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Volume 84 ◆ Number 12

Jesus Anointed with the Oil of Gladness

Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Hebrews 1:9

The book of Hebrews is all about Jesus Christ and His work as the mediator of a better covenant. Jesus was appointed heir of all things. Now, as our mediator, He is working to bring us to that inheritance. That is why God anointed Him with the oil of gladness, in order that Jesus could accomplish His work as mediator. That's a glorious truth. It has implications for every believer. God called and equipped Jesus to be a faithful servant. But, just as God called and equipped Jesus for office, so too does He call and equip us, who are brethren of Jesus. As we receive the anointing, we are able to carry out the duties to which God calls us.

That Jesus was anointed to serve in an office is indicated by the fact that He is the Christ; that

is to say, he is "the Anointed One." Of course, Jesus was not anointed with physical oil; but he was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 1:9 speaks of this fact when it says that God anointed Jesus with the oil of gladness. This was nothing less than the anointing with the Holy Spirit. It was this anointing that perfectly equipped Jesus to carry out the duties as mediator in His glorious office. His task was, and is, to bring us to God.

Anointed with oil

Anointing was a familiar occurrence in the Old Testament. The basic idea of anointing is to pour oil upon something in order to set it apart for special service. We find that idea expressed in God's conversation with Jacob in Genesis 31:13:

I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

The pillar was set apart to serve as a special memorial; that is the significance of its being anointed.

Similarly, oil was used to anoint the tabernacle and the vari-

ous vessels of the tabernacle to set them apart for special service. We read in Exodus 30:26-29,

And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, And the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, And the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.

Anointing showed that these things were specifically meant for the service of God. The anointing indicated that these things were holy; they were set apart from common use and consecrated to be used in the service of God.

Just as anointing was used to set *things* apart for special service to God, it was also used to set certain *persons* apart for service to God. We find that God commanded that those who served in any of the three special offices in the Old Testament were to be anointed. Most of us are familiar with the anointing of kings. David, for example, was anointed by Samuel:

And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of

Rev. Marcus is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: gritters@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rfa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpfadiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

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a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren... (I Sam. 16:12-13).

Similarly, priests were anointed: "And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Ex. 28:41). Lastly, we find mention of particular prophets being anointed: "...Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room" (I Kings 19:16). Anointing showed that God Himself had set these people apart for special service.

The anointing with oil indicated that a special office was being assigned to the person being anointed. It stands to reason, then, that the oil used in the anointing ceremony was very special. The oil was so special that God Himself gave the recipe for how it should be made: "And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil" (Ex. 30:25). The contents are described in the following verses:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy (Ex. 30:34-35).

It is evident that the recipe produced a sweet-smelling oil. This special oil must not be used for any ordinary purposes. Furthermore, we are told in Exodus that anyone who tried to duplicate the smell of this oil would be cut off from the people.

Why the pleasant smell? Why didn't God simply tell Moses to use plain old olive oil? Obviously God

didn't go through all the trouble of specifying a recipe for nothing. He had a reason for specifying a sweet-smelling oil. The oil, with its pleasant smell, was meant to serve as a picture of equipping those who were anointed. This is connected to the fact that the oil made the officebearers smell good. Psalm 45:7-8 declares:

Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

What was it that gave Solomon's garments such a sweet smell? It was the fact that he had been anointed with the oil of gladness.

Notice that the sweet smell made the officebearer glad; the psalmist says, "Whereby they have made thee glad." This is why the anointing oil is called the "oil of gladness." The fragrant oil poured on the officebearer had an effect on him. Wherever he went with his anointed garments, that wonderful sweet smell followed him. One can almost imagine a smile on his face as he breathed in the smell of the anointing oil while he went from one task to another. In effect, the sweet-smelling oil made his service a delight.

Inasmuch as the sweet smell made the officebearer willing to serve, the anointing oil was a picture of equipping him for service. The anointing set the officebearers apart in order that they might serve. When Samuel anointed David to be king, we read, "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward..." (I Sam. 16:13). Following David's anointing, the Holy Spirit came upon David and equipped him for his office. Thus, the anointing with the oil of gladness points to the anointing with the Holy Spirit, who equips and

strengthens officebearers to serve in office. Only in that strength are they able to serve.

Jesus was anointed with the oil of gladness. That is, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Even in His childhood, Jesus was given a radical measure of wisdom and grace from the Holy Spirit: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). As Jesus was about to enter His public ministry, there was another, more dramatic anointing: "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him" (John 1:32).

Strengthened for service

The reason that Jesus was anointed was to equip Him for the duties of His office. Jesus needed the anointing power of the Holy Spirit in His entire earthly ministry. We might wonder why the second person of the Trinity would need the Holy Spirit. But we have to realize that Jesus had a human nature. His human nature must be preserved from sin. And His human nature must be strengthened to do God's will.

The Holy Spirit certainly strengthened Jesus in His ministry. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus cast out devils: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus delighted to do God's will. Hebrews tells us that the very words quoted from Psalm 40 refer to Christ: "Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). This is why Jesus could say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Similarly, it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus rose again from the dead: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put

to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (I Pet. 3:18). It was the anointing of the Holy Spirit that strengthened Jesus to serve in His human nature.

Jesus loved righteousness and hated iniquity His whole earthly ministry. And this faithfulness earned Him a special degree of the Spirit's anointing in heaven. Jesus, the mediator, in His human flesh must also have the Holy Spirit's anointing in heaven. With that special anointing, Jesus, in His human flesh, is able to rule as He sits at the right hand of God in heaven. This is why we read in Hebrews 1:8, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." This is talking about Jesus in heaven. But then, immediately following, we find the reference to His being anointed with the oil of gladness: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Heb. 1:9). Jesus continues to be anointed with the oil of gladness in His state of exaltation.

Why was Jesus exalted to such a high degree? He was exalted because all His life, He loved righteousness and hated iniquity. He hated iniquity so perfectly that He never sinned, even once, His whole life long. He loved righteousness so much that He was obedient even to the point to giving up His own life, for righteousness sake. In other words, Jesus earned His position as eternal king over His kingdom.

Now, in heaven at the right hand of God, the anointed Jesus serves as prophet, priest, and king. As prophet, Jesus reveals the secret counsel of God concerning our redemption. The Good Shepherd speaks the good news of the gospel to His sheep. He tells us there is salvation in Him alone. As priest, He made the perfect sacrifice of Himself some 2,000 years ago. Now, as priest, He presents His shed blood in God's presence.

Then He argues, on the basis of that shed blood, that we also deserve heavenly blessings. Jesus, our High Priest, prays for us in heaven. As king, Jesus governs us by His word and Spirit. And He rules over all things in order to defend and preserve us in the salvation that He has purchased for us. Jesus faithfully carries out all the duties of His office in heaven.

Applied to His fellows

Jesus' anointing ought to comfort us. Consider that Jesus, the anointed One, rules in heaven for our good. The fact that Jesus enjoys the anointing of the oil of gladness in heaven means that we also enjoy the same anointing here on earth. Not just those who occupy the special offices of minister, elder, and deacon, but every believer receives the anointing of the Spirit to equip him to serve in the office of all believers. This is why Hebrews 1:9 talks about Jesus being anointed "above thy fellows." Jesus is anointed in great measure. But His fellows also enjoy this same anointing Spirit.

Think of that. We are fellows of Jesus Christ. We are united to Him. He is our Head and we are members of His body. Of course, if the Head is anointed, then the oil of gladness will flow down upon all the members of His body. Psalm 133 talks about that precious ointment that is poured on the Head. What does it do? It runs down the beard all the way to the skirts of His garments, so that every member of the body is covered with that sweet-smelling ointment. Since we are united to Christ, we are anointed with the oil of gladness. Christ is anointed without measure. But by faith we are members of Christ and therefore partakers of His anointing.

The result of our anointing is that we are glad. That's not to say that we wear a permanent smile on our faces and that we are constantly bubbling over with joy and laughter. The gladness we have is

not necessarily visible on the surface, like a babbling stream. Rather, our joy runs like a deep river; though it is quiet, its current is strong and is not easily redirected. Such is the joy of our hearts that it is not easily affected by the circumstances of life. In the most difficult trials, we still have gladness. No matter what the outward circumstances, we learn to be content. This is why Galatians 5 lists joy as one of the fruits of the Spirit. But, just like every other grace that God gives us, our joy is a fruit that is still in its beginning stages. So we must pray that God would give us more of the oil of gladness.

Furthermore, just as the oil of gladness makes Jesus glad in His service, so too it makes us glad to serve God. We delight in righteousness and hate iniquity. More and more we say with the psalmist, "O how love I thy law." More and more we hate sin and fight against it, so that we say, "Depart from me, all ye that work iniquity." Only the fact that we have been anointed with the oil of gladness can explain our love for God's law.

Having that anointing, we are also glad to confess the name of Jesus Christ. Yes, the sinful flesh drags us down. Yes, our old man tries to keep us from confessing Christ. But still we are glad to confess His name. We confess Jesus' name with our mouths before others when we are not ashamed of the gospel. And we make a confession by the way that we live. We are glad to present ourselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness to Christ. After all, look what He has done for us!


All this is bound up with the truth concerning Christ, the anointed One. What a privilege to know Him and His anointing. What a privilege to be anointed with the oil of gladness with Him. Anointed with the oil of gladness, we say with the psalmist,

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.... Thou anointest my

head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall
follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the

LORD for ever (Ps. 23:1, 4,5, 6).

Since we have the anointing of the
oil of gladness, we are confident

that it will never be taken from us,
but will abide with us even to the
very end. Then we shall have it in
its glorious fullness. 

Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Seeking the Unity of the Church (5) Making Distinctions

Are they Protestant Reformed?

This question is occasionally voiced by members of the Protestant Reformed Churches who have a real interest in the work of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches. When they hear of visits made to churches in other parts of the world, this question can arise.

The question itself is open to interpretation, and the intent may be to learn whether these churches agree with the central truths that define the PRC. And yet, the question may also indicate a serious misunderstanding of the work of the Contact Committee and of what interchurch relationships involve.

