

Clarion

The Canadian Reformed Magazine
Volume 51, No. 3, February 1, 2002

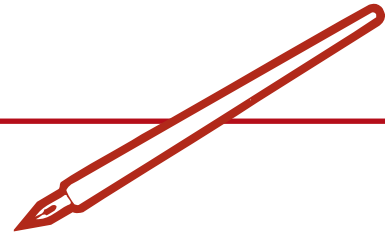


Numbers

10:1-10

*Faith and
Science in the
Reformed Tradition*

INSIDERS



By R. Aasman



Love Your Neighbour

Recently in the United States, a middle-aged man went on trial for beating another middle-aged man to death with his bare hands at a hockey arena. Some of the witnesses at the trial would be the two men's own children who range in age from eleven to thirteen. Quite another number of young children were potential witnesses. Does it sound like a nightmare? It is a nightmare fraught with irony: the two men were fighting over how rough kids were being with one another during a "stick practice." Rage and hatred boiled over until one man lay dying. Once again a man's blood was shed by another man. One can only shake one's head in deep frustration and sadness, and ask the question: when will people learn to overcome their hatred and prevent it from spilling over into violence? When will people come to grips with the sixth word of the covenant: "You shall not murder"?

Sadly, this is not an isolated incident. Another story remains burned in my mind: two women driving home after work. The one cuts off the other. Road rage ensues. In a few minutes, the one woman lies dying in her own pool of blood, while the other woman, disbelieving what she has done, looks at the smoking gun in her own hand. Rage and hatred directed at an utter stranger, for nothing more than a small bit of vehicular jockeying, boiled over until another human being lay dying. What has our society come to?

Rage and hatred boiled over until one man lay dying.

Love is the key

There is a danger in reflecting over such graphic and almost surreal acts of violence, and even bringing the sixth commandment into the picture. The danger lies in a complacency settling on those who are far removed from such acts of violence. Probably most of our readers can honestly say: I have not even been in a fist fight let alone seen a fist fight since my youth. As for guns, many of us don't even own one. When we continue to reason along these lines, we could come to the conclusion that killing, violence, hatred, and all the other miserable emotions that go along with this kind of behaviour are not the kind of things that concern us. In short, the sixth commandment really does not have much to say to us about the day-to-day reality of our life. Un-

fortunately, in doing so we miss the heart of the matter and we miss what the Lord God is saying to us in his Word.

When our Lord Jesus Christ summarized the law, he said with respect to our neighbour: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Similarly, the apostle Paul writes in Romans 13: The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Real love asks of oneself: how would I like this person to act toward me? It answers: Well, that is how I am going to act toward him or her!

We cannot even begin to understand the sixth commandment and the whole matter of relationship with people around us, until we understand that we are to love him as we love ourselves. That puts outright violence and murder at the tip of the iceberg. The bulk of the iceberg – that part which is not visible – is made up of all the other ways in which we do not love our neighbour, and in effect, are killing him.

Concrete examples

If ever there were two people who should genuinely love each other, then it is husband and wife. But where there is no love, marriage can be a nightmare. Not that there is any hitting or even yelling going on. By their silence and lack of attention to each other a husband and wife become two strangers under one roof killing each other softly with their reserve and detachment. The same applies to the relationship between parents and children, siblings, coworkers, and the communion of saints. Malicious gossip, jealousies, put-downs, rejoicing in another's hurt or shame, and disinclination to communicate and cooperate are things which hurt and do serious damage to others around us. I can say that I have never murdered anyone. But if I do not love, then I am engaged in breaking the sixth word of the covenant. I am squeezing the life from my wife, my child, my coworker, the coach of my child's

hockey team, when I hold them at a cold distance, not allowing them the benefit of my love, my listening ear, my concern and my communication.

Scripture

It is striking how Paul writes about love in 1 Corinthians 13: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

And again, how he writes about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." And that is after explaining what the fruit of the Spirit is not: "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy."

Real love for our neighbours means having a disposition genuinely inclined to being kind and patient, to giving a listening ear when that is needed, to struggling with them in their difficulties including their own struggle with hatred, jealousy and fits of rage. Real love does not rejoice in the hurt and the shortcomings of others, but seeks in a gentle manner to restore those who struggle with their own sins and weaknesses. Real love asks of oneself: how would I like this person to act toward me? It answers: Well, that is how I am going to act toward him or her!

What's inside?

Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff begins a five-part series of articles on how a Christian deals with the teachings of evolution. While appreciating the efforts of creationists, Dr. Oosterhoff examines another angle. As she states in her opening article in connection with Reformed scholars such as A. Kuyper and H. Bavinck: "My thesis in this series will be that these Reformed thinkers provide us with a view of scientific knowledge that can serve as an alternative or essential supplement to scientific creationism."

Prof. J. Geertsema presents us with the second half of his farewell address at the Thirty-Second Anniversary Meeting of the Theological College held on September 7, 2001: Is Conversion after Apostasy Impossible? The reader will appreciate his insights into the difficulties of understanding Hebrews 6:6.

Rev. C.J. Vandervelde shares his thoughts on the new English Standard Version Bible. Clearly, the matter of Bible translation remains an ongoing discussion.

We have in this issue two of our regular columns: *Treasures New and Old*, and *Education Matters*. Rev. W.B. Slomp is now coordinating material for the *Treasures New and Old* meditations. We also have a letter to the editor in response to recent articles in *Clarion*.

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Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher

Managing Editor: R. Aasman

Coeditors: J. De Jong, N.H. Gootjes, Cl. Stam

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION

26 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J3

Fax: (780) 418-1506 E-Mail: raasman@canrc.org

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

(subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.

One Beghin Avenue

Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca

World Wide Web address: premier.mb.ca/clarion.html

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	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$39.50*	\$65.00*
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International	\$64.00	\$97.00



*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$12.50 per column inch

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 1377531

Publications Mail Registration No. 09907

ISSN 0383-0438

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Can we do it?

The reality is, we cannot in our own strength show such perfect love to our neighbour. We are inclined by nature to hate both God and our neighbour. And yet, true love is possible. It is possible in God's grace. The answer is outlined so beautifully in 1 John 4:


This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

When we truly know and experience the love of God, when we know how awesome is God's love for us in that He gave his own Son to be born of a woman and to die for our sins, then that love of God burning within our hearts becomes the driving force to love others as well. This is a life-transforming change made possible by the Holy Spirit: God's love causing me to look at my neighbour and making me want to love and help all those whom God places in my path.

Hopefully the reader is nodding in agreement right now. Hopefully we are all saying: exactly! The closer my relationship and walk with the Lord is, the richer and the better becomes my relationship with my spouse, my children, my fellow worker, and my child's hockey coach. The people around me are feeling richer because of their contact with me. That is the power and the miracle of God's grace.

Back to the arena

We think of those two hockey dads at the arena, or those two women in their cars, where hatred and violence left one of each pair dead. How can there be any change? Our world can talk about more programs to teach people how to control their rage. No doubt these can be somewhat helpful. But the only real change can come through the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ. Only in Christ can a resentful heart become a loving heart. What an incredible task we have as church to get this gospel out to a broken world! What an incredible task we have to be a living witness in our own walk of life. We are a witness to the love of God not simply when we refrain from overt acts of violence and hatred. Remember, that is only the tip of the iceberg. We are a witness to the love of God when we show in our attitude, in all our words, and in all our deeds, a genuine love for our neighbour.

