



# REFORMED

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

—Exodus 20:12

## Fifth Commandment

**H**ow important are father and mother! Father and mother are the first thing that the child knows. Mother's voice and mother's smell and mother's milk and mother's arms and mother's face are the newborn's entire life. As perception widens, father's strength and father's work and father's interests and father's hands and father's scratchy whiskers on Saturday morning are endlessly fascinating. The child plays at cooking dinner like mother. The child plays at using tools like father. When father and mother smile, the world and everything in it are right. When father and mother frown, the world and everything in it are wrong. How important are father and mother!

Honor thy father and thy mother. To honor something means to give importance to it, to give weight to it, to give all due attention to it. To honor father and mother means to hold father and mother before one's mind with all due respect and deference and obedience. Just as the little child knows nothing of importance in this world save father and mother, so the grown child holds father and mother in highest esteem and highest regard. Honor them, for they are thy father and thy mother!

Behind father and mother stands God. For God is pleased to exercise his authority in this world through institutions that he has made. God made the family, and God exercises his authority over the child through father and mother. God made the state, and God exercises his authority over the citizen through the magistrate. God made labor, and God exercises his

authority over the laborer through the boss. God made the church, and God exercises his authority over the member through the elders.

Honor thy father and thy mother. But father and mother are only the first of many authorities for the child. Honor thy father and thy mother. Honor thy teacher. Honor the policeman and the governor and the president. Honor the boss. Honor the officebearer in the church. And in honoring all these, honor God, who raised them up.

Honor father and mother even when father and mother and all in authority are not worthy of honor in their weakness and sin. Honor father and mother even when father and mother are twisted and broken in iniquity. Honor father and mother even when one must disobey father and mother in order to obey God rather than men. Honor father and mother even when one must oppose father and mother for their being contrary to the cause of God. And "when my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Ps. 27:10).

How important are father and mother. And how scarcely we honor them! How much disdain, arrogance, and disobedience we have toward them! How lightly we esteem them! How shall such as us live forever in God's heavenly land?

Behold Jesus Christ. For he, too, had a Father and a mother. And without fail he honored them! All his life he did his Father's will: "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day"

(John 6:39). And even while dying he made provision for his mother, placing her under the care of his beloved disciple: “Woman, behold thy son!” (19:26). Jesus honored Father and mother; Jesus’ days in God’s heavenly kingdom are long, even eternal; and Jesus has done all this for us and in our place. Because Jesus has obeyed the

fifth commandment for us, our days shall be long in the heavenly land that the Lord our God shall give us.

How shall we show our gratitude for such salvation? This way: “Honour thy father and thy mother.”

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

The first snow of the season has fallen here at *Reformed Pavilion* headquarters. The snow did not linger long; but while it did, all through the wintry landscape rosy-cheeked children went out whooping to throw snowballs, while their mothers went digging for the children’s coats and hats and boots and gloves. In backyards all over, scenes out of a Norman Rockwell briefly came to life.

What is it about the first snow that so electrifies the senses? The lights seem brighter and cheerier on a snowy night, the blankets seem more snug on a snowy morning, and the hot drink blossoms inside with more comforting warmth. Perhaps it is the contrast that makes it so: the light against the dark, the warmth against the cold.

Whatever the case, it is certainly true that the contrast between our vile sins and Christ’s perfect purity makes our salvation through his blood so wonderful. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa. 1:18).

The first snow of the season may have already gone, but don’t let that stop you from getting the slippers out of the back of the closet, grabbing an extra blanket, and settling in with the new *Reformed Pavilion*.

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Be sure to check out the timely book review in this issue. Dewey Engelsma presents his review of *Bully Pulpit*. The review is profitable, insightful, and instructive. The review takes a special and compassionate interest in those sheep who

have been bullied by wolves in the pulpits. In a future issue Dewey plans to further apply the lessons of *Bully Pulpit*, so keep an eye out for an upcoming *From the Ramparts*.

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Next week Thursday, November 28, is the annual Thanksgiving Day for our American readers. What a tremendous word is *thanksgiving*. For thanksgiving is the summary of the entire Christian life. Being redeemed from our sin and death by the blood of Christ according to the eternal good pleasure of our heavenly Father, our lives are lives of giving thanks to our covenant God. “We may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for his blessings, and...he may be praised by us” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 86).

In the Old Testament the saints testified their thanks to God with a special offering—the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Lev. 7:12). In the New Testament the saints testify their thanks to God by their entire lives, which is their “living sacrifice” of thanksgiving (Rom. 12:1). And because God gives his children their lives of good works as that which he has “before ordained” that they should walk in (Eph. 2:10), our lives of thanksgiving are simply our returning to God what he has already given to us. How lovely!

