people and He chastens them, but God never punishes those whom He loves in Christ Jesus (cf. Heb. 12:4-11; James 1:2, 3, 12, 17). God punishes the ungodly and this means He destroys them. We must not, therefore, speak of punishing the lambs of God's flock. Parents must discipline their children and they must chasten them. This must be done by applying the "rod of correction." But, parents must not punish their children.

Discipline is something positive. Scripture speaks of it in terms of chastening, correction, nurture, and admonition. This certainly involves reacting to evildoing on the part of a child. Scripture, after all, enjoins the use of the "rod of correction" for the purpose of driving the foolishness out of the child's heart. But this is only part of discipline. Discipline is really a *process* which involves the child in the totality of his life. Discipline may be defined as: that process by which the child of God's covenant is molded and prepared to take his place within the Kingdom of God. This means that the child is molded according to the will of God. He must in all his speaking, thinking, willing, doing, even in all his being and life, be in harmony with the will of God. God's will is revealed in His Word and summed in His Law. Discipline aims at bringing the child into conformity with the law of liberty so that he is free to love the Lord his God with all of his heart, mind, soul, and strength and free to manifest that love of God to his neighbor. This means when the child transgresses God's law he must be chastened, admonished, and even corrected with the rod at times. Certainly the child must be brought back from his evil way. At all times, however, the child must be admonished to live in obedience to the will of God as a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Patiently the

parent must instruct his child and carefully guide him in the right way as revealed in Scripture. The parent will do this by means of his speech but also by means of the example of his own daily life.

Discipline is obviously absolutely necessary. This is something we need to stress because it is widely denied by the world's educators and psychologists. There are many theories and variations of theories on the whole subject of child development. Of these, two are worthy of some attention. There is the view according to which the child is predetermined by his very constitution, much like plants and animals, to a progressive development quite independent of any artificial aid. Those who hold to this idea condemn the exercise of any discipline at all. Quite similar is the view which maintains that the child is *autonomous*. The child, according to this view, is really a "law unto himself." This view is based on the erroneous presupposition that there is no higher authority than man himself. Man is the measure of all things. We might note in passing that this is really the basic presupposition of American Democracy with its "consent of the governed" and "will of the majority." According to this view man is free, he is independent. Man may direct his world (microcosmos) according to his own free will. Man is free to make his own decisions and choices, seek his own purposes and satisfy his own desires. The only qualification or limitation to this freedom is that no man may interfere with the rights and privileges of his fellow men. What a man does must not harm his fellows. Hence it is wrong to murder, cheat, steal, etc. All of this is called by various names. In the sphere of ethics or morality this view manifests itself as the new morality or sexual revolution. Theologically it is really Pelagianism (man is not depraved, but only becomes such by imitation and habit) and its child, Arminianism (the basic tenet of which is "the free will of man"). Or this is Liberalism which teaches doing good to one's fellows by following the example of Jesus.

These ideas and variations thereof permeate the thinking and life of the world. They serve as the foundational principles of the world's view of parenting and the education of children. These views determine the world's view of discipline. Operating out of the basic presupposition of the inherent goodness of the child there really is no room for discipline. Parents in the home and teachers in the school ought interfere as little as possible with the native tendencies and desires of the child. The parent must consult his wishes, respect the child's rights. The parent must issue few if any commands and only make kind requests of the child. No obedience to external authority must be required of the child. Rather, the parent must strive to promote independent thought and action on the part of the child (self-expression). The parent ought to reason with the child,

gently advise the child, provide a good environment for the child and encourage the child to appreciate what is truly good, right, and beautiful. An example of this kind of thinking carried to the extreme is cited by Dr. James Dobson in his book, *Dare To Discipline*, pp. 100-102:

Not everyone recognizes the importance of control in the classroom. In a widely publicized book entitled *Summerhill*, the author, A. S. Neill describes his supervision of an English school where discipline is virtually non-existent. The resident students are not required to get out of bed in the morning, or attend classes, complete assignments, take baths, or even wear clothes. Neill's philosophy is the antithesis of everything I have found worthwhile in the training of children; his misunderstanding of discipline and authority is complete and absolute. His brand of permissive absurdity gave birth to the social disasters we now face with our young. Listed below are the elements of Neill's philosophy which are particularly incriminating.

1. Adults, says Neill, have no right to insist on obedience from their children. Attempts to make the youngsters obey are merely designed to satisfy the adult's desire for power. There is no excuse for imposing parental wishes on children. They must be free. The best home situation is one where parents and children are perfect equals. A child should be required to do nothing until he *chooses* to do so. (This view is implemented at Summerhill, where the complete absence of authority is evident. Neill goes to great length to show the students that he is one of them – not their superior.)

2. Children must not be asked to work at all until they reach 18 years of age. Parents should not even require them to help with small errands or assist with the chores. We insult them by making them do our menial tasks; Neill actually stressed the importance of withholding responsibility from the child.

3. Religion should not be taught to children. The only reason religion exists in society is to release the false guilt it has generated over sexual matters. Our concept of God, heaven, hell, and sin are based on myths. Enlightened generations of the future will reject traditional religion.

4. Punishment of any kind is strictly forbidden according to Neill's philosophy. A parent who spans his child actually hates him, and his desire to hurt the child results from his own unsatisfied sex life. At Summerhill, one resident student broke seventeen windows without receiving so much as a verbal reprimand.

5. Adolescents should be told sexual promiscuity is not a moral issue at all. At Summerhill, premarital intercourse is not sanctioned only because Neill fears the consequences of public indignation. He and members of his staff have gone nude to eliminate sexual curiosity. He predicted that the adolescents of tomorrow would find a more healthy existence through an unrestricted sex life.

6. No pornographic books or material should be withheld from the child. Neill indicated that he would buy filthy literature for any of his students who wished to have it. This, he feels, would cure their purient

interest – without harming the child.

7. Children should not be required to say “thank you” or “please” to their parents. Further they should not even be *encouraged* to do so.

8. Rewarding a child for good behavior is degrading and a demoralizing practice. It is an unfair form of coercion.

9. Neill considered books to be insignificant in a school. Education should consist largely of work with clay, paint, tools, and various forms of drama. Learning is not without value, but it should come after play.

10. Even if a child fails in school, the matter should never be mentioned by his parents. The child's activities are strictly his business.

11. Neill's philosophy, in brief, is as follows: eliminate all authority; let the child grow without outside interference; don't instruct him; don't force anything on him.

If A. S. Neill had been the only proponent of this destructive viewpoint, it would not have been worthy of our concern. To the contrary, he represents an entire area, dominated by the neo-Freudians who reigned during the 1950's and early 1960's. The painful impact of those years will not soon fade. Most of the values held tightly by the “now” generation were implanted during the period I have described. Please note how many of the following elements of the new morality can be traced to the permissive viewpoint represented by Neill: God is dead; immorality is wonderful; nudity is noble; irresponsibility is groovy; disrespect and irreverence are fashionable; unpopular laws are to be disobeyed; violence is an acceptable vehicle for bringing change (as were childhood tantrums); authority is evil; everyone over thirty is stupid; pleasure is paramount; diligence is distasteful. These beliefs have been the direct contribution of the anti-disciplinarians who delicately fused an enormous time bomb in the generation they controlled. The relationship between permissive philosophies and adolescent militancy is too striking to be coincidental. Passive young people did not suddenly become violent. Self-centered petulance did not erupt spontaneously in America's young adults; it was cultivated and nurtured through the excesses and indulgences of the tender years. Selfishness, greed, impatience, and irresponsibility were allowed to flower and bloom in the name of childhood “freedom.” This great misguided movement was perhaps the most unsuccessful social experiment in history, and yet its influence is still far from dead in our schools and homes.

This has had a devastating effect on the American family and education for such evil roots as these are bound to bear evil fruit. It produced the chaos of the sixties, the rebellious youth, the hippie, and the unbelievable immorality.

Scripture is perfectly clear on the necessity of discipline. First, God *commands* it. God says: correct the child, bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; God says: spare not the rod. For that reason parents must discipline their children. They may not allow them to “follow their own heads.” They must correct them when they transgress

God's law. And, parents must lead their children in the way of obedience to the will of God. Second, the necessity lies in the child. The child has foolishness bound in his heart. By nature he is totally depraved. According to the flesh the child cannot do the good and is inclined to all evil. He has but a small beginning of the new obedience in Christ. In the child, therefore, there remains sin. In fact, there are sins peculiar to children. David prayed: "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions" (Ps. 25:7). The apostle Paul warned Timothy to "Flee youthful lusts" (II Tim. 2:22). The Christian parent must recognize these facts. The child is depraved and has but a small beginning of the life of Christ. For these reasons he needs discipline strictly and consistently applied. The covenant child does not need to be evangelized. He is a child of God. But, he must be disciplined in the Lord's service, nurtured and admonished in the fear of God. He needs to learn how to serve his king and walk in the way of His ordinances.

The authority to discipline is God's. God gives to the covenant parent the right to discipline his child. God gives the child as part of His heritage. God assigns the parent the awesome task and responsibility of training the child in His fear. Thus the parent is accountable to God for the discipline of his child.

That discipline must be motivated by the love of God for the child. Always the Christian parent in God's love seeks the eternal welfare of his child, his salvation from sin and death. Failure to discipline in love can only be to the child's detriment. In love the parent desires to see his child live in obedience to God's will, walk in righteousness and all holiness.

In all his preaching and teaching, his private counselling and care of his congregation, the faithful pastor or elder of the church of Christ will strive to lead God's people along these straight lines of God's Truth. The fruit will be solid, strong, faithful covenant homes. In this way the church will grow in the knowledge and love of God. In this way will the name of God be praised by covenant fathers and mothers and their sons and daughters.

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# A Reformed Liturgy

Steven R. Key

## Introduction

This paper was prepared for Professor Robert D. Decker as an assignment in Liturgics. The assignment was to prepare a paper setting forth a preferred order of worship with historical and scriptural support. The following is the fruit of that study. We would ask the reader to bear in mind the following as he reads this paper: In the first place, this paper arises out of the context of Dutch Reformed liturgy as that developed out of the Calvinistic Reformation. Hence, we do not enter the question concerning the differences of liturgical tradition, as Reformed liturgy developed in Presbyterianism, e.g., but simply take as our starting point the elements of worship that are currently in use in our Protestant Reformed Churches. In the second place, the order given in this paper is not intended to be a hard, dogmatic position. Scripture does not legalistically prescribe our worship in such detail that there is no room for differences of opinion. Within the bounds of scriptural principles of worship there is and must be freedom. But the order of worship must be determined intelligently and within the framework of Holy Scripture. The following, then, is a preferred order of worship on the basis of the scriptural and historical grounds given.



