

# **Rearing Covenant Children for Life in the End-Time**

by Rev. David Engelsma

## **Introduction**

My esteemed co-workers in the great calling of rearing the children of Christ!

My original intention, upon being asked to address you on the instruction and preparation of covenant children for life at the end of the ages, was to marshall the evidence that the end is near, in order to impress on us all that the task of Christian education is urgent.

There is the evidence from the brute creation: its multi-voiced groanings in earthquake, volcano, and storm.

There is the evidence from society: the abounding of its lawlessness; its love of pleasure; its thorough-going man-centeredness, in which the number, 666, is writ large.

There is the evidence from the nations. There are wars and rumors of wars. At the same time, there is the nations' susceptibility to, and deep yearning for, oneness and the peace and prosperity that oneness can provide. Thus, the nations can be delivered from the terror of mutual, mass destruction. Thus, they can share the various resources of the earth, if not equitably, at least so as to ensure survival. Thus, the "nobler" aspirations of mankind for brotherhood can be realized. In the language of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, the turbulent seas throw up the Beast. In this connection, there is evidence from political developments — socialism, communism, totalitarianism, and the welfare state; evidence from economics; evidence from international alliances; and more.

There is the evidence from this world's thought and philosophy, both educated, e.g., evolution, and popular, e.g., that the sole standard of human morality is man.

Not least, there is the evidence from the church. There is apostasy. There is the gradual fixing of the church's duty, and construing of her message, as a duty, and message, concerning earthly justice and peace in the here-and-now. There are the alliances of the churches and religions, not only the mergers, but also the co-operation in what is

considered the church's really important task. The Beast that is like a lamb — the false prophet — of Revelation 13 serves the first Beast — Antichrist — and teaches all men and nations to worship the Beast.

On second thought, I decided not to treat the subject this way. It is not that these things, these evidences, do not bear on the appropriate and vital subject. They do. Scripture predicted them. What our Belgic Confession declares in Article 5, in support of its doctrine of the Bible's authority, holds true here: "the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling." Scripture predicted them for us to recognize, as signs of the end; and Scripture predicted them so that Protestant Reformed parents, teachers, and preachers would rear covenant children with some degree of urgency.

Nevertheless, I will not come to you in this way. For one thing, world events are always subject to personal interpretation: what one regards as a loud footfall of the Antichrist, another may view as merely the personal folly of a president or judge.

For another thing, the kind of approach that I have sketched is subject to the warning, that the saints have always noted disasters and disobedience as harbingers of the end of the world in the very near future. Amidst the uproar of his day, Luther prophesied the end, if not quite in his lifetime, then soon thereafter. I myself heard a minister suggest the end in 20 years — 30 years ago.

Also, incitement to an urgent task by way of a vivid representation of the evils in the world has a way of dissipating with the good food and enjoyable fellowship of the banquet that very evening. It is difficult to keep this stimulation. The shenanigans at the U.N. are far removed from the daily routine in South Holland, Loveland, and Grand Rapids.

In addition, the call to Christian educational arms with the alarums of the evils of our time can so easily make Christian education a grim and gloomy business. There are Christian schools set up on account of socialism, communism, and liberalism, where the teachers are cold-eyed; the teaching is an almost anxious preparation of children for the impending conflict; and the gym classes, a training of boys and girls to handle rifles and grenades. This is not what the raising of covenant children should be.

Let us adopt a different viewpoint, that of Holy Scripture in I Corinthians 7:29-31: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they pos-

sessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.” This approach is not less radical, but more radical; it does not make life today less serious, but more serious; it does not make teaching less effective, but more effective.

### LIFE IN THE END-TIME

The apostle is concerned in the passage with earthly life — the earthly life of believers and their children. He refers to several of the most basic of human activities and relationships. Marriage is mentioned first: “they that have wives. . . .” This is an institution that is fundamental for church and society. It is a relationship of crucial significance for the married person himself and every other aspect of his life. Included are the home and the family.