But man in his folly would have his works be more than thanksgiving. Man is not satisfied with his works being *because* of his salvation; man would have his works be *unto* his salvation (or the experience of his salvation). Man is not

satisfied with his works being *thanksgiving* for his salvation; man would have his works be the way unto his salvation (or the enjoyment of his salvation).

Works more than thanksgiving? What folly!

Works unto salvation? Impossible!

The salvation of God's people is Christ. What more could be required than Christ? For Christ is the savior (see Matt. 1:21), and Christ is the salvation (see Isa. 49:6).

Our good works, then, are not *for* salvation but *from* salvation. For Christ the savior/salvation bears fruit in his people—the fruit of their thankful good works. “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

And now would you like to hear how full the work of Christ is? Not only does Christ give us

our thanksgiving; Christ has already *accomplished* all our thanksgiving. For our Lord, the sweet psalmist, has sung thus: “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD” (Ps. 116:17). Christ has offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving! And Christ has done so for us and on our behalf! Our giving of thanks, then, is the fruit and effect and result of what Christ has already done.

What a tremendous word—and what a tremendous gospel truth—is *thanksgiving*. So, to our readers near and far, happy Thanksgiving! And above all, blessed be God!

“Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev. 7:12).

—AL

## EDITORIAL

### Weathering the Storm

**W**e last left Rev. Albertus van Raalte and his few dozen companions on the shores of North America in Manhattan, New York.<sup>1</sup> The ragged little band of Dutchmen took a train from Manhattan to Albany and from there to Buffalo. November 23, 1846—exactly 178 years ago today—found them stranded by a storm in Buffalo for a few days before they could board a steamship for Detroit. While our spiritual forefathers wait out the storm in Buffalo, let us use this delay in their travels to reflect on the journey that they had taken and the journey that lay ahead. For that little band of Reformed Dutchmen transplanted into the soils of America is a stirring reminder that the reformation of the church is not a matter for the flesh but for faith. On this November 23, 2024, then, let us revisit the Reformed pioneers on November 23, 1846.

The journey from the Netherlands to America aboard the three-masted ship *Southerner* had been perilous. It was a journey of four thousand miles across the Atlantic Ocean in the cold autumn. These poor Dutch farmers and laborers and mothers and children—who had no experience with life at sea—spent nearly two months enduring the autumn swells of the Atlantic.

Shortly after sailing through the English Channel and entering the open ocean, the wind blew into a great storm. So fiercely did the ship buck and heave that the inexperienced passengers and even the experienced crew were dreadfully seasick. Waves crashed into the ship and rolled over the deck from one side to the other. Reverend Van Raalte was tossed across his rooms on board and injured his head and his hands and spent much of the remainder of the voyage recovering in his cabin.

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Lanning, “Transplanted,” *Reformed Pavilion* 2, no. 32 (November 16, 2024): 4–7.

There were deaths among the people of God during the journey as well—a young wife from one family and a two-year-old child from another. In the Netherlands the departed would have been buried in the earth and their resting places marked. But at sea the dead must be dropped overboard to sink into the depths. No headstones marked the places where they fell but only the ever-changing waves.

Families and neighbors watched and wept and prayed as the bodies were cast into the sea. “And how sad a funeral is on the ocean! The truth of God consoled us: ‘*And the sea gave back the dead that were in her.*’”<sup>2</sup>

The flesh of that little remnant was no match for the perils of the sea. But faith can weather the storms of sickness and injury and death, for faith beholds the God who made the sea by his word and the Lord who calmed the sea by his word.

O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein. These wait all upon thee. (Ps. 104:24–27)

Finally, after a long journey of seven weeks, the little band arrived in New York. With their feet upon solid ground in Manhattan, the saints of the little remnant of the *Afscheiding* now had to make their way into the vast North American continent. But how could they proceed? Just as their flesh had been no match for the perils of the sea, their flesh would be no match for the perils of their new land.

For one thing, they were such backward people. They spoke no English. They had no manners. They had no skill in dealing with people. From North America Reverend Van Raalte sent a letter to Reverend Brummelkamp, a fellow *Afscheiding* minister back in the Netherlands, with the lament,

The uncouth manners and ignorance of our people make it difficult for them to get work...There is work to be obtained here, and if our people only knew English or were more sociable!<sup>3</sup>

Not only were the newly-landed Dutchmen ignorant of the ways of America, but also there were plenty of unscrupulous Americans who were all too eager to take advantage of the new immigrants. Swindlers preyed on helpless foreigners by paying low wages, charging high rents, and making false promises, so that the *Afscheiding* folk were in constant danger of being cheated out of their meager possessions.

