

THE *April 1, 2006* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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Volume 82 ◆ Number 13

He Shall Feed His Flock

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Isaiah 40:11

Isaiah was called to be a prophet of the Lord. In fulfilling his calling he prophesies judgment against the enemies of God in the first thirty-nine chapters of this book that bears his name. His pronouncements of judgments, however, are not limited to God's enemies. He is also called to prophesy against Israel because of their sins. Therefore, the first thirty-nine chapters relate chiefly to events leading up to the captivity.

Beginning with chapter forty and continuing to the end there are prophecies, warnings, and promises that refer to events beyond the captivity. They point to the cross of Jesus Christ and are thus rich in Messianic references. Furthermore, these prophecies point beyond the cross into the new dispensation and to the second coming of Christ and

the ushering in of the new heavens and earth.

In the immediately preceding context of our text he relates to us the work of God's salvation for His people. In the true sense of the word we have here the gospel, or as oft called, the glad tidings or good news. Here we have comfort in time of need, distress, and seeming hopelessness. Isaiah does this in figurative and most beautiful language.

Our text continues with the use of figures by which the prophet describes the nature of this work of the Lord. God has determined to protect and guard His church. Previously God was described as armed with terrible power for the defense of His people. Here we see the tender side of the Lord in order that His people may sweetly repose under His protection. All this points to the One through whom the Lord performs His saving work, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is our good Shepherd, who leads us in the green pastures and by the still waters of His Word.

The keeping of sheep was a common vocation in Judah. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob were pilgrims and strangers keeping their flocks. David, who penned the well-known twenty-third psalm, took care of his father's flocks. We read of the shepherds who kept watch over their flocks on the night of Jesus' birth. When Jesus preached during His earthly sojourn He used these pictures to describe Himself when He said, "I am the Good Shepherd."

The position of the shepherd was often difficult, as can be seen from the characteristics of a good shepherd. He had to know his sheep, for often the sheep of several owners were herded into one fold for the night. In the morning he would have to know which ones were entrusted to him. He had to know the right pasture. Thus he searched for the green pastures where the sheep could eat their fill and to their hearts' content. He had to know the enemies of the sheep and have the power and the willingness to protect them. Patience and longsuffering had to characterize the shepherd, for the sheep is a very foolish animal. It is so inclined to wander away, thus endangering itself either by exposing itself to the wild beasts or by simply getting

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The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

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The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Editorial Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Website for RFA: www.rfa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

lost. Thus the shepherd had to be on constant vigil and employ his patience in weaning wandering ones back to the safety of the flock.

This is often used as a picture of God's relationship to His people. The familiar words of Psalm 23 readily come to our mind, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." The Lord must provide guidance and care for His sheep. The Lord knows every one of His sheep by name, every one of us, even before we were born or ever the foundations of the earth were laid. He knows what is good for you, those grassy slopes where you feed to your heart's content, even His covenant of grace where you feed on the love of God and His friendship.

He also knows your enemies and has the inclination and the power to protect you. He knows that the world would like to swallow you up. He knows the wiles of Satan, who would take you for his spoil. And He knows the enemy of sin and guilt that would burn you in everlasting hell. Against all these the Lord protects us. And, yes, He is longsuffering.

Historically this had great significance for Judah, for they would be scattered in captivity, captives in the land of Babylon for seventy years. They are given the assurance that the Lord will lead them even when they are absent from the promised land.

This has significance for us as well. As the Lord was the Shepherd of His church in the old dispensation, so He will be our Shepherd in the new dispensation. The church is His flock. He assures her that He will lead and feed her.

This feeding implies life, all that is necessary unto eternal life. Through this feeding we will receive everything that is necessary to sustain that life. All of this feeding is provided through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God's Son gives life to His sheep and gathers them. God also through His Son feeds us.

This brings us back to the picture of the Shepherd. Jesus knows His sheep. We read in John 10:14, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." God has given you to Christ already in eternity. And He has never forgotten you. He even gives His life for you. Jesus knows your pasture. He says, "I am the Bread of Life; I am the Water of Life." He tells us to eat and drink Him spiritually unto blessed communion of life. He is the pasture of His people in that He is the Word of God. The thoughts of the heart of God are your and my food. When they come into our hearts we are satisfied.

He also knows our enemies. He protects us from the world by His Word and Spirit. He knows the wrath of God against sin and guilt. In our place He has stood, even unto death, in order that we might live.

Through all of this He is longsuffering. How often we have wandered and do wander, only to be led back again. While in the watches of the night we weep because of our sins, He comes to dry our tears and to comfort us with the words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee. Go in peace."

This spiritual food is applied by the Spirit of God. The Spirit works Christ's life in us and nourishes that life. He dwells in our hearts, applies the Word, and guides in truth. This is certainly an appropriate feeding.

That is beautifully presented in the text. The shepherd gathers the young in his arms and takes them to his bosom. These are the lambs, newborn and weak, who cannot possibly keep up with the flock. They include the weakest members of the flock, which cannot possibly defend themselves against attack and which are in need of the shepherd's constant protection.

Gently he leads those with

young. The ewes with their young cannot be forced along by driving. Thus he tenderly leads them. Every sheep he treats according to its capacity.

So does God feed His sheep. In their weakness He reveals His marvelous strength. The "arm" of verse ten is symbolic of might and power. It is strong to protect so that in His arms no harm can come, nor can anything separate us from Him. In our sorrow and affliction He reveals His immeasurable tenderness. In this way God preserves His entire flock.

Surely these sheep are none other than those addressed in the first verse, where they are addressed as "My people," when He says "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." These are the same people to whom Christ refers in John 10:3, 4, 14, 27, 28. "To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow

him: for they know his voice.... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto

them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

So in our text God's people are called "his flock." This obviously does not apply to everyone. God is speaking of His elect, those chosen in Christ from eternity. And this flock, His people, have spiritual characteristics. They are called sheep with good reason. Sheep are animals that must be fed. Sheep remind us of meekness and humility. As sheep we also are fed, and that too by the Shepherd.

And, oh, how richly He feeds us.



*I am the
good shepherd,
and know my sheep,
and am known
of mine....*

Another Look at the Declaration of Principles (concl.)

A Summary of the Declaration

The Declaration of Principles sets forth the Protestant Reformed Churches' understanding of and convictions concerning what the Reformed creeds and church order teach about grace, the preaching, the covenant, and church government. It is not intended to be a complete development of any of these, but only gives some of the principles and important elements of each.

The Declaration repudiates the teaching that God has a common grace to all men. In that connection it rejects the view that the preaching of the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation to all men, or a conditional offer to all who are baptized. However, the Declaration insists that the preaching comes to all, and God seriously commands all who hear to repentance and faith, and that to all who come and believe God promises life and peace.

Much of the Declaration expounds doctrines connected with the covenant. It does not intend to set forth a complete doctrine of the covenant. It does, however, identify what conceptions of the covenant are excluded by the confessions and what the confessions demand. Briefly, the confessions rule out the notion that the promise of the covenant is conditional and for all who are baptized. Also, there is no room in the confessions for the teaching that faith

is a prerequisite or condition unto salvation.

On the other hand, the Declaration demonstrates that, according to the confessions, all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone. Additionally, God's promise of salvation is only for the elect, and He always fulfills His promise.

Finally, the Declaration rejects hierarchy in the church by insisting on the autonomy of the local congregation.

The question remains as to what is the proper place and function of the Declaration of Principles.

The Authority of the Declaration

The Declaration of Principles is binding on the Protestant Reformed Churches, because it was adopted by an official decision of the synod of the PRC. Every decision of synod is to be "considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order" (Art. 31, Church Order). It is as binding as synod's decision on baptism in the mission field, or synod's adopting modifications to the Church Order. This is the Reformed order.

It is not binding as a fourth creed, however. That reproach is continually heaped upon the Declaration in an effort to "poison the well." It immediately questions the validity of the document. It places the PRC in total isolation (the PRC are outside the circle of those who hold only to the Three Forms of Unity! They are a cult, having their own creed.) It turns the discussion away from the *content*, and

presents the document in the most unfavorable light. Over the years, few indeed have been willing to engage in a serious discussion of the Declaration's content.

Probably nothing will convince these critics that the Declaration is not a fourth creed in the PRC, but for those willing to consider the evidence, the following demonstrates it. First, the Declaration neither defines nor gives a complete description of the doctrines it treats. As such, those elements are essential in a creed. The Declaration delineates what the confessions rule out with regard to the covenant of grace, but does not set forth a specific doctrine of the covenant.

Secondly, it consists almost entirely of quotations from existing confessions and liturgical forms. Such would be a strange creed indeed — over four-fifths of it quotations from existing creeds.

That the Declaration is not a creed is evident from its preamble, which defines its use: "...to be used only by the Mission Committee and the missionaries for the organization of prospective churches...." A creed would never be so limited by a synod.

Fourthly, officebearers in the Protestant Reformed Churches are not required to sign the Declaration. They sign the Three Forms of Unity. To be sure, their signature indicates agreement with the doctrines of the creeds *as taught in the PRC*, and the Declaration sets that forth. Nonetheless, they sign only the Reformed confessions.

Finally, the Declaration is binding, as are all synodical decisions,

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2006, p. 268.

but not in the same way that a creed is binding. This is evident from the fact that a gravamen is needed to change a creed; only an overture is needed to change the Declaration.

We maintain that adopting the Declaration of Principles is a legitimate, proper way for a Reformed church to deal with controversy over doctrines that are treated in the confessions. For example, if a question arises in a Reformed denomination about whether the confessions allow for theistic evolution, these churches are required to decide something. Their synod cannot merely quote the articles of the confessions that touch on creation, and say nothing more. That does not settle the argument, because the creeds do not explicitly address the teaching of evolution. The faithful Reformed church would be required to demonstrate from the confessions that evolution is not allowed. That takes a decision that interprets the confessions.

Similarly, when the controversy arose in the PRC about whether or not the confessions allow for a conditional covenant, the churches studied it, and decided that the confessions did not. That is what the Declaration demonstrates.

The Declaration and Missions

The proper use of the Declaration is, first and foremost, in mission work. That is the origin of the Declaration, and that is the synodically adopted use. By clear implication, both foreign and domestic mission committees must use the Declaration.

