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Assuredly Told of the Lord's Return

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

II Peter 1:16-18

The apostle Peter was inspired to write to young Christians who were being greatly troubled by false teachers (2:1, 2) and scoffers (3:3) who spoke evil of the way of truth. This occasioned doubts in the new Christians. Is Christianity true, or is it just the fabrication of men's minds? Was Jesus truly the Savior?

Peter was seeking to assure them that the Christian faith is

not merely a theological or philosophical abstraction. He wanted them to know that he and the other apostles did not follow fables, and neither did these new believers when they were converted to Christianity.

He began his letter by pointing out that they had the same faith that he and the other apostles had (1). He pointed out that God's power had given to them everything they needed for life and godliness (3), so they were partakers of nothing less than the divine nature (4). Peter encouraged them to add to their faith, thus showing that their knowledge of Jesus was fruitful (5-9). He then admonished them to make sure to themselves their calling and election (10, 11). And Peter let them know that as long as he lived he would be committed to doing everything he could to keep them in the knowledge of this wonderful faith in Jesus Christ (12-15).



Christians (new and mature ones, young and old ones) find

stability in the midst of all difficulties when they stand on the basis of what they know (not on the basis of what they feel or see). Remember that feelings are real, but they are not the source of truth! We live and walk by faith, not by sight!

Peter desires that these young Christians know and are assured of their own salvation (1, 10) and of the hope they have for the future (11). God-given faith consists first of knowledge—knowledge of what God has revealed in His Word. The knowledge held for truth by faith is crucial for having assurance of one's own salvation. And faith's knowledge provides answers (then and today) to the charges brought by false teachers against Christianity. (Remember that we need to be convinced, and we do not have to convince the false teachers.)

The heart of the knowledge held for truth by the Christian faith concerns Jesus Christ. Our text describes this as the knowledge of "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The central teaching of Christian-

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ity is that God sent the Messiah (therefore He is divine), and the Messiah came and is coming in victory. This expression sums up the gospel, for all truth is rooted in the deity of Jesus Christ and in His faithfulness to fulfill God's purpose for Him. The whole of the Old Testament directed believers to look ahead to the coming of the promised Messiah. However, they did not realize that there would be two parts to the Lord's coming: the first in Bethlehem and the second at the end of this world. We learn that we are not to separate the first and second comings of our Savior, but to see them as the one coming of our Savior and Lord with two aspects.

The central teaching of the early church (when Peter was inspired to write this epistle) was on the "exceeding great and precious promises" (4) of Jesus' return. His people knew that He came, and they knew that He left promising that He would come again (Matt. 24:25ff.; John 14:1ff.; Acts 1:11). The apostle Paul preached Christ's return (Acts 17:31) and wrote of it often (I Thess. 5:2, 23; I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; Phil. 3:20, 21; II Thess. 1:7, 8; Titus 2:13). So did James (5:8) and John (Rev. 3:11; 22:20) and the writer to the Hebrews (9:28; 10:37).

However, the believers of the early new dispensation expected Jesus' return to be very soon—during their lifetime. As a result of this wrong expectation, they were greatly troubled. When He did not come (as soon as they expected), they began to doubt that He would ever come and that the gospel would conquer the world. To their consternation, they instead saw the wicked prospering and seemingly getting away with persecuting the church of Christ. So they asked, "Is this faith true, or has the gospel failed?"



Peter calls the young Chris-

tians to be assured of Jesus' return in power and glory. He does that in three ways.

First, Peter rejects the allegation that the apostles taught and wrote lies. The charge of the false teachers was that Christianity was based on "cunningly devised fables," that is, sophisticated (cleverly-made-up) myths, subtle inventions with the intent to deceive.

To the contrary, the Holy Spirit uses Peter to give them assurances that arise from what God Himself has said in His Word. Peter points out that Christ's return in victory is assured by the fact that all God's promises of His first coming were accurately fulfilled. Already Peter has urged them to remember, so that their knowledge would give them a peace and confidence. They can be reassured of God's precious promises because they know from the Scriptures that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2:9). God showed this to be true in the judgments that He already gave in the past: to the angels that sinned, to the old world in the flood, and to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (2:4-6). They may be assured, in spite of the scoffing of the false teachers, that the Lord Jesus will return in power to judge (3:10-12).

Second, Peter points out that the instruction he and other apostles made known to the converts was trustworthy and certain, for it was based on the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter knew what God had promised (1:4)—from the "scriptures" (3:2, 16). Peter knew from the Scriptures all the real, historical events of the fallen angels, the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus, what we now know as the Old Testament writings were obviously accepted as the true and authoritative writings of God,

and were held (as they ought to be) as instructive for the believers and church of his day (and of ours).

Third, Peter, along with John and James, were "eyewitnesses," that is, those who saw with their own eyes. They witnessed with ear and eye the real glory and majesty that God gave to Christ (Matt. 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-14). In the transfiguration Jesus experienced spiritually and physically the glory that God said would be His in heaven. Also on the mount of transfiguration were Moses and Elijah, who spoke to Jesus of the Old Testament writings concerning the Messiah's suffering and death. God showed in what He did to Jesus in the transfiguration what all believers can anticipate according to God's promise. While on earth they will experience much tribulation, but the promises of the gospel are that they will partake of eternal glory.


These promises are true and not a myth. God revealed it concretely to Peter, James, and John. They were on the mount precisely in order to give to the church testimony of this historical event and of its future significance. Note well that Peter's use of this event teaches us not to make a separation between the events recorded in the Scriptures and revelation. The Holy Spirit uses Peter to show us that God's revelation is in the historical events recorded in Scripture. Today some do not want to listen to the testimony of Scripture concerning creation and the universal flood. They reject the voice of God in the historical events of creation and the universal flood. However, Peter's inspired use of the historical event of the transfiguration shows how we must use also the historical events recorded in the Bible to hear God proclaim the power and coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can and must trust the report of these eyewitnesses. The

gospel is not made up of vague rumors. The apostles were authentic heralds of the things they had seen. Thus Christians (then and now) may be assured of the certainty of Christianity and of the final triumph of Christ and

of His cause. Whatever is taking place in the world now or whatever may happen in the future, we may know that the Lord of lords will triumph and prevail.

This end is sure: Lord Jesus

shall reign! Because we are one with Jesus in election, in the cross, and by faith, the end for us is sure and safe. Listen not to the false teachers and the scoffers. Hold for truth what God has revealed in His Word! 

Editorial Comments

Welcome to the Standard Bearer, Volume 85!

This volume year is the 85th year that Protestant Reformed men and women have produced our semi-monthly magazine, dedicated to the promotion and defense of the Reformed faith. Over the course of 85 years, much has changed, and yet much has remained the same. What has changed is not essential: a new generation of writers, more writers, a wider variety of subjects, and a more modern appearance. What remains unchanged is our commitment to the development and defense of Reformed doctrine, the fresh exposition of Scripture, and the clear application of truth to the life of the church and the people of God, and our writing all to honor God whose faith and truth it is.

But the magazine's staff and editors are always seeking ways to improve our witness. This year is no different. In June, the staff decided to add three new rubrics (a type of article) that we believe will be of great interest to and profit for the readers.

First, Rev. W. Langerak (pastor of Southeast PRC, Grand Rapids, MI) will be introducing a book review section. He will not be writing the reviews (although you might see some from him), but seeing to it that the maga-

zine *has* reviews. There will be some creativity, great variety in the kind of books reviewed, and review of some books that one might judge should be burned. The reviews will not be lengthy (usually). The reviewers will take books they judge to be worthy of comment. Perhaps that is the most unique feature of this section: it will not be driven by publishers promoting new books, but by our desire that God's people read good books—new and old. As usual, reviewers keep the books they review. If you have suggestions, write Rev. Langerak in care of the magazine, or at bill-langerak@sbcglobal.net.

Second, Rev. Allen Brummel (missionary in Sioux Falls, SD) and Rev. Jason Kortering (retired pastor and missionary) will write brief biographies of missionaries. This will add to the magazine's exposition of mission *theory* an explanation of mission *history* (and continue where Prof. Hanks left off when he wrote *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, which began as articles here). We are always interested in history—how God has worked in the church of the past. You will read of familiar figures like (St.) Patrick, William Carey, J.H. Bavinck, and Jim Elliot; women such as Amy Carmichael

and Johanna Veenstra; and probably of less familiar names such as Samuel Zwemer and Jonathan Goforth. We have two more articles from Rev. Kortering from the regular rubric, "Go Ye Into All the World." Then, the biographies!

Third, we have asked Rev. R. Kleyn (pastor of Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI) to begin an explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism. It has been many years since the *Standard Bearer* has included a regular exposition of one of our three major creeds. We believe a continued study of our confessions is crucial to maintain them as living documents in the church. Rev. Kleyn will explain the catechism in a practical and useful way for all the readers.

Fourth, after a year off, Prof. Engelsma, our former editor, will again contribute to the rubric "Things That Must Shortly Come to Pass," an explanation and development of the doctrine of the last things. Welcome back, brother Engelsma.

For the rest, most remains the same: editorials, meditations, comment on happenings in the church world, PRC news, PRC history, searching Scripture, word studies, articles for youth, science, church order, church and state issues, special issues (look for our

Reformation issue in two weeks), and much more. Thanks to all the writers who faithfully send in their material so that Mr. Doezeema is able to send the magazine to the printers in a timely fashion. Writing is hard work. We are grateful that so many are able to put their pens, keyboards, and minds to

work for the good cause of the written word. Pray for us.