There were those who made their living by taking advantage of other people’s ignorance. The Europeans who landed in New York were an easy prey for the sharks along the way. As late as the first decade of the twentieth century one could see them operate in trains between New York and Buffalo, presenting each passenger with a few scraps of food for which presently a charge of fifty cents was made. When the bewildered immigrants, who thought it had been a gift from the railroad company, had to pay this charge, their eyes were opened to an evil of wide proportions.<sup>4</sup>

Not only were the *Afscheiding* folk easy prey, but they did not have a clear idea where they were going in the North American continent. Reverend Van Raalte arrived in America sure

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne M. Jacobson, Elton J. Bruins, and Larry J. Wagenaar, *Albertus C. Van Raalte, Dutch Leader and American Patriot* (Holland, MI: Hope College, 1996), 27.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), 66.

<sup>4</sup> Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements*, 64–65.



that their little group was Wisconsin-bound, for the western shores of Lake Michigan looked like a promising place for a Dutch settlement. But the saints had arrived in November, and the waterways would soon be frozen. The best route to Wisconsin in those days—from New York City to Albany to Buffalo by train, from Buffalo to Detroit by steamship on Lake Erie, and from Detroit to the Straits of Mackinac to Wisconsin by steamship on Lakes Huron and Michigan—would soon be impassable for the winter, for the Straits of Mackinac would freeze. Reverend Van Raalte would be forced to winter in Michigan, traveling to Kalamazoo and Allegan, where he would discover that the eastern shore of Lake Michigan was best suited to them. But upon their arrival in America, they did not know where they would end up. The little flock of pioneers was so helpless. The people knew so little, and their future was so uncertain.

Add to this the fact that, from the moment they set foot upon American soil, the immigrants were dependent upon the help of others. They simply could not fend for themselves or provide for themselves. In the Netherlands they had scrimped and saved and collected the recommended provisions that each passenger should carry for a journey across the seas. But those provisions were nearly depleted and with winter coming! Thus they depended upon the Americans in New York who traced their ancestry to the Netherlands. More than two hundred years prior, shortly after the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19, Dutchmen had established colonies along the Eastern Seaboard of America. In fact, New York had originally been New Amsterdam, until the Dutch government had sold the city to the English in exchange for some lucrative spice islands in Indonesia. Those Dutch Americans who had lived in America for many generations helped the little flock of the *Afscheiding* immensely. The pioneers were so desperately helpless.

Add to all the earthly difficulties the spiritual fact that the lowly saints of the *Afscheiding* were sinners. They were God’s people, but they had

carried their depraved natures with them across the seas. They were prone to bicker and fight. Why, even when they had been back in the Netherlands, these *Afscheiding* folk had nearly split the entire *Afscheiding* apart by their constant infighting. Several years later, looking back upon the quarrelsome nature of the ministers and the people during the years of the *Afscheiding*, Van Raalte wrote,

The dissensions among the believers in the Netherlands caused me constantly a deep sorrow. They were harder for me to bear than the persecution; they deprived me of all enjoyment of life and made me afraid of life.<sup>5</sup>

And now what match was the flesh for what lay ahead? These backward, ignorant, helpless, quarrelsome folk stood on the shores of a continent that was still mostly untamed. And they stood there as the vanguard of still more backward, ignorant, helpless, quarrelsome folk who would join them once a Reformed colony was established. Could there have been a more unlikely group to bring the pure Reformed faith to America than these Dutchmen? For that matter, could there have been a more unfit group to be the church at all? Europe and America were filled with better people than those few of that little remnant who huddled together after their trip from the Netherlands. The flesh cries, “Let the church be built of the better men!”

Ah, but the flesh knows nothing. God has never yet built his church of better men. God did not choose Israel for her greatness, for she was not great. “The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” (Deut. 7:7). All the spiritually healthy people had no need of Jesus, the great physician—only the spiritually sick and poor and lowly and dead. Only sinners! For Jesus “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Always God builds his church of the foolish things, the weak things,

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements*, 39.

the base things, the things that are despised, the things that are not. And such were those few souls of the *Afscheiding* on the shores of America. And such are we. Always, such are we!