It could be argued that the Declaration does not apply well to missions in the twenty-first century, since it was written for use among the Dutch immigrants from the GKNV (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Liberated) in the 1950s. These people were raised in Reformed homes and churches, and thus they both knew Reformed theology and understood what the

Declaration taught. But those among whom we work today rarely have a Reformed background. To lead them to the point where they can understand the Declaration and express agreement with it will take a very long time. Is it necessary for a mission group to be that theologically advanced before organization into a church?

My answer is, emphatically, yes. The goal of every Reformed missionary's labor is the establishment of a Reformed church. If the church is Reformed, it will adopt the Reformed creeds. Before the church adopts these creeds, the members must understand them. Among other things, these members must understand that the Reformed creeds will not allow the teaching that God has grace upon the reprobate. It must be clear that the confessions reject the teaching of a well-meant gospel offer, and that they disallow the notion that the covenant is conditional. And one thing more. These Reformed confessions lay down a few principles of Reformed church government, the full expression of which is set forth in the Church Order of Dort.

What is that, but to bring the mission group to the point where they can say — we agree that the Declaration of Principles accurately sets forth the teaching of the Reformed creeds?

The alternative for a Protestant Reformed missionary is unthinkable. It is to teach the Three Forms, but to maintain that since these confessions do not explicitly reject common grace, the well-meant offer, and the conditional covenant, these issues may be faced later as they arise in the life of the newly organized church. Some have argued that simply because these issues are so intimately connected with the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, we ought not force mission churches to face these issues. These issues are a part of our history, and of Dutch Reformed theology, which does not apply to all situations, especially to foreign fields.

Such an approach is wrong on all counts. The Declaration demonstrates that these three errors are not allowed in the boundaries of what is confessionally Reformed.

In addition, these issues are not merely tied to the history of the PRC or to Dutch theology. Rather, these are issues of sovereign grace. Consider that common grace denies the total depravity of man. That is Pelagianism, the teaching of a British monk condemned by Augustine and the church almost sixteen hundred years ago. The teaching of a well-meant offer was the teaching of Arminius, but also of many in the Romish church before him, including Bishop Hincmar of Mainz in the ninth century over against Gottschalk, a martyr for the sake of the truth of sovereign, particular grace. The doctrine of a conditional covenant was taught by scholastics in the Middle Ages, as well as by the Frenchman Moyse Amyraud in the seventeenth century.

To organize a fledgling Reformed church without these issues clearly understood and settled is to leave a flock exposed to wolves. The issues will be raised. False teachers will bring in their damnable heresies. And if the starting point is that these are not confessional matters, the Reformed believer has lost a most significant help for understanding and defending the truth of sovereign grace. Without this solid foundation, the group will be split into factions or completely taken over by false doctrine. Much grief and division will be avoided if they adopt the explicit teaching of the Declaration of Principles early on.

The Declaration of Principles is a valuable aid to the Protestant Reformed missionary and the mission committees. It focuses attention on key doctrines that are potential trouble spots, areas where heresy will certainly be encountered today. If I were a missionary, I would insist that the Declaration of Principles be studied and adopted by the group before organization. If

any trouble later arose over these issues, the record would indicate that the people were taught the truth about grace, preaching, and the covenant. Let the mission committees by all means use the document that synod adopted for use “by the Mission Committee and the missionaries” (Preamble).

Other Uses of the Declaration

Although its preamble limits the official use of the Declaration of Principles to mission work, this does not preclude other good applications. Surely there is profit in instruction on the Declaration in catechism — if not on the whole document systematically, then at least let the minister bring in the Declaration at key points in his instruction on the Three Forms of Unity. By this, the instruction on the confessions will indicate that the confessions themselves reject the errors treated in the Declaration. Surely there is a place in the organic life of the church to study the Declaration of Principles — in societies, discussion groups, in families, and in personal study.

We must point out one other obvious good and proper use of the Declaration, namely in the work of the Committee for Contact with other Churches.

Even a quick perusal of the Declaration indicates that it would be very useful to a church or denomination that was interested in getting to know the Protestant Reformed Churches. Samuel Miller, writing on the value of creeds,


maintains that “the adoption and publication of a creed is a tribute to truth and candor, which every Christian church owes to the other churches, and to the world around her” (*Doctrinal Integrity*, p. 14). Though the Declaration is not a creed, it is a “tribute to truth and candor.” The fact is, there are scores of churches that go by the name “Reformed.” Virtually every one has adopted the same creeds — the Three Forms of Unity. What makes the Canadian Reformed different from the Netherlands Reformed, and the United Reformed from the Free Reformed, and the Christian Reformed from the Reformed Church US? There must be significant doctrinal differences that set them apart, else they ought not be separate.

The question ought to be faced by each one, Why are we a separate denomination from all the other denominations that call themselves Reformed? What makes us different? If it is simply a matter of emphasis or history, those are poor excuses for dividing the Reformed church world in North America.

The PRC has a ready answer to that question. It is found in the Declaration of Principles. We hold this truth dear. We stand on the foundation of the infallible Word of God and the Three Forms. If anyone is interested in knowing the PRC, here are the doctrines to which we have bound ourselves. We consider these doctrines to be biblical and founded on the Reformed creeds.

That is candor.

For the Declaration of Principles to be of much practical value, the Protestant Reformed Churches must use it, and even promote it, and that without apology. In the providence and grace of God, the Declaration of Principles preserved in her midst the truth of the particular grace of God and the unconditional covenant. Today, the twin-errors of common grace and the conditional covenant are destroying conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The PRC, out of a love for the truth and a love for the church of Jesus Christ, must make every effort to warn the churches and point to the fact that these errors contradict the Reformed confessions.

To continue condemning the Declaration for how it was adopted, or as being “extra-confessional binding” — that helps no one, and, I fear, only betrays an unwillingness to discuss the issues. If others can demonstrate that the Declaration wrongly explains the creeds, let them point out to the PRC her errors, for the love of the truth and the church of Christ. That is to say, let them demonstrate that the convictions expressed in the Declaration of Principles are not biblical, and are not based on the Reformed confessions. When all the chaff of criticism is swept away, that is all that matters to a Reformed believer, namely, is this the truth of God’s Word, and is it confessional. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

■ Teens Targeted with Porn

With full motion video from the internet now available on cell phones and iPods, the porn industry is becoming even more accessible.

Harvey Kaplan, who directs a company that sells two-minute hard-core video clips for download

to portable devices, sees the mobile world as an opportunity for his industry. He says that “people aren’t going to go out and buy a cell phone that streams video so they can watch a trailer of a Disney movie,” but they will, he thinks, buy that phone if they have five minutes of quiet time to view sexu-

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ally explicit video at 22 cents a minute. David Joseph, CEO of several "adult entertainment" companies, says, "Like other forms of entertainment, consumers want to watch programming that interests them at their convenience, so we expect that people will watch porn films in places other than the privacy of their bedroom." The target market is especially the youthful iPod and cell phone users.

Bob Knight, director of Culture and Family Institute of Concerned Women of America, says,

This is a nightmare for parents who are trying to protect their kids from early exposure to porn. In terms of delivering smut, the hand-held gadgets are already making the Internet look like a quaint old steam engine. Parents need to know that they are potentially putting an X-rated porn shop right into their kid's hands when they buy these [portable video players] for them.

Do our teenagers need these devices?

(*Herald Tribune*, 9-17-2005;
WorldNetDaily,
www.wnd.com, 1-29-2006)

■ 47,000,000 Abortions in the USA

In what can only be described as tragic, the United States likely experienced its 47 millionth legal abortion at some point in 2005, more than three decades after the Supreme Court issued its infamous 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing the killing of the unborn. The statistic is based on data since 1973 gathered by the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute and on estimates by the National Right to Life Committee. In the first full year of abortion legalization nationwide (1974), Guttmacher counted 898,600 abortions. That number reached a peak of 1,608,600 in 1990, before falling to 1,293,000 in 2002. Since 1975, the United States has witnessed more than 1 million abor-

tions each year. Unless the nation's laws are changed, the number of abortions post-Roe will pass 50 million in 2008.

Let's put this in perspective. This is almost 3000 murders per day — about the same number that were killed in the 9/11 tragedy. This is happening every day, and is considered legal. The tragedy is not simply that American culture is missing the talent, creativity, and productivity of these lives, nor is it simply that these children are missing out on life and opportunity, but the tragedy is the disobedience and defiance to God's word "Thou shalt not kill!"

(www.bpnews.net, 1-20-2006)

■ Biotechnology — When will men stop meddling in the things of God?

According to The Guardian newspaper, "Scientists, including Professor Ian Wilmut who cloned Dolly the sheep, are planning to use rabbit eggs instead. It gives new meaning to that old phrase 'breeding like rabbits.' They want to clone human embryos in rabbit eggs, and then destroy the embryos to get their stem cells." The problem is, while this solves one ethical problem (getting eggs from women), it raises a worse one—out of the frying pan, into the fire. The embryos that result from this process will not be entirely human. They will be what are called "chimeras"—part human, part rabbit. Mostly human, of course, but not all.

(www.christianitytoday.com,
1-20-2006)

■ Focus on the Family and Gay Rights

According to Paul Cameron of the Family Research Institute (FRI) Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family is wavering on homosexuality.

While Dobson has strongly denied supporting gay rights in any way, Cameron maintained the Colorado bill proposed by Sen. Shawn Mitchell — legislation that Dobson has endorsed — "grants homosexual couples some of the benefits currently reserved for married couples and their families."

Cameron asked: "How long can Dr. Dobson maintain the illusion that he has not endorsed special rights for homosexuals? Senator Mitchell, The Denver Post, the gay-rights movement — all understand the special pleading of this bill. Pro-family activists around the country are awakening to the reality that the leadership of Focus on the Family has — for some time and in a variety of ways — been leading the pro-family movement in a slow but steady retreat."