Meanwhile, we know that it will never be perfect in our world. We know of our own heart that often love often does not prevail. It makes us hunger for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ when every tear will be wiped away from our eyes, and all forms of jealousy, rage, violence and murder will be utterly banished forever. 

Rev. R. Aasman is minister of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

Holy Father, cheer our way
With thy love's perpetual ray;
Grant us every closing day
Light at evening time.

Holy Saviour, calm our fears
When earth's brightness disappears;
Grant us in our latter years
Light at evening time.

Holy Spirit, be thou nigh
When in mortal pains we lie;
Grant us, as we come to die,
Light at evening time.

Holy, blessed Trinity,
Darkness is not dark with thee;
Those thou keepest always see
Light at evening time.

Richard H. Robinson, 1859

By M.H. Van Luik

Through faith in Christ, you have crossed over from death to life.

*"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes . . .
he has crossed over from death to life.*

John 5:25

The Lord Jesus has been performing many miracles in Israel, but the Jews refused to believe that He was sent by God the Father as the redeemer of Israel. When Christ healed on the Sabbath day, the Jews began to persecute Him. In response Jesus tells the people that God is his own Father, so that they became even angrier because He was making Himself equal with God. Jesus Christ shows them that their life and salvation is intricately connected to his life. He says in 5:24, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life."

The believer no longer belongs to death, but has entered into life. Faith is not hoping that one day you may pass from death to life, but everyone who believes the Father who sent his Son by that very act has crossed over from death to life.

This crossing over from death to life is very closely tied to the person of Jesus Christ. This crossing over from death to life has been foreshadowed in Israel's crossing of the Red Sea on dry land. The apostle Paul makes this connection in 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2. He reminds the readers that all Israel passed through the Sea. "They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

The Lord God sent Moses as the mediator and deliverer of Israel. Moses is much more than simply God's spokesperson. For the Lord gives him the power to perform many wonders in Egypt (Ex 4:21) in order to deliver Israel. It is through Moses that

the LORD will deliver Israel from the cruel bondage of slavery. Moses will lead them from certain death in bondage to a new life of freedom. That is most evident in the crossing of the Red Sea.

At the Red Sea God instructs Moses to lead Israel through the Red Sea on the dry path He has made for them. Israel is to follow him and if they refuse, they will continue to be a people in slavery. Israel's deliverance is intimately tied to Moses.

Therefore Paul can write about all Israel being baptized into Moses in the cloud and the Sea. The lives of Moses and the people of Israel became so interwoven that you can say Israel became one with Moses when they joined Moses under the cloud and in the sea. Israel's life was bound up in the life of Moses whom God sent as their deliverer.


And so, when Moses entered into the sea to cross over, Israel joins him in the sea. This wonderful union with Moses has the result that the people have crossed over from slavery to freedom.

Standing before the Red Sea Israel faced death, but now that they have crossed over the Sea, they experience freedom. Through Moses, the LORD has delivered Israel from death and given them a new life. There on the other side of the sea, God enters into a covenant relationship with his people at Mt. Sinai.

Paul draws an analogy between Moses and Jesus Christ. Whereas Israel was baptized into Moses, today we ex-

perience something much greater, having been baptized into Jesus Christ. The life of the church of Christ is intimately bound up in the life of her Saviour. That is the point that the Jews refuse to accept in John 5. They refused to bind their life by faith to Jesus Christ whom the Father sent from heaven as their redeemer.

Christ declares that everyone who receives the one the Father has sent as his or her redeemer, has crossed over from death to life. Christ Jesus came to lead us from death to sin to life with the Father. The Jews were not able to understand that the redeemer would endure suffering and even death on the cross in order to lead his people from the death of this life to a new life that He has obtained by his resurrection.

But everyone who believes in Christ Jesus has died to sin with Christ and crossed over to life through his resurrection. By faith our life has become intimately bound up in the life of our Saviour. For everyone who seeks his or her life in Jesus Christ has crossed over from death to life. The deliverance experienced by Israel at the Red Sea has been given to you in much greater measure in Christ Jesus. In Him you have crossed over from slavery to sin and misery, to a new life of fellowship with the Father in heaven. 

Rev. M.H. Van Luik is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Chilliwack, British Columbia.

Is Conversion after Apostasy Impossible?

A Look at Hebrews 6:6 (Part 2)

By J. Geertsema

Part II The written context

We now go to Hebrews 6:6 in its immediate written context. The basic question is: Do we deal here with a general rule which is always to be applied in all cases of apostasy? If this were the case our text would be in conflict with many other words of Scripture. I mention here as example James 5:19-20. James writes there, "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth, and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins." A careful explanation of our text, read in the immediate context of the verses 4-6, will show that we do not have here a general rule for every case of apostasy, but a reference to a very specific case of apostasy. The verses 4-6 tell us, in the first place, *for whom* specifically the renewal unto conversion is impossible, and in the second place, *what exactly* is impossible, while in the third place, we learn *what* the reason is that this renewal unto conversion is impossible in this case. And so it will become evident that there is no conflict between Hebrews 6:6 and other texts like James 5:19-20. James writes, "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth, and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

The immediate context of our text, namely the verses 4-6, needs to be considered to find answers to the following questions: First, for whom is renewal unto conversion impossible? Second, what exactly is impossible? And third, why is this renewal unto conversion impossible for them?

For whom is being renewed to conversion impossible?

The verses 4b and 5 provide the answer to this question. It is those who once have been enlightened, etc. The term "enlightened" occurs also in 10:32 (RSV), "Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a struggle with sufferings." Thus, this being enlightened refers to the time when these readers heard the Gospel and accepted it in faith, and as a result were placed in the light of Christ Jesus. "When they were enlightened" must be taken as "when they became believers."

"When they were enlightened" must be taken as "when they became believers."

Further, they are people "who have tasted the heavenly gift." The heavenly gift is Christ Jesus Himself with all his benefits. *To taste* is not just to take a little sip, so that one knows whether something is good or not. To taste means the same as "to eat" so that one experiences the food or drink, either in its bitterness (2:9), or as something good (as here).

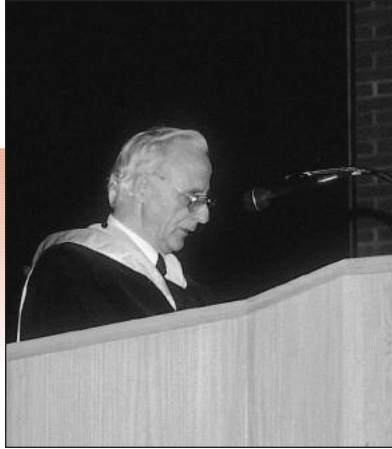
Thirdly, they are church members who have shared in the Holy Spirit. We are to think here of Peter's word on the day of Pentecost. At the end of his sermon he said to the crowd, "Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." On that Pentecost day, and also later, repenting from sins included repenting from the sin of rejecting Christ and calling for his crucifixion. Believing

what Peter and the other apostles said meant joining the Jerusalem congregation and sharing in what the congregation received, namely forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Spirit. According to 10:32-34, they were not only hearers but also doers of the Word, for they endured suffering for Christ's sake and showed their love for their suffering brothers and sisters in the church.

In the fourth place, they tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come. As members of the church they had been fed by the rich and encouraging apostolic preaching of God's Word. Their faith was further strengthened through seeing and possibly even themselves experiencing healing miracles (cf 2:3-4). This tasting of the powers of the coming age may also refer to receiving the strength to persevere under suffering.