That is why the gathering and transplanting of the church is not a matter for the flesh but for faith. And when one looks by faith, how lovely God and his works in Christ appear. For God had made the people of that lowly remnant on the shores of America his church. God had given them Jesus Christ to be their whole salvation. They did not stand on the shores of America by themselves, ready to be swallowed up by their ignorance and sin. They stood there in Christ, that all the world might know that the church does not stand in her own strength. For God has chosen the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are “that no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus,

who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Cor. 1:29–31).

God in his mercy had reformed his church. God in his mercy had transplanted his church. God in his mercy would not now abandon his church but would establish it according to his eternal purpose and good pleasure. The saints of the little Reformed flock had left their homeland by faith, not by sight. They had begun their journey inland, not knowing whither they went but knowing that Jehovah was their God. And now they wait in Buffalo for the storm to clear so that they can resume their journey to their winter home in Detroit, Michigan.

To be continued...

—AL



## BOOK REVIEW

*Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church.* Michael J. Kruger. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022. 164 pages, hardcover, \$14.29. [Reviewed by Dewey Engelsma]

*I purchased this book soon after it came out in 2022. I bought it because it was being whispered that the church of which I was then a member (and in which I was serving as an elder) was guilty of spiritual abuse. Knowing that I was perfectly capable of abuse and that, in fact, according to my nature, I was inclined to it, I bought the book to ask, “Is it I, Lord?” (see Matt. 26:22).<sup>1</sup> After reading the book I came to two conclusions: First, although it was evident that my church was not guilty of the charge, I realized that I was capable of every instance of abuse recorded in the book. (God keep me from the wickedness of my flesh.) Second, spiritual abuse exists, and it is a blot on the name of Christ. It is murder for those tender souls who find themselves caught in such a church. If some of them should read this review and the article to follow, here is my message to you: You need to know, torn lambs, that God in his mercy will cut a hole in the net and free you from such murder. Your help, after all, is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

<sup>1</sup> I am borrowing this reference from the last chapter of the book (142), as it summarizes my intent better than I could put it into my own words.



Psalm 124

*If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say;  
If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us:  
They they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:  
Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:  
Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.*

*Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.  
Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.  
Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

**W**hat a shame. What a shame that such a book as this must be written. An institution that takes the name of Jesus Christ on its lips murders the sheep, lambs, and ewes for whom Christ shed his precious blood. You have Jesus, on the one hand, who feeds his flock like a shepherd and who gathers the lambs in his arm and carries them in his bosom. On the other hand, you have men, “Christians,” who rend the sheep. You have Jesus, who shows compassion, and you have church leaders who rip and tear the flock.

I think it is fair to say that most people who read a book review do not then go out and purchase the book for themselves. The review, then, takes the place of someone’s reading the book for himself. I could wish, and ask, that that not be the case for this book. The book is inexpensive, costing the equivalent of about one month’s worth of fancy coffee. More importantly, it is a book that should be read and reread. The bane of spiritual abuse is not going to go away, and having a resource to turn to that provides scriptural references and sound judgment to identify spiritual abuse is more than helpful. Although the author, Michael Kruger, wrote the book “as a leader in the church to other leaders in the church” and wrote not so much to help those who have been abused “but to help church leaders identify and stop spiritual abuse” (xvi), the lay members of the congregation will benefit greatly from the book. After the word of God, this book will give the members a place to turn so that they can begin to see that they are not crazy (or wicked) after all, despite having been

told that they are by the abusive leaders and their supporters.

The author defines spiritual abuse this way:

Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals. (24)

The author is at pains to affirm the fact that “the Bible affirms the proper role of authorities—in the church and in the world” (25). This is to guard against a reaction to abuse that tries to overthrow all authority and to say that authority is evil or, at the least, undesirable. The proper response is not to condemn authority but to condemn the *misuse* of authority. The Bible in Acts 20:28 speaks of “overseers”; and in Titus 1:5–9 it speaks of the ordination of elders, which elders, according to Hebrews 13:17, “have the rule over you.” The authority in the church is God-given. The problem is that what ends up happening in churches where spiritual abuse is present is that the elders and ministers spend most of their time haranguing the congregation that they have the rule over the congregation. The result is that the officebearers, and the rest of the church, forget about the fact that as often as the Bible affirms authority, it also condemns a misuse of that authority. We will look at this event later in this review, but it is worth

mentioning here, as well, that when Jesus speaks to the authority figures in the church, he condemns those who had adopted an authoritarian attitude with the congregation. “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matt. 20:26–27). What occasioned this response from Jesus? It was the request of the mother of James and John to place her sons in positions of authority, one on Jesus’ right hand and the other on his left. Jesus taught them (and us) that it was the unbelievers (“Gentiles”) who exercised “dominion” and behaved in a lordly fashion (v. 25). It was not to be so with his people.

