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**THE
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God's Mercy to Hear His People

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer.

Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.

Psalm 66:16-20

There is no heading to this Psalm that indicates who the writer was or what occasioned his writing of it. The Psalm itself suggests that it was occasioned by the great work of God to deliver Judah from Assyria during the days of Hezekiah, during which time the Lord also spared Hezekiah's life from his illness. If this was not the occa-

sion, it must have been something of similar magnitude.

This Psalm was most likely written to encourage the church when she finds herself in similar emergencies.

The Psalm is divided into three sections.

The first section (vv. 1-7) is a general celebration of God's wonderful dealings with His people in all ages. Special mention is made of how God delivered Israel from Egypt by parting the Red Sea.

The second section (vv. 8-12) is an acknowledgment of how God preserved His people in the troubles that had just befallen them.

The final section (vv. 13-20) is a promise of thanksgiving by the psalmist personally. This section concludes with a summons by the psalmist to all those who fear God to hear what God had done for his soul. That summons is the focus of this meditation



The psalmist speaks of his prayers to God in the time of trouble.

There had been great trouble that faced the nation, which also brought great trouble to the psalmist's own soul.

This great trouble could possibly have been the Assyrian invasion and siege of the city of Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. And Hezekiah could well be the psalmist. If this is the case, we can imagine the despair of Hezekiah's soul. Judah was doomed as a nation, unless the Lord would somehow deliver them from insurmountable odds. And if He did not? What would this mean for the covenant that God had made with Judah? And then during this siege God told Hezekiah that he had but three days to live and that he must get his house in order. That only compounded Hezekiah's troubles. What was to happen to Judah in this terrible crisis? More importantly, Hezekiah had no son. How would the Christ who was to come from the royal line of David be born?

If this was not the background and occasion for this Psalm, the psalmist must have been someone

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who found himself in some other personal distress because of terrible things that threatened the nation and his very salvation.

We can find ourselves in similar situations. God in His providence and wisdom sometimes brings great adversity into our lives. We may experience this adversity in connection with war that He brings to our nation. Or we may experience this adversity in connection with division and infighting in the church. It may be adversity suffered in connection with disaster God brings to our family. But it is adversity that brings great distress to our soul, so much so that we fear for our soul and salvation.

The psalmist cried out to God in prayer.

Twice the psalmist mentions his prayers in this passage. The psalmist writes, "But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."

His prayers consisted, first, in crying out to God. The psalmist writes, "I cried unto him with my mouth." The word "cry" means to call out for help. The psalmist's soul was sinking fast. He cried out to God in prayer for help.

The psalmist's prayer consisted also in praise. The psalmist writes, "And he was extolled with my tongue." The phrase "he was extolled by my tongue" means that the psalmist used his tongue as an instrument to praise God. He praised God for the works of salvation God had accomplished in the past for His people. He also praised God for the deliverance and salvation he anticipated in this current situation. This speaks of the great faith of the psalmist.

Notice that the psalmist prayed not just in his heart but also aloud. The psalmist writes, "I cried unto him with my mouth,

and he was extolled with my tongue." This indicates how serious the situation was with the psalmist's soul. When one is in great distress his prayers are generally not silent but uttered out loud. They are cries for help.

Notice also that the psalmist prayed to God (Elohim) and the Lord (Adonai). Both these terms emphasize the power and rule of God. The psalmist turned his heart in prayer to the almighty God and Lord that alone could rescue him.

This is what we must do also in time of great distress that threatens to destroy our very soul.

We must cry out to God in prayer.

We must also in prayer use our tongue as an instrument of praise to God. We must praise Him for works of salvation past. We must also praise Him for the work of salvation that we anticipate by faith in our current distress.



The psalmist celebrates the fact that God heard his prayer and answered him in mercy.

God had not turned away his prayer. The psalmist writes, "Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me." When God turns away one's prayer, He does not hear that prayer but simply ignores it. That is a terrible thing. This the Lord does to some who pray. But with the psalmist, He had not turned away.

Instead, the psalmist can write, "God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer."

To "attend" means to prick up the ears. Think of an animal that pricks up his ears at a sound he hears. Nothing can distract him until he has investigated that sound. In like manner, God had attended to the psalmist's prayer, giving careful attention to his cry.

And the Lord heard the psalmist's prayer by bringing him deliverance and salvation. We know not whether God brought deliverance to the psalmist by delivering the nation from its horrible crisis or whether He simply strengthened the psalmist's soul so that he was able to weather the crisis and even grow in his faith. But God answered the psalmist's cry for help.

And the psalmist attributes this to God's mercy. Writes the psalmist, "Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."

God's mercy is His compassion for His people in distress. It is also the power to deliver His people in their distress so that they find the joy and peace of His salvation. All the mercies of God are found in Jesus Christ. In His mercy God sent His Son Jesus Christ to the cross to cover the sins of His people. In that perfect sacrifice we find all the blessings of God's mercy. On the basis of that sacrifice God in His mercy delivers His people for all their sins and all the woes that sin brings, and He makes them forever blessed. It was to this mercy that the psalmist appealed in his prayer. And in mercy God delivered him.

It is to that mercy in Jesus Christ that we also must appeal in our prayers for help in time of need.



The psalmist also speaks of how he received God's mercy.

Writes the psalmist, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

The word "iniquity" views sin as vanity, nothingness. Sin neither satisfies nor fulfills but leaves one empty.

Due to our sinful nature, all of us must contend with such iniquity.

The psalmist speaks of regarding iniquity in his heart. To

regard iniquity in one's heart is to set one's heart on sin. It is to cherish sin and do so in such a way that one cultivates sin in his life. We are often inclined to do this because we find sin pleasurable.

The psalmist was a sinner, as we all are. Had he cherished that sin and cultivated it in his life, the Lord would not have heard him and helped him, as He was doing. The reason for this is simple. The mercies of God's deliverance and salvation are received and enjoyed only by faith. One who cherishes his sin is not living in faith. And God turns away his prayers for help.

But God had heard and was hearing the psalmist's prayers and cry for help.

The psalmist was one who feared God.

This is suggested by the fact that he summons those who fear God to come and hear what God had done for him.

That he feared God means

that he stood in loving awe and reverence of God for His greatness, His goodness, and His faithfulness to His people.

This fear determined his attitude toward sin in general and his own sins in particular. Fearing God, he did not cherish sin. Instead, he hated his sin. He confessed his sin in godly sorrow and remorse. And he sought deliverance from his sin in the coming Savior, i.e., forgiveness and strength to turn from sin.

This is the activity of faith that is found in all those who truly fear God.

In that way of faith the psalmist found the Lord's mercy to deliver him in his time of need.

That is how we will find the mercy of God as well.



The psalmist gives out a summons: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

Notice that the psalmist summons those who fear God. He himself is one who fears God. In the fear of God he had cried out to God for help and he had received the mercies of God to save and preserve his soul. Now he summons those who fear God as he does.

He will declare to them what God had done for his soul. "To declare" means to declare in a spirit of celebration. The psalmist will therefore proclaim to those who fear God what God had done for him. He will celebrate this great salvation with his fellow believers. He will do that for the honor of God, whom he fears, and for the edification of his fellow believers.

Let us who fear God hear this summons. Let us hear what God did for the psalmist and celebrate his great salvation. And let us also learn from his experience so that we too cry out to God in faith in time of need and receive His mercies. 

Pornography: Balak Redivivus (2)

The devilish strategy the Moabite King Balak used against Israel is revived with a vengeance, such a vengeance that a person is tempted to say, "Balak himself is alive again." Thus: *Balak Redivivus*: "Balak, given a new life." Unable to curse Israel through the mercenary prophet Balaam, King Balak exported waves of attractive women and caused Israel to fall into fornication, and thus under the severe judgment of God.

Previous article in this series: April 15, 2008, p. 316.

The renewed sexual assault against the church today is terrifyingly strong. The enemy knows that the sinful natures of God's people are always susceptible to every temptation—especially this one.

Balak Redivivus assaults God's people. The enemy has his eye on the church. Reformed Churches. Our Reformed Churches. The reader who does not believe this may want to confirm it by talking to almost any minister or elder who deals closely with the people of God. Or he can simply add one plus one: both the cunning of Satan and the current state of western culture. Does someone

suppose that a Reformed believer's nature is less corrupt and not inclined to sin so?

The church must *speak* about the assault, openly. The church must be *unashamed* to speak openly about it. Spouses, parents, single members, elders and pastors, need to talk, to plan defenses. The church father was right 500 years ago who complained that the people of God were ashamed to speak when there was no need for shame ("So much purer have our ears become than the mouth of the Holy Spirit" who spoke about sex); and unashamed when they ought to be ashamed.

Balak's Identity

Balak is not so easy to identify today as he might have been in the wilderness of Moab. Hidden away, he has recruited disciples like a terrorist, and has trained them well. It seems his " sleeper cells " are everywhere and awakening to his calls to attack.

They produce television programs and movies. They generate the evening sit-coms and celebrity " news " shows, the daytime talk shows, the " reality " TV shows, and even some TV contests, to say nothing of cable and satellite television. And they all are oozing with sex. The movies on the big screen that do not promote themselves with sex are scarce as hen's teeth. Besides, the ratings (" G," " PG-13," " R," etc.) become less restrictive. What was thought to be inappropriate for *anyone* 50 years ago is considered acceptable today for a thirteen(!) year old child—as long as he's accompanied by a parent.

And much of the church hardly notices. It is distressing to me that *World* magazine, considered to be the evangelical voice in news magazines and appreciated by many Christians, every week reviews TV programs and movies—most of which have pornography (the portraying of sex)—without the slightest blush of shame, much less a warning: " Beware of Balak! " Often only the obligatory note, *Rated " R " for sexual content, nudity, and extreme violence, or Rated " PG-13 " for brief nudity and language,* and then analysis of the acting and perhaps the " Christian message " in the show. These are promoted by *World* for entertainment and education. Of the church.

