

The background features a stylized orange illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower left, partially overlapping the sword's hilt. The shield has a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,  
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,  
and who is the sword of thy excellency!  
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;  
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

NOVEMBER 2020 | VOLUME 1 | NUMBER 7

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*Sword and Shield* is a monthly periodical published by Reformed Believers Publishing.

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All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Quotations from the Reformed and ecumenical creeds, Church Order, and liturgical forms are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), unless otherwise noted.

Every writer is solely responsible for the content of his own writing.

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*Sword and Shield* does not accept advertising.

Please send all business correspondence, subscription requests, and requests to join Reformed Believers Publishing to one of the following:

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325 84th St SW, Suite 102  
Byron Center, MI 49315  
Website: [reformedbelieverspub.org](http://reformedbelieverspub.org)  
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## BE THANKFUL UNTO HIM

*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations. — Psalm 100:4–5*

It is not difficult to close our eyes and hear the saints of all ages making a joyful noise unto Jehovah and coming into his presence singing this psalm. It is not difficult to imagine the saints when they at last enter into the eternal gates and the heavenly courts of God, overcome and delighted by the beauties and glories of heaven, singing this psalm of thanksgiving to God.

There is something grand about this psalm: its sweeping expressions of praise to Jehovah as God and as good, merciful, and faithful; its steadfast refusal to point anywhere else but to Jehovah, the only good; its profound statement of the essence of the Christian life as gratitude for grace received; and its exuberant intonation of the praise that swells in the believer's heart when he contemplates the glories of Jehovah his God. The psalm breathes unshakable confidence and assurance that, God being for us, nothing can be against us; for we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. He has made us and not we ourselves. Psalm 100 is a grand psalm.

There is also something grand about the congregation of God gathering on Thanksgiving Day to do exactly what the psalm commands his people to do: enter into Jehovah's gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. What a contrast—stark and telling—does this activity of the church of Jesus Christ form to what passes for thanksgiving celebrations in the world. The church's sober, reverent, holy, and joyful rejoicing in the Lord is lovely; the world's godless celebration of things is ugly. The church's thanksgiving to God for his goodness is light over against the darkness of the beastly eating, drinking, and merrymaking of the world's besotted revelry. Blessing God's name instead of blessing our own names and accomplishments. Rejoicing in Jehovah instead of bowing down to worship mammon.

Be thankful unto him! Be thankful to Jehovah. He is the great I AM THAT I AM. He is the perfectly self-sufficient one, fullness and perfection itself, possessing all things and needing nothing. He is the creator of all things by the Word of his power and the one who upholds all things by the utterance of his mouth. All is his.

Bless Jehovah's name. Wherever and however God has revealed himself is his great name. The name of God is God. To bless his name is to bless him. To praise his name

is to praise him. His name reveals that he alone is God. He alone is the sole object of worship and therefore of all thanksgiving and praise.

He has clearly revealed his name in creation. All the world knows! The whole of heaven and earth and all of history are the theater for the brilliant display of his glory. The earth and everything in it was created for no other purpose than to glorify him. The creation and every creature find their highest purpose in the glory of God, and all creatures are so many instruments to praise him. From the creation of the world are clearly seen his invisible power and Godhead. History speaks of nothing except of the glory of God in upholding and governing all things.

A revelation because of which all men—every man, woman, and child—are inexcusable in the day of judgment for refusing to give Jehovah thanks and to worship him. The world knows that God is and that he must be worshiped because the invisible things of God are clearly seen in the creation, and God has manifested them unto all people. But the world does not praise God; they do not thank him; and they do not bless his name. Inexcusably mad, they take the knowledge of God and hold it under in unrighteousness. Immediately, with their reprobate minds they corrupt that knowledge. Stubbornly, they continue in their sins, knowing the judgment of God. They change the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible things, and they worship the creature rather than the Creator. The Greek worshiped Zeus and the rest of the Olympian gods. The Roman worshiped Jupiter and the other gods of his Pantheon. The modern man worships himself, his money, his work, the false gods of his apostate philosophies and theologies, and whatever other idols he makes and conjures for himself.

So unthankful! They do not bless his name. They may be thankful that their gods of money, prosperity, rich food, and good health have not abandoned them. But they are not thankful unto Jehovah, and they do not bless his name. The natural man is earthly, sensual, and devilish. Although he sees God's eternal power and Godhead displayed in creation, he holds that truth down in unrighteousness and reaps for himself the wrath and judgment of God revealed against that ungodliness and

unrighteousness of men. And according to Jehovah's very purpose, the natural man is without excuse.

Jehovah's name must come another way to make men thankful, so that they bless his name. His name must come in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the name of God. He is the name of God come near unto his people, come in the very likeness of their flesh, Immanuel, God with us. He bears the great covenant name, Jehovah, for he is Jehovah come to save us. In Jesus Christ we see Jehovah, the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the God of the covenant himself and the God of a gracious covenant with his people. In Christ we see Jehovah as self-sufficient and independent. He alone is. He needs no one else to complete him. He does not depend upon anyone else. No one and nothing can add to his glory. In Christ we know Jehovah as the unchanging God, eternal and eternally the same. There is no shadow of turning in him. In Christ we see that Jehovah is the all-wise God who eternally ordains and perfectly carries out his will for his glory. In Jesus Christ we see that Jehovah is the all-sufficient, independent, all-wise, omnipotent savior of his people. He depends on no one and nothing other than his own arm and strength for the salvation of his chosen people.

For we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. He made us and not we ourselves. Creator of the world. Marvelous. Raised the dead. Wonder of grace. God made us his people, recreating us in Jesus Christ after his own image. Surely, he made us in the natural sense. In him all men live and move and have their being. God gave us our lives, our personalities, and our characters. He determined everything about us. He made us who we are. This fact alone demands that we thank him and bless his name.

But more, so much more! He made us his sheep. As independent as Jehovah is, so are we as sheep utterly dependent on him. He chose us as his sheep in his eternal counsel, set his love on us, and made us the apple of his eye and his peculiar treasure and joy. He engraved us on the palms of his hands that we might be ever before him and wrote our names in the Lamb's book of life. He sovereignly calls his sheep to him from the midst of the world

and separates them to himself in Christ. God regenerated each of his sheep and gave them new, thankful hearts, creating each one in Christ Jesus unto good works, which he had before ordained that we should walk in them. All his sheep he seals with the Spirit of promise to make them inviolable and indestructible unto the day of Christ. He is our shepherd who rules in our hearts, cares for us, defends us, and preserves us. He feeds us with the blessings of salvation. He opens the stores of heaven and earth to supply our daily needs. We are his, absolutely and exclusively.

We are his people, and he is our God. We are the sheep of his pasture, and he is our shepherd.

Be thankful unto him.

For Jehovah is good.

He is good in himself. He is only good. He is all good. There is none good but God. In him alone is goodness, and outside him there is nothing good. He is good in all his perfections. He is spotless perfection and holiness. He is immaculate beauty and loveliness itself. Pleasant, altogether lovely, worthy of all praise.

And he is the overflowing fountain of all good. Jehovah lavishes goodness on his creatures. He is good to them. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, from the Father of lights.

In his goodness he loves the righteous and blesses them. In his goodness he hates the wicked and curses them. In his goodness he punishes the

wicked and ungrateful for their thankless lives. And so he reveals the goodness of his holy and righteous judgments. In his goodness he had mercy on whom he would have mercy. In that he reveals the goodness of his particular mercy, for all were equally involved in ruin. He is merciful to some only, whom he has chosen. Jehovah is good, and his mercy is everlasting.

That goodness of God manifests itself in his mercy and his covenant faithfulness. He loved his people and willed to deliver them from all their woes and to bless them with himself, to cause them to know him and to taste and experience his blessedness. He was and is merciful to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the revelation of the goodness and the everlasting mercy of God. Jehovah gave us to Jesus Christ in eternity as his people. Jehovah sent Jesus Christ

There is something grand about this psalm: its sweeping expressions of praise to Jehovah as God and as good, merciful, and faithful; its steadfast refusal to point anywhere else but to Jehovah, the only good; its profound statement of the essence of the Christian life as gratitude for grace received; and its exuberant intonation of the praise that swells in the believer's heart when he contemplates the glories of Jehovah his God.

in the fullness of time to deliver us from our sin and guilt—our death—which is our greatest misery. And in his goodness and mercy, he also regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies his sheep. He adopts us for his children and heirs. He assures us of his goodness, love, and mercy toward us. He held back nothing from us but gave us his own Son to deliver us. Mercy shown in our generations. Good, merciful, and faithful to believers and their seed.

Unchangeably good. His truth endures to all generations. Give thanks unto him and bless his name because he is unchangeably good and merciful. His truth is his faithfulness. His mercy endures forever because he is unchangeable and his promise is unchangeable. God's faithfulness is the unchangeableness of his goodness and mercy. In his faithfulness he does not change, turn back, or swerve from his eternal purpose to bless his people in Jesus Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He so preserves us that not a hair can fall from our heads; yea, all things must be subservient to our salvation.

Good to us in all things. In his goodness, mercy, and faithfulness everything must serve God's purpose and will to bless us. In fruitfulness, prosperity, and health, God is good. He gives us bounties to enjoy. By the blood of Jesus Christ, we have again the right to have, to enjoy, and to be thankful for the earthly bounties we receive.

No unrighteous man, no wicked person, has any right to anything of the bounties of God's creation. He is a robber and a thief. All his eating and drinking do nothing but increase his guilt, and for his unthankfulness he is doubly guilty.

In Christ we have again the right to the fullness of the earth because Jehovah bought us from death and sin and made us his own children. He is good and merciful in everything. In sickness, in poverty, and in barren years, our God and Father is good, for these things must also serve our blessing and salvation. In all things Jehovah is good because he causes all things to serve the everlasting salvation of his people, whom he has willed to bless.