(*Christian Newswire*, 2-14-2006)

■ Evolution Sunday

February 12, 2006 marked the 197th birthday of Charles Darwin. The day was labeled by many as "Evolution Sunday" and churches across the country had good words for Darwin and evolution. Obviously, this meant bad words for Bible-believing creationists. Patricia Templeton, who closes her mind to God's Word by taking the office of minister in the church, said in a sermon, "A faith that requires you to close your mind in order to believe is not much of a faith at all." Theoretically, she is correct. But in her open mind to evolution, she closes her mind to Scripture.

(*New York Times*, 2-13-2006)

■ Worship Seminar at Calvin College

"The Last 30 Years: What We've Learned Along the Way" was the theme of a day-long seminar at Calvin College in late January. According to Witvliet, who opened the session, the goal was to "see what God is doing in the church today"

and to avoid a “blindness to other ways God may be at work.”

The panel of speakers included one Roman Catholic scholar (Joyce Zimmerman), one Orthodox Presbyterian historian (Larry Sibley), one president of an African Methodist Episcopal Zion seminary with roots in the United Methodist church (Albert Aymer), one reputable practitioner of “spiritual theology” (Eugene Peterson), one pastor from the seminal mega church Willow Creek (Nancy Beach), and the leading spokesperson of the Emergent church movement (Brian McLaren).

The day was one of open dialogue between the different speakers, and they and their audience were supposed to learn, not from the mistakes of the last 30 years, but from each other and the way others were doing things in worship. At the end of the day, Nancy Beach was able to say, “I can’t say enough about this kind of gathering, because I think one of the most important virtues that we could walk out of here with [is] humility and grace towards one another. I see too many Christians shooting their own, and I don’t understand that.”

Certainly there is something to learn from changes in worship in the last 30 years — and that is that the change has not been good for the church. When we talk about worship, we need to be learning first from God’s Word. He will not be worshiped in any other way than He has commanded in His Word. That’s Reformed.

(www.christianitytoday.com, 1-31-2006)

■ Gibson’s Profits

What is Mel Gibson doing with all the money he made from “The Passion of the Christ”? Three things,

1. Apparently, he’s starting his own breed of Catholicism which rejects Vatican II.

Last year, according to federal tax filings, Gibson parked \$5 mil-

lion of his “Passion” profits in his tax-free private foundation — the same vehicle he’s used to pour millions into a 17-acre religious compound he’s building in Agoura Hills, Calif., at a “secret” rural location. The setup now includes his very own 9,000-square-foot Holy Family Catholic Church. The church has about 70 members and a collection of buildings under construction.

2. He’s financially supporting his father’s setting up of a similar church in Pennsylvania. In this, Gibson seems also to be endorsing his father’s controversial beliefs about the holocaust (Hutton Gibson says, “It’s all — maybe not all fiction — but most of it is”).

3. He has made a new film, *Apocalypse*, and is readying it for release this spring.

(www.foxnews.com, 2-13-2006)

■ WCC Begins Meeting

The World Council of Churches began its 2006 meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil on Tuesday, February 13. It seems that there is some internal tension amongst the 350 member-denominations. At this meeting, the WCC wants to reach out to Pentecostals, cooperate with Roman Catholics, and seek to mend rifts with Anglicans. The two main sticking points are dialogue with Islam and the ordination of homosexuals. The goal, of course, is to help churches to be more open-minded, and at the same time, less biblical.

(ABC News International, 2-16-2006)

■ Evangelical Center in Jerusalem

Pro-Israel Evangelicalism is reaching across religious lines to Judaism again. The goal is obviously to get a foothold in Jerusalem, with the hopes of the millennial kingdom having some connections there.

The Jerusalem Municipality has au-

thorized the temporary establishment of an Evangelical Christian center for worship on the Mount of Olives for the benefit of those visiting the Holy Land, according to the city and the organizer.

The prayer tent, the brainchild of a Jerusalem-based Evangelical Christian leader who is directly involved in contacts between Asian Evangelical Christians and the Holy Land, will be able to host up to 500 people at a time.

Its establishment comes at a time of burgeoning ties between Israel and the predominantly pro-Israel Evangelical Christian community around the world.

Organizers hope that the center will become a permanent fixture and that the city will extend the interim permit.

(*The Jerusalem Post*, www.jpost.com, 2-12-2006)

■ Missionaries Leave Venezuela

President Hugo Chavez has ordered the expulsion of a team of 40 missionaries from Venezuela. The missionary group, known as New Tribes Mission, has been accused of spying for the CIA and exploiting indigenous communities. The government has not backed up the accusations with any evidence. Chavez simply claims that the indigenous people will be better off without “that organization of imperialist penetration.”

Alexander Luzardo, a professor of anthropology at Venezuela’s Central University, has denounced the missions for what he calls “cultural genocide,” accusing them of terrorizing Indians into adopting Western practices and beliefs.

Of course, this is politically motivated, but it shows also an opposition to Christianity and the spread of the gospel.

(Associated Press, 2-12-2006) 

The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (6)

The Second Disputation: Chapter 1:6-2:9 (continued)

1:11. *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Whatever of spiritual things we do not cherish God takes away from us. That is the reason for the gift of the gospel to the Gentiles, and it is the reason why the gospel has moved from one Gentile nation to another in the course of New Testament history. Here, for their lack of regard for the priesthood and offerings, God promises that He will take both away from the Jews and give them to the Gentiles.¹ The eleventh verse of Malachi 1 is not just a prophecy of the ingathering of the Gentiles, however, but also a prophecy of the priesthood of all believers in the New Testament and the spiritual sacrifices that are offered by that universal priesthood.

That glorifying and honoring of God's name by the Gentiles is described in terms of their becoming

a priesthood that replaces the corrupt and wicked priesthood of Malachi's day. The verse therefore prophesies what Luther called the priesthood of all believers. In that priesthood every believer is now priest, as well as prophet and king, through Christ and under Christ. Apart from the priesthood of Christ Himself, there is no longer a special and separate priesthood.

That priesthood is mentioned and its work described in I Peter 2:5: "Ye also, as lively (living) stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Those spiritual sacrifices are described in Romans 12:1, 2 as the offering of our bodies in grateful service to God; in Hebrews 12:15 as the offering of our lips in praise; and in Psalm 51:17, the sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart. These sacrifices are offered, according to I Peter 2:9, for the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Such offerings are made in worship and in the everyday life of God's people. They really are sacrifices in that they require the giving up of all pride, all self-sufficiency, all self-seeking, and all fleshly desires. They are true spiritual sacrifices, sacrifices with which God is well-pleased and which He accepts, not as an atonement for sin — that sacrifice was offered and could be offered only by Christ — but as a thank offering, a freewill offering, that is the

deepest expression of a redeemed and regenerated heart.

As a spiritual and universal priesthood, New Testament believers no longer need trust in the intercession of an earthly priesthood, but go themselves to the throne of grace, praying there for one another and for themselves. As a spiritual priesthood, they bring and offer their own sacrifices. And insofar as their priesthood is universal, their work as priests is no longer limited to one place but is done "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same."

That priesthood of all believers, one of the great doctrines of the Reformation, though seldom remembered or believed today, is an important truth for the daily life as well as for the church life of every believer. It is that priesthood which requires private prayer and worship as an integral part of the life of every believer. As a priest, every believing father has the calling to be an intercessor and teacher in his own family. Holding that priestly office, every child of God, male or female, young and old alike, has the calling to be holy and in holiness to offer himself in all he or she does as a sacrifice to God. It is that same priesthood of believers that requires that believers be participants, not spectators, in the

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2006, p. 255.

1. As was noted last time, the words "Gentiles" and "heathen" in verse 11, though translated differently in the KJV, are really the same word in Hebrew.

public worship of God, and that makes them the source of all authority in the church.

The Heidelberg Catechism identifies this priesthood of all believers with being a Christian. In answer to the question: "But why art thou called a Christian?" the Catechism answers: "Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may ... present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him...." In those who fulfill these priestly duties and do so with a true heart, the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled.

1:12. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.

1:13. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness it is! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.

In these verses, which conclude the first chapter but not God's word to the priests, the prophet returns to the matter of priestly sins. Insofar as this section repeats what has already been said in verses 6-10 it does so by way of emphasizing the seriousness of the priests' sins. God could not forget or overlook those sins, though the priests would not recognize them. This section, then, is not just repetition, but it elaborates on the sins of the priests and on the reason why their actions were so wicked.

Verse 12 and the first part of verse 13 tell us more about the attitude of the priests towards their priestly duties and office. The priests excused their laxness with respect to the offerings by saying that what they were doing really did not matter — that neither the table of the LORD, that is, the table of shewbread, nor the food that was offered to God on that table and on the altar were very important.

We do not know exactly what they were saying, but perhaps they used the excuse that neither the table nor the altar were the originals, or that the meat of the sacrifices and the bread of the table were only types and shadows of heavenly things. Whatever they were saying, it was simply an excuse for their own lack of proper regard for the things of God. Thus they found the service of God wearisome and snuffed at it, that is, treated it with disdain and contempt.

How common these sins are. Many have the same attitude toward those aspects and elements of worship that God commands. When anyone raises questions about their own practice, their excuse is always that these things do not really matter, that the only thing that matters is that God be worshiped and served — the *how* is of no account. And when they must endure the things God has commanded, they view them with the same contempt and sneering arrogance as did the priests whom Malachi curses.

This is their attitude not only towards matters of public worship, but towards the things that are required of the Christian in his daily life. All that matters is feeling and sincerity. The specific details of the Christian life commanded in the Word of God do not matter. Blasphemous words, Sabbath-breaking, disdain for authority, fornicating, lying, cheating and stealing, speaking evil of others, coveting and hatred do not matter.

It should be noted, too, that "torn" in the description of their sacrifices does not mean "torn by wild beasts" but torn away from others by violence, stolen. That needs emphasis over against the practice of so many self-appointed priests and leaders in the church who use their influence and office to fulfill their own carnal desires, and who by hook and crook, by pleas and tears, by suggesting that the Lord will take them away if

their hearers do not send them millions, tear away the living of the poor and of the widows. That is bad enough, but when they make a pretense of offering it in the service of God, surely they must hear Him say, "Should I accept this of your hand?"