Caution is also given not to belittle the importance of the church or church membership when confronted by abuse. The church, after all, is “the most important institution on the planet” (18). What could be more important than the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:2), the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22–23), or the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15)?

The book gives examples of men who have been guilty of spiritually abusing their flocks. The fact that these men are all high-profile ministers is indicative of the fact that it is the celebrity-type pastors who find their way into the newspapers and the news broadcasts. But for every Bill Hybels or Mark Driscoll, there are pastors of much smaller congregations who domineer and spiritually abuse their flocks. “It doesn’t matter if his church is fifty people or five hundred. He merely has to be the big fish in his own little pond” (10).

How can you identify men who are guilty of spiritual abuse? Such men are “domineering, authoritarian, and heavy-handed in the way they rule those under their care” (xiv). “While most pastors are gentle, kind, and patient, others have a proverbial knee on the neck of their sheep” (xviii). An abusive leader will “control those under them through threats” (29). An example is given of a church leader who would issue “threats of church discipline for those who

resisted him” (6). They will be cruel, which may manifest itself through screaming and cursing or through more subtle means, like cutting a person off from ministry or from relationships in the church (29). The example is given of a pastor who called on his congregation to shun the family of a man who had tried to stand up to him and told his congregation to cut that family off from all their friends (103). Having been shown mercy from God (they say), they immediately turn around and grab their brother by the throat (Matt. 18:28).

Abusive pastors are good at “flipping the script” so that the pastor makes himself out to be the victim, and the brave soul who identified the minister as a spiritual abuser is made out to be evil and the one responsible for the trouble. This results in close friends and even family members’ feeling the need to choose sides, and they often land on the side of the pastor (105). Neither does this take much time. Kruger relates the words of one abuse survivor, who said, “Since loyalty to him [the abuser] was what he enforced—not even my closest friends would talk to me. I was cut off instantly” (80).

Another characteristic of a spiritual abuser is that he is “notoriously thin-skinned,” the irony being that “the pastor who is unable to take criticism is often highly critical of everyone else.” Kruger points out that this is not a good combination. “It’s the classic mark of a narcissist” (31–32).

The author points out that spiritual abusers will not hesitate to weaponize their sermons and attack their victims from the pulpit (27). The abuser will take a passage from scripture and use that passage to “attack, demean, and control them, and those passages bear extra weight on the lips of God’s appointed leader” (27). That is also why it is so difficult for someone to speak up. And when someone does finally dare to say something, the response is brutal and swift. Most people would prefer to “act as defenders than accusers, especially in a Christian context and especially on behalf of a pastor” (80). The pastor is, after all, in the minds of the people,

God's ordained servant to bring them the word of God; to feed them in the green pastures of that word; and to teach and defend right doctrine against the assaults of the devil, the world, and our flesh. "Thus, most elders or church members quickly become aggressive defenders of a pastor—even lobbying others to join the cause—while very few become advocates for the victims. After all, the latter requires them to accuse the pastor, whom God supposedly called to be a leader" (80).

Often, the abusive pastor will also enlist others (ministers or elders) to defend his cause and to confront anyone he sees as a "threat, to accuse them, and to keep them in line" (33). All that the pastor has to do is wind them up and let them do his dirty work.

The author points out that not everything is abuse. There are those who, when confronted by their sin, shout, "Abuse!," even though the pastor brought their sin before them in the way of love and in no sense domineering it over them. An abuser, however, will use that sin as a club with which to beat that member; and the "accusations themselves are a form of intimidation and control" (38). This is what makes charging a pastor with abuse so difficult. "Whether a pastor had an affair is more concrete than whether he is a narcissistic bully" (38).

What should characterize the pastor of Christ's flock? He should be "lowly" and "humble." Kruger points out that these words do not describe a bully pastor at all.

One is hard pressed to come up with two words more opposed to the characteristics of a bully pastor, which is precisely why such pastors should be disqualified from ministry. Bully pastors lack gentleness, compassion, and understanding. They put enormous burdens on the backs of people, are hypercritical, and are hardly ever pleased. (53)

The qualifications for a pastor given by God in I Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 disqualify a bully pastor. Instead of being a person who "accomplishes his goals by manipulation or

intimidation or with a demanding spirit" (52), the pastor will manifest Christ to the congregation—the Christ who described himself as "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).