... of all the Calvinistic Churches represented in these United States, the Reformed Dutch denomination alone has faithfully retained her ancient forms of worship.<sup>1</sup>

With this statement Charles W. Baird, in *The Presbyterian Liturgies*, opens the chapter entitled "Liturgy of the Reformed Dutch Church." This book was written in 1856, and what was true then is no longer true

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1. Charles W. Baird, *The Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 207.

some 130 years later. The predominant term with respect to liturgy in the Dutch Reformed church world today is "innovation." The order of worship, which was once consistent throughout Reformed churches, is now varied widely, not only from church to church, but, in some cases, from week to week. And in many cases even the beautiful, time-tested Reformed liturgical forms have been changed beyond recognition or rejected entirely. As John H. Piersma wrote in a recent article in *The Outlook*, in congregations of the Reformed Church in America and of the Christian Reformed Church, "one can find most anything, from the simplest to the most complex, from the most traditional to an almost reckless innovationism. It seems as if there is little consensus as to what Reformed worship is, and what the principles are that govern it."<sup>2</sup>

We would emphasize that although there seems to be a great deal of care about worship and liturgy, there seems to be very little care about *Reformed* worship or *Reformed* liturgy. The evidence for this statement can be seen in many Reformed churches today where innovations abound, often, it seems, in direct correlation with a decline in the emphasis of preaching. And although our Protestant Reformed churches have not seen such a drastic departure from traditional liturgical practices, also in our congregations some changes have occurred in recent years and continue to occur. It is true that change is not always bad. There is truth to the statement, "Reformed, always reforming"; but let us never forget the fact that we are "Reformed." That word "Reformed" carries with it a certain "freight," also with respect to worship. The one distinctive truth that stands out among those of us who are Reformed is this: "God is God." Thus, a Reformed theology of worship can be stated very briefly: The liturgy must express the adoration and reverence of the church for God. To alter the words of C. S. Lewis just a little, 'tis mad idolatry that makes the service greater than God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Those words, as recorded by the apostle John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, apply also to us today. We would notice two truths in connection with that verse. First of all, because worship is a *spiritual* activity, the liturgy itself can only serve to contribute to, or detract from, a proper spiritual attitude in worship. Liturgical change does not and cannot itself cause a worship which is in spirit and in truth. In

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2. John H. Piersma, "Comment and Opinion," *The Outlook*, December, 1985, p. 14.

fact, much of the liturgical change we see today in the Reformed church world is abominable in the sight of God because it is change brought about on the basis of untruth and heresy. In the second place, this text in John 4:24 points us to the truth that our worship must be determined by the nature of God Himself, Whose majesty transcends the heavens and the earth. Our worship may never be merely external. When we come to the house of God, *God* is there. We bow before Him.

John Calvin, who played a major role in the development of Reformed liturgy, understood this truth and insisted, therefore, that the worship of the church had to be ordered by the Word of God. "God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word."<sup>3</sup> For Calvin every element in the liturgy had to pass this test. By the words "expressly sanctioned" Calvin did not mean that only those elements specifically commanded by God were to be included in the liturgy. There is no explicit command, for example, to read the Ten Commandments or to pronounce the vatum, or to recite the Creed. But Calvin's point was this: Every element in the liturgy must be permitted and approved and supported by the Scriptures. The liturgy must be thoroughly scriptural. With this principle we agree. God's Word, after all, reveals the God Who must be worshipped. God's Word tells us our status as children of the covenant worshipping Jehovah. From God's Word we judge the content of the church's prayers, songs, and proclamations. And it is in this light that the structure of the entire liturgy must be built.

There is one other principle that must be taken into account when determining a Reformed order of worship. That principle is found in 1 Corinthians 14:40: "Let all things be done decently and in order." This principle also follows from the nature of God Himself. The Triune God is a God of beauty and order. The three Persons of the Holy Trinity live in perfect harmony. The unity and harmony of the Triune God must be reflected in the worship of His church. With respect to the liturgy, there must be unity in the various elements and orderly progress in the service from one element to the next.

With these principles in mind, we present the following as our preferable order of worship.

1. Introductory Service
  1. Vatum
  2. Salutatory Benediction

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3. John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), p. 128.

3. Psalm
4. Law (including Summary)
5. Psalm Response
6. Scripture Reading (Old Testament or New Testament – opposite that of sermon text)
7. Congregational Prayer
8. Psalm
- II. Service of the Word
  9. (Baptism)
  10. Scripture Reading (or reading of Heidelberg Catechism with related texts)
  11. Sermon
  12. Prayer
  13. (Lord's Supper)
- III. Service of Gratitude
  14. Psalm
  15. Apostles' Creed
  16. Offering
  17. Doxology
  18. Closing Benediction

Before we treat the various elements of our preferred liturgy, we should make a few comments about those actions which do not belong to the service itself.

In the first place, the organ prelude, which precedes the beginning of the service, must serve to instill a worshipful mood in those present. The organist, therefore, should make it his or her conscious aim to select music appropriate for this purpose.

In the second place, there is the element of silent prayer before the service. Currently in our churches, several congregations begin the service with an announced silent prayer. Apart from any practical benefits derived from such a practice, it unavoidably makes this prayer a part of the worship service. It is true that God's people must seek His face in order to approach Him with the proper attitude in worship. But historically this prayer has not been included in the order of worship. If we are going to have an announced silent prayer, we could include it as part of the order of worship immediately following the vatum and before the salutatory benediction. Nevertheless, there is an important objection to consider before including this element in the liturgy. A congregation in silent prayer is a group of individuals in private devotion. Congregational worship, however, is a communal act. For that reason, we would maintain that individual silent prayer ought not have a formal place in the liturgy. In

our estimation there is one solution that would be acceptable: As soon as the council enters the sanctuary and takes their places, the organist should conclude the prelude and allow adequate time, unannounced, for office bearers and congregation to pray. This would solve the problem of entering church and trying to pray silently when the climax of the prelude is being reached with a full organ. This also would avoid making silent prayer a liturgical act.

We now proceed to treat briefly each element in our proposed order of worship. For a more detailed study of the individual elements of worship, we refer the reader to a series of articles written by Prof. Herman Hanko in *The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 59-62, under the title "Our Order of Worship."

## I. Introductory Service

### 1. The Votum

In some churches the service is begun with the salutation, "Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ." Historically this element was not included in Reformed liturgies. In 1574 the Synod of Dordrecht specified opening the service with the votum and closing it with the Aaronitic benediction.<sup>4</sup>

It is proper that the worship service begin with the votum taken from Psalm 124:8: "Our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made heaven and earth." It must be understood that the reason God's people are together for worship is because *God* called them together, not only objectively (Heb. 10:25), but also subjectively by His Holy Spirit. Hence, in the votum the congregation confesses her absolute dependence upon Jehovah, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, and acknowledges that apart from His blessing their worship is in vain.

### 2. Salutatory Benediction

This very important element following the votum is the Lord's word of welcome and blessing, His covenant embrace of His reconciled people. The church throughout history has used the formula of the apostolic greeting, especially as found in two passages:

I Corinthians 1:3: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:4, 5a: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful

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4. A. James Heynen, "Switching Without Fighting," *The Banner*, May 31, 1982, p. 15.

witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

To this benediction is usually added the phrase "through the Holy Spirit." This addition is superfluous when the apostolic greetings are understood correctly. "God our Father" refers not to the first Person of the Holy Trinity, but to the Triune God. This is evident from the fact that the possessive pronoun "our" is used instead of the definite article "the" before "Father." This means that we have fellowship with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, only in the face of our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

The address that is sometimes used to open the service, namely, "Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ," belongs with the benediction. It must be clearly understood that those to whom God addresses His blessing are His beloved, and they alone. This address would also serve to emphasize the truth that worship is the *covenant* fellowship of God with His people in Christ.

This is the formula found in Romans 1:7: "Beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

### 3. Psalm

As is evident from our order of worship, music plays an important part in the worship of God. Music has always played an important part in worship. In the Old Testament, David instituted the liturgical use of the singing of Psalms (I Chron. 16:4ff.), and there were detailed instructions given concerning the use of music in the Temple (II Chron. 29:25-30). In the New Testament, such passages as Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16, although not referring exclusively to divine worship services, show nevertheless that the principle remains. It is our position that with the three terms translated "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," the apostle refers to the headings given by the Septuagint to the Old Testament Book of Psalms. When Paul wrote "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," he would expect his readers to think of what were, in the terms of Scripture itself, "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," namely, the Old Testament Book of Psalms.

Because of the importance of music in divine worship, great care ought to be taken when selecting *Psalter* numbers. All music must serve the worship of the Almighty Jehovah and the edification of His church. One ought to be at pains, therefore, to avoid tunes which are unsingable for all except those with trained voices. Because worship is a communal act, worship is impoverished to the extent it is taken away from the

individual saints. Furthermore, in *The Psalter* currently in use in our Protestant Reformed Churches, there are selections, the tunes of which are inextricably connected with popular Arminian hymns. There are also some very poor versifications of the Psalms. All these should be avoided. In addition, in order to preserve the unity and progressive development of the worship service, the Psalms selected ought also to fit their particular place in the order of worship.

In response to the salutatory benediction of God through the mouth of His servant, the proper response is a song of praise. A Psalm should be selected which gives expression to the joy of meeting the Lord in His sanctuary. Psalms 24, 48, 65, 84, 95, 100, and others are especially appropriate.

It will be noticed that we omit the opening doxology that is usually sung in our worship services. We do so for two reasons: In the first place, it is improper to begin the liturgy with a doxology. For the reasons stated above, the votum properly begins the service. In the second place, to sing a doxology *and* a Psalm immediately after the benediction is an unnecessary redundancy. It might also be added that the doxology which we sing, "Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow. . .," for all its beauty, is not a Psalm and is inconsistent with our insistence on exclusive psalmody.

#### 4. The Reading of the Law

Of all the elements of the liturgy, this one is probably the most difficult to place. Some, including Calvin, include confession of sin and absolution at this point in the liturgy, followed by the reading of the Law, as a rule of gratitude.

Without going into detail concerning the place of confession and absolution in the liturgy, we are not in favor of giving them a separate place. In the first place, confession and the petition for forgiveness are given an important place in the model prayer by Christ Himself. It should, therefore, remain an important part of the congregational prayer, and not be given a separate place in the liturgy. There is no little danger in adding such elements separately to the order of worship, that they become a matter of lip-service and formality. In the second place, absolution is unnecessary and redundant in a Reformed worship service. In the absolution, the minister in the name of God solemnly assures those who sincerely repent of their sins that they have pardon in the blood of Christ. This is redundancy, we say, because this element is a requirement of the preaching of the Word. We call attention to our Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 84: "How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel? Thus: when according to the

command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, *whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven of God, for the sake of Christ's merits.*" Absolution is an essential part of sound preaching!

That leaves us with the question as to the place of the Decalogue in the liturgy. The reading of the Law has become a distinctively Reformed liturgical tradition. What was really fixed in the liturgy by Calvin was carried on only in the Dutch Reformed tradition. Is its place justified? Indeed it is. In the first place, it testifies to the truth of the *unity of the covenant*. A church that has no respect for the unity of the covenant of grace would be hard pressed to justify the inclusion of the Law of Moses in the liturgy. Hence, its place in the liturgy is distinctively Reformed. In the second place, the Law should be included early in the liturgy that it might serve its purpose as a mirror for our misery. We have but a small beginning of the new obedience. Only in this light do we see God in all His sovereignty as the God of our salvation. And in this light, too, we approach the living God in godly fear and true humility.