Be thankful unto him; bless his name. Profoundly simple calling, encapsulating the whole duty of the believer, the quintessence of the Christian life. Be thankful to him and praise him: in all your praise thank him, and in your thanksgiving bless his name.

Thanksgiving is not everyone's business, the National Day of Thanksgiving notwithstanding, and not everyone who takes the word *thankful* on his lips gives thanks. All are duty bound to give thanksgiving, for the Lord is good and is good to all. Some will not. And for that they will be judged for their unthankfulness. God will give them over to their insatiable lusts.

Thanksgiving is the noble duty and spiritual activity of God's dear sheep, the beloved people of his pasture.

Thanksgiving is worship. Thanksgiving is the confession of him in truth as the God Jehovah. Nowhere is thanksgiving more marred and destroyed than where the truth of his name is denied. Thanksgiving is the confession of Jehovah and that we are entirely dependent upon him. He is independent and needs nothing from anyone. We are dependent and need everything from him. Thanksgiving is our praise, our singing, our prayers, and our whole thankful lives of obedience to him.

Be thankful unto him and bless his name, for Jehovah is good. We are thankful because we have prosperity? But what if we lack? What if instead of health, we have sickness; instead of riches, we have poverty? Instead of a fruitful year, we have a barren; instead of peace, there is war? Are we then without cause for thanksgiving?

No, Jehovah puts the cause of our thanksgiving well beyond the reach of the vicissitudes of this life, beyond all changes that may happen in the world, and beyond all the circumstances of our lives. He puts the cause of our thanksgiving outside ourselves, outside the world itself, and locates the cause of that thanksgiving in himself and his own being, in his goodness, steadfast covenant love, and faithfulness to his people. He places us firmly and securely in his own hands.

This is a reason for praise and thanksgiving. It is he that made us and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. He is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endures to all generations. Is not that ground for thanksgiving? Shall we not give thanks unto him and bless his name for that?

Bless him in his gates and courts—the sanctuaries within the temple of God in the city of Jerusalem. This refers to the intimate confines of his gracious presence in the church, covenant, and kingdom of God. The gates and courts of God are where the church gathers for public worship. It is the most appropriate place. How different from the world's beastly celebrations concerned only with food, drink, and football.

A lifelong, all-consuming activity for believers. Not for a day, a month, or a season. Nothing else is fitting for children of God than to give thanks and to bless Jehovah's name. To praise God in the depths of regenerated hearts with joy, gladness, and singing because he has delivered our souls from death, forgiven us our sins, and sanctified us as his people. To praise him in all our lives. To praise him with song. To praise him in our whole lives in the vocations that he gives to us, whatever those stations may be. To praise him in his courts in the church. To praise him in the school, in the home, on the job site, and in everything we do. To praise him by drawing near to him in our prayers. To praise him in our whole thankful lives.

O Jehovah, we thank thee that we may thank thee.

—NJL

## A BELIEVER'S PAPER: THE FREEDOM OF *SWORD AND SHIELD*

**A**t this first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP), I would like to speak to you about the fundamental principle that defines and governs our magazine, *Sword and Shield*. That fundamental principle is this: *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth. We must take hold of this principle—and this principle must take hold of us—at the outset of our endeavor as a publishing organization. This principle will be challenged and will be difficult to maintain. Nevertheless, this principle is fundamental to our organization and to our magazine. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

*Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth because it is a believer's paper. *Sword and Shield* arises out of the office of believer. The believer is free to know the truth, to confess the truth, and to publish the truth. As members of Reformed Believers Publishing, we are the believers who publish *Sword and Shield*. The magazine that we publish partakes of the freedom of our office of believer to confess the truth. It is from the office of believer that we derive the fundamental principle of our magazine: *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

My topic, then, is "A Believer's Paper: The Freedom of *Sword and Shield*."

### *The Freedom of Sword and Shield*

*Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

This is the fundamental, defining, guiding principle of our magazine. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

The emphasis of this foundational principle is the freedom of *Sword and Shield*. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth. It has the right to publish the truth. There are no restrictions on its publication of the truth. No topics are off limits to *Sword and Shield* in its publication of the truth. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish safe things, and it is free to publish controversial things. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

The freedom of *Sword and Shield* is with regard to the truth of God's word. *Sword and Shield* does not claim freedom to publish the wisdom of man, which is always darkness and deceit. *Sword and Shield's* freedom is freedom in the truth. *Sword and Shield* is free to confess the truth of God's word, to witness to the truth, to

promote the truth, to teach the truth, and to glory in the truth. Inasmuch as the Reformed faith is the faithful confession of God's word, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the Reformed faith. This commitment to the truth is established in the very first sentence of the constitution of RBP: "The members of Reformed Believers Publishing have organized for the express purpose of witnessing to the Reformed truth." *Sword and Shield* claims no right to say anything it wants. Rather, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

An important aspect of publishing the truth is exposing, judging, and condemning the lie that militates against the truth. In this work, too, *Sword and Shield* is free. *Sword and Shield* has the right to bring the truth of God's word to bear on anything and everything in order to evaluate and judge all things in the light of God's word. It is free to condemn everything that is contrary to God's word as false, wrong, and evil. It is free to embrace everything that is in harmony with God's word as true, right, and good. *Sword and Shield* is free to expose the opinion of man as foolish and to reject it. *Sword and Shield* is free to receive the wisdom of God as truly wise and to magnify it. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

In its freedom to publish the truth, *Sword and Shield* is not restricted by man's response to the truth. Whether the content and the tone of the magazine make everyone happy, or whether the content and tone make everyone mad, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth. Whether the response to the magazine is a deafening silence in the churches, or whether the response is a deafening tumult in the churches, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth. Whether the response is a line around the block to pick up one's copy before it is even mailed, or whether the response is to make a beeline with one's copy to the trash can, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

*Sword and Shield* is so free to publish the truth that it even has complete liberty to comment on the decrees of ecclesiastical assemblies in light of the truth. *Sword and Shield* may approve of, disapprove of, suggest improvements to, explain, criticize, promote, commend, or condemn the decisions of classes and synods. Let us be specific. The editors and writers are members

of the Protestant Reformed Churches and love these churches. The editors and writers are free in the magazine to bring the truth of God's word to bear on the decisions of Classis East, Classis West, or the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). In bringing the truth of God's word to bear on those decisions, the editors and writers of *Sword and Shield* may commend or condemn the decisions of the Protestant Reformed assemblies. The commentary of *Sword and Shield* on the ecclesiastical decisions neither nullifies those decisions nor establishes those decisions. *Sword and Shield* does not have power to decide for the churches where the denomination shall stand or what the churches shall decree. But *Sword and Shield* does have the freedom to publish the truth, also regarding the ecclesiastical decisions of the PRC.

This is the fundamental principle of our magazine: *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

*Sword and Shield's* freedom to publish the truth without restriction is being denied and challenged. In response to early issues of the magazine, many Protestant Reformed consistories addressed letters to their congregations warning them about the magazine. All of the letters deny *Sword and Shield* the right to publish the truth freely regarding the ecclesiastical assemblies of the PRC. All of the letters appeal to article 31 of the Church Order as though that article limits the freedom of *Sword and Shield* to publish the truth. One example will suffice. After quoting a portion of the first editorial, which claimed the right of *Sword and Shield* to comment on ecclesiastical decisions, a consistory wrote:

The consistory informs you that such a practice is not according to Reformed church government and has potential to create schism in the Protestant Reformed churches.

The loving and orderly way for members of a Reformed congregation to voice their objections with any decision of an ecclesiastical body is the way of protest and appeal to the various ecclesiastical bodies, as our Church Order, article 31, states.

Rev. Nathan Langerak has begun a masterful defense of *Sword and Shield* that decisively answers these charges. Rather than repeat his arguments, I refer the readers to his explanation of article 31 of the Church Order in the October issue of *Sword and Shield* and to his explanation of the Formula of Subscription in the November issue. I add only these few comments of my own.

First, up to this point the editorials in *Sword and Shield* have not explicitly claimed the right to condemn ecclesiastical decisions. The first editorial claimed the

right to comment on ecclesiastical decisions. However, the first editorial perhaps implied the right to condemn ecclesiastical decisions, and consistories have certainly inferred that to be the claim. Let us make explicit what so far has only been implied and inferred: *Sword and Shield* is free to condemn ecclesiastical decisions that contradict the truth. This is part of *Sword and Shield's* freedom to publish the truth.

Second, *Sword and Shield's* freedom is with regard to the truth. *Sword and Shield* is free to condemn ecclesiastical decisions that compromise the truth of God's word and the doctrine of the Reformed confessions. Not every decision of synod is in view here. *Sword and Shield* will not lurch higgledy-piggledy through the *Acts of Synod* like some drunken Old MacDonald with here a "Fault!" there a "Fault!" everywhere a "Fault! Fault!" But when the truth of God's word and the doctrine of the confessions are at stake, *Sword and Shield* is perfectly free to judge erroneous decisions of the assemblies.

Third, no editor or writer in *Sword and Shield* has condemned ecclesiastical decisions of the PRC. To my knowledge no editor or writer has plans to condemn ecclesiastical decisions of the PRC. In fact, under the blessing of God, *Sword and Shield* has done more than any other publication to uphold the ecclesiastical decisions of Synod 2018 and to press those decisions home to our consciousness as churches. Nevertheless, what *Sword and Shield* has not yet done, it has the freedom to do if necessary.

Fourth, *Sword and Shield's* right to publish the truth does not ignore or supersede the duty of an editor or writer to protest and appeal erroneous decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies. An editor or writer can do both: protest a decision and write about a decision. This raises an interesting practical question of when an editor or writer should exercise his freedom to write about an erroneous decision. Only at the end of the process, when all protests and appeals have been exhausted? At the beginning of the process, so that he is simultaneously writing about decisions while he is protesting them? Probably there is no single answer to this practical question. In some cases a writer may consider himself to be compelled to write immediately, while in other cases he believes he must wait. We do have an example in the fathers of the Protestant Reformed Churches, who immediately began writing against the decisions of the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924. While their protest to the following synod was pending, they repeatedly condemned in writing the synod's three points of common grace. Nevertheless, though it is a weighty question for the individual who is protesting, the question of when to write is only a practical question. It does not

affect the principle that *Sword and Shield* has the right at any time and at all times to publish the truth.