There are defenses made of a bully pastor. "Well, that's just Pastor Bob. You know the way he is" (63). In other words, he might be a little rough around the edges, not so personable, and even a bit domineering; but he must be that way on account of the spiritual battle in which he is engaged! This is what happens when you have a "strong leader" (63). Or "It's just what happens when pastors are faithfully doing their job" (7). Or this: Would you rather have our minister, who is tough to deal with but is strong on doctrine, or a weak-in-the-knees pushover who teaches false doctrine? (Option three, probably.) This is where my antennae went up because I have been programmed to think that no matter what a minister says or does, if he gets his theological formulations correct, that is all that matters. In other words, a minister can behave however he wants if he preaches right doctrine. My problem, which is to say my sin and unbelief, is that I forgot about what is "impossible" for faith, spoken of in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24, Q&A 64. It is impossible for one who has been implanted into Christ not to bring forth fruits of thankfulness. Spiritually abusing a congregation is not a fruit of thankfulness. We cannot see a pastor's heart, but we can see his fruit; and the word to such a pastor is, "Show me your faith by your works" (see James 2:18). This is where the argument that tries to allow a minister's "doctrinal eloquence [to] function as a shield" for his unrighteous behavior needs to be condemned (12). Our default position, that "the purity of [our] pastor's doctrine must somehow guarantee the purity of [our] pastor's character," needs to be re-examined. The truth of the matter is that the minister who trumpets his orthodoxy while his behavior testifies otherwise needs to be identified for what he is: a fraud and a charlatan. What will end up being the case is that the abusive pastor's doctrine was not correct but was a doctrine that in some way magnified and exalted man and displaced Christ.

That may not be evident at first, but it will be revealed. “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit” (Matt. 7:17–18).

The author points out the danger of allowing a pastor’s doctrinal eloquence to protect him from any negative consequences of his ungodly behavior. The author also points out that true doctrine is not unimportant. “To be sure, God cares very much about doctrine, especially for the pastors and teachers of the church (for example, Titus 1:9, 2:1)” (12). That point needs to be emphasized. Is there anything more abusive than a church’s indoctrinating its people with a doctrine that will send them to hell? By the time a church has been around for a while, say, a hundred years, it will have learned enough sophistication to teach that doctrine with smiles and back slaps; but the result is the same.

In a beautiful section relating how God is against these wicked shepherds who scatter the flock and drive them away (Jer. 23:2), Kruger points out that God not only judges the wicked shepherds, but he also promises to make things right.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness” (v. 5). In other words, he will be a just and good shepherd for the people. Who is the righteous branch of David? This is none other than Jesus, the Messiah, the “Son of David” (Matt. 9:27). (47)

That illustrates the horror when an institution that goes by the name of church tears and rends the flock in this way: it does so in the name of the good shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ. The magnitude of the sin is captured by the description of the one who perpetrates it: ravening wolf (Matt. 7:15).<sup>2</sup>

What characterized Jesus’ ministry? “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered

unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). As was pointed out earlier, Jesus said it was the Gentiles who exercised lordship over the people. But his people were to be different. And would be different. “And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (vv. 27–28). In other words, “You don’t lead by demanding your rights but by giving them up” (16). What wickedness, then, when a man who claims to represent Christ’s cause on the earth not only lords it over the flock but spiritually abuses them as well. Have churches “hired men more eager to call down thunder than to don the servant’s towel and wash people’s feet” (16)?

A few final thoughts before I close out this review. The author takes many quotations from secular media and popular culture. But is that necessary? Or right? I am sure it is done to make the writing more gripping and relevant to the audience; and from that perspective, he is probably successful. But as a Reformed man and the president of a Reformed seminary, does it not weigh with him that some of the material from which he quotes is littered with blasphemy against the name of the God he serves? One of his confessions is the Heidelberg Catechism, which in Lord’s Day 36, Q&A 100, says that the profaning of God’s name by cursing and swearing is so heinous that there is no sin greater or more provoking to God than that. Shouldn’t we who love the name of God hate such a profaning and keep ourselves from it? Doesn’t making references to it to bolster your otherwise commendable position against abuse provoke God and cause others to stumble?

The book did not have a call to action for those who find themselves under an abusive pastor or in a church that thrives on violence. This is not a criticism, as the intended audience is not victims of abuse (although the author states that he hopes that abuse victims might

<sup>2</sup> The author points out that these men do not always appear to be ravenous wolves. They have two sides: one that they present to many, warm and kind, and another side that is “cruel and dark” (60).



benefit from the book). The audience is other leaders in a church with an abusive leader, and the goal of the book is to empower them to take action and do something about it. But there should be a word to those who are in that situation and who, with righteous Lot, vex their souls in that place. That word is not to give them a false sense of security. They know what is coming.