It is true that the Law also serves as the rule for our life of gratitude. But in the liturgy that is not the primary place of the reading of the Law. Once again, the aspect of the Law as the rule of the Christian's life finds its emphasis in the preaching, as is evident also in its treatment in the Heidelberg Catechism.

To emphasize the absolute sovereignty of God in our salvation, and that against the darkness of our own sin and helplessness, the minister ought to read the Law expressively, emphasizing especially the introduction to the Law. It is not out of place for the minister to say a few words in that connection, reminding the congregation that the Law comes to them in the context of the introduction, "I am the Lord *thy* God, which have brought *thee* out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." That, after all, is the gospel of our salvation!

It is also good, in our opinion, to give variety to this element of the liturgy by sometimes reading the Law out of Deuteronomy 5. Also, the summary of the Law ought to be read as given by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40.

#### 5. Psalm Response

This *Psalter* number ought to be a response to the reading of the Law, either a penitential Psalm or a Psalm expressive of the life of gratitude. The determination of the type of Psalm selected should be made in connection with the sermon content.

#### 6. Scripture Reading

One element that should be added to our liturgy is the reading of

Scripture before the congregational prayer. It is true that in some of our churches this is currently done, but because there is only one Scripture reading, this element is then separated from the sermon. As we shall show in our treatment of the tenth element, the reading of Holy Scripture properly belongs immediately preceding the sermon.

There are good grounds for adding this element. In the first place, the reading of God's Word deserves a prominent place in the liturgy. In the synagogue the Law *and* the prophets were read. The New Testament Church added the reading of the apostles' letters (Col. 4:16). There can be no question but that the reading of God's Holy Word played a much more prominent part in the church of the past than it does today. In the second place, we include this addition at this place in the liturgy because the hearing of God's Word very naturally leads into and sets the mood for the congregational prayer.

As to the selection of Scripture, we suggest that the reading be from the Old Testament if the sermon text is from the New, and vice versa. The Scripture selection should be in the service of the sermon text. There is also a pedagogical purpose for reading from both Testaments, and that is that the unity of God's Word is maintained, as well as the knowledge of both Testaments.

#### 7. Congregational Prayer

Prayer is to play an integral role in the worship service. This is in accordance with the Word of God, "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7; Matt. 21:13). The essential elements of this prayer are established in the model prayer given by our Lord, as expounded in our Heidelberg Catechism. We must avoid vain repetition and prayers that are so lengthy as to tempt the people of God to sleep. We dare say that the average adult is not mentally equipped to concentrate for more than ten minutes during a congregational prayer. Van Oosterzee writes:

The longest prayers preserved in holy Scripture, supposing them to have been verbally so uttered, could hardly have lasted more than ten minutes, and must in that respect at least be followed as models. Though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak, and the precept of Matt. 6:7 is seldom overlooked save to our own loss and that of others.<sup>5</sup>

We wholeheartedly agree. Although the minister or elder who leads in congregational prayer cannot set an alarm clock, he ought to be conscious of the weakness of the congregation.

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5. J.J. Van Oosterzee, *Practical Theology: A Manual for Theological Students* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), p. 407.

There must also be variety in the congregational prayer. This can be attained when the minister spends time in preparation for this element of worship, and when he relates the prayer to his sermon content and various portions of Scripture upon which he has meditated.

#### 8. Psalm

This *Psalter* number should lead into the sermon and be connected with the content of the sermon. Once again, the one selecting this *Psalter* number must be cognizant of the place of this element in the unity of the worship service, and should select a Psalm accordingly.

### II. Service of the Word

#### 9. Baptism

The sacraments belong with that portion of the service that we have designated the "Service of the Word." That is in accordance with the definition of the sacraments given us in Lord's Day 25, Question and Answer 66:

Q. What are the sacraments?

A. The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, he may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel, viz., that he grants us freely the remission of sin, and life eternal, for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross.

From a practical point of view, baptism is better administered before the sermon, so that a squalling baby can be taken out of the sanctuary and attended to, rather than interrupting the preaching of the Word. After all, the sacrament is to support the preaching, not to be the means of distraction from it.

#### 10. Scripture Reading

The linking of the Scripture lesson with the sermon is desirable both from an ideal and a practical point of view. A true sermon is an exposition of a portion or portions of God's Word. Since it usually contains frequent references to the chapter which was read, the practical advantage of preaching while the Scripture lesson is still fresh in the mind of the hearers is evident.

But there is also historical precedent in having Scripture reading immediately preceding the sermon. In the Reformed churches of Calvin's day,

The preached Word was so closely identified with Scripture that in the service of the Reformed churches the Scripture reading and sermon are ordinarily referred to in one comprehensive rubric, "the Word." It was one liturgical act to read the Scripture and to preach it. The sermon followed immediately on the reading, and was not separated from it

(as in many modern services) by anthems, prayers, and other elements.<sup>6</sup>

If Scripture reading is also done earlier in the service, this element could be filled by the reading of the Heidelberg Catechism, with related texts, in connection with Catechism preaching.

#### 11. Sermon

Our brief treatment of this element is not in any sense to be construed as indicative of the importance we give to this element. We do not hesitate to say that *this is the most important element* of all Reformed liturgy. Liturgics has no importance whatsoever, absolutely none, apart from the pure preaching of the Word. The preaching of the truth is essential to the worship of the church, and is the core of the Christian liturgy. As the Reformed confessions teach, preaching is the chief means of grace. The apostle Paul writes to Timothy in II Timothy 4:1, 2a: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearance and his kingdom; preach the word." Through the preaching it pleases God, through the exalted Christ, the Chief Prophet, Who alone gathers His church, to speak to His people unto salvation. Without the lively, unadulterated preaching of the Word, without God's speech to His people, worship will become lifeless. Men can devise all kinds of liturgies and liturgical innovations, but apart from the pure preaching of the Word, all liturgy is abomination in the sight of the God Who will not be mocked. Although there may be liturgical freedom with respect to the importance and use of other elements of Reformed liturgy, there may be no compromise whatsoever with this element. Corruption or de-emphasis of the preaching of the Word is the death of all Christian worship!

#### 12. Prayer

This is an applicatory prayer of thanksgiving and should be very brief and to the point of the sermon.

#### 13. Lord's Supper

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper also belongs to that section of the liturgy which we have called the "Service of the Word," for the same reason that the sacrament of baptism belongs (cf. Lord's Day 25, Question and Answer 66). There can be no question but that the Lord's Supper belongs to the corporate worship of the church. That is evident from the institution of the Lord's Supper as given through the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11:23-30.

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6. James Hastings Nicols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 30.

Much could be written concerning the *proper* use of this sacrament in the worship service. Suffice it to say that we think this is worthy of serious study. There are various evidences in our circles that this sacrament has been unduly elevated. For example: Why is church attendance in some of our churches better on Communion Sunday than on other Lord's Days? Is it necessary for this element in the liturgy to take so much more time proportionately than the other elements? Why do we dedicate (subordinate?) three sermons — preparatory, communion, and applicatory — to this sacrament? Why is the sermon in the Communion service only one-half to two-thirds the length of that in the regular service?

In 1920 a Christian Reformed synodical study committee reported that "the most prominent element in a communion service should not be the Word but the Sacrament."<sup>7</sup> We would point out that this statement as it appears is certainly erroneous. But have we fallen into that error? That the sacrament serves the Word and not vice versa is, in the Reformed tradition, a confessional matter. The preaching of the Word is always the chief means of grace. According to our Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 65, the Holy Ghost *works* faith by the preaching of the gospel, and *confirms* it by the use of the sacraments.

Further, in most of our churches this sacrament is administered only four times a year. Has this infrequent administration of the sacrament contributed to the elevated place it is given? Ought this sacrament be administered more frequently? If so, how often?

Without endorsing his position, we would point out that John Calvin believed that the Supper should be administered "at least once a week."<sup>8</sup> He writes:

... it was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrance to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness; finally, by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ's body.<sup>9</sup>

Calvin's understanding in this matter was grounded in Scripture:

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7. Christian Reformed Church, *Acta der Synode, 1920, van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (Grand Rapids, 1929), p. 201.

8. John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Book IV, Chapter 17, 43, p. 1421.

9. *Ibid.*, Book IV, Chapter 17, 44, p. 1422.

Luke relates in The Acts that this was the practice of the apostolic church, when he says that believers "continued in the apostles' teaching fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" [Acts 2:42, cf. Vg.]. Thus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. That this was the established order among the Corinthians also, we can safely infer from Paul [cf. I Cor. 11:20]. And it remained in use for many centuries after.<sup>10</sup>

These quotations from Calvin only serve to demonstrate that all these questions, as well as others connected with this very important element of worship, are certainly worthy of consideration both from a historical and from a scriptural point of view.

### III. Service of Gratitude

#### 14. Psalm

This closing *Psalter* number ought to be an appropriate and joyful response of thanksgiving to the Word of God heard in the preaching.

#### 15. The Apostles' Creed

Although the use of creeds in worship is not expressly commanded by Scripture, there are scriptural grounds for including a confession of this sort in the liturgy of the church. According to Romans 10:10, the faith which unites the church must come to verbal expression: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The New Testament church apparently included such an element in the worship, an example of which is found in I Timothy 3:16, and possibly in II Timothy 2:11-13.

There have been differences as to the place of this element in the order of worship. Some, including Luther, placed it before the sermon. Calvin put it after the sermon. Likewise, the Synod of Dordt (1574) placed it at the conclusion of the sermon and as part of the prayer. The Creed, therefore, is conceived of as the "Amen" of the congregation to the Word of God heard in the preaching of the gospel.

In addition, on the basis of the truth of God's Word the congregation, by its confession of the Creed, expresses her unity with the church of all ages. In spite of all the devil's attempts to destroy that truth, it still stands unshakable. God through the preaching of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit preserves His holy, catholic Church.

#### 16. Offering

Various passages speak of giving as part of the worship service

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10. *Ibid.*

(Rom. 15:26; II Cor. 8:9; I Cor. 16:1-3). Furthermore, our Heidelberg Catechism, in its treatment of the Fourth Commandment, enumerates the giving of alms as one of the basic elements of worship (along with the hearing of the Word, the use of the sacraments, and prayer). True offering is a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the gifts God has entrusted to us, and therefore belongs as part of the service of thanksgiving. It is proper to introduce the offering, either by referring to it as an act of worship or by quoting a Scripture text such as II Corinthians 9:7 which indicates the importance and blessedness of giving.

In some Reformed churches, an offertory prayer is included with this element, either before or after the offering is received by the deacons. The Scriptures are silent on this point. Discretion, therefore, must be used by consistories in this matter. We find no objection to the inclusion of a prayer with this element and, in fact, find it quite appropriate. However, there is a danger for the one who must lead the congregation in this prayer so specifically tied to one element of the service, and that danger is that he fall into the sin of mere repetition. That must be avoided.