The work of the Contact Committee is not to search the world over for churches that are, or with a little work could become, Protestant Reformed. There is only one body of churches that is Protestant Reformed. These churches have been molded by their heritage and history. The rejection of common grace and the well-meant offer are crucial to their existence due to the controversies that led to their birth in 1924. The doctrine of the unconditional covenant has been imbedded in her very foundation through the traumatic schism over this doctrine in 1953. Their church order is the fruit of centuries of de-

velopment in the Netherlands. Their liturgical forms and liturgy obviously come from the Dutch Reformed tradition. These churches have their own catechism books and Psalter. There is no other church or group in the world that is or can be Protestant Reformed.

The task of the Contact Committee is, therefore, not to find Protestant Reformed churches in other nations.

However, the PRC, through their Contact Committee, are seeking fellowship with other churches. And we are seeking unity in the truth. Agreement in doctrine, worship, life, and church government is requisite for unity between churches.

This inevitably raises the question, *How much agreement* must there be for churches to have fellowship, even to establish relationships?

John Calvin, zealot for church unity, addressed this matter in his *Institutes* (IV.1.12). There Calvin urges individuals to seek unity in the local congregation, but the instruction is applicable to unity among churches. Calvin insists that the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are the central matters, but even in these, he remarks, “defects may creep in which ought not to alienate us from its communion.” He then makes an important distinction:

For all the heads of true doctrine are not in the same position. Some are so necessary to be known, that

all must hold them to be fixed and undoubted as the proper essentials of religion: for instance that God is one, that Christ is God, and the Son of God, that our salvation depends on the mercy of God, and the like. Others, again, which are the subject of controversy among the churches, do not destroy the unity of the faith.

Calvin distinguishes between “the proper essential of religion” and other matters where disagreement may be allowed. He illustrates the latter:

For why should it be regarded as a ground of dissension between churches, if one, without any spirit of contention or perverseness in dogmatising, hold that the soul on quitting the body flies to heaven, and another, without venturing to speak positively as to the abode, holds it for certain that it lives with the Lord? The words of the Apostle are, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Phil. 3:15). Does he not sufficiently intimate that a difference of opinion as to these matters which are not absolutely necessary, ought not to be a ground of dissension among Christians?

Calvin goes on to note that “the best thing, indeed, is to be perfectly agreed, but seeing there is no man who is not involved in some mist of ignorance, we must either have no church at all, or pardon delusion in those things of which one

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2008, p. 245.

may be ignorant, without violating the substance of religion and forfeiting salvation."

He cautions, "Here, however, I have no wish to patronize even the minutest errors, as if I thought it right to foster them by flattery or connivance." But he adds, "What I say is, that we are not on account of every minute difference to abandon a church, provided it retain sound and unimpaired that doctrine in which the safety of piety consists, and keep the use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord."

Calvin's distinction between essential and nonessential matters in the local church is most applicable to relationships between various churches. The Church Order of Dordt incorporates that thought of Calvin into Article 85. "Churches whose usages differ from ours in merely nonessentials shall not be rejected."

This same principle applies to church relationships. Some doctrines (in the words of Calvin) "are so necessary to be known, that all must hold them to be fixed and undoubted as the proper essentials of religion." Some are not. How to distinguish between the two?

First, it should be evident to all that no set document can be drawn up that lists all the essential doctrines on one side, and all the nonessential on the other. Calvin gives examples, not an exhaustive list. Generally speaking, confessional doctrines are the essentials. And yet, Calvin's example of what happens to the soul immediately after death has been set down in the Heidelberg Catechism. Rather than making lists, churches seeking fellowship with other churches must face concrete differences and make a determination of whether these belong to the essentials or the nonessentials.

The Protestant Reformed Churches have done this in the past. A full sister-church relation was established with a Presbyterian congregation because she was "agreed with us in all essentials of doctrine, life, calling, and church polity"

(Acts, 1985, Art. 23). That agreement included a unity in confession (recognizing the Westminster Confession as a faithful Reformed confession), as well as agreement on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, on the offer, and on the covenant. One item that (by implication) the PRC determined was not essential was that the sister church allowed women to vote in congregational meetings, which, as was pointed out to her sister, the PRC "consider ...unbiblical" (Art. 23).

Another sister church (Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland) is fully in agreement with the PRC in doctrine and life, but maintains nonessential differences in worship in the matter of instrumental accompaniment, the reading of the law, and the use of the Apostles' Creed, for example.

Still other matters were relegated to nonessentials in the sister-church relationship with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore—singing of hymns and elders preaching, to name two. The PRC may well want to reexamine one day whether such matters are in fact nonessential.

"Denominational Distinctives"

While it is obvious that each denomination is distinct, and that one can speak of denominational distinctives, the term "distinctives" can be used in different ways. There are distinctions that characterize a church that are doctrinal in nature, and there are distinctives that are, shall we say, more cultural. By doctrinal "distinctives" we mean unique insights into and developments of the truth. This could include also the application of the doctrine to walk of life. These "distinctives" are the result of serious struggles against error and/or serious searching of the Scriptures as the church seeks to live out her faith.

There are also "distinctives" that are part of the history and culture of the denomination. Each church has its own life, its own viewpoint related to its history, and

even to the race and ancestry of the members. This is not unrelated to the doctrines and confessions maintained by the denomination, but these are not *per se* confessional. In this category we would place such matters as the particular songbook used in worship, the particular catechism books used, the version of the Bible used, the manner of praying, the style of preaching, the form of the liturgy (within the boundaries of the regulative principles of worship), the content and character of the youth conventions, and some of the Church Order regulations. No doubt there is liberty with respect to these unique elements of a denomination. These matters are not of the essence of the church and are therefore nonessential.

However, the doctrinal development unique to a denomination is different. This is rather a matter of the truth of God. Every denomination has either developed the truth faithfully according to Scripture and the confessions, or she has begun to depart from the truth and will eventually lose it altogether. God's truth is not subject to negotiation or compromise.



This brings up the need for another necessary distinction. A clear distinction must be made between a church that has apostatized from the truth and a church that has not fully developed an aspect of the truth. In the one instance, a church had the truth, but let it fall to the ground. In the other instance, the church never had it in her history.

An illustration of the former is a church that once preached sovereign, particular grace, but then adopted the error of common grace and the well-meant offer, and so apostatized that she eventually refused to discipline those who taught that God loves everyone. Little possibility of fellowship exists with this church. She must be called to repentance, and only if she does repent is fellowship possible.

However, very different is a church that preaches sovereign grace but never faced the theory of common grace. Common grace is spoken of in her midst, for she picked up the term from various Reformed theologians. Perhaps this church has a vague notion that God is good to all men in providing food, health, and all that man enjoys. When they examine it closely, they realize that it is not really a grace at all, but a work of God's providence. Fellowship can be explored with this church.

Likewise, there are churches that once held to an unconditional covenant, but later adopted, or allowed for, a conditional covenant with every baptized child. These churches must have their apostasy pointed out to them. On the other hand, some churches relatively new to the Reformed faith have never squarely faced the issue of a conditional covenant. Perhaps the word condition is tolerated in their midst—they have read it in the works of orthodox theologians. But they never thought through the issue. Such a difference calls for a very different approach. This church must be dealt with patiently, given time to see the issue and decide on the matter. Much wisdom is required in such an approach. Obviously, the issue would have to be decided before a sister-church relationship could be established.

The matter of divorce and remarriage calls for similar careful distinctions. Some churches have for many years held strictly to the position that divorce was allowed only on the ground of adultery. Further, based on their understanding of Matthew 19:1-9, they held that the sin of adultery broke the bond for the innocent party. Thus the innocent party in such a divorce was allowed to remarry. But many of these same churches, caving in to pressure from the world, now maintain not only that divorce may be allowed for virtually any reason, but also that every divorce dissolves the marriage bond. Thus

remarriage is now allowed for all divorcees. Reformed and Presbyterian churches are being destroyed by this horrible cancer. Such teaching is deadly serious—and not only because of its devastating effect on covenant families. In addition, since marriage so obviously pictures the covenant relationship between God and His people, what does rampant divorce and remarriage based on broken marriage bonds do to the picture? Churches who have thus departed must simply be called to repentance.

On the other hand, churches do exist who hold to some divorce and remarriage, but have not followed that way of departure. These churches have taken the stand of Calvin and the rest of the Reformers that adultery and desertion are grounds for divorce, and remarriage is allowed for the innocent party in those cases only. For Presbyterian churches it is established confessionally, since they have adopted the Westminster Confession. Such churches have not apostatized, but are upholding the teaching that was maintained in virtually all Reformed and Presbyterian churches since the time of the Reformation. They have not caved in to pressure to arrive at this position. They are convinced by the exegesis of John Calvin that the Bible teaches this.

Sixty years ago, the Protestant Reformed Churches took the stance that remarriage was allowed for the innocent party in a divorce grounded on adultery. The churches were following the practice adopted in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. But, through Rev. Herman Hoeksema, God led the PRC to see the inconsistencies of this position—that the bond could be broken for the one (innocent) party and not for the guilty. That the bond could be broken by divorce for adultery, but not by divorce for other reasons. That in the picture of the covenant, man could break the bond, but in the true covenant, man cannot break it. That puny man could

truly break a bond that the sovereign God established. Rev. Hoeksema patiently showed the churches the inconsistencies.

He did more. Rev. Hoeksema gave us better exegesis for the pertinent passages. He showed that there were no contradictions between the various passages on marriage and divorce. He demonstrated that marriage is for life, and that only God breaks that bond through physical death.

This teaching has been a great blessing for the PRC—doctrinally and practically in our homes, schools, and churches. For the PRC to enter into a sister-church relationship that would put into jeopardy their stand on marriage would not only be foolhardy, it would be a despising of the work of the Spirit of truth who has given it to us.

Having said that, what must be the attitude of the PRC towards a church that faithfully maintains the truths of sovereign grace, that worships God reverently in spirit and in truth, and lives godly lives, but maintains the old position of the Reformation on marriage and divorce? One that is committed to the Westminster's position? A church that believes that Hoeksema stands with Calvin on the unconditional covenant governed by election, but is not convinced that Hoeksema's exegesis of the marriage passages is better than Calvin's?