And if you can, please promote the reading of the magazine. It is not expensive—the RFPA works to keep the price reasonable. We know of men who subscribe for their married children, those who give gift subscriptions to their

friends, and people who pass on their copy to their neighbor. How profitable if every home had the magazine on the living room end table, and all the family read it on a Sunday afternoon.

Blessings from the SB editorial staff!

—BG 

Editorial

Prof. Barry Gritters

Catechism: The Old Path, the Good Way (3)

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”

Jeremiah 6:16

In the last two editorials I showed that the church’s practice of catechizing her youth is an old path. From the very beginning, the church taught her own youth the ways of God in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament the Levites had this special privilege. In the New Testament, pastors are the teachers appointed by God to do this work. The second editorial reminded us of the importance of good *qualifications* for the catechism teacher, because doing it poorly is almost as bad as not doing it at all.

That catechism is a (compulsory) old path does not mean that there cannot be development and improvement in the content and methods of catechism instruction. The Protestant Reformed

Churches have a long history of *developing* and *improving* their materials and curriculum.

In the PRC’s youth, Herman Hoeksema wrote two catechism books for the covenant young people—in 1927 the *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine* (now revised, but still in use today), and in 1929 the *Heidelberg Catechism for Juniors* (a book the Synod of 1974 determined, for significant reasons, not to revise and reprint).

Books for the instruction of the younger children in *Bible history* were not approved until more recently. Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, this Bible history instruction of ages 6-12 was done in various ways. In the 1930s the consistories decided that the ministers should prepare their own materials. Some of our older members will remember their own pastor’s mimeographed notes or notebooks. I have in my possession a few of these early books, some of which were used in more than a few of the churches (by Revs. A. Cammenga and P. DeBoer), although not with official sanction of synod. Before these materials were produced, ministers used books from our mother denomina-

tion, by Revs. Beets, Borstius, and Bosma. A report to classis in 1934 says that these books were “commonly used.”¹

This report came from a committee appointed to study the advisability of making our own books for Bible history. Without hesitation the committee recommended in favor of the idea, because of both doctrinal and pedagogical weaknesses in the existing books. We did not complete the project, though, until the 1950s, and then only after various consistories had to plead for them. Official synodical approval of the Bible history books was delayed until the 1960s (see the publication data on the inside of the books by Revs. C. Hanko, J. Heys, H.C. Hoeksema, G. Vandenberg, and H. Veldman). These books are used by all Protestant Reformed Churches.

Books for teaching the Heidelberg Catechism were most recently approved, with the *workbooks* by Rev. Dale Kuiper (1979) pre-

¹ “Report of Committee on Catechism Books, to the classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches met at Oskaloosa, Iowa, June 6, 1934,” signed by HH, PDB, and JDJ.

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2008, p. 484.

dating the *memory* books by Rev. W. Bruinsma (2000).

Thus, there developed a catechism curriculum that has a broad perspective and a unified aim at the spiritual preparation of covenant youth to take their place in the church. Better: the curriculum took sharper and sharper aim at teaching God's children to love God with their minds, hearts, souls, and strength. These good catechism books enable the ministers to teach Christ's lambs the "whole counsel of God."

But the catechism curriculum *developed*.

Still today, development and improvement are needed.

This is the expressed and official intent of the churches.

Synod's Catechism Book Committee

One of synod's standing committees (a committee appointed by synod to do the work of synod in the interim between meetings—see the Church Order, Article 49) is called "The Catechism Book Committee." I have printed the constitution of the committee in the "box" on this page. This committee, reorganized in 1993 after disbanding twice, is comprised of ministers and elders from the Chicago-area churches. The first duty these men are charged with is to "*Make recommendations* to synod regarding the improvement of the existing catechism material and the addition of new material." They must also "review catechism materials submitted to the committee and make recommendations to synod," which implies that others in the churches are *making* suggestions for improvement.

Right in the committee's constitution, the fathers of the PRC embedded the familiar theme: "Reformed but always reforming."

This committee has done good work over the years, much of which is little recognized and

probably hardly thanked (but most work goes that way, which is why God's servants labor not for the praise of men, but of God; see John 12:43). All of us, though, see the fruit of this committee's work—it appears week after week and year after year in every PRC across the country and even in some other churches worldwide.¹ God is using the committee's work. Nightly the books are in the hands of the churches'

¹ A useful, newer book, *Rediscovering Catechism*, P&R Publishing, by Donald VanDyken, includes the books of the PRC in their suggested curriculum for catechism instruction.

children and their parents. There is not an evening, from September through April or May, when these books are not opened, read, and discussed. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these books are opened and studied a hundred times more than any other book we have published.

So these editorials, as well as calls to faithfulness in *teaching* catechism, may also be calls to all of us to be thankful for the materials we have and for the men who produced them. For almost 25 years now I have used these books—to teach our six children; to teach the covenant youth in the two churches I served; and now

Constitution of the Catechism Book Committee

I. Name

The name of the committee shall be the "Catechism Book Committee."

II. Constituency

A. The committee shall consist of three ministers and two elders or ex-elders from the Chicago-area churches.

B. The members shall be appointed by the synod for a term of three years and are eligible for reappointment.

III. Officers

A president and a secretary shall be chosen annually from the constituency of the committee.

IV. Duties

A. Make recommendations to synod regarding the improvement of existing catechism material and the addition of new catechism material.

B. Review existing material for factual errors, correct the errors, and notify the Catechism Book Distribution Committee before reprinting.

C. Review catechism materials submitted to the committee and make recommendations to synod.

D. Make an annual report to synod of the activities of the committee.

V. Procedure

A. Those who write new catechism materials or who make suggestions for changing/correcting our present materials shall submit these to the Catechism Book Committee.

B. The Catechism Book Committee shall make a preliminary review of those materials and make a recommendation to synod.

C. Synod shall then decide whether further action is necessary and instruct the Catechism Book Committee as to its mandate with regard to those materials.

D. After provisional synodical approval of new materials, the Catechism Book Committee shall request some of our ministers/churches to make use of such materials on an experimental basis and suggest changes for their improvement. This shall be done before the final review by the committee and final approval by synod.

to teach aspiring ministers to be faithful catechism teachers. In my heart lives profound gratitude for the activity of catechism instruction in our churches, for the materials we all employ, and for the men who produced them.

And I haven't even taken the time and space to mention some of the beautiful answers that will always live in the hearts of the children who have memorized these answers each year.

Improvement of Old, and Production of New

The Catechism Book Committee's constitution, however, maintains its call to the churches for both *improvement* of existing materials and for *production* of new. The busyness of pastors leaves precious little time to make suggestions for revisions, much less produce new materials. With the congregations becoming larger each year, the workload of the pastors does not get lighter either.

Yet the churches do well to keep in view the wisdom of regular reviews of existing curriculum: can improvements be made? And reviews of the curriculum as a whole: would something *new* be of benefit to the churches?

After reviewing the old decisions of our synods on the matter, reading some ministers' papers given at officebearer conferences on the subject of catechism, and looking at my tattered folders labeled "catechism improvements" and "catechism—misc. ideas," I would like to suggest some possibilities for improving our materials for edifying Christ's growing lambs. Considering that 18 of our 34 active ministers have over 15 years' experience teaching catechism, and at least 7 emeriti ministers are still able to give good thought to the matter, we have many men qualified to do this work.

First, the Bible history books could be improved by an attempt

to harmonize them. The books should explicitly build on each preceding book, repeat more of the same, biblical language, and ask for memorization of some of the *same* Bible texts, lists of kings, tribes, judges, and books of the Bible (which now is required only once). This repetition, year after year, would help the slower students in the later years, but help all of the students really retain what is taught year after year.

In my judgment, all of the history books could be improved by eliminating the questions that ask things like, "What *else* did he do?" or "What *further* significance..."; by making some of the answers more complete sentences, so that the children give answers that mean something without the question; and by changing words here and there that are not appropriate for their age. Also, some ministers have suggested blocks of Scripture for memorization, rather than isolated texts. This is better. I remember Hebrews 11 because we worked on it all year. There ought to be more of that kind of memorization.

The "History for Seniors" course is intended to be a transition from simple history to an understanding of doctrines. The original report in 1934 indicated this, and the introduction to the books calls for this. Let us consider revising the books so that each lesson includes an important but basic doctrinal concept (calling, covenant, testament, faith, antithesis, regeneration, promise, prophecy, repentance, miracle, etc.) that comes out of the history and is illustrated by the history. The word could be simply defined for memorization. At the end of two years, the children would know 25 to 50 new words, all in anticipation of helping them understand the comforting doctrines in our Heidelberg Catechism. Even the definitions should use the language of the Heidelberg. Perhaps some of the

ministers already have such lists and give these definitions. They would be in a good position to suggest revision of the existing books.

A harder question, but one worth asking, is how (and whether) to coordinate the history instruction in catechism with the good instruction given by the teachers in our good Christian schools. Most pastors have experienced the discomfort of attempting to teach in 45 minutes or less the history that the school teacher has five days to cover.

But my special interest is the older, doctrinal classes. I limit myself to my two *main* interests.

Essentials of Reformed Doctrine

The Essentials book would benefit from a closer tie to the *approach* and *language* of the Belgic Confession. This would have at least three main benefits. At a younger age the students would become more familiar with and appreciative of another of our Three Forms of Unity. After the Heidelberg, the Belgic Confession. How natural! What could be better for a Reformed young person than to learn the "essentials" of the Reformed faith more directly from the Reformed creed?