With these four strokes of his brush, the author has painted a picture of the riches of God's promises in Christ Jesus to those who come to faith. How great were the gifts God in Christ had given them. That they shared in these gifts meant that they were active, members of the church in Jerusalem. They knew the truth. They knew God's gifts.

And yet, in spite of all this, there was the real danger of apostasy from the faith. This is expressed with the next negative phrase: "and who have [then] fallen away." This falling away does not refer to an accidental sin out of weakness under pressure. It is a conscious "deliberate apostasy" (Bruce, 124). It is a maintained willing disobedience to God's Word in a situation of temptation, when a choice had to be made for or against Christ Jesus as He had been preached to them by the apostles. It was a situation in which the danger was very great to make the wrong choice in full awareness.



Prof. J. Geertsema

The expression “falling away” (falling beside the goal) is paralleled in other passages of Hebrews. The author speaks of “sailing past the harbor” (2:1), “falling away in apostasy” (3:12), and “trampling down of the Son of God by considering unholy the sanctifying blood of the covenant” (10:29). In the light of the fact that God has now spoken through his Son (1:1-2), it means a rejection of Him, God, who spoke to them (12:25). After the first four positive statements, this having then turned away is not just a matter of lack of insight. It means a conscious decision not to go along with God on God’s way. It is, therefore, overt disobedience.

Acts 21:20-21 gives us some background information about the cause of this choice against Christ, this apostasy. We read there how, at the end of the third missionary journey (58 A.D.), the apostle Paul with his travel companions (Acts 20:4-5), visited James and the other elders and told them about the great works of God done through their hands among the Gentiles. Hearing this report, the elders praised God. Then the elders, in turn, spoke about the tremendous church growth in and around Jerusalem, among the Jewish people. Also, many thousands of Jews had come to faith in Christ as Saviour. The elders added, “And all of them are zealous for the law.”

The leaders then related to Paul that false rumours had been spread in Jerusalem about him: that Paul had taught all the Jews among the Gentiles, outside of Palestine, no longer to circumcise their children and no longer to live according to their Jewish customs. So, for Paul’s own safety and to show that the rumour was false indeed, they suggested that Paul join four men who had made a vow to the LORD of purifi-

cation according to the law of Moses. If Paul now paid the cost for all five, this would show even more that he himself was not against the Law of Moses and that he was supportive of other Jews keeping it. The suggestion makes clear that this being zealous for the Law here concerned particularly the ceremonial law.

Obviously, combining faith in Christ Jesus as Saviour with abiding by ceremonial purification rules was not rejected in the church.

For a pious, righteous Jew it was important to keep God’s law, including the ceremonial law. Obviously, combining faith in Christ Jesus as Saviour with abiding by ceremonial purification rules was not rejected in the church. Paul did not object to the suggestion of the elders. He himself wrote (1 Cor 10:32), that the believers must not put a stumbling block before one another, neither for the Jew nor for the Greek. This meant for him that he had to be a Jew with the Jews and a Gentile with the Gentiles. A Jew who had come to faith in Christ was allowed to continue to live as a Jew, according to Jewish customs, but he should not compel a Gentile Christian to live as a Jew. In line with this, Paul accepted the advice of the elders of Jerusalem’s church. It is clear from what is said further in Acts 21 that James and the elders agreed with Paul that Gentile believers did not have to become Jews and live as Jews.

And yet, a dangerous temptation was lurking in being zealous with re-

spect to the law. Paul fought against placing the law beside Christ which really amounted to being in the place of Christ. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews does the same. While Paul fought against placing the law as supreme above Christ on the point of becoming righteous before God, Hebrews fights against placing the ceremonial law with its temple worship above Christ Jesus and his sacrifice as the way in which access is given into the presence of the holy God.

In the situation of the revolt against Rome, a choice had to be made. The fundamental question was: What came first for the Christian Jews in Jerusalem who were zealous for Israel’s mosaic Law? Was for them belonging to Israel combined with keeping the law the most important thing? Would that mean: choosing against Christ Jesus as Saviour who would bring us to God? Or should they maintain that we come to God only through Jesus Christ?

Our conclusion is that the statement in verse 6 that it is impossible to renew to conversion must not be read as a general rule that applies to all cases of every kind of falling away from the faith. It refers here to specific church members in a specific situation, in which they are confronted with a conscious, specific choice: being a nationalistic, old-covenant Jew, or being a new-covenantal, Jewish Christian (cf Longenecker, 162).

2. What is exactly impossible?

The answer to this second question is given in verse 6a: “It is impossible to renew again unto conversion” (those who have fallen away). The Greek word (*metanoia*, literally meaning “a change of mind”) is rendered here with “conversion” but can also be translated as “repentance.” This latter translation is found in connection with the preaching of John the Baptist: he preached a “baptism of repentance.” I will here use the translation “conversion,” though it will be good to keep in mind that we could just as well use the rendering “repentance.” Now we have a remarkable formulation here in verse 6a. Translated literally, the text speaks of a “renewing again unto conversion.” Usually we meet a reverse word-order: “to convert again unto renewal.” For Scripture teaches that conversion from unbelief and sin leads unto renewal of life. Apparently the author wants to indicate that these

apostates need a renewing change to be able to come to conversion.

The meaning of the word “conversion” should be understood in the usual way as conversion from unbelief and sin unto obedient faith in Christ and a new life for God. This is the meaning of the expression “conversion from dead works” in 6:1. Dead works are, according to 9:14, works done outside of faith in Christ. For it is the blood of Christ that cleanses one’s conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The author wrote in 6:1 that he did not want to return to the elementary beginning of the teaching of Christ and to lay down again the foundation of, among other matters, this “repentance from dead works.” He refused to do this, because it is impossible to renew again to conversion those who have been enlightened and have fallen away.

The question can be asked why it is impossible to be renewed to conversion. Is the reason to be found in man or in God? Is man’s apostate mind set the cause why renewal is impossible or is God’s wrath the cause? In other words, is the mind of the apostate not receptive for God’s words anymore? Or does God in his anger no longer accept him in his presence?

Hughes, in a discussion of the verses 4-6 (206-222) writes correctly, that these people who fall away in the end, were hypocrites and never became true believers, because true faith is an enduring work of God that cannot fail. They did accept the gospel of Christ Jesus as Saviour and were actively involved in the congregation and in congregation life, but they kept playing the role of believers without belonging to them. We can formulate it in line with the Epistle to the Hebrews in this manner: These apostates played the role of true believers in Christ as their Redeemer, but they remained first of all nationalistic Jews and their Christian faith was to fit into their Judaistic thought frame and world view. That is why they slackened off in their faith when a clear choice had to be made. And it explains their turning away and denying Christ in the end. In other words, the Epistle to the Hebrews, also in our text, does not deny the promise of the perseverance of the saints, of those whom God chose from eternity and gave to Christ to save. Rather, it is similar to the Lord’s word in Matthew 7:21-23. He speaks there about people who prophesied, drove out demons, and performed miracles in his Name, and to

whom He will say on judgment day, “I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!” We can, therefore, say that this impossibility of their being renewed to conversion had to do with their hypocritical unbelieving mind set.

