

The STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

. . . To grow in the knowledge of Christ our Savior does not mean merely to increase in intellectual knowledge of Him. Intellectual growth is indeed important and necessary. . . . But the apostle is not merely interested in the fact that our heads are filled with the knowledge of Him. We must not only know about Him, but we must know Him. We must not only know that He is a perfect Redeemer, but we must know Him as our Savior. . . .

And the relation of these two, grace and knowledge, is not such that we first grow in grace, and then in knowledge; but we grow in grace as we increase in knowledge. The latter is basic for the former.

See "A Final Warning
and Admonition" — page 338.

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MEDITATION

A Final Warning and Admonition

Rev. M. Schipper

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

II Peter 3:17, 18a.

To these words all that needs to be added is, "To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." and the apostle's second epistle is ended. The words of our text really constitute the final word of the apostle

Peter to the beloved pilgrims. Final they are also when you consider that most probably the apostle sealed his faith with a martyr's death soon after the last word of this epistle was written.

It is evident, too, especially from the first part of the text, that the apostle is reflecting on what he had written in this epistle and in the preceding context, from which he concludes that it is necessary to give this final word of warning and admonition. The word "therefore" always in Scripture, and so also here, indicates that a conclusion is drawn in the text from the preceding context. This is indicated also from the words "seeing ye know these things." What these things are which the readers of this epistle know must be determined from what the apostle had written. Not only do they know that the day of the Lord is coming and what will take place when He comes, but they also know that prior to His coming there will be scoffers and false prophets who will deny His coming, and who will privily bring in damnable heresies, by reason of whom the truth will be evil spoken of and many will follow their pernicious ways. The temptation will be there to be led away with the error of the wicked.

So, in a negative sense, the warning is in place, not to give heed to the error and thus fall from their own steadfastness. And, positively, the beloved pilgrims must be exhorted and admonished to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It should be noted that if the apostle considered it necessary to express this warning and admonition nearly two millenia ago, it certainly behooves us, upon whom the end of the ages is come, to give attention to what the Word of God says in this text.

The heart of the warning in the text must be found in the words, "beware lest ye also . . . fall from your own steadfastness."

Now certainly these words imply that, for the moment at least, they to whom this is addressed were standing fast. To stand fast implies, first of all, that you have a place to stand. It implies that your feet are firmly planted on solid ground. It implies, too, that while you are firmly fixed, there are external forces bent on moving you from your place, against which you must take a stand to be able to endure. This whole idea is beautifully illustrated in the figure of the rock on the coast of Maine projecting into the Atlantic where the billows smash themselves against the rock but never succeed in moving it from its place.

That solid ground on which the believers in Christ remain steadfast can only be the truth of God's Word. All other ground is sinking sand. The church of Christ is built upon the solid ground of the doctrine of the apostles and prophets as it is the revelation of Christ. Of that foundation Christ is said to be the chief cornerstone. To this idea we will return presently, but it is important to see at this juncture that the only solid ground on which the Christian

church and the believers in Christ can remain steadfast is the Word of God.

To fall from your steadfastness implies therefore that you depart from the truth, from the Word of God. Now, of course, in the strict sense of the word it is impossible for the believers in Christ to fall away from the truth. This would certainly imply a falling away of saints, which is quite impossible. The church, viewed from the aspect of her election in Christ, cannot fall away. However, when the church is viewed organically, that is, as she develops historically, and is thus composed of a two-fold seed, righteous and wicked, elect and reprobate, it is not only possible but expected. When the apostle for example in chapter 2 writes of the coming of false prophets, and that many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of, this could happen only in the church, as she comes historically to manifestation in the world, not outside of her. And always the reality is that some, and even many, will depart from the faith. This is what we must expect. Also here it becomes evident that they are not all Israel that are called Israel.

But why then must the church be warned if it is the corrupt seed that always falls away? The answer is two-fold: in the first place the ungodly in the church must know that when they turn away from the truth, they incur great condemnation. Always the Scriptures stress the truth that they who have known the truth and have departed from it shall be beaten with many stripes; but, in the second place, this warning is necessary also for the true children of God. We must not forget that they live in the flesh and in an old nature which will never be subjected to the truth. That old nature is always prone to the error of the wicked. Consequently it is necessary that the apostle sound the warning.

Beware lest ye also. . . !

That word "beware" comes from a word that is used in the military, where the soldier is placed on guard as a sentry. If that sentry is not alert, watching, ready to fight the enemy, he may be destroyed, and those over whom he is set to guard may perish with him.

The apostle means to say that the power of the error of the wicked is so strong that if the child of God is not on guard he may be enticed to the error, and so he would fall away from the truth. This is true of error in any form. And especially is this true with respect to the error which denies the coming of Christ. One who falls for that error will suffer the effects on the whole of life. He will not live in hope. He will become worldly-minded, and spiritually indifferent. Against this error of the wicked we are to stand

guard. And that means that we expect the enemy, and are prepared to withstand him. It means that we stand fast in the truth.

How important is this word of warning today! In the world about us there is naturally no concern relative to the coming of Christ. There is concern about mundane things. Right now there is considerable disturbance over the energy crisis, and the government is projecting plans to cope with it for years to come. All seem to be concerned about the possibility of war in the Middle East, and they are shuttling back and forth to establish peace. You hear an awful lot about our national debt which steadily increases, and we are warned that for years and years to come we, our children, and our grand-children will be still struggling with it. Then there is frightful concern about inflation, and nobody, Democrats or Republicans, knows what to do about it. But no one in the government or, so it seems also in the church, mentions the coming of Christ.

This worldmindedness rubs off on the church where too the concern is about social and economic problems, and the cry is for world betterment – as though we are all going to stay here forever. And in our affluent society things are really pretty nice down here. Who wants Christ to return and spoil it all? If Christ is mentioned at all, it seems as if it is in the question of the scoffers of Peter's day: Where is the promise of His coming? All things continue as they were. Yes, even the children of God get carried away with this philosophy.

Indeed, we need this word of warning! Not only must we be alerted at our post, having on the full armor of God to stand, but we need to be reminded that we know our Lord is coming quickly. And this glorious truth must so pervade our heart and mind that we constantly live in hope, and are quickened spiritually so that we are able to remain steadfast to the end, and are not moved from that Word of God by the temptation to error.

But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

That is the positive admonition and exhortation in the text. To grow in grace is to increase in all the virtues of grace which by the grace of God are bestowed upon us. All these virtues of grace are in principle bestowed in the grace of regeneration. In seed form, as it were, the graces of faith, love, hope, righteousness, holiness, etc., are ours in the wonder of the new birth in Christ. Through the rain and sunshine of the Word and Spirit of Christ these graces are fertilized and blossom out in our Christian experience. So we increase in all Christian virtues. Our faith expands, our love grows, our hope is quickened, our righteousness becomes plain, and our

holiness comes to manifestation in our lives. Our assurance of justification is more perfectly established, and our walk in sanctification develops and comes more and more in evidence.

It must be clearly understood that we do not have these graces of ourselves. They are all in Christ as the grace of Christ, and by Him are given unto us.

It must also be understood that to be steadfast in the truth is not a static experience, as a pillar or post is fixed in the ground, but the children of God are alive and they grow as the tree that is planted in the soil. Standing in the grace of Christ they grow and increase in grace.

To this the apostle adds: "And in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." To grow in the knowledge of Christ our Saviour does not mean merely to increase in intellectual knowledge of Him. Intellectual growth is indeed important and necessary. It is extremely important that we increase in the knowledge of Him as He is revealed in the Scriptures. This we can do by faithfully studying the Word of God, and by faithfully coming under its proclamation. Only through the Word and its faithful proclamation can we come to know Christ. The purer the preaching of the Word is, the purer will also be our conception of Him. But the apostle is not merely interested in the fact that our heads are filled with the knowledge of Him. We must not only know about Him, but we must know Him. We must not only know that He is a perfect Redeemer, but we must know Him as our Saviour. The knowledge is therefore one of spiritual experience.

And we must notice that this is an admonition, an exhortation, which is directed to us. We are exhorted and admonished to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of Christ our Saviour and perfect Mediator.

The apostle, therefore, does not consider his readers and us to be dead pots into which the grace and knowledge of Christ is deposited. Nor are the grace and knowledge dead objects that we carry around with us. But they are living, spiritual realities, capable of increasing in the use we make of them, as we come regularly and faithfully under the Means of Grace. So also we grow spiritually, while also the grace and knowledge grow in us as we develop in the grace and knowledge of Christ our Lord.

And the relation of these two, grace and knowledge, is not such that we first grow in grace, and then in knowledge; but we grow in grace as we increase in knowledge. The latter is basic for the former.

Both the warning and the admonition in the text are very urgently to be heeded. "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware. . . ." So the apostle stresses the urgency.

As beloved of the apostle, but especially of Christ, you know from all that the Word of God declares that there will be heresies in the last times. Heresy is not something peculiar to the day in which the epistle was written. As long as the truth of God is maintained and faithfully proclaimed in the world there will be opposition to and denial of the truth. It is imperative that we be prepared for this. Nor is apostasy something peculiar to the day of the apostle. Fact of the matter is that Scripture predicts that in the last days the apostasy will be great. This also we know. And it is urgent that we remain steadfast.

What is our positive calling then? As we already suggested, we cannot remain static, inactive, stationary. You either grow in spiritual stature, or you go backward and grow weak and wobbly. Urgent it is that we increase in the knowledge of God's Word, for only so will we grow in the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So we will be steadfast, immovable, when the error of the wicked assails us. And so will we be prepared for the coming of Christ our Lord.

EDITORIALS

Prof. H. C. Hoeksema

A Legitimate Gravamen

Twice in recent months the claim has been made that Dr. Harry Boer's gravamen is not a legitimate gravamen. The argumentation is that the Boer gravamen is a "prove it" gravamen, that it is simply a request for the Christian Reformed Church to give Scriptural proof for the doctrine of sovereign reprobation, and that the Synod is not a kind of "question-box" and cannot be called upon to render proof for the various doctrines set forth in the creeds.