### *A Believer's Paper*

The freedom of *Sword and Shield* to publish the truth arises from the fact that it is a believer's paper. *Sword and Shield* arises out of the office of believer. *Sword and Shield* belongs to the believer as the possession of the office of believer. The witness in *Sword and Shield* is part of the activity and exercise of the office of believer. When we say that *Sword and Shield* is a believer's paper, we are dealing with the office of believer.

So important is this fact that it is prominent in the name of the organization that publishes the magazine: Reformed Believers Publishing. The word "Believers" sits in the middle of the organization's name as a jewel in the name: Reformed Believers Publishing. Central to the name, and central to the organization and the magazine, is the office of believer. *Sword and Shield* is a believer's paper.

The constitution of Reformed Believers Publishing teaches unmistakably what the word "Believers" means in the name of the organization.

Preamble: The members of Reformed Believers Publishing have organized for the express purpose of witnessing to the Reformed truth. The organization is rooted in the office of believer, by virtue of which every believer has the privilege and calling to confess the truth and contend against the lie. Reformed Believers Publishing is non-ecclesiastical, is self-governing, and is not the possession of, or under the governance of, any church institute. An invitation shall be extended to all who desire to share this opportunity to sound forth a true Reformed testimony in the discharge of the office of believer.

The office of believer is a marvelous gift of God to his people. It is a gift that the believer has by virtue of his union with Jesus Christ by faith. The believer is truly and spiritually one with Christ. He is one organism with Christ, one plant with Christ, one body with Christ. From Christ, who is the believer's life and root and head, the believer receives all the riches of Christ and all the blessings of salvation.

Being a member of Christ by faith, the believer also shares in the anointing of Christ. Christ was ordained of God the Father and anointed with the Holy Ghost to be God's officebearer and representative. He was anointed to the position and the task of the salvation of God's people for the glory of God. Being anointed of God, Christ's office is to be our chief prophet and teacher,

who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption. Christ's office is to be our only high priest, who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us and makes continual intercession with the Father for us. Christ's office is to be our eternal king, who governs us by his word and Spirit and who defends and preserves us in the enjoyment of that salvation he has purchased for us (Lord's Day 12). Jesus' title "Christ," which means anointed, reveals him as God's prophet, priest, and king.

The believer partakes of the anointing of Christ. Just as the oil of anointing ran down Aaron's head all the way to the hem of his garment (Ps. 133:2), so the Holy Spirit, who anoints Jesus the head, also anoints the believer as a member of Christ's body. The Spirit, descending from heaven upon Christ, the head, is in turn poured out by Christ upon all of his members. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

This anointing by the Spirit of the Anointed gives the child of God the office of believer. That is, as a believer he has an official position and calling and task before Christ. In the office of believer, he represents Christ and his cause in the world, which cause is the glory of God. In the office of believer, he has the blessed privilege and calling to serve his head, Jesus Christ. Christ is anointed prophet, priest, and king to save us. In him we are anointed prophets, priests, and kings to serve him.

It is exactly here in the office of believer that *Sword and Shield* has its roots, especially in the believer's calling as a prophet. Believers have an unction—an anointing—from the Holy One, and we know all things (1 John 2:20). That anointing Spirit is the Spirit of God, who searches all the things of God, yea, the deep things of God, and knows all the things of God. We have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit that is of God, so that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God (1 Cor. 2:10–12). The things of God that the Spirit reveals to the believer are true and are not the lies of man or the false wisdom of man. "The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:27).

The anointing Spirit reveals God to the believer by revealing Jesus Christ, who is the truth and the revelation of God (John 14:6–9). Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh, full of grace and truth (1:14). The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (v. 17). To this end was Jesus born, and for this

cause came he into the world, that he should bear witness unto the truth (18:37). The unbelievers hated that truth and sought to kill Jesus for it (8:40). God's people know the truth, and the truth makes them free (v. 32). Having died and risen again for the salvation of his people, Jesus sends his people the Comforter, who is the Spirit of truth, who is their unction, and who guides his people into all truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:7, 13; 1 John 2:20).

The anointing Spirit reveals God in the face of Jesus Christ in the scriptures, so that the believer knows his savior through the word of God. All scripture is given by God's Spirit and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Through all the world Jesus sends forth the word of truth, which is the gospel of his people's salvation (Eph. 1:13). By that truth, laid upon our hearts by Christ's Spirit, we have eternal life, which is to know God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent (John 17:3).

Knowing God by virtue of the Spirit's anointing, believers confess him. Christ's Spirit poured out upon all flesh causes even our sons and daughters to prophesy (Joel 2:28). The Christian is a member of Christ by faith and thus is a partaker of his anointing, so that he may confess Christ's name (Lord's Day 12, Q&A 32). He confesses Christ before men and does not deny him (Matt. 10:32–33). He speaks the truth about Jesus, that he is the Christ, the son of the living God (16:16). The child of God exercises his office of believer by asking for the old paths (Jer. 6:16), standing fast and holding the traditions that he has been taught (2 Thess. 2:15), and earnestly contending for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). The believer sounds forth his confession with other believers: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth" (Belgic Confession 1).

*Sword and Shield* is a unique way for the believer to discharge his office. On a platform that can reach the ends of the earth, and with solid Reformed content, under the blessing of God, that makes young and old alike set down their screens for a moment, the believer can confess the truth. Through the magazine that he publishes as a member of RBP, the believer joins his fellow believers "to promote, defend, and develop the Reformed faith, which is the truth revealed in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, with special emphasis on the truths of the absolute

sovereignty of God in salvation, particular grace, and the unconditional covenant." Through the magazine the believer joins his fellow believers "to expose and condemn all lies repugnant to this truth." Through the magazine the believer is able "to give a theological and antithetical witness to the Reformed church world and beyond by broadcasting this distinctive Reformed truth to the people of God wherever they are found" (RBP Constitution, article 2).

Being a publication of believers, whose office and calling are to confess the truth before men, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

### *The Truth Is Above All*

Ultimately, the freedom of the believer, and therefore the freedom of *Sword and Shield*, is that the truth itself is free. And the truth is free because God, whose truth it is, is sovereignly free. God sends forth the word of truth out of his mouth to accomplish what he pleases, and it shall

prosper in the thing whereto he sent it, and it does not return to him void (Isa. 55:11). No man is able to silence that word. Though man may even go so far as to bind an apostle, the word of God is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9). God sends forth his word and its joyful tidings of salvation in Christ to whom he will and at what time he pleases (Canons 1.3).

God's word of truth enlightens the eyes of the believer (Ps. 19:8). The believer's eyes of understanding are opened by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God (Eph. 1:17–18). The believer, thus illuminated by the Spirit according to the word, knows all things and needs no instruction from blind and ignorant man, who can only come with the wisdom from below (1 John 2:20, 27).

Knowing the truth from God, the believer stands above all things with the word of God and judges all things (1 Cor. 2:15). He compares spiritual things with spiritual (v. 13). He receives and discerns the spirit of God from the spirit of the world, which he does not receive but rejects (v. 12). As the believer judges all things by the truth, the believer's doctrine and knowledge and truth are not judged—and cannot be judged—by any wisdom of man (v. 15). He believes not every spirit, but he tries the spirits and discerns the false prophet (1 John 4:1). He judges the teacher who comes to his door, whether that teacher has the doctrine of Christ,

This is the fundamental, defining, guiding principle of our magazine. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

and based on that judgment either receives him into his house and bids him Godspeed or not (2 John 10). The believer tries even those who say they are apostles and are not, and finds them liars (Rev. 2:2). The believer judges Paul by Paul's own gospel. And if an angel from heaven would appear and teach him, the believer would judge the angel and its doctrine according to the word of truth. If he found the angel a liar, teaching another gospel than the truth, the believer would curse the angel according to the truth (Gal. 1:8).

So free is the truth! So free is the believer in his confession of the truth and in his judgment of all things by the truth!

The believer is jealous of the word of truth. He suffers nothing to be its equal or to supplant its authority and judgment. He insists on "The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the Only Rule of Faith" (Belgic Confession 7). He suffers no rules or decisions of man contrary to God's truth to bind his conscience. If the lawful rulers of the church—the ministers, elders, and deacons—would depart from those things that Christ, their only master, has instituted, the believer would reject those unlawful rules. "Therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever" (Belgic Confession 32). He would do this, not because he is a lawless radical who seeks to overthrow the lawful authority of the special offices under Christ, but because God's word stands above and judges even the lawful rulers of the

church, and the believer is committed to God's truth above all. The believer confesses that the holy scriptures fully contain the will of God, and he holds all other things under the scriptures and subject to the scriptures. He confesses,

Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house. (Belgic Confession 7)

"The truth is above all!" This is the freedom of the believer to judge all things, including councils and ecclesiastical assemblies. This is the freedom of *Sword and Shield*, as a believer's paper, to publish the truth.

You believers, who publish *Sword and Shield* as members of Reformed Believers Publishing, let this principle take hold of you at the outset of our work: *Sword and Shield* is a believer's paper, and therefore *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

—AL

These are exciting days for Reformed Believers Publishing. First, a warm welcome to all the new members of RBP! It is a joy to have you join us in sounding forth a true Reformed testimony in the discharge of the office of believer. *Sword and Shield* now shows up in your mailbox not only as a magazine to which you subscribe but also as a magazine that you publish as a member of RBP. May God guide you as you see to it that *Sword and Shield* remains a believer's paper.