Second, an essentials book with the language and approach of the Belgic Confession would have our young people make a more explicit *confession* of their faith—the fathers' faith—as they learn their catechism. What beautiful language the creed employs: "We believe... We confess... We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth...."

Third, this revision of the Essentials book with the language of the Belgic Confession would make room in the post-essentials class for another book and a different study (see below). Often, after the Essentials book is finished, the students go directly to the Belgic Confession or the

Canons of Dordt. In the way I propose, they will already have learned the Belgic Confession. Later, perhaps, they should study the Canons. But before that there is an even more pressing need.¹

The Church Order of Dordt

What I have already suggested speaks to revising or improving existing catechism books. But there also seems to be a striking *lack* in what the church's youth learn as they prepare to confess their faith, approach the Lord's table, and become members in full standing in Christ's church. Unless the pastors have made some special provision for this lack, the young people have not learned Reformed church *government*.

A study of the PRC's Church Order would remedy this. Just consider all of the important subjects treated in this venerable Reformed document (the "old path").

The Church Order shows how ministers are called and examined, who may and may not


preach, what are the qualifications and duties of ministers. It explains that a Reformed church supports her pastors (also pastors in training and retired pastors), trains her own ministers, and calls seminary professors to expound Scripture and oppose heresy. It shows the relationship of the consistory to the "good Christian schools." It explains the election process for elders and deacons, what their work is in the congregation, and how long are their "terms." The Church Order describes consistories and their meetings, classes and synods, what is and what may and may not be treated in them, and the manner of conducting their business. This Reformed document puts in plain words what a congregational meeting is, how new churches are organized, and who regulates the church's mission works. There is description of the important "Formula of Subscription" that every office-bearer must sign. There are rules regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper that are not treated in the Heidelberg Catechism, and treatment of special worship services, Catechism preaching, and Psalm-singing. The document concludes with a thorough description of Christian discipline.

How important for Reformed youth to learn all this! Familiarity with the Church Order should not wait until someone suggests a study of it in an adult Bible study. Consistory members ought to be thoroughly familiar with the document before they read it (as many do), article by article, at their monthly meetings.

A textbook, although not essential for teaching the Church Order, would be very beneficial. It could include 25 or 30 lessons, covering the major topics of the Church Order's 86 articles. As the Church Order itself is divided into four main sections—Offices, Assemblies, Worship (basically), and Discipline—the book could be also. Each lesson would quote pertinent articles, give brief explanation of that aspect of the church's life, offer biblical basis for the articles, and perhaps propose some questions for preparation.

A class on the Church Order! It would teach the covenant youth the whole system of Reformed church government, which otherwise they will not learn, at least not thoroughly.

Are the churches open to revisions of existing books? To a new textbook on the Church Order?

The old path involves being Reformed, but always reforming. In catechism, too. 

¹ A revision of the Essentials book could add requirements for Scripture memorization, give more definitions that would build on and develop the simple definitions given already in History for Seniors, and include extra work questions with answers that would come *mainly* from the creeds.

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Discouragement

Every believer faces the unpleasant experience of being discouraged. There are times for every child of God

when he feels disheartened and blue, and has very little or even no joy in life.

This is something God's people have always experienced. We read for example of Jacob, who, thinking Joseph is dead, having Simeon in prison in

Egypt, and now facing the prospect of Benjamin being taken away to Egypt, said, "All these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). We are told concerning the nation of Israel, as they faced the hardships of the wilderness journey, that "the soul

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of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Num. 21:4). King David referred to discouragement when he said, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me?" (Ps. 42:5). Elijah also faced it, to the point even of feeling that life was no longer worth living. His cry of despair was, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life" (I Kings 19:4). And yet another example is the apostle Paul, who spoke of being "troubled on every side," "perplexed," and "cast down" (II Cor. 4:8-9).

We face discouragement in all areas of life.

Fathers and husbands face it in their daily work as they seek to earn a living to support their families. Their work is often difficult and either physically or mentally tiring. They do not always receive a good income. For many, the possibility of advancement does not exist. Some also have to work among unbelievers and be exposed to unrestrained ungodliness. Many work long hours and are still barely able to make ends meet.

Wives and mothers face discouragement in their calling. There are many demands placed on a Christian wife and mother. She must give of herself for the welfare of her family. She needs to be ready to help her children all hours of the day and night. The demands placed upon her can make her feel overwhelmed. Sometimes she finds she can barely cope with it all.

Parents often become discouraged in their calling. Although they work diligently in bringing up their children in the ways of God, yet the children do not always obey. In fact, some are very disobedient and stray far from the things they were taught. This causes much heartache and grief. The parents are convinced, at times, that all their labor is fruitless.

Young people and children become discouraged. It can seem to them that their parents are always reprimanding or restricting them. Other times they are discouraged because of the struggle to get good grades in school. They try hard, but the effort seems wasted. At times they also struggle to fit in with others and to find good friends.

Also office-bearers in the church face discouragement. They take seriously their calling to serve the people of God and they work hard at doing so. They bring the Word of God to those with whom they labor. They pray often for the needy or erring sheep. But they quite regularly do not see the positive fruit they would like to see and for which they pray.

School teachers experience discouragement. They do, for example, when children show little interest in learning, and either learn nothing at all, or else very quickly forget the things they were taught. They also become discouraged when parents are cruelly critical of them and their work, or when parents defend a child's misbehavior and blame the teacher instead for any trouble that arises.

These are just a few examples. Many more could be mentioned, and even these few could be expanded upon. The point is clear—discouragement is faced in every area of life. It is very real.

Though a reality, discouragement is not a good thing. It is not proper for us to be discouraged. While it is certainly understandable that God's people often become disheartened and

discouraged, doing so is wrong. In reality, discouragement is sin.

This is clear from the biblical examples mentioned earlier. Jacob was wrong when he said, "All these things are against me." The truth of the matter was that all things were for him. God, in His sovereignty, was overruling everything to work for his good and salvation. Elijah erred as well when he wanted to die. He was forsaking the calling God had

given him, not trusting that God was powerful to save His people even in those wicked times in Israel. In addition to this, he was being dissatisfied with the circumstances in which God had placed him. The same can be said of David when he spoke in Psalm 42 of his heart and soul being cast down and disquieted. David, as he himself acknowledged in that same Psalm, failed to trust and hope in God as he should.

These examples point clearly to what is a prominent sin in our discouragements: a lack of faith and trust in God. Whenever we face challenges in life, we very quickly take an earthly perspective. We look at and consider simply the earthly factors. We evaluate things according to earthly standards. And we lose sight of the spiritual. We fail to consider and keep before our minds the sovereign hand and will of our heavenly Father in what we are facing. We forget that He is directing all things for our eternal, spiritual good.

When facing discouragement, therefore, there are a number of things the child of God can and should do.

While it is certainly understandable that God's people often become disheartened and discouraged, doing so is wrong. In reality, discouragement is sin.

Most important is prayer. Prayer is a great help and blessing when we are discouraged. This is true, first of all, because prayer is the solution to worry. Often our discouragement involves being anxious. We worry about the future. We worry about where this or that will lead. We worry about how we will cope and how we will get through our problems. God's Word tells us, however, to deal with all this by praying. Instead of worrying, we must bring all our requests to God in prayer (Phil. 4:6). In this way, we will have peace. Through prayer (as well as through attendance to the other means of grace) we come again to the realization that God is directing all things for our good.

Prayer is also the solution to discouragement because it turns our hearts and minds away from the earthly toward God. Through prayer we speak to God, and thereby acknowledge our complete dependence on Him. By praying we confess, not only that God is Lord over all, but that He is our Father for the sake of Christ. Through prayer, therefore, we become conscious of God and of His hand in the circumstances that would or could make us discouraged.

Another important help in times of discouragement is to work diligently in our calling. When discouraged, one is tempted to give up. As was true of Elijah, so also a parent or teacher or officebearer can be tempted to forsake his calling. One can feel there is no fruit on his work, and therefore all time and effort are wasted.

But work is often the solution to discouragement on account of work. I am reminded of a seminary professor telling us that very thing. He informed us

as students that there are indeed times in the ministry when a man can become greatly discouraged and not feel like doing his work. But the solution, he said, is not to quit working and to feel sorry for oneself, but to knuckle down and get back to work. That applies to all. When we are busy, and when we work diligently to fulfill our calling, the Lord encourages us by giving us to know we are doing the work He has called us to and thus what is pleasing to Him. Another benefit of working hard is that God uses that to give us a sense of accomplishment, which aids in dispelling the feeling of being useless and worthless. These things help significantly in overcoming discouragement.

One who is discouraged also overcomes this by thinking on positive things. It can happen that we dwell on the negative things in our lives, and lose sight of the positive. There will always be negative things to focus upon, and these can get us down. But the Word of God directs us to consider things that are positive and good. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue,

and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). There are many such virtuous and positive things in our lives, both

physical and spiritual. There are countless ways in which the Lord has blessed us. And above them all is the immeasurable wealth of God's grace to us in

Christ. That alone outweighs all the negatives, and also brings those negative things into perspective. We do well to think on positive things.

Hopefully, too, those who are discouraged will receive encouragement from their fellow believers. Children need to be encouraged by their parents and teachers. Teachers need encouragement from their students and from the parents of those students. Husbands and fa-

thers need encouragement from their wives and family, and wives and mothers need it from their husbands and children. Officebearers need it from the members of the church. Young people need it from adults and from each other. Every believer needs encouragement from fellow saints who face the same struggles and disappointments in life. God has placed us together in the communion of saints so that we might give such help and encouragement to each other. And it is not simply a matter of someone being there to give encouragement when we need it—we must realize that others need it from us. We ought therefore to be always looking out for this need, and seeking to fill it.