Next, he refers to the entire human effort to enjoy pleasure, comfort, security, and success; on the national and international level, this is the endeavor for peace and prosperity: “they that rejoice. . . .” He has earthly pleasure in mind. In itself, you understand, this is innocent: we want a house; we try to be healthy; we like to be good at our job; we desire to sit, peacefully, of a Friday evening, in front of the fire, with a good book, without creditors banging on our door and without a toothache. The disappointment of this is the weeping of the passage — the suffering of all kinds of earthly pains: no lodging; loss of job; sickness; bills; and what not.

Third, he brings up the economic aspect of life: “they that buy. . . .” We are to think of labor; business; finances; property — the marketplace. We really did not need Karl Marx to inform us that this has a large place in the life of a man, including the Christian man.

Lest anything escape the sweep of his net, the apostle adds, “and they that use this world. . . .” The “world” here is not the wicked world of men who are enslaved by the Devil and whose culture and civilization are impressed with his mark; but it is the cosmos that God created in the beginning — the earthly creation. It is the earth, the waters, and space; it is the raw materials and the earthly products made of them; it is the various ordinances established in the creation by God. The subject is nothing less than our use of the earthly creation — any use, and all use: breathing the air; feeding the body; plowing the field; driving a car; climbing the mountains.

Besides the all-embracing reference to the activities of men in the creation, there is mention of two fundamental, earthly forms of these activities. The first is time: “the time is short.” This is the time of our own personal life. It is also the time of the existence of the world

itself — what we call history. The second is “the fashion of this world.” This is the way in which creation is set up for human life and the way it appears. Our world is such a world that there *must* be marrying; pleasure and sorrow; buying and selling; and all the rest of ordinary human life.

So, the subject is the big subject: the life of man on this big ball — the life of your students and of you yourself.

Our lives are being lived in the end-time. This is a fact, altogether apart from any and all “signs of the time,” in nature, society, and the church. It was the end-time, and Christians had to live consciously in the end-time, in the apostle’s day, almost 2000 years ago, when there was no apostasy as we see today and when there **was** no Communism. No doubt, it is true that the very end is closer **now** than then; but to say so is really to miss the point and to overlook what really makes the present time, the end-time.

Two great truths make the present, the end-time — the last days. First, the “time is short.” “The time” is the period of time from the ascension and exaltation of the Lord Jesus to His second coming; it is the history of our careering globe, *anno Domine*. This time has been shortened! From the ascension to the second coming, the line of time is a straight line. It must not, however, be thought of as a dead line, but as a taut tendon that is pulling us and the world towards the End with the greatest pressure. Everything necessary has been packed into this “time”; there is not one unnecessary, wasted moment. John expresses this by saying that Jesus “comes quickly.”

What is true of history is also true of each Christian. The time of the life of each of us has been shortened. This means more than that, really, none of us lives very long. It means that God has made the life of every one of us as short as possible, with a view to each one’s attaining to Christ and his own share in Christ’s glory. There is not a wasted moment! The life of each is just that long, as is demanded by his preparation for the End. Think of that, when you teach your children. Nor does it hurt, now and then, to remember that some of your students may never reach 50, or even 20.

The great truth here is that there is a Goal of time, towards which history and the believers are straining: the Day of the public, universal glorification of Jesus Christ the Lord and, by the mercy of God, of all who are His.

The second truth that makes the present time, the end-time, is that the fashion of this world is passing away, is perishing. The entire cosmos in its present set-up and appearance will be destroyed; it is not

going to last forever. Peter tells us when and how this will happen: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Peter 3:10). Since this is timed according to the Goal of time — the second coming, this will happen quickly, as soon as possible. Everything is rushing towards the destruction of the fashion of the world.

In fact, the fashion of the world is passing away continually. It is perishing right now, while we are using it and struggling to get a little chunk of it. This is true in two ways. First, God in judgment is destroying the fashion of the world. This is the deepest meaning of the pollution; the trouble in marriage and family; social strife; economic distress; war; and catastrophes in nature. Judgment is not the one, sudden stroke at the End, but an ongoing, ever-increasing act of God that culminates in the conflagration and earthquake of the End.

The other way is our own passing away from the fashion of the world. When I die, the fashion of this world passes away, for *me*. And I am always in the process of dying.

We and our children live in the end-time. We live in the end-time in A.D. 1982, just as the saints lived in the end-time in A.D. 60. We live in the end-time, whether we live in earthly peace and freedom, or in war and slavery. We live in the end-time in such a fundamental way, that the truth of it is at hand, day in and day out.