Second, the first annual meeting of RBP has now come and gone. I am writing this prior to the meeting, but I trust that it will have been profitable for all involved. We have seen God's blessing upon RBP thus far, and we commit it to his will and blessing in the months and years to come. The editorial in this issue is the speech delivered at the annual meeting.

Third, there is good news on the publishing front. Because of a generous donor, the board is able to continue sending *Sword and Shield* free of charge to everyone currently on the mailing list, or anyone who would like to be added to that list, through June 2021. This means that

even if you have not yet subscribed, you will continue to receive the magazine free of charge through June 2021. All who have already subscribed to the magazine and paid your subscription fee, your annual subscription will take effect beginning July 2021, with no further fee due until July, 2022. Thank you very much to those who have sent donations and gifts. We are astounded at the generosity shown, and we give God thanks. Thank you very much as well to the hundreds who have already subscribed to the magazine. We are moved by the interest shown, and we give God thanks.

Fourth, we are still receiving many letters. We will be publishing these as space permits, and we are thrilled to see them rolling in. We are also receiving some articles from readers for publication. We are glad to present a submission by Mr. Philip Rainey in this issue.

Yes, these are exciting days indeed. On the next dark and cold autumn evening, grab another blanket, pour a cup of something hot, and settle in with the latest *Sword and Shield*. May God speed the truths written herein to your heart, and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Salvation, including the assurance of Salvation, is only by God's grace to the Elect. That is a Biblical truth that is indisputable.

It seems to me that the root causes of the thinking that assurance of Salvation is earned by good works is twofold: First of all, man wants, by nature, to claim Salvation as due to his good works (Man's pride at work). Secondly, many view the lack of or removal of this assurance as punishment, which in turn leads them to think that having this assurance must then be a "reward" for good works.

There is no merit in our works. Scripture is clear. The only thing that merits is what Christ has done, not what we think we have done.

What is sometimes forgotten is that God is always gracious to his elect people. When He gives the assurance of Salvation to His elect child, it is in His grace, and when He withholds the assurance of Salvation from His elect child, it is also in His grace. The giving or withholding of that assurance is always done for the good of His elect child, whether to comfort or to work repentance or for whatever good purpose the Lord has.

Salvation with the assurance of Salvation is all of Grace, not of works.

That is indisputable.

—John Mantel

*Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.—1 Chronicles 12:32*

## DEFENSE OF *SWORD AND SHIELD* AND REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING (2): The Formula of Subscription

Last time I began a defense of *Sword and Shield* and Reformed Believers Publishing, the organization that publishes the magazine, by explaining from the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) the position of Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and Henry Danhof and their consistories concerning article 31 of the Church Order. A storm of false and unjust criticisms of the magazine and publisher delivered by open consistorial letters to some Protestant Reformed congregations necessitated this defense. These letters branded the magazine, its editors, and its publisher before the world as schismatics committed to rebellious activity in the churches for holding to what these consistories understand to be a schismatic and rebellious understanding of article 31, which allows *Sword and Shield* to criticize ecclesiastical decisions. My defense began with article 31 not because this is the most important criticism. It is not. It is a distraction. But the opponents of *Sword and Shield* have made article 31 their bulwark from which to heap aspersions on the magazine, the writers, and the publisher and to instill doubt in the minds of believers whether they may with good consciences support the magazine.

These criticisms are false and unjust. The position of *Sword and Shield* that these consistories criticize was the position of the fathers of the PRC, as clearly laid out in their writings, not only in the heat of controversy but also years after the events and after much reflection. If the criticisms of these letters are applied to the beginning events of the PRC, this means that the denomination had its origin in schismatic and rebellious activity on the part of the ministers, consistories, and congregations involved. Besides, the criticisms are doubly unjust because *Sword and Shield* began in part to uphold a synodical decision. Unjustly and without evidence, the letters cast as the main activity of *Sword and Shield* to criticize decisions of Protestant Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies, while in reality, at present, the editors are intent on explaining a synodical decision for the benefit of the reading public. We have never yet exercised our right that is criticized so fiercely, openly, and unjustly.

Another criticism in some consistorial letters to congregations betrays ignorance of sound Reformed church polity and the history of the Protestant Reformed denomination. Closely related to these consistories' wrong understanding of article 31 is their wrong understanding of the Formula of Subscription in relation to article 31. Representative is the position of one consistory:

The Church Order in article 31, *to which every office bearer subscribes upon signing the formula of subscription* [emphasis added], states: If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by the general synod.

The position of this consistory is evidently that article 31 has such bearing on the issues of the appearance of *Sword and Shield* and the editor's claim to be able to criticize decisions of the broader assemblies because every officebearer subscribes to the Formula of Subscription. According to this consistory, when an officebearer signs the Formula he subscribes to the Church Order and thus especially to article 31. But the consistory is patently wrong in its assertion that the officebearer subscribes to the Church Order when he signs the Formula of Subscription.

I urge every reader to read the Formula of Subscription and article 31 of the Church Order, found on pages 326 and 390 of *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. A cursory reading of the Formula shows that the officebearer who signs it does not subscribe to the Church Order but to *the three forms of unity*—"the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618–'19." The Church Order is binding on

the churches and thus on the officebearers in the churches because the articles “have been so drafted and adopted by common consent” (Church Order 86). The officebearer’s subscription to the Formula has nothing to do with the Church Order. Signing the Formula is strictly subscribing to the three forms of unity, and officebearers do so because they “heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine...do fully agree with the Word of God.” In the end, with subscription to the Formula, the “Word of God” alone rules in the church of Christ. The creeds have their authority in the churches, and officebearers can subscribe to them without being profane because the creeds “fully agree with the Word of God.”

Another consistory wrote to its congregation,

While we agree that believers in our churches have the right to discuss these decisions and even to condemn these decisions by going directly to these church assemblies, we are required to do so in the proper manner...We remind you of the “settled and binding” nature of decisions by church assemblies (See Church Order Articles 31 & 35), and we remind you of the submission and order which God requires of us and to which we have vowed (See Formula of Subscription, and the third question of Confession of Faith).

It appears that this consistory’s position is that all decisions of church assemblies are settled and binding and that every officebearer who signs the Formula with that oath unconditionally promises not to contradict these decisions publicly or privately by teaching or writing until he appeals to consistory, classis, or synod. I do not know what other interpretation can be put on these words. What the Formula of Subscription applies to the *creeds*, this consistory applies to every decision of the church assemblies. This consistory does not even limit the oath of the Formula of Subscription to doctrinal matters but arbitrarily extends it to all ecclesiastical decisions.

Still another consistory wrote,

This is the Reformed and orderly way of resolving controversy and disagreements which orderly way is laid out in our Church Order, Art. 31. This process, as it has been followed throughout our history, begins at the Consistory level and proceeds, if necessary, to the Classical level and then finally to the Synodical level. *Every office bearer promises to follow this way of decency and good order when he signs the Formula of Subscription* [emphasis added] which says, “whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the consistory, the classis or the synod, and

until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.”

This consistory is even more explicit and forceful than the previous one. Its position is that article 31 makes every decision of the ecclesiastical assemblies settled and binding and that these decisions may only be appealed. In the meantime the officebearer must acquiesce. Then the consistory contends that every officebearer promised to follow this way when he signed the Formula of Subscription. The consistory also equates the language of the Formula with the requirements of article 31 of the Church Order. The mighty oath of the Formula of Subscription—and that logically means the penalty of the Formula too, namely, immediate *de facto* suspension—is now applied to every decision of the church assemblies. This consistory, too, does not limit the application of article 31 and the Formula to doctrinal matters of the Reformed creeds, or even to doctrinal matters generally, but applies it to all decisions.

The positions of these consistories are obvious. These positions are based on their wrong understanding of article 31. These consistories do not understand properly the exception clause of article 31. Their references to the Formula of Subscription are simply attempts to bolster that wrong understanding of article 31 by tying it with the sacred oath of the Formula of Subscription. This ends up vitiating the real significance of the solemn act of signing the Formula and the real calling of every officebearer by that vow to uphold the creeds. Instead, the vow of subscription is pressed into the service of enforcing a calling that is exactly the opposite of what that vow calls for in certain instances.

The positions espoused by these consistories and publicly proclaimed to their congregations—and by which the editors of *Sword and Shield* and officebearers who are members of Reformed Believers Publishing are declared before the churches and world to be profane for breaking their oaths of subscription—are patently and egregiously wrong regarding both the Formula of Subscription and its relationship to article 31 of the Church Order. The consistories simply quoted phrases that seem to make their cases and in so doing changed the proper meaning and precise application of those phrases from the Formula of Subscription.

In order to examine the positions of these consistories regarding the Formula as it relates to article 31 of the Church Order, I turn again to the beginnings of the Protestant Reformed denomination during the doctrinal controversy over common grace in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). I treated this history in the previous article in connection with the proper understanding of article 31. This time I look at the history from the viewpoint of the Formula of Subscription. Because the view of these

Protestant Reformed consistories is exactly the position of the two Christian Reformed classes that deposed the founding fathers of the PRC and their respective consistories, I will let Herman Hoeksema tell us what he thought of this position.

Hoeksema explained that after the Christian Reformed synod of 1924 adopted the three points of common grace, Classis Grand Rapids East decided “to demand of the consistory of Eastern Avenue Church, that they ask their pastor whether or no he would abide by the three points of doctrine as adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo, 1924.”\* In defense of this demand, the classis wrote, “Obviously it was the duty of the consistory to interpellate [demand an explanation of] the pastor as soon as he publicly opposed the doctrinal decisions of the Synod in the *The Standard Bearer*” (155). The classis at least waited until Hoeksema opposed an ecclesiastical decision before applying its invented interpretation of article 31 and the Formula of Subscription. The classis at least limited the application to doctrine and even to the doctrine of the creeds.