1:14. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

God is not in verse 14 simply speaking again of the way in which the priests corrupted His offerings. Rather, He is implicating the people as well in their wickedness. Rarely is it the case that the church has bad leaders and good members, or that the wickedness of the leaders cannot be traced to the failings and weaknesses of the people themselves, as well as the wickedness of the people to that of the leaders. Here, too, that was the case. The priests polluted the offerings of God, but did so at the behest of the people who were themselves covetous and empty of the fear of God.

God is also saying something about how evil the practice of both people and priests was in light of the fact that He required so little of them. He did not ask all their flocks and herds, only an occasional beast. He did not expect them to bring the more valuable females, but allowed them to bring the more expendable males. So little did He ask, and even that they would not do. Having vowed a male, they brought one that was sick or lame. Obligated to bring a sacrifice, they brought only what they did not want anyway. We are often like them. As one commentator says: "How often do we keep back the firstlings of our flocks, the best of our services, and offer God the shreds of our time, the weary remnants of our thoughts and affections, and the niggardly gleanings of our means."²

For the first time, the book of Malachi uses the name "Lord," that is Adonai. This name, not all in capitals, as all who are acquainted with the KJV know, is a different name from the name LORD, or Jehovah. The name Lord refers to God's sovereign ownership of all things, and is a further reminder that the grudging covetousness of the Jews in giving God only their castoffs was all the worse in view of the fact that all that they had belonged not to them but to Him. In bringing their offerings they were only giving Him what was al-

ready His own. For us, too, it is always the case that when we forget that God is the Owner of all, we begin to grudge everything He asks of us.

God shows them, and us too, that this is no small thing in His sight, for He is no beggar to be satisfied with scraps and leavings, but a great King, one whose name is worthy of awe and reverence, one who is offended and angered at their contempt for Him. Even the heathen, He says, had shown and would show more regard for His name than do His own people.

The reference to the heathen is a reminder of those heathen who had in times past acknowledged, some of them under duress, the greatness of God's name (Dan. 4:1-3; Jonah 3:6-9). It is also a prophecy of the coming of Christ, when God's name would be taken from the Jews and given to the heathen who would honor and worship it.



2. T. V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974, p. 123.

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist (4)

Introduction

Charles Finney's work can be criticized for many reasons. He was thoroughly Pelagian in his theology, not because he was ignorant of the Reformed faith, but because, although he had been taught it as a youth and young man, he had deliberately abandoned it. He was a sort of self-appointed evangelist and an itinerant preacher who pretty much "did his own thing," without being responsible or accountable to anyone but himself. He was also and preeminently a revivalist, and his revivalism was unbiblical in all respects. This latter especially needs to be emphasized because re-

vivalism is today a major element in evangelistic and even Reformed thinking. Many see the only solution to the church's woes as revival. Many therefore confidently expect that it will come, and they pray earnestly for it. They pray against the will of God who does not work in His church in that fashion.

Revivalism and the Covenant

In the last article I criticized revivalism for a number of reasons. I waited till my final criticism to deal with what I consider the most important objection of all. I refer to the fact that revivalism does not and cannot have any proper conception of the covenant of grace. This charge is true on especially two counts. It has no biblical conception of the place of children in the covenant, and consequently it has a wrong view of conversion; and it lacks a proper and biblical conception of how God works salvation organically in the line of the

covenant. About both I must say something.

Revivalism has no biblical conception of the place of children in the covenant. The teaching of Scripture and the Reformed confessions is that children as well as adults belong to the covenant of grace. This does not mean only that children of believing parents are born outwardly in the covenant and receive outwardly the privileges of the covenant. That children as well as adults belong to God's covenant means that the elect children of believing parents are in a relationship of friendship between God and His people, which is the essence of salvation. God saves children.

Although this is the Reformed view of the covenant, many do not hold to such a conception. They insist that children of believing parents, though they may belong to the covenant outwardly, are not truly and inwardly in the covenant until

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Previous article in this series: March 15, 2006, p. 282.

they are converted, or, as some say, until they accept the provisions of the covenant. Especially in revivalistic preaching, conversion is the one condition that is required for salvation. If revivalists speak of a covenant at all (Finney did not), they emphasize that conversion is necessary for entrance into God's covenant of grace.

This view leads to a very sad attitude that people take towards their children. Perhaps a personal experience will underscore this point. In our work in the British Isles we came up against a strange phenomenon in connection with people who were concerned about the work of salvation. People were constantly asking whether their children or their acquaintances or their fellow members in the church were either converted or unconverted. And, if they were considered converted, the time and place and circumstances of their conversion could readily be described. Furthermore, the more interesting the "conversion story," the more likely the conversion was genuine. This was especially sad in the attitude that parents took towards their children. They watched eagerly for signs of conversion in their children as they grew up, and they dealt with their children as unconverted until such signs appeared, frequently only after their children had married and had families of their own. Children and young people, aware that their parents considered them unconverted, began to consider themselves as unconverted, and many concluded that, since they were unconverted, they might just as well live that way.

It struck us as strange that characterizing people as converted or unconverted should be so much on the minds of people. But it soon became evident that this whole tendency to judge people when we ought not to judge them arose out of a wrong view of the covenant and God's way of working conversion.

Most people were unconverted, whether in the church or outside

it. The churches were dead chiefly because they were filled with unconverted people, officebearers, and even ministers. Such a state of unconversion within the churches persists and seemingly grows worse. Revival is the one thing that can bring change. When revival comes, along with it comes mass conversions. Hundreds and thousands are brought under the conviction of sin and are introduced to the happiness that forgiveness can bring. The whole process, brought about by the revivalists, is accompanied by mass meetings, emotional preaching, and the most outrageous behavior imaginable. Especially strange and wrong behavior is supposed to be indicative of true conversion, although, even then, experts in what constitutes true conversion are sometimes required to judge whether a person's experiences were genuine or not, for room is allowed for the deception of the devil, who likes nothing better than to give people a false sense of being converted, for that is the surest way to hell.

Add to all this mix the Arminian gospel of Finney, along with his anxious seat, and you have a situation where true conversion is the work of man, brought about by the revivalist who presses the claims of the gospel and demands an immediate decision, but who assures you that the final decision is yours to make.

How much more God-glorifying is the way the Holy Spirit saves. Without contesting the fact that sudden and remarkable conversions may take place on the mission field, especially in those foreign fields where the gospel has never been preached, we insist that, even on the mission field, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ ordinarily saves believers and their seed. He saves households, not individuals. He brings into the fellowship of the church covenant families, not solitary souls.

And when, within the covenant, the Holy Spirit works con-

version, He does so in the elect children of believers in their infancy, or even before birth (Jer. 1:5). And when the Holy Spirit works conversion, He works it in such a way that it is quiet and all but unnoticed in the heart of the elect sinner and it continues all his life. He works, not through the earthquake, the fierce wind, the fire of revivals, but through the still, small voice (I Kings 19:9-18) of the irresistible power of His Spirit transforming the heart and mind. He works through the elect believer's life so that daily the believer is brought to the consciousness of sin, flees to the cross, and finds peace in the blood of his Savior. He works so that the believer daily fights with sin within and without, and finds strength for battle in the cross. He works as a fern that I once saw, the spore of which was buried beneath the asphalt road, but which, slowly, without daily measurable growth, unnoticed and unattracting, nevertheless was able to force its way through two inches of tarmac.

This was the lesson Elijah had to learn. He thought revival had come on Mt. Carmel when all the people shouted, "Jehovah, he is the God." But he found that once Carmel's revival was over, Israel returned, as converts frequently do after revival, to their deadly normal way of life. He had to learn that fire, thunder, earthquakes, and wind will not accomplish God's purpose. The still small voice of the Holy Spirit reserves to God a seven thousand who refuse to bow the knee to Baal.

Revivalism and Preaching

As it is God's purpose to save in the line of generations and thus to accomplish His decree of election, so it is also God's purpose to accomplish reprobation in the line of generations. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Thus, when individuals forsake the

church and turn their backs on the true gospel, these go lost in their generations. It is true that, as generations go lost, God saves a remnant out of these generations. Much of home missions consists of that work. But the time comes when a church (or a family within the church), once having departed from the way of truth, becomes the false church in which the blood of atonement is denied. So it was in the northern kingdom of Israel; so it is today.


In this way God completes His work. He saves the true human race of eternal election. That human race must be and is gathered from all the nations of the earth. Jesus points to the fact that one of the signs of His second coming is that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). The end comes because the gospel, having gone throughout all nations, has gathered the elect from all nations. But God's work is always perfect. That same gospel has

accomplished its sovereign purpose of hardening, and the whole world has, through its rejection of the gospel, become ripe for judgment.

God always performs His work in an orderly way. What is done in the church must be done decently and in good order because God does things orderly. Revivalism teaches that God, through special outpourings of the Holy Spirit, returns again and again to a dead church to bring revival. A church dies, the Holy Spirit brings revival; the same church dies again, revival comes again. And so it goes, on and on without any end. No, God does not work this way. He causes the gospel to be preached and He saves in the line of generations, believers and their seed. He hardens in the line of generations, unbelievers and their seed. In such a way the church is gathered from all nations and tribes and tongues, and the wicked are hardened in their sin and become ripe for judgment.

But the power is always the preaching. Our Heidelberg Cat-

echism makes part of our confession of the church this statement: That the Son of God, by His Word and Spirit, gathers defends and preserves unto Himself a church... (Q. & A. 54). It is not revival that the church needs, but preaching. It is not special outpourings of the Spirit with horrible manifestations of power. It is the pure preaching of the gospel. It is Christ-centered, biblical and confessional, expository, lively preaching of the Word that the church needs. How sad it is when the church looks to revivals that will never come except in a form that does violence to all that Scripture teaches concerning God's way of saving His church, all while true preaching falls in the streets.

Let the church tend to her task of preaching. When the church preaches, it is faithful to her divine commission. Then the Holy Spirit will work, by the still, small voice of His efficacious power, to save those ordained to eternal life. And God will accomplish His purpose to the glory of His name. 

Grace Life for the Rising Generation

Rev. Mitchell Dick

"Discerning the Bodies"

Bodies bodies everywhere. What's a body to think?

God has made them. He has made the universe *full* of bodies, and He has put us smack dab in the middle of them. And He has even given glorious bodies for us to think about. There is a glory of the sun, of the moon, and of yon feline. Think about it. And thank God for such glories. It is all cre-

ated — the size, the brightness, the power, and yes, the curves, to show something of the great and glorious and bodiless ... God Himself!