However, these people did enter the new covenant established in Christ when they professed their faith in Him and by baptism joined the church. They received the position of members of the covenant. They also acted as such. When they went the way of apostasy,

They did accept the gospel of Christ Jesus as Saviour and were actively involved in the congregation and in congregation life, but they kept playing the role of believers without belonging to them.

they broke God’s covenant in Christ with them. And for those breaking the old, and even more the new covenant God is a consuming fire (12:28). We should recognize that God’s covenant anger with these covenant breakers who reject his Son as their King and High Priest is the first cause of this impossibility (see K. Schilder in *Heidelbergse Catechismus* I, 467-468, in a discussion of this sin of apostasy together with the sin against the Holy Spirit). God’s anger does not allow them to turn to repentance. It is similar to Jeremiah who was not allowed to pray anymore for the people of Judah (Jer 14:10-12). Repentance, conversion is God’s work. Regeneration comes from above, from the Holy Spirit (John 3:3,5). Their renewal unto conversion is impossible because God will not work it. God can and does hand over sinners who abide in their sin to their sin (Rom 1:25-32, 1 Pet 2:7-8).

Our conclusion is that the expression “renewing unto conversion” refers to a renewal of position before God. The persons described in our passage were not in such a position. God was no longer willing to work conversion. At the same time, their mind was so stuck in their own views that they were not open for repentance. They did not want to change. This has to do with the character of their sin. What this character is, is presented in the next point.

3. Why is this renewal unto conversion for these apostates impossible?

The reason is given in verse 6b: “because they are crucifying Christ all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace.” The two verbs indicate two aspects of the same action. When Christ was crucified, He was subjected to public disgrace. When then these church members again reject Christ, they again publicly submit Him to contempt and disdain.

This action of “crucifying again” is usually understood as stressing the object of the verb, Christ Jesus. As far as the apostates are concerned, Christ is crucified once again. This aspect is certainly present. However, we should put no less stress on the subject of the action, *they*. These apostate Jewish church members, by falling away from the faith, do this crucifying for the second time. They repeat what they did almost four decades ago (cf. Bornhäuser (18-20 [314-6]). They were present, in Jerusalem. They belonged to the crowd that cried before Pontius Pilate, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

The fact that Hebrews is written shortly before the fall of Jerusalem, thus some thirty-five or more years after the Lord’s physical crucifixion on Golgotha, does not make this interpretation impossible. In the first place, many of those who had been between twenty and forty years old when the Lord was crucified would be still alive when Hebrews was written. Even younger people may still have remembered his crucifixion. In the second place, on and after the Day of Pentecost, Peter accuses the Jewish people in Jerusalem that they have rejected and killed the Lord (Acts 2:23,36; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30); they were the people who lived or resided in Jerusalem at that time.

With this verb, as with the surrounding formulations, the author succeeds in painting the sin of this specific apostasy in all its horribleness before the eyes of the first readers. They crucify not just a man, but the very Son of God; and they do it for the second time! In this way, it becomes clear why for this sin a renewal unto conversion is not possible. When the Lord was crucified in person, He prayed for those who committed this sin, “Father, forgive them because they do not realize [know] what they are doing” (Luke 23:34, see also Acts 13:27, 1Tim 1:13). Ignorance was a valid ground for forgiveness in the eyes of Christ Jesus and

of his Father. But this plea of ignorance can no longer be submitted. They had been enlightened and had accepted God's words spoken through the prophets to the forefathers and to them through his Son. Rejecting Him now meant, in fact, declaring publicly that Christ was of no real worth to them and to the people. It was spurning the atoning blood of the Son of God again, and exposing the Son of God to contempt and disdain. It was crucifying Him for the second time. Therefore, only God's judgment remained. A renewal unto conversion was no longer possible for them. Here is a parallel with the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. It is that unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit.

God's anger does not allow them to turn to repentance.

Part III Conclusions and Consequences

Conclusions

The first conclusion is that Hebrews 6:6 speaks in a very specific situation about a specific, even unique sin of apostasy. No one today can crucify Christ for the second time, as they were in danger of doing. The unique character of this action means that we should not apply what is said about this apostasy to every instance of someone falling away from the faith. Hebrews 6:6 does not state a general rule that conversion is impossible for someone who abandons the faith.

The second conclusion is that the horrible sin of crucifying Christ again is in line with the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. The common element is that aspect of knowing and understanding the grace of God in Christ, and yet choosing against it. It is the sin of covenant people deliberately rejecting what God says and what He gives with Christ. If God meets such sin with his covenant wrath, this cannot be called a lack of love. God is a God of wrath, when his promising words of love in Christ, his Son, are rejected.

Consequences

In Hebrews 6:6, we have to do with a very specific situation and with a unique form of apostasy, and not with a general truth and a general rule. The first consequence is that in different

cases of someone falling away from the faith, church councils and believers in general must not think that our text would declare useless all prayers and efforts to bring wayward church members back to the Lord and his service. Much less should we conclude that it would forbid such prayers and efforts. On the contrary, they should intensify prayers and efforts to bring those who fell away or are in danger of falling away unto conversion. There is still more joy in heaven over one sheep who repents and returns than over the ninety-nine who do not need such repentance. And the admonition with which James concludes his epistle should remain an incentive for the church for calling unto conversion those who fall away (5:19-20), "My brothers, if one of you should *wander* from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death, and cover over a multitude of sins."

Another consequence should be that we as church members who know the truth, abide by it, watching out for apostasy, and living humbly with our God, accepting of his Word as given to us. Especially in the church, we should tremble and fear that we, who have known Jesus Christ from an early age, do not ignore Christ Jesus. It is still possible to turn away from Him knowingly. And it is still terrible to fall in the hands of the living God as the avenging God of the covenant that is broken.

There is still another Day of the LORD coming. Also for today, Hebrews 6:6 remains a serious warning to submit by Him who spoke to us through his Son and to abide by this Son.

May this address serve to keep alive the fear of the LORD.

The works of those authors who were mentioned above are the following:

D. Bornhäuser, *Empfänger und Verfasser des Briefes an die Hebräer*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, 1988.

G. Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913.

F.W. Grosheide, *De Brief aan de Hebréeën en De Brief van Jakobus*, Kampen: Kok, 1955.

Ph.E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977.

R.N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1975) 1999.

K. Schilder, *Heidelbergse Catechismus*, vols. 1-4, Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1947-1951.

After word

A few remarks of a different character are to be made. I gave my official farewell address, even though I am still allowed to continue teaching during the coming semester. Nevertheless, let me express at this occasion my thankfulness, first of all to the Lord that He gave me the task to be part of a team that was called to teach the riches of his Word to future ministers in our churches, here in North America, as well as in Australia. God called. He gave health and strength from his side although there were weaknesses and shortcomings on my side.

I express also my gratitude to the churches which called me to this task as God's instrument. During these years it was my constant aim to serve the Lord and his churches with my work at this College of and for the churches. It is my prayer that He will enable me to go on with serving Him and the churches, that is, you all.

There is still more joy in heaven over one sheep who repents and returns than over the ninety-nine who do not need such repentance.

I am also thankful that there was always an excellent and enjoyable cooperation with the colleagues. And that there was a good relation, throughout this decade and a half, with the Board, with the members of both the Academic Committee and the Finance and Property Committee. With gratitude I can remember their care. I want to mention too my appreciation for the good service and care of our general assistant or manager of almost everything, Ms Cathy Mechelse, and the care of our librarian, Ms Margaret VanderVelde. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

May the Lord continue to bless the College and all who have a place in it.



Prof. J. Geertsema is the retired professor of New Testament studies at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.