The Protestant Reformed Churches must view such churches as faithful in their tradition, but as not having the benefit of the advances in doctrine that God has given us. This judgment of charity must not come with a smug air of superiority, "for who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). The PRC must recognize that there is a oneness in the truth with such a church. Because of this significant difference, a full sister-church relationship, with the accompany-


ing practical issue of free exchange of membership and ministers, is impossible. Yet it does not rule out a warm relationship of mutual love based on the oneness that exists in Christ in the truth.

In the areas of differences, both must view each other without suspicion. Mutual trust will grow as each witnesses the other's commitment to the Reformed faith. They must recognize that they are from two different traditions. Both must

look for ways that the other tradition has advanced beyond their own.

So, the question is not, Are those churches Protestant Reformed? Rather, are they fully committed to the Reformed faith? Do they preach sovereign, particular grace enthusiastically? Do they maintain those doctrines consistently in the doctrine of God's covenant of grace, and insist that the covenant is governed by election? If so, then the question must be

faced, are there practices or doctrines that would make it impossible to have a full sister relationship? The discovery of another church or denomination committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace and a covenant consistent with sovereign grace causes great excitement. Reformed believers, including Protestant Reformed believers, hope for some manifestation of unity with such a church.

... to be concluded. 

Letters

Anabaptistic World Flight?

I would like to respond to the comments of the Rev. Spriensma on voting that appeared in the February 1st issue of the *Standard Bearer*. The Rev. Spriensma states, "There are those who would take an anabaptistic position of world flight, and take no interest in the messy realm of politics. These men and women do not care to cast their votes. Shame on them."

I write as one Christian who does not vote. For the information of all those who wish to smear such as myself with the "anabaptistic world flight" label, I would like to demonstrate from Scripture (not philosophy or polls) why I do not vote. In Exodus 18:21 the qualifications for those who would be judges in Israel are listed as "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (cf. Deut. 1:13). A wise man is by definition one who keeps the commandments of God. And that, I submit, is the *only* question involved when one decides to vote or not to vote. The question is, "Is this man (yes, a woman not ruling applies equally in the civil as well as the ecclesiastical sphere) a God-fearing man, who shows by his testimony and life that he is a servant of Jesus Christ?" If the answer is no, then "shame on them" who use the power of the vote to help godless men obtain political office that enables them in the civil sphere to rule over Christ's church!

At bottom, every politician is one of two things. He is either a true servant of Jehovah who will make his decisions based on the principles of God's Word, or he is a servant of the Evil One. Only those holding to some sort of common grace would try to posit a third possibility. How can one be a loyal subject of King Jesus when he helps put into office men who say in their hearts, "let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3)?

Those Christians who vote, believing in some illusion that they are helping the church by voting for "the better candidate" (whatever that is, when one is talking about unbelievers) are closing their eyes to the hard reality that, as history winds down, "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse" (I Tim. 3:13), and that includes the American political process.

Finally, the Rev. Spriensma states that we are to "exercise our duty to vote." This may be right out of High School Civics 101, but it is hardly biblical reasoning. A duty is that which God commands His people in His Word. While it is true that civil rulers are the servants of God, as Romans 13 teaches, it is a whole other step to assert that if one has the *right* to help choose that man (ignoring the hard realities of how big money actually manufactures candidates) he

must help to choose that man. The only duties that God binds upon His people in the political realm is to be subject to the laws of the magistrate, to do what is good, to pay taxes, and to pray that the church may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. Scripture nowhere commands the vote. Further, our Lord warns about those in the church who teach for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:9).

So, in closing, I not only do not vote, I would submit that it is my duty *not* to vote for any man unless he fears God and keeps His commandments. I feel no shame and I can assure Rev. Spriensma I am no Anabaptist!

Mark Brooks
Sauk Village, Illinois

RESPONSE:

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Thank you, brother, for responding in writing to this very important topic. I do not presume to know your motives for voting or not voting. So I do not "smear" all who do not vote with "anabaptistic world flight." There might be many reasons, such as sickness, lack of information, inability.... If you will notice, I was only addressing those in the church who would take an anabaptistic position of world flight. Shame on them.

I think, however, that you do protest too loudly. If you are

merely exercising your Christian liberty in not voting because nowhere does the Bible give the explicit command to vote, that is your right. But I would ask, "Do you shake hands with your fellow believer in church?" The Bible does not command it. Rather we are told to "salute one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). That is a command given in a cultural situation. The idea is to express our Christian love towards one another in the church. In America, this is carried out with a warm handshake.

So also, in biblical times, there were no democracies. One did not have the luxury of choosing one's leaders. Therefore there is no command to vote. The people could not vote even if they wanted to. But even though the leaders were forced upon the people, Christians were called to honor, submit, support, and pray for them.

As citizens today, we in free countries are called by our leaders to help select those who govern us. But you have the right to exercise your Christian liberty not to do so. We can have this difference without "smearing" or resorting to the charge that those who vote "hold to some sort of common grace."

There are, I believe, two impor-

tant things that need to be addressed in your letter. First, there was a reference to "qualifications for those who would be judges in Israel," in the context of running for civil office today. Israel was a theocracy. Israel was God's peculiar people, God's church. Of course the qualifications for office, whether judge, prophet, priest, or king, would be that they were "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness." But one cannot compare civil leaders of the theocracy with civil leaders today. America (or, for that matter, any other modern nation today) is not God's nation, God's peculiar people, or the church! And the matter of women ruling is a matter that pertains to Christian women in the home and in the church, not in business or society.

America is a pluralistic community with leaders that are chosen from many different backgrounds and viewpoints. As Christians in that pluralistic community, we seek leaders that will allow for the church to carry on our calling and allow us to live in peace. In no way do those in political office rule in the sphere of Christ's church. God in His providence has placed us in this nation, and as citi-

zens of this nation we are corporately responsible for what the leaders of this nation do. And we have the privilege of participating in choosing who those leaders are. Therefore a duty.

Second, we need to address the question of who are the servants of Jehovah. Romans 13 does give civil authorities the lofty title of "ministers of God" (Rom. 13:4, 6). Cyrus is called by God His servant (Isaiah 45:1: "his anointed, whose right hand I have holden"). These men and women might be the most wicked and rebellious of the earth, yet God puts them into positions of authority. Does that mean that we have nothing to do with politics? Is there not a place for Daniels today to give good advice to wicked leaders, to be in positions of authority, and, yes, even for us to choose leaders who will be used by God for good and to restrain and be a terror to the evil (Rom. 13:4)? Do we not seek leaders who will fight the evil of abortion, the destruction of marriage, using the sword to bring God's justice to murderers and evil men? Shall we leave the selection of leaders to uncircumcised Philistines? Shame!

—Rev. Audred Spriensma 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Preparing for the Office of Deacon (1)

Desiring the Office

We have concluded our treatment of the work of the office of deacon—both the work that pertains

specifically to the office, and the work that deacons do in conjunction with the elders.

Perhaps some male readers, realizing more clearly what the deacons' work involves and understanding better why the office is necessary in the church of Christ, desire to serve in that office. Then the question arises, "What can I do

to prepare?" We devote several articles to an answer to this question.

Let it be understood at the outset that actively preparing to hold an office is no guarantee that God will ever call one to that office. More men prepare for the ministry by taking pre-seminary courses, or by going to seminary, than actually enter the ministry. And men

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

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have died who desired to serve as elders or deacons, but never did serve in those offices, for whatever reason.

One who actively prepares himself to hold office must do so in the conviction that if God never does call him to office, God still used his preparations to enable him better to serve God in the office of all believers. And one who actively prepares himself to hold office does so in order that, if God does ever call him to office, he may serve readily and without reservation, saying with Isaiah: "Here am I; send me" (Is. 6:8).



Asking the question "How do I prepare for office?" indicates that one has the desire for office. If he has no such desire, he would not bother himself with the question.

Sometimes we think suspiciously of one who desires the offices of elder and deacon. This is inconsistent of us, for we would not expect a man to go to seminary who did not desire the office of minister. So if we know that one desires to be an elder or deacon, we should not, without good cause, be suspicious of his motives and goals, but should encourage him to pursue his desire, subject to the Lord's guiding hand.

Scripture and the Reformed confessions speak of a proper desire on the part of godly men for the offices of the church, regardless of which office that might be.

I Timothy 3:1 says: "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." While the word "good" describes the work of the office, the text suggests that the desire for that office is also good. A desire for a good work is a good desire. It leads a man to exert himself to get that which he desires—this is the picture suggested by the Greek word translated "desire." The same word is used in Hebrews 11:16 to refer to the believing patriarchs who desired a better country: this desire led them to live as

pilgrims and strangers on earth, longing for heaven! Desiring office in the church, a man lives a certain way. This is good.

Commenting on this verse, John Calvin makes the same point.

Here a question arises: "Is it lawful, in any way, to desire the office of a bishop?" On the one hand, it appears to be highly improper for any one to anticipate by his wish, the calling of God, and yet Paul, while he censures a rash desire, seems to permit it to be desired with prudence and modesty. I reply, if ambition is condemned in other matters, much more severely ought it to be condemned in "the office of a bishop." But Paul speaks of a godly desire, by which holy men wish to employ that knowledge of doctrine which they possess for the edification of the Church.¹

Although I Timothy 3:1 speaks specifically of the office of bishop, or elder, what it says applies as well to the office of deacon. The work of the diaconate is a good work; the office of the diaconate is God's institution in the church; to desire that office and its work in a proper way is good.

Article 31 of the Belgic Confession presupposes that a man desires office—any of the three special offices—when it says:

We believe that the ministers of God's Word, and the elders and deacons, ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election by the church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teacheth. Therefore every one must take heed not to intrude himself by indecent means, but is bound to wait till it shall please God to call him, that he may have testimony of his calling and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord.

None would intrude by indecent means, and none need the reminder to wait until it pleases God to call him, except those who desire the office, regardless of the reason.



As Calvin intimated in the quote above, not the desire as such, but the *reason* for the desire is either proper or improper, and makes one's desire either good or bad.

Bad reasons to desire an office include a desire to have influence and power over others; a desire to cause things to go one's own way; a desire to correct what one thinks the officebearers have done wrong in the past; and a desire for personal honor and glory. More specifically, bad reasons to desire the office of deacon include the desire to be sure that this member gets more help or that that member gets less help from the deacons; to have some say in the general finances of the church, trying to see that one's own preferred causes get support; or any other desire to gain a personal advantage from holding the office.