It is more distressing to hear that some Reformed parents allow their children to watch the movies, in some cases because " we aren't convinced that drama and acting are evil. " Put aside the argument for drama for the moment, and save your children the misery of

ruined marriages and miserable single life because they learned sex from Balak. To borrow Solomon's language from Proverbs: You will mourn at the last when your children's marriages fall apart, when their children are consumed by sexual lusts, and you will say, " How I hated the good instruction of the church, and my heart despised reproof. I have brought myself into such evil in the midst of the church. " May God spare us from this distress, so dishonoring to Him.

Aside from the television and movie screens, most effective has been the enemy's use of the computer screen and Internet to tempt God's people with free and easy pornography, thus to fall into fornication. Moabitish whores in every home. Instantly. Are most parents alert to the unbelievable filth available to their children, in seconds? I trust they are. I also trust that no parent is naïve enough to allow unfiltered access to the Internet for the family, of any age. To allow it would be like our grandparents, 50 years ago, stocking the unlocked closet with filthy magazines, with the warning to their children as they left for the evening: " Now, no peeking in the closet. "

But what ought especially to gain our attention is the availability of the Internet for men at the workplace or wherever else they may have private access to the computer, like their home office.

Christianity Today magazine reported in March that men—married and single men—are those who are falling to this evil. Through this evil, they lose their honor, wealth, children, marriages (see my editorial of April 15). They become *enslaved* to sexual

Put aside the argument for drama for the moment, and save your children the misery of ruined marriages and miserable single life because they learned sex from Balak.

sins, such slaves that though they vow a thousand times to quit, they cannot. Worse, it seems at times, than the addiction to alcohol or methamphetamines, the addiction to sexual sin is powerful, and rampant.

In the churches. Respectable men. Leaders. Ministers, elders, deacons, school teachers and principals. They experience the misery of any other kind of addict. Many of them are unexposed, as yet... " Be sure your sin will find you out. " God sees to it.

God's Judgment

God judges sexual sins. Often by allowing the addict to become known. The man who does not truly repent, turning from the sin (if necessary even by seeking the help of others to be freed from it), will be found out. " Because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience " (Eph. 5:6).

When Israel received the Moabitish prostitutes and began worshiping their gods, the " anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel " (Num. 25:3). That anger manifested itself in a terrible plague that took the lives of twenty-four thousand Israelites.

I spoke of these judgments of God upon sexual sin in the last editorial.

But sexual sin *itself* may be God's judgment upon *other* sin. Dreadful as it sounds, God may give a man over to sexual sins as judgments or chastisements for other sin.

This is the truth Paul teaches in Romans 1. Because a people reject God, willing to serve creatures more than the Creator, He " gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which

are not convenient (or fitting); Being filled with all unrighteousness..." (v. 28). The first "unrighteousness" given as God's judgment upon wicked men is *fornication*. Often, the only sin one considers in Romans 1 is the vile sin of homosexuality. Included, however, is a list of others, with fornication at the head.

God judges sin with sin. He punishes rejection of Him by giving men over to foolish lusts.

Luther, speaking now to God's people, warned about proud men in the churches:

So God comes and takes a hand in the matter and lets the proud spirit fall so hard and receive so severe a blow *by frequently falling into adultery* and at times doing worse things, that he must come to his senses and say: Be quiet, brother, and hold yourself; you are made of the same cloth of which he is made! Thus he then realizes that all of us are made of the same stuff and one mule should not venture to call another "sack bearer," because we are all born of one flesh.

God punishes the sin of pride, specifically the sin of self-righteousness, by allowing men to fall into sexual sins. As God chastised King David's pride by withholding the grace (see the Canons of Dordt, V. 4) that would have kept him from sin with Bathsheba, God chastises men's proud sense of self-importance and self-reliance today.

The objects of God's judgments are not merely heretics, they are also hypocrites. Those whom God "gives over" to sin are not only atheists who have gone wholesale into idolatry, or those who re-

ject the truth in apostasy, but also those who come close to God with their mouths, but whose hearts are far from Him.

Thus, *Reformed* churches and *Reformed* men and women are also to be cautioned here. God may well judge the proud *Reformed* man by allowing him to fall into adultery. God may chasten the *Reformed* church that exalts herself over others, as though she made herself to differ, with a flood of sexual offences. This was precisely Luther's point. He speaks of those who "puff themselves up," and "cannot come to the point of being gracious to sinners." (Luther was fond of praying, "Help, O God, dear Lord and Savior, that we stay pious sinners and not become sainted blasphemers.") God judges the God-denying sin of pride. With falls into sexual sin.



The lessons that we may take from the falls of many into sexual sins include the lesson of humility. My pride may be subdued by such a fall. God brings a man

to his senses when He allows him to fall so deeply and shamefully. This is the *goodness* of God to him, because not to come to his senses would be worse.

Let all of us also learn humility with regard to our sinful natures. Becoming a believer, a *Reformed* believer, even a believer passionate about the faith and life of God's people, does not diminish the evil of my sinful nature, or in any way moderate how vicious are the inclinations of my flesh. So we sing, paraphrasing Psalm 51: "I am evil, born in sin; thou desirest truth within" (see "Prayer of the Penitent" below). And we confess with Paul, "I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18).

Let us hate both the sin that brings the judgment of God upon us, and the sins that bring us to our senses.

And let us love God alone, faithfully. Falling into sexual sins—unfaithfulness sexually—is *fitting* chastisement for us when we are unfaithful to Him. 

Prayer of the Penitent

Psalter #140

*God be merciful to me,
On Thy grace I rest my plea;
Plenteous in compassion Thou,
Blot out my transgressions now;
Wash me, make me pure within,
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.*

*My transgressions I confess,
Grief and guilt my soul oppress;
I have sinned against Thy grace
And provoked Thee to Thy face;
I confess Thy judgment just,
Speechless, I Thy mercy trust.*

*I am evil, born in sin;
Thou desirest truth within.
Thou alone my Saviour art,
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,
Wash me whiter than the snow.*

*Broken, humbled to the dust
By Thy wrath and judgment just,
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear Thy voice;
From my sins O hide Thy face,
Blot them out in boundless grace.*

■ The Reformed Churches in Iraq

The Middle East is much in the mind of all of us. The war in Iraq has now passed the five-year point and is still going strong. The Gaza Strip continues as a flash point of incendiary potential that keeps world leaders awake at night. Terrorism seeps out of this part of the world to threaten anyone anywhere with catastrophe of global proportions. One almost despairs to find anything hopeful, even a glimpse of positive change.

In focusing on this part of the world in this article, we do not have in mind to assess the political fallout as it relates to the upcoming presidential election in the USA. Nor do we have in mind to put it into the historical context of eschatology. These would be worthwhile efforts to understand what is going on “all around us” in today’s context. Rather, we want to try to learn what these events are doing to our fellow Christians who live in that part of the world. More particularly, what is happening to our fellow Reformed believers in Iraq?

While we served as minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore, we had the privilege to have as our house-guest Brother Victor Atallah, who during those years worked to establish the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. Over the years his repeated visits to Singapore while enroute to Australia and New Zealand allowed us to keep a bit up-to-date on the fruits of these labors. It was

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a learning experience to see how the Reformed churches throughout the world were able to work together to supervise and finance the labors of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. The committee that oversees these works functions much like our mission committees, only it works not with one Reformed denomination, but many. There is necessary supervision, accountability, and help, in order to maintain a careful balance so as not to disrupt the spread of the gospel in that delicate part of the world.

Included on the web page of MERF is a significant document entitled “The Reformed Churches in Iraq.” This is most likely the most authoritative information on this subject. I will quote and summarize from this article.

Until recently most Christians were not aware of the presence of Christian churches in Iraq. It is possible that few Western Christians are conscious of the presence of Reformed churches there. Yet, biblical Christianity in Iraq goes back to the second half of the first century A.D.

The land of the Tigris and Euphrates was Abram the Hebrew’s birthplace. His wife Sarah, and his son Isaac’s wife, Rebecca, were also from there. Jacob also went back there in search of a good wife. He ended up marrying Leah and Rachel, his cousins, daughters of Laban, his mother’s brother.

The Assyrians and Babylonians exiled the Israelites there. It was there that the people of God experienced a spiritual awakening under leaders like Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai. The concept of gathering in simple meeting places called synagogues to study the Scriptures sprang up there and spread among the rest of the Jewish communities in Palestine and

elsewhere. From there the exiles returned by the Lord’s mighty hand refreshed and blessed by the presence of a vibrant believing remnant. They rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. For several hundred years afterwards they were prepared for the coming of the promised seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham through whom all families of the earth would be blessed.

Archeological evidence points to the conversion to the Christian faith of many Jews who remained in Mesopotamia during the first century. The Jewish communities there did not enjoy the same level of influence they had in the Mediterranean lands. Synagogues were turned into Christian meeting places, which gradually were remodeled and became elaborate liturgical church buildings. It was not long before the entire area became predominantly ‘Christian.’ The early Christian communities there did not seem to have had much pressure from local authorities or followers of other faiths. Even before the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the Christian communities there enjoyed much freedom and were spared the kind of persecution endured by other Christians elsewhere during the first three Christian centuries.

The quality of the Christian faith in Iraq seems to have declined as fast as the number of its adherents increased. The Church in Iraq was more quickly invaded by unbiblical doctrines and practices and more speedily divided than in other lands in the region. Mesopotamia became a strong base for Nestorianism and the anti-Chalcedon rebellion. Hierarchical and other forms of power struggles among the clergy sometimes led to violent clashes and to deep and lasting divisions among Christians. This, coupled with an increased distancing of the people from the reading and the study of the Bible, led the

faithful to rely more and more on the clergy. They, in turn, lost sight of the ministry of the Word and the saving grace of God in Christ.