The Rev. Nelson Kloosterman made this claim in *The Outlook* (February, 1979). After writing rather confusedly about the nature of a gravamen, he continues as follows:

"It is important to note the possible results in the life of the church from here on if Boer's gravamen and its suggestions are accepted. His strident demand for 'the express testimony of Scripture' will, no doubt, be repeated in the years to come by those seeking indubitable prooftexts which command the practice of infant baptism, seeking incontrovertible biblical evidence for the doctrine of the tri-personality of God, and asking for unquestionable proof for the correctness of the Heidelberg Catechism's interpretation of the necessity of Christ's burial ('To prove thereby that he was really dead,' Q. 41). And

on and on . . .

"You see, if the terms of the debate are set so narrowly, in fundamentalist, biblicist style, calling for explicit biblical proof of that sort, we are bound to flounder about in a kind of confessional abyss 'til the Lord returns. And that because the high-sounding expressions, 'just the Bible,' or 'just tell me what the Bible says,' are not as simple or as innocent as they might seem." (pp. 3, 4)

Editor Lester De Koster has made the same claim in *The Banner*, asserting that the Boer Gravamen is not a legitimate gravamen and that it should be marked "Return to Sender." In *The Banner* of April 6, 1979 Dr. De Koster repeats this assertion. Among other things, he writes:

"This suggestion (call it a well-meant offer?) was not intended to be tricky or cute. I think I speak for many of you in repudiating the notion that any of us may put the Mother of Believers to a 'prove to me' test. To those who claim to find Biblical doctrines better expressed than her confessions express them, the Church owes a ready ear; but to those who would put her on trial to 'prove' to their satisfaction what she confesses over the centuries, the Church should be deaf. She knows, in advance, that in fact no

'proof' is likely to satisfy this kind of challenge.

"She should be deaf, I noted, not only out of self-respect, but equally out of determination to keep good order. One confession involves another. . . ."

A little later De Koster suggests that the door might be opened to whole series of "prove it" gravamina and that "One 'show me' gravamen could follow hard on the heels of another."

Now, in the first place, it would seem a bit tardy to begin talking about the legality of Boer's gravamen. Has not the Synod of 1977 received the gravamen as properly before the churches? In fact, did not the Synod of 1975 already declare of the notorious Boer "Letter" about reprobation that Boer raised a matter of legitimate concern? Further — although I would certainly disagree with the manner in which the Synod of 1976 tampered with the Formula of Subscription and with the methods of filing and dealing with gravamina — is it not true that the Boer Gravamen is fully in harmony with those newly adopted rules? Still more, has not Synod given its committee the mandate "to study the gravamen in the light of Scripture, and to advise Synod of 1980 as to the cogency of the gravamen and how it should further be dealt with by Synod," saying nothing at all about studying or advising on its legitimacy? And, finally, following the decisions of 1975, 1976, and 1977 has there been any protest raised about this aspect of the Boer Gravamen? It would seem, therefore, that while this might, to some, be a neat way out of a knotty problem, it is rather late to raise this point now.

But, in the second place, the question arises whether this is a correct representation of Dr. Boer's gravamen, or whether it is a gross over-simplification and under-estimation of his gravamen. I trust that I hardly have to state that I disagree with Dr. Boer's position on reprobation. At the same time, however, I do not think that Dr. Boer is so simple or so naive as to think that anyone can simply call on the church to

prove the doctrines set forth in the confessions. If this were true, of course, there would be "open season" on the confessions for gravamina; and it would indeed result in an intolerable situation. It has been suggested that the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of infant baptism could then be challenged and a demand for proof of these put on Synod's agenda. Maybe there is even more fact than imagination in such a suggestion.

However, the Boer gravamen is far more serious than a simple demand for proof. It is true, of course, that Dr. Boer demands of the Christian Reformed Church to furnish him "the express testimony of sacred Scripture" (the language of Canons I, 15) in support of the doctrine of reprobation as set forth in Articles 6 and 15 of Canons I. On the surface of it, therefore, this would seem to be a mere "prove it" gravamen. However, Boer is no fool. He knows very well which are the Scriptural proofs that the Canons offer and which they call "the express testimony of sacred Scripture." Hence, the largest part of Boer's gravamen is devoted to his attempt to demonstrate that the Scriptural proofs offered by the Canons *do not prove* what the Canons claim they prove. In other words, Boer claims to have given the lie to the Canons' words, "the express testimony of sacred Scripture." He then proceeds to state that he himself knows of no other Scriptural proof. And only then does he demand of Synod to furnish such proof. It seems to me that while it is negative, the Boer gravamen is nevertheless a perfectly legitimate gravamen in itself. And if the Christian Reformed Synod agrees with Boer's exegesis, there is only one conclusion to which the Synod can come, namely, to declare Articles 6 and 15 of Canons I null and void. This is the same conclusion to which the Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands was forced: the language of Articles 6 and 15 is not in harmony with the Scriptural givens.

The alternative is for Synod's committee and the Synod of 1980 to show conclusively that Boer's exegesis of the Canons' proof-texts is incorrect and that the Canons do indeed furnish the express testimony of sacred Scripture in support of the doctrine of reprobation. Then, of course, Dr. Boer would be faced by the alternative of either bowing to the decision of Synod or saying farewell to the Christian Reformed Church because he can no longer sign the Formula of Subscription.

For many reasons it is to be hoped, too, that the Christian Reformed Church will not be misled by this propaganda about the legitimacy of the Boer gravamen, but will forthrightly face up to it and deal with it. Chief among these reasons is that of ecclesiastical honesty!

NOTICE!!!

According to the decision of the Synod of 1978, the Consistory of the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, was appointed the calling church for the 1979 Synod. The Consistory of First Church hereby notifies our churches that the 1979 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Wednesday, June 6, 1979, at 9 AM in the First Protestant Reformed Church. The pre-Synodical service will be held Tuesday evening, June 5, at 8 PM in First Church. Rev. John Heys, President of the 1978 Synod will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service. Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Theodore Looyenga, 1125 Adams St., S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49507.

Theodore Looyenga, Clerk

Of Arminianism And “Logic-Chopping”

When all the dust being raised about the Boer gravamen clears, it will, I trust, still be necessary to deal with the burden of Dr. Boer’s gravamen, which is an exegetical one.

Meanwhile, there is much dust being raised; and at least some of it ought to be exposed as just that — dust. An example may be found in the editorial department of *The Banner* (April 6, 1979, pp. 10, 11). Far be it from me to agree with Harry Boer’s doctrinal position, but I believe that Editor De Koster does his former colleague of *The Reformed Journal* injustice by accusing him of basing his gravamen on his own logic. In the meantime, Dr. De Koster’s own references to Arminianism and to logic-chopping — whatever that may mean — are far from accurate.

In the first place, it is news to me that “Arminius and his followers . . . filed a gravamen against the teaching of Belgic Article 16 and related doctrines.” If only they had filed a gravamen, things might have gone differently at the time of the Synod of Dordrecht. But my history books and my “Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-19” show, for one thing, that it was all but impossible to get the Arminians to put their views black on white, and that even at the Synod itself they had to be admonished and reprovved and threatened in order to get them to present their views. In the second place, while the Arminians themselves wanted to be treated as equals at the Synod and wanted simply to “review” the confessions along with the Counter-Remonstrants, the fact is that the Arminians (with the erudite Simon Episcopius at their head) were hailed before the Synod as defendants, who were on trial for heresy. Would that the Christian Reformed Church today were strong enough to imitate Dordrecht! I assure you that there would have been multiple heresy trials (and convictions) long ago!

In the second place, however, when Dr. De Koster writes about “logic-chopping” — whatever that may be — he sorely misrepresents both Arminianism and the Bible. De Koster writes as follows:

When it came to logic-chopping, Arminius out-distanced most others in his time — while accusing them of falling victim to . . . logic!

You will discover that the Arminian mind produces a number of logical objections to the mind of the Canons; like these:

1. If God reprobates, He forecloses the well-meant offer of salvation to all men. *But, in fact, the Bible teaches both reprobation and the well-meant offer.*

2. If God decrees from all eternity, He abrogates man’s choice and responsibility. *But, in fact, the Bible teaches both God’s decrees and man’s free will and responsibility.*

3. If God elects, He must reject, and therefore reprobation is only the logical implicate of election. *But, in fact, the Bible makes no such connection. In ways higher than we can lay hold of, God chooses and God passes by — and affords no “reason” for either except His own good pleasure.*

4. If God reprobates, He may be charged with responsibility for man’s sin. But, in fact, the Bible repudiates even the suggestion: God forbid!

And so on. All of these are logical efforts to lower God’s thoughts to the level of our thoughts, and to reduce God’s ways to our ways. And you will find, I think, that when all the talk subsides, the critics of the Canons have been moving on logical assumptions like these all along — while charging, of course, that it is the Canons “that bend any desired Scripture to its foreordained meaning”.

Of the four examples of logical objections produced by the Arminian mind, numbers “2” and “4” and their replies may stand, provided that “free will” in “2” is correctly understood.

However, number “1” is not an objection raised by the Arminian mind, and its answer is not an expression of the Reformed mind, or mind of the Canons. The reverse is true. “If God reprobates (sovereignly), He forecloses the well-meant offer of salvation to all men.” That is indeed the Reformed mind, the mind of the Canons. More specifically, it is the Protestant Reformed mind — and we were never accused of having an Arminian mind, only of being Reformed in the fundamentals, with a tendency to one-sidedness. The “Arminian mind” is the very opposite: God’s well-meant offer of salvation forecloses sovereign reprobation.

The italicized reply to “1” is not the mind of the

Canons nor the mind of God (the Bible). It is the Christian Reformed mind, adopted in 1924. And while I am glad to see the First Point of 1924 come out of hiding in the current discussion, I must needs point out that it is a contradictory mind, which no rational human being can accept. Furthermore, it involves ascribing contradictions to the Bible, and thus to God Himself. Simply put, it means: 1. God wills the salvation of the reprobate. 2. God does not will the salvation of the reprobate, but their damnation. Men like Berkhof and H. J. Kuiper tried to escape this contradiction by calling it a mystery. R. B. Kuiper spoke of a paradox. Editor De Koster, I fear, is suggesting the same thing in different language when he speaks of God's thoughts and ways being higher than our ways. Men like Boer, Daane, Stob, and Dekker are at least honest enough to face up to this obvious and intolerable contradiction. But they choose the Arminian position, and foreclose sovereign reprobation.