In all this, the Lord Himself gives us a word of encouragement. "My beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58). This especially should spur us on to continued faithfulness in serving our God in our various callings in life. May we take these encouraging words of our heavenly Father to heart.



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Censura Morum (1)

"The ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons shall before the celebration of the Lord's Supper exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office."

Church Order, Article 81.

Introduction

Article 81 mandates the practice commonly known as *censura morum*. This is the practice of mutual censure among the officebearers within a church council, which practice is to be implemented at the council meeting immediately before the administration of the Lord's Supper. *Censura morum* is a Latin phrase that refers literally to a censure or examination of morals. The practice is also referred to as *censura mutua*, that is, mutual censure, or *censura fraterna*, that is, fraternal (brotherly) censure.

This article concludes, for all practical purposes, the last section of the Church Order, the section entitled "Of Censure and Ecclesiastical Admonition." Article 81 speaks of both "censure" and "admonition." It is censure and admonition among the officebearers mutually of each congregation. The Church Order requires us to view *censura morum* as an aspect of Christian discipline. *Censura morum* belongs to the calling of the officebearers to exercise supervision (discipline) over the local congregation, an important aspect of which is their calling to "take heed unto themselves," (Acts 20:28 and I Tim. 4:16).

The Scriptures provide us with examples of officebearers who exhort, even censure, their fellow officebearers. Galatians

2:11-14 records Paul's rebuke of his fellow apostle Peter "to his face" and "before them all" because "he was to be blamed." In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul exhorts his fellow officebearers, particularly his fellow ministers, Timothy and Titus, with regard to the discharge of their office. And in I Peter 5:1-5, the apostle Peter exhorts "the elders which are among you"; he does so as one "who [is] also an elder."

Scripture makes clear that the officebearers' oversight of the congregation must begin with the oversight of themselves. The discipline of the congregation must arise out of the censure and admonition of the officebearers mutually. Our Reformed fathers who established the practice of *censura morum* were convinced of the necessity of this. They were persuaded that the effectiveness of the discipline of the members of the congregation depended on the willingness of the officebearers to discipline themselves.

This matter of the mutual supervision of the officebearers is referred to elsewhere in the Church Order. Article 16 speaks of the calling of the minister "to watch over his brethren, the elders and deacons...." And Article 23 calls the elders "to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office...." The church visitors are mandated to put the question to every consistory annually: "Is *censura morum* conducted among the members of the consistory

before each Lord's Supper?" The denomination has a stake in the faithful carrying out of *censura morum* in the congregations.

Background and History

As is the case with so many of the practices of the Dutch Reformed churches, the practice of *censura morum* can be traced to John Calvin. In the Reformed church of Geneva, Calvin established the practice of a quarterly mutual censure among the ministers.

Fixing a day of censure every three months

For the effective maintenance of this discipline, every three months the ministers are to give special attention to see whether there is anything open to criticism among themselves, so that, as is right, it may be remedied.¹

What Calvin began in Geneva, the Dutch Reformed imported into the churches of the Lowlands and applied to all the officebearers, the elders and deacons as well as the ministers. *Censura morum* was first incorporated into the Church Order of the Synod of Dordt, 1578. The article called for the practice to take place before the celebration of the Lord's Supper and specified that it was to consist of "examination with one another concerning doctrine as well as conduct...." In

¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes ed. and trans., *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 40.

its Church Order, the Synod of Middelburg, 1581, maintained the decision of Dordt. It also responded to a question from one of the consistories: “Whether it is profitable and advisable that ministers of the Word, elders and deacons exercise censure among each other before the celebration of the Lord’s Supper?” The synod’s answer was a definitive: “It is most profitable and advisable.” The Synod of the Hague, 1586, amended the original article in two ways. First, it deleted the description of *censura morum* as an investigation of “doctrine as well as life,” substituting “the discharge of their office” as the focus of the examination. Second, the synod also removed the reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as the specified time when *censura morum* was to be conducted. No mention was made of a set time for conducting *censura morum*, only that the officebearers should do this. The Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, adopted the decision of the Hague without any change. Its Article 81 was: “Ministers of the Word, elders and deacons shall exercise Christian censure among themselves and admonish one another in a friendly way concerning the exercise of their office.”

In its revision of the Church Order in 1914, the Christian Reformed Church reinserted the reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as the set time when *censura morum* was to be conducted. This is the form of Article 81 that was inherited by the Protestant Reformed Churches. Thus, in our churches, *censura morum* is to be conducted at the council meeting prior to each celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This guarantees that ordinarily *censura morum* will be conducted at least four times a year.¹

¹ It is possible that for weighty reasons the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is suspended in a congregation. Even then, perhaps especially

Underlying Principles of Article 81

There are two main principles that underlie the Reformed practice of *censura morum*. The first of these principles is the sinfulness of the officebearers. The officebearers are men—ministers, elders, and deacons alike—mere men. Because they are mere men, clay vessels, they are in need of supervision, and from time to time in need of censure. The officebearers work in the church in weakness and they can always improve in their labors. There is only one perfect officebearer in the church, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. 2:25), the Lord Jesus Christ. The officebearers must know this about themselves. They must be keenly aware of their own weaknesses and sins. For this reason, the officebearer does not labor alone, but always in concert with his fellow officebearers, a plurality of officebearers. And for this reason, every officebearer must be open to the censure and admonition of his fellow officebearers. He must feel the need for mutual supervision and see the value of it for himself and for the church of Christ in the midst of which he is called to labor.

The second outstanding principle upon which the practice of *censura morum* rests is the Reformed conviction of the parity of officebearers. The Reformed reject all hierarchy in the church. Over against a hierarchical view of church government, the Reformed maintain three distinct offices, with the officebearers exercising equal authority in their own distinct offices. No officebearer is above another officebearer, but all possess the same authority. This principle is expressed in Church Order, Article 84: “No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other

then, the officebearers ought to continue the regular practice of *censura morum*.

ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons.” We will consider Article 84 in the future. But for now we note only that it is the Reformed view of the parity of officebearers that underlies the practice of *censura morum*. Concerning this Van Dellen and Monsma write:

In Churches holding the hierarchical or episcopal system one officebearer has greater authority than another. Consequently the higher office-bearers exercise supervision and jurisdiction over those that occupy lower offices. The archbishop supervises the bishop; the bishop supervises the priest, etc. But the Reformed Churches are Presbyterian also in the matter of supervision. The office-bearers are equal in authority, each in his own sphere, and supervision is mutual. They supervise each other, just as the Churches supervise each other (Article 44). Now Article 81 provides for this mutual supervision of office-bearers.²

The Focus of *Censura Morum*

Originally the mutual censure prescribed by Article 81 focused on the doctrine and life of the officebearers. The name *censura morum* indicates this. The term refers literally to an examination of morals. That this was intended to be the focus of the practice was expressly stated by the Synod of Dordt, 1578. Its Church Order called for “censure or examination with one another concerning doctrine as well as conduct....” Three years later the Synod of Middelburg, 1581, called for the same thing. During *censura morum* the officebearers were to “inquire into the doctrine as well as into the life...” of their fellow officebearers. But that was changed by the Synod of the Hague in 1581. In its Church Order, this synod replaced the refer-

² Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1951), 332.

ence to “doctrine and life” with “the exercise of their offices.” This changed the focus of *censura morum* rather significantly.

That the older church orders called for regular examination of the officebearers in doctrine and life is quite understandable. The churches of the Reformation reacted to the immorality, ignorance, and heresy that characterized the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformed were determined to prevent unfit officebearers from exercising office in the church. And they were determined to employ every possible measure to safeguard the Reformed churches from suffering at the hands of such unfit officebearers. It is entirely understandable that the early church orders, therefore, called for regular examination of officebearers in doctrine and in life.


But soon enough it was felt that this could not properly be the focus of *censura morum*. The reasons were obvious. For one

thing, if an officebearer was guilty of sin in either his doctrine or walk of life, this could not possibly wait to be addressed until the time of *censura morum*. Additionally, errors in doctrine or immoral living on the part of officebearers were matters that called for discipline, the immediate implementation of the procedure outlined in the Church Order for suspension and deposition (Articles 79 and 80 of the Church Order). Therefore, early on, the focus of *censura morum* was necessarily shifted to “the discharge of their office.” The work of the officebearers, therefore, the manner of their work, their faithfulness in doing the work—this is what is properly to be examined during *censura morum*. This does not mean that we ought to discontinue the use of the term *censura morum* to refer to the requirement of Article 81, as some have argued.¹ But it does

¹ This is what W.W.J. Van Oene argues in his Church Order commentary *With Common Consent* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1990), 334ff.

mean that we must understand that the focus of *censura morum* is not the doctrine and life of the officebearers, but their work in their respective offices.

Even then, certain weaknesses and sins may be brought to light in *censura morum*. That is very well possible. But these are weaknesses and sins that pertain specifically to “the discharge of their office.” And these are weaknesses and sins that are not of a censurable nature, sins so serious that they would lead to suspension and deposition from office.

Next time, the Lord willing, we will conclude our consideration of Article 81 and the practice of *censura morum*. We will consider the method for conducting *censura morum*, the manner in which it ought to be conducted, and the purpose for this unique practice in the Reformed churches. 

The Congregation's Support of Her Diaconate (2) Principles of Giving

The calling to support her deacons comes to the congregation as a whole, excluding no individual member. Demonstrating this point from Scripture in our last article, we drew attention particularly to

I Corinthians 16:1-2 and to II Corinthians 8 and 9.