The classis grounded its judgment that Hoeksema was guilty of schismatic behavior on “Art. 31, ‘...Whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote in the major assembly shall be considered settled and binding...’... And the formula of subscription” (156). The classis explained its understanding of article 31 when it decided the following:

The classis informs the Consistory that these brethren [Hoeksema and Danhof] had the right to protest, but to protest does not include nor involve the right to propagate views opposed to the doctrinal decrees of Synod 1924. In case their opposition should be or should become of such a character as to call for disciplinary action, Reformed Church polity requires their respective consistories to initiate such action. (157)

And the classis decided that

according to Reformed Church polity, the decisions of our major ecclesiastical assemblies are binding for all the officers and consistories within its jurisdiction and, therefore, also for Rev. H. Hoeksema and his consistory...In case an officer or consistory gives reason to doubt his or its adherence to these decisions, such officer or consistory may be called upon to explain their position. (Cf. the Formula of Subscription). (157)

That body also decided that classis should

require of Eastern Avenue’s consistory to require of its pastor, Reverend H. Hoeksema, that he state whether in the matter of the three points...he will submit with the right of appeal to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted by the Synod of 1924, i.e., neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend, either by preaching or writing, any sentiments contrary to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted by the Synod of 1924, and, in case of an appeal, whether in the interim he will acquiesce in the judgment already passed by the Synod of 1924. (158–59)

Hoeksema called the whole classical report “a concoction of truth and sophistry” (159). Sophistry is a superficially plausible line of reasoning that collapses under close scrutiny as being false. The classis referenced or used phrases from the Formula of Subscription and the Church Order and so seemed to have a great concern for proper church polity. However, in reality the classis gave to those phrases an interpretation that they cannot bear, in order to twist the Church Order in pursuit of its agenda to silence and finally drive out the truth. The classis concocted out of thin air an interpretation of church polity that was sophistry at every level and especially in its interpretation of article 31 and the Formula of Subscription. Hoeksema explained,

In its report the committee [of classis], evidently, takes the stand that agreement with the Confessions on the part of any office-bearer in the Christian Reformed Churches implies agreement with all the doctrinal interpretations by any synod. In this case synod had composed and adopted three points of doctrine, which it chose to call interpretations of the Reformed Confessions but which are in a very real sense additions to and corruptions of those Confessions. Synod had adopted these three doctrinal declarations without first consulting the churches in general. And now, according to the report of the committee of Classis Grand Rapids East, all must accept the faith of synod as their own, profess it and teach it, until another synod may be willing to listen to their grievances! All this is supposed to be sustained by Article 31 of the Church Order. (161–62)

The classis said, “According to Reformed Church polity, the decisions of our major ecclesiastical assemblies are

\* Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1936), 149. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this book are in text.

binding for all officers and consistories within its jurisdiction” (157). The classis obviously meant decisions about the confessional standards as interpreted by the synod. The classis grounded its meaning in the Formula of Subscription when it wrote, “Cf. the Formula of Subscription” (157) and when it stated that Hoeksema’s duty, in the language of the Formula of Subscription, was “neither publicly nor privately [to] propose, teach or defend, either by preaching or writing, any sentiments contrary to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted by the Synod of 1924” (159).

Hoeksema summarized and criticized classis’ view of article 31 and the Formula of Subscription: “According to the stand assumed by the report of the Classical Committee, however, an office-bearer in the Christian Reformed Churches is bound unconditionally to submit to all the decrees of any synod. And this is popery” (162).

The viewpoint of the Christian Reformed classis was that the oath of the Formula of Subscription bound an officebearer to submit to all decrees of the synod. This Hoeksema rejected. And he rejected this viewpoint not only in its application to the decrees of synod generally but also in his specific case, where the matters were doctrinal and involved the doctrine of the creeds as interpreted by synod. The CRC said that the three points were explanations of the creeds. But with this Hoeksema had two problems: the churches in general had not been consulted, and those interpretations were in fact additions to and corruptions of the confessions.

His belief that the decisions of the Christian Reformed synod were additions to and corruptions of the creeds explains his conviction to oppose those decisions publicly. About the attempt by the classis that deposed him to extract from him a promise to be silent about common grace while he appealed, Hoeksema said,

Let it here be stated, eleven years after that memorable session of Classis Grand Rapids East, that if such a promise could, indeed, have been made without a violation of the truth and the dictates of conscience before God and the Christian Reformed Churches, the pastor of Eastern Avenue would certainly have made it...

He felt, however, that this was impossible.

He was convinced that it was absolutely impossible to preach and teach in his own congregation, without touching upon and contradicting the principles expressed in the Three Points.

And he also felt that it would be a breach of promise on his part if he should refrain from publicly warning the churches against the false doctrines adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo.

For, when he signed the Formula of Subscription he promised, that he would maintain and defend the Reformed doctrine as expressed in the Formulas of Unity. (204–5)

Not only does the Formula of Subscription have nothing to do with article 31 of the Church Order regarding the decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies generally, but also its oath does not bind an officebearer to silence in the face of departure from the creeds while he appeals. Rather, should a synod corrupt the creeds by its doctrinal decisions, which synod would call interpretations of the creeds, his oath demands him “to refute and contradict these, and to exert [himself] in keeping the church free from such errors.” The oath of subscription is strictly a subscription to the three forms of unity. When I signed the Formula of Subscription, I signed the creeds. Any and all decisions of the assemblies, whether consistory, classis, or synod, do not fall under that oath. Not even all the doctrinal decisions of the consistory, classis, or synod fall under that oath. Decisions that touch the purity of doctrine contained in the creeds fall under that oath. My oath requires me to endeavor that the churches make decisions in harmony with the creeds, but if the churches should corrupt the creeds by their decisions, then I am called to oppose that with all my might.

Banished forever from the proper understanding of the Formula of Subscription should be the idea that the oath of subscription has anything at all to do with synodical decisions generally. One of the consistories quoted above made this connection explicitly and forcefully when it wrote,

Every office bearer promises to follow this way of decency and good order when he signs the Formula of Subscription which says, “whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the consistory, the classis or the synod, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.”

The way of decency and good order that the consistory mentions is the “orderly way...laid out in our Church Order, Art. 31.”

I agree that the way of article 31 is the orderly way. But the exception clause, “unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God,” may never be left out of the explanation of that orderly way. That exception ought especially to be understood by the members of the PRC because it was instrumental for the beginning of the Protestant Reformed denomination. The exception clause and the implied duty not to consider a decision settled and binding if it clearly conflicts with the word of God belongs

to the orderly way. This exception clause with its implied duty also harmonizes perfectly well with the calling of the officebearer to oppose decisions that corrupt and militate against the Reformed doctrine of the creeds.

Further, the way of appeal in article 31 is not what the Formula of Subscription refers to when it says, “Whenever we shall believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the consistory, the classis, or the synod, and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.” This is not an interpretation of article 31, as this consistory makes it. The Formula of Subscription refers to a consistory, classis, or synod requiring an examination of an officebearer’s beliefs concerning specific articles of the creeds “upon sufficient grounds of suspicion.” The officebearer is to comply with that requirement but reserves for himself the right of appeal when he believes himself aggrieved by the decision, and he promises to acquiesce in the judgment already passed while he appeals.

This was the importance of Hoeksema’s insistence that the Christian Reformed synod had faced and settled the question of his orthodoxy and had refused the demand for his discipline in light of the Formula of Subscription for opposing common grace. The synod did not recommend discipline and instead declared Hoeksema to be fundamentally Reformed. He acquiesced in that decision, but two classes of the CRC would not acquiesce and insisted on pursuing discipline on the grounds of the Formula of

Subscription, against good order and by means of corrupt church polity.

Once again, I ask whether Hoeksema’s understanding of the Formula of Subscription and its relation to article 31 is your understanding. Were Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof profane violators of their promises when they insisted not only that they had to oppose common grace by means of a protest, but also that they were required by their oaths of subscription to the creeds to exert themselves to keep the churches free from errors that militated against the creeds and to do so publicly? Did they break their oaths of subscription when they publicly opposed a synodical decision that corrupted the creeds under the guise of interpreting the creeds?

Every reader should know that if a classis or synod of the PRC should corrupt the doctrine of the creeds by adopting dogmas that contradict and militate against the creeds, the editors of *Sword and Shield* will exercise their right and calling to oppose those dogmas, in harmony with their oaths of subscription. But mark well, the false arguments drawn by these consistories from the Formula of Subscription and article 31 of the Church Order are being leveled before the church and world against believers who are committed to explaining a synodical decision that they believe is in harmony with the creeds, and to doing so in obedience to both article 31 and the Formula of Subscription.

—NJL

## SOUND DOCTRINE

*Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.—Titus 2:1*

# THE ANTITHETICAL PROMISE

*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. — Genesis 3:15*

**T**he protevangel or mother promise of Genesis 3:15 is declared in words that give it a strange sound.

So strange is this sound that it may be hard to understand how the protevangel is indeed the gospel. It may be even harder to understand how it can be so pivotal as to be the first proclamation of the gospel.

How can this word of enmity actually be a word of friendship, a covenant word? How can it be a gospel promise, let alone the first gospel promise? It speaks not of friendship or of salvation but of enmity. It speaks not

of freedom but of warfare. It declares not healing or restoration but violence and death.

From the viewpoint of speech, it is simple enough to explain why this is the case. Although our first parents were present to hear this protevangel, the Lord God did not speak it directly to them. He addressed these words directly to Satan, the deceiver and tempter. The Lord promised to put enmity between Satan and the woman and between his seed and her seed. God promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the

serpent, while the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman's seed.

With that understanding in mind, it is simple enough to understand why this mother promise is expressed in its particular words. God pronounced wrath and judgment against his bitter foe for what he had done in marring God's good creation. Satan had wickedly disrupted the fellowship that God had with his creatures, those created in the height of glory in his very image and likeness. Satan had turned the friend-servants of God into enemies.