Problem with us, however, is we can be *too* body conscious.

We can be too concerned about *human* bodies. Why, there are whole books called "bod-books," which are supposed to identify everyone from fresh men to seniors according, I suppose, to their bodies. Besides, what makes us feel good about ourselves is often just about how good we think we *look* as to our bodies. And what attracts

us to other humans is often mostly their figures, or perhaps, what they can *do* with their bodies.

Too much. Body. That's our problem.

We are more than that. We are more than the water that makes up a large percent of our bodies. We are more than the flesh, the bones, the hair, the glands, the organs, and the teeth. We are souls. We are soulish-bodies. We are bodies with hearts within hearts. And we can *do* more than catch, and throw, and ski, and digest. We can think. And do poetry. And love. And pray.

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But seems so often bodies and flesh and the jamming of balls and dressing to kill and hankering after and dreaming of, and being *just bodies* is all.

Our little life.

Of the earth earthy.

Of heaven? Of communion with the God above? Of *spiritual blessings in heavenly places*?

Seems like that's alright for the body...of a creed.

Or maybe for the bodies of those who are old and gray and about to lay their bodies down to sleep in the grave.

But I in my body, you in yours ... and at the same time more than meets the eye and sniffs and sleeps and touches and toils and wants to wed....

Hardly....



So what's a body to think? What is a grace-life young body to think? And to do?

First thing is, relax. Bodies are gifts of God. And Christianity is not and is not to be an "out-of-body" experience. Don't think of your bodies as so much excess baggage, weighing down the soul and interfering with the soul-life. Be set free of the talons of the tall tale that sanctification is all about suppression of this, that, or any and every other desire to eat, drink, and even to be merry in the body. The incarnation of our Lord puts that notion to rest. And Saint Paul speaks of every creature of God (including their bodies) being *good* and even a blessing when sanctified by the Word of God and prayer.

But second thing is this. You want to know about bodies and what to think of them and do with them *as believers*? You want to know what to do or not with your body, or with her body? You want to know how to admire beautiful bodies without lusting after them? You want to know the difference between a good and godly getting "in shape" and anorexia or being the all-American who sweated and sprinted away his soul? You want

to know how *not* to want more stuff and bodies than is good for the soul? You want really to be able to desire and to pray just for daily bread and not daily caviar or a bevy of Bachelors or to be an American idol?

Here. Simple. Profound. The Word of God. Truth of God. Salvation. Gospel of grace. Jewel which is Jesus. Of souls. And about bodies.

It is this.

Discern the body. That's it.

That body is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. That body is the body of God with us in real human flesh. It is that Son of God come to substitute for real sinful human souls and their bodies. It is that body which bore sin for us, and the wrath of God for sin. It is the Savior Body broken that we might be again one with God. It is the body risen as *the Head* for the justification of that other body He makes, that body, His, called *the Church*.

Yes, the Church. That too is the body we must discern, and exactly because it is the body of our Lord Himself.

The body of our Lord is the people of God who are chosen in Him, bought by Him, indwelt by Him. It is the One in Him. It is the many on earth and the many in heaven and bound by grace to be glorified one day body and soul. It is the body of the Bride blessed of Him. It is the beautiful virtuous body of Him.

Discern that, Grace Life readers! That is, know what that body, that Christ, that Church of Christ is. And then: know and acknowledge the difference between the Christ and His Church *and all those other bodies in the heavens and on earth!* And then, at the same time: *Value* this Body of bodies, this Christ and His Church, more than all you can see and get and chew and gain and throw and hug and kiss and marry and walk on and put in your bank.



Discern? Separate in your mind from all others? Value above all others? Christ and His Church? When over there they go surfing on Sunday, and it looks so fun, and here I am in a tree and it's a certain week in November and it's just the best? When, though Jesus has never let me down, His Church surely has, and *that* body looks to me kind of battered, and, well ... blah?

Discern? How? Just How?

Just this: *Believe*. Exercise that wonderful gift giving you an eye for God, and an appetite for things that earth can neither afford nor contain (in any body!).

Believe! Trust God! Place complete confidence in the Captain of your salvation, Jesus Christ. Be confident in all He has revealed in His Word. Hold it for truth, and that the salvation-from-sin-and-to-be-with-God life is all your happiness now and forever.

Believe! Exercise unto pools of sweat and blood your faith. Tear from too much world. See how tiny and temporal are the things that perish with the using. Stop blaming God for body problems. Try a little repenting....

Right now, and for the discernment of the body of Christ: *that kind of believing!* In your body, in your place in your skin with your blemishes and in the midst of so many bodies below and though you and I tumble and fall over and over again in our bodies on this earth ... *believe!*

And believing, hop, skip, and run with no further delay to these merry things that make for believing: Hearing Jesus in His Word and by His Preachers! Loving Jesus, which is an obeying of Jesus! Cherishing His salvation and life and blessings in Him, which is a *disdaining of the vanities of this life!* Giving to and being involved in His cause and kingdom and people ... *more than to or in any body else in the universe!*



All this, of course, is being

soulful in your body. Which is good. Which is the way God made us humans to be. But it goes against the grain of fallen nature. And it surely goes against the urges of a growing young grace life believer.

The easy thing, even for Christians, is to go with the grain. It is quite bodily of us, even carnal, and very common to yield in the body to the flesh, to the principle of sin still snurking around even in what we thought were the most safe and sacred of houses and habits.

But an easy bad thing. An easy devastating thing.

For then, like Corinthian Christians long ago, we do not discern, as we ought, that body of our Lord.

In fact, not discerning the Lord's body was for all kinds of body problems at Corinth long ago. It even got folks killed there (I Cor. 11:29ff.), and some believing in no resurrection of the body (chapter 15), and spoiling the communion with God and one another in one perverted bodily way or another.

Beware! Lack of discernment and preaching and hearing and believing of Christ and of Him crucified, and lack of love for Him and His Church ... is becoming and has become the death of many-a-professing believer and even of many-a-once-Reformed body of believers.

That body! Christ's body!

Discern it, exalt Him, and exult!

Live in communion with that body, and not with the wicked world.

Through faith, dear Grace Life readers!

For blessing of body and soul.

And the grace life.

In the body now even.

Not for your kingdom

And stuff.

Nor your perfect 10.

But for God's


And His blessing

And the perfect

In progress

Grace life

In the body and the soul...

Glory! 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Doug Kuiper

The Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians (2) The Example of Calvin's Geneva: The Hospital

In our last article we argued from Scripture and church history that the care of sick, aged, widowed, or otherwise afflicted saints, even when such are not poor, is properly the work of the deacons. This is because the care of such saints is a work of mercy; because Christ shows mercy to afflicted saints through His church; and because the diaconate is the God-appointed means officially to administer Christ's mercies on the church's behalf.

In noting examples from church history, our glance fell on

the church in Geneva at the time of John Calvin. We saw that Calvin understood the early church to have two kinds of deacons — one that distributed alms, and the other that gave practical, hands-on care to the poor and sick. In scriptural support of this twofold diaconate, Calvin appealed to Romans 12:8.

Especially two institutions were established in Geneva to care for the needy: the first was the hospital, and the second was the various funds that were established. Because each of these institutions deserves a more careful examination, we devote a full article to each.



Geneva's General Hospital predated John Calvin.

During the Middle Ages various institutions arose that were devoted to the care of the poor, sick, widows, orphans, travelers, and the like. Many of these institutions were run by monasteries or other church authorities. Others were established by the wealthy of the land, motivated in part by Rome's teaching that almsgiving and the care of the poor were meritorious works.

By the early 1500s Geneva had numerous such institutions, with the two oldest dating back to the 1200s. Seven of these were called "hospitals," although they were not hospitals as we think of them today. They served no medicinal purpose; rather, they provided hospitality:

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2006, p. 249.

They were private foundations, created by the gifts of wealthy individuals or families, to provide for the repose of their souls and the care of the poor. They maintained buildings in which were provided free food and lodging for widows, the crippled, the sick of non-contagious diseases, poor pilgrims passing through the city, and others.¹

In 1473 another hospital was built specifically for victims of the Black Plague. While the plague hospital was run by the city, the other hospitals were governed by private organizations. The church (Rome) established none of these institutions, and played little, if any, role in maintaining them.

In 1535, one year before Calvin came to the city, Geneva declared itself Protestant. As part of the reorganization of the city, the seven hospitals were combined into one, called the General Hospital. The Plague Hospital remained a separate institution.

When Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541, he drew up the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which constituted the church order of the Genevan Reformed Church. In this document are found regulations for the General Hospital. Some of the pertinent paragraphs are worth quoting.

It will be necessary to take every care that the communal hospital is well maintained and that its amenities are available both for the sick and for the aged who are unable to work. The same applies to widows, orphaned children, and other poor persons. These, however, are to be placed in a wing of the building apart and separate from the others.

Again, the succour of the poor who are scattered through the city shall be derived from this source, according as the stewards shall order it....

It will be necessary also, both for the poor in the hospital and for those in the city who have not the means for assisting themselves, that a physician and a surgeon should be specially ap-

pointed at the city's expense, who, while practicing in the city, shall be charged with the care of the hospital and with the visitation of other poor persons.

As for the plague-hospital, it is to be kept entirely separate, and especially in the event of the city being visited by this scourge of God.²

It goes without saying that the poor, aged, sick, widows, orphans, and abandoned and illegitimate children of Geneva and its immediate environs needed the services provided by the General Hospital and the Plague Hospital. This need was increased in years of crop failure, and in the spring and summer months, during which the Plague usually visited the city.