Example "3" is a true statement if only it would be *completely* stated. Completely stated, it would read: "If God elects some out of the mass of mankind, it follows that He rejects (passes by) the rest. In this sense reprobation is nothing but the logical implicate of election." God does not merely elect and reject, choose and pass by. Election and reprobation have personal and definite objects; and those objects are mutually exclusive. James Daane's objections to the "logic of numbers" to the contrary notwithstanding, as surely as election is personal and definite (and this is the teaching of the Canons), so surely are the rest of mankind the "non-elect," or the reprobate. Moreover, the Bible itself makes this

connection many times. In fact, as often as it uses the verb "eklegein" (to choose out of), it makes this connection; and it also makes the same connection in various other passages of Scripture.

Incidentally, while the claim is made (also by Dr. De Koster) that the "great theologians" do not draw this conclusion, a careful study of John Calvin himself will reveal that in his treatise on "The Eternal Predestination Of God" he not only makes this connection, but ascribes it to Scripture. Commenting on Ephesians 1:4, in reply to Pighius, he states: "In the first place, there is, most certainly and evidently, an inseparable connection between the elect and the reprobate. So that the election, of which the apostle speaks, cannot consist unless we confess that God separated from all others certain persons whom it pleased Him thus to separate." (p. 45) And again, p. 75, he writes: "The mind and intent of the apostle, therefore, in his use of this similitude, are to be carefully observed and held fast — that God, the Maker of men, forms out of the same lump in His hands one vessel, or man, to honour, and another to dishonour, according to His sovereign and absolute will. For He freely chooses some to life who are not yet born, leaving others to their own destruction, which destruction all men by nature equally deserve. And when Pighius holds that God's election of grace has no reference to, or connection with, His hatred of the reprobate, I maintain that reference and connection to be a truth. Inasmuch as the just severity of God answers, in equal and common cause, to that free love with which He embraces His elect."

Personally, I would rather be in the company of Calvin than that of Pighius. How about you?

THE LORD GAVE THE WORD

News From Victoria

Prof. Robert D. Decker

In 1974 Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan called the Rev. Robert C. Harbach to serve our Churches as a Home Missionary. For several years Rev. Harbach served in Houston, Texas where a Protestant Reformed Congregation was organized as a fruit of his labors. For some time now

Rev. Harbach has been preaching and teaching the Gospel in Victoria, British Columbia. Of this labor he writes in the succeeding article. We are sure that the reader will appreciate Rev. Harbach's trenchant analysis of the ecclesiastical and religious situation in Victoria.

Let the Isles Be Glad

"The Lord," no less than the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal King of kings, "reigneth," as Head of the church, and Head over all things for the church; "let the earth rejoice;" why? because all authority in heaven and in earth is given to Him risen from the dead; so "let the multitude of the isles be glad" (Ps. 97:1), including isles and maritime lands to which our churches have had the blessed privilege of sending the gospel — Jamaica, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vancouver Island. "Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. 98:7), because the glad sound of the gospel continues to go out to the islands of the seas.

Looking at a map of the North American continent back home in the Midwest, one gets no proper sense of geographical orientation with respect to the island last mentioned. For it is then represented on the map by hardly more than a mere speck. Now we are on that tiny speck (how small and insignificant we are!), and it's all quite different. The "speck" seems huge with a stretch northward of wilderness crammed with forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, swamps, bogs, streams, farmlands, and the ubiquitous rocky prominences. It would take months and months, if not years, to discover all that the island affords.

The Lord brought us to a fine group of saints here who requested catechetical instruction, Bible study, preaching, and worship services. For a while, there was also a Bible study class held bi-monthly on the mainland near to Lynden, Washington. The children here have been taught the second time around in Old Testament Bible history. Adult Bible study has proceeded through The Essentials of Reformed Doctrine and more than half way into the Belgic Confession. With delight the beautiful contents of the Heidelberg Catechism are regularly studied and fed on. Series preaching has seen us through three of the epistles and into a fourth. Regular worship and Bible study is supplemented with personal reading in the Beacon Lights, The Standard Bearer, the Reformed Dogmatics, The Triple Knowledge, Therefore Have I

Spoken, God's Covenant Faithfulness, and The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination. One person has read *De Geloovigen En Hun Zaad*. Copies of The Standard Bearer are mailed out by a faithful reader of the same, and the group works together in preparing a two-page *Calvinist Contender* for mailing. The truth of the gospel is further spread abroad by means of a weekly, 15-minute radio broadcast aired out of KARI, Blaine, Washington, on Saturday mornings. The program is called "Bible Truth Meditations," and reaches not only Victoria, but well up into the island. Services and the broadcast are advertized regularly in three newspapers, one here, one up-island and one over on the mainland, all, of course, in British Columbia. In this way, it is hoped, a radio audience to our program will be built up. Some three responses, so far, have been made to this radio endeavor.

The usual maze of religions is found here as elsewhere and everywhere on this continent. There are sensationalistic and hand-clapping charismatics, the usual string of prophetic preachers, the hordes of "healing" hucksters, the fast-decaying apostate churches, and the increasing number of anti-church groups. The latter are little independent knots of professing Christians who claim that as the end of the age draws nearer, believers will increasingly separate themselves from the institution of the established churches, to meet in private homes for independent Bible study. The institute of the church is viewed with suspicion and avoided, even though the Bible teaches that there will always be true church institutes in the world, like the seven churches in Asia, and that right up to the return of our Lord on the clouds of heaven. This trend does embrace many sincere people, but sincerely wrong, and so all the more dangerously wrong, as the trend, of which they are a part, is both schismatical and part and parcel of the present apostasy. Then there is the being "Calvinistic" without being Reformed. Arminianism and Semi-pelagianism are the popular opiates of the masses.

But it matters not that we may have to stand alone in all this bleak, arid religious wilderness. It is our calling to let our light shine before men, and to "set up the standard toward Zion" (Jer. 4:6). For a while in our meetings we were able to count some half dozen nationalities represented in attendance. Ordinarily, it has been our firm, faithful few who continue with us, growing spiritually in the truth. Some of our ministers have visited us, most of whom have preached here. We enjoyed having them, although there were not multitudes flocking out to hear them. These are days when preaching is largely ignored, especially Reformed preaching. It is pushed aside for dashes of religious entertainment. Men who occupy the pulpit (I hate calling them ministers) do not preach the Word, do not produce sermons. The people do not hear the Word. Many of them do not ask for bread, being satisfied with stones, which is what they get. Then will their children ask for bread, or for an egg? It's unlikely. Any way, they only get a stone or a scorpion. The church service is cluttered with pageants, dramas, films, discussion panels, and an overload of music (religious jazz) and people-participating programming. When young men enter the seminary, seldom is it to learn to become a preacher. Rather, it's to become a counselor, a chaplain, a minister of music, a minister of youth, a minister of visitation, or a minister of education (a sort of Sunday School superintendent). Recently, a president of a Bible institute was introduced as an internationally known author and Christian film maker. In the days when we were students in a Bible institute, all the teachers were also preachers and pastors of churches; and, where there was a female teacher, she was the wife of a preacher. Preaching can be eclipsed by film-making. Preaching is allowed to slip from being the chief means of grace. Many turn from preaching to private Bible study. The two should go together. To turn from the divinely appointed instrument of the church institute to independent Bible study is a deception. There ought to be a turning away from the apostate churches. Some in these churches are true Christians. They grieve over the deadly falling away from the truth. They themselves know the great truth of sovereign grace. They know that the preaching of the Cross, foolishness to those who are perishing, is the power of God to those who are being saved. But no one is saved in the purveyance of error. These things they see, know and deplore. But do their generations know these things? Do their children hear the truth? Do they get bread, or only stones and gravel? Are their parents a witness to them? Can they point their children in the right direction? Was Lot in Sodom a witness to his children? Lot knew God's pure truth. He was painfully aware of the corruptions all around. He knew the true church was not there where he was,

but with the 316 souls in the household of Abraham. Could he, where he was, be a witness to his children? Isn't it a fact that the only way he could be an effectual, consistent witness to them would be for him to leave the cities of the plain that then he might point them to the house of Abraham as the then true Bethlehem or House of Bread? And what about his children? Were they not without the benefit of a strong parental witness? Did they know and love the truth as did their father? Were they, as their father, children of God? Were they, too, vexed with the filthy manner of life of the wicked? Could they be said to possess "righteous souls"? Did they have the slightest interest as to where the True Bread could be found? Were they not wholly concerned, rather, with a secure economic and advantageous social life? ("Remember Lot's wife.") When did they ever give a thought to the Word of God for the good of their souls? The church in Abraham continues to this day (Gal. 3:26, 29). The church in Lot was in that day lost in its generations. In Lot's family there was a "famine, not a famine of bread, nor of thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). It must also be said of Lot's children, and of those like them in our day: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me; seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hos. 3:6).

Without the pure preaching of the Word, we become like God-forgotten children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. The younger generation, then, slips father away from God than have their parents. But the preaching of the Word is still to be heard. By it we learn to know the truth, embrace it, love it, live in it, and gain heaven by it. Under the preaching of the gospel is that promise ours, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Preaching is a very serious stewardship, a weighty trust committed to Christ's ministers. We are all answerable to Him as to how we use and respond to the divine appointment of "the foolishness of preaching." For by such means the sovereign God purposes to save those who believe, and to gather together in one the children of God scattered abroad. "Let the multitudes of the isles be glad" because they hear the joyful sound of the gospel. Then let us be glad and sing:

From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain!

Rev. Robert C. Harbach

QUESTION BOX

About Pharaoh and His Host

Rev. C. Hanko

Dear Question Box Editor:

Will you please comment on these questions?