You recall that the early Christian church in the west was faced with a two-pronged attack by the enemy. First, it was in the form of terrible persecution at the hand of the Roman authorities. Those authorities insisted that everyone in the empire must be willing to serve Caesar as god. They did not require everyone to forsake their own religion; they insisted that they include in their religious practices prayer to Caesar and consider him a god. Accompanying this persecution and even succeeded by it were serious doctrinal controversies in the early Christian church. These are known as the Trinitarian controversies and concerned the three Persons of the Godhead and the divinity of Christ. The Western churches settled these issues by the Councils of the early church. The Eastern churches escaped the persecution but were more open to the heresies.

In the subsequent years the Mongols, Muslims, and Ottomans pretty much held sway over that part of the world. The Muslim armies easily subdued most of Iraq as well. The few Christians there were forced to seek refuge in the mountainous north. Their lives were spared only because already then the Muslims were preoccupied with their own conflict between Sunnis and Shiites.

Despite the internal weaknesses of the Church and the external threats to its existence, there continued to be a significant Christian minority in Iraq. Until the early part of the twentieth century, Christians constituted about 30% of the Iraqi population. Immigration and other demographic factors have reduced the numbers to less than 8% at the present time. For the most part they belong to various

ethnic and linguistic branches of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. There are Chaldeans, Assyrians, Romans, and Armenians in both groups. In addition there is the ancient Nestorian Orthodox church, a portion of which migrated eastward and settled in southern India. There they gained some Indian converts and have survived until this day.

Still, Iraq's 'Christian' communities have, throughout the centuries, had small groups of lay people and clergy deeply interested in the study of the Bible. The traditional churches for the most part, unlike others in the West prior to the Protestant Reformation, did not discourage the people from the study of the Bible. This made the job of Reformed missionaries far easier as they began their endeavours of Gospel proclamation in 1836. Reformed witness in Iraq and the Arabian Gulf was established as a joint endeavour between the American immigrant German Reformed churches at the time called "Reformed Churches in the USA" and the main Dutch immigrant churches called "Reformed Church in America." Both denominations were committed to the Scriptures, the Reformed faith and the Great Commission. (The RCUSA, however, drifted to liberalism and ecumenism and later became part of what is now called the United Church of Christ. A small remnant remained faithful and is now called RCUS. The RCA still exists and has many faithful Reformed missionary-orientated people.)

Reformed mission work in Iraq proved to be very effective from the start. In less than five years, a congregation was organized in the northeastern city of Mosul. In 1840 a church building was erected for the use of the young congregation. Later another congregation was established about 15 miles from the first one, in a smaller town. The work continued to advance to the south and west. Congregations were organized in Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Basra, with several preaching stations throughout

the country. Just like in other Arabic-speaking countries, the churches have been called "Evangelical." Presbyterian and Reformed missions recognized that such an identification with the "evangel" (Gospel) would not only give the right impression of the churches as Gospel-preaching and Gospel-based, but also solved the problem of having to use terms like "Presbyterian" or "Reformed" which do not translate well into Arabic. So the term "Evangelical" in the Middle East does not mean just being generally evangelical. Now, if you hear of "Evangelical" churches in the Middle East, you would be hearing of the Presbyterian or Reformed ones. At least local people understand that.

This mission work by these Reformed churches focused on the Arabic-speaking, which was the majority language. They translated the Heidelberg Catechism and the Bible into Arabic, which proved to be the greatest contribution to long-term labors. One thing they failed to do was concentrate on making the churches indigenous, by training local pastors and church leaders. Throughout the region, ex-pat (foreign) missionaries served as pastors in the local congregations for years. They paid a high price for this when, as so often happens, the missionaries were forced to leave the countries, including Iraq. In contrast, it was during the 1970s and 80s that the churches in the bigger cities such as Baghdad and Basra enjoyed good pastoral leadership by the faithful Egyptian-Presbyterian undershepherds. The church in Kirkuk did not have effective pastoral care.

From the beginning it was not difficult to gain government recognition for these Reformed congregations. In the sixties, however, some visiting non-Reformed preachers introduced dispensationalist eschatological teachings with pro-Israeli overtones. This caused a great

deal of turmoil to the churches and led to the imprisonment of several people including one of the pastors. By the Lord's grace, the churches have been able to withstand those difficulties and ably proved to the authorities that they advocate biblical loyalty to the authorities divinely ordained over the country. For over twenty years, the Reformed churches of Iraq have enjoyed much freedom. This might surprise many; but the Iraqi authorities have been quite helpful to all Christian churches including the Reformed ones. Christians enjoy a lot more religious freedom in Iraq than many other countries in the region, including Turkey, Israel, and Kuwait. One of the elders of the congregation in Baghdad recently put it this way, "In Iraq you can legally and freely do anything religious as long as it is not mixed with politics and so far as it does not endanger the social stability of the community."

In recent years, Reformed believers in Iraq have experienced the same difficulties as other Iraqi citizens. The last Gulf war devastated the economic superstructure of the nation. The US led air bombardment did not spare one sector of the economy. Most industrial sites were destroyed. The rest have not had spare parts or raw materials necessary for continued operation. The harsh United Nations embargo and sanctions have made it very difficult for the people to return to living a normal life. Many Reformed people lost their jobs or businesses and have not been able to provide for their families. Some have resorted to selling houses, other properties and even household effects to provide food or medicine for their families.

Because of the severity of the economic situation there, the government has allowed relief agencies to operate quite freely throughout most of the country. This has included some very unsound church-based as well as para-church groups. Such people have tried to win converts from among the members of the

Reformed churches in order to establish their own works or alter the Reformed nature of some of these congregations.

The above description ought to help us have a little different perspective on the effects of war on a country such as Iraq and also on our fellow Reformed believers who struggle to survive.

Also, we ought not only to pray for their well-being and safety, but we ought to be open to assisting them in any proper way. Obviously, there is precious little we can do either individually or as churches directly. There is a way we can help by assisting those who are able to minister directly. I do not know of any organization more qualified than the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. When I say this, I do not imply that everything this organization does must carry our stamp of approval.

There always lurks, in our good judgment, the question of the wisdom and advisability of working together with so many Reformed churches. Not everyone always agrees with everything that today goes under the banner of Reformed. There are areas of difference. But these differences ought not prevent us from appreciating and supporting efforts to minister to the needs of Reformed believers in Iraq who hold to the Heidelberg Catechism and the doctrines of grace, and who celebrate with us the sovereignty of God in the salvation of men. The price they pay for faithfulness to the gospel excites in us a deep appreciation for their work.

MERF ministers to these Reformed believers throughout the entire Middle East, including Iraq. Correctly, they know that the

most important ministry they can do is to train local men to function within the congregations (or, as in some Muslim countries, in complete obscurity) so they can bring the glorious gospel to their own people. This they are doing in Cyprus at the Study Center. Away from the tension of conflict, these men sit at the feet of Reformed pastors from various countries who contribute their time and effort for this work. For most of them, their local Reformed church raises the necessary funds. They have a rather extensive library to assist in this training. They also publish suitable material for evangelism work.

Another way that MERF reaches out to this part of the world is through radio broadcasting. Radio is still a very significant means for communication. The BBC is used to send forth Arabic language messages. In addition, Radio Monte Carlo in Paris is used. These obviously are secular stations and attract the general public, yet they both allow

Arabic Christian broadcasts in the Middle East and North Africa. Judging by the response, it is obviously true that God is using the medium-wave transmitters for good.

Finally, MERF is active in diaconal work. Funds are raised by various Reformed churches throughout the world for meeting many financial needs of the Reformed people and churches in the troubled Middle East.

Working through the local church deacons, they seek to meet some of these needs.

In closing, I quote from the summary given in the document *History of MERF*:

Pastors, churches, and Christian individuals all over the world have caught sight of this vision. MERF has the great op-

We ought not only to pray for their well-being and safety, but we ought to be open to assisting them in any proper way.

portunity to promote an active Reformed witness in the Middle East out of its headquarters in Cyprus, with local MERF administrative committees in Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon. MERF is committed to the service of the church of Christ according to God's Word. This is a truly ecumenical effort since it unites the gifts and resources of God's people from different ethnic backgrounds for the service of Christ in the Arab World, with a view of expanding outreach to other Muslim lands. By God's grace, much prayerful and hard work over the years has resulted in an effective and expanding ministry in the region. As the work has expanded, its needs also have grown. Thus, MERF support-bodies have been organized in Australia, New Zealand, United

Kingdom, the Netherlands, the USA, Canada and South Africa.

I trust that this information will help us understand a little more clearly what the situation and needs of our Reformed brothers and sisters in Iraq are. There are ways we can help them, even though we feel so helpless. Most of all we must pray that God will sustain them in a very difficult time in the history of the Reformed churches in Iraq. I am not able to get credible information on the Reformed congregation in Baghdad, for example; this is quite confidential for their own safety. One source indicated that it was temporarily non-functioning due to the dangers of violence between the Sunnis and the Shiites. More than once Christians

have been the target of persecution as well. We now have 4,000 US troops killed in the five-year conflict. And I am sure among them are Reformed Christians as well. How important it is for us to turn to the throne of grace to ask wisdom and help in our time of need.

Jesus Christ, the King of the church, at God's right hand is in control, and He has a clear plan and purpose for all these events. His sovereign grace is sufficient for His own. Through all these events, we can be sure that He is gathering His church from all the nations of the earth, with a view to the coming of our Lord in glory. How blessed it is that we may be part of that work and give all glory to Him. 

In His Fear

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

Humility in Affliction

God is active. He is always at work. The Scriptures point this out by speaking of God's hands, and of the things He does with them. By His hands He created the heavens and the earth. Now with those same hands He upholds and governs all things. With His hands He sends judgments on the wicked, and blessings on the righteous. Through the works of His hands He causes generations of His people to come forth. By means of His hands He saves them. His hands direct all creatures and all events.