From the same passages of Scripture we take instruction regarding *how* the congregation must support her deacons.

Of course, in one word, the congregation supports her deacons by *giving*. She gives her gifts of time, energy, and possessions, so that the deacons have the means to care for the sick and aged in the congregation. But the congregation also gives the gift

of money, which she puts in the collection plate when the offering for benevolence is taken.

How much should we give? And with what attitude of heart? Because the answers to these questions matter to God, He has given direction in His Word regarding those answers.

The reader should bear in mind that what follows can be applied to all of our giving to the deacons for any cause—giving for the general fund, the Christian

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schools, the work of missions, and other causes for which collections are taken. But specifically we have in mind giving for the relief of the poor, to which subject also these passages in I and II Corinthians speak particularly.

How much must we give?

In answering this question, Scripture does not stipulate a specific monetary figure, nor a percentage of income.

Even in the Old Testament, the care of the poor was not limited by such a figure or percentage. The Old Testament laws required the Israelites to bring the tithe of their increase to the temple, and to pay the annual temple tax of a half shekel. The purpose of such was not the care of the poor, but the maintenance and upkeep of God's sanctuary. Regarding this half-shekel, God specified: "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less" (Ex. 30:15). It was not money *for* the poor, but money that even the poor must bring.

The law required the Israelites to care for the poor by simply giving to the poor in his need; lending without usury; leaving the corners of the fields and vineyards unharvested, and leaving the gleanings that fell from the reaper's hands, for the poor to gather; and willingly redeeming the poor without regard to any personal loss. Two things were to govern how much was given to the poor: first, how great the need of the poor was; second, how much the one giving had to give.

That God does not tell us specifically how much to give for the poor holds true in the New Testament as well. Yet, at least two broad principles do guide us in determining how much to give.

The first is the teaching of Scripture that we must give as we have been blessed. In encouraging the saints in Corinth to give for the needs of the poor saints in

Jerusalem, Paul wrote that each should lay by himself in store "as God hath prospered him" (I Cor. 16:2). Again, he told them that they must give "out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (II Cor. 8:11-12).

God gives to each of us a different measure—some have more, some less. And He requires us to serve Him with what we have. Therefore, with what we have we must give for the needs of the poor.

The second principle that guides us in determining how much to give is that we must give generously.

While we are to give as we have been blessed, we are also to give sacrificially. Notice what Paul says to the saints in Corinth regarding the saints in Macedonia: "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves..." (II Cor. 8:2-3). The saints in Macedonia also were poor, apparently as a result of persecution. But they did not give little; they gave generously, almost more than they were able to give: "beyond their power."

In this way Christ gives to us. Our spiritual poverty was extreme; we were unable even to begin to pay the infinite debt we owed God. But Christ bestowed His riches upon us generously, so that the debt is fully paid, and His infinite righteousness is imputed to us. We are rich! God bestows His grace in abundance.

The apostle continues to encourage the Corinthian saints in this regard by reminding them that a man reaps according to

that which he sows: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (II Cor. 9:6).

Too bad, in a sense, when the apostle must convince the church to give for the needs of the poor by telling her how such giving benefits her personally. Too bad when the pastor must preach to

Too bad when the pastor must preach to his congregation that they are poorer because they do not sacrifice for the poor.

his congregation that they are poorer because they do not sacrifice for the poor. But that is what the apostle does here, and we learn

from it an important lesson. In giving for the needs of the poor, we plant seed. To the degree to which we give of our earthly means for the support of the poor, we reap spiritual benefits, experiencing God's blessing to the degree to which we put Him first.

The fruit we reap is not that of earthly material goods. Such an explanation is the error of the "health and wealth" gospel, the mantra of whose preachers is "Give to the cause of my ministry, and God will make you rich." Rather, the fruit consists of spiritual benefits. This is clear from II Corinthians 9:8, in which Paul identifies that which they shall reap: "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." Also II Corinthians 9:11 indicates this: "Being enriched in everything to all bountifulness..." where the Greek word translated "bountifulness" refers really to a heart that is single-minded and not self-seeking.



We need this reminder to

give for the relief of the poor generously, as we have been blessed.

First, we need it because we so quickly think we have little, when in fact we have much. Often we think we have little because we are not looking at what God has given us, but at how much money we will have left after spending it on all the things we want. We forget that God would have us give for His kingdom causes, including the relief of the poor, not according to what we have after our own needs and desires are satisfied, but according to what He has given us—that is, gross income. Earthmindedness makes this reminder necessary.

Second, we need it in order to hold before us that giving for the relief of the poor must be a matter that we take seriously. According to that which we have been given, we are to give generously! To do this, our decision as to what we will put in the benevolence fund cannot be an afterthought; we may not merely give our leftovers. Rather, we must seek first the kingdom (Matt. 6:33) in this area also.

How are we to give?

In addition to the principles regarding how much to give, II Corinthians 8 and 9 gives instruction regarding how we are to give.

First, we are to give with sincerity and simplicity of heart.

To the word that indicates this, used in II Corinthians 9:11, we have already referred. In that passage it is translated “bountifulness,” but in II Corinthians 8:2 “liberality,” and in 9:13 “liberal.”

The word indicates that we must give with pure motives, with a sincere heart in genuine love for God and the neighbor, and with the genuine desire that the needs of our poor brothers in Christ be relieved.

The purpose of our giving

must not be that others might notice and think highly of us for what we have given. We must not give thinking that we will earn God’s favor. In this way the Pharisees gave. Tithing mint, rue, and all kinds of herbs (Matt. 23:23, Luke 11:42)—in other words, being scrupulous in their outward obedience to the law—they did so for the praise of men.

The poor widow was different. We recognize that her giving was not for the cause of the poor, but for the maintenance of the temple and its service; but the *manner* of her giving is the point for the moment. She did not give for the praise of men, but for the praise of God—and she received that praise from Jesus Himself, her Lord and Savior (Luke 21:3-4).

For the sake of clarity, let me say that both the Pharisees and the widow were giving, not for the care of the poor, but for the general upkeep of the temple. But *how* they gave applies as well to giving for the poor.

Secondly, we must give willingly and cheerfully. Not only did the saints of Macedonia do this (I Cor. 8:3: “they were willing of themselves”), but Paul also required the saints of Corinth to give “not grudgingly, nor of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (II Cor. 9:7). In this way the Holy Spirit lays on all of us this obligation.

To give grudgingly is to give, literally, “out of pain,” wincing with every dime dropped into the collection plate, because it is one fewer dime one can spend on himself. To give of necessity is to give simply because it is required. God does require us to give; but if that is the only reason why we give, we are not giving and obeying from the heart, in love.

To give willingly and cheerfully is to give because we want to give, and because we find joy in giving.

Thirdly, we must give trusting God to supply our needs.

He who gives grudgingly is not manifesting this trust. He who gives grudgingly is like the farmer who takes the grain that he has reserved from last year’s harvest for this year’s seed, and who sows it sparingly, because he thinks that the more he sows, the less he has to eat. He does not trust God to cause that grain to spring forth and bear much fruit, thirty or sixty or an hundred fold!

That we must give trusting God to supply our needs is implied in II Corinthians 9:6, in which we are reminded that we reap according as we sow. It is also taught in II Corinthians 8:15: “As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that had gathered little had no lack.” Paul quotes from Exodus 16:18, which speaks of the effect of God’s miraculous provision of manna on every Israelite. None had too much; none too little. While in Exodus this is spoken regarding gathering, in II Corinthians 8 Paul applies it to distributing. As the saints in Corinth had much, and the saints in Jerusalem little, the Corinthians were to give for the relief of their brothers. In the way of doing so, the saints in

Corinth would notice that they did not lack.

That we must trust God is also the point of the words of Jesus to the disciples in Matthew 6:33, with reference to giving for any kingdom cause:

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added

God does require us to give; but if that is the only reason why we give, we are not giving and obeying from the heart, in love.

unto you.” And note the promise that Paul gives the saints in Philippi (the Macedonians of whom he speaks to the Corinthians), when they have given him a gift: “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Fear not, ye Philippians, that in giving a gift to me, you will suffer want! God will care for you, too!

So must we give for the relief of the poor—trusting God to know what we need for the future, and to supply us with our daily bread day by day.

Trusting in God, we will give

liberally and cheerfully!



By nature none of us will give for the relief of the poor this way.

After all, we might reason, some of them are poor due to their own fault, their own mismanagement of funds, their own poor choices with regard to vocation and jobs. Why should I suffer because of their own faults? Or we might say, the poor can turn today to the government to find help. Let them turn there, and leave me alone!

So selfish are we by nature!

By the power of God’s grace, and by that power alone, we can give as God requires us to give. The same grace that sent Christ to give Himself for us! The same grace by which we are justified in Christ, giving us reason for gratitude! The same grace by which we are renewed and sanctified, so that we have the life of Christ Himself in us!

God makes this grace abound in us. Therefore, we give willingly, cheerfully, trusting in God, with simplicity of heart, generously, as God has prospered us. And we reap spiritual benefits!



Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Working Towards an Indigenous Church (3) A Self-Propagating Church

John Nevius suggested that an indigenous church ought to have three distinctive characteristics: self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. In this article we focus on the second characteristic, self-propagating. We will do this from the point of view of the missionary’s role in this effort.