Imagine a member of relatively low influence coming to the elder board and saying that the lead pastor is an abusive bully. That elder board is faced with a choice between possibly losing a dynamic, gifted pastor (and the ministry that goes with it) and losing a relatively inconsequential church member. It isn't difficult to see which way that decision will go. Indeed, it was effectively made long before any accusations of abuse were made—when the church decided it preferred a “gifted” pastor over a godly one. (12)

From an earthly perspective, that member can't leave. It is simply impossible to leave. His flesh will not allow it. But what is impossible with man is possible with God. And that is where the help will come from. Not from digging deep within himself but from the Lord, who made heaven and earth, who makes a promise to them.

And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven

them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. (Jer. 23:3–4)

The abused member has heard the threatening and manipulating voice of his abusive pastor, which voice will finally and inevitably drive the child of God away. But there is another voice, which voice will irresistibly draw the member to himself. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

The book ends with an answer for the abusive pastor, and that is where this review will end as well. Although the abusive pastor will often see himself as a pretty nice person and see everyone else as the problem, should God open his eyes, he will see that the answer was there the whole time (143).

It is the cross of Christ. There, on display for all the world to see, was a shepherd who did not save his own life but gave it up freely for the sake of others. And anyone called to the ministry must do the same. (145)

Having reviewed this book on spiritual abuse, I hope in the next article to apply what we have learned.

—DE



**Article LXXXV. The New King and His Kingdom: Sons of God (continued)**

**I**n connection with the bit of exegesis given by modern higher criticism of the expression "Sons of God" in Gen. 6, I touched upon the question of modern criticism itself. "Sons of God," so the critics explain, can mean but one thing, namely, angels. The passage, therefore, tells us that angels had intercourse with human beings, married them, and that the result was a race of wicked giants. That is unquestionably the meaning of the text as such. But, so the modern critic continues to assure us, this cannot and must not be accepted as historical reality. It merely gives us an insight into the conception of angels and their relation to men, prevalent at the time when the story in Genesis was written.

You must not think that Scripture offers historical reality in every one of its parts.

It also contains legends.

It often presents nothing more than the religious conception of the writer of a certain period.

Thus it was with the conception of the angels as illustrated in Gen. 6.

And the same is true of the conception of God in the Bible.

Some parts of the Bible present a very crude conception of God. "The conception of God," thus Peake writes in the book already quoted, "exhibits a remarkable growth from naive anthropomorphism to a lofty spirituality. Thus we read of the Creator as moulding man out of the dust of the ground, and by breathing into his nostrils, imparting to him the breath of life. Realizing that man needs a companion. He fashions from the ground the various animals and brings them to him. Finding that none of these

meet the need, He tries a fresh experiment, and now, casting the man in a deep sleep, He takes a rib from his side and builds it into the woman whom the man recognizes as flesh from his flesh and bone from his bone. He forbids them to touch the magical tree, which would impart to them a knowledge such as is reserved for the heavenly beings, and when they have eaten of the tree of knowledge, He prevents their access to the tree of life, lest by winning immortality in addition to their knowledge they should be a menace to the heavenly powers. He walks in the garden in the evening as men do in Palestine, when, after the heat of the day, the cool wind blows in from the sea. Pitying the crude attempts of the guilty pair to hide their shame, He makes them coats of skin to clothe them. Prompted by the same dread of what men might do if their adventurous enterprises were not nipped in the bud, He comes down to see the tower they were building as their rallying center, and fearing that they may achieve their purpose of reaching the sky, He scatters them over the earth and confounds their speech. And just as He comes down to see the city and the tower, that by personal observation He may inform Himself of the facts, so He comes down to Sodom to see whether it has acted according to the rumor which has reached Him. With two companions He visits Abraham and eats of the meal which the patriarch prepares for them. He meets Moses at the inn and seeks to slay him, though He would thus have made impossible the task to which He had summoned him; but is turned from his deadly purpose by the prompt action of Moses' wife. At Sinai Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, with seventy of the elders of Israel,



ascend the mountain and see God, who refrains from laying his hand upon them. In another passage, however, the desire of Moses to see his luminous glory is not granted, since no man could behold his face and live. Nevertheless, God places him in the cleft of the rock and while He passes He covers him with his hand that he may not see his face, but when He has passed by and the fatal peril is over, He takes away his hand that Moses may see his back. So physically by the author of this narrative was God conceived!" Pp. 342–344.