#### 17. Doxology

A doxology of praise is proper in the worship service as the last act of thanksgiving on the part of God's people. Psalm 72, especially to the majestic tune "Coronation," is very appropriate. Psalm 150 could also be used.

#### 18. Closing Benediction

It is appropriate that God speak the final word in the worship service. The only way for His people to continue their pilgrimage in the earth is the way of the blessing of Jehovah resting upon them. Although the Synod of Dordt (1574) prescribed the Aaronitic benediction found in Numbers 6:24-26, the apostolic benediction in II Corinthians 13:14 also enjoys the sanction of historical usage. We would recommend the use of the apostolic benediction in the first and the Aaronitic in the second service. Reverence for God's inspired Word requires that the minister shall not add words or phrases of his own, nor in any way seek to improve upon these inspired benedictions.

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# The Necessity and the Advantages and Benefits of Pastoral Care

Charles J. Terpstra

The following paper was originally written by the undersigned for the final semester examination in the Seminary course known as Poimenics, taught by Prof. R. D. Decker. The students were required to write on some aspect of pastoral care using their knowledge of the principles of Poimenics learned during the semester's studies. The following is the fruit of this student's fulfillment of the exam requirement, as well as the fruit of his own personal interests.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

In our modern ecclesiastical age we have seen the tremendous growth of the pastoral care aspect of the office of the pastor-teacher. The great out-pouring of books on this subject attests to this growth. In the light of

the present evil age in which the sheep of God's flock are called to live this growth is not hard to understand. In this day of abounding immorality and false teaching the people of God are requiring more and more spiritual help in the form of personal, private care from their pastors. This emphasis on the pastor's personal and individual care of God's sheep has had both positive and negative fruits. Probably the chief positive fruit has been an increase in the awareness on the part of pastors that the people of their congregations need this special care and need it urgently. On the other hand, perhaps the chief negative fruit has been the specialization of this aspect of the pastor's work, so that often the pastor feels himself unqualified for this work and even pushed aside by pastoral care "experts" and specialized counselors.

In any case, there has been and is presently a negative reaction to this growth and the emphasis placed on this particular aspect of the ministerial office. Some would argue that the stress put upon the pastor's personal, individual care of the flock leads to an imbalance in the total picture of the minister's labors, resulting in a general de-emphasis on the preaching task of the pastor. Now it is not my purpose to argue this point, because I believe it is a justifiable criticism. However, it is my conviction that often there is an over-reaction to this, so that this important and necessary aspect of the work of the under-shepherds of Jesus Christ among His sheep is even down graded and relegated to the last and least of the minister's duties. The danger it seems to me is that one criticizes so sharply the pastor's involvement in pastoral care that at least in some cases ministers are actually discouraged from caring for their sheep. Perhaps there are ministers who have experienced this at the hands of concerned elders who have detected a certain decline in their pastor's preaching. And so they approach the pastor with words such as these: "Your preaching has been suffering as of late. You must be too busy with your pastoral visitation and counseling. Hence, we advise you to lay off this work, spend more time in your study in sermon preparation, and get yourself back on top of things."

Now there may be an element of truth in these words. It may very well be that a given pastor especially in a large congregation *is* so busy, that he is kept from his study and the time necessary to prepare his sermons properly. But there is always a danger inherent in this reaction of the elders, and that is that the elders, whose calling it also is to care for the flock of Jesus Christ, often fail to pick up the slack after they have admonished their pastor. The ultimate result of this is the sinful *neglect* of the care of God's sheep. And so the faithful pastor, observing the fact that this care is neglected, either ignores the problem, or goes out to do it

but with a terrible feeling of guilt, actually feeling burdened by this work, and losing all sense of joy in and love for the work. In either case, something is drastically wrong and must be righted for the sake of the spiritual and eternal welfare of the flock of Christ.

It is not the purpose of this paper to attempt a solution to what is often a difficult and involved problem in connection with the above. Rather, it is my intent simply to support the absolute necessity of the pastor's involvement in pastoral care, and to point out some of the advantages and benefits that ensue from faithful, pastoral labors among the sheep of God's church. In achieving this purpose this writer will not be original, but will draw from some of the vast, extremely helpful resources written on these subjects by others far more qualified than himself.

### THE NECESSITY OF PASTORAL CARE

The necessity of pastoral care on the part of the minister of Christ has a threefold basis. The first basis for this necessity is *objective*, having to do with that which Jesus Christ Himself demands of His under-shepherds. The second and third aspects of this basis are *subjective*, having to do with that which is necessary for the *pastor* to do his work properly and effectively, and having to do with that which is necessary for the *congregation* to function properly and effectively as sheep in the midst of the world.

First of all, then, the objective basis for the necessity of pastoral care on the part of the pastor is that the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of the souls of His sheep demands this of those to whom He entrusts the care of these sheep. Christ calls men to labor in His kingdom not only as preachers, who are heralds and ambassadors in the bringing of His Word publicly, but also as *pastors*, who care for and feed His sheep, bringing His Word privately, personally, and individually.

This objective necessity is set forth throughout the Scriptures both in the Old and New Testaments. Already in the old dispensation God made known that the calling of those men who were appointed to the offices of prophet and priest was to be that of a shepherd (that is implied in the negative passages, too; cf. Jer. 23:1-4 and Ezek. 34). In the New Testament Christ Himself while on the earth gave this calling to His disciples, and therefore to all who labor officially in His church (cf., for example, Matt. 10 and John 21:15-17). And that calling to labor in the area of pastoral care was set forth further by the apostles in their epistles as they were under the inspiration of the Spirit of the Good Shepherd (cf., for example, Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-16; I Pet. 5:1-4; James 5:14, 15). Further, there is the example of Christ, Who in His earthly ministry demonstrated for us by His personal, individual care of His sheep what the

calling is of the pastors He has now placed over His sheep (cf., for example, Jn. 3, with Nicodemus; 4, with the Samaritan woman; 11, with Mary and Martha; Lu. 19, with Zacchaeus, etc.). And there is the example of the apostles and their co-laborers recorded for us to teach us concerning the pastoral duties to which all ministers of the gospel are called (cf., e.g., Acts 8:26-39; 10; 20:20, etc.).

From this Scriptural evidence, therefore, it is clear that the calling of the pastor to be involved in the pastoral care of the sheep of his flock is absolutely necessary and indispensable from an objective point of view. He who is called to the ministry of the Word is called to the ministry of individual, personal, private care among Christ's sheep. Hezekiah Harvey, a 19th century American Baptist preacher and seminary professor, put it this way: "Pastoral visitation, therefore, — this personal care of souls — is an essential part of the pastor's work; and no minister meets the responsibilities of the sacred office who neglects direct individual religious contact with his flock."<sup>1</sup>

In the second place, this necessity of pastoral labors has a dual *subjective* basis. The first subjective basis for this necessity is found in the fact that this poimenic labor is necessary from the viewpoint of the *minister*. He must needs be active in this work if he is to perform his other work properly and effectively. The point that must be made in this connection is that no minister can perform his chief public duties of preaching and teaching his sheep except he *knows* his sheep in their private lives, *understands* their wants and cares, and is *touched* with the feelings of their infirmities. And how is he to do that? The pastor must go to his sheep and have them come to him. He must talk to them and have them talk to him. He must experience firsthand their needs, their struggles and problems, their weaknesses and sins, their joys and sorrows, their victories and defeats. Only then will he be qualified and prepared to bring the Word of God to them in his public ministry in their midst.

John R. W. Stott makes precisely this point in his book, *The Preacher's Portrait*. In connection with the chapter on the preacher as a *father* to his congregation, Stott says this:

A father labours to understand his children as they grow up. He cares about them so deeply that he will do his utmost to enter into their hopes and fears, their weaknesses and their difficulties. So too a preacher, if he loves his people with a father's love, will take time and

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1. Hezekiah Harvey, *The Pastor: His Qualifications and Duties*. (Rochester: Backus, 1982), p. 80.

trouble to discover what their problems are. The minister usually leads a sheltered life. . . . As likely as not, the congregation are aware of this, and are quite convinced that their minister does not understand their difficulties. . . . It really is of the greatest importance that we think ourselves into the situation in which our people find themselves; that we identify ourselves with them in their sorrows, responsibilities and perplexities; and that we do not live, or appear to live, in a remote ivory tower.<sup>2</sup>

To this Stott adds: "Such estrangement between preacher and congregation is most harmful both to the proclamation and to the reception of the message. Speaker and hearers are not on the same wavelength."<sup>3</sup> And what does Stott propose to avoid this estrangement? Listen to what he has to say:

There is no quicker way of bridging the gulf between preacher and people than meeting them in their homes and in our home. The effective preacher is always a diligent pastor. Only if he makes time each week both for visiting people and for interviewing them, will he be *en rapport* with them as he preaches. The more they speak to him in his study on weekdays, the better he will speak to them from the pulpit on Sundays.<sup>4</sup>

Charles Bridges, a 19th century English divine, also has some pertinent thoughts on this need of the minister to be involved in pastoral work. In his book *The Christian Ministry* he begins his treatment of the subject of the pastoral work of the Christian ministry with these words: "Let us not think, that all our work is done in the study and in the pulpit. Preaching—the grand lever of the Ministry — derives much of its power from connexion with the Pastoral work; and its too frequent disjunction from it is a main cause of our inefficiency."<sup>5</sup> A little further on in connection with the nature and importance of this work Bridges writes:

The husbandman does not rest, when he has committed his seed to the earth. He watches its growth with constant anxiety, and toils incessantly for its preservation from impending dangers, until he has safely gathered his fruit. And are not our people the field of God? Are we not the husbandmen, to sow the imperishable seed, and instrumentally

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2. John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 88.

3. Stott, p. 88.

4. Stott, pp. 88-89.

5. Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry, With An Inquiry Into the Causes of Its Inefficiency*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 343.

to gather the harvest? And are our fields more secure from injury, or in less need of constant and anxious superintendence? Every other view of our work illustrates the same point. As physicians, how can we prepare the proper medicines, without a knowledge of the individual disease? As stewards, how can we make our distribution, if unacquainted with the respective objects of our attention? As nursing-mothers, how ineffective our care and tenderness, if it be not regulated according to the known strength or weakness of our people!<sup>6</sup>

These statements of Stott and Bridges serve to reinforce the point that we have made, namely, that it is subjectively necessary for the minister to be involved in pastoral care. It is vital that the pastor take the time to deal privately with his sheep, not only in obedience to the command of the Chief Shepherd, but also for the spiritual well-being and effectiveness of his public labors in his congregation.

The second subjective basis for the necessity of poimenic labor on the part of the pastor is found in the fact that this work is absolutely necessary from the viewpoint of the *sheep of the flock*. A consideration of who and what they are as the people of God makes pastoral care inherently necessary. These people of God demand attention, not only because from an objective viewpoint their care is placed in the hands of the undershepherds of Christ. But they also demand attention because of their very nature as *sheep*. Sheep in the very nature of the case demand careful attention and care. They require private oversight and nurturing.