1. Did Pharaoh die in the Red Sea?
2. Is Exodus 15:19 proof that he did die?
3. Does Exodus 14:28 seem to say that those who went into the Sea died, but some of the Egyptians stayed on land? "All the host of Pharaoh *that came into the sea after them*, there remained not so much as one of them."

Sincerely,
An Iowa Reader

REPLY

We appreciate your question. The Standard Bearer is always eager to hear from its readers.

Your main concern is, Did Pharaoh drown in the Red Sea at the time of the exodus, or did he not?

Most commentators and some historians simply assume that he did drown, without burdening themselves with the question of who this Pharaoh might be, the date of his reign, etc. Other historians and commentators, among whom is Dr. W. H. Gispen in his commentary on the book of Exodus (*Korte Verklaring der Heilige Schrift*), maintain that king Pharaoh did not drown at that time.

They base this on the following:

1) At the time when God sent Moses to Egypt to deliver His people Thutmose III was king. (1501-1447 B.C.) His successor was Amenophis II (1447-1421 B.C.), during whose reign the exodus is supposed to have taken place, approximately 1445 B.C. It is interesting to note that these dates have been changed by later findings, so that Thutmose II is said to have reigned from 1482 to 1450 B.C. and Amenophis II from 1450 to 1424 B.C. And the exodus is reckoned at 1447. It is further maintained that the mummies of both of these kings have been found.

2) In Exodus 14:27, 15:4, and Deut. 11:4 the drowning of Pharaoh's army is mentioned, but no mention is made of Pharaoh. Pharaoh may have led the army up to the sea, and then sent the army on ahead, while he stayed behind.

3) The only reference to the perishing of Pharaoh in the sea, according to this contention is found in Psalm 136:15, where we read, "But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea: for His mercy endureth forever." This is regarded either as poetic license, or is ascribed to the fact that the poet had not been properly informed.

On the other hand, we certainly cannot question the infallible inspiration of Psalm 136:15. That must stand.

In fact, it is in the light of this clear testimony of Scripture that we must understand the account of the crossing of the Red Sea as we have it in Exodus 14. We note,

1) That Exodus 14:8-10, 13 leaves the impression that Pharaoh led his army of charioteers and horsemen, which followed after him. Verse 10 states, "And when Pharaoh drew nigh. . ."

2) There is no mention made of the fact that Pharaoh withdrew to allow his army to pass through the sea before him. Verse 16 does tell us, "And I (Jehovah) will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon his host, upon his chariots and his horsemen." In the light of that verse the passage you refer to (14:28), "all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them, there remained not as much as one of them," must mean that Pharaoh and his entire host perished in the sea.

3) Moreover, as you point out, Exodus 15:19 states, "For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them." This is a synecdoche; it certainly cannot mean the horse without the rider. We can also refer to Psalm 73:53, and to Psalm 106:11, the latter declaring,

"And the waters covered their enemies, there was not one left."

Those interested in chronologies will wonder how this harmonizes with the dates of the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenophis II. We realize, of course, that these dates are a bit flexible, and that there is not perfect agreement about these dates. It seems possible that Thutmose III is the king referred to in Exodus 2:23, who died about the time when Moses was called in Midian to return to Egypt to

deliver God's people. In that case, there must have been a Pharaoh who reigned for a short time, that is, who reigned during the ten plagues and the departure, only to drown in the Red Sea. In that case Amenophis II was his successor. In any case, chronology must be brought in harmony with Scripture, not Scripture with the findings of men. We must always bow before the Scriptural "It is written."

Letter for the *Standard Bearer*

Dear Prof. Hanko,

After reading the *Standard Bearer* of Jan. 1, 1979, I felt like talking to you. The reason is the book review about "Daylight", by Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven. You wrote: "Most are not of exegetical nature, but are rather brief meditations 'hanged on' a given text: all tend to be practical rather than doctrinal. They can be read with profit by those who enjoy devotional literature."

After I read this I felt worried and concerned.

We here in Edmonton came out of the Christian Reformed Church in 1975. We read before much of Rev. A. Kuyvenhoven's writings. We learned how he taught the two-sided covenant.

I will quote from a Family Altar, Feb., 1971: "The coming of Christ divided the Jewish nation into two groups. One group accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the other group rejected Him.

"A battle raged between these two groups about who could call himself a real child of Abraham. . . . By a *life* of faith the sons of Abraham show that they have believed the gospel. . . ."

Here is a minister who believes the world and life view of the Neo-Calvinist. Is this really literature to be recommended? If it is not doctrinally sound, how can it be devotional?

The most modernistic C.R.C. churches here, which are now called "community churches" because they do not want to be called confessional churches, they use Rev. Kuyvenhoven's writings.

Rev. H. Hoeksema wrote in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 768: "It is of course true that the doctrine of eternal punishment seems very severe and harsh to our natural sentiment and human feeling. But let us

not forget, in the first place, that it is not our human sentiment but the clear teaching of Holy Writ that may be the only standard for our faith and doctrine.

"Secondly, we must also remember that even our human sentiment is sinful, and that we certainly cannot summon the holy and righteous God before the bar of our feeling without going far from the path of truth."

When Rev. H. Hoeksema answers Dr. Hepp in "Van Zonde en Genade", p. 237, he writes: "We are not concerned about a word. We are not engaging in a verbal dispute. We are fighting against a world and life view of which Dr. Kuyper gives an example in his book, 'Common Grace'. That view is no good and is not Reformed; not only in the sense that it deviates from what is stated in our Confessions concerning the sinner who is dead in sins and iniquities, but also because it deviates from the fundamental line of the Reformed faith in the historical sense." (Translated.)

When we read some of the writings (in our papers), then I ask: Is there really Neo-Calvinistic teaching among the Protestant Reformed members?! Are we blinded?

It is hard to describe how dangerous this teaching and the results are. We went through this all and do not like to experience it again.

I talked with my children about the danger of Rev. Kuyvenhoven's teaching. They also know that God's covenant is one-sided. This is Scriptural. But if in the *Standard Bearer* Rev. Kuyvenhoven's writings are recommended, what will our answer be to our children?

A devotional booklet not based on Scripture is misleading.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel. They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine." Isaiah 29:22-24.

And doctrine *is* life!

Wishing you the Lord's blessings,

Your sister in Christ,
Mrs. F. Tolsma

REPLY

Although it is true that I recommended the book by Rev. Kuyvenhoven for those who enjoy devotional literature, this recommendation by no means must be interpreted as a blanket approval of all that the book contains. In our book reviews we often recommend books which are worth reading even though they must be read with discernment. We assume our readers possess such discernment and that all the writings of men are compared with the infallible standard of God's Holy Word.

Your remarks about Neo-Calvinism, however, need a bit longer reply. It is certainly true that the bilateral

conception of the covenant held so widely within the Christian Reformed Church is a view not according to the Scriptures. But I have not seen anything in the writings of any of our people which suggests such a bilateral view of the covenant. So far as I know, the unilateral and sovereign nature of the everlasting covenant of grace is held among us without exception.

But it is not, I think, this which you mean by Neo-Calvinism. I have an idea that you probably refer to writings which speak more of the relation of the Christian to culture. Your reference to Neo-Calvinism is probably a reference to the views of the A.A.C.S. so widely promoted in Canada and in this country. I do not think it necessary to get into this question in detail. But I want to assure you that, so far as I know, there is no sympathy for this Neo-Calvinism in our Churches. Nor is there any sympathy for the world and life view of Dr. A. Kuyper as developed in his three volume work on common grace.

Nevertheless, we must remember too that we firmly believe that this present creation is God's world, ruled and ordered by God. And God calls His elect people to labor in this present world antithetically and for the cause of the kingdom of heaven.

I appreciate deeply your concern about these things, your willingness to write, and your evident concern for the truth of the Scriptures.

Letter from Covenant Church, Wychoff, N.J.

To our sister churches,
Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since you have shown such great concern for us by your gifts toward our building fund, we consider it of interest to you to keep informed about the progress of our building project. We are indeed very thankful for all the many gifts which we have received and give thanks and praise unto the Lord for all His benefits. We received some very sizable gifts, including one of \$10,000 from Hope church of Grand Rapids. This has made it possible for us to begin the actual work on our project. We are holding to our original plan not to use any of the money received through the sale of our sanctuary bonds until the entire offering is sold. However, since we received the large gifts we decided to use these gifts to do as much work on the project as possible. Already the work of clearing and excavating the area for the church building and the

driveway is under way. About this we are very excited.

The sale of our bonds is not going as well as we would like. We therefore urge all who are able to consider purchasing our bonds. A complete prospectus giving all the details of our offering is available by writing our treasurer, Mr. Clarence De Groot, 176 Prescott Ave., Prospect Park, New Jersey 07508, or by calling (201) 790-4732.

Our plans are to continue working on the project as the Lord provides the means. Meanwhile we wait upon Him to realize the desire of our hearts at His appointed time for His glory.

Covenant Prot. Ref. Church,
Wyckoff, New Jersey
(by Rev. A. den Hartog)

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

II Corinthians - The Authority of the Word (2)

Rev. J. Kortering

Paul continues to explain to the Corinthians his joy in the affect which his former letter had upon them.

3. Paul adds another reason as to why he did not return immediately to Corinth, viz., he wanted to spare both the church and himself unnecessary grief, (II Cor. 2:1-4). If he returned to them immediately and found them in a state of anguish and spiritual uncertainty, it would make him grieve; and if that were so, he could not function as a pastor to them (who would make me glad? vs. 2).

4. The action by the church of Corinth in disciplining the man guilty of incest is proof that the gospel produces reconciliation in the way of repentance and forgiveness (vs. 5-11). Notice how gently Paul now deals with the church regarding this entire matter. The fact that they excommunicated him indicates that as a church they were receptive to the Holy Spirit's instruction. Now they have to be careful that they do not go too far. They should think about willingness to forgive him, and make it as easy as possible for him to return to the fold of the church, lest he be swallowed up with over much sorrow, (vs. 6,7). This sinner must have given indication of sorrow for sin and a desire for forgiveness. Now the church must confirm their love to him by receiving him again, (vs. 8). In this way the church at Corinth would show by their deeds that they were obedient to the gospel of love, (vs. 9). In this joyful activity, Paul would gladly join in and eagerly forgive him, (vs. 10). This too would prevent Satan from gaining influence by working despair in the heart of the repentant. Joyful forgiveness encourages heartfelt repentance, always!