If a mission church is truly going to stand on its own and be able to free itself from dependency upon the sending church, it has to have the desire and ability to grow in numbers. Self-propagating refers to the activity of the mission church to reach outside

of itself, to do its own mission outreach, so that it can sustain its calling as a church of Jesus Christ independent from the calling church. In our last article we focused upon the goal of an indigenous church becoming self-governing. As we saw then, this includes the ability to function as a church within the local congregation and federally, together as churches. This knowledge of the church to preach the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to protect both by faithful administration of Christian discipline is the backbone of church government. This includes trained leaders who can function in the offices of Christ, the pastors, elders, and deacons.

Now we focus on the calling to propagate. A few things come to bear on this aspect of

the mission church. It is important that as the members of the mission church function in their newfound faith, they must grow in that faith in order to maintain stability in the church. It is very common in mission work that recent converts leave out of the back door as fast as new converts come in the front door. When that happens, the mission’s propagation will not result in a growing in numbers and strength. Also, it is vital that the local congregation understand the importance of God’s covenant of grace and the care of children for the coming generation. This will open the way for propagation from within the church itself. Finally, they must also realize that it is the duty of every local congregation, by the effort of its members, to bring

Rev. Kortering is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Previous article: April 15, 2008, p. 322.

the gospel to others, so that they grow in numbers as well as in faith. Such self-propagating encourages the mission churches to stand on their own and gradually free themselves from needing the sending church in order to function.

I might insert here that the goal of establishing indigenous churches, including all three aspects (self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting), is crucial for the survival of much work in foreign countries. Often mission work is done in countries whose governments are hostile to foreign missionaries. The history of India is a good example. Years ago, when the Hindu party gained enough power to throw out all foreign missionaries, it left the mission churches in shambles. They had not been trained to be independent but rather to be dependent on foreign resources. As a result, the local congregations could not function on their own when the sending churches were gone, and to solve this problem they merged together and formed associations such as the Church of South India and the Church of North India. This took place only through much compromise and toleration of differences. The fruits of it are seen in the weakness of those churches to this day.

The sending church must work with all urgency because, in most of the world, we do not know how long the opportunity to do mission work will be given to us. The day may come when missionaries and calling churches are forced to leave. From day one we must work towards making

the church independent, and now also self-propagating.

In this article, we will limit ourselves to a few decisions that a missionary must make that will have an impact on the propagation of the gospel in that country. We will condense a few points made on the subject by the three

authors, John Nevius, Roland Allen, and J. H. Bavinck.

Nevius insists that if the gospel will be propagated it must go forth from a solid foundation of truth.

Some have supposed that we are warranted in the first presentation of Christianity in withholding those doctrines which antagonize Chinese

systems and are calculated to excite prejudice and opposition, presenting only those features which are conciliatory and attractive, thus drawing the people to us and gaining an influence over them and afterwards giving them instruction in the complete system of Christian truth as they are able to bear it. I doubt very much whether such a course is justified by the teaching and example of our Savior and the apostles. God may and does in His mercy and grace make use of our incomplete presentation of His truth and an imperfect apprehension of it to the conversion and salvation of men; but have we not still greater reason for expecting His blessing in connection with His truth when given in its completeness? I believe there is no doctrine of Christianity the full presentation of which we need fear. ...It is for us, however, to make our teaching as full and clear as possible (Nevius, *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*, p. 88).

Bavinck writes in his *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*:

It is equally obvious, how-

ever, that gradually they acquire the need for their own confession of faith, in which they can express what they themselves have found in God's Word. Such a confession must be formulated in opposition to the forces opposing them, in opposition to the communism that is everywhere rampant as a world religion; in opposition to the old religions still followed by many in their environment, and against Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and against the phenomenon of syncretism, the inclination found everywhere to mix all religions together. Such confessions of faith cannot be made, they must grow, they must be born out of a need (p. 204).

Scripture and the confessions form the foundation for building the church in the truth and also propagating it. It may be that, in the early years of mission work, the local church expresses briefly what the Christian faith is in a self-composed confession, but the goal ought to be that such a church identifies herself with the historic confessions of the Reformed churches. This is the way not only to develop true ecumenicity, but also to take advantage of the work of the Holy Spirit done in the past and for the benefit of the church today.

I find it interesting that experienced missionaries recognize that the location of the initial work in the country has a tremendous impact on the propagation of the Word in that country. Nevius recognizes that Paul, and subsequently most missionaries, began with spreading the Word wherever the Holy Spirit allows them to preach. Christ directs the shepherd's voice to the sheep, but the missionary does not know where they are, so he begins with a general approach. As time goes on, he soon learns that he needs to concentrate his labors lest he spread himself so thin as to be of no effect. At that point it is crucial what place he

...it is the duty of every local congregation, by the effort of its members, to bring the gospel to others, so that they grow in numbers as well as in faith.

chooses to locate the mission work for the sake of propagating the Word. One perspective is the relationship between Paul's home and field of labor. Nevius explains:

The great centres where he (Paul) spent most of his time were apparently not selected by him in accordance with a predetermined plan, but were providentially indicated to him in the ordinary course of his apostolic tours. But most missionaries, however much they may itinerate, will require a fixed place of residence that is a home in selecting which the chief consideration should be health, facilities for acquiring the language, and a place which is an influential centre in itself and affords easy access to the unevangelized regions about it. Such a home the apostle Paul had in Antioch, where he spent the intervals between his itinerating tours (p. 78).

Roland Allen gives another perspective, on the location of the missionary within the country in which he works.

It is not enough for the church to be established in a place where many are coming and going unless the people who come and go not only learn the Gospel, but learn it in such a way that they can propagate it. It has often happened that a mission has been established in an important city, and the surrounding country has been left untouched so far as the efforts of the native Christians have been concerned because the gospel was preached in such a form that the native convert who himself received it did not understand how to spread it, nor realize that it was entrusted to him for that purpose. By establishing the church in two or three centres St. Paul claimed that he had evangelized the whole province. Ten years after his first start from Antioch, he told the Romans that he had "fully preached the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem and round about Illyricum," and that he had

"no more place in those parts." In that single sentence we have the explanation and the justification of St Paul's establishment of the churches in important centres in a province. When he had occupied two or three centres he had really and effectually occupied the province (*Missionary Methods: Saint Paul's or Ours?*, p. 13).

Next we want to address the need for a missionary to learn the language of the people among whom he labors. When we read of the pioneering work of missionaries in countries such as Africa, India, and Burma, we see that the need for the missionary to learn the language was critical. The only way he could bring the gospel to people of a different culture was to learn their language as a means to adapt to their culture. Because America has made a global impact on most countries, and English is the universal language, missionaries can make use of local men who know English and are able to serve as interpreters. But even then, almost all missionaries insist that any effective work done by a missionary in a foreign culture requires the missionary to learn the local language. Dependency on interpreters limits and negates effective propagation of the Word. Even Nevius (the old veteran) expresses his regret for not putting forth more effort to learn the local language even better.

It has been to me a matter of constant regret that a portion of time was not strictly reserved, especially during my first five or ten years in China, for laying a broader and deeper foundation for future usefulness by a more extensive and methodical reading and memorizing of Mandarin and Classic literature. Suitable and adequate plans were made for such study, but other occupations in the form of direct missionary work, promis-

ing immediate results, were allowed to interfere with and set aside those plans. In this way, as in many others, we are too easily induced to sacrifice a greater future good to a less present one (p. 76).

Very soon, the missionary and sending church become keenly aware that besides the Bible there was need for instructional material in the local language. The Bible takes precedence over all others. One of the pioneer missionaries, Adoniram Judson of Burma, gave his entire life to learn Burmese and write a good version of the Bible in that language. Today, Wycliffe Bible Translators, also known in Southeast Asia as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, specializes in this arduous work. They continue to publish Bibles in tribal languages. In the Chin State of Myanmar, the churches had to be content with *The Good News for Modern Man* in their dialect. Subsequently, the churches have worked together to produce a reliable version of the King James into Chin. Missionaries play a key role in the work and recognize its importance for the spread of the gospel in their land.

Next to the Bible, good study books are in greatest demand. Missionaries of the Reformed faith know how difficult this is. Some general books about Christianity may be published in the local language, but missionaries need books that expound the Reformed faith. In most instances, they have to function as instructors for future ministers and Bible workers. The demand for books in the local language becomes paramount. Many missionaries put a lion's share of their time into preparing such material or guiding others in their publication. Nevius had this to say about books:

If I were asked what in my opinion is the most important

of all departments of mission work in China, I should not be able to answer categorically. All are important. The most important work for each man is undoubtedly that for which he is best fitted and to which he is specially called. Book-making is the ripest and richest fruit of all. Its influence extends over nations and continents and goes down to successive generations (p. 77).

No matter how hard a missionary may work in helping a local congregation, no matter how diligent he is in training others to function as pastors in outlying areas where new congregations are formed, one aspect of his labors is crucial for propagation, and that is training the converts to speak of their faith to others and spread the gospel in this manner. Usually, in the early years of mission work, a convert naturally takes on this task. Sometimes missionaries have to labor for years to gain one convert, but when that convert is there, things begin to happen. A local person is able to speak the local language, relate to the local people, understand their superstitions and hang-ups, and be used by the Spirit to lead to conversion. Such people are useful for the missionary and ought to be incorporated into his labor of working towards the institution of a local church. Nevius has this comment:

Some will say that depending largely upon the voluntary and unpaid labor of native Christians for the propagation of the Gospel is pre-supposing a larger amount of zeal and devotion on their part than is found among Christians at home. If this is true, so much the worse for Christians at home. I believe the contrary, however. There is a great army of active workers at home as well as idlers. As to young converts in our country stations, it is a fact that they are willing to do this work and able to do it, and still further that they do it. In the early his-

tory of the Church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Christianity spread chiefly through the voluntary zeal of ordinary church members, and the work of the apostles consisted mainly in superintending and organizing the companies of Christians they gathered. Their zeal was so great that persecution could not repress, but only intensified it. If there is not that zeal and effort in the Church at home, it is much to be deplored. Perhaps the want of it is due in a great measure to a growing habit of leaving work for Christ to be done by those who are paid for it. Where such an idea prevails, whether at home or on missionary ground, it tends to paralyze the power of the Church for good (p. 25).