God's hands are mighty. They are all-powerful. No one

can resist God in anything He does. "None can stay his hand" (Dan. 4:35). Whatever He has planned will happen. If He has purposed to do something, He will do it. We may not like what God's hand does in the world, or to others, or to us personally, but we can do nothing to stop it.

The truth of this is brought home to us especially when God's mighty hand reaches down and touches us personally. That often happens. God's hand does things to us. We feel its strength. We struggle and groan under its weight. Its force and power are inescapable and make us squirm. His hand can cause us to weep, and lead us to cry out for help.

God's hand, for example, causes His people to suffer for the sake of Christ. Some of God's people already experience this heavy hand of God. The rest of

us can expect to do so as the end of time approaches. We will find it so severe that we will cry out for deliverance and for Christ to return without delay.

God's hand also chastises us for our sins. David, in connection with his sin of adultery and murder, makes specific reference to this. He states, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me" (Ps. 32:4). The fact that we deserve these chastisements does not take away from the heaviness of God's hand. The sense of shame, guilt, and sorrow can be overwhelming.

God's hand also sends afflictions into our lives. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. We experience such things as life-threatening sickness, constant physical pain, sudden loss of loved ones, lack of work, years of loneliness, heart-wrenching

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pain because of family troubles, and the awful distress caused by church strife.

Every child of God feels God's hand in affliction, though it be in different ways, at different times, and in different measures. It is a heavy hand that makes us struggle. Our lives are turned upside down. Things are not as we wish they were or as we planned them to be. It seems at times that God's hand is too heavy and too harsh. The things He does do not make sense, especially as they come from Him who says, "You are My beloved, and very precious to Me!" Often our cry is, "Has God forgotten to be kind?" The heavy hand of God dampens or even eliminates our happiness and joy, and at times almost drives us to total despair.

What should be our response to God's hand working in our lives?

In the midst of such affliction, the child of God must first of all acknowledge, for his comfort, that it is indeed God's hand that works these things. It is true that afflictions come upon us through the instrumentality of others. We experience distress because ungodly men and women hate and oppress us. We face the sorrows of death because of the errors that other men and women make that result in loved ones being suddenly taken away. We are burdened and grieved on account of the sins that others commit against us. Even the sins of other believers or family members are often the cause of our sufferings. But ultimately it all comes from the hand of God. We must not say that God sends only the good things, and that it is the devil who controls and sends all the bad things that come upon us. Whenever we suffer, we must confess that it is the hand of our sovereign Lord and King that touches us.

But we must do more than simply acknowledge the mighty hand of God; we must also hum-

ble ourselves under that hand (I Pet. 5:6).

We do not normally or very easily respond humbly to affliction. Usually when God sends severe suffering our response is characterized by pride.

One way pride is evident is when we fail to submit to the will of God because we think we know better than God what He ought to do, or not do, to us. We have our own ideas concerning how things should be and go. We think God ought to do things as we want them to be done. And when He doesn't, we complain against Him and sometimes even become angry. We proudly think we are wiser than He.

Our pride is also seen when we are of the opinion that we do not deserve what God is doing to us. We often say, "Why did this happen to *me*? Why does *my family* have to suffer like this? If it happened to so-and-so, I could understand it, for it seems he (or she) deserves troubles in life - at least more than I do. I haven't done anything terribly evil, so I really don't deserve this!" Again, this is pride. We think we are of ourselves good, and therefore should not have any (or many) afflictions. We imagine that, on account of our goodness, we deserve constant happiness and success in life.

We also respond proudly to afflictions when we figure we are able to deal with the troubles on our own. We are not willing to admit our helplessness. We refuse to confess that we cannot stand a moment on our own. Proudly we imagine that we are able to solve our own problems. We believe we have the wisdom and strength to do it alone, without help from anyone: not from our fellow saints; not from God.

In light of all this, we need the directive of Scripture that

calls us to put aside all our pride and to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand.

This means that when God's mighty hand touches us, we must be willing to admit how small and foolish we are compared to Him. We have no right to think we know better than He what is good for us, nor any right to criticize His perfect plans. God does not have to answer to us for what

We do not normally or very easily respond humbly to affliction.

He does, nor should He be expected to do what we think is better. God is all wise. He

makes no mistakes. Humility means accepting and submitting to whatever He does.

In the second place, we must confess how sinful we are and how undeserving of any good. We have no claim to a trouble-free life. We do not deserve any of God's kindness or love. We have no right to expect our lives to be smoother, easier, or more enjoyable. In light of our sins, we must realize that if we deserve anything at all from God, we deserve only trouble and misery. We deserve a heavier hand of God. We deserve constant distress. God would be perfectly just if He did this to us.

Finally, humbling ourselves means we must admit how helpless we are. We are always, of course, helpless creatures. But the afflictions God sends upon us bring us to a clearer realization of this fact. For what can we do for ourselves when a loved one is suddenly snatched away? What can we do for ourselves when struck with a life-threatening disease? What can we do for ourselves when our children go astray? By means of God's heavy hand the people of God are brought to confess that their only help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Such humility leads to prayer.

Humble children of God cast all their cares upon the Lord. They do so in the confidence that He will avert all evil or turn it to their profit. This confidence arises from their understanding that although God's hand is heavy, it is always loving. His hand protects our souls and our salvation. His hand leads and guides us onward to our eternal home in the heavens. In this confidence we can trust Him no matter what He does.

Since God directs all things with His almighty hands, we may be sure that no matter what He does to us we are safe. For our names are engraved on the palms of His hands (Is. 49:16). This means that every time God does something with His hands, He sees our names and is reminded of who we are as His beloved in Christ. He never forgets that. In the light of it, He does everything in love and with a view to our

eternal good and glory.

May we put aside our pride and by the grace of God respond humbly whenever His hand reaches down and touches us. May we do so realizing that His promise is to reward the humble. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (I Pet. 5:6). In due time, in God's appointed time, the humble will be eternally exalted to the glories of heaven. 

Translated Treasures

Not Anabaptist but Reformed*

By Rev. H. Danhof and Rev. H. Hoeksema
III. Calvin and Kuyper On Common Grace (2)

In Institutes II.3.3, Calvin once again returns to this same subject. Here also it must be pointed out that he does not speak of these gifts as one of his most important doctrines. Just the opposite is true. This chapter deals with the fact that natural man can never produce anything other than what is damnable before God. But after Calvin has developed this very sharply and powerfully, he foresees a potential objection. And he goes into that objection. Some of the heathen have indeed been adorned with excellent gifts. And therefore the opinion is untenable that man's nature is entirely cor-

rupted. Well, then, to that Calvin gives the reply "that amidst this corruption of nature there is some room for Divine grace, not to purify it, but internally to restrain its operations."

If one wants to know what Calvin understands by this grace amidst the corruption of human nature, and how he conceives the fact that God restrains sin, then one must continue reading to the end of this paragraph. There Calvin writes, "Hence some by shame, and some by fear of the laws, are prevented from running into many kinds of pollutions, though they cannot in any great degree dissemble their impurity; others, because they think that a virtuous course of life is advantageous, entertain some languid desires after it; others go further, and display more than common excellence, that by their majesty they may confine the vulgar to their duty. Thus God by His providence restrains the perverseness of our nature from breaking

out into external acts, but does not purify it within."

This too is clearly sufficient. Calvin does not speak of a grace that works in the heart of natural man by which in one way or another he feels impelled to do and will the good, but of other influences, like shame before others, fear before the law, selfishness, etc., which can serve as a deterrent to sinful deeds. His mind always remains just as wicked and sinful, but he does not always break out into the act. Take notice that this is also completely different from the newer view that the process of sin is checked in history. Calvin never makes natural man even a little bit better by a working of common grace.

Calvin also feels that there remains yet an objection. How, by a restraining of sin in man, by a bridling whereby the sinful man does not break out into the act of sin, shall the good yet be performed by that man? Even

Not Anabaptist but Reformed was a pamphlet written by Danhof and Hoeksema in 1923 as a "Provisional Response to Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen Concerning the Denial of Common Grace." Translated here from the Dutch by seminarian Daniel Holstege.

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if the act of sin is held back in him out of fear or shame, he is still not performing the good. Yet it seems to be true that some heathens have led virtuous lives. Thus we have the example of Camillus. To that, then, Calvin replies in the first place that this is no more than appearance. Even under the greatest appearance of purity, he says, human nature is impelled unto corruption because the mind of man is and remains wicked. Whatever appearance of virtue he may practice, he does this with a wicked mind. But apart from that, Calvin explains cases like Camillus in this way: "that those virtues are not the common properties of nature, but the peculiar graces of God, which He dispenses in great variety, and in a certain degree to men that are otherwise profane."¹

Take notice that graces (plural) here simply has the meaning of gifts; and that these also are not common but peculiar. And then Calvin adds this: "But because every one who has risen to great eminence has been impelled by his ambition, which defiles all virtues and deprives them of all excellence in the Divine view, whatever may be apparently laudable in ungodly men ought not to be esteemed at all meritorious."²

So much for Calvin. We think all this can be briefly summarized as follows:

a) He does not deal with any doctrine of common grace. And what he does write in this respect is not treated as a prominent part of his instruction, but in reply to objections which men would bring against his exposition of the total depravity of man.

b) He views what has remained in man after the fall as gifts of God, and he calls those gifts graces for which man owes gratitude to God.

c) The fact that natural man

¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.3.4.

² Calvin, *Institutes*, II.3.4.

does not always break out into the act of sin Calvin attributes to a certain restraining of sin through shame, fear, selfishness, and so forth.³

d) He always very emphatically maintains that natural man, with all those gifts, can never will or do good, but that all those gifts are impure to him because he himself is impure.