We need instruction in this. We need instruction that this is indeed the truth about our time. It is so easy to forget and ignore it. It is so easy to regard time apart from the Goal, i.e., Jesus Christ, with the result that I regard time as an opportunity for me to get a name, to become rich, or merely to live an easy life. It is so easy to view the fashion of the world as permanent and stable, for me to depend on and settle into.

We need instruction, how to live in the world in light of this awesome truth of the end-time.

It is required of Christian school teachers that they instruct the covenant children in this. You teach about the world and about life in the world. You must teach life in the world *in the end-time*. You must teach what kind of life is demanded by this, and follows from this.

This is, in face, the burden of the passage: how to live in the world, and how to use it, *in light of the end-time*. The *consequence* of the shortening of time is the concern of verse 29: "*it remaineth that. . .*"

*What follows* from the passing away of the fashion of the world is the concern of verse 31: "And they that use this world, as not abusing it: *for. . .*"

If I may lapse, for a moment, into the language of theology, the Word cries out, "Live eschatologically!"

#### THE APPROPRIATE REARING

It is striking that the kind of life demanded by the end-time, and, therefore, the appropriate rearing for life in the end-time, is not that the children abstain from immorality — rebellion, fornication, drunkenness, drugs, and the like. Paul does not say, "Since the time is short, do not fornicate, or divorce and remarry, or have an affair"; but he says, "Have a wife, as not having a wife." He does not say, "Do not steal"; but he says, "Buy, as not possessing." We may not content ourselves with admonishing the children not to be immoral.

Life appropriate to the end-time is human life that "sits loose" to the world and to every aspect of earthly life in the world. This is the explanation of the paradox: have a wife, as not having one; weep, as not weeping; buy, as not possessing. Having a wife, being comfortable, being uncomfortable, owning real estate, and every other earthly condition are of no real importance. It is not of ultimate importance whether one is married, or unmarried; whether one's earthly life is weeping or rejoicing; whether one is a "has" or a "has not"; or even whether one is a slave or a freeman, as the apostle has said in verses 21, 22.

This is the holiness of indifference to the world. It is what Calvin called "contempt. . .for the present life." Describing the Christian life, in Book III, Chapter IX, of the *Institutes*, Calvin wrote: "For there is no medium between the two things: the earth must either be worthless in our estimation, or keep us enslaved by an intemperate love of it." We must, said Calvin, "hasten to despise the world, and aspire with our whole heart to the future life."

The life that is fitting for the end of time is a life that runs the risk of being charged with carelessness towards earthly things: world-flight! other-worldliness! pie-in-the-sky Christianity! In fact, the charge is false. But you can certainly understand why those "Whose portion is below/ Who, with life's treasures satisfied/ No better portion know," as *The Psalter* puts it, raise this charge against the life of the man who takes seriously the apostle's exhortation in I Corinthians 7, and practices it.

Such a life, and such a life only, escapes the fatal danger of laying

up treasures for ourselves on earth and having our heart in the earth (Matt. 6:19, 21); of loving this present world, as did Demas (II Tim. 4:10); of having the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word in us, so that we become unfruitful (Matt. 13:22); of saving our lives and gaining the whole world, only to lose our own souls (Matt. 16:24-26).

This kind of life spares us from many destructive evils: covetousness; envy; ambition; drunkenness.

Our Great Teacher forewarned us that the danger in the end-time would be earthlimindedness. He used the object-lessons of the time of Noah and the time of Lot. What was the evil of the world before the flood and of Sodom before the fire? It was not the violence and perversion that we immediately think of. But:

They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.

Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

(Luke 17:27-30)

They were wrapped up in this world: they had wives, as having them; they rejoiced, as rejoicing; they bought, as possessing; they used this world, as abusing it.

When Jesus, in a parallel passage, Matthew 24:42ff., says, "Watch," He is saying: "Watch, that you never put too much stock in the present life."