Later, Nevius writes:

When a man becomes a Christian the fact is known through the whole circle of his acquaintances, male and female, far and wide. It is generally believed that his mind has lost its balance. He is shunned for a time, but before long his friends visit him either from sympathy or curiosity. They find him in apparently a normal condition and working quietly in his shop or on his farm, and are curious to know what this new departure means. An opportunity is thus afforded of presenting the claims of Christianity as not the religion of the foreigner but the true religion for all mankind (p. 43).

It is apparent that such a convert needs much encouragement and instruction from the missionary to fulfill his newly commissioned role of prophet on behalf of the Lord Jesus.

A final observation that ought to be made as it relates to the missionary's involvement in the spread of the gospel is the training of children. These may be children who come to faith by means of the missionary effort, or the children may be children born to believers. This is a big

subject, we can offer only a few thoughts

Missionaries have addressed this need to instruct children in different ways. Within the fellowship of the congregation must be a special effort to train the children in the fear of the Lord. Yes, parents must be trained to do this teaching for their own children. In some situations this may be difficult due to the lack of maturity of some of the parents. In such instances the church fellowship has to assume more involvement for the instruction of the children. This may be Sunday Schools, special ministries for the children on Saturday, Vacation Bible School during holiday periods, and such like.

Christian schools in the mission field are sometimes possible as the means to meet the needs of children. At other times the children have to attend local schools, usually due to financial reasons. Efforts are usually put forth to supplement this training with religious education in the evening, weekends, or holidays. More than likely homeschooling cannot be considered due to the immaturity of parents and because the houses may not be conducive to teaching. In some instances I know, even schools are not fit (due to extreme heat), and classes are held under a shade tree.

We have simply highlighted a few areas that the diligent missionary has to consider, decide, and carry out. All of them will have an impact on the spread of the gospel through his efforts. Each area is full of challenges as he seeks to be faithful in his calling to propagate the Word. Such missionaries need our daily prayers for God's guidance and wisdom.



British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference

One who has attended a number of BRF conferences, as this writer has, might be inclined to say that the 2008 conference was the best one to date. Maybe that's the result of a faulty memory, or maybe it's just because people seem to relate to the most recent event in life. Whatever the case, this past conference, with its theme being "The Work of the Holy Spirit," was at least one of the best, if not the best.

It was held at a venue called The Share Center (or "Centre" — since it was in the UK, the British spelling holds) from July 25 – August 1. The Share Centre is located on Lough Erne, near Enniskillen in the southwestern part of Northern Ireland. While most of the previous conferences were held in places where we were all pretty much housed in the same building, the Share Centre had us in separate cabins, or "chalets." There were four rooms in each chalet, one being a single room, and the others with two bunk beds in each room. There was a common room and a kitchen also (which came in very handy for those putting on "protein parties"). As the brochure we received said, the facilities were "purpose-built for guests with disabilities." We should have paid attention.

Having this kind of setup had some disadvantages. First of all, having things "purpose-built for

guests with disabilities" meant that such things as mirrors in the bathrooms were set so that we got really good views of our kneecaps. Also, being in separate cabins, and with activities spread around the grounds, it was sometimes difficult to find people one might be looking for. But these are minor things, and, all-in-all, the venue was a great place for the conference.

People who came showed the catholicity of God's church. There were about 70 people who attended from all parts of the UK, from the US (including one from California), from Italy, and from Portugal. Some were there for the first time, while others were veterans. Because of the different nationalities, we sometimes had language barriers, which led to examples of biblical speaking in tongues (fitting right into the subject matter of the conference), with someone there to translate what was being said for the benefit of all there. What always amazes me at these conferences is the way that, no matter what our nation or tongue, there is an immediate connection with people who share a common faith in our Lord Jesus. Very soon we feel like old friends, being members of one body.

There were many activities at the Share Village, and these not only kept us busy, but they made the week go faster than any week I can remember. Many activities provided by the center required extra money, so this limited how many activities each person got involved in. Some took archery

lessons and had a little competition. Others chose "banana boating" (like being pulled on an inner tube by a boat, but the inner tube being shaped like a banana), canoeing, or other water activities; in the water activities, we had to wear wetsuits and life jackets (the European Union having some hold on the rules at the place, we got a taste this way of European government regulations, fast coming to our country as well). There was also wall climbing, "fuzzball" (human foosball), and swimming in the indoor pool. Two large-group activities were a cruise on Lough Erne, including a visit to the ruins of Crom Castle and a trip to the Ulster-American Folk Park, which is an outdoor museum (similar to Greenfield Village, for those who have been there), which traces the history of the Irish immigration to America. There were also activities for the younger children, such as making tile mosaics.



*Francesco DeLucia (N.I.),
Marco Barone (Italy),
Nuno Pinheiro (Portugal)*

Mr. Bos is a teacher at Hope Protestant Reformed School in Walker, MI.



Of course, the center of all these activities was the reason we were all there—the speeches themselves. There were six conference speeches given, each one followed by a question-and-answer session. We also, between church services on Sunday, had a discussion on the book of Revelation, which turned into a discussion on whether or not the Pope is the Antichrist.

We began with a speech on Friday night (the 25th) by Rev. Angus Stewart on the apostolicity of the church. He spoke of apostolic unity, holiness, and catholicity, and how these help us understand the other attributes of the church. He also pointed out how our view of this is different from the Roman Catholic view, in that the apostolicity of the church is based on the teachings, doctrines, and truths of the apostles, and not on the apostles themselves. This doctrine is ultimately tied, then, to Christ, the Cornerstone, and not to man.

There were two speeches on Saturday. The first of these was given by Prof. Engelsma on “The Person of the Holy Spirit.” He pointed out that there are two modern problems with regard to the Holy Spirit: the Charismatic Movement and the problem of a lack of attention to the work of

the Holy Spirit. He talked about how the creeds and early councils helped to show who the Holy Spirit is and what His place in the Godhead is—that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, with emphasis on both parts, being divine and being a person (Matt. 28:19). He also brought out the teachings about the Spirit found in John 14-16, that He reveals the truth and guides us to all truth in testifying of Christ. The practical side of all this is that there can be a personal fellowship in the Godhead, and there can be a personal presence and work within us that makes us holy, living sanctified lives. We do not need the emotionalism of the charismatics.

The conference speech in the evening was given by Prof. Hanko. Its topic was “The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” This event was the culminating work of Christ, yet it is often reduced to a simple revival or dismissed altogether today. Pentecost really is the beginning of the new dispensation. All before this was type and shadow. But Christ establishes the kingdom through the work of the Spirit. Prof. Hanko talked of the three signs of Pentecost. The sound of the rushing mighty wind shows the kingdom is invisible and does not come with observation, and

also shows the power and sovereignty of the kingdom. The tongues of fire show the saving and purifying work of the Spirit and the work of judgment. Sin is destroyed in order to save us. “Zion is redeemed through judgment.” The speaking in tongues shows the positive work of Christ—the salvation of the church in all nations, and the catholicity of the church. Prof. Hanko also showed that the Spirit never works apart from the Word, and how the Spirit now does all this work through the church. We still need the church, even though we are all anointed into the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king.

On Monday we had a special lecture by Rev. Stewart on Pentecostalism. He dealt with the “baptism of the Spirit,” tongues-speaking, and prophecies. He showed how these ideas attack the biblical concepts of one baptism, that this baptism happens at regeneration, and that it is unconditional. The Pentecostal idea also attacks the unity of the church, dividing it into “haves” and “have-nots.” Tongues-speaking in the early church was not gibberish; real languages were spoken, languages in which the speaker expressed the “wonderful works of God” (Acts 2: 8-11), the

purpose of which was edification of the church.

On Tuesday there were two conference speeches. In the morning Prof. Engelsma taught us of "The Holy Spirit and the Covenant of Grace." It is through the Spirit that we have the blessings of the covenant. Our calling, faith, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification are all the work of the Holy Spirit. The covenant, then, is made with each of us personally, since the Spirit works within each of us. This is the new covenant written on our hearts, spoken of by Jeremiah (ch. 31). Prof. Engelsma compared the old and new covenants, and showed that while there are differences, they are not two completely different covenants. Both are God's fellowship with His people, but we should not desire to go back to the old covenant. The Spirit is the giver of the gifts of salvation that we have within us, and He does all this to glorify Christ. The Spirit binds Himself to Christ and the work of the cross, so that He is identified with Christ.

"The Spirit of Christ as the Spirit of Truth" was Prof. Hanko's topic for the evening address. The Spirit is the author of truth as the church comes to know it and confess it in the midst of the world. As the Spirit


of truth, He is also our Comforter, bringing the blessings of salvation. He gives the church the power of knowing the truth, loving the truth, living the truth, and confessing the truth. This truth is infinite, is revealed only through our Lord Jesus Christ, and is revealed only to the elect. This Spirit of truth is with us always. He works in the church slowly, almost unnoticed, and it is an ongoing work as the church comes to an ever-deeper understanding of the truth.