Now compare this with the newer view of common grace. Kuyper in *De Gemeene Gratie*:

And finally in the fourth place, it follows from Romans 2:13 & 14 that this common grace not only left a notion in the fallen sinner of what is honorable and dishonorable, just and unjust, good and evil; it not only holds him in place and allows him to work, *but this common grace still also grants the sinner the power to do good.* He (Paul) indeed says that, "When the Gentiles, which have not the law (of Sinai), do by nature the things contained in the law...." They, therefore, not only *know* them, but they *do* them as well, and exactly from that fact that they do them Paul draws the conclusion that they have knowledge thereof. That doing is therefore even a point of departure for the apologetic argument. Now if it is maintained that even a child of God professes "to be incapable of thinking, and much less of doing, any good of himself," then it follows from this that the heathen do not do this good of themselves either, nor of their own strength, but only through the fact that common grace drives

³ What Calvin means is not an internal improvement by a working of God's grace which yet enables natural man to do good within his consciousness and will and inclinations. But he simply has his eye on the difference between the external act and the heart. The heart always is and remains just as wicked. It is even very possible that by sin not breaking out into the external act, it becomes even greater before God. (Editor's note: This f.n. is part of the pamphlet by Danhof and Hoeksema.)

and enables them to do it."⁴

Now, first of all, we want to remark that already in the explanation of this text from Romans 2 Dr. Kuyper deviates fundamentally from Calvin. To be sure, Calvin also gives an explanation of the same text in his *Institutes* II.2.22. There he writes,

And no sentiment is more commonly admitted, than that man is sufficiently instructed in a right rule of life by that natural law of which the Apostle there speaks. But let us examine for what purpose this knowledge of the law was given to men; and then it will appear how far it can conduct them towards the mark of reason and truth.

Calvin then demonstrates that this law can only serve to take away from natural man every cloak of innocence. Calvin argues that the Apostle does not mean that the heathen actually obey the law, but that they formally walk according to a law, and thus sin against a law that is written in their hearts.

Moreover, let us pay attention to the notion which is expressed here by Dr. Kuyper:

a) He speaks of good here in the sense of practicing God's law, or even in the sense in which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks about it, when he says that we are by nature incapable of any good.

b) Now no man does this good by nature. We are by nature so depraved that we are incapable of any good.

c) The child of God does this good in principle by the power of regeneration. Not of himself, but out of the life of regeneration he is once again capable of doing good.

d) But the heathen man does this (even in the same measure) by the power of common grace which works in him.

⁴ Kuyper, *Gemeene Gratie*, II, p. 17.

Now you might hold it against us if we attack a great man like Kuyper, but the fact remains, as we contend, that Dr. Kuyper has herewith fundamentally strayed from the path of Calvin, who always maintained that natural man can never will or do good with his remaining gifts. And Kuyper has also strayed away from the clear pronouncements of our confessions. The proposition indeed can be briefly restated by the following words: "Natural man is incapable of any good unless common grace grants him the power to do this good." We deny that anyone who professes this proposition is Reformed.

Now we are completely aware of the fact that Dr. Kuyper himself attempts to justify this notion in every possible way and to explain it in harmony with our confessions, which always maintain that man is by nature wholly incapable of doing any good. It is also a fact that this endeavor was never successful. He first declares it to be true that good exists in unregenerate man only on the outside. God causes him to do good by His common grace without man wanting or intending it himself. This is a strange notion indeed! (See *De Gemeene*

Gratie II, pp. 300-301.) But later he himself feels that this notion cannot give any satisfaction either. After all, whatever man does he does consciously and willingly. Otherwise in the doctrine of common grace you get a sort of determinism by which God forces the sinner against his will to do some good which he does not mean to do. And therefore, Dr. Kuyper later declares it to be also true that common grace indeed improves natural man to some extent, even in his understanding, will, and inclinations, so that in reality he also wants to do that good which he performs. The core of the ego (whatever this might mean) stays out of it, but "the unconverted man in his inclinations, in his consciousness, and in his will can be influenced by common grace."¹

So then you get an operation of God's grace by which natural man is turned to the good in his understanding and will, and in his inclinations, by which he can think and will that good, and which finally differs from saving grace only in this, that it does not penetrate to the ego. There-

¹ Kuyper, *Gemeene Gratie*, II, p. 306.

fore, by common grace the nature is indeed improved (understanding, will, and inclinations certainly belong to the nature of man), but the ego stays out of it.² Now, however great Dr. Kuyper may be, we cannot reconcile this with Scripture and the confessions. Not even Dr. Kuyper is successful in this. And we profess with all boldness before God and the church that we must fundamentally differ with this view. Outside of the regenerate, there is not such an operation of God's grace in natural man.

But the main goal of this exposition on our part was only to demonstrate that this doctrine of Dr. Kuyper is found nowhere in Calvin, and that, therefore, our claim also stands that it is audacious to say that the doctrine of common grace is one of the most prominent doctrines that Calvin distinguished. Moreover, we can also take our leave of Rev. Van Baalen's chapter on this. He mainly points out that we differ with Dr. Kuyper and Dr. Bavinck on this point. We had written that ourselves for a long time already. In this chapter we have once again and emphatically asserted it. 

² Kuyper, *Gemeene Gratie*, II, p. 309.

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Thomas Miersma

Laboring in the Consciousness of God's Sovereignty in Missions (5) *The Voice of Christ that Saves*

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We have considered the underlying foundation of election and reprobation in the work of missions, as it is also an element of the content of the gospel and mission preaching. With that in mind I would

turn to another element of laboring in the consciousness of God's sovereignty in missions. Mission work and evangelism is the work of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ by His word and Spirit.

To begin with, it may be well

to call to mind the order of salvation, sovereign grace, taught in our Essentials of Reformed Doctrine classes: regeneration, calling, faith. Since man is born dead in sins, the dead sinner must first be immediately regenerated by the Spirit of God. This precedes the work of preaching and evangelism and is below our conscious experience. Jesus Himself teaches us this: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3) or enter it (John 3:5). "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). It is the new spiritual life that is effectually called by the power of grace through the gospel unto faith, repentance, and conversion of life. It is in that prepared or regenerated soil that the seed of the gospel, in the parable of the sower, grows and bears fruit, and nowhere else. Jesus speaks of this in another way when He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). Christ Jesus calls the dead to life, spiritual life, a work that is a resurrection from spiritual death. He calls men unto faith by the Spirit. He is the chief prophet also today. He is, we may rightly say, *the* missionary and *the* evangelist.

The biblical order of the work of Christ by the Spirit, therefore, is regeneration, saving calling (by the preaching), and faith (the result). This is our confessional language. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25, asks, "...whence doth this faith proceed? From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel..." The Confession of Faith, Article 22, uses the same language, "the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks

nothing more besides Him." The Canons of Dordt I, Article 3, put it this way: "And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom He will and at what time He pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified." The Canons then quote Romans 10:14, 15.

There are several observations we may make about this truth. We may begin with Jesus' own words in John 10:16: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." The reference is to the gathering of the gentiles, the other sheep who are not of the fold of Israel, but are to be incorporated into it so that there will be one fold and one shepherd. Beside that unity of Israel and the church of the gentiles we should note first of all that Jesus says, "Other sheep *I have*." He possesses them already from the Father and lays down His life for them (John 10:11). Second, in the context of missions and evangelism, we should note that He says, "them also *I must bring*." Jesus brings them. He is the true missionary, the builder of the church, the gatherer of the flock. It is His work. The third element is, "and they shall hear *my voice*." Jesus also tells us how He will bring them, the method. It is by hearing the voice of Christ. It is through preaching.

Preaching is the voice of Christ, which is the next observation we must make. We must understand and believe what the Scriptures teach about preaching. By the preaching of the gospel, through an effectual work of Christ by the Spirit, we hear Christ, and the sheep know His voice (John 10:3, 14). That is the point also of Canons I, Article 3, in quoting Romans 10:14, 15:

"How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?" Literally, the text says, believe on Him *whom* (not of or about whom) they have not heard. The elect hear *Christ* in the preaching. His voice sounds in the preaching of the gospel. By it the spiritually dead are raised up.

Therefore the gospel and the preaching of it "...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth..." (Rom. 1:16). This is the sovereign wisdom of God in Christ, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). It is through preaching that the sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd and are saved. You cannot see or hear this work physically in a sermon itself, for it is the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit through the preaching. It is a work in the soul, which work is hidden from us. That work in the soul is a spiritual operation of grace that is effectual, powerful, and sovereign. Jesus knows *who* the lost sheep are. He knows *where* they are. He also sovereignly *directs* His word to them so that they *hear* His voice, through *preaching*, and they know *Him*.

This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. To see that, we must add also a third element to our observations, namely, that preaching is by one called and sent. The word "to preach" and "preacher" refers to one who is a herald or ambassador of the king sent to speak His word in His name to His people. "How shall they preach except they be sent?"

Christ ordained the office of preaching and commissioned His disciples and the church to go "and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). It

is in that light also that we must carefully understand certain passages. The early church, after Pentecost, had several preaching offices. "And he gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). The church had these offices for several reasons. First, the New Testament scriptures were not yet written, and to preach the gospel in the worship service, the church had only the Old Testament and could not compare scripture with Scripture the same way we can. There were special gifts of knowledge and understanding that would eventually pass away (I Cor. 14:29-32; I Cor. 13:8).

This prophetic office included men like Agabus, who was a prophet also in the sense of foretelling what should come (Acts 10:27-30). The list of preaching offices in Ephesians 4:11 also includes men who were called evangelists or "gospelizers." Timothy and Titus were such. These men were co-laborers with the apostles, especially in mission work. We find such men in the church in Jerusalem. Philip and Stephen, originally called to the office of deacon, were such men. The purpose of this office was also to serve the laying of the foundation of the church by its being gathered. We find therefore in Jerusalem not only the apostles preaching in the temple, but Stephen disputing in the synagogues (Acts 6:9). It was this that led to his trial and death.