A brief, simple consideration of the nature of sheep will make this need of private care stand out clearly. First of all, sheep are weak and helpless, and therefore also defenseless. Such are the people of God. They are not only susceptible to physical sickness and disease, but also prone to every form of mental, emotional, and spiritual weakness. Further, they are open to attack from the "wolves" of temptation and false teaching. Surrounded by such "wolves" they are utterly helpless, and defenseless against them. They are easily and quickly overcome and devoured by them. Without the aid and care of a watchful and protecting shepherd, therefore, these sheep of God would be lost, and that not merely temporarily, but eternally. In the second place, sheep are prone to wander and go astray, and that alone, with no sense of danger. So also are God's people. Because of their depraved human natures and its corrupt inclinations they are prone to stray off the path of truth and righteousness and wander from the field of God's Word, where alone they have nourishment and

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6. Bridges, p. 345.

defense. Therefore, also with respect to this the sheep of God require urgent, frequent, and diligent care. Hence arises the necessity of the under-shepherds of God's sheep to seek out and provide for these wants.

This subjective necessity arising from the basic needs of God's people as sheep is all the more outstanding in our present age. The sheep of Jesus' flock live in an increasingly evil day. The need for their personal, private care by the pastor is all the more urgent against the background of our society. Their normal wants and cares are often multiplied and compounded by the complexities of our wicked world with its constant pressures and temptations. The Christian father, mother, teenager, and young child; the Christian businessman and shop worker; the Christian teacher and student require more attention and care than ever before. Must not pastors, then, give themselves wholeheartedly to their pastoral labors in the face of these considerations?

### THE ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF PASTORAL CARE

Having established the necessity of pastoral care on the part of the minister, it is now my intent to set forth some of the advantages and benefits that follow upon faithful poimenic labors among God's people. It is in connection with this subject that I am especially indebted to the insights and thoughts of Hezekiah Harvey (*The Pastor*) and Charles Bridges (*The Christian Ministry*). Hence, I will quote extensively from them on this subject. The treatment of this subject will be divided into two parts. First, I will describe those benefits that accrue to the pastor himself. And, second, I will describe those that accrue to the pastor's flock. It should also be kept in mind that these advantages here described are not intended to be exhaustive. I have simply included those that appeared most prominent to me from my reading. I am sure experienced pastors will readily identify with those given, as well as be able to add to the list.

First of all, then, in connection with the advantages and benefits for the minister who involves himself diligently and faithfully in pastoral care, there is this benefit that the pastor's own personal, spiritual growth is aided. He who is involved with the care of his flock on a personal, private basis finds that his own spiritual life grows stronger and richer through contacts and visits. In relation to this benefit Harvey had some excellent thoughts. He writes:

In a minister's life the danger is that he may degenerate into mere professionalism. He may come to study God's word and its great truths, not with personal application, but with respect only to the preparation of his sermons and their application to the people. He may lose a vivid consciousness of his personal relation to God, and read and think and

pray with reference only to others. Many a pastor actually advancing in general knowledge of the Bible and in professional power as to the composition and delivery and mental richness of his sermons is, after all, only retrograding in his inner personal life as a Christian.

But the direct contact with individual souls in pastoral visitation brings religion before him less as a theory, more as a living, personal reality. He deals here with religion in the concrete rather than the abstract. He is the witness of its actual power to comfort in sorrow, to strengthen in temptation, to guide in perplexity, to triumph in danger, and his own soul thus enters into a more full realization of it as a living fact. How often when seeking to guide another to Christ does he himself find new access to Him, or when administering consolation to a dejected, afflicted spirit do new courage and hope spring up in his own heart! It develops within him broader, purer sympathies and makes him a truer, nobler Christian.<sup>7</sup>

This then is one benefit that comes to the faithful pastor: His own personal walk with God becomes deeper and richer as he experiences first-hand the work of God's grace in the lives of those with whom he labors. And, as the pastor goes in and out among his flock he grows also in his dependence on the God of all grace for the enablement to fulfill his work among his flock, so that his own prayers for himself become more fervent and direct.

A second benefit that comes to the faithful pastor is that in this way he becomes better acquainted with his sheep. We have already touched on this in connection with the subjective necessity of poimenic labors. The point that must be made in this connection, however, is that pastoral visitation and care is of the utmost advantage to the pastor, because it enables him to know his flock as they really are, in their real lives and experiences. As he views them on the Lord's Day, they are often at their finest from an outward point of view. Their true identity and nature, and their personal needs and cares, are often masked and veneered. Their real problems and burdens, their struggles and battles, their weaknesses and needs are indiscernible when the pastor stands before them on a given Sunday. How advantageous then, when the pastor can go to them in their homes, in the hospital, at work, or wherever, to view them and get to know them as they really function and respond to life's situations. And this, too, has direct bearing on the pastor's effectiveness in the pulpit. Concerning this Harvey has some apt words:

The successful preacher must be a student of men, especially a student

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7. Harvey, pp. 86-87.

of his own congregation. Many a recluse pastor wastes the greater part of his force because his preaching lacks adaptation and practicalness. His sermon, it may be, is faultless in its rhetoric and logic and learning and orthodoxy, but it fails to move the people, because it does not come within the range of their experiences. It removes none of their perplexities; it touches none of their special sins; it discusses no questions vital in their life; it is not Ithuriel's spear, to touch and expose the masked tempter charming and deluding their ears. The preacher is not in sympathy with the actual life of the congregation, and the sermon, however abstractly true and beautiful, does not move and bless them. It is with the actual life the minister has to deal; and the study of it in all its manifold phases, as developed under the power of sin and grace, is essential to the highest power in the pulpit. An old divine used to say: "The preacher has three books to study – the Bible, himself, and the people."<sup>8</sup>

These thoughts on this inseparable relation between the minister's pastoral care and his preaching ought to weigh heavily on every pastor and pastor to be. There can be no doubt but that many a weakness in the pulpits of Reformed churches can be traced to a neglect of faithful poimenic work. Let us more seriously consider this benefit and advantage that ensues from regular poimenic work among God's sheep.

In the third place, faithful pastoral labors also have this benefit and advantage that they enrich and stimulate the pastor mentally, providing fresh insights and subjects for his preaching. On this Harvey states:

In the study of life and experience, as a pastor meets them in passing from house to house, he is ever gaining new insights into character. In these conversations new vistas of truth open before him, and from these visits he comes back to his study with new texts and subjects for sermons and new illustrations of experience and doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

In much the same vein Bridges adds these thoughts in connection with this third advantage of pastoral care:

By a judicious improvement of this intercourse, we may receive instruction from the meanest of our flock. Teachers must be constant learners; and much is here learned consciously or unconsciously. It is at once the seal to the testimony of the preceding, and the treasure-house, which furnishes the most valuable materials for the ensuing Sabbath. Perhaps there is no better way of filling up interesting subjects for the pulpit, than to draw them out in familiar contact with cases, to which they might be adapted. The sermons thus made in our

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8. Harvey, p. 87.

9. Harvey, pp. 87-88.

parishes differ from those that are thought out or collected in the study. If they are less abstract, they are more pointed and experimental. We mark the precise evil requiring caution, the deficiency calling for exhortation, the circumstances needing advice, the distress or perplexity looking for consolation and encouragement: and thus the Pastoral preaching gives a local and instructive application to our pulpit Ministry.<sup>10</sup>

Again it is apparent that the pastor's involvement in pastoral care is extremely advantageous for his public preaching and teaching. This benefit, too, ought to spur us on to a greater awareness of the importance of pastoral care and to a greater diligence in performing these duties among the sheep of Christ's flock.

A fourth benefit and advantage that befalls the faithful pastor is that his personal, spiritual relationship to his congregation is greatly aided. It is important to the sheep of God that their pastor does not appear to live in a "remote ivory tower," as Stott has said. The pastor who goes to God's people to meet them where they are, who takes an interest in their every need and circumstance, binds himself to the sheep spiritually even as a shepherd becomes attached to his sheep. And because he takes an interest in them, he gains their confidence and trust, and they in turn take a greater interest in him and his preaching. Harvey has some excellent comments on the benefits of this relationship effected through pastoral care:

These pastoral visits. . . alter the standpoint of the hearer in reference to the preacher. The man with whom you have wisely and tenderly conversed on vital, personal religion cannot turn a cold, critical ear toward you on the Lord's Day; nor does he. . . listen as a mere admirer of your pulpit performances. He has a deeper feeling. He turns to you, not merely his critical and intellectual, but his religious nature, and the words you speak, as the utterances of one sincerely seeking his eternal welfare, come to him with a religious power.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, this personal interest in and contacting God's people often makes up for what one may lack in making and delivering excellent sermons which grip the attention of one's congregation. So says Harvey:

This is, without doubt, the secret of many a successful pastorate, even where there has not been the aid of brilliant pulpit eloquence. The pastor has established personal religious relations with his hearers, and to them even his least elaborate sermons are clothed with sacred power.

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10. Bridges, p. 349.

11. Harvey, p. 88.

Brilliant sermonizing may secure popularity, but only this personal religious contact between pastor and people secures confidence; and a pastor's real power in producing spiritual, eternal results is dependent on the religious confidence of the people in him.<sup>12</sup>

This personal, spiritual growth of the pastor's bond with his flock might possibly be the most important benefit that accrues from faithful pastoral care. The gaining of his flock's trust and love is of supreme importance and consequence for the pastor and his effectiveness. Bridges also gives some nice thoughts on this:

A congregation thus used to seeing their Minister in private, is like a family listening to a father's instruction. When, after the example of our Great High Priest, we are "touched with the feeling of their infirmities," mutual sympathy is excited; their confidence is encouraged; they readily apply for more personal counsel and consolation; and they bring to us their cases, doubts, and perplexities, that we may make them our own.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, according to Harvey, the result of such intimate fellowship with one's congregation is that that bond between them is "cemented," so that pastor and flock desire to be with one another for years to come. This personal contact with his congregation results in the minister's desire to continue with his flock, and that desire is reciprocated in the church. Hence, the short, ineffective pastorate becomes the enduring, effective, and personally rewarding pastorate every minister desires. In this connection Harvey remarks:

... The relation of pastor and people, as God ordained it, is most sacred and enduring. Charged with the care of souls, he is to move among his flock as their spiritual guide and friend. The confessional, terrible as its power for evil is, was after all in its origin only a perversion of the pastoral institution, based on a real and universal need — the longing of troubled souls for guidance, help in getting back to God. This need the pastor must meet as the confidential counsellor and helper of the individual members of his flock; and if true to this sacred trust, his resources of power are ever increasing, and new bonds of sympathy hold him more firmly year by year in the hearts of his church.<sup>14</sup>

This concludes a treatment of those benefits that accrue to the pastor as he involves himself in regular pastoral care. We now would like to point out some of the benefits and advantages that accrue to the *congregation*,

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12. Harvey, p. 88.

13. Bridges, p. 353.

14. Harvey, pp. 89-90.

when their pastor labors faithfully in their midst, bringing the word of God to them privately.