All of these reasons boil down to pride, which leads one to seek oneself.

The man who desires to hold office in the church must guard against such reasons. He must pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24, applying it specifically to his desire for office: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The proper, godly reason for desiring to hold office is that one seeks to serve God by doing the work of the church, and to serve the church by doing the work of God. The proper, godly reason for desiring the office of deacon is that one has a heart of compassion for the poor and needy of the church, and desires to assist them by giving good gifts and by bringing them comforting words from Scripture.

The heart from which such a reason will flow is a godly, humble heart, which desires to emulate the example that Jesus set. It understands the words of Jesus in Matthew 20:26-27: "but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever

will be chief among you, let him be your servant." It is a heart renewed and sanctified by the grace of God.

Possessing such a heart, and examining the thoughts and intents of one's heart to be sure that they are thoughts of love for God and His people, one properly desires the work of the offices in the church.



Not only the reasons for the desire, but also the *manner in which one expresses his desire*, can be proper or improper. To this the Belgic Confession alludes, when it says that "every one must take heed not to intrude himself by indecent means."

"Indecent means" include usurping the office—simply taking it, assuming one has the right to function in it. King Uzziah did this to the priesthood, and was smitten by God with leprosy as a judgment upon him (II Chron. 26:16-21).

"Indecent means" include any attempt to manipulate the election process. The man must wait until God calls him, so that he can have the assurance that his call is of God. When God has truly called a man, He will cause that man to be put into office, apart from any attempt on the part of that man to try to get into office.

So may one suggest his own name to the council for nomination? Article 22 of our Church Order allows for the council "to give the members an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons" for the offices, which our councils often do in the fall of the year by means of a bulletin announcement. May a man direct attention to himself? Or, if he is nominated, may he encourage others to vote for him? (The question applies as much to pastors, with regard to being on trios and getting calls, as it applies to elders and deacons being nominated and elected).

I suggest that no man ought do these things. Even if a man is truly

convinced in his heart that his reasons for desiring office are right, and that the church has need of a godly man of his sort in office, he ought not. From an earthly viewpoint, his doing so might make people question his motives, the result of which would be that he is emphatically *not* considered for office. But the real reason why no man ought do these things is not merely earthly: such a man is not waiting for God to call him. For one to suggest his own name, or to encourage others to vote for him, are manipulation attempts—not only attempts to manipulate men, but attempts to manipulate God. Our sovereign God, who knows the hearts of men, and who knows the needs of His church, will be sure to do right; He will put into office the right man at the right time! And if He has called you or me, who have waited long and prayed often for an office in which to serve, He will answer our prayers *apart from* our attempts to bring the answer to pass.

I do not mean to suggest that a man who desires office may never express that desire at all. He may. Perhaps he will be asked, either by his officebearers or by other members of the church, if he desires office in the church. He may answer truthfully. Perhaps this desire weighs on his heart, and he wants to discuss it with another person, to deal with it rightly. Let him seek out a godly man in the church, possibly even the pastor or an elder, to whom he can confide this desire. These are not manipulation attempts.

But when the council informs the congregation that it is nominating men for office, and solicits the congregation's input, no man should then draw attention to himself.

How, properly, does one express his desire for office?

First, not so much by telling certain men, but by telling God in prayer.


God knows the godly desire of our hearts, of course; He created

those desires, and caused us to desire them. We do not speak to God in prayer of our desires in order to inform Him of them. Rather, we tell God our desires in order to seek His grace. We need His grace to prepare us more to hold the office to which He might call us. We need His grace to submit to His will. If in fact what we desire is not His desire, we need grace to say, "Thy will be done." If He does desire us to serve, we need grace to wait patiently on Him to put us into office in His time and in His way. His time might be farther in the future than our time. His way might involve personal trials that we must endure in faith and obedience, as a means to draw the church's attention to us and our qualifications.

Having prayed, one expresses his desire for office by working. The old Latin expression *Ora et Labora*, Pray and Work, applies here too. Not the work of manipulating, so that our desires come to pass. But the work of devoting oneself to the service of the church in any way possible, the work of fighting sin and living godly in one's own personal and family life, the work of reading and studying. We will develop this point in future articles, God willing.



As I indicated in the beginning, praying and working with a view to holding office is no guarantee that one will ever hold that office.

Nevertheless, in those whom God from eternity appointed to hold office and whom He in time is raising up for that purpose, such desire and preparation for office is His means to bring them to the church's attention as suitable men, and to cause the church to call them. 

1. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1989 reprint), p. 74.

Dispensational Eschatology (2)

Recent Events and the Rise of Dispensationalism

Of all the factors that have affected the rise of dispensationalism, one of the chief is the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. After years of predicting that this would happen, dispensationalists became euphoric when it did. In the mind of a dispensationalist, the establishment of Israel as a nation in 1948 was proof to the world that dispensational eschatology is correct. Then about twenty years later, when the Israelis were victorious in battle, taking control of Jerusalem and greatly expanding their borders, dispensationalists proclaimed this to be another great victory for dispensationalism. Since dispensationalists take prophetic passages concerning Israel to be references to the modern Israelis, any victory the Israelis obtain is said to be a fulfillment of prophecy, and thus also a vindication for the dispensational view of how to interpret prophecy. Victories for Israelis are viewed as victories for dispensationalists. Thus it is not surprising that the rise of the nation of Israel has contributed to a corresponding rise in the popularity of dispensationalism.

The present-day nation of Israel is not the only nation the dispensationalists find in Scripture. They also claim to find specific references to Iraq, Russia, China, and other nations of the modern-day world. But central to much of dispensational thinking today is the thought that all Christians should be supporting Israel, and that those who are doing so are actually helping to fulfill the prophecies of Scripture.

So as we continue this introductory overview of dispensationalism, let us begin by considering some of the history behind the movement to restore the Jews to the land of Palestine.

Helping the Jews Return to Palestine:

An Idea with a Long History

As virtually everyone knows, the Nazi persecution of the Jews became the occasion for multitudes of Jews to move to Palestine. But the idea that the Jews should return to their ancient homeland goes back a lot farther than that. For centuries there have been those who have argued for this restoration, with especially two arguments being used to support it:

1. The Bible says that this is God's will.

2. This would be advantageous from an economic and imperial point of view.¹

Especially since the days of the

Puritans, there have been many who have held that the restoration of the Jews to Palestine is something God has promised. Although Reformed theologians since the time of the Protestant Reformation have adhered to the position that there is only one people of God that has been gathered throughout history, many Puritans insisted that God promised the blood descendants of Jacob that they would one day be converted to Christianity, and would return to Palestine to become a glorious nation. Puritans in America, even while viewing America itself to be a kind of "New Jerusalem," zealously maintained that God's promise to gather Israel in the latter days would be fulfilled in a future restoration of the Jews to their ancient land. Increase Mather, one of the leading Puritans of the seventeenth century, taught that the Jews would one day convert to Christ, "be brought into their own land again," and become "the most glorious nation of the whole world."² Many have followed in this belief, arguing for the restoration of Israel from a religious perspective.

But there has also been a long history of supporting this restoration from an imperial-economic perspective. Of the men who have become heads of state, Napoleon Bonaparte is said to have been the first to have proposed the restoration of the Jews to Palestine.³ Especially since his days, there have

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

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been numerous men who have supported this idea from economic and imperial motives. Many have concluded that whoever would help the Jews return to Palestine will receive the following reward for their efforts:

1. They would have a close ally in the Middle East, which would provide them a sphere of influence in this vital region and keep open for them the route of trade to the East.

2. They would acquire some very rich and influential friends in the Jews, who could likely be persuaded to part with some of their fortune and to use their worldwide influence for the advantage of the nation that not only helped them return to their ancient homeland, but also protected them once they were there.

This idea that restoring the Jews to Palestine would result in earthly power and riches for the nation that promoted it, and the position that God promised such a restoration to the Jews, have both been around for a long time. That there is a relation between these two, one may well suspect. Many, while lusting for earthly power and dominion, have sought to camouflage their lust by professing that their goal is simply to do the will of God. As to what may have been the goal of this or that individual, whether in the past or in our own day, only the Lord knows. But the love of money, which is the root of all evil, must somehow be at the bottom of much of the false prophesying today concerning the earthly nation of Israel.

Keeping this matter in mind, let us turn now to consider three recent events, and how dispensationalists have capitalized on them to promote their views.

The Restoration of Israel in Palestine (1948)

In 1917, some thirty years before Israel was declared to be a nation, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, in which they prom-

ised to help bring about "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."⁴ Seeing this move to be advantageous from an economic and imperial point of view, Great Britain set out to make Israel a Jewish commonwealth within the British Empire. Yet many proclaimed this event to be a clear indication that God was about to fulfill some of His promises to Israel—promises that they claimed God had left unfulfilled for centuries.

The Balfour Declaration spoke of the Jews having a home in Palestine, but it did not say anything about their becoming a state. Prior to their being declared a state in 1948, there was debate among dispensationalists as to whether Israel would become a nation before Christ returned or after Christ returned, and as to whether Israel would become a nation while still in unbelief or not until after they had turned to Christ. Once unbelieving Israel actually became a state, the debate of course was over. From then on, dispensationalists have commonly agreed that Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones predicted a restoration of Israel to their homeland before the return of Christ—a restoration that Ezekiel supposedly predicted to be a physical restoration in unbelief, with a spiritual restoration to follow.

This physical restoration in 1948, however, was viewed as being incomplete. The borders of Israel were far from what God had promised them—they did not yet possess the entire city of Jerusalem, and the Mosque of Omar sat where the temple was supposed to be. Thus there clearly was important work to be done before Christ could descend upon the Mount of Olives and enter the temple in Jerusalem.⁵

Israel Victorious in the Six-Day War (1967)

In June of 1967, in what is known as the Six-Day War, Israel fought against the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and suc-

ceeded in taking control of Jerusalem as well as of large tracts of Arab land. After this victory, Israel occupied the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, which made the country more than three times its original size.

