

## Resident Aliens

Traditionally we sing on New Year's Eve the well-known hymn by Rhijnvis Feith:

Hours and days and years and ages swift as moving shadows flee;  
as we scan life's fleeting pages, nothing lasting do we see.  
On the paths our feet are walking, footprints all will fade away;  
each today as we enjoy it soon becomes a yesterday.

As I think about the message of this hymn and the swift passing of time, the metaphor "resident alien" comes to mind. The Bible uses it to describe our relationship to our world. We are not permanent residents here. We are pilgrims and strangers passing through. We are people on the move with a specific destination. We are on the way "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Hebrews 11: 10). Like the patriarch Abraham, we are nomads, always travelling until we reach that wonderful country that lies beyond time and space.

How often do we think about our pilgrim's journey? With our cradle to the grave social benefits, the appeal of consumerism, the crass materialism of our time, it is fatally easy to forget that we are not permanent residents. As we change from one year to another year of our Lord, we should remind ourselves that this world is not our true home. We are dual citizens - of earth and heaven. This doesn't mean that we shun the world in our desire to reach the next. When King David saw all the treasures his people had brought for the building of the temple, he rejoiced in them and in his God. Nevertheless, he confessed, "We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers" (1 Chron. 29:15). David enjoyed the good things of the world but was not possessed by them.

The secular mind set believes that this life on earth is all there is. But Christians live in this world to the fullest, while looking forward to the next. They look at the world from the perspective of heaven. They are so heavenly minded, they are earthly good. John Calvin wrote, "the Lord ... teaches that the present life is for his people as a pilgrimage on which they are hastening toward the Heavenly Kingdom. If we must simply pass through this world, there is not doubt we ought to use its good things in so far as they help rather than hinder our course. Thus Paul rightly persuades us to use this world as if not using it; and to buy goods with the same attitude as one sells them" (cf. 1 Cor. 7:30-31). This year is behind us. We go into a new year following our Good Shepherd Who will lead us eventually to " a better country - a heavenly one" (Heb.11: 16).

Johan D. Tangelder