The first and most obvious benefit that comes to the congregation through their pastor's private care of them is that their personal needs are met. Those private, individual, and spiritual needs they have and which require the personal care of their pastor are dealt with by means of the direct application of the Word of God. Those who otherwise could not be fed by that Word in the public proclamation of the Word are fed privately by the pastor as he comes to them in their homes, in the hospitals, and nursing homes, and wherever God's people in need are. Harvey addresses himself to this with these words:

In every community there are the aged, requiring the supports of religion in their declining life; the sick and sorrowing, craving the words of Christian consolation and hope; and the careless, needing the kindly invitation and warning. The pastor is God's commissioned messenger to such, and in these personal interviews he may adapt instruction, encouragement, comfort, and admonition to each.<sup>15</sup>

It is, of course, the ideal that the pastor be able to feed his entire flock and meet their personal needs in his *public* ministry from the pulpit on the Lord's Day. And while, in general, it is true that this is when sound counsel and pastoral care may be accomplished and the individual needs of God's people met, nevertheless, the knowledgeable pastor knows that this is precisely an ideal, and that reality demands that his congregation's needs be dealt with and met privately. And when the pastor acts in accordance with this reality, then his flock's needs are cared for and they are spiritually benefited.

A second benefit that befalls that congregation in which faithful poimenic labors are performed by its pastor is this, that she also grows spiritually in her own life and walk with God. We mentioned previously that this is a benefit that comes to the minister. But the same is true also for the congregation. As the flock becomes aware of and experiences personally the pastor's private care for her, as she witnesses him in her midst in his own private, spiritual life, she grows in her love for him and the Word he brings. And she grows in her confidence toward him, so that she receives him more openly and readily. And as she does that, she longs for more; she seeks more and more the means of grace, both in its public and private aspects, and consequently, she is more and more built up in her faith and walk with God. That congregation in which faithful pastoral

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15. Harvey, p. 88.

care is a reality is a stronger, more vibrant church, both in doctrine and in life. May God bless all his pastors, that they may be faithful shepherds of God's sheep, so that all of God's people may experience this benefit as a reality!

Finally, there is also this benefit for the flock, that they establish a lasting relationship with their pastor, one which keeps him in their midst for a longer period of time, and one which endures even when he moves on to labor as pastor in another church. In this way they do not have to go through quite so frequently that painful and often spiritually detrimental process of seeking and waiting for another pastor.

In connection with the benefits that come to the minister who carries out his pastoral labors faithfully, the "cementing" of the pastor-flock relationship was already mentioned. This "cementing" has obvious advantages also for the congregation. When this bond between pastor and flock grows and becomes stronger because of the diligent pastoral care by the pastor, then the flock desires to keep its minister, and the minister desires to stay longer. And when this desire becomes reality (in harmony with the will of God), and the pastor does stay and continue his work in their midst, then the flock's needs can continue to be met and they do not have to experience a period of vacancy, during which time their private needs and cares can often go unattended.

Hezekiah Harvey has some pertinent thoughts on this from a negative point of view as he comments on what takes place when a pastor does not faithfully perform his pastoral work. I quote:

Of late years pastorates have become of short duration. Hardly is a minister settled and fairly at work before the question of a change begins to be agitated. May not the decline of pastoral visitation, so faithfully done by many of our fathers in the ministry, be in part an explanation of this? The pastor's personal religious life is not brought into contact with his people; and as a result, their religious confidence is not won, and his ministry is not in sympathy with their needs. The only bond between them is the pulpit; and when the novelty of his voice and manner and modes of thought has passed away, they are tired of him and seek a change.<sup>16</sup>

Also these thoughts ought to weigh heavily upon pastors and upon those who prepare for and anticipate being pastors among God's sheep. If our true love is for those sheep, and if it is our sincere desire that their needs be met, then ought we not strive to become better pastors, seeking out and meeting their private wants and cares?

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16. Harvey, p. 89.

## CONCLUSION

The above emphasis on the importance of the pastoral work of the minister of Christ is not intended in any way to detract from and undermine the minister's duties in the study and in the pulpit. It is undeniably true that the minister is first of all and primarily a preacher. But the stress put on the poimenic labors of the minister in this paper has been placed here to point out that the pastor-teacher's work is not complete, unless there is both faithful preaching in public *and* faithful pastoral care in private. The two are inseparable.

We conclude with the following words of Charles Bridges on the person and work of the faithful minister:

The true portrait of a Christian Pastor, is that of a Parent walking among his children -- maintaining indeed the authority and reverence, but carefully securing along with it the love and confidence, that belongs to this endearing relation. He is always to be found in his own house, or met with among the folds of his flock -- encouraging, warning, directing, instructing -- as a counsellor, ready to advise -- as a friend to aid, sympathize, and console -- with the affection of a mother to lift up the weak -- "with the longsuffering" of a father to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort." Such a one. . . really lives in the hearts of his people, and will do more for their temporal and spiritual welfare, than men of the most splendid talents and commanding eloquence.<sup>17</sup>

May this description fit every pastor in the church of Christ to the spiritual benefit of both pastor and flock.      ■ ■ ■

# The History of the Free Offer of the Gospel (8)

Prof. H. Hanko

In our last article we examined the writings and teachings of some of the Reformed theologians from the Netherlands from the time of Dort to the end of the eighteenth century. We discovered that not only did these men not teach a well-meant offer, but that they often openly repudiated it and branded it

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17. Bridges, p. 360.

as Pelagian. We turn now to a discussion of Reformed thinkers from the beginning of the nineteenth century to today.

## LATER DUTCH THINKERS

If it is true, as we noticed in our last article, that Dutch theologians from the Synod of Dort to the end of the eighteenth century did not hold to the present-day idea of the offer, the question arises how this notion became such an accepted part of Reformed theology. There were several factors which must be considered.

One element in this change in Dutch thought is undoubtedly that in the period following Dort, the Dutch churches entered a time of doctrinal and spiritual decline. While in the 17th and first part of the 18th centuries, there were still many solidly Reformed theologians, the decline began almost at once and increased in severity as the decades rolled by. We cannot go into the reasons for this doctrinal decline in this article, nor is it necessary for our purposes; but the fact remains that with this doctrinal and spiritual decline, the great truths of Dort, which emphasized so strongly God's sovereign grace in the work of salvation, were forgotten and denied. This opened the door to many different kinds of heresies, also those which denied the sovereignty of grace. And the door was open also for the idea of the well-meant offer.

In the second place, and in close connection with this idea, were the ~~inroads of~~ Amyrauldianism. In an earlier article we spent some time describing this heresy which arose in France soon after the Synod of Dort and which affected the thinking of English and continental thought. Amyrauldianism taught a hypothetical universalism, denied the sovereignty of God in election and reprobation and taught an early form of the free offer. These ideas came also into the Netherlands. While it was more than obvious that such errors would find their way across the border of France into its Dutch neighbor, the rise of the influence of Amyrauldianism was hurried by the persecution of the Hugenots in France. During increasing pressure on the Hugenots, which came to a head with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, many fled France to find refuge in other countries. While most of the Hugenots themselves were staunchly Calvinistic, many who fled were not, and these carried with them into other lands various heresies among which was to be found the heresy of Amyrauldianism. Kromminga writes concerning this:

Before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes various heterodox opinions had made their appearance among the Reformed churches of France. At Saumur, professor Moses Amyrauld had taught a double decree of predestination, an anterior decree determining that Christ

should make atonement for sinners and that sinners should be called to salvation, and a further particular decree of the election of some and the preterition of others. In 1649 he was cleared by synodical judgment. Another Saumur professor, Claude Pajon, when minister at Orleans later, saw his name connected with reduced estimates of man's depravity and God's redeeming grace, and these views various French Synods condemned in 1677 as pelagianizing. A third Saumur professor, Josue de la Place, had taught mediate instead of immediate imputation of Adam's guilt, against which view both Rivet and Maresius had raised their voices, and which view the French Synod of Charenton had condemned in 1645. When the repression of the Reformed faith in France prompted the Netherlands to throw open its borders to the Huguenot refugees, the danger arose of the importation of these erroneous views. . . .

In the period of severe persecution which befell the Huguenot Church after the revocation of Nantes, the purity of teaching did not improve among the persecuted. . . .

These tendencies which were at work among the Huguenot refugees soon made their appearance also in the Netherlands and affected the course of scientific theology so that it began to lose its Reformed character. . . .<sup>1</sup>

As Kromminga points out, various Synods both in France and in the Lowlands warned against these errors. The Walloon Synod, e.g., warned, among other things, against the view that God's grace to sinners consists only in the preaching of the Gospel and not in the irresistible operation of the Spirit in the heart. That is, grace was not in the external call only, a grace which came then to all who hear, but was to be found in the internal operations of the Spirit, and in the external call only in connection with the internal work of Christ's Spirit. The former idea led to a conception that salvation was dependent upon the will of man.

Nevertheless, certain Dutch theologians, influenced by Amyrauldianism, began to teach these views. H. Venema and Vitringa, e.g., taught that there was a twofold decree of election, one general and conditional, the other particular and unconditional. This kind of teaching opened the door for the well-meant offer.

Yet another factor was the influence of wrong covenant conceptions. Earlier, in the last article, we noticed that the history of the free offer in the Netherlands was closely connected with the history of the doctrine of the covenant. Throughout the history of the Reformed faith in the

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1. D. H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1943; pp. 48, 49.

Netherlands the covenant had almost always been defined in terms of an agreement between God and man. The agreement, with its mutual stipulations, conditions, and promises, was in effect at such a time as man accepted the provisions of the covenant and made them his own. Because the promise of the covenant was signified and sealed already in baptism, and because all the infants of believers were baptized, this promise was made to all the children who were baptized, whether elect or reprobate. The reprobate children as well as the elect had the promise of God made to them that God would be their God. While this promise did not actually become effective in their lives until such a time as they accepted the provisions of the covenant, nevertheless there was some sense in which they all had a claim on the promise and some sense in which God actually made this promise to them.

It is not difficult to see how this is closely associated with the idea of the well-meant offer. After all, the same promise signified and sealed in baptism is also proclaimed in the preaching. If the promise is, in some sense of the word, made to all the children who are baptized, then that same promise when it is proclaimed in the preaching comes to all who hear the gospel. That promise, because it proclaims that God will be the God of those who hear, quite naturally fits in very well with the idea that the gospel is an offer, i.e., that it expresses God's desire and intention of saving all those who hear. In other words, a general and conditional promise of the covenant is fundamentally the same thing as a well-meant offer made to all, but given only upon condition of faith.

This is not to say, of course, that all who held to the idea of the covenant as an agreement (for this was the commonly accepted view) held also to the well-meant offer. There were many exceptions as we shall see. But the fact is, and this is the point we are making, that such a view of the covenant allowed room for and influenced the development of the well-meant offer in Dutch thinking.

Finally, an important factor in the rise of this idea in Dutch thinking was the so-called "Nadere Reformatie," or "Later Reformation." In order to understand this we must remember what we said above that the Dutch Churches, after Dort, entered a period of doctrinal and spiritual decline. This decline was characterized in the first place by a certain dead orthodoxy which sapped the spiritual strength of the churches. This dead orthodoxy manifested itself in the life of the people so that, under the influence of Dutch colonialism and economic prosperity, worldliness and carnality became endemic. This situation prevailed also in England at the time of the Puritan reaction.