Dispensationalists responded to this with exuberance. Dr. L. Nelson Bell, a Presbyterian medical missionary to China, executive editor of *Christianity Today*, and father-in-law to Billy Graham, upon whom he is said to have had great influence, had this to say of this Israeli victory:

That for the first time in more than 2,000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives a student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible.⁶

Dallas Seminary's John F. Walvoord, one of the most influential dispensational theologians of the twentieth century, called the conquest of Jerusalem "one of the most remarkable fulfillments of

1. Barbara W. Tuchman sets forth the long history of using these arguments to support the return of the Jews to Palestine. She makes reference to the two arguments in the title of her book, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).

2. Quoted in Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 183. The quote is from one of the first Puritan works devoted to the subject of the return of the Jews to Palestine, and entitled *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation Explained and Applied* (1669).

3. Tuchman, pp. 162-164.

4. Quoted in Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 156.

5. Ibid., pp. 156-179.

6. Quoted in Timothy P. Weber, p. 184.

biblical prophecy since the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70."⁷

Dispensationalists took advantage of the Six-Day War to press their idea that the final events of this age were now underway and could not be stopped. In addition, they found in this war at least a partial fulfillment of God's promise that the times of the Gentiles would come to an end:

And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

Dispensationalists boasted that this event proved them to be correct, and argued that people should now look to the leading dispensationalists to tell them what was going to happen next. In their mind this victory was clear proof that soon Jerusalem would no longer be trodden down of the Gentiles, and that the events leading up to the second coming of Christ were now quickly going to take place.

It was in 1970, three years after this Israeli victory, that Hal Lindsey published his *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This best seller, which marked the beginning of a dramatic rise in the sale of dispensational works, cited the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War as a clear proof that the dispensational method of interpreting prophecy was correct. This Israeli victory in Jerusalem, along with the booming sales of dispensational works, made dispensationalists extremely confident that multitudes were now ready to listen to them.⁸

Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait (1990)

During the next two decades, from 1970 to 1990, dispensationalists continued to make adjustments to their positions in response to current events. During the years of the Cold War, dispensationalists repeatedly spoke of the Soviet Union as the number one enemy

of Israel in the last days. But as the Soviet Union began to collapse, they switched their emphasis to the New World Order, which they maintained was the promised one-world government that was soon going to form. Furthermore, they began to take more notice of the rise of Islam and the struggle for oil. Partly in response to the oil crisis of 1973, John Walvoord published his best-selling work *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East*.⁹

As one might expect, things really took off for the dispensationalists when the United States got involved in a war in the Middle East. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the United States' response to this, resulted in a sharp rise in the popularity of dispensational eschatology:

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 came at just the right time. In one sense, the Persian Gulf War put dispensationalists back in business. Zondervan Publishing Company reported an eight percent increase in the sales of the venerable *Late Great Planet Earth*, even though the 1970 book reflected a world much different from the one in 1990. According to Bantam Books, its mass-market edition of Grant Jeffrey's *Armageddon – Appointment with Destiny* was its "hottest single religious title" in the fall of 1990. John F. Walvoord's rather stodgy *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* had a surge in sales, as did his updated and reissued *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*. In fact, after decades of popularity in dispensationalist circles, Walvoord suddenly found himself the center of attention in the secular media. He appeared on CNN, CBN, and CBS and gave interviews on sixty-five radio stations on the prophetic significance of the Gulf War. Prophecy teachers preached to full auditoriums about the prophetic significance of the war. Newspapers across the country reported on the growing interest in Bible prophecy, with the *New York Times* concluding in 1991 that it was at "fever pitch."¹⁰

Since Iraq was the opponent in this Gulf War, the dispensationalists rapidly promoted the idea that the Babylon mentioned in the book of Revelation was actually a reference to modern-day Iraq.

This marked a change in dispensational eschatology. For years dispensationalists had taken Babylon symbolically to mean the Antichristian empire and the union of false religions. The following quote is taken from *The New Scofield Reference Bible*:

There are two forms which Babylon is to have in the end-time: political Babylon (Rev. 17:8-17) and ecclesiastical Babylon (Rev. 17:1-7, 18; 18:1-24). Political Babylon is the beast's confederate empire, the last form of Gentile world dominion. Ecclesiastical Babylon is all apostate Christendom, in which the Papacy will undoubtedly be prominent; it may very well be that this union will embrace all the religions of the world. Although some hold to a literal rebuilding of the city of Babylon...the evidence seems to point to the symbolic use of the name here.... Ecclesiastical Babylon is the "great harlot" (Rev. 17:1) and is to be destroyed by political Babylon.¹¹

But when Iraq invaded Kuwait, the dispensationalists decided to adopt a "literal" interpretation. Babylon was now said to be a reference to Iraq, seeing as Iraq was located where Babylon once stood. And for a while dispensationalists were able to sell books promoting the idea that Saddam Hussein, by rebuilding Iraq, was going to fulfill prophecy.¹²


Although Saddam's regime has fallen, the idea that Babylon is a reference to Iraq still remains. Today it is maintained that Iraq will soon become the center of a world religion, and that for a time the coming Antichrist will find it beneficial to make use of this apostate religious body, and will even make Iraq to be the eastern capital of his worldwide empire.¹³

So now dispensationalists have a carnal interpretation of Babylon to go with a carnal interpretation of Israel. Such carnal interpretations are common when one interprets Scripture in the light of current events, rather than current events in the light of Scripture.

But take a step back now, and consider where such an interpretation of Scripture would inevitably lead. If the earthly nation of Israel is said to be God's special people, and if Israeli victories are said to prove the validity of the Bible, then one would naturally conclude that everyone should support the Israeli cause, regardless of what this may mean in terms of a future world war. So what if tensions rise in

the Middle East? Who cares about international law and the rights of the Palestinians? If God has promised Israel the whole land, then they have every right to take it, and to use whatever force is necessary to do so. And if this means that World War III breaks out, well, that is what God said is going to happen, so it cannot be avoided. And as for believers today, they need not fear this world war, because they will be raptured into heaven before it takes place.

This kind of thinking is very common today, and many are becoming aware of it. When you add to this the dispensational goal of rebuilding the Jewish temple in Jerusalem where an Islamic

mosque presently stands, it is easy to understand why dispensational thinking is becoming increasingly feared in the secular world. But more on that subject, Lord willing, next time. 

7. Ibid.

8. Weber, pp. 179-186.

9. Ibid., pp. 199-212.

10. Ibid., p. 208.

11. From the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, quoted in Weber, p. 209.

12. Weber, pp. 209-212.

13. John F. Walvoord with Mark Hitchcock, *Armageddon, Oil and Terror: What the Bible Says About the Future of America, the Middle East, and the End of Western Civilization* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007), pp. 135-148.

Decency and Order

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Suspension and Deposition of Officebearers (3)

"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.

Suspension and Deposition of Ministers

Article 79 distinguishes between the suspension and deposition of elders and deacons on the one hand, and ministers on the other hand. Elders and deacons may be both sus-

pended and deposed by their consistories, with the concurrence of a neighboring consistory. Ministers, however, may only be suspended. Before the consistory may proceed to the deposition of its minister, it must obtain the approval of the classis and the concurrence of the delegates *ad examina* of the synod. Only after the approval of the classis and the delegates *ad examina* has been obtained may the consistory formally depose the minister from office in the church of Christ.

This is not because a consistory

does not inherently have the right to depose its minister, whereas it does have the right to depose any of its elders or deacons. It does have this inherent right. For this reason, the early church orders prescribed that consistories could and should both suspend and depose also the ministers when necessary. The Convent of Wesel, 1568, prescribed that ministers who "polluted themselves with some public crime or misbehavior" should be "removed from office with shame and dishonor without waiting for the judgment of the classis."

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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However, already the Synod of Embden, 1571, made the distinction between the deposition of ministers and the deposition of elders and deacons.

If ministers of the Word, elders, or deacons have committed a public sin that brings shame and slander to the congregation or one that should be punished by the power of the government: elders and deacons shall immediately be deposed from their office by the authority of the consistory, but the ministers of the Word shall be suspended from their office for a time. Whether they shall be completely deposed from office shall be decided by the classis, and if they are not satisfied with that decision, they shall appeal to the Provincial or General Synod.

The stipulation of Embden that required the involvement of the classis in a minister's deposition was adhered to in subsequent church orders produced in the Dutch Reformed churches, including the redaction of the church order approved by the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19.

When ministers, elders or deacons commit a public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or is punishable by the authorities, the elders and deacons shall immediately be deposed from office, but the ministers shall be suspended. Whether they shall be completely deposed from office shall be up to the judgment of the classis.

Our Article 79 is basically that of Dordt, 1618-19, with the addition of "the advice of the delegates of the synod mentioned in Article 11." These delegates are the synodical delegates, the delegates *ad examina*.

The procedure in the case of a minister, therefore, is that his own consistory takes a decision to suspend him from his office on account of some public, gross sin. (It should be noted that emeriti ministers are also subject to suspension and deposition. Although they do not actively perform the duties of the office, they

nevertheless continue to hold the office—Church Order, Article 13.) Having taken the decision to suspend, the consistory seeks the advice of a neighboring consistory within its classis. In a joint meeting of the two consistories, the details of the case are laid out before the neighboring consistory, after which it meets in order to approve or disapprove the decision the consistory has taken. If it concurs, the minister is suspended from his office. Suspension means that although he retains the office itself, he is forbidden to function in the office. He may not preach, administer the sacraments, teach catechism, lead consistory and council meetings, serve as a delegate to the broader assemblies, or perform any of the other duties that belong to the office. If the neighboring consistory does not agree with the decision to suspend the minister from his office, the matter must be presented to the classis for adjudication.

After the minister has been suspended, the consistory must seek the approval of the classis before it proceeds to his deposition from office. Ordinarily in closed session, the classis will consider the material of the case and render its judgment concerning the minister's deposition from office. Additionally, the delegates *ad examina* must concur with the decision of the consistory and classis. Only after a consistory has received the concurrence both of the classis and of the synodical deputies may it proceed to the minister's deposition from office. In case of a difference between the consistory and the classis, or between the classis and the synodical deputies, the matter must be brought to synod for final resolution.

Why the Difference in Procedure?