Even with the above understanding, we might still be puzzled by the form of the words of the first promise of the gospel. We might think the precious note of the gospel would have been pronounced much more clearly if the Lord God had spoken to our first parents rather than to Satan, if God had spoken simple words of reclamation, asserting that he would continue being their friend-sovereign and that he would in wondrous grace repair the breach they had created and raise them out of their desolation and death, making them his friends again.

But the Lord God did not. He spoke what he did and to whom he did. He spoke these words recorded in holy scripture for an important reason. That reason is the antithesis.

The word *antithesis* is from the Greek language and is made up of a main word and a prefix. The main word is *thesis*. Its counterpart in the English language is the word *stand*. Attached to this main word is the prefix *anti*, which has the English counterpart *against* or *contrary to*. The antithesis, then, is a stand against. To be antithetical is to take a stand against something else. Thus the antithesis is the necessary implication of the word "enmity" in Genesis 3:15. The mother promise makes the antithesis the gracious promise and work of God.

The word *antithesis* calls our attention first to the *thesis*. That *thesis* is the radical effect of the fall. The serpent had his *stand* against his sovereign creator. Through Satan's temptation he gained the willing participation of our first parents in his stand against God. Together they stood shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, against the living God. Such is the condition of the fallen world by nature. That condition is a clear, decisive, unrelenting stand against the sovereign God of heaven and earth. The thesis of sin is all there is by nature. It runs through all human society and culture. The thesis is the development of the world in its politics, its society and community, and its art, culture, and technological progress. The thesis must develop to its climax in the kingdom of antichrist.

In the middle of that thesis, the God of grace instituted the antithesis. By his word and Spirit, he works another stand, a stand against the current and trend of the thesis of Satan and fallen mankind.

According to the promise of Genesis 3:15, the antithesis is all of God. His word of promise begins with the word "I." The Lord God, the speaker of the promise, declares himself to be the source of the antithesis. Additionally, the promise is from God alone. His word alone declares that establishing enmity will be his work alone. He makes no plea. He attempts to strike no bargain. He gives no invitation. The reason? Quite simply, the thesis cannot at all become the antithesis. Of itself the stand against God cannot become a stand for God.

Such is an additional benefit to the understanding that God did not address this word directly to our first parents but to Satan.

Also this promise of the antithesis does not allow the seed of the woman to be a party over against the God of the antithesis. The antithesis allows only one party, the party of the God of the antithesis. There is only one anti-stand, not two anti-stands, or two antitheses.

God's covenant word of promise gives no independent place to man, the seed of the woman. The glorious power of the promise is that it rescues man from his alliance with the serpent and his seed. That rescue does not leave him in an independent position. He is not to be a party by himself. The power of the promise is that it takes man back to the very God to whom he had belonged. It joins man back to his God in redeeming grace, with the result that man becomes of the party of the living God. The power of the promise is that, in covenant fellowship, God and man stand in alliance against the seed of the serpent.

The above becomes crystal clear when we consider that the heart of the covenant promise of Genesis 3:15 does not refer to our first parents. The promise was given to them and belongs to them. Such was the power of the promise that they were redeemed back to be with their God in his antithesis. But the heart of the promise is the seed of the woman. That seed is Christ first, and then the elect in Christ (Gal. 3:16). The seed of the woman is the Son of God. It is not only the Son of God who would become incarnate and whose death on the cross would be the bruising of the serpent's head. But it is also the Son of God who was personally given to our first parents by God's mother promise.

In the Son of God alone is the entire and complete antithesis to the seed of the serpent. He is the Word that

The power of the promise is that, in covenant fellowship, God and man stand in alliance against the seed of the serpent.

God spoke to our first parents. In that mother promise, God gave himself in the person of the Son to be the savior of all the seed of the woman, the children of promise. With his antithetical word giving his Son, Jehovah God brought Adam and Eve back into saving covenant fellowship with himself. In that salvation they became his, of his redeemed people and of his party. By his Word and in his Word, they were joined to him to stand together against sin and Satan, never apart and never over against each other.

This antithesis must stand, according to the mother promise of Genesis 3:15, as a dominant feature of all subsequent covenant history. In all the development of sacred history and covenant history, the antithesis looms large. The kingdom of God comes through conquest. The church on earth is always a militant church. Through judgment God redeems his Zion. The gospel is a savor of life unto life and of death unto death, always declaring salvation to God's people and judgment to the wicked. The Christian is called to put on the whole armor of God, and he must constantly wear that armor until the day of his death. He is called always to wield the sword of the word of God and must not lay down his arms until he gains the final victory in the glory of heaven.

The antithesis occupies the same prominence from the viewpoint of the seed of the serpent as well. Scripture draws back the veil to reveal a world that is dominated by the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). The world, under the dominion of Satan, is desperately bent on the ruin of the church, the cause of God in the world. As the church bears witness to God's truth in the world, the seed of the woman comes under incessant attack.

Sometimes that attack is overt. The world persecutes the church, the party of God. The false church persecutes the true. Heresies threaten the church that holds fast to the truth. False teachers and promoters of licentiousness arise from within. The way of God's covenant people is made harsh and severe. Tribulation and oppression grow strong, and compromise is presented as the way of relief. How easy life would be if Christianity were not so exclusive! So the seed of the serpent tries to separate God's people from their God.

Sometimes that attack is far different, subversive in character. Sometimes the seed of the serpent dresses in the guise of the seed of the woman. Goodness and grace are all around, not only in the church. The world participates in the gift of redemption, though to a far lesser degree. The church and the world have much in common that they can enjoy and treasure in this present life. At other times the seed of the serpent entices with its own overtures of friendship and fellowship. Why be lonely? Why be so few? Why not take our daughters for your sons? Why not

give your daughters to our sons? There is so much to share and enjoy together! So the seed of the serpent tries to steal away the hearts of God's people from their God, seeking to separate what God has joined together.

In the first proclamation of the gospel, the proclamation of God himself, the antithesis is the gospel. The gospel is the gospel of enmity. Compromise is impossible. Alliance with the seed of the serpent is impossible. There is and must remain only enmity, the enmity created and maintained by sovereign grace alone. The mother promise of the gospel is the war declaration of enmity, spoken directly to the enemy himself.

But the enmity of the mother promise brings its power to another, much deeper realm. The promise results in enmity within the members of the party of the living God. Redeemed by grace into covenant fellowship with their God, the seed of the woman find that enmity runs within. The covenant people of God find within themselves deep opposition to their God. The motions of the seed of the serpent characterize not only the seed of the serpent, but also what the seed of the woman find within themselves.

What the people of God have within them is in alliance with the seed of the serpent. They have the flesh, the old man of sin, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. They have within them their depravity, the depravity that makes common cause with the serpent's seed. The seed of the woman are characterized by the struggle described so fitly in Galatians 5:17: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Because of this enmity within, the people of God must take up arms against themselves. That enmity means their calling to put to death their members that are of the flesh. They are called to put off the old man for the sake of putting on the new. The people of God are called to repentance and out of that repentance to true conversion, putting off the old man with his deeds and putting on the new man in Christ Jesus.

By the promise of Genesis 3:15, the covenant people of God are placed in the unrelenting, constant antithetical stand against the seed of the serpent. From the viewpoint of the antithesis existing in all history, that stand appears so very small and weak, to the point of being helpless. The outward viewpoint of that antithesis has the whole world (1 John 5:19) pitted against the remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5). The inward viewpoint of that same antithesis has the members of that remnant deeply involved in another conflict, having only a small beginning of the new obedience, a beginning so small that they cannot do the things that they would.

The above character of the antithesis makes prominent and powerful the mother promise of God in the hearts of his people. In all their warfare they are assured both of their survival and of their conquest. Their God is faithful who has promised. His faithfulness is clear against the bitter and shameful backdrop of their unfaithfulness, woefully exhibited in their first parents. There will always be enmity because their God has promised it. There will always be enmity because their God has promised to place it there, between them and the seed of the serpent. Their small corner from which they fight must always exist because God has promised. Their small numbers cannot be overcome because the enmity that is their strength to fight is from God's faithfulness to his promise. No matter how small their beginning of new obedience, it cannot be snuffed out, because it is God's performance of his word.

Their present assurance in the conflict of enmity is rooted in the promise of ultimate victory. Yes, their corner from which they fight is so very small. Their numbers are so very small in the face of their enemy, the seed of the serpent. Their beginning is also so very small. But they must be victorious because of the promise of their God, of whom they are members. They are, after all, the seed of the woman, the children of promise.

Their victory is sealed in this promise because the very God who created all things by himself is the God who has promised. All the seed of the serpent is under his sovereign government, so completely that without

his will they cannot so much as move. The God who promised will bring, by his glorious power, his promised enmity to its glorious conclusion in the final judgment of the seed of the serpent (Rev. 20:10–15). The victory is sealed because of the promise that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. That seal becomes apparent in the history of the seed of the woman as that seed feels the power of the serpent whenever its heel is bruised. As much as that heel-bruising is part of the mother promise of God, so must it lead to the promise of victory: the head of the serpent must be crushed in final victory.

But most of all, that victory is sealed because of the one seed of the woman, the one whom this mother promise concerns first of all, the enmity of God in his natural and eternal seed, the only begotten Son. The Son of God, to be begotten by a woman and born under the law in the fullness of time, is the promised seed of the woman (Rev. 12). That seed is the savior and the judge. The bruising of his heel at the cross is the salvation of his people and the crushing of the serpent's head. The victory of Christ's cross he will fully realize when he executes the judgment of God against the nations, ruling them with the rod of iron.

In that antithetical mother promise of enmity and victory is the power of God's covenant people to represent victoriously the cause of their God in this world of darkness and sin.

—MVW

## CONTRIBUTION

# THE VIRUS, THE MOVEMENT, AND OUR GREAT LEADER: AN ALLEGORY

Welcome to the “new normal” of America 2020. It is the world of postmodern absurdity that claims as its fundamental tenet that there is no such thing as truth. Of course, the claim itself is a contradiction—if there is no such thing as truth, how can the claim be true? But no matter, nothing—not even logic—can be allowed to interfere with the new orthodoxies of the day. They are the principles of the new world order, principles comprised under the name Worldthink. Permit me to describe the “new normal” of America (and indeed of the world) in 2020.