Faith and Science in the Reformed Tradition (1)

By F.G. Oosterhoff

Against evolutionism

The triumph of evolutionism in the nineteenth century led to a sharp conflict between faith and science. That conflict continues in our days. More so perhaps than formerly, the struggle is joined on the religious side not only by scientists but also by laymen. Among them is a growing number of Reformed believers – or so it would appear from the many letters-to-the-editor on evolutionism that have recently appeared in Reformed periodicals on this continent. In the large majority of cases, these letters express a belief in the literal meaning of the first two chapters of Genesis, in a “young” earth, and in six normal (that is, 24-hour) days of creation. Sometimes the writers make it clear that this conviction is a simple matter of faith in revelation; sometimes they defend their stand with arguments that seem to be derived from what is called scientific creationism, a movement that has been actively promoted among us in recent years.

We are confronted here with a new development. As I have argued on previous occasions,¹ scientific creationism has roots not in the Reformed tradition but in American Evangelicalism, and in a number of important points it differs from the approach of leading Reformed thinkers on the issue of faith and science. This is not, of course, in itself an argument against the movement. If scientific creationism provides us with valid, biblical answers to the questions raised by Darwinism, we should make use of it, whether or not it agrees with the Reformed way of looking at things. When I read the creationist articles and letters in a variety of Reformed periodicals, however, it strikes me that no attempts are made truly to analyze the movement, or to compare it with the Reformed tradition,

especially as it was developed in the past century or so in the Netherlands. In fact, that tradition is hardly mentioned in our press and seems to have been forgotten among us. As a result, the impression is left that scientific creationism is the most appropriate and indeed the only means to fight an anti-Christian evolutionism.

It strikes me that no attempts are made in our Reformed press to compare scientific creationism with the Reformed tradition, especially as it was developed in the past century or so in the Netherlands. In fact, that tradition seems to have been forgotten among us.

That is unfortunate. To say this is not to suggest that I don't see any good in the creation-scientist movement. On the contrary, I am in full agreement with the creationists' adherence to the truth of Scripture, and I admire their struggle against the unfounded scientific claims of Darwinism and the attempt to explain all of life in evolutionist terms. Creationists make clear that they want to take their starting point in the authority of God's infallible Word – and what Bible-believing Christian would not applaud such a stand? In short, in a variety of areas the movement's goals are to be commended. It deserves the support of Christian believers who in many different ways can and do profit from the work done by creationists.

But if the ends are good, the means to reach them are not necessarily the only or the best possible ones. In some of the publications to which I referred, I have attempted to substantiate this claim by comparing the creationist approach with that of the Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper. In the present series I want to return to the issue, giving special attention to Kuyper's younger contemporary, the theologian Herman Bavinck. But because of similarities between the theories of the two men, I will have to begin by giving an outline of Kuyper's work in the field.

My thesis in this series will be that these Reformed thinkers provide us with a view of scientific knowledge that can serve as an alternative or essential supplement to scientific creationism. As such their work deserves the attention of all Christians. It should be especially helpful for those among us, students and others, who are in daily contact with the claims of a naturalistic science. These claims, of course, extend not only to the physical, biological, and geological sciences, but also to theology, history, and various social sciences. Indeed, as following articles will show, the approach of these thinkers makes it possible to critique the conclusions of an unbelieving scholarship in all fields of modern learning.

The prestige of science

Before I delve into my topic, I have to explain why Christians have from the very beginning considered Darwinism to be a serious threat to the faith. An important reason is that Darwinism is presented as a scientific theory, and that in western society the conclusions of science are generally accepted as definitive. Science's prestige has a two-fold foundation. In the first place, there is the fact of its explanatory power. Modern science has shown that natural

phenomena, many of which were formerly held to be a result of direct supernatural intervention, are governed by natural laws and can be explained in natural terms. By doing so it has made natural processes understandable and in many cases predictable. In the words of an eighteenth-century poet, science has removed the mysteries from nature and replaced darkness with light.

The prestige of science and the trust in the near-infallibility of the scientific method are major reasons why the rise of Darwinism became such a serious threat to the faith. They go a long way also in explaining the appeal of scientific creationism.

A second reason for the prestige of science is its technological potential. That potential became increasingly evident in the last century and a half, which witnessed very rapid advances both in pure science and in technology, including medical technology. These developments were important in convincing the general public of science's promise. They also played a role in the secularization of western society. Noticing the improvements that technology made in their lives, people reasoned that the way to reach true and worthwhile knowledge was to follow the way of science, rather than to rely on revelation or traditional wisdom. (Many people, I should add, continue to think so today, even though belief in the benevolent nature of science and technology is rapidly declining and interest in religion is growing. But that is another story. We are now concerned not with postmodern but with modern developments.)

The trust in science and its method as a virtually infallible way to truth was not restricted to unbelievers. During the modern period many Christians also thought that the scientific method could be relied upon to lead to fully objective knowledge. The attitude of trust was strengthened by the fact that until the rise of evolutionism this period witnessed few clashes between faith and science. It is true that some conflicts did occur. The most serious one arose

in connection with the ideas of Nicholaus Copernicus, who proposed a new model of the universe. Although the issues raised by Copernicanism are different from those raised by Darwinism, the story has relevance for today's situation and I will therefore relate it.

Copernicus taught (in a book published in 1543) that the sun, rather than the earth, is at the centre of the solar system and that the earth is a mere planet, rotating on its axis and revolving with the rest of the planets around a stationary sun. The Roman Catholic Church objected to the fact that this idea was taught not simply as a hypothesis but as literally true. It found this unacceptable because Copernicanism contradicted the teachings of the influential Greek philosopher Aristotle, and because it could even be interpreted as being contrary to Scripture. For did not the Bible speak of an earth that was securely "founded," and did not the Book of Joshua, when describing Joshua's war against the Amorites, state that not the sun but the earth stood still (Joshua 10:12f.)? When in the 1630s the scientist Galileo ignored church warnings and in one of his writings continued to promote the Copernican view, Rome responded by officially condemning Copernicanism, placing Galileo's book on the Index of forbidden books, forcing Galileo to recant, and punishing him with house arrest.

Calvin and Luther also were unhappy with Copernicanism, but they did not treat it as a religious heresy. In fact, Calvin denied that the theory implied a clash between revelation and science. He argued that in speaking of a moving sun the Book of Joshua simply accommodated itself to the worldview of the period and that therefore it did not condemn the sun-centred hypothesis. And in any event, he added, it was not the Holy Spirit's intention to teach astronomy in Scripture. The Reformers and their followers refrained – wisely, in retrospect – from pronouncing on the issue in confessional statements.

Rome did not rescind its condemnation of Galileo until the last century, but most Protestant theologians followed Luther's and Calvin's more moderate approach, and Copernicanism, which was soon widely accepted in Protestant circles, did little to upset a generally amicable relationship between faith and science. On the whole, believers had a positive opinion of the scientific enterprise, which is not all that surprising, for most early scientists

were themselves Christians and anxious to uphold the teachings of Christianity. Many theologians and Christian philosophers, in turn, made use of scientific findings to defend the truth of Scripture, convinced that nature as described by science so clearly revealed God's power and deity that atheism was intellectually impossible. The approach of these "natural theologians" was supported by scientists as well as laymen and strengthened the conviction that there could be no real conflict between faith and science. That conviction survived until the rise of evolutionary science.

Scientific creationism

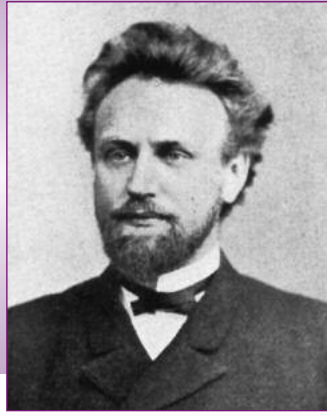
To recapitulate my argument: the prestige of science and the trust in the near-infallibility of the scientific method, also among Christians, are major reasons why the rise of Darwinism became such a serious threat to the faith. They go a long way in explaining why some Christians abandoned the faith altogether when confronted with Darwin's hypothesis, and why others looked for a solution to the problem by combining Darwinism with belief in the supernatural, a solution that they believed they found in theories of theistic evolution.