But word soon spread that Geneva was both a haven for Reformed believers and a city well equipped to help those in need. As a result, refugees came to Geneva in droves, from France, Italy, and even as far away as England. Alexander M. Zeidman, who did detailed research into the care of the poor in Geneva in the sixteenth century, writes:

It is probable that the reputation of the quality of care given by Geneva to those in need played a great part in the large numbers of needy that were attracted to her. Her central position in Europe, her proximity to those fleeing the angry mobs in France, no doubt accounted for many of those who found a new home in Geneva. It is certain that the Genevan reputation for hospitality spread far and wide among the struggling groups of adherents to the reformation and when they fled their homes they found their way along the underground railway to Geneva.³

Although these refugees were arriving in Geneva continually, the numbers swelled after events such as the 1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France and the wars with Savoy beginning in 1589. Many of

these refugees were also poor young adults coming to study at the Genevan Academy. From original documents, including the hospital's archives, Zeidman gives evidence that the Hospital did a vast amount of work, and often did it well.



Calvin and the Genevan church considered not only the oversight but also the daily administration of the General Hospital to be the work of the deacons. This is immediately evident from the fact that the section of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* that regulated the hospital was actually a sub-section of the regulations pertaining to the office of deacon.

At first this was not so. We have already mentioned that, prior to 1535, each individual institution was overseen and administered by a private organization, not by the church. Even when the institutions were first consolidated in 1535, it was the city government that appointed four or five men to serve on what we would call the first board of directors. These were called "procureurs." Another man, called the "hospitaller," supervised the day-to-day running of the institution. Kingdon says that these men "are really the first deacons of the Reformed Church in Geneva, even though they never bore that title, even though they were selected before Calvin arrived."⁴

In 1541, by virtue of the adoption of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, the oversight and administration of the hospital was designated to be the work of the deacons, and the positions of procureur and hospitaller were filled with new men who were supporters of Calvin.

The *Ordinances* explicitly identify the procureurs and hospitallers as deacons. They were to be elected as deacons: "The election of both stewards and hospitallers shall be conducted as for the elders and delegates to the Consistory; and in electing them

the rule which St. Paul lays down for deacons (I Tim. 3, Titus 1) shall be followed.” Another statement reiterates that they were to be held to the same standard that I Timothy 3 requires of deacons. “Furthermore, the hospitallers must control their own families in an honourable and godly manner, seeing that they have to govern a house dedicated to God.”

The work of both procureurs and hospitallers was certainly diaconal in nature. The procureurs were men who worked other jobs in order to support themselves. Yet the demands of their work as procureurs of the hospital were heavy. They met with the hospitaller twice a week to oversee the hospital and its staff. One of the procureurs was the treasurer of the hospital; another was in charge of purchasing all necessary food and supplies and keeping inventory. The hospitaller, with his wife and family, were lodged in the hospital itself. He was paid a small salary and given living expenses. As to his work, he

not only had to account for all the orphans, the poor, old, ill, and over-night guests who were housed, fed, taught, and tended at city expense, but also had to oversee vineyards, hemp, grain and turnip fields, keep an eye out for the dozen cows, horses, pigs and other livestock, be foreman for the weaving and jug-making industries at the hospital....⁵

And, just as today in Reformed churches the elders are charged with the oversight of the deacons, so then the ministers and elders, as well as the city’s councils, were charged with the oversight of the procureurs and hospitaller. The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* require that “for this purpose every three months several from their Company shall, together with the stewards, carry out a visitation to the hospital in order to ascertain whether everything is well regulated.”



Controversial is the question whether Calvin’s idea of a twofold diaconate, and the concrete expression of this idea in Geneva’s General Hospital, is valid. Was the hospital truly an ecclesiastical organization? That it was regulated by the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* and overseen by the clergy supports the contention that it was. Or was it really a civil welfare organization? That it predated the Reformed faith in Geneva, and that it was regulated by the civil government, seem to indicate so.

I find it impossible to argue either that the hospital was exclusively an ecclesiastical institution of mercy, or that it was exclusively a civil welfare organization. Too much evidence supports both sides. But what is the problem with acknowledging that it was both? Even today, a church-supported institution of mercy will be subject to many regulations by and inspections of civil government. Though the church alone can rightly be said to manifest the mercies of Christ, yet both church and civil government work to relieve the poor, sick, and needy. This is the very reason why Article 26 of our Church Order requires that in “places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them, to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have the greatest need.”

It is questionable whether Scripture truly means to teach that the church should have two kinds of deacons, with one devoted exclusively to the practical and hands-on care of the sick, widows, etc. The classic text that Calvin uses in support of this, Romans 12:8, does not speak explicitly of deacons, let alone two sorts of deacons. It is because of the silence of Scripture on this question that Reformed churches generally, with Geneva being the notable exception, have had only one body of

men called deacons. A more detailed analysis of this question we hope to give in a future article.

Nevertheless, the point for now is that the one body of men called deacons, which must be found in every church, must devote themselves not only to the care of the poor, but also to the care of the sick, aged, and otherwise needy saints. In this connection, the work of the procureurs and hospitaller of Geneva’s General Hospital is instructive for us. First, it shows that Reformed deacons from the beginning understood the care of the needy to be their duty. Second, it is one concrete example of how deacons in the past have carried out this task. Perhaps today deacons will implement this part of their work in another way. But they do well to know how deacons in the past have done so. The diligent, hard work of deacons in the past ought to inspire deacons today to the same degree of commitment to their work — the care of the needy in the church of Christ.



1. Robert M. Kingdon, “The Deacons of the Reformed Church in Calvin’s Geneva,” *Calvin’s Ecclesiology: Sacraments and Deacons*, ed. Richard C. Gamble (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1992), p. 256.

2. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, editor and translator, *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 43-44. All subsequent quotes from the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* are from pages 42-44 of this same source.

3. Alexander M. Zeidman, *The Care of the Poor and Indigent in Geneva in the Latter Half of the Sixteenth Century* (Master’s thesis, Knox College of Toronto, 1965), pp. 20-21.

4. Kingdon, p. 257.

5. William Fred Graham, Jr., *The Permeation of Calvin’s Social and Economic Thought Into Genevan Life: 1536-1564* (Doctorate thesis, State University of Iowa, 1965), p. 162.

The Idea & Importance of the Sacraments (concl.)

The sacraments are a real and particular means of grace. Over against those who make them out to be empty signs, it is important that we understand and maintain that they are really means of grace. They are used by the Spirit of Christ to strengthen the faith that He has worked by the preaching. As a real means of grace they are also particular. There are many who have received the sacrament but have not received the grace signified by the sacrament. The grace in the sacraments, as the grace in the preaching of the gospel, is always particular.

This truth concerning the sacraments is related to the truth concerning the covenant and church of Jesus Christ. The sacraments are to be administered by the church and are to be enjoyed by those who are members of God's church and covenant. This being the case, there is a relation between wrong views of God's church and covenant and wrong views of the sacraments. Some examples of this will be considered in this concluding article on the idea and importance of the sacraments.

The Sacraments and the Church Institute

Pictures must be distinguished

from realities. Just as the sacraments must be distinguished from the grace they signify, so the church institute must be distinguished from the universal body of Christ that it pictures. Some receive only the visible sacrament and not the invisible grace. Similarly, some of those who are members of an instituted church are not members of Christ's universal body. Pictures must not be identified with the realities. They must be distinguished.

The Romish church is a clear example of one that wrongly identifies the pictures with the realities. They insist that their church institute is the one catholic (i.e., universal) body of Christ, and similarly they identify the sacraments with the grace that they signify, teaching that the sprinkling with water *is* the washing away of sins, and that the bread and wine *actually become* the body and blood of Christ.

The wicked result of this identification of the pictures with the realities is that the pictures become idols. An idol is anything besides God in which people place their trust, as we rightly confess in Lord's Day 34 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. 95 What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust.

Those who identify the pictures with the realities place their trust in the pictures, and thus make idols out of them.

The Romish church institute is an idol in which millions place their trust. The Romish church blatantly teaches the people to trust in her, rather than in God. They insist that whatever their church teaches must be believed as the infallible word of God, even if it clearly contradicts the Scriptures. Furthermore, they change the Apostles' Creed, so that the people are taught to believe "in" the holy catholic church, by which they mean their apostate church institute. We rightly say that we believe "an" holy catholic church. We do not place our trust in the church, rather we are confessing that we believe that a holy catholic church exists. The Romish church institute is an idol set up to replace the living God, so that the people believe in it, rather than in Him.

This church then proceeds to make idols out of the sacraments it administers. By identifying the sprinkled water with the washing away of sins, people are led to trust in the water for this spiritual cleansing. They even go so far as to say that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, so that the people are taught not only to trust in the elements, but also to bow down and worship the elements, claiming that they are worshipping Christ in the elements.

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2006, p. 247.

Such is the nature of the evil of identifying the signs with the realities. Pictures must be distinguished from these realities, otherwise the pictures become idols set up to replace God and His Christ.

The Sacraments and the Unconditional Covenant

The two means of grace — the pure preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments — both direct our faith to the work of Christ as the *only* ground of our salvation. In other words, they both set forth the truth that our salvation is based solely on the work that Christ has performed, and not even partly on a condition that we have fulfilled. The central importance of this truth is confessed in Lord's Day 25 of the Catechism:

Q. 67 Are both Word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes, indeed; for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross.

The sacraments, therefore, illustrate the truth that God's covenant is unconditional.

There are many, of course, who reject the truth of the unconditionality of God's covenant. Such people will not give a proper explanation to the sacraments. Rejecting the truth concerning the covenant, they will wrongly explain the signs God has given to illustrate the grace enjoyed by those in that covenant.

For example, many want to maintain that God desires to save everyone born in the sphere of the covenant. They reject the twin truths that God's grace is always particular and that man is saved solely on the basis of what Christ

has done. So they take the sign of baptism and explain it in such a way that both of these fundamental truths are denied. First of all, rejecting the truth of particular grace, they claim that a gracious covenant promise comes to every person that is baptized. God's grace, they insist, must be to all the children of believers. So they claim that baptism signifies common grace, that is, a grace that is common to all those born into the sphere of the covenant. Then, seeing as they also reject the teaching that man is saved solely because of what Christ does, they claim that the promise given to all those who are baptized is a conditional promise. Thus, in order for a person to be saved, the obedience of Christ and the obedience of the sinner are both required. Those who teach this are really saying that the obedience of Christ was not enough to satisfy God. God, they are saying, will not be satisfied until the sinner also obeys. He must obey the command to believe. Only after he has done this will God be satisfied and save the sinner.