On Wednesday, Prof. Engelsma spoke on "The Holy Spirit and Assurance." Assurance of salvation is part of salvation itself. It is experiential. He spoke against those who teach doubt about salvation, and the need for a radical "conversion experience." Ephesians 1 tells us that our assurance is a conscious experience, that it is shown in hearing and believing, which are active, conscious things. Romans 8 and Psalm 23 are both confessions of assurance. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, no matter what the trials of life are. The witness of the Spirit within us is not a witness "to" our spirit, but "with" our spirit (Rom. 8:16). We have the knowledge that we are the children of God.

The final address on Thursday night by Prof. Hanko was on "The Holy Spirit and the Church." The church is invincible and invulner-

able. The church is the bride of the triune God. God will do anything it takes to bring His Bride to heaven—even the death of His Son. And He works all things for the good of His Bride. All the work of Christ on this earth, from birth to death, involved the Spirit. So it is with the church. The calling of the church is first of all to preach. And preaching depends for its efficacy on the work of the Spirit. The most important of all the signs at the end of time is the gathering of the church by the saving power of the gospel and the Spirit, which is done by the preaching. All the seals in Revelation are dependent on the first seal—the spread of the gospel.

It is hard to do justice to the speeches in such a small space. All the speeches were recorded and can be found on the BRF website (www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk/audio.htm).

The conference was worthwhile on every level. I wish that all could experience this event. One can grow in so many ways by attending these conferences. For those for whom this kind of thing is viable, I encourage you to plan to attend the next one. It is scheduled, the Lord willing, to be in the southern part of Wales in the summer of 2010, and the topic will be on the Word of God in this present age. Prayerfully consider this. 

Report of Classis West

September 3, 2008


Classis convened at 8:30 A.M. on Wednesday, September 3, in the church building of the Peace PRC. Rev. Clayton Spronk led the delegates in opening devotions with the reading of I Samuel 12:16-25 and a brief meditation on the passage. The officers of the meeting were: Rev. Spronk

as chairman, Rev. M. Vander Wal as vice-chairman, and Rev. D. Kuiper as clerk in the place of Rev. R. Smit who was absent due to the death of a member of the Immanuel PRC.

Classis treated the regular reports of the stated clerk, of the Reading Sermon Library Committee, and of the Classical Committee. Pulpit supply appointments

were scheduled for Calvary PRC through March 2009, if necessary. The total expenses for this meeting were \$8,448.63.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 4, 2009, and that meeting will be hosted by the Edgerton PRC in Edgerton, MN.

Sincerely in Christ,
Rev. Richard J. Smit,
Stated Clerk 

Mission Activities

The Council of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI continues to administer cyclone relief to the Protestant Reformed Churches in Myanmar at the rate of \$5,000 per month. These funds continue to be used for food and medical expenses. To date, two houses have also been rebuilt and one more is in the process of being rebuilt.

Back in our "News" of September 1 we included information regarding our denomination's mission work in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and their plans to use local television station KSFY/ABC/channel 13 to air 42 ads each month for the next year promoting the worship services of the Heritage PR Fellowship. Rev. Allen Brummel, our missionary there, writes that these ads started airing in mid-August, the first one on August 18, right after Jeopardy, at 11:18 in the morning. Rev. Brummel was also kind enough to send us the 30-second TV spot that was finalized for that first ad. It looked great, and we add our prayer, along with the Fellowship's, that God will bless this exciting effort to get the name and message of the saints in Sioux Falls out to a wide audience. Tentative plans are to change the spots and the message every month or so during the one-year campaign.

Rev. Rodney Kleyn and a group of Young Adults from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville MI, traveled to the Pittsburgh Mission in mid-August. On Saturday they joined the members of the Pittsburgh Fellowship in doing some work on their church property. Together they built a retaining wall, put new electrical service in the house, cleaned windows, scraped rusty hand-rails, and more. Sunday they traveled to Franklin, PA, where Rev. Kleyn preached in the Trinity OPC, and

in the evening they were with the saints in Pittsburgh for worship.

Prof. Herman Hanko and his wife were able this summer to attend the British Reformed Fellowship Conference in Northern Ireland, where Prof. Hanko spoke on "The Work of the Holy Spirit." After briefly returning to west Michigan, the Hankos traveled to Singapore August 14-29, where he was able to preach in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church the Sundays that they were there. After two weeks in Singapore, they went to the Berean Protestant Reformed Church of the Philippines, under the auspices of the Foreign Mission Committee, where they joined Rev. Richard Smit and his brother, Peter Smit, for one week-end, before Rev. Smit and Peter returned home, while Prof. Hanko remained in the Philippines for two more weeks to provide pulpit supply and speak for a conference there. They hoped to return September 15.

Denomination Activities

Our Seminary began their fall semester of instruction on August 25. May God bless professors and students alike, and use this means to provide pastors and teachers for His church. Currently, seven students are studying for the ministry in our churches and one each for the ministry in the Covenant PRC, Northern Ireland; Berean PRC, the Philippines; and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Our Seminary held their annual "Seminary Convocation" on September 3 in Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI. Prof. Russell Dykstra spoke on the topic, "Seminary and Saints: A Reciprocal *Sine Qua Non*."

To be a member of the Hope Heralds, the all-male chorus of west Michigan, takes more than a good voice. It also takes a summer of commitment. Not only do these dedicated men meet together each Sunday morning for practice at the seminary, they also give some nine

concerts July through September. Starting July 22 the Hope Heralds presented six concerts at rest homes throughout west Michigan, followed by three concerts in our area churches: Grandville, MI PRC on September 7; Kalamazoo, MI PRC on September 9; and Cornerstone PRC, Dyer, Indiana on September 14.

Congregation Activities

August 16 the Young Adult Society of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA met together at Hope Christian School grounds for a summer outing. Softball and other activities began in the late afternoon, followed by a barbecue dinner.


The members of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to Hudsonville Lanes on August 22 for Southeast's annual Bowling Night. Pizza, pop, and unlimited bowling were provided for a mere \$2 per person.

The Young People's Society of the Hull, IA PRC enjoyed a skiing/tubing activity on August 16. Incoming freshman society members were especially welcomed to join the group.

School Activities

The Consistory of the Randolph, WI PRC approved the request of Faith Christian School's Education Committee that their pastor, Rev. Douglas Kuiper, teach Bible in the lower room for the 2008/2009 school year.

Minister Activities

Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI has extended a call to Candidate Heath Bleyenbergh to become their first pastor. The congregation of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA extended a call to Rev. Ronald Hanko to serve as their first pastor. Rev. James Slopsema declined the call extended to him to become the next pastor of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI. 

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Southwest PRC expresses Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Steve Kuiper and his family in the death of his father-in-law,

MR. KENNETH SCHIPPER.

It is our prayer that they be comforted by the Word of God in Philipians 1:21: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Rev. Arie denHartog, President
Don Doezeema, Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to our covenant God, we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

JOHN and DELORES KUIPER, as they celebrated 50 years of marriage on September 25, 2008.

We are thankful for the many years God has given them. It is our prayer that God will continue to be with them and bless them in the years to come.

"...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).

- ❖ Cheryl Ann (in glory)
- ❖ Scott and Joyce Boverhof
Brandon
- ❖ Ron and Marlys Kuiper
Abbie, Colton
- ❖ John and Renita Kuiper
Emma and Ashley (in glory),
Liam, Jenna, Sarah
- ❖ Dave and Pam Moelker
Eliese, Courtney, Eric
Jenison, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents, **ALAN and CAROL KARSEMEYER**, as they celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary on October 12, 2008. We give thanks to our heavenly Father, the center and rock of their marriage, for the years He has given them. God has richly blessed them in their marriage, and also us, their children and grandchildren, through their godly example and God-fearing instruction. We are incredibly thankful for their love, devotion, and many sacrifices they have made. We pray that God will continue to bless and preserve them in the years to come. "O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (Isaiah 25:1).

- ❖ Clint and Katie Karsemeyer
- ❖ Wes and Ronda Fisher
Meghan, Kylee and Luke
- ❖ Kirk and Carrie Karsemeyer
- ❖ Nathan and Jessica Decker
- ❖ Troy and Danae Karsemeyer
Madalyn
- ❖ AJ and Marie Karsemeyer

Hudsonville, Michigan

REMINDER!!

Anyone wishing to have their own volumes of the *Standard Bearer*, volume 84, bound, please turn them in to the RFPA office (in Jenison) by the end of October. Cost: \$17.00.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's and Ladies' Society of Southwest PRC extends its Christian sympathy to our fellow member Marilyn Schipper in the recent and sudden death of her husband,

KENNETH JOHN SCHIPPER.

May she and her family find comfort in Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Marvin Kamps, President
Beverly Hoekstra, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Grandville PRC extends Christian Sympathy to Helene DeVries in the death of her brother,

MR. PETE HAGAR.

May she have the assurance expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 86:6-7 "Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer... In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for Thou wilt answer me."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
Mr. Herm DeVries, assistant clerk

NOTICE!!

Change in worship time
Hull PRC

March-November:

9:30 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.

December-February:

9:30 A.M. and 2:00 P.M.

Reformed Witness Hour

October 2008

Date	Topic	Text
October 5	"Passing Through the Red Sea"	I Corinthians 10:1, 2
October 12	"A Promise to the Single Members of God's Covenant"	Isaiah 56:3-7
October 19	"Use Hospitality"	I Peter 4:9
October 26	"The Return to the Gospel of Grace"	Romans 11:6