We are now in Year 1 of Our Great Leader (OGL), and the devoted citizens of Area 2 (formerly North America) are rapidly adjusting to the new truth. I am of course applying the terminology of Oldthink: words such as truth, logic, honesty, and God. In Worldthink truth is science, honesty is transparency, God is The Leader. And what of logic? The redefinition of logic has been the biggest challenge for the language committee of Worldthink. As a concept, it has proved most difficult to abolish, not least because they have found, to their chagrin, that you need logic in order to deny logic. This is true because

without the law of noncontradiction you cannot, of course, deny any proposition or say that it is false. But the committee assures us that with the input of leading “thinkers” from Harvard, Princeton, and Berkeley they will soon have a fix for this troublesome concept.

The victory of The Movement, leading to the creation of The Community, was stunning. Many in what was formerly known as the Western World were bewildered, even shocked, at the speed of events and the absolutely sweeping character of The Movement’s victory. In the space of just three months, the old order, characterized by private enterprise, constitutionalism, nominal Christianity, and private property, was overthrown. While many of the older generations, who clung to the culture and practices of the old order, were genuinely shocked at the speed of its demise, not so millennials and Generation Z. They were always in the vanguard of The Movement. Specifically, white middle-class, college-educated millennials and Generation Zs were the stormtroopers of The Movement. After all, they had been assiduously groomed and indoctrinated in Worldthink the whole way through public school and college. Even in the so-called Christian colleges, through the vehicles of their state-mandated “diversity departments,” these young people had been taught at least to tolerate the new world order and its way of thinking—Worldthink. This was manifest, to the great pleasure of the thought leaders of The Movement, in the abundance of Coexist and Tolerance bumper stickers in the parking lots of Calvin and Hope universities.

Such outward displays of the youths’ devotion and loyalty to the principles of Worldthink reached their zenith in the summer of 2020, when, at the command of Our Great Leader, it was not uncommon to witness these devotees persistently adorned with face masks while they were outdoors in conditions of 90-degree heat and extreme humidity! A truly religious fervor (if only “religion” was comprised under Worldthink).

During late May and June, the elite troops of The Movement spearheaded the final push to victory. In what The Movement now celebrates as The June Days, the soldiers of Black Lives Matter (BLM) swept away all remaining outposts of old order resistance. No institution of Western society could withstand their assaults. When the last president of what was known as the USA sent his best forces against them, it was all to no avail. So invincible were the soldiers of BLM that the forces sent against them ended up taking the side of BLM. This was evinced in the spectacle of police chiefs’ “taking a knee” with BLM and in some cases joining its marches. These elite troops quickly overcame any remaining old order resistance: police stations were burned down and their officers committed to reeducation programs; corporations were forced to espouse

the principles of Worldthink, and those who refused had their buildings burned down and property looted; the halls of academia enthusiastically joined the volunteers of BLM (having long been infiltrated with the principles of Worldthink anyway). Such was the irresistible power of The Movement manifested in BLM that churches rushed to display BLM signs alongside their rainbow flags.

Not only could no institution of Western society withstand their assaults; neither could any symbol of the old order. In common with every revolution, the symbols of the old order were replaced with those of the new. In those heady days of June and July 2020, down came all the symbols of the old, corrupt, racist, patriarchal, capitalist, heteronormative society. Statues of such racist, patriarchal fiends as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were enthusiastically thrown down all over the former USA. Streets, buildings, cities, and schools bearing their names were all renamed after the heroes of this new revolution. Preceding the removal of such symbols, and as a softening-up exercise, had been the removal of statues of former generals in the South of the former USA, men whose names are deemed by The Movement so intolerable as to warrant their complete expunging from the lexicon of Worldthink.

### *The Virus*

In addition to, and in parallel with, the assiduous efforts of white, middle-class, college-educated millennials and the doctrinal zealots of BLM, there was another factor operating for the destruction of Western society. It was an insidiously clever tactic, insidious in that it clothed its real aim in the garb of compassion. It was “the virus.” More precisely, it was the *response* to what was called the virus. That there was some kind of virus infecting populations of the world was not in dispute. That it severely affected some people with respiratory ailments and those with weakened immune systems was not in dispute. What was in dispute was the mortality rate—the proportion of those testing positive who died of it.

Sometime around mid-March of 2020, Western governments became concerned about the spread of the COVID-19 virus. They were concerned about how quickly this “new” virus was spreading to their countries from China. The fact that it spread from China seemed to add to the threat, with various conspiracy theories circulating around this fact. But whatever the source of the virus, the thought leaders of The Movement quickly recognized it as a powerful tool in their arsenal.

The Movement had for the longest time been inculcating its worldview—Worldthink—in the public education system and especially the colleges. We shall give more attention to this worldview later, but for now suffice it to say that one tenet of Worldthink became incredibly

potent in The Movement's use of the virus: science is truth. Do not underestimate the power of this tenet. One underestimates the power of the belief that science is truth at one's peril. Alas, how the Western world was brought to abject submission and sniveling obeisance before the great god of science as in a moment. One after another, The Movement paraded the high priests and prophets of science. There they were, seemingly ubiquitous: on the TV screen, the radio, social media, and the printed page. They were there with their intense frowns, their dire predictions of millions of deaths, their prophecies of ravaged bodies and strewn corpses, of hospitals overrun and healthcare systems collapsing, and all backed up with figures and data. Oh yes, data. Scientific data. Scientific models predicting two million deaths from the virus in the USA alone. And who, WHO could possibly gainsay or question the data? For after all, science is truth.

Nothing and no one could stand before "the science." Such had been The Movement's success in inculcating Worldthink that no one seemed able to articulate any alternative. The right to private property that had existed since the Magna Carta almost a millennium ago was an immediate casualty. At first it was restricted, then abolished. At the commencement of "the virus," surrounded as always by the scientific and medical "experts," OGL solemnly pronounced in grave and urgent tones, "In the face of this deadly virus that will undoubtedly wipe out countless millions, we must shut down the economy. This is necessary to prevent the spread." In support "the experts" brought forth graphs showing steeply rising infection rates and mortality rates in the millions. Their consensus was that we must limit the spread by lockdown and social distancing. We must, they said, have a two-week lockdown. Some doubted that a whole economy could be shut down and reopened in two weeks, but OGL had said so, and that was enough for most people. The economy was duly shut down, and within three weeks most people seemed to forget the facts of almost full employment and a booming economy.

The right to own a business and collect the profits thereof is part of the right to private property. Free enterprise had been a bedrock of the previous world order. It was essential to individual freedom that one could use his God-given abilities to develop a business, run it on the profit motive, and then enjoy the fruits of his labor as he chose. The Movement understood this very well. As devoted disciples of Karl Marx (one of their founding fathers), they understood the need to get rid of private property if they were ever to realize The Community—their new world order in which everyone is beholden to the State. But try as they might, the realization of The Community had proved elusive. It had worked for a while

in the Soviet Union and in China, but they could never seem to establish it in the West. Now, with the virus, they saw their chance and seized it.

Having been taught the scientific worldview for a hundred years, the people believed the experts. They would not have believed politicians telling them to shut down the economy, but the word of medical experts... who could possibly gainsay it? Some protested. They were business owners who watched their life's work go to ruin. As the two weeks became four and then six, some owners tried to reopen, only to be visited by The Public Safety Committee. The offenders were heavily fined. Condemned as "greedy capitalists" who imperiled public safety, these offenders were publicly shamed on social media. The worst were handed over to The Doctrine Committee of The Movement for, as it was termed, "additional instruction in the principles of Worldthink."

The principles of Worldthink were now applied to economics. The Economic Committee announced the new principles on which the economy would now be organized. There would be common ownership of the means of production; the principle of the market (the profit motive) was declared illegal. This was all necessary—we were assured—in order to deal with the virus. Ah, yes, *the virus*, what changes hath it wrought! The word went out: "We must shut down the economy in order to stop the spread of the virus, and then The Economic Committee will decide when and under what circumstances it can be reopened." We were assured the economy must be put on a completely new footing in order to deal with the virus, and only The Movement could be trusted with it again.

If I may attempt to interpose a modicum of sanity at this point, it might seem somewhat absurd and illogical to shut down an economy because some people are sick; it is akin to saying, "I didn't buy any turnips today because the apples were bad." But remember we are now in a post-modern world where the rules of logic no longer apply, or at least where truth is just whatever you want to make it. It is a world where dentists and engineers are deemed "non-essential," but abortion clinics are "essential." But we must delve back into the insanity of our brave new world.

There was much talk of the evils of social and economic inequality and how the new system would "share the wealth." The Economic Committee quickly began sharing the wealth by issuing what were called "stimulus checks" to all the people who had lost their jobs (more accurately, all those who had been put out of work). This measure was hailed as "fair," "compassionate," "necessary." It won the masses to the cause of The Movement, not least because people soon realized they were better off sitting at home than working. The measure was so popular, in fact, that it was decided just to give everybody

three thousand dollars. Everybody wondered why economic policies so agreeable and generous had not been thought of before and were quickly assured that it was all a testimony to the genius of OGL.

And so the new economic system was established. It was known as “the collective system” or “the communitarian model.” The profit motive was castigated as corrupt and owning private property egregious. Only the leaders of The Movement and their friends—the politicians and leaders of the big corporations (they being unquestionably orthodox in the principles of Worldthink)—could be trusted to use their property and wealth for the interests of The Community. Some people scratched their heads and wondered about this, thinking it a contradiction. They were referred to The Doctrine Committee, who soon remedied their concerns.

