

for a secular public school based on an appeal to a vague deism disguised as Christianity that was supposedly offensive to no one and open to pupils of all beliefs. No longer would there be a public school which was in any clear sense Christian from an orthodox standpoint. The new religion of the public school was secular humanism. In effect, this legislation was a rejection of Groen's attempt to solve the school question by the introduction of denominational public schools. At this point Groen resigned his parliamentary seat, for he realized that the nation was no longer Christian. He was stunned. A few years later he was reelected to parliament, but this time as *the champion of private Christian schools as the alternative to the secular public school with a deceptive Christian facade* (emphasis A.L.).

■ ■

## **Hitherto Hath the Lord Helped Us**

Rev. J. Kortering

Rev. Kortering gave this inspirational address at a public meeting of the P.R.T.I. Convention, October, 1984. He is pastor of the Grandville, Michigan Protestant Reformed Church.

Ebenezer! What a declaration!

According to I Samuel 7, Israel had good reason to cry out, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The Philistine threat had just been overcome. During battle, the Lord had thundered upon them and discomfited them. The army of Israel had moved in for the kill. At last there was peace in the land.

This had been a long time in coming. For years the armies of the Philistines had plundered the fields of Israel. They had laid waste their cities. Even the ark of the covenant had been captured and for twenty years confined in Kirjathjearim. But, why? not because Israel was inferior in power or the Philistine better equipped for battle. Israel had walked in sin and Jehovah had raised up the Philistines against them. The heavy hand of Jehovah was against them.

Now, things were different. At Mizpeh they had repented before Jehovah. They had fasted, poured out the symbolic water in expression of their sorrow for sin and had asked Jehovah to forgive them.

And He delivered them.

Ebenezer, hitherto hath the Lord helped us!

Well may we say that this evening. The thirtieth anniversary of this teachers' convention is a testimony of Jehovah's love and care. The only reason we are here tonight is the faithful help which Jehovah gives us. Let's consider this subject and ask two questions. In what way has Jehovah helped us? and what is the significance of this for the future?

The first thing that comes to mind when we face the question, in what way has Jehovah helped us, is this: He has preserved for us the truth of His covenant, that He is a covenant God of believers and their children.

The truth of the covenant is the heartbeat of the Reformed faith. One hesitates to take any doctrine and exalt it over other truths. All truth is organic. Much like the plant — who can say the roots are more important than the stem, or the leaves, or the flower? Each part is important for the whole. The same applies to truth. Truth is living since it flows forth from the living God. In Him all truth is vital. The very nature of His Being, His attributes, His Persons and works are living in Him. He has manifested His truth in the Person of His own Son. Jesus Christ said of Himself, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He is the expressed image of the Godhead, full of glory and truth. This truth is revealed to us by the wonder of the Holy Spirit inspiring men to write the Word of God. That Word is the content of the preaching of the gospel and becomes alive in us as the Holy Spirit applies it unto our hearts.

This truth of the Living God has a heartbeat, it is the doctrine of the covenant. As a covenant God He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Within His own Being He enjoys covenant friendship. He expresses this friendship in His eternal decrees, the decrees of sovereign predestination and providence. He manifested His covenant friendship in the creation of Adam and Eve in the garden, all the wonders of creation were joined in friendship with the Creator through the heart of man. This covenant extended unto His fallen people through Jesus Christ, His Son. In Christ the covenant was sealed for eternity. By His Word and Spirit He gathers His covenant people unto Himself. At the end of the ages, that covenant will be perfectly manifest in heavenly glory.

What does this mean for us? Through the knowledge of this truth we are brought into covenant friendship with God. We know God as

our Father, His love beats in our hearts, all these truths about God move us to bow before the adorable God. We listen to Him and confess and believe what He says about Himself. We realize the importance of serving Him and conforming our will to His will. We become obedient before Him.

This covenant is with believers and their children. God establishes His covenant with them — not that all children of believers are in the covenant; the seed of the promise are counted as the seed. This gives an entirely different perspective to our dealing with children. They are the children of God. His friendship extends unto our children.

This doctrine, the heartbeat of the Reformed faith, has been preserved for these many generations. We do well to remind ourselves that these great truths did not originate with us. If that were true, we could well be concerned about the charge of our being sectarian. As churches we do not want to raise up new doctrines, our calling is not to be original in our thinking. No, rather we face the responsibility to hold to the truths of God's Word written centuries ago, truths which the church of the past confessed, truths which the Reformed churches expressed in their confessions. The study of history shows that these truths which we hold dear as churches and in our Christian schools have been handed down to us from our forefathers. The joy of this anniversary is that we still hold them dear and God has preserved them for us these many years.