After Stephen's death, followed by Paul's persecution of the church, the church in Jerusalem was scattered abroad. Those scattered from the church "went everywhere preaching (gospelizing) the word" (Acts 8:4). That this was the work by the evangelists and that that is what is referred to is made plain by the immediate context in the next verses by the example of Philip.

Philip is led of the Spirit as an evangelist to preach in Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:5-40). The word began to leave Jerusalem, and by the labors of the apostles and evangelists to be preached in other cities, going from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, as Jesus had said.

These were not individual efforts but the labor of the offices and the church. Peter, too, had to flee the city. It is in that context that Peter preaches later in Joppa (Acts 9) and to Cornelius (Acts 10). It is in that context also that we read of those who were scattered abroad in Acts 11:19 preaching (literally, speaking) the word, and preaching to ("gospelizing") the Greeks in Antioch (Acts 11:20). The Scriptures are recording the work of scattered believers traveling in groups from the church in Jerusalem, among whom are those given of the Spirit to do the work of an evangelist, namely preach. And when that work is fruitful, the church sends Barnabas to Antioch, just as Philip was joined in Samaria by Peter and John. That office of evangelist abides today in the office of the minister of the word and particularly that aspect of the ministry that is mission work.

Now the point is an important one. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word" (Rom. 10:17), that is, the word preached. Evangelism, "gospelizing," is preaching. Mission work is preaching. Evangelistic outreach is preaching. When the Canons of Dordt in I, Article 3 speak of God "sending the messengers" with the tidings of the gospel, "joyful tidings," it is speaking of preaching. Our forms for ordination of ministers and missionaries take the same approach. The reason is that the sheep, lost in themselves, but

sheep according to election, must hear the voice of Christ to believe. He saves them. He brings them. It is His work *through preaching*.

This has a profound implication for Reformed mission work and evangelism. We must not limit the idea of preaching in this connection to the formal worship service. Jesus preached on a mountain in Galilee, from the stern of a boat, as well as from

house to house. Paul likewise taught from house to house (Acts 20:20) and preached in the Philippian jailer's house at night (Acts 16).

Wherever there is an open door, we are to preach. That the voice of Christ is heard by preaching means that the missionary goes everywhere with his Bible open, speaking to all who will hear, not his own word, but from the Scriptures, "thus saith the Lord." Whether in following up contacts, in the pulpit, or in the home at the dining room table, missions and evangelism are *preaching the word*.

That God saves His people by this means of grace and in this way works salvation does mean, however, that we stand today almost unique in the Christian world and among the Reformed and Presbyterian church world. The Christian church also of the Reformation is abandoning preaching through unbelief in this truth. They are doing so in the churches, to the spiritual destruction of the covenant seed in their generations. They are also doing so on the mission fields and in evangelism. Gimmicks and human inventions are supplanting preaching.

This can happen to us in our approach to missions and evangelism also. We want to see growth. We are perhaps inclined to look at numbers. We see the

That the voice of Christ is heard by preaching means that the missionary goes everywhere with his Bible open...

lost and want to do something. We forget, especially in North America, that we labor largely among those who have had the gospel in their generations and who are being cut off from the olive tree through unbelief (Rom. 11:19, 20). We are engaged in a difficult labor, plucking branches out of the burning. We live in a results-oriented culture of quick

fixes, sound bites, and instant gratification.

Walking the way the Lord taught us, resting in His promise that His Word never returns void, is difficult. That God saves His people by preaching means that a large part of mission work and evangelism consists of not just one but three “p”s: preaching, prayer, and patience, or waiting

upon the Lord. A large part of mission work and evangelism is a matter of waiting upon the Lord, in prayer, and *letting the Word work!* That His sheep might hear His voice, He is pleased, “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (I Cor. 1:21). We therefore must walk in that “foolishness” of preaching by faith. 

Suspension and Deposition of Officebearers (4)

“When ministers of the divine Word, elders, or deacons have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities, the elders and deacons shall immediately, by preceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest Church, be suspended or expelled from their office, but the ministers shall only be suspended. Whether these shall be entirely deposed from office shall be subject to the judgment of the classis, with the advice of the delegates of the synod mentioned in Article 11.”

Church Order, Article 79.

A Controversial Issue

One issue remains to be considered in connection with Article 79 of the Church Order, the article that treats the suspension and deposition of officebearers. That issue has proved in the history of the Reformed churches to be a controversial one. The issue is whether broader ecclesiastical assemblies may discipline officebearers. May classes and synods suspend and depose officebearers? May they suspend and depose whole consistories? May they suspend

and depose ministers and professors of theology?

This issue figures large in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). From the beginning of their existence, these churches did not only object to the adoption by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of the false teaching of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer, but they objected as well to the altogether unjust treatment that the founding fathers of the PRC experienced at the hands of the broader assemblies of the CRC. In 1925 two different classes of the CRC deposed Henry Danhof, George M. Ophoff, and Herman Hoeksema, as well as their consistories. These ministers and their consistories objected to the classes' deposi-

tion of them on the grounds that neither classis nor synod had the lawful right to suspend and depose from office. This right belonged, they insisted, to the local consistory and to the local consistory alone.¹

Danhof, Ophoff, and Hoeksema were not the first officebear-

¹ The interested reader can confer Hoeksema's discussion of his unjust deposition in *The Protestant Reformed Churches of America*, p. 202 ff. This issue was more recently considered by the CRC theologian Dr. John Bolt in an article reflecting on the 75th anniversary of the organization of the Protestant Reformed Churches that was entitled, “Common Grace and the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo (1924): A Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Retrospective,” published in the April 2000 issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal*.

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ers in the history of the Dutch Reformed churches to be deposed by broader assemblies. In the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, it happened more than once that officebearers were deposed by the action of the broader assemblies. And there were those who vigorously defended the right of the broader assemblies to engage in this discipline of officebearers. The Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, the very synod that drafted the church order that we still follow for the most part today, deposed a number of notable Remonstrant (Arminian) ministers, and at Dordt's instruction some two hundred additional Remonstrant ministers were deposed by various particular synods. In 1926 the Synod of Assen (GKN) deposed Dr. J. G. Geelkerken. Geelkerken denied the reality of a speaking serpent in Genesis 3 and spoke of the opening chapters of Genesis as a symbolic account. In 1944 the GKN synod deposed a number of professors and ministers, including Saekle Greijdanus, Benne Holwerda, and Klaas Schilder. These men were the founding fathers of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated).

Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder initially felt a close kinship, not only on account of their mutual rejection of the teaching of common grace, but also because they had both been unjustly deposed from their offices by the presumptuous action of broader assemblies.

Prior to the deposition of Danhof, Hoeksema, and Ophoff, the Rev. Harry Bultema and his consistory had been deposed by a classis of the CRC meeting in 1919. Bultema had espoused pre-millennial views and had refused to recant after his views were condemned by the CRC Synod of 1918.

Many have defended the right of the broader assemblies to exercise discipline over office-

bearers. If they did not go so far as to approve the exercise of this right in all circumstances, they at least favored it in extreme cases. These extreme cases would involve serious doctrinal departure or grievous sin by officebearers. These cases would also include instances in which the minor assembly, usually the consistory, refused to suspend and depose officebearers who were worthy of such discipline. A representative of this position would be K. De Gier: "A major assembly may exercise discipline only when a minor assembly has failed to act. It may not begin the procedure itself" (*Explanation of the Church Order of Dordt in Questions and Answers*, p. 115).

Voices of Objection

In the Reformed tradition there have always been those who objected to the claim that the broader assemblies have the right to discipline, including the right to depose officebearers. They insisted that it was the local church to which Christ entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the means of grace. The local church preaches and teaches. The local church administers the sacraments. And the local church exercises discipline, including the discipline of officebearers. For the broader assemblies to engage in the exercise of the keys of the kingdom and the administration of the means of grace is presumption and hierarchy. Such presumption and hierarchy necessarily tramples on the autonomy of the local congregation.

In *The Church Order Commentary*, Van Dellen and Monsma face the question whether a classis may depose elders and deacons.

Some have contended that a Classis may depose Consistories. The present authors feel that no major assembly, according to Reformed Church polity and the Church Order, has the right to depose a minor assembly. The deposition of a Consistory, for example, by a Classis or Synod would seem to be a violation of the integrity and of the rights of the particular Church concerned, whereas the Church Order in more than one article seeks to safeguard this integrity and these rights (p. 327).

In connection with the deposition of ministers, Van Dellen and Monsma speak of cases of deposition being "referred to Classis," and not of a classis initiating deposition proceedings against a minister. They also point out two significant requirements of Article 79 that would speak against the right of the broader assembly to take it upon itself to depose a minister. First, there ought to be a period of time between suspension and deposition, which they suggest should be a period of three to six months as a rule. Second, deposition cannot proceed without the concurrence of the synodical deputies. They must be present when any case of deposition is brought to a classis. Taken

together, these two aspects of the procedure outlined in Article 79 preclude the broader assemblies' initiating deposition proceedings.

W. W. J. Van Oene in his commentary on the Church Order opposes the

notion that the broader assemblies may depose officebearers.

Note: we do not say that classis shall depose him [the minister]. No broader assembly ever has the right to infringe

For the broader assemblies to engage in the exercise of the keys of the kingdom and the administration of the means of grace is presumption and hierarchy.

upon the privileges and rights of a consistory. It was not at a classis or by it that the brother was ordained but in a local church and by it. Classis only admitted the brother to this ordination in that local church and, by virtue of this, into the ministry in all the churches. Likewise, as for the question whether the brother may be deposed, or should be, a classis is authorized to give only a judgment. The consistory with the deacons of the church (of which he is a minister) undertakes the actual deposition. Any different action undertaken by broader assemblies in the past was a clear violation of the provisions of Art. 71 [our Art. 79]. No church can be deprived of its ministers or any of its officebearers against its will, nor can this be done by anyone but its own consistory with the deacons (p. 325).