5. Paul explains to the Corinthians his eagerness to learn of their welfare, and having learned it to rejoice in the triumph of the gospel, (2:12-17). What a tremendous display of pastoral concern. He had an

open door at Troas (there was a church there and they desired him to stay and preach, see Acts 20:6), but he stayed only seven days, which included his late night sermon when Eutychus fell out of the window. He was so eager to learn about the welfare of Corinth, that he had to travel on in search of Titus who was on his way back from Corinth. This is pastoral compassion at its peak. He went into Macedonia looking for Titus, and when he found him and learned of the fact that the church of Corinth received his epistle and responded correctly, he jubilantly praises God for the success of the word, (vs. 14-17). A few words describes it all, "Thanks be to God who causes us to triumph through the savor of the gospel." Savor has to do with smell, aroma. I suppose Paul reflects upon the Old Testament sacrifice of burnt flesh, which was followed by the sweet smell of the incense. This is true of the gospel, It is God's savor, sweet in the holy nostrils, for it is effective both in them that are saved and in them that perish. Paul rejoices in that God accomplishes His purpose through the gospel. He personally rejoiced in this for God had just used him to write that important letter that bore fruit in the church of Corinth. Who is sufficient to these things, to be used by God not only unto salvation, but also unto destruction? Who will accept this mandate and bow before such fruits? Not man, but a humble servant of Jehovah will. The glory returns to God in both dimensions.

The Corinthian saints are epistles of the Holy Spirit and as such are living proof of the power of the gospel (3:1-18). Paul refers to "epistles of commendation," (vs. 1). These were letters which the church would send along with a minister or missionary attesting to his orthodoxy and faithful labors (something we still do today when a minister accepts a call to another congregation). Paul raises the question of the need he has for such letters as he

labors in the church of Corinth. His response is that he does not need such letters, for the members of the Corinthian church are themselves letters written by the Holy Spirit as an attestation of his labors as missionary pastor (vs. 3). In this way he also silences the accusation made by some that he labors for self acclaim, (vs. 1). The glory is God's, for it is His work, (vs. 5,6). This writing by the Holy Spirit upon the hearts and lives of God's people is now contrasted to the Old Testament law, written upon stone, (vs. 6-11). It is contrasted as to "spirit." The old is the letter that killeth for it said, "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. 3:10. The New Testament spirit is different. It is liberty: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," Gal. 5:1. Paul refers to this in verse 6 as the spirit that giveth life. Also the ministration was different. The Old Testament law was one of condemnation; the New Testament gospel administers the righteousness of Christ, (vs. 9). Finally, the contrast is that the old is done away with in Christ. He fulfilled it by keeping the law perfectly and making satisfaction for its curse upon the cross. Now, in Christ, the spirit of life remaineth forever, (vs. 11).

The gospel preaching is so effective because of its clarity and liberating power, (vs. 12-18). Continuing the reference to Moses' brightness of face, Paul refers to the veil that had to be placed over his head, Ex. 34:33. This veil represented two things: the revelation of God was veiled in that it came as type and shadow, through the blood of lambs and feasts of grain, etc.; but also the hearts of the people were blinded as beneath a veil, (vs. 14, 15). Christ took that veil away and now the opposite is true. The gospel is God's revelation in clarity and beauty, (in vs. 18 he speaks of the glory of the Lord) and the response is that we rejoice in the freedom of God's glory.

The effect of such a gospel is that the believer is an epistle of the Holy Spirit which proves God's indwelling presence which He accomplishes through the faithful labors of a preacher.

7. Paul preached in plain language and no one could blame him for unbelief (4:1-6). The fact that some did not believe was not due to Paul's craftiness or deceitful use of the Word; but the god of this world (Satan) blinded such a one. Paul preached openly, plainly, appealing to every man's conscience. After all, the light of Christ shone upon Paul's heart (on the way to Damascus) and by the Word preached, Christ now shone forth in the hearts of the people.

8. Even suffering did not hinder his ministry, but helped him (4:7-18). The treasure (his ministry as a preacher) was in an earthen vessel, so that the power and glory might be God's and not man's in any way.

True, the persecution affected him. He was troubled, perplexed, cast down, bearing in his body the dying of Christ. But it did not leave him distressed (suffocated, without room to live), nor in despair (give up), forsaken (no one to help), destroyed (taken out of service). The reason for this is "for Jesus sake," (vs. 11). The flesh must be put down so that Christ can be exalted. He is encouraged by persecution for two reasons. First, God Who raised up Christ will daily raise up Paul, and in the end raise him up to everlasting life. Secondly, affliction produces a greater degree of thanksgiving to God which ends in God's glory. He concludes by making a comparison between affliction and glory. The one is "light and for a moment"; the other has an "eternal weight." The light affliction works for that eternal weight of glory. It even made him a better minister of the gospel. Well may we ponder whether we are or would be influenced in this manner by tribulation.

9. He was encouraged to press on in his ministry for he was sure that upon his death, God would receive him into heaven, (5:1-10). We can understand why Paul was encouraged by this fact. Even though our earthly house (body) may be destroyed by disease, torture, even death, we have a house with God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. What is that house? Some suggest it is a reference to a temporary, intermediate body which we will have only from the time we die to the time of the resurrection of our own body. Others suggest it is a reference to our future resurrection body. More correctly, it refers to heaven itself, heaven is the house in which the souls of the saints enter upon death to await the resurrection of their own bodies at the coming of Christ (John 14:1-3). In this present body we groan, but in death we will exchange one set of clothes (this earthly body) for a heavenly house in which we will be able to enjoy life to a greater degree. What a beautiful description of death — absent from this earthly body, but present with the Lord. For this cause we say with Paul, "We faint not!"

10. As an ambassador of Christ, he only sought the welfare of the church (5:11-21). He was motivated by the fact that God would judge him, hence he sought God's approval (5:16). By pointing this out to the Corinthian church, Paul did not exalt himself. Rather, it gave them reason to defend Paul before his false accusers who glorify outwardly, (vs. 12). He sought the good of the church whether sane or insane (as it might appear to some, but in fact was not). God is the one Who called him as a new creature in Christ, and this qualified him to be a fit instrument to serve in the ministry of reconciliation (this is for people to return to God in the way of faith in Jesus Christ, our righteousness). With this call, he was truly an ambassador of Christ; he had authority to

speak in the name of Christ and bring His message. If they oppose Paul, they oppose Christ.

11. Paul sought their good, and this demonstrated that he was motivated by love (6:1-18). As a co-worker of God, see I Cor. 3:9, God was pleased to work through Paul. It seems strange to speak of "receiving the grace of God in vain," (vs. 1). Is this proof of the Arminian view of falling from grace? Grace, here, refers to the message of grace, namely redemption and reconciliation of chapter 5. If a person hears it with the outward ear, but not with the heart, he receives it in vain. The quote from Isa. 49:8 substantiates this from the ministry of Isaiah. As a minister, he did not give offense; he was patient in the midst of all kinds of distress, faithful in many adverse circumstances, and this should prove beyond any doubt that his heart was open to them in love and he desired that they would respond in like manner, (vs. 11, 12). Here follows a beautiful

description of how they should demonstrate their love by not being unequally yoked with unbelievers, but by being spiritually separated unto Jehovah. The figure of an unequal yoke was taken from farming of that day. A yoke was the wooden frame that bound two oxen together and fastened them to the plow or cart. It was crucial for the two animals to be of the same strength and temperament. Imagine the plight of the farmer who had a pony yoked with an ox. So it is true spiritually, if we are yoked to an unbeliever in marriage or in business (as a partner or union member) the Christian cannot work in the right direction. There is no concord between Christ and Belial (a name that signifies wickedness; e.g., son of belial was a wicked man). The call to spiritual separation comes to each of us from our heavenly Father Who jealously protects those whom He loves (vs. 18).

(To be continued)

ALL AROUND US

"Church Order and Anarchy"

Rev. G. Van Baren

In the April 1979 news bulletin of the Association of Christian Reformed Laymen there appears a quotation from this rubric, which was entitled: "Women in Office" (*Standard Bearer*, Feb. 15, 1979, page 235). That article commented on a letter from North Blendon Christian Reformed Church which appeared in the Banner. In that letter, the consistory of North Blendon informed the denomination that they "do not and will not consider this decision of Synod (on women in office of deacon) settled and binding upon the conscience and practice of our congregation." The A.C.R.L. Bulletin uses my article to point out that no anarchy is involved. I would quote part of their article and comment on some of their criticism. Those who would desire the entire article, can write the A.C.R.L., Box 1303, Grand Rapids, MI. 49501.

In the article, there is pointed out two "misconceptions." They write:

Misconception *number one* holds that the "lower ruling bodies" are the servants of the supreme ruling body: synod. Misconception *number two* holds that classes and synods are the servants of the local consistory as *the* supreme ruling body. *Both* suffer from an error which they have in common: they discuss the entire issue in terms of who is The Boss in the church. The implied premise is that someone must be the final authority, either the consistory or synod. *The one* holds that ministers and elders are the errand boys of synod. *The other* holds that the delegates to classes and synods are the errand boys of the local consistory. *Both* misconceptions destroy the *integrity of the office* as it has been established by Christ in the Church.

The article continues by explaining what is the

proper relationship between consistory and classis and synod:

They (classis and synod) are there *to serve* the local consistories. They are called together upon *the request* of the local churches, which takes turns in convening them, so that no one church is continually burdened with the organizational work involved, while maintaining the principle of equality among the churches. When their work is completed, they cease to exist. They are to act only upon matters duly brought there by the churches themselves. They are never to initiate action on their own. Major assemblies that go beyond the agenda presented by the churches are one of the greatest dangers in Reformed church polity. Delegates to classes and synods have a task that is limited by the Church Order, their credentials and their agenda. Any step beyond that is usurpation of authority. . . .