This latter is important, for Puritanism found its way also into the

Netherlands and was particularly attractive to those within the church who were concerned with the spiritual decline of their churches. Not only did this Puritanism come into the Netherlands by means of ministers from England, such as A. Comrie, and by means of ministers from the Netherlands who visited or studied in England only to return to their own land, but the writings of Puritans were translated into the Dutch and read avidly by those who saw in Puritanism a cure for spiritual lethargy and worldliness. The writings of many Puritans were translated, but particularly popular were the writings of such men as Ironsides, the Erskine brothers, and Philpot. The Puritan conception of preaching, which we discussed in an earlier article, was very appealing because of its emphasis on the subjective life of the child of God. But insofar as the well-meant offer was also taught, especially by those who were followers of the Marrow men, this idea entered also into Dutch thinking.

All these things brought about what is called the *Nadere Reformatie*. So much was this true that some could write: "It is clear that it (the *Nadere Reformatie*) agreed greatly with English-Scottish Puritanism; we can call the *Nadere Reformatie*, Dutch Puritanism."<sup>2</sup>

In this movement the first emphasis was on piety along the lines of Calvin as he discussed it in his *Institutes*, Bk. IV. It was, in this respect, analogous to the "Second Reformation" in Scotland. But gradually it developed into a certain Anabaptism and mysticism and began to emphasize a "definite content and style of life: the practice of Godliness." With this practice came a kind of legalism which spoke more often of the "dos and don'ts" of the Christian life than of the "liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." The mystical piety and devotion which these people practiced was first of all within the established church, but gradually separated from the church, first with the establishment of conventicles, and then by absolute separation, as in the case of De Labadie, Schortinghuis, and Lampe. "One no longer speaks properly of *Nadere Reformatie* where the original purpose is abandoned, but of pietism in the sense that piety becomes in large measure an end in itself, by which experimental enjoyment takes the place of prophetic witness and struggle." This *Nadere Reformatie* received new life in the 19th century in the Reveil and the Separation of 1834, commonly called the *Afscheiding*.

Because, therefore, this *Nadere Reformatie* was influenced in part by English and Scottish Puritanism, also by that segment of Puritanism which

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2. *Christelijke Encyclopedie*, in loc. For the information and quotes which follow we are indebted to this work.

was under the influence of the Marrow Men, the idea of the free offer was gradually introduced into Dutch thinking.

These then are the factors which introduced into Dutch thinking the whole conception of the well-meant offer and which made it a part of Dutch theology.

The *Afscheiding* of 1834, under the leadership of such men as De Cock, Van Raalte, Scholte, Brummelkamp, and Van Velzen, was a true Reformation of the church of Christ in the Netherlands. The State or Established Church (Hervormde Kerk) had become so corrupt that it was becoming increasingly impossible for the people of God to survive spiritually within it. When the Churches of the Secession were established, God was preserving His church and maintaining His cause in the Netherlands.

But it is important for us to remember that the *Afscheiding* was predominantly a movement among the common folk in Netherlands; and, as such, it was a movement which attracted to it those who were the spiritual heirs of the *Nadere Reformatie*, i.e., those who were the deeply pious and religious among the Dutch, but who had been, in many instances, influenced also by unhealthy mysticism.

While we cannot enter into the details of this Separation, we ought at least briefly to notice the development of the idea of the well-meant offer among these men and their successors. There are two or three elements which are worthy of our notice. In the first place, it is rather striking that on the specific question of the well-meant offer there was no unanimity of opinion among the leaders of the *Afscheiding*. We can probably go so far as to say that there were really two wings among these leaders, one of which was soundly Reformed according to the solid traditions of Dort, and the other wing which was less Reformed and more susceptible to error. The well-meant offer was an issue which separated these two wings. Algra tells us that in the controversy among the men of the *Afscheiding* over the preparation of ministers, Brummelkamp was suspicioned because "the offer of salvation was too broad in his preaching."<sup>3</sup> This idea of the well-meant offer prevailed among some in the *Afscheiding* and the view was never officially condemned by these churches. The result was that the view was commonly taught among certain segments, but came over also into this country when the people of the *Afscheiding* immigrated.

In the second place, the question of the offer was closely bound up with the question of the ground for the baptism of infants. Because the covenant was defined in terms of an agreement in which only adults could

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3. Algra, *Het Wonder van de Negentiende Eeuw*, J. H. Kok, Kampen, 1965.

enter, the question arose: what constitutes the ground for infant baptism? The answer which was given was: a general promise of God made to all the children who are baptized, but which promise is also conditional. Hence, although all children possess this promise, they possess it only objectively, and it does not become subjectively their own until such a time as they fulfill the condition of faith. This view which prevailed among the *Afscheiding* quite naturally led to the whole idea of the offer.

In the third place, and in keeping with all these ideas, the people of the *Afscheiding* held also to such views as infralapsarianism, mediate regeneration, and justification in time. These views were quite in keeping with their views on the promise of the covenant and the preaching of the gospel.

Quite different was the second movement of reform in the Dutch State Church, the movement under the leadership of Dr. Abraham Kuyper and called the *Doleantie*. While this movement, thanks in part to the gifted leadership of Kuyper, was much more organized church politically than the *Afscheiding*, it was also much more doctrinally articulate. Kuyper was a theologian of great ability and left an indelible stamp upon the church. But his doctrinal position was quite different from that of the *Afscheiding* in some important points. While the *Afscheiding* was infralapsarian, Kuyper was supralapsarian; while the *Afscheiding* held to mediate regeneration, Kuyper maintained immediate regeneration; while the *Afscheiding* believed in justification in time, Kuyper maintained eternal justification; and while the *Afscheiding* held that the basis for infant baptism was a general and conditional promise, Kuyper maintained that the promise of the covenant was always particular, i.e., only for the elect, and absolutely unconditional.

But it is particularly our interest to examine Kuyper's views on the question of common grace and the free offer of the gospel.<sup>4</sup> In his early ministry Kuyper was a modernist, for he had been trained in seminaries of the State Church which were thoroughly modern in their teachings. But while minister of the church in Amsterdam, he was converted and became a strong and ardent defender of the Reformed faith and of the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace.<sup>5</sup> He defended the truths of sovereign

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4. We do not intend to go into this question in detail; a careful analysis of Kuyper's position on this question can be found in D. Engelsma's book: *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, which book contains also many valuable quotes from Kuyper's writings and can be obtained from the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Similar material can be found in H. Hoeksema's book, *God's Goodness Always Particular*, pp. 67-71. Unfortunately, this latter book is out of print and generally unavailable.

election and reprobation, particular atonement, irresistible and particular grace. He repudiates a Christ for all, a grace for all in the preaching, a desire or intention of God to save all, and a double decree or twofold will of God (so essential for the well-meant offer).

Later in his life, however, Kuyper began to teach "common grace" and in fact wrote a three-volume work on this subject under the title, *Gemeene Gratie*. It is not altogether clear why Kuyper changed his mind on this matter of common grace. Perhaps, as some say, Kuyper's modernistic education once more came through in his teachings in later life. It is probably at least partly correct, however, that his *Gemeene Gratie* was written at the time when he was prime minister of Netherlands and developed this idea of common grace to justify his coalition with the Roman Catholics, a coalition necessary to give his Anti-Revolutionary Party a majority in the Lower House.

However all this may be, even though Kuyper taught a certain common grace in his later years, his views of common grace were quite different from those views of common grace so closely associated with the well-meant offer. In fact, there are two Dutch expressions for these two different kinds of common grace: *algemeene genade* or general grace was used to denote that grace which was a part of the well-meant offer; and *gemeene gratie*, the common grace of which Kuyper spoke. The differences between these two are briefly: while *algemeene genade* or general grace is given to all including those within the church, is somehow connected with the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and is a kind of blurring of the doctrine of election, *gemeene gratie* is given outside the church, outside election, independent of the cross, and only to the wicked world. *Gemeene gratie* was a grace which was evident in all the good gifts which God gives to us, was manifested especially in the restraint of sin in the wicked world so that men are rarely as bad as they would be without it, and resulted in a "natural" good which the unregenerate were able to perform and from which the people of God could benefit.

Because of this definition of grace, Kuyper was a bitter opponent of the well-meant offer. He insisted on distinguishing sharply between this grace which was common, and particular and saving grace; and therefore insisted that this *gemeene gratie* operates outside the church and is in no way con-

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5. One can find these ideas throughout Kuyper's writings, including his major work on theology, *Dictaten Dogmatiek*, but the teachings of Kuyper on sovereign and particular grace are beautifully set forth in his book *Dat de Genade Particulier Is*, i.e., "The Grace is Particular."

nected to the preaching of the gospel. There is no grace for all in the preaching. Nor does God in any way, through the preaching, give expression to a love for all, a compassion for all, a desire to save all, a divine intention to bring all who hear the gospel to Christ. And this position he maintained all his life. Kuyper would turn over in his grave if he could know how his name is quoted today in support of the free offer.

We do not, of course, agree with Kuyper's views on *gemeene gratie*; but the fact is that Kuyper cannot be appealed to in support of the well-meant offer, and his teachings on particular and sovereign grace remained his chief emphasis through all his life.

It is strange, therefore, that in the name of Dr. A. Kuyper the Christian Reformed Church adopted a certain view of common grace and of the free offer.

But in order to understand how this came about, we must backtrack in time a bit and consider briefly the views on the free offer which were held among the people of the *Afscheiding* who immigrated to this country.

The immigration to this country began shortly after the *Afscheiding*, and some of these earliest settlers, under the leadership of Van Raalte, settled in the area which is now known as Holland, Michigan. While, soon after their arrival, and at the urging of Van Raalte, these settlers joined the Reformed Church of America, they soon became disillusioned with the RCA and separated to form their own church, which became known as the Christian Reformed Church.

While these settlers were, on the whole, pious and godly saints, they were strongly under the influence of the thinking which prevailed among the leaders of the *Afscheiding*, and insofar as the well-meant offer was taught among some, it was taught also in the early colonies. This is not to say that the sermons which were preached were not often soundly Reformed and that the truths of sovereign grace were not emphasized, but the strain of thinking which included the well-meant offer was there. As the Christian Reformed Church developed along these lines, that idea of the well-meant offer appeared more and more in the preaching. The doctrines of sovereign grace were less and less heard; the truths of sovereign election and reprobation were less and less preached, and the emphasis began to fall increasingly on Arminian views. As one reads the sermons which were printed during this period, one cannot help but be struck by the fact that this sharp emphasis on the truth of sovereign grace was not sounded from the pulpits as it ought to have been, but was replaced with an Arminian emphasis which included the free offer of the gospel. We quote from a few of these sermons to emphasize this point.

In the early 1900's a series of sermons by Dr. C. Bouma was published

under the title *Genade Geneest*. In a sermon on Luke 19:41, 42, we find the following statements made (the translation is ours):

Jesus wept. And in His weeping He is also the Priest, Who still reaches out His hands to those who are sinking away in order yet to save them. . . .