We need but remind ourselves that the doctrine of the covenant was the heartbeat of all truth throughout history. Many times our forefathers did not use the term as such, yet their defense of the faith makes it plain that they loved the truth of God's friendship. Augustine fought Pelagius on the doctrine of man's innate natural depravity in order that He might preserve the truth of sovereign predestination and salvation by the blood of the cross. Our Reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin, expressed this. Luther fought the dead church on the living truth of justification by faith not by works of righteousness we do. To triumph in this he had to deny decrees of the church and publically confess, "My heart is captive to the Word of God." John Calvin systematized these truths and centralized them in the sovereign good pleasure of God. Only a deep commitment to Holy Scripture and love of God could produce such a Reformation. The heartbeat of God's friendship was manifest. Our Dutch forefathers carried on this Reformed tradition. De Cock, Van Raalte, Scholte left the state church in the Netherlands because they despised the inroads of Arminianism, hierarchy, even dead orthodoxy. They came to America because they

loved the Sovereign God and rejoiced in His covenant. They saw that the covenant demanded spiritual separation from the influence of the ungodly world. Even a new country did not guarantee spiritual fidelity. In 1857 the Christian Reformed Church began since many in the Dutch Reformed Church in America departed from the truths which were dear to their hearts. The heartbeat of the Reformed faith was at stake. Similarly, our origin as Protestant Reformed Churches focused upon these very issues. The doctrine of common grace and the free offer of the gospel mitigated against God's sovereignty and the particular character of His love. In 1953 our churches faced the painful controversy once again: what of the doctrine of the covenant, is the promise for all on condition of faith or is it sovereignly realized by God because it is particular throughout?

The preservation of the great truths of God's sovereignty and His covenant of grace is a history written in controversy, church splits, persecution, even death. God has been good to us in that He has preserved these truths for us and our children. Surely, we say, Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us.

The second thing we wish to point out is that integrated throughout this glorious history is the fact that God has preserved for us Christian schools. Our forefathers who were committed to the truth of God's covenant, realized the need for Christian schools in which the children of the covenant might be instructed. They saw the need for a thorough education in languages, science, literature, philosophy, and theology. If God's cause was to prosper, ignorance had to be overcome, the issues of the day had to be faced and this required solid Christian instruction. They worked hard to organize Christian schools on all levels, the lower grades, academies, as well as university education. Martin Luther and John Calvin both labored hard and impressed upon the people the need for Christian schools. Our Dutch forefathers were the same. Abraham Kuyper saw the need for Christian schools in the Netherlands. We can thank God that our Christian Reformed forefathers in America carried on in this great work. Similarly, our Protestant Reformed fathers worked to have our Christian schools. The anniversary booklet is a chronicle of this history. Our Hope school in 1947, Adams and Edgerton in 1950, Loveland and Doon in the early 1960s followed by South Holland and Covenant Christian High in the later 1960s, Hull, Redlands, Lynden in the 1970s. Here we are tonight to remember this work of God. We have a Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools and this Institute in which our teachers can discuss ways to better themselves in the great task of instructing the youth of the

covenant. Indeed, hitherto hath the Lord helped us!

Finally, we like to limit this work a bit more — we may also say tonight that our heritage includes not only Christian schools, but parental Christian schools. The heritage of Reformed Christian schools is that these schools are not operated by the state, not the church, not by some private corporation, but by covenant parents. This too, has encountered opposition. Governments have not always allowed this. Many insist that to have an educated citizenry means that government does the educating. The church frequently stepped in and insisted that it is their duty to instruct in all these subjects. Historically the Roman Catholic, the Lutheran, and more recently the Baptist churches have done this. In some instances private corporations have been organized with boards of directors to take on this task. Yet, the position of the Reformed churches has been and is today, this is a parental duty. God has given this responsibility to parents, Ephesians 6:4. Such schools have the prayers, interest, and support of parents and family. These parents insist that the purpose of these schools is to teach their children all the formal subjects from the perspective of God's Word. Almost everywhere opposition arises when parents take this responsibility seriously and organize such Christian schools. It takes courage, willingness to be a separate people, and most of all a love for the God of the covenant.

The next question we face is this, what is the significance of all this as we face the future? From many points of view the future seems dark and foreboding. Think for a moment of the society in which our children must live. The effects of secularism and humanism are being felt on every side. The entire structure of our society is undergoing change. Gross immorality abounds on every side. Does the church of today hold forth any hope? In general the church has lost any significant effect for change. In fact the apostate church leads the way into the pit of modern day degradation. Can government help? Big government is reaching its greedy fingers into all areas of life and it is not for the common good, it is directing the state toward the world government of the anti-christ.

Does this mean that we are trapped in a hopeless situation? Do we bemoan our sad state of affairs? No, if this anniversary is going to glorify God we may well take this theme, Hitherto hath God helped us, and apply it to our future as well. While we look back we need a perspective for the future. In faithfulness to God's Word and continuing the great work our forefathers preserved for us, we will carry with us the guarantee that God will help us no matter what the future holds.

May I suggest that we renew our commitment in this way?

First, that we continue to champion the truth of God's covenant. Since it is the heartbeat of Reformed theology, giving it its proper place will keep us from two errors: doctrinal indifference and cold intellectualism. The Reformed faith is not heady scholasticism, it beats with the warmth and glow of God's sovereign good pleasure to accomplish our salvation and that of our children. Surely, we cry, "Let God be God" when our eternal security is at stake. Such doctrine is sweet to our taste and music to our ears. It draws us into a personal fellowship of friendship with God. Within such a covenant we love God, cherish His Word, grow in grace, and seek to conform our lives to His will. Then we know what it means that friendship with the world is enmity with God and we cannot sit at the table of the Lord and the table of devils. God's covenant friendship is an exclusive relationship.