Kuyper and Bavinck anticipated conclusions reached by increasing numbers of present-day philosophers and scientists, many of whom do not share the faith of these two men.

The prestige of science and the trust in its method go a long way also in explaining the appeal of scientific creationism. The nature and goal of scientific creationism are expressed in its name. The movement calls itself "creationist" because it believes in special creation and therefore rejects Darwinism and all it stands for. It uses the adjective "scientific" because the gathering of scientific evidence is its chosen means of resolving the problems raised by evolutionary hypotheses in biology, geology, and other branches of knowledge. To reach this goal is the movement's concern. Its members make it their task to disprove evolutionary hypotheses and at the



Abraham Kuyper



Herman Bavinck

same time to collect scientific data in support of a literal interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis.

As I said before, while as a Christian I cannot but applaud the movement's goal of upholding the truth of revelation, I have questions about the sufficiency of the creation-scientists' approach. In discussing these questions I do not intend to deal with the negative judgments (not only by unbelieving scientists but by Christian ones as well) on the scientific validity of some of the movement's conclusions. Introducing that aspect would require far more space than is available to me. It could, moreover, well lead to endless arguments and counter-arguments, on the validity of which as a non-scientist I would find it difficult to decide.

The problem I want to address is located in a different area. It concerns what I see as the movement's failure to expose the assumptions underlying the modern trust in the sufficiency and full objectivity of the scientific method. I am very much afraid that, if this basic issue is not fully and clearly addressed, Christians may be led to believe that they must fight fire with fire. In other words, I fear that it may lead to a situation wherein we attempt to battle the enemy with weapons we have borrowed from that enemy, which have been shown to be faulty, but which are nevertheless a major reason for the apparent strength and the seductiveness of the Darwinist position. And such an approach, as I hope to make clear in this series, would not only be unsuccessful, it would be counter-productive.

The limitations of human reason

It is in this area, then, that I locate the greatest difference between cre-

ationism and the position held by the two Reformed scholars I mentioned – and indeed by several of their co-religionists as well. (I am thinking, for example, of the philosophers Dirk Vollehoven and Herman Dooyeweerd, founders of the Cosmonomic Philosophy – on this continent sometimes referred to as the Amsterdam Philosophy – and their followers.)²

The fact that science cannot lead to fully exhaustive knowledge and that man does not know as God knows is beginning to be widely recognized in our postmodern age. Christians should take notice.

These Reformed thinkers did not despise science, nor did they denigrate the gift of human reason. They were heirs of John Calvin, and Calvin admired the accomplishments of scholarship, also of pagan scholarship.³ In one of his writings he confessed that human reason, "though fallen and perverted from its wholeness," was God's excellent gift to mankind. Its fruits were therefore by no means to be despised.

"... If the Lord has willed," Calvin wrote, "that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God's gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths." In short, Calvin did not despise the life of the mind, nor has such an attitude characterized the Reformed tradition in gen-

eral. Calvin's strong assertion of reason and science as God's gifts to humanity no doubt constituted an additional reason why, before the rise of evolutionism, Reformed Christians generally had a positive view of science.

But Calvin was not uncritical, and he never denied the baleful effects of sin on human understanding. Sin, he wrote, had destroyed mankind's supernatural gifts, so that with respect to knowledge of God's grace toward mankind, even the greatest geniuses were "blinder than moles." And although after the Fall man retained the gift of reason, sin had weakened and corrupted it. Calvin did not explain exactly how the Fall affected man's reasoning powers, but his recognition of the corruption of the original gifts sets him apart from later Christians who endowed science with the power to reach absolutely certain truths. In what follows we will see how later Reformed scholarship built on Calvin's insights regarding not only the excellence but also the limitations of human reason.

An interesting and important point, which I can mention here only in passing,⁴ is that Kuyper and Bavinck anticipated conclusions reached by increasing numbers of present-day philosophers of knowledge – many of whom, as it happens, do not share the faith of these two men. The fact that science cannot lead to fully exhaustive knowledge and that man does not know as God knows is beginning to be widely recognized in our postmodern age. Christians should take notice.

NOTES

¹ See, e.g., the articles "To Love God with our Mind," Part 2, *Clarion*, January 22, 1999, and "Postmodernism and the Question of Truth," Part 3, *Clarion*, April 28, 2000. For much of what follows see also my *Ideas Have a History: Perspectives on the Western Search for Truth* (University Press of America, 2001).

² On a future occasion I hope to give some attention to the work of this movement in the field of theory of knowledge.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, ii, 12, 15, 16, 18.

⁴ For details, see my *Ideas Have a History*, especially the Introduction and chapters 20-23.

Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff is a retired principal of Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton, Ontario.

New Bible Translation Launched: The English Standard Version

By C.J. VanderVelde

In September 2001, a new Bible translation was launched, called the English Standard Version (ESV). Since we are “people of the Book,” such a publication should be of interest to us.

The preface to the ESV indicates that the starting point for this translation is the Revised Standard Version (RSV). We are told that “Archaic language has been brought to current usage and significant corrections have been made in the translation of key texts” (p. vii). Moreover, the “. . . goal has been to retain depth of meaning and enduring language that have made their indelible mark on the English-speaking world...” (p. vii).

As far as translation philosophy is concerned, the preface states that “The ESV is an ‘essentially literal’ translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer” (p. vii). The ESV does not emphasize dynamic equivalence, which is a “thought-for-thought” approach rather than a “word-for-word” approach.

Furthermore, “In the area of gender language, the goal of the ESV is to render literally what is in the original” (p. viii). “The inclusive use of the generic ‘he’ has also regularly been retained, because this is consistent with similar usage in the original languages and because an essentially literal translation would be impossible without it” (p. ix).

With respect to the textual basis for the ESV, the preface tells us: “The currently renewed respect among Old Testament scholars for the Masoretic text is reflected in the ESV’s attempt, wherever possible, to translate difficult passages as they stand in the Masoretic text rather than resorting to emendations [removing supposed errors from

the text, CJV] or to finding an alternative reading in the ancient versions” (p. ix). The Masoretic text is the text of the Old Testament Scriptures as carefully preserved by Jewish scribes.

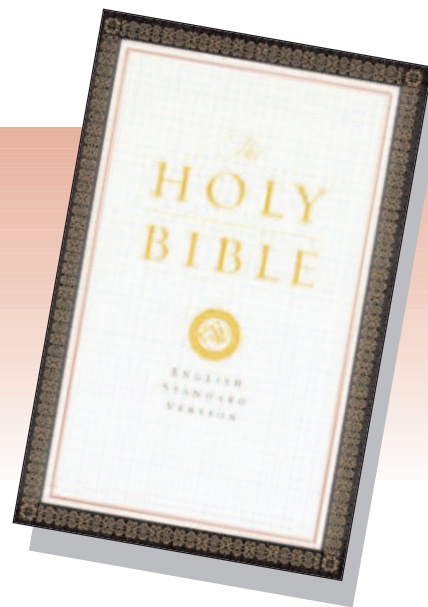
The translation team consists of more than a hundred people. This team “. . . shares a common commitment to the truth of God’s Word and to historic Christian orthodoxy” (p. x). The website of Crossway Bibles states that the translation team “. . . shares commitment to historic evangelical orthodoxy, and to the authority and sufficiency of the inerrant Scriptures.” The general editor is Dr. J. I. Packer. The translation team consists, among others, of the following notable scholars: Dr. Wayne Grudem, Dr. Robert Mounce, Dr. Vern Poythress, Dr. Gordon Wenham, and Dr. Leland Ryken.