It was understood that The Movement would decide who could buy and sell. Only those who espoused the aims of The Movement and who confessed OGL as their mighty deliverer and savior could find a job. And only those who confessed this and displayed his Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Commandments were permitted to run a business. This the Christians refused to do. Hence, Executive Order 499 was promulgated: “Those who refuse to confess OGL as their savior, neither will display his holy commandments, are forthwith excluded from all economic participation.”

### *The Christians*

There were some who remembered there had once been another source of truth. At one time, before The Movement and The Age of Enlightenment, it was widely believed there was a book called the Bible. At that time, many believed this book to be the very word of God. They believed the Bible was a miracle of inspiration by which God spoke his own words through men. As such, they held it to be the supreme authority for what they were to believe and how they were to live. These people were called Christians because they followed the one revealed in the Bible, Jesus Christ. There were still some of these people around during the revolution that brought The Movement to power. They refused to join the revolution and stoutly opposed it. But they were soon criminalized, no place being found for them in The Community.

Their crimes were legion, but among the worst was their outspoken opposition to Worldthink, closely followed by their insistence on meeting for public worship during “the virus.” The latter led to widespread and hysterical denunciations of them all over social media as dangerous radicals who threatened the safety of The Community. Pictures of them, meeting *in public! indoors! unmasked! with no number limit!* featured in every social media feed and headline.

Then there were the headlines screaming their heretical pronouncements: “Jesus Christ is king over all”; “We reject The Leader as antichrist”; “The Bible, not science, is truth”; “Pestilence is a sign of Christ’s coming: repent and believe the gospel!” The populace was shocked! Stunned! Outraged! Aghast! “What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard from their own mouths,” they concurred. The demand and petition arose to The Leader, “We would be rid of these Christians!” A loud and incessant demand, everywhere repeated, social media abuzz with it, flashed across every LED screen, hysterically chanted during morning and evening “community times.” What could The Leader do but accede to the loud and impassioned pleas of his people? And so Executive Order 501 was promulgated. The Christians were silenced; their places were found no more.

In addition to the Christians, a few others raised their voices against the science of The Movement. That there could be, and in fact were, other scientific models put forward as an explanation for the spread and course of the virus mattered not. There was, for example, the model of herd immunity. As with any virus, once a population is infected it builds an immunity to the virus. It seemed that the low incidence of COVID-19 in California, when other parts of the USA were recording high rates in March and April 2020, was linked to the high incidence of flu-like symptoms there in November and December 2019. The argument was that California had COVID-19 before the rest of the nation and had herd immunity. This would then explain why it recorded markedly lower rates of infection in March and April. This is a viable explanation of the course of the virus. So why would it not then gain widespread acceptance? The repudiation of the therapeutic drug hydroxychloroquine could also be mentioned as evidence of the misuse and abuse of scientific knowledge—the use of this drug did not fit the political agenda.

The reason the theory of herd immunity gained no traction is simple: it advances no political, globalist agenda. The very plausible theory simply says, “Leave it to the body.” A healthy human body has its own incredibly advanced defense system against invaders. It is called the immune system. But The Movement saw early how fears of a putative worldwide pandemic could be harnessed to its agenda. The Movement sent out its missionaries, carrying the gospel of science to every quarter of the globe. They preached dogmatically their sermons of scientific data. They warned their terrified listeners to flee the wrath of the virus to their own homes, where they were to “self-quarantine” for weeks. But above all, they pointed the distressed and comfortless citizens to Our Great Leader as the object of their trust.

## *The Emergence of The Leader*

Our Great Leader assumed power on an unprecedented wave of hysteria that crashed over the Western world during the spring of 2020. The dire assessments and predictions of the scientists and the medical bureaucracy had their desired effect. The populations were warned of their impending doom if they did not put their complete trust in OGL. In his daily appearances, surrounded by “the experts,” our Leader assured the cringing populations that if only the people would adhere without question to his prescribed measures, all would be well. Upon the conclusion of his speeches, all the people dutifully responded, “All this we will do.” Always following him to the podium were “the experts.” Yes, the experts. They were the high priests and prophets of science. They would bring forth their divine revelations of data. *Data! Scientific data!* Oh, the words themselves have such mesmerizing power! Who, pray WHO, can stand before them?

The Leader was quick to formulate, announce, and enforce the new doctrines of society. The speed with which the people accepted and imbibed these new orthodoxies was truly astonishing. Who could have imagined that within the space of barely three months the old order, which had existed largely intact for the best part of a millennium, could be swept away? It was as if the Western ideals of individual freedom, limited government, nation states, free enterprise, and Christianity had never existed. Instead of faith, family, and freedom, the watchwords became science, community, and safety. From the youngest child to the senior, these watchwords [SCS] became their creed. On every billboard, credit card, and identification card the letters SCS were emblazoned over the seemingly benign face of our Leader.

But The Leader would draw closer still, for not only did he become our Leader; he became also our guardian and protector. Such was the people’s love and devotion to him for delivering them from the virus (some even declared it to be miraculous) that, overcome with emotion, they enthusiastically acclaimed Executive Order 500: “It is hereby proclaimed by Our Great Leader, and as a token of his undoubted care and unfailing affection for his people, that together with SCS his face become the image on every personal device home screen.” With one accord the people acclaimed this as indubitable evidence of The Leader’s extraordinary wisdom and benevolence. For now, every time we open our devices to learn the principles of Worldthink and to receive with joy

the proclamation of the latest executive orders, we are reminded of Our Great Leader and his unfailing care.

After all, our Leader had saved the Western world. As the director of the World Health Organization, he had stepped forward in the hour of need: “Cometh the hour, cometh the man.” Indeed, and what an hour! For some time, the people had been subjected by their media to dire warnings of imminent war with China. But now the virus. Millions would certainly die. In the United Kingdom alone the “experts” predicted a million deaths (in a country of fifty-six million). The cry arose, “Peace and safety.” This was the hour, but what of the man?

Fostered by the dire prophecies of the scientists and a hysterical media with its constant and breathless reports of “spikes” and “surges,” the cry of the hapless populace became a demand. “We must take action; we must limit the spread; we must do all in our power; we must have lockdowns; we must have executive orders (hundreds of them); we must have masks...and we must have someone.” Ah, yes, the cry for someone. It is the cry of man from the beginning. It is the cry for a Nimrod, a Nebuchadnezzar, a Caesar, a pope, a Napoleon, a Lenin, a Hitler, a president. It is the cry of man for a man; for a man of extraordinary genius who can alleviate all mankind’s ills by establishing the worldwide kingdom of man. It is a cry that is as old as history itself.

And herein lies part of the explanation for the clamor for Our Great Leader: only those who have learned history understand that all previous attempts at world rule have ended in misery and the deaths of millions. But the schools of the West had long ago eschewed the teaching of history. In the place of the broad sweep of world history they substituted themes: themes such as black history, women’s rights, and social justice. And now in Year 1 of OGL, world history is replaced by the history of The Movement.

But the real explanation—the one determining and lying behind all others—is that of the Bible, namely that a sovereign God, according to his eternal purpose, raised up The Leader. The real name of The Leader is antichrist. There were some who understood this and who identified The Leader as antichrist. They proclaimed this publicly (it was known then as preaching), but with the same general clamor and hysteria that elevated The Leader, they were denounced as disturbers of the peace. For after all, we must have peace and safety! “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thess. 5:3).

—Philip Rainey



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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

*Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.—2 Corinthians 13:11*

*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.—1 John 5:21*

**T**he truth versus idols. The true spiritual worship of God versus the corruption of superstitions and false doctrines. Idols! Vanities created from the God-hating mind of man. The idol is every departure from the truth. The worship of devils! Idols have eyes, but they see not. Ears have they, but they hear not. Hands have they, but they handle not. But our God is in the heavens; he does whatsoever he pleases.

The Son of God has come and given to us an understanding, so that we may know God, who is true; and we are in him, who is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the truth, the full, saving revelation of the true God. The truth is set down in scripture. From beginning to end scripture is the revelation of the true God in Jesus Christ his Son. How precious is the truth—a living root in us that springs up to eternal life, a living root in us by which we are in Christ and he in us, and we in him are in God. Our fellowship with God is in the truth. He is true, and with the lie he has no fellowship. His revelation is the truth—the truth we have through the coming of the Son of God, who has given to us an understanding. In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son of God has declared God, so that we might know God and have fellowship with him. For eternal life is to know God in his Son Jesus Christ, and he has given us power to become the sons of God.

Little children. Dear, beloved, enlightened children of God, called out of the darkness of Satan's kingdom, from that race of vipers and that generation of serpents to which everyone belongs by nature. By nature everyone is without God and hope in the world, aliens from God and the covenants of promise. All live in the enmity of their minds and the darkness of their hearts. The things of the Spirit are foolishness to them: holding the truth in unrighteousness, fashioning to themselves idols of every creature, and worshiping them rather than the Creator, who is God blessed forever. What madness! Walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. Devoid of the truth. All men are darkness and full of vanity and lies. But, little children, we are of God. Chosen. Called. Made children of light. Turned from idols to serve the living God. By the wonder of grace.

Little children—small and exposed in the world, having only a small beginning of the new obedience and exposed to the temptations of Satan and the innate lusts of the flesh to worship idols. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Be ever vigilant against the powerful work of the flesh to fashion idols and the powerful lust of the flesh to worship idols. Love the truth. Cling to the truth. Stand for the truth. Hate idols—all idols—idols of superstition, false doctrine, mammon, wood, stone, silver, gold, and man's favorite idol, himself.

Oh, keep yourselves from idols! Constant calling. Relentless battle. Cleave to Jehovah God, the only good. Know him rightly. Turn from idols to the living God. Put not your trust in men, but put your trust in Jehovah. Be ever mindful of how easily men turn to idols and trust in vanity. Be ever mindful of how powerful is the lie and how easily men are persuaded by the lie and accept it as the truth.

God is true. Love, fear, honor, glorify, and praise him only. Amen.

—NJL