Why the difference in the procedure for deposition between elders and deacons, on the one hand, and ministers, on the other hand? The difference is not that the office of the ministry is higher or holier.

It is not that at all. But there are at least two reasons why deposition of ministers requires classical and synodical approval.

The first reason is that in the case of the minister a man's livelihood is at stake. The minister devotes himself full time to the work of the ministry. His entire support comes as a result of his devotion to the work of his office. Elders and deacons do not ordinarily derive their livelihood from the work of their offices. They are usually gainfully employed in some secular vocation. Because the minister's livelihood is at stake, it is proper that an additional safeguard be introduced in order to prevent any wrongful dismissal from office.

A second reason for the involvement of classis and synod in the case of the deposition of ministers is that in a unique way ministers belong to the churches in common, not just to the local congregation that they are serving at the time. The churches in common approve their entrance into the ministry. They exercise their office throughout the churches of the denomination, often preaching and administering the sacraments in other churches. They are eligible to be called and to serve in the other churches of the denomination. For this reason, the churches in common ought rightfully to be involved in the process that ends in removing a man from the office of the ministry.

Because a minister belongs in a unique way to the entire denomination, the churches must all be informed of a minister's deposition from office. In the case of elders and deacons, an announcement is made only in the congregation in which they serve. In the case of ministers, an announcement must be made in all the congregations of the denomination, as well as the sister churches, since he was eligible for a call also in the sister churches.

It should be noted that during his suspension, a minister ought to continue to receive his salary. But when he is deposed, the financial

obligation of the church ceases, including salary, housing, and emeritus benefits.

Possibility of Reinstatement

The question arises whether a minister who has been deposed from office may be reinstated. May a minister who has been deposed ever be permitted to serve in the office again? Or, having been deposed, is he necessarily for the rest of his life barred from serving in the office?

This question has been faced by the Reformed churches in the past.

Whether the minister of the Word and the elders and deacons who have been deposed should be readmitted to their office after they have satisfied the church by their penitence and have again been chosen: as regards the elders and deacons, that shall lie in the discretion and judgment of the consistory; but as far as the ministers of the Word are concerned, the classis shall judge (Synod of Embden, 1571).

Whether minister, elders, and deacons who have been deposed may be readmitted after they have satisfied the churches with penitence and again have been elected: as far as the elders and deacons are concerned the consistory shall decide, but as far as ministers are concerned this shall be decided by the classis (Synod of Dordt, 1578).

To the Synod of Middelburg, 1581, the question was put: "Whether deposed ministers, elders and deacons, if they by their penitence have satisfied the congregation, may again be chosen?" Undoubtedly in consideration of what the Synods of Embden and Dordt had decided, the Synod of Middelburg responded: "Answer: As far as the elders and deacons are concerned it shall be left to the judgment of the consistory. But as far as ministers are concerned, this shall be decided by the classical gathering."

The church order authorities, for the most part, concur on the possi-

bility of a minister's reinstatement. The Rev. K. DeGier, in his *Explanation of the Church Order of Dordt in Questions and Answers*, in the questions and answers relating to Articles 79 and 80, writes the following:

14. Does the Church Order mention the possibility of reinstating a deposed minister? No, not the Church Order, but the preceding synods did.

15. What were the judgments of these synods about this? Restoration into office of deposed ministers may not take place except with the greatest caution. Foreknowledge and approbation of the deputation according to Article 49 (synodical deputies, R.C.) are required.

16. What two distinctions were made in France, Scotland and Holland in regard to the deposition of ministers? a. Deposition on account of minor offensive sins (*deposition minor*). After repentance and confession of guilt by the minister, the Classis could pronounce him eligible for a call to another congregation. b. Deposition on account of scandalous sins (manslaughter, adultery, political offences, etc., *deposition major*) was irrevocable.

17. What may be done by the Classis when a request is made for reinstatement (of a minister) into office? It must decide whether or not he is eligible for call. After he is called by a congregation, he may be reinstated into office.

In *The Church Order Commentary*, Van Dellen and Monsma address the issue of reinstatement after deposition.

Regarding deposed Ministers Synod of 1918, Article 52 decided that re-instatement must be effected by the Classis which acted in the deposition. The Holland Synod of Groningen, 1927, decided that a deposed Minister is not to be re-instated by Classis without the knowledge and approval of the Particular Synod. It might be well if our decision of 1918 were amended so that no deposed Minister can be re-instated without the approval of the syn-

odical delegates according to Article 11.

The Holland Synod of 1927 also decided that it would not be advisable to make general stipulations as to when a deposed Minister should be re-instated. Each case should be judged on its own merits. Classis should consider the question why the deposition took place, whether true penitence be evident, whether reconciliation was made and whether the deposed brother will be able to labor to the edification of the Church of God and without detriment to the holy character of the Church and the glory of God. No doubt this is wise counsel....

It is necessary that the Churches act with great prudence, especially when sins have been committed which indicate a weakness of will-power, steadfastness of character, and complete consecration, such as adultery and drunkenness (p. 329f.).

In his commentary on the Church Order, W.W.J. Van Oene, minister and theological professor in the Canadian Reformed Churches writes:

As an elder or a deacon can be made a candidate for office again, so a deposed minister might again be declared eligible for call after a period of time, when things have calmed down and he has proved his repentance by an exemplary conduct. It will not happen very often that this is done, but it should not be deemed impossible or impermissible. We can see no valid reason why it should be prevented or forbidden. In God's Word we also read of officebearers who fell into serious and grievous sins but who were maintained by the Lord in the office He had given them (p. 328).


A number of Reformed churches have incorporated an article concerning reinstatement in their church orders.

Article 80b. Restoration in office of deposed ministers may only take place with the greatest carefulness and the approval of the synod (*Church Order of the Free*

Reformed Church of North America).

Article 84: Reinstatement to Office. Persons who have been suspended or deposed from office may be reinstated if they give sufficient evidence of repentance and if the church judges that they are able to serve effectively (*Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America*).

The decisions of the past synods of the Dutch Reformed Churches and the practice in various churches of Dutch Reformed extraction indicate the possibility of reinstatement of ministers who have been deposed from office. As has been noted, this will be a rare occurrence. It may be done only with the approval of the classis that concurred in his deposition, along with the approval of the synodical deputies. It may be done only

when a man clearly demonstrates true repentance over the sin(s) that occasioned his deposition. And it may be done only when, in the judgment of all concerned, he will be able to function effectively, for the edification of the church. Not the desires of a particular man, or group of men even, must carry the day. But what must carry the day is the welfare of the church and churches as a whole. 

Translated Treasures

Not Anabaptist but Reformed*

By Rev. H. Danhof and Rev. H. Hoeksema

Chapter III. Calvin and Kuyper On Common Grace (1)

As Rev. Van Baalen next proceeds to judge our view in the light of Reformed theology, he says first of all that he will limit himself to Reformed theologians of the last half century. The reason that he gives for this is that we are dealing here “with an immense field.” Now if this should mean that the field of Reformed theology as such is immense, then that can be relatively agreed upon. But we do not see the sense of these words in this connection. The author clearly wants to give the impression that before half a century ago there was already so much written about common grace that it would be impossible to get through it if one

would begin to draw this doctrine up out of Reformed theology. This is all new to us. And if it is truly the conviction of Rev. Van Baalen that there are still a whole bunch of little flowers to be plucked in this immense field in support of the doctrine of common grace, then he could really do a service to Reformed theology, which no one has yet done, and we would ask that he get to work. Kuyper laments the fact that this doctrine was so poorly developed by Reformed theology. And he went all the way back to Calvin.

Therefore what Rev. Van Baalen unearths from Reformed theology of the last half century is almost not worth the trouble, except of course for Kuyper and Bavinck. Surely even brother Van Baalen does not concur with Hodge’s view. The quotation from Gravemeyer is preposterous. And what Rev. Van Baalen cites from Van Andel does not even relate to the present question among us. We deny neither the longsuffering of God nor the glimmerings of natural light. And the fact that Rev. Van Baalen cites

these passages demonstrates that, although he has certainly searched diligently, he has been able to find only very little on common grace outside of Kuyper and Bavinck.

Then Rev. Van Baalen again begins to attack us over what we wrote against Dr. Janssen. This continually recurring phenomenon is typical. “*Ex ungue leonem*”: From the claw one knows the lion. Rev. Van Baalen is of the opinion that we have dragged Dr. Janssen’s good name through the mud. We disagree with the brother on that point as well. We continue to be of the opinion that we have done the churches a service by calling their attention to the dangerous instruction of Dr. Janssen. Rev. Van Baalen should be thankful for that. He has, however, not one word of appreciation for us. He condemns everything we have done. And thereby he also condemns the Church. It is simply absurd to assume that Rev. Hoeksema, who has not even once served on the Janssen committee at Synod, could alone have effected Dr. Janssen’s deposition and our churches’ con-

* 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. Previous article in this series: February 15, 2008, p. 223.

demnation of his teaching as un-Reformed. Rev. Van Baalen, who certainly has the right to protest a synodical decision, here gives the whole Church a slap in the face.

But this now aside, we ask, on what basis does he claim that we have dragged Dr. Janssen's good name through the mud in this context? Simply on the fact that we wrote, "One cannot but be speechless at the audacity of the claim that the doctrine of common grace is one of the most prominent doctrines that Calvin distinguished." We still hold to this position, and in a moment we will also show the reason. But we also want to add here that we are speechless at the way brother Van Baalen argues in this connection: We drag Dr. Janssen's good name in the mud here, and we should not write like that. Why not (according to Van Baalen)? Because in the claim that the doctrine of common grace is one of Calvin's most prominent doctrines, Dr. Janssen has simply followed Dr. Kuyper and quoted Dr. Bavinck. Therefore, we should not say that the claim was audacious and that we were speechless! Well then, brother, here is our explanation. This time we have purposely scoured Calvin. We have read over his *Institutes*, and on that basis we have come to the conviction that Dr. Janssen's claim mentioned above was audacious. And now we want to demonstrate that further.