. . . They (the consistories) agreed to abide by the decision of the major assemblies, *provided* these decisions agree with Scripture. What they said in effect is that it is quite all right for a classis and synod to decide upon the matters before them, but that any such decision does *not become effective* until it has been looked over and reviewed on its Biblical merits by the local church. *They did not give away the authority entrusted to them by Christ!* . . .

The *Standard Bearer* states that the North Blendon CRC faces a dilemma: anarchy or anti-scriptural submission. The author labors under a serious misconception. He conceives of a synod as the equivalent of a civil government. As to the State the rule of Scripture is: Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers (Romans 13). Resisting these powers is revolution and results in anarchy. To curtail revolt and anarchy, the civil government has been given the power of the sword. But in the church we do not recognize "higher authorities." We recognize office bearers only, who have equally the *same* power and authority, wheresoever they are (Art. 30 Belgic Conf.). In the church we do not even for a moment yield with submission to "authorities," that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Galatians 2). Paul says that God is not a respecter of persons, therefore we are not to be respecter of persons. When Peter speaks according to Scripture, his words are received as from a brother in Christ. But if Peter acts cowardly, and plays false with the gospel and the church, as the Synod of 1978 did, we must do what Paul did: *publicly oppose* these false teachers to their face! As the apostle Paul considers it his duty to publicly oppose another Apostle, so it is the duty of our faithful office bearers to *publicly face* false office bearers, and disqualify them by dismissal from their office, if they persist in their heresy. That is not a matter of facing a dilemma, but a simple question of obedience to the teachings of Scripture.

The *Standard Bearer* considers the *mere act of publication* by the North Blendon Church in *The Banner*, that it is not bound by the women-in-office decision, an act of anarchy. As indicated in our

previous News Bulletin, the Stated Clerk and the Synodical Interim Committee in the CRC, essentially agree with this position of the *Standard Bearer*. So in principle does *De Wachter*, which considers it a weakness in the present Church Order to allow a local consistory the right to review a synodical decision on its Biblical merits, *before* it accepts such a decision as gospel truth, and *adopts it as its own decision*. If the *mere act of publication* of such a decision must be characterized as an act of anarchy, one is left to wonder by what word in the dictionary the *actual decision* not to abide by what Synod said must be qualified. It is remarkable how scared certain people are of the *printed word*, and in this age, of the *taped word*. The Pope sent thousands of people to the stake merely because they printed, or had in their possession, a printed copy of the Belgic Confession. . . .

. . . The *Standard Bearer* makes a big issue of the fact that the Church Order (Art. 29) states that an ecclesiastical decision must be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with Scripture. It reads this article to mean that this must be *proven to someone*. It can hardly mean to prove this *to oneself*. What it must mean, according to the *Standard Bearer*, is that this must be proven *to the body* against which one is aggrieved. But that body has been disbanded. Synod of 1978 is no more. That should have alerted the author that he was reading something into the Church Order which is not there. For a correct reading of the Church Order he should have gone to Scripture. How did the Bereans prove the teachings of the Apostle Paul? Mind you, those Bereans were simple folks, and they subject the words of an Apostle, a man directly appointed by the Lord to speak His Word, to a searching examination. How did they prove that Paul spoke the truth? *From Scripture*. And that is how in the church we "prove" synodical decisions. That's what the Church Order means when it states that in the church ecclesiastical matters shall be dealt with in an ecclesiastical manner. The church has her own "style" in proving things. Not by compulsion, not by managing the news, but by comparing the words of men (synods) with the words of Scripture. To maintain order and decency in the church, the Church Order has mapped out an orderly procedure. In the case of the women-in-office decision that procedure is very simple: do not consider the issue settled and binding. In other words: reject the decision. Who must do this rejecting? Of course, first of all each and every member of the church. But since no believer in the CRC is an atom that exists all by himself, he acts in concert with his fellow believers, as a member of the local church. And the consistory of the local church makes that rejection known to the other churches via its membership in the classis and synod. There is nothing mysterious about this that should confuse anyone, or cause anyone to holler: anarchy. *The CRC of North Blendon has invoked a right that she, and every other church in the CRC, has reserved for herself under the prevailing Church Order*. A church does not live in a vacuum. The rights of a church are not directed to a

vacuum. Every right carries a responsibility. In the present situation we are dealing with a clearcut case of heresy and disobedience to Scripture. What is required in these circumstances is discipline. We are dealing with a hard core of modernists who have far too long had their own way in the church. We are dealing with a determined group of people who are bent on destruction of the CRC as a church of Christ. That situation cannot be tolerated. That situation is not subject to discussion either. We are not dealing with a debatable issue. If the coming Synod proves unwilling to declare the women-in-office issue out of order, and does not declare the teachings of Drs. Allen Verhey and Harry Boer, and a number of other prominent men among us unscriptural, there will be only one way left to deal with these issues: namely, that the faithful churches *re-unite the CRC* on the basis of Scripture and the Confessions, and if at all possible, preferably the Church Order of Dort as maintained by us prior to 1965. The Revised Church Order is an amateurish piece of work, and a potential hazard witness the proliferation of virtually autonomous Boards and the papal powers bestowed upon or assumed, by the Stated Clerk. Forewarned is forearmed. The Rev. Van Dellen and others who predicted this development have been proven right. Let us not commit the same mistake twice.

1. I hesitate to respond to anonymous writers. I have never understood the practice of the ACRL in writing its bulletins this way. Surely all of its members are not unitedly in support of *every* word written and all do not assume responsibility for every word – at least I would hardly think so. A writer ought to assume full responsibility for what he has written – and consequences for this, if there are such.

2. The writer of this bulletin attributes views I presented as those of the *Standard Bearer*. The editor and other writers in the *Standard Bearer* do not necessarily espouse the views of any individual writer. So if there is any error or wrong in my article, I'll assume full responsibility. The views are not necessarily those of the *Standard Bearer*.

3. The writer(s) of the bulletin correctly point out the hierarchy evident in recent actions of the CRC Synods. He (she?) correctly sees the contradiction between this form of activity and the Reformed system of church government. However, the writer likely lived many years within the CRC denomination which in 1924-25 already practiced even worse hierarchy when two classes suspended and deposed ministers and consistories in the common grace controversy. Surely those who have lived within the church communion of those who practiced that kind of hierarchy over 50 years ago, could hardly have reason to expect anything different today. The writer would be well-advised to trace some of the current hierarchy back to its roots. Until such past action is condemned, what could he expect?

4. I find rather interesting the description of the writer concerning the two "misconceptions" about who is "Boss": the Synod or the Consistory. I would suggest that within Reformed church polity, we ought to insist first on the *autonomy* of the local consistory and church. It is the local manifestation of the body of Christ. A denomination consists of an organization of a number of such churches on the basis of agreement in doctrine and confession. (Therefore we speak of our denomination as Protestant Reformed Churches, not "Church," as though the denomination were that.) However, the autonomy of the local church is limited by its denominational ties, obviously. The local church assumes obligations and responsibilities within the denomination. As long as it is part of the denomination, the local church cannot ignore these obligations *while remaining part of the denomination*. It is not a question of Synod being the "boss." I refuse to be placed with *De Wachter* in that regard. But I have real difficulty with the claim, "What they (consistories) said in effect is that it is quite all right for a classis and synod to decide upon the matters before them, but that any such decision does *not become effective* until it has been looked over and reviewed on its Biblical merits (and approved? – G.V.B.) by the local church. *They did not give away the authority entrusted to them by Christ!*" And later, concerning the published decision of a CRC that it refuses to "consider this decision of Synod settled and binding," the bulletin states, "The CRC of North Blendon has invoked a right that she, and every other church in the CRC, has reserved for herself under the prevailing Church Order." Truly does the autonomous church have the right to reject anti-Scriptural and anti-confessional decisions of classis and Synod. Not only that, they have the duty and responsibility before God to do that. I do not fault North Blendon for a decision and publication of it in this connection. My problem is that North Blendon *does no more than that*. It announces publicly no decision to protest. Nor does it announce its intent to be separate from the denomination because of this heresy. It will nicely remain part of the denomination *while refusing to abide by the Synodical decision*. This position I regard as inconsistent and even un-Reformed. But perhaps North Blendon has taken other action not announced publicly in the *Banner*.

5. But it also struck me that the Synod of 1978 made such a decision that no one could possibly act in violation with it. So, what then does the decision of North Blendon really do? How are they going to implement their decision? The Synod also said that one need not install women deacons; North Blendon will not install women as deacons; so North Blendon is not opposing Synod's decision. Or: does their decision mean that now they will refuse to support

the College and Seminary where this is maintained? Are they going to refuse to support such mission activity where this might be taught? Are they going to refuse to allow ministers in their pulpits who teach this — though they are in good standing in the denomination? Are they refusing such to partake of the supper of the Lord who maintain this heresy?

6. The writer of the bulletin objects to my claim that one must prove to the erring body their violation of Scripture and confessions. It is plainly true that one must *first* prove to himself the error of a decision — before he can prove this to others. But if this is all, the result would be anarchy. The ACRL will soon discover this for themselves if they do manage to begin a new denomination. Can one, for instance, prove to *himself* that the decisions of the Synod re a-millennialism are in error — and then remain in the denomination while teaching something contrary? If “proving” something means that one need prove it only for himself, the church soon will be filled with people of many conflicting views concerning Scripture and the confessions. I maintain that one has to prove from Scripture and confessions to classis or Synod. If Synod will not be convinced, then one is

obliged either to submit to Synodical decision — or leave the denomination and find another more in agreement with the Word of God.

7. Nor do I believe that I “read into the Church Order something which is not there.” Surely it is true that the body making the decision is disbanded at the close of its sessions. Neither classis nor Synod are continuing bodies. But the writer(s) of the bulletin knows well that the Reformed church polity allows for and demands protest and appeal. Obviously, this can not be directed toward the body *disbanded* which had made the decision. But, protest must always come to the following gathering of the Synod. Have you never done that — even though you are protesting to a body that did not make the original decision?