This is only one example of how views of the covenant manifest themselves in views of the sacraments. This serves to illustrate why there has been so much debate over the years on the meaning of the sacraments. From a certain point of view, the sacraments are very simple to explain. One may wonder how there could possibly be so much debate about them. The reason is that many people use the sacraments to promote wrong views of the covenant that God has established with His people. Debates about the sacraments, therefore, really amount to debates about God's covenant.

Why Only Two Sacraments

There is a reason why there are only two sacraments — baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism pictures our entering into the body of Christ, and the Lord's Supper pictures our constantly being fed and

nourished within that body of Christ. When we consider this, we can easily understand why these are the only two sacraments there are. The two together picture the whole of our salvation.

Baptism pictures our being saved in the initial sense, and that is why it takes place only once in a person's life. The Lord's Supper pictures our being saved in the ongoing sense, and thus it is repeated. There is a sense in which we are justified and sanctified when we are brought into the body of Christ. At that time we receive Christ and all His benefits in a moment. This is pictured to us in baptism. But there is also a sense in which the experience of these blessings is ongoing. The blessings of justification and sanctification continue to be experienced by God's people throughout this life. The blessings of salvation in this ongoing sense are signified by the Lord's Supper.

The fact that there are only two sacraments also serves to illustrate that the covenant is unconditional. There is no condition that man must fulfill to remain in the covenant. If there were such a condition, we would expect there to be one sacrament to picture getting into the covenant, another sacrament for being nourished while in the covenant, and a third sacrament to illustrate getting back into the covenant if one has fallen out of it for a time. If one can fall out of the covenant, and can get back into it again by repenting before he dies, then it would stand to reason that a third sacrament would illustrate this for God's people.

Thus it is not surprising that the Romish church, which teaches that a believer can lose God's grace and then recover it again, has invented a sacrament for this purpose. They have actually invented five sacraments, one of which is called the sacrament of "penance." They teach that one who has been truly cleansed of his sin by baptism can nevertheless commit what they call a "mortal sin," which re-

sults in their losing their “baptismal grace.” Then, they say, the person must do acts of penance, which they refer to as a sacrament by means of which one can reenter into communion with God. This is just another example of how a denial of God’s unconditional cov-

enant can manifest itself in a perversion of the doctrine of the sacraments.

If it is true, and it is, that the sacraments are ordained and appointed by God to signify and seal unto us the promise that God’s covenant with us is unconditional,

then it will be important to bring out this truth as much as we can whenever we explain the sacraments. With this in mind we turn now to consider the sacraments individually, starting with baptism.



Book Reviews



A Study Commentary on I Corinthians, by Peter Naylor. Evangelical Press, 2004. 543 pp. (hardcover). [Reviewed by Rev. Doug Kuiper.]

As its name indicates, this commentary is a *study* commentary. It will benefit the pastor in his sermon preparation; but even more it will benefit the Christian believer who is studying I Corinthians in a Bible study, or for his own private devotion. This is a “popular” commentary — a commentary for the people.

Several facts about this commentary underscore the previous statement. First, Naylor’s expositions are not wordy, but usually brief, and almost always to the point. Second, Naylor’s references to the Greek language are made with the English reader in mind. He does refer to the original Greek — which is good, for it shows that he is conveying the real meaning of God’s Word. And he translates each verse fairly literally. But when he refers to Greek words, he does not use the Greek characters, but English characters, in such a way that the English reader can pronounce the word; and he shows why the word is significant. Third, after treating a section of Scripture, Naylor adds to the section an “application” that is practical and that clearly has the average church member in mind.

Three criteria of a good commentator are that he have a high view of Scripture; that he be doctrinally sound; and that he exegete

Scripture well. Especially must a commentator on Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians have these characteristics, for the epistle is full of rebukes, admonitions, and instructions to God’s church on a variety of doctrinal and practical matters. Many of the subjects treated in the epistle are current issues today, such as matters of sexuality, church discipline, divorce and remarriage, tongue speaking and the broader issue of how the Spirit manifests Himself today in the church, matters of worship, and questions regarding the necessity and benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ. One who comments on this epistle without being committed to a high view of Scripture, and without being on sound doctrinal footing, will surely twist this Word of God and lead many astray.

Naylor is to be commended for meeting these criteria of a good commentator.

He holds Scripture in high regard. This is why his translation of the epistle is, in his own words, “slightly more literal than dynamic” (p. 13). In treating 2:12, he defends the doctrines of inspiration and infallibility. And, appealing repeatedly to the last part of 1:2 (“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, ... with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”), he emphasizes that the epistle of I Corinthians is not “culture-bound,” but is relevant to all believers in any culture at any time in history. This high view of Scripture leads him for the most part to avoid the error of so many Christians

and churches today, who sell the faith of the fathers in order to buy into the spirit of the age. It should also be noted that he views Scripture as the complete revelation of God.

Doctrinally, Naylor is sound — at least insofar as he expresses his personal convictions in this book.

The reader will notice Naylor’s commitment to the sovereignty of God in salvation. He confesses God as the sole agent of salvation (p. 35). He speaks of “calling” as the “sovereign act of the Spirit in drawing men to faith” (p. 183), and refers to its irresistible character (“those whom he calls always come,” p. 59). The basic Christian doctrine that Jesus is God’s eternal Son come in the flesh he asserts (p. 459). That Christ’s resurrection is central to salvation he defends when commenting on chapter 15. That the work of Christ benefits a particular group of men, and not all men universally, is emphasized on pages 434 and 463. That the saints cannot lose their salvation he states on page 217.

Regarding other doctrines, Naylor opposes the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation (p. 299), opposes premillennialism (p. 438), and opposes a charismatic interpretation of I Corinthians 12-14. In fact, in the preface Naylor explains that he wrote this commentary in part to respond to Dr. Gordon Fee’s charismatic interpretation of I Corinthians 12-14, which Fee set forth in his commentary published in 1987. And in two appendixes to his commentary, Naylor further refutes the charismatic approach to these chapters.

Although this is not stated in so many words, the commentary gives reasons to suspect that Naylor is a Baptist. If this is true, the Reformed reader will not be surprised that Naylor uses the terminology of “accepting” the gospel (pp. 49, 109), which phrase we consider to be inconsistent with the confession of God’s sovereignty in salvation. He also hints, without expressly stating, that he does not agree with the Reformed position on baptism. Regarding the significance of baptism, he states what no Reformed person would consider to be the fundamental significance of baptism: “Christian baptism displays the believer’s irrevocable allegiance to Jesus, now his Lord” (p. 247). And he disagrees with the covenant approach to interpreting 7:14 (“else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”), which suggests that he favors believers baptism, and does not share the Reformed conception of the covenant.

Naylor’s exegesis is also sound, for the most part. When I disagreed with his particular interpretation of a passage, the disagreement was rather minor — that is, we both agreed on the fundamental meaning of the passage at hand.

The most significant point at which I disagreed with Naylor’s exegesis was in connection with I Corinthians 7, in which is set forth

God’s view of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Naylor does find in Scripture a condemnation of divorce, except for fornication, and a condemnation of remarriage, except ... when the divorce was for fornication. This he does, because he understands fornication to break the marriage bond. Naylor’s error on this point is perhaps understandable, and one might congratulate him for taking his stand at a time when divorce and remarriage for any reason are the rule of the day. But his error cannot be overstated: it makes the permanency and value of marriage depend on man himself, rather than on God; and it proceeds from a wrong exegesis of the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:32, 19:9, etc., as well as of I Corinthians 7:10, 11, 15, and 39.

Sound exegesis leads to an understanding of the need to live antithetically — and Naylor drives home this point throughout the commentary, sometimes in the body of the commentary itself, and sometimes in his “application” section.


He rightly sees the chief importance of preaching, and the fact that worship is to be God-centered and reverent: “Today’s preacher should not be a showman. We need pulpits rather than stage platforms, portable lecterns and clapping” (p. 78).

He is firm on the matter of excommunication: “Nor, if circumstances warrant, is excommunication optional. A church must respond in this fashion when a moral collapse is perceived, both in its own interest and in that of the offender. If action is not taken, a communion of saints can become a communion of sinners” (p. 134).

He understands Scripture to oppose homosexuality: “This seventh chapter is based upon the assumption that all homosexual activity is unnatural and sinful, and that it was never part of God’s plan for mankind (cf. 6:9, I Tim. 1:10; Rom. 1:24-27). Churches which continue to deliberate about whether or not to receive homosexuals to communicant worship show that they do not take the New Testament seriously” (p. 165).

Grounding his views in the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection, Naylor states his opposition to believers celebrating Halloween (p. 449), and bemoans the materialism of our day which detracts us from working for the Lord (p. 468).

These and other “practical points” make for interested reading, and a valuable aid in studying this epistle.

I recommend this commentary to any Christian who takes the Bible seriously. It will be profitable reading — even for reading’s sake. 

Report of Classis West

On Wednesday, March 1, 2006, Classis West met in Loveland, Colorado.

An officebearers’ conference was held the day before. The theme of the conference was “The Minister and His Money.” The morning session was devoted to a presentation concerning US tax code law as it affects ministers’ salaries of our US churches and concerning ways to structure a pastor’s support in order to use the tax savings provided by the law.

The afternoon sessions were devoted to presentations and profitable discussions on the subject of the pastor’s use of his money and possessions and on the subject of counseling God’s people regarding the wise use of our money and wealth in obedience to Christ.

On Tuesday evening, a special worship service was called by the consistory of the Loveland PRC. As part of his classical examination, Pastor-elect Dennis Lee, who had accepted the call to serve as

pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, MN, led this worship service and expounded the Word of God for the edification of the Loveland congregation, the delegates of Classis, and the delegates *ad examina* from Classis East. Mr. Lee expounded on Acts 13:48, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

The majority of the labors of

Classis on Wednesday focused on the examination of Pastor-elect Dennis Lee. Classis examined Mr. Lee in the 6 sections of Reformed Dogmatics, in knowledge of Scripture, in knowledge of our confessions, in Controversy, and in Practica. Each part of the oral examination lasted 15 minutes; and, after each section, the delegates were given opportunity to ask follow-up or other questions.