The ESV has received many endorsements. Of the many endorsements the Crossway Bibles website

lists, we note the following: Dr. R.C. Sproul, chair, Ligonier Ministries; Dr. S.M. Baugh, Associate Professor of New Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary; Dr. Robert Ricker, President, Baptist General Conference; and Dr. Paige Patterson, President, Southern Baptist Convention.

RSV connection a liability?

I have compared the ESV to the RSV, using some of the objections against the RSV as cited in the Committee on Bible Translations’ *Report to General Synod Abbotsford 1995. NASB, NIV, or NKJV: Which Version Now?* (which used reports submitted to earlier synods). I have done this comparison since General Synod Abbotsford 1995 stated in its considerations that “General Synod cannot continue to recommend the use of the RSV since there are better translations available according to the judgement of both the Australian and Canadian study



committees" (*Acts*, art. 72, Consideration D, p. 37). What follows are a few of my findings:

- The RSV was faulted for using the neuter for the Holy Spirit ("which") in Romans 5:5, Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:14 and 1 John 3:24 (*Report*, p. 111). The ESV has abandoned the neuter in all of these examples ("who," "whom").
- The RSV had a weak Christology. For example, in Rom 9:5, the RSV did not identify Christ as God. (*Report*, p.114). The ESV has corrected this example.
- The RSV was weak in reflecting the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament as far as the translation process was concerned. This created an unnecessary tension between the way a passage was rendered in the Old Testament and quoted in the New Testament. See, for example, Genesis 12:3, Genesis 18:18 (Gal 3:8); Genesis 22:18, Genesis 26:4, Genesis 28:14 (Acts 3:25, Gal 3:16); and Deuteronomy 6:4 (Mk 12:29) (*Report*, p. 112). In all of these cases, this difficulty has been eliminated in the ESV.

The ESV does not emphasize dynamic equivalence, which is a "thought-for-thought" approach rather than a "word-for-word" approach.

- The RSV showed the influence of modern critical scholarship in the Old Testament (*Report*, p. 116). For example, Psalm 51 was presented as post-exilic because it spoke about the "rebuilding" of Jerusalem's walls in verse 18. The ESV has "build" the walls. Another example: the RSV suggested an evolutionary development of language by translating in Genesis 11:1 that mankind had "few" words. The ESV translates "same" words. In both cases, the ESV is an improvement.
- The RSV also created contradictions (*Report*, p. 116). For example, Genesis 9:20 stated that Noah was the "first tiller of the soil," but this contradicted Genesis 4:2. The ESV cor-

rects this by translating that Noah "began to be a man of the soil."

- The RSV was also faulted for heavily emending the Masoretic Text. A review of the ESV's translation of the book of Hosea, which does away with many of these emendations, illustrates the ESV's more favourable attitude toward the Masoretic Text. Some examples: Hosea 2:23 in the RSV is "I will sow him," but it is "and I will sow her" in the ESV. Hosea 4:18 in the RSV is "a band of drunkards," but it is "when their drink is gone" in the ESV. Hosea 5:2 in the RSV is "And they have made deep the pit of Shittim," but it is "And the revolters have gone deep into slaughter" in the ESV. Hosea 6:7 in the RSV is "at Adam," but it is "like Adam" in the ESV. In all of these examples, the ESV has done away with the RSV's emendations to the Masoretic Text and has opted for a translation along the lines of the Committee on Bible Translations' 1974 report. More examples from Hosea could be given (see *Report*, p. 196-216). Therefore, although the ESV takes its starting point in the RSV, this does not have to be seen as a liability, since the ESV has made many improvements.

Other positives

Furthermore, the ESV is very readable. Outdated and difficult expressions have been modernized. The RSV's use of the archaic "Thee/Thou" has been replaced with the contemporary "You."

At the same time, the ESV retains an elevated and dignified style. In comparison with the NIV, for example, I have not found any contractions in the ESV (for example, cf. Lk 12:57 and Lk 14:20). Moreover, the language for sexuality is more dignified and true to the original than in the NIV (cf. Gen 19:5: NIV "have sex"; ESV "know." Cf. Gen 31:35: NIV "I'm having my period; ESV "the way of women is upon me).


In addition, since the ESV takes its starting point in the RSV, one still encounters much familiar language and sentence structure when reading the ESV. One of the things which I lament about our move to the NIV (and also NASB and NKJV) is that things committed to memory in the RSV are no longer reinforced since the language and sentence structure of the NIV is so different. With the ESV, we can recoup this. I be-

lieve that several generations should be able to live with one Bible translation, and that changes should be minimal. The ESV keeps us within the RSV tradition with which many in our churches have grown up.

Outdated and difficult expressions have been modernized.

Besides, some churches in our federation remain reluctant to use the NIV; others have adopted the NIV half-heartedly. Still other congregations have opted for the NASB or NKJV. Perhaps all of the churches in our federation will be able to rally around the ESV if it is shown to be a worthy translation. Therefore, I sincerely hope that our Committee on Bible Translations will have a close look at the ESV and present an analysis in its report to General Synod 2004. Its mandate is indeed "To monitor developments in the field of Bible translation" (*Acts General Synod Neerlandia 2001*, art. 38, Recommendation 5.2.4, p. 41).

Increased unity as to Bible translation in our federation would also be to the benefit of our *Book of Praise*. If the *Book of Praise* is adapted to the NIV, churches which do not use the NIV may feel alienated from their own liturgical book. There is already evidence of this (see *Acts General Synod Neerlandia 2001*, art. 91, pp. 102, 103). If our churches are able to rally around the ESV, this problem can be overcome.

In light of all the above, the ESV merits careful consideration by our churches. We would do well to familiarize ourselves with this new translation. It is available in hardcover and leather. The hardcover ESV Classic Reference Bible has a Bible Resources CD-Rom enclosed. The CD includes several Bible translations, nine commentaries, dictionaries and encyclopedia resources, Greek and Hebrew resources, as well as 200 colour maps. This added electronic feature is a handy study tool for "people of the Book." 

Rev. C.J. VanderVelde is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Yarrow, British Columbia.



Regulations for Ontario's Equity in Education Tax Credit

By K. Sikkema

Just before the end of 2001, the Ontario government announced the regulations which were to be enforced regarding the new Equity in Education Tax Credit. To everyone's surprise, it will be easy for each of our schools in Ontario to meet the requirements. This article is intended to present the significant aspects for our people. The details of the regulations can be found in the Ontario Tax Legislation Bulletin at: <http://www.gov.on.ca/fin/english/taxbeng.htm>.

With the regulations, one concern for the viability of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College has also been alleviated, as there are no specifications for teacher qualifications from recognized institutions.

The new regulations show that our schools easily meet the size requirement of at least five students. It should also be easy to obtain the required Canadian Police Criminal Reference information for those staff members that frequently meet with students. Other required information, which should be made available to parents sending or intending to send their children to the school by the end of March 2002, include the school's name and address, location, history, financial statements, summary of academic programs and expected academic results, nature of student evaluation, professional credentials of teaching staff, school policy on refunds of fees, and information relating to provisions for the health and safety of the students. Much (though perhaps not all) of this information is typically disseminated

by our schools already, through parent handbooks or regular publications. With the regulations, one concern for the viability of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College has also been alleviated, as there are no specifications for teacher qualifications from recognized institutions.