It would be worth the trouble to produce a separate brochure on the question what Calvin actually taught about common grace. Determining what Calvin taught is not all that easy, especially taking into consideration that the meaning attached to a specific term at a certain time is sometimes entirely different from the meaning given to a term later on. Still, we must attempt to state briefly what his view is in all this. It is our conviction that, with regard to the essential point, Calvin's view is fundamentally different from that of

Kuyper. The difference comes down to this: Calvin as well as Kuyper and Bavinck teach that God gives good gifts to all men in this life. We agree with this. Gifts of understanding and reason, of artistic talent and sense, of rain and sunshine, of money and goods, houses and fields, love and merriment are all good gifts of God. God is good and His gifts are always good. He always treats all His creatures well. But the great difference lies in this, that Calvin always holds to the position that natural man with all his gifts can never will or do good before God, but always remains wicked, whereas Kuyper supposes that natural man by the power of common grace is in a condition that is inclined unto good. Calvin does also teach, as we shall soon see, that the fact that natural man does not always fall into the most dreadful sins is to be attributed to a restraint of sin by God. We believe that we have found another explanation for this phenomenon in the organic development of things. But Calvin never permits any good to come forth from that restraint. Kuyper does. Let us try to make this clear with quotations from both writers.

Already in his Dedication to the King of France (in the *Institutes**) Calvin wrote: "For what is more consistent with faith than to acknowledge ourselves naked of all virtue, that we may be clothed by God; empty of all good, that we may be filled by him; slaves to sin, that we may be liberated by him; blind, that we may be enlightened by him; lame, that we may be guided; weak, that we may be supported by him; to divest ourselves of all ground of glorying, that he alone may be eminently glorious, and that we may glory in him? When we advance these and similar sentiments, they interrupt us with complaints *that this is the way to overturn, I know not what blind light of nature, pretended preparations, free will and works merito-*

rious of eternal salvation, together with all their supererogations."¹ Especially this last part is significant. One may hear the same complaint against the total depravity of natural man also in our day.

Concerning the natural knowledge of God in the sinner, Calvin writes: "That seed, which it is impossible to eradicate, a sense of the existence of a Deity, yet remains; *but so corrupted as to produce only the worst of fruits.*" And then: "Yet this is a further proof of what I now contend for, that an idea of God is naturally engraved on the hearts of men, since necessity extorts a confession of it, even from reprobates themselves. In the moment of tranquility, they facetiously mock the Divine Being, and with loquacious impertinence derogate from his power. But if any despair oppress them, it stimulates them to seek him, and dictates concise prayers, which prove that they are not altogether ignorant of God, but that what ought to have appeared before had been suppressed by obstinacy."² The short summary of all this is that there is a knowledge of God engraved in natural man, which, however, never produces anything in him but exceedingly wicked fruits. He is not thereby induced to honor God, but only to make use of Him as his instrument in times of need and anguish. It needs no explanation that this is something entirely different from that which Dr. Janssen wished to force upon us, who wanted to put us above Scripture with this natural knowledge of God.

Concerning this natural understanding over against the general revelation of God in nature and in history, Calvin writes, "But, notwithstanding the clear representations

* Translator's note: The authors use the Dutch translation of Corsmanus. I have inserted that of John Allen.

1. Calvin, *Institutes*, Dedication, pp. 23-24.

2. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.4.4.

given by God in the mirror of his works, both of himself and of his everlasting dominion, such is our stupidity, that, always inattentive to these obvious testimonies, we derive no advantage from them."³


And concerning the philosophies of the heathen world, he writes, "In proportion to the vigour of his natural genius, and the polish acquired by art and science, each of them seemed to give the more specious colouring to his own opinion; but, on a close inspection, you will find them all fading colours."⁴

And once again concerning general revelation, he writes, "Vain, therefore, is the light afforded us in the formation of the world to illustrate the glory of its Author, which, though its rays be diffused all around us, is insufficient to conduct us into the right way. Some sparks, indeed, are kindled, but smothered before they have emitted any great degree of light."⁵ This language is in agreement with our Reformed confessions. But we [i.e., the CRC] have by no means followed this route with our doctrine of common grace. On the contrary, we have so fanned those sparks that they are spreading a blaze of light in the enlightened world around them in which even the believer may bathe himself! It is true that Dr. Kuyper has not dared to follow this through consistently. But those who, apart from common grace, do

not need much of Kuyper, who abhor and hate the antithesis, and want to build almost entirely on his common grace, surely do this. Thus, we are led into the midst of the world. And so also Dr. Janssen arrives at his notion that man naturally seeks after truth.

In *Institutes* II.2.12-17, Calvin deals with the natural gifts that remain in man after the Fall. It would require too much space to copy this entire passage here. We will reproduce the thought and cite the sharpest sections. One must also understand that Calvin does not speak of these natural gifts as one of his most prominent doctrines. He never does this. He treats them in connection with the depravity of man, and among them he dedicates a few paragraphs to the natural gifts. He begins by saying, "And, indeed, I much approve of that common observation which has been borrowed from Augustine, that the natural talents in man have been corrupted by sin, but that of the supernatural ones he has been wholly deprived." Among these last, supernatural gifts, Calvin then names the love of God, the love of the neighbor, and the exercise of holiness and righteousness. He says that these were destroyed in man by sin. Nevertheless, there have remained in man a few natural gifts of the understanding and will. But even natural rea-

son has been so corrupted that it seems to be in unsightly ruins.

Further, Calvin then deals with a few things that are brought about by these natural gifts, such as civil justice, beautiful works of art, perception and reasoning. And he attributes all those gifts to the Holy Spirit, who distributes them to everyone as He wills. He even calls this something in which we have to recognize God's particular grace; particular not in the same sense that we now use that word, but in the sense of distinction. For there are indeed also men who are deprived of these gifts, such as those who are insane. And he concludes this consideration by saying, "For the sentiment of Augustine...is strictly true—that as the gratuitous or supernatural gifts were taken away from man after the fall, so these natural ones which remained have been corrupted; *not that they can be defiled in themselves as proceeding from God, but because they have ceased to be pure to polluted man, so that he can obtain no praise from them.*" Take notice also that here again is the same thought. Man does receive good gifts from God. But they are unclean to him. He pollutes them. And this pertains to the natural gifts. 

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3. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.11.
 4. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.12.
 5. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.5.14.

Book Reviews



What the Bible Teaches About Marriage. Anthony Selvaggio. Evangelical Press. 2007. Pp. 240, paperback. \$14.99. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper].

The cover of this book contains a picture of a young couple in a Volkswagen van, on the front of which hangs a sign: "Just Married."

It appears at first glance that the woman is in the driver's seat. Exactly the problem with many marriages today.

A closer look, however, indicates that the picture was taken in Great Britain. The van is driving on the left side of the road. And under the young man's right arm, on the right side of the vehicle, is the faintest trace of what must be a steering wheel.

The man is in the driver's seat, after all! Exactly what the Bible teaches about marriage!



Evangelical Press is publishing a number of works entitled "What the Bible Teaches About...." Anthony Selvaggio's contribution to the series deals with marriage. His purpose is to note what the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) teaches

about “romantic love, marriage, and human sexuality” (p. 7), apply this instruction practically, and show the beauty of love as manifested in Christ.

Focusing on a different aspect of love, each chapter begins by noting how that aspect is taught in the Song of Solomon, continues by explaining how married couples are to manifest that aspect in light of current dangers, and concludes by noting how God manifested that same aspect of love in Christ, thereby enabling us to do the same.

Underlying the whole work is the conviction, expressed in chapter 1, that the sin of Adam and Eve has wrecked human sexuality and the marriage relationship, that only grace can restore it, and that the church has “failed to instruct its people about the nature of redeemed relationships and human sexuality” (p. 14).

Chapters 2 and 3 each deal with a prerequisite of true love—maturity and purity. These chapters are especially pertinent for single young people. In chapter 2, the author points out the perils of the modern dating system, and gives practical advice regarding how to prepare for true love. In chapter 3, not only the need for godly young people to live chastely, but also the role that the parents play in this connection, is emphasized.

Chapters 4-6 each set forth an aspect of the nature of true love: it is exclusive, enduring, and priceless. Being exclusive, the true love of married people does not permit a third to interfere. That third could refer to an affair one is having, but also to pornography, an emotionally intimate relationship with another, work, friends, family, recreation, and children. The author gives suggestions how to avoid such.

That true love endures (chapter 5) is clearly biblical; but that love between husband and wife does not always endure is reality. The author gives practical sugges-

tions to help one’s love to grow and endure.

Although true love is priceless, sin causes us to cheapen love, or put a price on it, by objectification (treating our spouse as an object to be used for our satisfaction), commercialization (as when a married couple has a rigid guideline regarding who carries out which household chores), and self-seeking manipulation, often manifest in subtle ways.

The next four chapters address the matter of maintaining true love. Chapter 7 addresses the matter of spouses being each other’s friends—best friends. Couples ought to manifest this friendship, not only when taking time out from their work for each other, but by working together in God’s service.

Chapter 8 sets forth the need to complement each other. In this chapter, the issue of why God created Eve for Adam, and just who belongs in the driver’s seat, is set forth. That the husband is to lead in love and the wife to submit is stated. Practical advice is given, especially to the husband, in this connection.

The husband and wife ought to praise each other, as did Solomon and his wife; this is addressed in chapter 9. In addressing the matter of sexual unity in marriage in chapter 10, the author indicates a high and godly view of this union. Among other practical points made, the author reminds men that our sexual relationship with our wife is not intended to be a subject for jokes, or discussion at work.

Chapter 11 concludes by reemphasizing the power of Jesus Christ to enable a couple to live as they ought in holy wedlock, and pointing us to the perfection of marriage in heaven, when we serve Christ perfectly as we ought.

The teaching of the book is sound, practical, and necessary.

The author’s correct assessment of sin’s effect on marriage, the

author’s fundamentally correct idea that the Song of Solomon speaks of love in human marriage as a picture of God’s and Christ’s love for His people, and the author’s fundamentally correct view that the creation of Adam and Eve was a historical event, all give me reason to say that any Christian could read this book with profit, even those who are not married, or whose marriages are not “bad.”

In fact, because the book is intended to be a study guide for married couples, every chapter ends with a list of questions for review and discussion. Whether used for premarital counseling, marital counseling, small-group Bible study, or self study, the book will be beneficial.

It would serve well as an after-recess study guide for any adult Bible study group in any of our churches.