8. Brethren, in spite of my comments and some points of disagreement, I would assure you that my sympathies are with you and with North Blendon. I wholeheartedly commend you for your opposition to all heresy. It is our prayer that through all of these struggles, doubtlessly so difficult for you at the present stage, His Cause may be maintained and His Word yet purely taught even till Jesus comes again.

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Letter to Timothy

May 1, 1979

Dear Timothy,

In my last letter to you I finished our discussion of some of the qualifications which a pastor ought to possess in order to work effectively with the sheep over which the Lord has placed him. I do not want to pursue this matter further at this time, but I do want to say a few words about the role of the elders in the whole area of pastoral work.

It is my judgment that, generally speaking, we do not involve the elders sufficiently in this aspect of labor. It is true that the elders are called to perform the work of the *government* of the Church, and that this means that elders are to be engaged especially in discipline. But this distinction must not be so forced that the elders are barred from doing the work which involves helping those who are in distress and beset by problems of every sort.

That this is also the work of elders follows from

several considerations.

In the first place, there cannot be any question about it that this work does indeed involve the government of the Church. It is not necessarily a part of discipline, if by discipline is meant the exercise of the keys of the kingdom. But discipline is a much broader term and includes more than censure and excommunication. Its basic meaning is, after all, instruction. So we also speak of “The discipline of the Word” as that Word is preached to all God’s people on the Lord’s Day. The Word which also the elders are called to bring is a Word of instruction to God’s people in particular circumstances in which the Lord has placed them. And that Word, in its very nature, has always a certain correcting power when it is applied to the heart by the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit. The elders also bring that Word.

In the second place, the elders are the only ones in the congregation at certain times who are in a

position to do this kind of work. This is true when a congregation is without a shepherd or when, for one reason or another, the pastor is absent from his flock. The responsibility for all kinds of pastoral labor falls exclusively on them.

In the third place, they are often best equipped to do this kind of work. It is, after all, a fact that a minister comes into a congregation as a total stranger. It takes him at least several months to come to know anything about that congregation at all and a much longer period of time to know the congregation intimately. In that congregation he stays for five or six years (sometimes less, sometimes more) and then he leaves for another flock. But the elders are often men who have been born and raised in a congregation, or who are, at least, members of a congregation for a much longer time than the minister. They know the congregation better. They have closer contact with the congregation. They are better able to understand the strengths and weaknesses of a given congregation (for, if I may put it that way, a congregation taken as a whole also has a personality, a particular character. In fact, it has struck me over the years that a congregation does not even change its personality very much even though one generation may die and another generation take its place.) They have known the members more intimately in their lives and problems. We talked a bit last time about how essential it is for one to know the sheep with whom he works. But elders know these people far better than does the pastor.

For these reasons elders are often in an excellent position to do pastoral work. And they ought not to be barred from this.

It is often objected that a pastor is in the best position to do this kind of work because he is trained for it in the Seminary. There is, of course, an element of truth in this. But there are several considerations that do not make this objection very serious.

In the first place, a student in the Seminary does not really get all that much formal training in this area. If fact, in our Seminary he gets only one semester of two hours of such formal training. This does not mean that matters of pastoral concern do not come up in many other courses and in many other connections. But the fact remains that his training is quite skimpy. We might make a good case for an expansion of this part of our Seminary curriculum; but the fact remains: this is the way it presently is.

In the second place, any minister will tell you that, while the training he received in the Seminary is necessary and invaluable, it was after all, when he actually began his pastoral work that he really began to learn what this work was all about. In the natural

sciences you can add laboratories to your school so that students have actual experience in cutting up frogs and such like things. But you cannot make a pastoral laboratory in the Seminary because you cannot move life itself in all its complexity and diversity into a lab. You cannot make a scientific study, within the walls of the school, of the troubles and problems which beset the people of God. You cannot pull out a man's soul and place it under some theological microscope in the Poimenics class. And not only does a pastor really learn what pastoral work is all about when he actually does the work, but he continues to learn all his life long. There are never two problems which are exactly the same because there are never two people who are exactly the same. Experience is everything. And an elder can gain that experience just as well as a pastor.

In the third place, it may very well be that elders need some help and guidance, some instruction and assistance in this work. But there are really no significant reasons why such help cannot be given. I know that ministers and elders are all busy and there is little time for extra meetings and extra work. Nevertheless, in an important matter such as this, it would be worth considering that a minister spend some time giving his elders some instruction in these matters, or, if it would work out better, that the minister and his elders meet periodically to discuss principles and methods of pastoral work. At the very least, ministers and their elders should spend some time at every consistory meeting going over the current problems in the congregation and discussing them. I am increasingly convinced that ministers ought not, as a general rule, labor in this area entirely independent of and without the knowledge of the elders. And I am increasingly convinced that the elders should take more of this work upon themselves.

The strength of our system of church government and the strength of the Church of Christ rest greatly upon the office of elders. Never must we minimize that office. Never must we neglect it. Never must it be shunted aside or made into a kind of Board of Directors. Never must an elder be denied his God-given place and calling within the congregation.

Let the elders assume more of this work within our churches. God will bless our elders so that they can perform this work; and God will bless our Churches through this work. It is indeed my own experience that elders are well able to do it if only they are encouraged and instructed as much as possible.

We must turn now to other subjects, but we shall wait with that until another letter.

Fraternally in Christ,
H. Hanko

TRANSLATED TREASURES

Pamphlet on the Reformation of the Church

Dr. A. Kuyper

Chapter 2

The Proper Formation of the Church

(After having laid down some general principles, Kuyper now turns to the subject of the proper form which the church of Christ in the world must take. His argument is that it is necessary to understand the church in her proper form before one can understand how the church loses this proper form and becomes ripe for church reformation.)

13. *In What Way the Formation of a Church is Brought About.*

When we speak of the formation of the church we refer exclusively to its perceptible manifestation, i.e., to her visible appearance; and thus not to her inner, mystical, and spiritual existence. To the question, who fashions this visible form of the church, it must be answered, God. Or, to be more specific, Christ does this through the believers by means of the leadership of the office.

God does this: 1) through His counsel in which is to be found the decree concerning the mystical essence of the church; 2) through His miracles and revelations by which the foundation is laid upon which the church shall be built according to the decree; 3) through His word and Spirit working the calling and the gathering of His elect; 4) through the impulse toward establishing a church which He works in His elect through the fellowship of the saints; and 5) through the demand for a confession of the word with which He comes to each believer.

Without the counsel of God there could be no people of God and thus no church could make its appearance.

In the same way, this impulse towards the communion of the saints and this demand for a confession become perceptible first if the saints reveal themselves by attempting to associate together in obedience to the word. And it is by this that God the Lord has bound Himself to the use of the means of the active manifestation of the believers in the forming of His visible church.

A certain number of believers, living in the same village or in the same town, but without the ministry of the word and orderly fellowship, does not yet form a visible church because then that function of

the life of believers which forms a church remains inactive. The church reveals herself as a visible body only when the impulse towards the fellowship of the saints begins to work in the company of the believers and in obedience to the word. Then the result of this activity of faith in the believers is that they walk in mutual fellowship, join hands, form a visible church, and by this formation bring into existence a church which is formed in personal and communal obedience to the Word of God. Only God and His Christ know whether this forming work of the activity of faith in the company of believers is genuine and pure, i.e., comes forth from an impulse of the person of the Holy Spirit in a part of the mystical body of Christ. But this is something which men can never know, at least in the absolute sense. He who does not know the heart can be misled by appearance and pious show, and as greatly as the gift of discerning the spirits is present in God's elect, sometimes in large measure, this gift is always exceptional and never perfect. This is the reason why the rule must always be applied that every judgment concerning the hidden life of the heart, (*iudicium de intimis*) must be avoided, and every judgment in the church must be made only concerning what men confess with their mouths and show in their visible walk.

By believers as instruments of church formation, we understand, therefore, such persons who by their pure confession of the truth of God and their virtuous walk, proclaim themselves openly as believers. This is a rule which includes the idea that seldom will a church be established which, already in its origin, has not hypocrites who slip into the gathering of God's saints.

For such an establishment of the church through the instrumentality of believers the following are necessary: 1) freedom to come together, to deliberate and decide; 2) a desire and declaration to join together in a common bond; 3) agreement with the demands of the Word of God in their formative activity; and 4) the duty and freedom to untie personally this bond when such a bond would make obedience to the Word of God impossible. Out of that principle each ecclesiastical bond is always dissoluble; or better yet, it falls apart of itself as soon as what was established as the church of Christ degenerates into a church of Antichrist.

Finally, this formation of churches through the instrumentality of believers never comes into being apart from the leadership of the office.

A church is no society, gathering, or association which regulates its interests according to its own choice and insight and is represented through certain functionaries who form it according to their own ideas and who determine its membership. If the church in her visible form were such a society, then it would be no more the true, spiritual, mystical church, i.e., a real church, and would thus forfeit the name of church. It would not then be formed principally by God Himself and only instrumentally by the believers. It would, apart from God, be simply a human creation. So as not to be this, but rather to be, by God's work, an essential and actual church, it must conform itself to that form ordained by God. Not the will of believers, but God's will; not human choice but God's word must be the formative power which controls its origin. Hence, already in its beginning and origin, a church is tied to the office. This indicates that the assembled believers who proceed to form a church do not have the least power over themselves and out of themselves, nor out of or over each other; but they must together kneel before the only One Who alone has power over them, i.e., before the Lord their God. They therefore possess no power of their own. Thus they cannot take up or take over any power; and therefore they have no other obligation than, in obedience to God, to designate men who are clothed with power. This power comes not through them but through God and for God's sake.

The church receives officebearers and in this way reveals herself as an organism only through the divinely instituted office of believers. The body which they form actually becomes and manifests itself as the church in the fullest sense only by the guidance of these officebearers.

This office can come into being either from without or from within.

It comes from without when overseers from other churches help in the formation of such a church. Or it originates from within when such a body which has freely withdrawn from all fellowship with neighboring churches designates, through the office of believers, persons concerning whom they ask God to place them in office.