We then have the spiritual impetus to see the importance of maintaining parental Christian schools. I have in mind maintaining them not so much over against the attempts of government to bribe us with federal aid and thereby to begin to control. This danger is real enough. But, I have in mind the need to work to preserve our parental schools from within. Unless our parents continue to work for them, they will cease to be parental Christian schools.

How is this?

First, parents must continue to be involved in the formal education of their children once we have our Christian schools. The great threat in this connection is parental indifference. When this happens other things begin to go wrong. Soon teachers develop an attitude of "professionalism" — we are the educated ones, we know what it takes to teach, parents keep your nose out of our business. Another way is "boardism" when the administration of the school, principal, school board members take the attitude — we know how to run a school, ignore parents. To my knowledge this is not present in our schools, but you can be sure it will become a real thing if parents become indifferent. The solution is obvious. Parents must continue to be involved with the school. They must attend all meetings in which they have opportunity to learn about the school, evaluate the instruction their children receive, or be busy in the government of the school. In this way, accountability is to the parents who are given this duty by God. The other thing is that if parents believe that the school is not fulfilling its commitment to teach, such dissatisfaction must be expressed in the proper way. It is so easy to destroy God's covenant work with careless criticism, faultfinding, running down the school. Any grievance must

be expressed to the teacher, principal, school board so that it can be considered in a proper way. Our involvement as parents must not be destructive but constructive and for the good of all God's children.

Another thing that is important is that we agree on a Biblical sense of morality, of right and wrong. Our schools must operate in a proper sphere of godliness. We parents have much to do with this. In fact it is on this score that our parental schools are vulnerable. If the majority of parents have a worldly attitude and care not for the antithetical walk of obedience by ourselves and our children, the school will reflect this. This happens in schools from time to time. The parents become successful in business and money begins to talk. The character of the school will reflect this, our kids must make money, the emphasis is placed on the physical building and its conveniences, not so much on its teaching. With luxury comes pleasure, the more money people have the more ways they spend it. Soon worldliness creeps into homes and school. Then you hear talk of parties, social dancing, movies, and this becomes acceptable. The school should include these functions as well. A little controversy follows, but soon the majority win out and if a parent goes to the principal to discuss this, his answer is, the majority of the parents approve, what can we do?

How can this be avoided? If we see these wrong values entering our homes, and that's where the trouble lies, not in the school itself, but in the homes, we must in obedience to God's Word go and show our brother (and sister) his fault between you and him alone, Matthew 18. The only way to root out worldliness is the proper application of Christian discipline, mutually among each other and formally by the church.

Finally, we must as parents do everything in our power to make sure our homes are covenant homes, where God is honored and from which our children go forth to school and enter into the world.

This involves three things. First, our homes must reflect the Lordship of Christ by honoring marriage. Nothing contributes more to the spiritual development of our children than providing them the atmosphere of a loving father and mother who honor God by accepting their God-given place in marriage. Such a home demonstrates covenant love by experiencing it first-hand through parental love. This furnishes spiritual security which children need in this hostile world. Secondly, we must motivate our children to be diligent in learning. This cannot be done by criticizing a teacher or talking about boring subjects. Covenant parents encourage their children to explore our Father's world and discuss with them their subjects and learn along with them.

Excited parents contribute much to motivated children. Finally, our homes must form a structured environment for learning respect for authority and the need for discipline. We owe it to our teachers to furnish them children who have respect for them for God's sake and realize that when they do wrong God is displeased and they must correct themselves and not take their anger out on the teacher. If we teach them this as parents, it is but natural for them to expect the same from the teacher. Only within an orderly classroom can the great learning process be advanced.

May God bless our homes so that our parental schools may remain Christian and thoroughly committed to the advancement of God's covenant in our day.

Looking back and looking ahead, let us humbly say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

■ ■

## **Preventive Discipline**

Mr. Calvin Kalsbeek

*Mr. Kalsbeek presented this paper at a convention sectional of the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute 1984 Convention. Mr. Kalsbeek is on the faculty of Covenant Christian High School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

"Eighty percent of the persons who quit after one year of teaching do so because they cannot handle discipline." So writes Professor Norman DeJong in the August 27, 1984 issue of *The Banner* in an article titled, "Good Discipline is Good Teaching." If Mr. DeJong's figures are correct, maybe what we are in part concerned with in our sectional this morning is what could be called a teacher conservation program. No teacher enters the profession planning to have difficulties maintaining a well-ordered classroom. However, it is clear from the quote above that many teachers do enter the profession who are unsuccessful in this endeavor. Why is this? Isn't it enough that one desires an orderly classroom, a classroom in which it is possible for good teaching to take place? Obviously more is necessary! For one thing,