I consider the title of the book to be misleading. The book treats not what the Bible teaches about marriage in every respect, but what the Bible teaches about *true love* in marriage.

When I pick up a book entitled *What the Bible Teaches About Marriage*, I expect to find everything found in this book, and more. I expect to find a more in-depth treatment of Ephesians 5. Selvaggio does refer to Ephesians 5 in treating the roles of husband and wife in marriage, against the backdrop of Christ’s love for His people. But the crucial point of Ephesians 5, that marriage is a picture of the mystery of Christ and His church, is not explained even briefly, let alone developed in detail.

I also expect to find in a book with this title a clear explanation of the biblical teaching regarding divorce and remarriage. Usually I expect the author to lead his reader astray here, teaching that divorce is permissible for reasons other

than fornication, and that remarriage is permissible, especially for the “innocent” party, and perhaps for the “guilty” party as well. Selvaggio does not go wrong in this area. Nor does he go right. He doesn’t even address it. This, in spite of devoting an entire chapter to the matter of the enduring nature of true love. The general tone of the book suggests that divorce is another effect of sin, as indeed it is. But the reader with expectations like mine is left to wonder whether what the Bible teaches about love and sexuality applies just as well to remarriage after divorce as it does to one’s first marriage.

The title should be accurate, so the reader knows what to expect from it. And the title should be *What the Bible Teaches About True Love in Marriage*.



The author is to be commended for emphasizing the calling of the

wife to submit to her husband, and for setting forth what such does *not* mean. But he is to be faulted, I believe, for this statement: “Submission also does *not* mean that a wife is to submit in all circumstances ... she is not required to submit to her husband if he is being abusive to her or is calling her to submit to something which is contrary to Christ’s command” (p. 159).


I grant that when a husband is truly abusive, intervention is required. And I grant that when a man commands his wife to do what is contrary to Christ’s command, she must obey Christ and disobey her husband.

But in both instances her attitude must still be one of submission—that is, of acknowledging that she is under her husband’s God-given authority. This is the requirement of I Peter 3:1, in which wives are commanded to be in subjection to their own husbands, even

to those who do not obey the word. This is the same kind of submission required of servants, not only toward good and gentle masters, but also toward froward, or wicked, masters (I Peter 2:18).

The question is not whether such wives must be submissive; they must. The question is, what does such submission mean. I fear that at this point Selvaggio confuses submission with outward compliance, and with a failure to deal with the sins of one’s husband in a godly, biblical way.

If he really means that certain sins on the part of a husband free the wife from the calling to be submissive, then does it follow that certain sins on the part of the wife free the husband from the calling to love her? The fact is that the Bible requires the husband to love and the wife to submit unconditionally in all things.

Surely this must be understood, when speaking of what the Bible teaches about marriage. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

The Family Conference 2009 Committee of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada held their first fund-raising event for that conference, a “Dessert Evening,” Friday evening, February 8, at their church. The committee urged all young people and adults from that congregation, and from neighboring Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, to come out and enjoy an evening of tasty desserts served buffet-style, along with various games and good Christian fellowship. A donation was requested to help meet anticipated expenses for the up-

coming conference. The “News” would be remiss if it did not add here that First’s Family Conference is planned for July 2-5, 2009, with Prof. D. Engelsma and Prof. B. Gritters scheduled as guest speakers.

While reading the bulletin from the Wingham, Ontario PRC for Sunday, February 10, we were reminded of the old adage that goes something like this, “timing is everything.” That bulletin included notes from Wingham’s Consistory meeting of February 5. One decision made that evening was a resolution that if worship services needed to be cancelled due to weather, their consistory members would try to let the congregation know by 9:00 A.M. in the morning and by 11:30 A.M. for the afternoon service. The following three wor-

ship services at Wingham were cancelled due to the weather.

Young People Activities

The Youth Group of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, with the assistance of their congregation’s newly organized Help and Hospitality Committee, sponsored a Multi-cultural Evening for the members of their church and visitors on February 8. Those attending that evening were able to enjoy an ethnic potluck dinner, which was followed by an evening of praise, fellowship, and fun, to celebrate the church’s unity in diversity. Since this was a potluck dinner, guests were encouraged to bring an ethnic dish to pass, and were also encouraged to wear clothing that represented a specific ethnic background.

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

The Senior Young People of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI got together on February 8 for a "Lock-In" at their church. Girls were asked to bring munchies, boys were asked to bring pop, and all were reminded to bring pillows and sleeping bags.

The Young People's Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited the members of their congregation to a skating party on Family Day, February 18, at Les Walker Rotary Park. Skaters were also asked to bring their own hot dogs and buns for roasting after the skate.

The Young People's Society of Calvary PRC in Hull, IA hosted a ski trip to Mount Kato on Presidents Day, February 18. Young people from the Calvary, Doon, and Hull, IA congregations met at Hull for devotions and breakfast before leaving for Mankato at 7:00 A.M. for a day of skiing.

Saturday, February 16, the Young People's Society of the Lynden, WA PRC hosted a Valentine's Dinner at their church.

Members of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI were invited to the annual Fellowship Western Dinner hosted by their young people on

Saturday evening, February 9. The members of Faith who did attend were encouraged to dress to fit the occasion and were able to enjoy an evening of fellowship together as they contributed to the young people and this year's convention.

The Young People of the Hudsonville, MI PRC met recently for a special get-together after their evening worship service on January 27 at the home of society members to discuss the place of the special-needs children and adults in our churches.

School Activities

The Genesis PR School in Lacombe, AB, Canada hosted a ski night on February 8 at Canyon Ski Hill in Red Deer.


An AED (Automated External Defibrillator) was recently donated to Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI. In response to that donation, Faith sponsored an AED and CPR training class at their school on February 22. Anyone interested in that class could make arrangements to attend.

The PTA of Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI met on February 7 to hear Mr. Jon Van Overloop speak on "Faith, Food,

and the Folly of the Figure."

The Board of the Midwest Society for PR Secondary Education hosted a special society meeting on February 11 at the Hull, IA PRC. There were many important matters of business for the Society to consider, besides the annual voting for new Board members. Society members approved a proposal to grant their Board permission to begin looking for an administrator. The Society voted to adopt the name Trinity Christian High School as their school name, and also approved a proposal to amend their constitution to reflect Calvary PRC's representation on the Board. Further, there was information presented about work being done on the building project, with a view to opening a school as soon as possible.

Looking at bulletins the past few weeks gives us the distinct impression that all our Christian schools need teachers. Last week we counted five announcements of need for teachers and one for administrator on our church bulletin, with new openings seemingly added weekly.

Young people, are you paying attention? 

Announcements

ADVANCE NOTICE

The Loveland Protestant Reformed Church will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on September 19, 2008. If you plan to attend, please call Ray Ezinga at 970-667-5702 or e-mail tammyjvan@aol.com

NOTICE!!

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2008, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Don Doezeema
4949 Ivanrest Ave.
Grandville, MI 49418

NOTICE!!!

Each issue of the *Standard Bearer* is available on cassette tape for those who are blind, or who for some other reason would like to be able to listen to a reading of the *SB*. This is an excellent ministry of the Evangelism Society of the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. The reader is James Noorman of Southeast Church. Anyone desiring this service regularly should write:

Southeast PRC
1535 Cambridge Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

NOTICE!

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for two teaching positions for the 2008-2009 school year. One open position is for a Spanish teacher. The other position could involve teaching in Social Studies (Government, Economics), Business law, Accounting, and/or Religion (Bible and Cults). Secondary Teaching Certification is desirable. For more information or to request an application form, please contact Mr. Rick Noorman, (616) 453-5048 or rnoorman@altelco.net or Mr. Dave Bouwkamp, (616) 457-6419.

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TEACHER NEEDED

Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI is accepting applications for a 1st grade teacher for the 2008/2009 school year. Questions should be directed to Mr. Brian Kuiper (616-669-1773 or bkuiper@hchr.org) or Education Committee Chairman Mr. Bernie Kamps (616-453-9773 or BernieK@Kampspallets.com). Please mail résumés directly to the school.

NOTICE!

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is offering scholarship awards to prospective Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers. If you are interested in receiving a packet, please contact Melinda Bleyenbergh at 616-453-8898 or e-mail darylme1@altelco.net by April 1, 2008.

NOTICE!

The Protestant Reformed Seminary is sponsoring a series of three public lectures on Southern Presbyterianism in April 2008. The schedule is as follows:

Tuesday, April 15, at 1:30 P.M.,
*"Development of the
Reformed Faith in the South"*

Wednesday, April 16, at 1:30 P.M.,
*"Distinctives of Southern
Presbyterian Theology
and Ecclesiology"*

Thursday, April 17, at 7:30 P.M.,
*"Notable Southern Presbyterian
Theologians and Preachers"*

The speaker will be the Rev. Eugene Case, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Woodville, MS (PCA). All meetings will be held at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, 4875 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI. The public is invited. For more information, call the Seminary at (616) 531-1490.

British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference 2008

Venue: The Share Centre, Co. Fermanagh, N. Ireland

Date: Friday, 25 July - Friday, 1 August, 2008

Subject:

The Work of the Holy Spirit

1. The Person of the Holy Spirit
2. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit
3. The Holy Spirit and the Covenant of Grace
4. The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth
5. The Holy Spirit and Assurance
6. The Holy Spirit and the Church

Special Lecture on Charismaticism

Main Speakers: Profs. David Engelsma and Herman Hanko
Special Lecture: Rev. Angus Stewart

FOR BOOKING FORMS OR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

BRF Booking Secretary

Julie Rainey
4 The Olde Close
Cullybackey, N. Ireland BT43 5AR
jhrainey31@yahoo.com
44 (0)28 25 881955

North American Booking Office

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Oomkes
1710 Westminster Court SW
Byron Center, MI 49315 USA
oomkes@iserv.net
1 616 878 1309

Booking forms are also available on-line at
www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk

Many on-site activities.

All of Share's facilities are suitable for guests with disabilities.

More information, including color pictures, is available at
www.sharevillage.org

Full payment must be made by 25 May, 2008.

For information on Philip Rainey's after-conference bus tour of N. Ireland's north coast (4 & 5 August), contact Julie Rainey (details above)