With the concurrence of the synodical deputies of Classis East, Classis West unanimously approved the examination of Mr. Lee, and advised the First PRC of Edgerton to proceed with his ordination into the office of the ministry of the Word and sacraments. We render hearty thanks to our

heavenly Father for the gracious gift of prepared and qualified men to labor as ministers of the Word and sacraments in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ in our churches.

Classis approved three subsidy requests for 2007 (from Bethel, First-Edmonton, and Immanuel-Lacombe) and forwarded these requests to Synod 2006 for approval.

Classis conducted its annual elections. Classis appointed Revs. S. Houck, S. Key, R. Miersma, and R. Smit as Church Visitors for the next year, and appointed Revs. A. Brummel and R. Hanco as alternates. Classis elected its delegates for Synod 2006, which are as follows:


Ministers (*Primi*) — A. Brummel, S. Houck, S. Key, R. Miersma, R. Smit.

Ministers (*Secundi*) — D. Kuiper, J. Mahtani, J. Marcus, D. Overway, M. VanderWal.

Elders (*Primi*) — A. Brummel (Edgerton), G. DeJong (South Holland), D. Poortinga (Loveland), J. Regnerus (Randolph), Gys VanBaren (South Holland).

Elders (*Secundi*) — J. Andringa (Hull), R. Brands (Loveland), J. VanBaren (Randolph), R. Vermeer (Peace), and E. Westra (Hull).

The expenses of Classis totaled \$9,300.91. Classis West plans to meet next in its regular sessions on September 6, 2006, in Hull, IA, and on March 7, 2007, in Doon, IA, the Lord willing.

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

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Denomination Activities

Classis West met in regular session on March 1 at the Loveland, CO PRC. The main item on the agenda for that meeting was the examination of Pastor-elect Dennis Lee with a view to his ordination as pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC. An officebearers' conference was held the day before, treating the subject of "The Minister and His Money." Arrangements were made for a presentation, in the morning session, by Clergy Financial Services of Loveland, CO concerning the unique features of tax law for pastors, followed by two of our pastors, Rev. R. Smit and Rev. R. Miersma, speaking in the afternoon on godly stewardship and the temptations that face ministers of the gospel with regard to money.

In an update from the "News" of the February 15th issue of this magazine we can now report that

ten men from our churches went to Biloxi, Mississippi, February 11-17, under the sponsorship of the Council of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI to help as volunteers with recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina. Some men stayed at the First Presbyterian Church, while others stayed with the Salvation Army, and worked out of there all week. Their jobs consisted of drywall, electrical repair, and new roofing. Plans also call for a return trip to Biloxi, the Lord willing, the first week of April, for more of the same type of repair work.

Evangelism Activities

In evangelism news from the Randolph, WI PRC we learned that radio station WRRD 540AM will soon begin airing the Reformed Witness Hour at 11:00 A.M. instead of 4:00 P.M. each Sunday. One advantage for listeners from our church there is that now they can listen to the program on their ride home from church.

The Evangelism Committee of the Byron Center, MI PRC spon-

sored a lecture March 2 at their church. Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor at Byron Center, spoke on the very important and relevant subject of "The Bible and Bio-ethics." Rev. VanOverloop looked at a wide range of topics, such as physician-assisted suicide, abortion, technologies used for reproduction, cloning, genetic intervention, stem-cell research, and medical decisions concerning the end of life, and he asked, How would God have us respond?

Mission Activities

The Council of the Doon, IA PRC thanked the Bible Societies of their church for their generous assistance with sending Bibles and Psalters to the Berean Church of God in the Philippines. The books were delivered by the recent delegation to the mission field.

The "News" was also reminded at the end of February of the very real dangers that our foreign missionary to the Philippines, Rev. A. Spriensma, along with his wife and daughter, face. As many of you have no doubt heard by now, the

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

Philippines was under a state of national emergency after an attempted coup and large protests in Manila. Our missionary and his family remained safe but were encouraged to stay off the roads and away from large gatherings and to have their visas and passports in order. Please remember to pray for the continued safety of the Spriensmas and for the good of God's church living in this country of unrest and economic insecurity.

Sunday morning, February 19, Rev. W. Bruinsma preached his inaugural sermon as our churches' new Eastern Home Missionary to the members of the Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA under the theme, "Declaring the Testimony of God," with his sermon text I Corinthians 2:1-5.

Rev. Bruinsma moved to Pittsburgh in mid February, while his wife, Mary, and their two daughters will remain in Kalamazoo, MI until the end of the school year.

In an update to the building plans for the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland, we find that the back of a recent bulletin of the CPRF contained a rough floor plan of their much-anticipated church building. Their building committee also recently received formal permission to bring a water line onto the work site, which will enable them to provide running water

and toilet facilities for the builders.

Rev. A. denHartog, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, filled the pulpit of the PR Fellowship of Fayetteville, NC on February 19. Besides preaching at both services that Sunday, Rev. denHartog also gave a slide show of his missionary labors in Myanmar (Burma) on Monday, February 20.


Congregation Activities

February 24 and 25 the congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI enjoyed their annual church conference. This year's conference was held at Camp Geneva on the shore of Lake Michigan in Holland, MI, and featured Rev. Brian Vos, pastor of Trinity United Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI and Rev. A. Brummel, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, speaking on the theme, "Comfortably Numb," with Proverbs 4:23 as their basis from the Word of God. The Georgetown congregation hoped to discuss matters of the heart from a spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical point of view. Friday evening Rev. Brummel spoke on "Spiritual Fitness" and Rev. Vos on "That Your Joy May Be Full" and then Rev. Vos spoke Saturday morning on "Of Some Profit."

March 3 and 4, over 300 ladies from our churches met at the Byron Center, MI First CRC for a Retreat sponsored by the ladies of the Byron Center, MI PRC under the theme, "Women Walking in Wisdom," based on Ephesians 5. What a wonderful opportunity for these godly wives, mothers, and single women to gather together and not only enjoy Christian fellowship, but also explore how God's Word instructs them in their unique role in His church and kingdom. The ladies heard three speeches, delivered by Rev. R. VanOverloop, Rev. W. Bruinsma, and Rev. R. Kleyn respectively, and were also able to enjoy their choice of any two of nine sectionals offered throughout Saturday. Thanks go out to the ladies of Byron Center for providing what, by all accounts, was a wonderfully spiritual day. And special thanks to the men of Byron Center who proved themselves gracious hosts by serving the ladies breakfast and lunch Saturday.

Minister Activities

Rev. R. Kleyn and Rev. S. Key declined the calls they had been considering from the vacant Faith PRC in Jenison, MI and the Kalamazoo, MI PRC respectively to serve as their next pastors.

The Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ has extended a call to Rev. J. Slopsema. 

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Doon Adult Bible Society express their Christian sympathy to Jean Wynia and extended family on the passing away of their mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, and great grandmother,

RIKA VAN DEN TOP.

May the family find comfort in the promise of God's word and be upheld by His grace. "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence" (Psalm 62:1, 2a).

Rev. David Overway, President
Helinda Wiersma, Secretary/Treas.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of Loveland PRC express their sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. John Mooy and his wife, Rachel, in the passing of her grandmother,

MRS. RIKA VAN DEN TOP.

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (II Corinthians 1:3).

Gary Kortus, President
James Jansma, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of the Doon PRC extends their Christian sympathy to our fellow council member, Robert Blankespoor, in the death of his mother-in-law,

RIKA VAN DEN TOP.

May he find comfort in the words found in Psalm 73:25, 26: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and portion forever."

Rev. David Overway, Pres.
Alan VanBemmel, Clerk

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THE STANDARD BEARER

IN MEMORIAM:

The Staff of the *Standard Bearer* express sympathy to the family of

MR. KEN RIETEMA,

whom the Lord took home on November 22, 2005. For many years Mr. Rietema read the entire issue of the *Standard Bearer* into a recorder, to make our testimony of the Reformed faith available to those who could not read it. We are grateful for that work, and are confident that God is not unrighteous to forget the works and labors of love shown toward His name and ministered to the saints (Hebrews 6:10).

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We give thanks to God for his faithfulness to

JUNE and CARROLL HOLLEMAN

as they celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on February 14. They have been granted trials and blessings in Christ, and we pray the Lord shine His face upon them, and make their burden light. We pray the Lord continue to bless their home and marriage, and sustain them in these days.

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever, with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- * Mike and Judie Holleman
Julia, Mark, Sara
- * Rob and Shelby Holleman
Taylor, Jake
- * Jim and Wendi Holleman
Ella
- * Joel and Brooke Holleman
Anna, Allison

South Holland, Illinois

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to God for His continued covenant faithfulness to our parents and grandparents,

VERNON AND BARBARA KLAMER, we celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on April 8, 2006.

As they have walked united in Christ, they have set a godly example to us, their children and grandchildren. We are grateful for their presence in our lives and our prayer is that God will bless them as they continue to look to Him for their strength and guidance. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psalm 90:1).

- * Thomas and Vicky VanOverloop
- * Charles and Verna Terpstra
- * John and Valerie VanBaren
- * Bruce and Joann Klammer
- * David and Vonda Jessup
- * Steven and Brenda Langerak
- * Brent and Shelli Klammer
36 grandchildren,
6 great grandchildren,
1 grandchild in glory

Grandville, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 10, 2006 at the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 10, 2006.

Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!!

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan, is inviting applications for a full-time 7th-8th grade teacher/administrator beginning in the fall of 2006. Successful applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis between Christianity and the world, and covenantal theology. Applicants should send a letter of application and resume to: Steve DeVries, School Board President, Reformed Heritage Christian School, 700 N. Fletcher Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49006. For more information, phone (269) 375-8455.

An "Easter Special"
on RFP books
is available at www.rfpa.org.

Standard Bearer archives
are available
through the RFP website
(www.rfpa.org).

NOTICE!!!

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

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

Reformed Witness Hour

Topics for April

Date	Topic	Text
April 2	"The Graves Were Opened"	Matthew 27:52, 53
April 9	"Surely, This Was the Son of God!"	Mark 15:39
April 16	"Not Here, But Risen!"	Mark 16:1-8
April 23	"Even So Send I You"	John 20:19-23
April 30	"Will the Next Generation know?"	Judges 2:6-14