From the beginning of their history, this has been the position defended by the PRC. His own unjust deposition led Herman Hoeksema to the firm conviction that the offices reside in the local congregation. The local consistory ordains into office, supervises the labors of the officebearers, and, if need be, exercises discipline over the officebearers. This is not to rule out the legitimate role that the broader assemblies have in the deposition of ministers, as that role is spelled out in Article 79. But it is to insist on the rights and duties that belong exclusively to the local consistory as ordained by the Head of the church, Christ Jesus.

Grounds for Reserving to the Local Consistory the Right of Deposition

There are compelling biblical grounds for restricting the right of deposition from office to the local church. This follows from the clear teaching of the New Testament that it is the local instituted church that preaches the gospel (Rom. 10:15), administers the sacraments (I Cor. 11:18ff.),

and exercises Christian discipline (I Cor. 5; Rev. 2:12-23). Additionally, the offices reside in the local congregation (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 4; Titus 1:5; Titus 2). Since the offices reside in the local congregation, supervision over the officebearers, including discipline of them, is the duty of the local congregation. Acts 15 recounts the meeting of the apostles and elders from Jerusalem and Antioch, the first broader ecclesiastical assembly. It is significant that the Jerusalem Council, although it condemned the heresy of the Judaizers who were troubling the churches in the days of the apostles, did not initiate discipline against them. Any discipline was left to the local congregations.

The Church Order itself supports this position and practice. There is the fact that Article 79 makes no provision for the initiation of deposition proceedings by the broader assemblies. The broader assemblies have their role, particularly in the deposition of a minister. But the broader assemblies are called upon to become involved in the deposition of a minister only after the local consistory, with the advice of the neighboring consistory, has suspended the man and brought the matter of deposition to classis for its advice. The stipulations of Article 79 itself oppose the hierarchical presumption by classes and synods of the right to initiate deposition.

Besides the language of Article 79 itself, there is Article 36 of the Church Order. This very significant article describes the jurisdiction, that is, the lawful authority of the broader assemblies. "The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory

as the particular synod has over the classis and the general synod over the particular synod." What is significant is that Article 36 does *not* say that the authority of the classis or synod is the same as the consistory's authority over the congregation and the officebearers of the local congregation. There is a fundamental differ-

There is a fundamental difference between the authority of the broader assemblies and the altogether unique authority exercised by the local consistory.

ence between the authority of the broader assemblies and the altogether unique authority exercised by the local consistory. To the unique authority of the local consistory

belongs the discipline of its officebearers, including suspension and deposition from office.

Also Article 30 of the Church Order argues against the right of the broader assemblies to take upon themselves the deposition of officebearers. Article 30 deals with matters lawfully transacted in the major assemblies. An important restriction is placed on the business with which the broader assemblies may be occupied. That important restriction is "such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies...." That qualifier clearly restricts the broader assemblies in their involvement in the deposition of officebearers, and prohibits the broader assemblies from intruding into matters that rightfully belong to the local consistory. Only after the matter of suspension and deposition has been handled at the local level, in harmony with the prescriptions of Article 79, may the broader assemblies become involved. Never may they initiate the deposition of an officebearer altogether apart from the matter being dealt with and finished, so far as it could be finished, at the local level.

This is not to say that the hands of the broader assemblies

are tied if a consistory refuses to proceed with the deposition of an officebearer. The broader assemblies cannot suspend and depose. But consistories that stubbornly refuse to discipline officebearers, especially ministers, who are worthy of deposition can be and must be set outside the denomination. The federative tie with them must be severed. The consistory and congregation are by such a deci-

sion of the broader assemblies set outside the denomination, that is, outside *the* true churches of Jesus Christ. To be sure, the broader assemblies may not and cannot discipline in the formal sense. But severing the denominational tie is of the greatest spiritual significance. It is that inasmuch as the federative unity of the denomination is the living expression of the unity of true churches of

Jesus Christ. Such a congregation and its officebearers would be set outside the covenant fellowship and blessed life of true churches of Jesus Christ in the world. How much more serious could their plight be? Further, they would be guilty of schism and division in the body of Christ, a terrible sin against Christ Himself, whose will is "that there should be no schism in the body" (I Cor. 12:25). 

Preparing for the Office of Deacon (2) Educating Oneself and Supporting One's Officebearers

One who prepares for the office of deacon, we noted last time, desires that office. That desire leads him to pray. Prayer manifests his submission to and contentment with God's will, for the man does not yet know whether God wills him to serve in office, nor when God might will him to serve. His desire also leads him actively to prepare for office. By active preparation I mean that the man consciously, before God and by God's grace, prepares himself for office so that he is ready in God's time, subject to God's will. This active preparation shows that his desire for office is sincere.

What specifically might one do who is actively preparing for office in the church? The following come to mind: by educating

himself regarding that office, by being thankful for and supportive of the work his officebearers already do, by being sure he is qualified for the office, and by being involved in the life of the congregation.

In this and a future article, God willing, we will expand on these points, especially in regards to preparing for the office of deacon.

Be educated

One who prepares for the office of deacon will certainly want to educate himself regarding that office.

More than one person has trained for a job, only to find that he does not truly desire that job. More than one college student has taken classes with a certain career in mind, only to find that the more she knows about this career the less she desires it.

So by educating himself regarding the office of deacon, a man will either grow in his desire

for office (this is certain, if his desire is proper), or that desire will wane (especially if his desire is not proper).

Educating oneself regarding the office of deacon need not be a daunting task. It does not necessarily require reading every last thing one can find on the subject. It merely requires reading solid, basic works.

Assuming he is a member of a Reformed church, such a man ought to begin by reading Articles 30 and 31 of the Belgic Confession, the Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons, and the Church Order. Because these are our confessions, our understanding of the office begins here. If he is not a member of a Reformed church, he would begin by reading his own confessional statements regarding the office.

In addition he might obtain recordings of past conferences and classes on the office of deacon. Peter Y. De Jong's book *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* re-

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mains a classic text on the subject for men in Reformed churches. And may I humbly suggest the possibility that some of the articles appearing in the *Standard Bearer* in the last decade or so might also be of value.

If one desires to pursue the matter further, a visit to the local Christian bookstore, or browsing websites of book publishers and retailers, might turn up an interesting book or two.

But as I indicated, such preparation is less a matter of reading every last word on the subject, and more a matter of coming to a right understanding of the office. This right understanding of the office involves three things in particular.



First is that the office of deacon—indeed, every office in the church—manifests the presence and work of the exalted Christ in His church. Though seated at God’s right hand in His human nature, Jesus Christ is present with His church always, as He promised (Matt. 28:20). He is present by His Word and Spirit, as they work in every believer, and particularly as they work through the special offices.

So he who desires to hold the office of deacon must understand that the deacons represent Jesus Christ to His church. In bringing gifts for the relief of the poor and needy, the deacons show that Christ loves them to the point of caring for their bodily needs. And in bringing comfortable words from Scripture to those in need, the deacons show that Christ cares for their souls.

Is he who desires the office, then, truly willing and ready to represent Christ to the church? Does he know Christ truly? Does he consciously serve Christ? Does he know the Word of God?

Can he say to the poor and needy, as well as to those who despise Christ and His mercies, “Thus saith the Lord...,” knowing what the Lord truly says? And does he have the love for the people of God, which is required of those who serve the church? Is he patient and longsuffering, gentle and kind, merciful and compassionate? Or would he be short with the people of God, impatient with them in their needs, expecting them to deal with their own problems with the least amount of help from him?

The deacons deal with God’s sheep. Some of those sheep are meek, tender, compliant, a joy to work with. Others have gone astray—their financial problems are due to sin in their lives. The deacon must be like the good shepherd—he must seek those who have gone astray, to instruct and care for them.

If in fact a man desires the office because of the prestige it will give him, he will either cease desiring the office, or

begin to desire it for better reasons, when he understands that the deacon represents Christ.



Second, he who desires the office of deacon must know that if called to the office, he must serve. Remember that the word “deacon” means “servant.” And remember that the office of deacon was instituted in the New Testament church in order to free the apostles from the responsibility of serving tables, that they could devote themselves more to the word of God (Acts 6:2). The deacons were to serve those tables.

The deacons serve not only God, doing His will, but also the

poor and needy. As the servants in the palace bring the king and queen their food, bowing with respect, hastening to fulfill their every wish, so the deacons are placed, as it were, at the beck and call of the poor. In the church, the poor are the kings and queens; the deacons are their servants. Thus deacons are like Christ. He came, not to be served, but to serve. He came to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

Is he who desires the office of deacon, then, truly willing and ready to serve? Is he able to humble himself to serve? And is he ready to deny himself? Is he ready to spend time away from his family, his regular work, and his own interests, to carry out the calling of deacons? Times will come when the poor need help *tonight*, although the deacon had made other plans for tonight. The plans must be cancelled. The kingly poor beckon; the deacon comes running.

He who desires the office because he thinks that in it he will be served will either cease desiring the office, or humble himself, when he understands that the office is one of service.



Third, he who desires the office must know the work required of those who hold office—that of showing mercy to the poor, sick, and needy.

As we have pointed out in previous articles, the work of the diaconate is not that of the elders. The elders rule; the deacons do not. And the work of the deacons is not the work of taking collections and administering the finances. He who desires to rule or to administer finances will decide, if he educates himself regarding the office, either that he does not want to serve in this office at all, or that he must do the real work to which God calls him, if God should indeed call him.

the office of deacon—indeed, every office in the church—manifests the presence and work of the exalted Christ in His church.