This attitude of heart and fundamental posture of soul will show itself in sobriety and moderation in earthly life. This is a recurring theme in Calvin. The British poet, Davies, summed up the Reformed style of life in earlier days this way: "simplicity, sobriety, and measure." Holy indifference to this world is a foe of excess, luxury, and extravagance, whether in eating and drinking; in dress; in house; or in recreation. It is a foe of that which is called "abusing" (the world), in I Corinthians 7:31. Literally, it is an "overmuch-using." "Overmuch-using" is, primarily, a use of the world with one's heart set squarely on the world. Invariably, it is also an immoderate use.

Let us teach the children *this* in the end-time. This may seem strange, even paradoxical: as you teach them the world and its fashion (and you must!), you teach them to "sit loose" to the world, because

it has no ultimate worth; indeed, in itself, apart from the Goal, it is worthless, and life in it, vanity. This instruction is never so effective as it is when it comes from you, the teachers, who know the world and devote your life to instruction about the world. The students cannot so lightly dismiss this teaching coming from you, as they do when it comes from the preachers, by saying, "Well, they don't know anything about the world anyhow." As with all instruction that is effective, however, it must be seen in your life; and for that, you yourselves must believe it.

This does not make Christian education a gloomy task, but a joyful, hopeful one, even as the life of holy indifference to the world is a joyful, hopeful life.

### EDUCATION WITH ETERNITY IN VIEW

The apostle of Christ is not advocating world-flight, or even carelessness of earthly life. No schoolboy may respond enthusiastically to your instruction about life in the end-time, by shouting: "Hooray! This creation and earthly life in it really do not matter; and, therefore, I need not study my math, or even go to school."

Paul does not conclude, "Have no wife"; "Do not buy"; and "Try not to use the world, or use it as little as possible." Rather, he commands: "Have a wife! Buy! Use the world!" That he intends a careful use, a heart-felt, hearty use, is plain from all the rest of his writings, including this very chapter, particularly as regards having a wife. Calvin understood this well enough. Having exhorted "contempt. . .for the present life," he continues, in the *Institutes*: "Still the contempt which believers should train themselves to feel for the present life must not be of a kind to beget hatred of it or ingratitude to God."

The command is not to flee the world, but to use it in a certain way; and this way is, not for itself, but for the Goal of it all: the Lord Christ, His coming Kingdom, and the re-fashioned world.

Into this Kingdom, we and the children whom we educate have already been translated. Our hearts are on it; and we seek it first.

The present time must usher us into eternity. We use the world in its present fashion for the sake of the world in its future fashion. All earthly things and relationships are used and enjoyed, or suffered, on behalf of the heavenly Christ. Nothing in time is permitted to deflect from eternity; and nothing in the world, to compete with Christ.

Exactly this invests the present world, and our life in it, with meaning and purpose — real significance. Even this poor, perishing



world is important, for although the fashion of it passes away, the world itself shall be re-formed in the fashion of Christ. It is eternity, the eternity of the coming Christ, that makes having a wife, weeping, rejoicing, buying, and use of the world significant. It is eternity, the eternity of the coming Kingdom of God, that makes instruction concerning this world, and life in it, significant.

We live and rear our children with a view to eternity.

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## **Educational Pluralism: A Threat or an Ally**

by Agatha Lubbers

We are met here tonight as believers who have covenanted to support Protestant Reformed Christian Education with our love, our time, our money, and all our resources. Several vocal and active Reformed Christians advocating a philosophy of life called Pluralism have developed a carefully argued appeal that says we should most certainly support Christian Schools with our love and our time. However, they also assert that we can legitimately petition for more financial support from the state and federal government than we have received thus far in the history of the independent, non-public Christian school movement in the United States. This movement advocating a philosophy known as "Pluralism" says that now is the time for Reformed Christians and all others who support non-government schools to work for the *disestablishment* of sole and primary monetary support for monopolistic system of education known as public education. They would argue, I am sure, that a meeting and fund-raising activity, such as we enjoy here tonight, is good. We should be concerned with methods for engendering and promoting among ourselves more support for Christian Schools. But they believe we also should be attempting to find ways to retrieve the tax dollars we pay for education, so that some of these taxes come to Christian Schools. Rockne McCarthy, one of the chief advocates of Pluralism, writes in a recent *Christian Home and School* article that "There is a pressing need throughout Canada