There are thus three requirements for church formation. First, the operation of the Triune God in the fellowship of the saints. Secondly, a determination of believers to associate together in submission to God's word. Finally, the establishment of the office to distinguish the church of God from all other societies.

14. *What Constitutes the Essence of an Established Church Which Proceeds Towards Church Formation.*

In connection with an established church, it is necessary to make a sharp distinction between the form of the institute as such and the essence of the church which manifests itself in that institute. The essence of a visible church is and always remains the invisible church, provided that one includes with this the increased inclination to manifest itself externally. The invisible church is the body of Christ, i.e., the organic union of all the elect through the Holy Spirit under Christ as its Head. Thus if there are living in a certain city or village a number of living members of this body of Christ, then the essence of the church is there. And this essence comes to consciousness as soon as these members, even though in a defective way, exercise the communion of the saints and have the mind and will to bring this communion to fuller and surer ecclesiastical manifestation as soon as this is possible. Societies such as are established by non-ecclesiastical sects or antichristian groups are excluded from this. They are excluded not because no living members of Christ are included in these groups, nor because men do not attempt to exercise the fellowship of the saints in these groups, but because the mind and the will is lacking to manifest ecclesiastical formation when that becomes possible. A newly engrafted branch, even though for the moment it does not possess leaf or cluster, yet possesses the essence of the grapevine. It possesses the essence of the grapevine because it is certain that it develops out of itself towards the budding of leaf and blossom and thus towards the formation of clusters of grapes. So also a gathering possesses the essence of a church, even though its officers do not yet function, as soon as it is definite that it, growing and further expanding, shall acquire these officers who function in their office. On the other hand, a wild vineyard is no vineyard and lacks the essence of the vineyard even though its trunk shoots up very high and it is covered with the most luxuriant foliage, simply because it, though growing, never can produce a single cluster of the noble grape.

The essence of the church, therefore, does not lie in the means of grace nor in the institution which these means of grace help to introduce. No vine certainly, to keep the same figure, can live, much less thrive, without moisture and light, earth and warmth. But who would ever look for the essence of the vine in moisture and warmth? In the same way, no church can live without the means of grace. But the essence of the church must never be thought to lie in the means of grace, of whatever kind that may be. And the same even applies to those institutions which these means of grace serve. To keep a peach tree alive it must be fed with manure, irrigated with water, and covered with leaves to protect it from the frost. But neither the nourishing of the root nor the watering nor the reeds with which the gardener cared for it

belongs to its essence. So also the means of grace cannot be suitably administered to the church without ecclesiastical regulation, without a church building, without a baptism font, without bread and wine. But this in no way implies that this regulation and that which proceeds from it belongs to the real essence of the church.

The essence of the church always lies exclusively in her church-forming power. And this power rests, for the invisible church, directly in God, and for the visible church, in the members of the body of Christ.

It follows from this that a gathering in which there are no longer many members of the body of Christ has lost the essence of the church and retains nothing but a mocking image of the church even though it may continue formally pure in its institution. And on the other hand, each church still retains the essence of a church as long as it still bears in its bosom a group of living members of Christ even though all her institutions are corrupted. Even a tree entirely cut down still retains the essence of a tree as long as there is still life in its roots.

Naturally, we do not mean by this that each church, no matter how corrupt, shall remain a church as long as there still are a few children of God inactively remaining in it. But, on the other hand, these children of God or this group of members of Christ always maintain the ability in themselves either to reform the church of God or to form it anew. As long as acorns remain at one's disposal, the essence of the oak is not lost; but it can, though hidden, manifest itself again. However, the further treatment of this point will come in its proper place.

At this point it is sufficient to note that one ought not to be too hasty in his judgment concerning the church. Without doubt a group of elect is necessary for the first manifestation of the essence of the church, a group of people who are mature and resolute confessors. Young children, or people who have not yet made confession, even though they belong to God's elect, are incapable of church formation. In an existing church on the other hand, the seed of the church is indeed reckoned a part of it, and the essence of the church has not been lost even though the last of the adult elect have died out and no elect among the youth have come to conversion.

David's house remained the house of the Messiah even though an Ahaz and a Manasseh and an Amon raged in horrible worship of idols, because a Hezekiah had to be born from Ahaz and a Josiah from Amon.

On the other hand, a church which in earlier times blossomed can go so far that all living members die out and no seed of the Lord is recorded there any longer. As a result of this, the means of grace disappear and the institutions are corrupted. It is then possible for a church to reappear in that same town, but only by forming a new church, and no longer by means of a shoot out of the trunk which is not only cut down but has died within. We need therefore neither add to nor subtract from the description of Christ given by our fathers: "That it is a holy gathering of true believers in Christ who expect all their salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by his blood, sanctified, and sealed by the Holy Spirit." This description applies equally well to the invisible and to the visible church, and thus applies just as well for each local as for the church in general.

However, in this connection, one ought to keep before his eye the fact that the essence of a church can be considered from a double viewpoint. The church can be considered from the viewpoint of her essence according to her ability (*potentia*) or her essence according to her operation (*actu*). Dynamite is dynamite even though it has not yet exploded, because it carries in itself the potential to explode. And so a gathering possesses the essence of a church even though it may lack every office, because it continues to have the ability to establish the office.

According to this ability, or as some said in years gone by, reckoned according to potential, nothing else is necessary for the essence of the church except the gathering of believers in Christ, because this gathering has in itself the ability to establish and use the office and the means of grace. On the other hand, according to its operation, or *actu*, as men used to say, the office as well as the means of grace cannot be separated from the essence of the church. And whereas the essence almost always appears *actu* (actively) in the visible church, our fathers have correctly placed the essence of the church in "the gathering of the believers." And yet they referred to the word and sacraments protected by the discipline of the church as the earmarks of the true church.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon (Iowa) Protestant Reformed Church wishes to express their sympathy to a fellow member, Mrs. Jean Wynia, and her family in the death of her sister, MRS. MARLENE ALSUM.

May they be comforted by the words of the Apostle Paul with the assurance that "— all things work together for good to them that love God." (Romans 8:28).

Rev. M. Kamps, Pres.
Mrs. John Van Den Top, Vice Sec'y.-Treas.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 13, 1979, the Lord willing, our parents, MR. AND MRS. PETER ZANDSTRA will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the Christian home they have provided for us and for His guidance during our years together. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them in His care.

Joel and Marcia Zandstra
Emily Kay
Paul and Donna Zandstra
Neal and Jeanne Hanko
Bern Zandstra
Ruth Zandstra

News From Our Churches

Our Southeast Church in Grand Rapids has extended a call to Rev. David Engelsma, pastor of our church in South Holland, Illinois. The call was extended after a congregational meeting on March 19. The trio also included Rev. Arie den Hartog and Rev. Bernard Woudenberg. Professor Herman Hanko declined the call extended to him previously by the Southeast congregation.

The Council and the congregation of our South Holland Church have been working toward the goal of calling a missionary to work in a field for several years. Recently, the South Holland Council informed the congregation of their investigation of this project and have also made a proposal that the congregation call a missionary and begin labors. At present, the council felt that there are three possible fields of labor available. They are Jamaica, Birmingham, Alabama, and northwest Washington. Some work is being done in the northwest Washington area by our congregation in Lynden, Washington. The South Holland Council has recommended that labors be begun in the area of Birmingham, Alabama. The greater Birmingham area has a population of about one and a half million. Several of our ministers and professors have been to this area and report that the area seems to have a good potential for mission labors. There have been several requests for a missionary from our churches to come and work in this area. Seven families attended a recent meeting and expressed interest in the doctrine taught by our churches. These people have a Baptist background and are interested in the Bible and in preaching.

The Council has recommended the Birmingham area for the following reasons: it is a field recommended by the Mission Committee, the people have asked for help from the Mission Committee of our churches, and this field is the closest of the three to the South Holland Church. This work is to be accomplished under the new rules for missionary labor in which the work is to be the work of the local church, not the Mission Committee of Synod. The Mission Committee will contribute financially and assist the local church when help is needed. A final reason for this field is that the request for help has been for labor on a more continuing basis than to have different people coming in for a few weeks at a time.

The Mission Committee also recommends that the congregation try to go to the area in which they are responsible for mission labor so that they can meet with the people, see the field, be encouraged and encourage the work. This kind of work must have financial backing and prayers, but it must also have the love, attention, and prayers which can only be given by individuals and families.

The Council has proposed to, and received approval from the Mission Committee for, a list of five ministers who could be considered for a call to labor as missionary in Birmingham. They are Rev. den Hartog, Rev. Kortering, Rev. Slopsema, Rev. Van Overloop, and Rev. Woudenberg.

A special congregational meeting was held in South Holland on April 9 to decide on the mission field and to call a missionary from the trio of Rev. Kortering, Rev. Slopsema, and Rev. Van Overloop.

Our Hull, Iowa, consistory has informed the churches that they "grant Rev. Mark Hoeksema, upon his request and advice of Classis, release from the ministry under Article 12 of the Church Order." From a trio of Rev. D. Engelsma, Rev. J. Slopsema, and Rev. R. Van Overloop, Hull has extended a call to Rev. Engelsma.

The League of Eastern Men's and Ladies' Societies met at First Church in Grand Rapids on April 10. Rev. George Lubbers spoke on "Angels in the Holy Scriptures."

South Holland has scheduled a public lecture in their church on April 30. Professor Robert Decker plans to speak on "The Church's Calling to Mission Work and the Believer's Calling to Witness."

The Reformed Witness Hour still has copies of two cassette tapes available for \$2.00 each. Each of these contains 60 minutes of music sung by the Radio Choir. One tape is all Psalms and the other contains Psalms and Anthems. One hundred ninety-seven copies of these tapes have been ordered to date. Write to: The Reformed Witness Hour, P.O. Box 1230, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501.

The Spring Lecture in the Michigan area is scheduled for Wednesday, May 2, at 8:00 P.M. in Hudsonville Church. Professor H. Hanko plans to speak on "The Virtuous Woman."

K.G.V.