The work of the deacons is that of caring for the earthly needs of the poor and needy. This involves an assessment of the requests of these people for help; a cheerfulness in giving them what they need, when their needs are genuine; a readiness to admonish these people regarding their stewardship of their possessions if the need requires; and a resolve to disburse the mercies of Christ wisely, ready to deny the request of all whose need is not genuine, or who are misusing the funds that the church gives them. Yet the deacons' work is broader than this. It involves helping the sick or aged in the congregation in other ways, as needed. It involves cooperating with institutions of mercy in the care of the poor. It involves working with the elders in the council, doing the work that pertains to the church as a whole, but not to any particular office.

So is this the work that you desire to do? Do you believe that God will give you the wisdom to make hard decisions, the compassion to show to those in true need, and the love for the faith to guide you in the work?

Be thankful and supportive

Let the one who desires the office of deacon examine his attitude toward the men who currently hold office in his own congregation. Is he thankful to God for them? Does he support them in the work they do?

More than one person has desired to hold office in the church of Christ because he was convinced that the men currently in office were not doing their work well, and that he could do it far better than they.

I do not refer to the truly pious man who desires to hold office because in love for his

congregation, which he sees to be growing weak in manifesting the marks of the true church, he desires that she grow stronger. I do not refer to instances in which officebearers truly do not have a care for God's sheep; in which pastors are not concerned to bring the Word properly, elders to rule according to God's law, and deacons to show true mercy.

The member of such a church must manifest his love for her first and foremost, not by hoping to be put into office, but by being ready to protest the failures and shortcomings of her officebearers. And, while God can bless such a voice as that man's to the strengthening of a congregation, it is as likely that the man will find that most are satisfied with things

as they are, and that if God will have him serve in office, it must be in a different congregation, and probably in a different denomination.

When I speak of one who is convinced that the men in office are not doing their work well, and that he could do it far better than they, I refer to a man who is unjustly and sinfully critical of his own officebearers, and who is too quick to think of himself as the answer to all the church's problems.

Are you thankful for the officebearers God has given you? Do you support them in their work?

To be thankful and supportive, not unjustly and sinfully critical, does not mean one will never disagree with decisions made by one's officebearers. And if one who disagrees with such decisions is convinced he must follow the prescribed process of protest and appeal, this by itself does not mean he is unthank-

ful and unsupportive. He will show himself truly thankful and supportive by addressing his disagreement with his officebearers with a proper, godly attitude (humility) and a proper, godly goal (righting the wrong for the sake of the church).

At the same time, to be thankful and supportive does not require one always to compliment the officebearers for the work they do. Perhaps from time to time he does convey his gratitude and support to them; but he does not do so excessively.

One shows his gratitude and support primarily in other ways.

First, he prays for his officebearers. His gratitude is expressed to God. His support is manifest by praying that God use them for the good of His church and that they be equipped to do their work well.

Second, he defends his officebearers. When he hears others criticize them, he rebukes as needed. Perhaps he rebukes the critic by showing that his criticism itself is wrong. Or perhaps he rebukes by showing the critic that, even if he appears to have good reason for his criticism, he is expressing it wrongly, and should go to the officebearers with it.

Third, he obeys his officebearers, and follows their faith in all things lawful (Heb. 13:7, 17). Many a man is willing to obey and follow the lead of his officebearers when he sees a real benefit to himself; but if he cannot see such benefit, he will not obey and follow. One who supports his officebearers and is thankful for them will, by contrast, obey and follow in all things that are not contrary to God's Word, whether or not he sees any personal benefit of such. He does this, understanding that God has given him officebearers to lead, guide, and direct him in the way that leads to heaven.

Are you a critical person?

*Times will come
when the poor
need help tonight,
although the deacon
had made other plans
for tonight.*

Are you a faultfinder? Are you of the opinion that your own good abilities to serve in office are overlooked, and the inferior gifts of others are too highly appreciated? You are not fit to serve in office. Part of preparing for the

office will involve praying for grace to change, to be humble in regard to one's own abilities, and thankful for the gifts God gave others.

All of God's people, whether officebearers or not, should examine themselves in this respect,

and repent of their sins in this regard.

But one who desires the offices in the church, and is preparing for them before the face of God, must do so all the more diligently. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committees of several of our congregations, including Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI and Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, have made available to their members copies of the new book "Evangelism in the Established Church: The calling of committees and individuals concerning the work of evangelism," by Rev. J. Kortering. From the introduction of this book, originally published as a short series of articles in the *Standard Bearer*, we read that its purpose is to motivate each member of the local church to be personally active in evangelism and to give the work of the Evangelism Committee the spiritual impetus it needs.

As a follow-up to the recent Officebearers' Conference held at Hope PRC in Redlands, CA on the subject of "Promoting Sabbath Keeping in the 21st Century," their Evangelism Committee has updated their bookstore to include a section of books about the Sabbath, including several books mentioned in the speeches. Also, the text and audio of all the speeches and the audio of the discussions are now available from Hope's web site, www.hopeprc.org.

While you are on line looking at Hope's web site, we invite you to check out also the newly

updated web site of the Hull, IA PRC, www.hullprc.org. Besides listing general information about their church and beliefs, Hull has also made available for downloads the sermons preached from their pulpit within the past two years. Weekly bulletins as well as the *Midwest Messenger* newsletters are also accessible on the site.

Congregation Activities

The Choral Society of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL hosted a "do it yourself" Easter Cantata for choir members and any others desiring to sing on Easter Sunday after their evening worship service. A light lunch was planned, followed by singing through the Easter Cantata, "Hallelujah, What a Savior." Most veteran choir members would be familiar with the music, and for others it would be a rewarding challenge. This "do it yourself" was not a performance, it was only for those who wished to sing.

The ladies attending the Tuesday Morning Bible Study at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI were reminded to bring their donations for the college student care packages. They were busy preparing items like toothpaste, bars of soap, snacks, cans of soup, pens, highlighters, or anything else a college student would like. The ladies hoped to collect enough items to fill fifteen gift bags.

Sunday evening, March 30, the members of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada

gathered together after their evening worship service for an hour of singing as they celebrated together our risen Lord in song. Immanuel enjoyed a light supper followed by a singspiration in their sanctuary, complete with a variety of special numbers.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adult Bible Study of the Grandville, MI PRC met together for a special meeting on March 25. Mr. Scott VanUffelen spoke on "Our Dual Citizenship in an Election Year."

The Young Adults and Young People of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited to join together with the young adults and young people of the Covenant Grace Reformed Church of Lynden for a night of fun and fellowship at the Lynden YMCA on April 4.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Grandville, MI PRC hosted a Rook tournament on March 22 at Adams Christian School as a fund-raiser for the 2009 Convention. Included with the tournament was a nursery, along with games for children up to 8 years of age. Supper and snacks were included, with prizes going to the top two winning teams.

The members of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited to their Young People's Society Singspiration on March 23 after their evening service. An offering was taken for convention travel expenses.

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

The young people of the Doon, IA PRC hosted a Spring Banquet on March 17 at their church.

School Activities

Supporters of the much anticipated Trinity Christian High School in Northwest Iowa put together plans for a seminar about "The Kingdom of God and the Protestant Reformed Christian School" on Saturday, March 29, at the Hull, IA PRC. Coffee started about 9:00 A.M. and the first speech, by Prof. D. Engelsma, followed at around 9:30. A noon meal was also provided, and the seminar concluded by mid-afternoon. This PR Federation-funded

event gave those who attended an opportunity to examine the basis for our schools as they in turn work together toward the opening of their own high school.

The Midwest Society for PR Secondary Education (Trinity Christian High School) had a profitable meeting on March 20. A floor plan was adopted, with an estimated cost of \$2,000,000. The Board will be going on a drive this spring, and construction will begin, D.V., as soon as the \$1.5 million benchmark is reached.

Mission Activities

The Heritage PR Fellowship of Sioux Falls, SD, with the approval of the DMC and the Edg-

erton, MN PRC, has contracted with Sioux Falls radio station KWSN 1230AM for the Reformed Witness Hour to be aired every Sunday morning at 8:00 A.M. This broadcast will begin on Sunday, April 6, the Lord willing.

The Covenant Christian High School Choir traveled to Pittsburgh, PA and presented a night of sacred music for the members of the PR Fellowship of Pittsburgh on March 29 in their church.

Minister Activities

Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call he was considering to become the first pastor of Calvary PRC in Hull, IA. 

Announcements

NOTICE!

Faith Christian School in Randolph, Wisconsin is seeking applicants for a combined first and second grade classroom starting in the 2008/2009 school year. Interested applicants are encouraged to contact Mr. John Huizenga, administrator, at (920) 326-6186 or principal@randolphcs.org. Résumés may also be e-mailed or sent to Mr. Huizenga at Faith Christian School, 611 N Columbus St., Randolph, WI 53956.

INVITATION

A Retirement Open House will be held in honor of **MISS AGATHA LUBBERS'** 11 years of dedicated service as principal at EASTSIDE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
When: Wednesday, May 14, 7-9pm
Where: The lower level of First PRC, Grand Rapids
School Board of Eastside Christian School

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 2007 appointed Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI the calling church for the 2008 synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2008 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 10, 2008 at 8:30 A.M. in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 9, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Slopsema, president of the 2007 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Harry Langerak, 1508 Ferndale Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534. Phone: (616) 453-7317.

Consistory of
Hope PR Church,
Harry Langerak, Clerk.

Reformed Witness Hour

May 2008

Date	Topic	Text
May 4	"Fighting Under the Banner of Our Ascended King"	Ex. 17:8-16
May 11	"The Daughters of Sarah"	I Peter 3:3, 4
May 18	"I Will Pour Out My Spirit"	Isaiah 44:3-5
May 25	"Set Me As a Seal Upon Your Heart"	Song of Solomon 8:6, 7