The regulations also clarify which portions of tuition are and which portions are not eligible for the credit. To identify the portion of school contributions people in Ontario could claim for income tax purposes, they previously had to subtract the "Cost of Education" for their own children from their total contributions. Although the document does not specify that this "Cost of Education" is the same as the eligible amount for the Equity in Education Tax Credit, it certainly would be a very close match. In essence, the portion that used to be eligible as a charitable tax deduction, is still eligible. As a rule of thumb, we can expect about 40% of our charitable donations to show up as a refund on our income tax.

What can be expected?

The amount of contributions to the schools that could *not* be deducted as a charitable donation is addressed by the new tax credit. For the 2002 taxation year, parents can expect to receive a refund of 10% of that amount, even if they do not pay any taxes. There is a maximum of \$70 per child of ages 6-21, or \$35 for every child aged 4-5, for every month he or she attended elementary or high school or kindergarten, but it is unlikely that our parents are paying that much. After all, tuition for elementary schools or high schools is typically in the range of \$5000 to \$6000 per family per year, and for kindergarten programs it tends to be significantly less. It should be noted that the tax credit does not alleviate extra fees such as for uniforms, textbooks, and outings.

In the scenario of my family, with two children in elementary and two children in high school, we could expect a total education tax credit of approximately \$600 for the 2002 taxation year. In the spring of 2003, we would receive: (two elementary school stu-

dents) X (10% of \$1250 cost of education per student) = \$250, plus (two high school students) X (10% of \$1700 cost of education per student) = \$350, for a total of \$600. This example is based on rounded fees and cost of education figures for the 2000 taxation year, and assumes that those figures will not change much. As the education tax credit increases by 10% each year until it maxes out at 50% in 2006, we would expect to receive approximately \$3000 in the spring of 2007 if we continued to have two children in both schools.

In the trend to offer parents more choice for the education of their children, Ontario is behind by several years.

It may vary

Of course, there are variations on this scenario. If we had fewer children in either of the two schools, the tax credit would be less, but we would be able to claim a greater portion of the contributions for charitable purposes. If we had a student entering school for the first time in September, or leaving school at the end of June, the amounts would be calculated based on the number of months the child actually attended school. This would come down to 1% of the cost of education for that child, times the number of months attended (ten months would give the full 10%). In a situation where the cost of education leaves no room for a charitable donation refund, parents can expect to receive the full 10% of their total contribution to the school as a tax credit over the 2002 taxation year. To get accurate figures for yourself, it would be best to look at your own documentation regarding tuition paid and cost of education. As indicated above, the tax credit applies to the tuition you paid, but for which you could not claim an income tax deduction.

These scenarios will probably require our boards to issue more detailed taxation information to each family at the end of each calendar year, but it


should not be necessary to revamp the school's fee structure from a family-based system to a per-student system. For the school to qualify, boards will also need to make sure that the required information is available to their constituents by the end of March 2002, and by the end of February in subsequent years.

Unrest in education

Ernie Eves is a leading candidate for the new leadership of the Ontario conservatives, and he regrets that the regulations cause the government to lose control over part of its money. The government is very unpopular because of its public school policies. Many peo-

ple are unhappy with the demanding and hastily implemented new curriculum, while the government cut significantly in the education budget at the same time. Many believe that the quality of education in public schools has suffered, and that the children bear the brunt of the government's mistakes. Furthermore, it appears that the government withdraws money from the public system to give it to private schools – which are, in the eyes of many, elitist schools for the rich. The correctness of those perceptions can be and is being argued, but they constitute public opinion nevertheless.

In my opinion, it is not likely that the tax credit will be completely elimi-

nated. The United Nations pressured Ontario to stop its discrimination of non Roman Catholic religious schools by withholding any form of financial support. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of scientific evidence that confirms improved learning and teaching outcomes if there is a high degree of similarity between the beliefs or ideologies of parents and the schools their children attend. In the trend to offer parents more choice for the education of their children, Ontario is behind by several years. 

Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter to the Editor:

Where is Smithers?

Smithers is a small city in northern British Columbia with a Canadian Reformed Church of approximately 380 members. It was instituted in 1956, and from 1952-1956 it was a house congregation. Houston is the mother church and is sixty-five kilometres east of Smithers. One hundred kilometres north of here is Fort Babine where Rev. W. Bredenhof is active as a missionary.

In *Clarion* of November 23, 2001, Vol.50, #24, I read "Observations" by Rev. G. van Popta and the report by Rev. R. Aasman, "Who shepherds the shepherds?" Both articles disturbed me more than I would like to admit because of the situation we are experiencing here in Smithers.

We have been a vacant church for three years, having extended eight calls, but receiving only declines. Reading these articles, I am asking myself, "Are we that impossible?" I also get the impression that ministers like having colleagues nearby, because ministers need to be stimulated by each other as ministers. I do believe that to be of great importance, but I also believe that vacant churches need a pastor and teacher. The declines and the disappointments are hard to describe. Realizing that in the end it is God our Father who guides and leads us here also, we go on in the knowledge that in God's time we will have a minister to bring the Word to instruct his flock.

Perhaps though, the Canadian Reformed Churches should look at a different way to have ministers serve the congregations. If there were more frequent changes in congregations, maybe there would be less burn out. If a congregation were in a remote location, and that would be a problem for a minister, the knowledge that a change is coming might make it more relaxed for both.

What am I trying to say? To me it seems that the most remote congregations have the most trouble getting a minister. After reading these two articles, I am not sure if the conclusion is a right one. I agree with most of what is in these articles, but does that help the remote congregations or the small ones?

My wife has lived in Smithers from the very beginning of the church here in 1952. I came in 1956. Having lived here this long, and being members of this church, I must say that we both love the area, but even more, we love the church of which we have been members all this time. We might have had some rough times, but as our last minister once said to me, "In spite of everything we are still here."

Please realize when one loves someone, or a church, or a school, or mission, it is hard, if not impossible, to listen to second and third hand information about what you love, always having been told to look at the positive.

We might not have many influential or noble members, but we are a church of Jesus Christ, in need of a pastor and teacher. No minister can be forced to

come here; neither do we know the need in other churches. But we do ask you to remember all the congregations, also those who are smaller and in remote places. Please rotate the services of the shepherds. We are thankful that the apostles heeded the call to spread the gospel throughout the world and did not stay in Jerusalem.

I have put down some of my concerns. It is not to criticize our ministers or others. Their task is heavy, but the request is there as parents and grandparents: come over and help us. Perhaps help in vacant churches should be a topic of a ministerial conference.

From Smithers, Fred Hofsink Sr.

Our brother refers to two articles in *Clarion*. In all fairness to the two articles, the first one speaks about the urgent need for ministers. More ministers would address the need of the vacant churches. The second article is a summary of a seminar by Dr. N.D. Kloosterman in which he spoke about the need for collegiality among ministers. Much of this can be carried out by phone, email and meetings at Classis and ministerials. The remote location of Smithers would not affect this negatively. Moreover, there are two Canadian Reformed ministers in the Smithers area, along with United Reformed ministers. This would be a great support and blessing to any minister moving into that area. Thus, in our opinion, these articles do not undermine the plea of our brother.

The editors