Of course, with such a crude, naive, physical conception of God the picture of angels having intercourse with human beings harmonizes quite well! Strange, that the common Christian, who has read his Bible for so many years, never noticed that crude, heathenish picture of God in the first part of the Sacred Book!

But this is not all.

Criticism not merely maintains that we find a very crude and physical presentation in the early part of Scripture; it goes further and asserts that the conception of God in some parts is positively immoral. The conception that God is a moral God, loving truth and equity above all, was not reached till the time of the prophets. There is no moral character attributed to God in the earliest portions of the Word.

"We cannot so readily sympathize with some representations of God on the moral side...I have referred already to the nervous apprehension attributed to Yahweh lest man by passing his appointed limits might become a menace to God himself. The incident with Moses at the inn; the impulse with which He inspires David to number the people, all the more that obedience to the Divine promptings involves the monarch in a sense of guilt and brings on his land a terrible pestilence; the approval accorded to the suggestion of the spirit that he should be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets to lure him to his doom; the ruthless extermination of a people in revenge for a wrong inflicted on Israel's generations earlier, and the inclusion even of innocent children in this indiscriminate massacre,

are illustrations of the difficulty I have in mind. Here the biblical writers sanction a thought of God which is not only unworthy as judged by a Christian standard, but inconsistent with much in the Old Testament itself."—A. S. Peake, "The Bible," etc., pp. 344, 345.

Thus the same author finds that Ezekiel presents God in a manner the Christian could never approve! To Ezekiel God is a narrow-minded, national divinity, an egoist, concerned only about his own glory and brooding always over the slightest offenses committed against his dignity. Especially the prophecy of Gog and Magog, lured by God to their destruction, is positively repulsive to the author and cannot be approved by the Christian conscience. "Can we seriously think that Yahweh entices Gog and his hordes from the far countries, that by their overthrow He may get himself glory, and that in the name of morality, humanity and religion?" The same feature of narrow national hatred of Yahweh over against the heathen nations we find in other portions of the prophets. The most repulsive of these the author detects in Isa. 63, the famous picture of the man coming from Edom with dyed garments. In short, Scripture presents a crude, physical, immoral conception of God in many of its passages.

Do not receive the impression that I have quoted one of the most extreme radicals of modern criticism. On the contrary, the author of the above quotations, though a faithful disciple of the Grafian school, still claims to believe in a certain form of inspiration of Scripture, though it is difficult to grasp just what he understands by inspiration. There are other critics far more radical in their statements.

According to one author the book of Genesis is "a book of sacred legend, with a mythical introduction." According to Wellhausen the first book of Scripture presents no historical knowledge of the patriarchs, but only of the time when the stories about them arose in the Israelite people. Kuenen claims that the entire passage that speaks of the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt and their wanderings in the

desert, their conquest and partition of Canaan, is simply unhistorical. It is even doubtful, according to another, whether the people of Israel ever were in Egypt. The book of Joshua is only a historical romance, and as such we must treat it. Personages as the patriarchs never existed. They are personifications of tribes and clans! Sufficient to show that we did not quote one of the most radical, rather one of the most conservative among modern critics. (See Orr: "The Problem of the Old Testament," pp. 56, 57.)

You say, perhaps, that I am off on a tangent?

And I admit. But, in the first place, after all we have said as to the conception of the modern critics of the Bible, we are not surprised at their interpretation of the expression "sons of God." And at the same time we will be able to see that their exegesis is by no means uncolored. They look at this passage from Genesis through the dark glass of their historical criticism. And, in the second place, I want to enter into the question of modern higher criticism just a little more deeply. It is a live question. A live question even among us. Whatever one may think of the attitude of our last Synod over against this question, certain it is, that the question was there.

I do not feel as yet like Rev. H. Bultema, who, in a rather strong philippic in one of the last issues of the "Bereer," accuses the church of having thrown open the doors to modern criticism through the final decision of the last Synod in regard to the question before it. And this is not the attitude I am assuming, either.

But with many others I feel uncertain.

There are principles involved in the question of modern criticism that demand elucidation, restatement, emphasis, new stress. To some of these principles I wish to call the attention.

In answer to Rev. Bultema's scathing criticism I think it is safe to say that neither the Church, nor the last Synod, nor the school would open the doors to modern criticism.

But true it is also that the last word has not been said in regard to this important problem.

And the importance of the problem justifies the insistent demand that we must know exactly where we stand in our attitude over against it.

Hence, my digression.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.



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