In that manner Jesus is the great Highpriest, Who not only weeps, but His weeping is also a prayer. He spreads out His arms to the apostate city and prays. Even as a mother extends her arms to her son when he leaves to go into the world and toward the abyss, whether perchance he may still rush into the safety of mother's arms.

How great and wide is His mercy! "If thou hadst known this day." Already repeatedly Jesus had preached peace at the former feasts. Now it is the last time; soon He will die. Now it is the eleventh hour; soon Jerusalem will be destroyed. But even still at the eleventh hour Jesus stands there, praying for conversion, for the apostate Jerusalem. Even yet at the eleventh hour He stands at the closed door of the heart of the sinner. Frequently refused, He still stands there. Frequently insulted and mocked, He still calls. O, if in this day you would recognize that which pertains to your peace!

How great is His compassion. It reaches out even to Jerusalem. . . . You also, even you. Many have already come to the fountain of life; you come also, Jerusalem. Many around the sinner already drank of those waters, maybe a pious father or a God-fearing mother. *Christ does not want any one to go lost*. (Italics ours.) He therefore stands at the door of the strongly barred heart calling: "You come also, why should you perish?"

In another book of sermons, *Van De Onzen*, published in 1910, Rev. J. Keizer has a sermon on Ephesians 5:2. After speaking of the love of Christ for His own, he concludes with a word of application:

Many walk no longer with us; they have turned their backs to God's covenant and words, even their heel, their neck, "the cold shoulder." Their end is the ways of death; as children of the kingdom they will perish. Return still, ye who are so averse; the Lord will still accept you; He still waits to be gracious to you.

It is clear therefore, that these immigrants were subject to Arminian preaching in some instances; that they were, while generally pious folk, under the influence of Dutch Puritanism, and that, though the Reformed faith was preserved among them in many respects, they were also somewhat doctrinally weak.

It is clear from further developments that common grace and the free offer of the gospel were held among many. Some maintained that common grace was closely connected with "general revelation." This common grace conveyed to all men, apart from the gospel, a certain knowledge of God whereby all had some understanding of the truth,

though imperfectly. While the idea itself is certainly in keeping with what Paul teaches in Romans 1:18ff., that this “general revelation” was *grace* was a serious error. Because it was grace, this “general revelation” created in man a certain yearning for God and desire to know Him more perfectly. It not only enabled man to develop in science, philosophy, jurisprudence, etc., but also was preparatory for the gospel and served as a point of contact in gospel preaching. Thus Bavinck writes:<sup>6</sup>

The Christian, who sees everything in the light of the Word of God, is anything but narrow in his view. He is generous in heart and mind. . . . He cannot let go his belief that the revelation of God in Christ, to which he owes his life and salvation, has a special character. This belief does not exclude him from the world, but rather puts him in position to trace out the revelation of God in nature and history, and puts the means at his disposal by which he can recognize the true and the good and the beautiful and separate them from the false and sinful alloys of men.

So it is that he makes a distinction between a *general* and a *special* revelation of God. In the general revelation God makes use of the usual run of phenomena and the usual course of events; in the special revelation He often employs unusual means, appearance, prophecy, and miracle to make Himself known to man. The contents of the first kind are especially the attributes of power, wisdom, and goodness; those of the second kind are especially God’s holiness and righteousness, compassion, and grace. The first is directed to all men and, by means of common grace, serves to restrain the eruption of sin; the second comes to all those who live under the Gospel and has as its glory, by special grace, the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of life.

But, however essentially the two are to be distinguished, they are also intimately connected with each other. . . . Grace is the content of both revelations, common in the first, special in the second, but in such a way that the one is indispensable for the other.

It is common grace which makes special grace possible, prepares the way for it, and later supports it; and special grace, in its turn, leads common grace up to its own level and puts it into its service. Both relations, finally, have as their purpose the preservation of the human race, the first by sustaining it, and the second by redeeming it, and both in this way serve the end of glorifying all of God’s excellences.<sup>7</sup>

Masselink goes so far as to say that this “general revelation” is brought

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6. It is interesting to note in this connection that Herman Bavinck was a child of the *Afscheiding* and retained this influence all his life. He wrote in the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries.

7. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, Eerdmans, 1956, pp. 37, 38.

about by a general and universal operation of the Spirit in the hearts of all men.<sup>8</sup>

And this in turn stands connected with the free offer of the gospel: The basis for this general offer of the Gospel is the general external and internal revelation of the Holy Spirit which comes to all men. . . . This general revelation witnesses within the souls of the ungodly as well as the godly. This general revelation is the basis for mission work. The reason why God comes with a well-meant offer of salvation to both the elect and non-elect is correctly set forth by Prof. Berkhof in his "Dogmatics." He mentions the following four facts under the significance of the external calling:

- (1) In it God maintains His claim upon the sinner.
- (2) It is the Divinely appointed means to bring sinners to conversion.
- (3) It is a revelation of God's love to sinners.
- (4) It adds greatly to the responsibility of those who hear it.<sup>9</sup>

But if, so it was taught, there is a common grace shown to all men through "general revelation," there is also a common grace in the preaching of the gospel. That is, the gospel is itself objectively grace to those who hear. It in itself is evidence of God's favor to all who hear. It is evidence of God's favor to all that He even gives the gospel to all. But this idea of an objective grace shown in the gospel was even sometimes interpreted as a *subjective* grace as well, for it is impossible to separate the objective and subjective elements of grace. Thus, objectively the gospel expresses God's desire and willingness to save all who hear and thus manifests His grace; but subjectively He also bestows a grace through the preaching to all so that all are enabled to accept or reject the proffered grace.<sup>10</sup> And all of this led in turn among some to a view of general or universal atonement, a Christ *pro omnibus*.

However, after the *Doleantie*, the reformation in the Netherlands under Dr. A. Kuyper, many immigrants who came to this country were from this denomination. Because in 1892 the churches under the leadership of Dr. Kuyper and the churches of the *Afscheiding* merged into what is now

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8. William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace*, Eerdmans, 1953, p. 84. It is true that Masselink wrote after 1924 when the official decisions on common grace were made in the Christian Reformed Church. But he reflected thinking that goes back to the years prior to 1924, as he himself says.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

10. Cf. e.g., William Heyns, *Manual of Reformed Doctrine*, Eerdmans, 1928, especially pp. 195-201. Heyns was also a child of the *Afscheiding* who taught in Calvin College and Seminary before and after 1924 and had a great influence on subsequent thinking in the Christian Reformed Church.

known as the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, the immigrants from the Doleantie Churches generally joined with the Christian Reformed Church.

In some respects the influence of the followers of Kuyper was good, for Kuyper had emphasized strongly the truths of sovereign grace. The followers of Kuyper were much more doctrinally sound and aware, and able to defend and define doctrine with more clarity and precision. But along with the Kuyperians who came to this country came also Kuyper's views on common grace. These views were strongly represented in a segment in Calvin College and Seminary and found a mouthpiece in the magazine, *Religion and Culture*. All of this involved considerable struggle within the Christian Reformed Church as the views of the *Afscheiding* and those of Kuyper clashed.

This controversy was carried over also into the doctrine of the covenant, something which ought not to surprise us. The Kuyperian influence represented the view of a particular and unconditional promise of the covenant, although Kuyper had also made presumptive regeneration the ground for infant baptism. The *Afscheiding* tradition, on the other hand, held to a general and conditional promise of the covenant made to all who are baptized whether elect or reprobate children. Under the influence of W. Heyns, the latter won out and the way was prepared for the acceptance of the free offer of the gospel. All this came to a head in the controversy of 1924, which centered in a dispute over the free offer of the gospel, and which was the occasion for the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

## THE CONTROVERSY IN THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN 1924

Because the history of the controversy in 1924 is so important for our discussion, we shall be somewhat detailed in describing it.

The problem really started in connection with the so-called Janssen Case. Dr. Janssen was a professor in Calvin Seminary, in Old Testament branches, who introduced higher critical views into his teachings. When he was required to give an account of his views, he appealed to the doctrine of common grace in support of them. That is, he argued that, because of common grace, higher critics were also capable of doing good and were able to give to students of Scripture insights into Bible studies which were of benefit and profit to a Reformed Seminary. Even though, therefore, these views were developed by unbelievers for the most part, they were views from which the church could profit because, as literary and historical discoveries, they were the fruits of the operation of common grace among these higher critics.

While his higher critical views were condemned by the Synod of 1922, the Synod did not make any decisions with respect to common grace itself. That crucial question, the basis for Janssen's defense, was left untouched. In a way this was sad, for the outcome of the common grace struggle might have been considerably different had the issue been tackled then.

However that may be, many Janssen supporters remained in the church, though Janssen himself was deposed from office. Because of their presence in the church, nothing was really resolved.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema, at that time minister of the Word in the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, determined to bring the matter of common grace before the consciousness of the church in the hopes that the church would see the error of it. He began a series of articles in the church paper, *The Banner*, in which he subjected the whole doctrine to a careful Scriptural analysis and came to the conclusion that the doctrine was contrary to the Word of God.

The result of this was that many protests were lodged against him both from members of his own congregation and others in the denomination. These protests not only took exception to his views on common grace, but also challenged his position on the free offer of the gospel. Eventually all this material came to the Synod of 1924 where the issue was resolved. Three doctrinal statements were made concerning this doctrine of common grace and the free offer. We quote them here.

1. Regarding the first point, touching the favorable attitude of God toward mankind in general and not only toward the elect, synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession it is established, that besides the saving grace of God shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scripture passages that were quoted and the Canons of Dort, II, 5 and III & IV, 8 & 9, where the general offer of the gospel is set forth; while it also is evident from the citations made from Reformed writers belonging to the most flourishing period of Reformed theology that our fathers from of old maintained this view.

2. Regarding the second point touching the restraint of sin in the life of the individual man and of society in general, synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession there is such a restraint of sin. This is evident from the Scripture passages that were quoted and from the Netherland Confession, Arts. 13 and 36, which teach that God by a general operation of His Spirit, without renewing the heart, restrains the unbridled manifestation of sin, so that life in human society remains possible; while the citations from Reformed authors of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology prove, moreover, that our fathers from of old maintained this view.

3. Regarding the third point, touching the performance of so-called civic righteousness by the unregenerate, synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confession, the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any spiritual good (Canons of Dort, III & IV, 3) are able to perform such civic good. This is evident from the Scripture passages that were quoted and from the Canons of Dort, III & IV, 4, and from the Netherland Confession, Art. 36, which teach that God without renewing the heart, exercises such an influence upon man that he is enabled to do civic good; while it is, moreover, evident from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology that our fathers from of old maintained this view.<sup>11</sup>

A detailed analysis and criticism of these three points is not important here for our present study. We are concerned mainly about two points: 1) the teaching concerning the free offer; and, 2) the relation between the teaching of the free offer and common grace. We will consider these at length, the Lord willing, in a separate article.

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11. These points are quoted from *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*.