

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

. . . we live in a busy world and lead a busy life. And there is a very real danger, both for our family life and our congregational life, that we more and more let our lives become so crowded with mundane things which are not necessarily wrong in themselves that we reserve only a small portion of our time — sometimes only the Lord's Day — for spiritual things.

See "Society Life in Our Churches"

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THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.

Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.
Second Class Postage Paid at Grand Rapids, Mich.

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Editorial Policy: Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Question-Box Department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be neatly written or typewritten, and must be signed. Copy deadlines are the first and the fifteenth of the month. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

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Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$10.50 per year. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

Advertising Policy: 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 \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is the 1st or the 15th of the month, previous to publication on the 15th or the 1st respectively.

Bound Volumes: The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume; such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume. A limited number of past volumes may be obtained through the Business Office.

MEDITATION

Christian Contentment

Rev. H. Veldman

"For I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Philippians 4:11b

What a truly remarkable and apparently contradictory word this is, if we regard it from the aspect of the world's celebration of Thanksgiving Day! Imagine, to be content in *whatsoever state I am!* The world's conception of contentment is determined by the things of this present time and the amount of

them they possess. So, there are thousands who fail to see any cause whatever for thanksgiving and happiness.

However, what a truly remarkable word we have here also from the viewpoint of the child of God! Remember, we have here the statement of a fact.

This is not a prayer, no expression of a desire which we express to the Lord, but a factual statement, a confession of the apostle. Besides, the apostle offers us this statement that we should repeat it after him. Are we able to do this? Should we change this positive confession into a humble prayer: Lord, teach me to be content? Fact is, the human heart is very deceitful. And this lesson of our text (I have learned) is surely not an easy lesson to learn.

* * * * *

Contentment is not merely satisfaction, the satisfaction of our carnal desire.

I, then, may rejoice in an abundance of things. The dispensations of the Most High over me do not always appear to be in agreement with my own will and desires. It may then seem as though I can and do confess with the apostle that I have learned to be content — however, upon closer and honest self-examination I discover that my satisfaction and contentment is a merely carnal rejoicing. Fact is, one can be satisfied without being content and we can be content without being satisfied. Our satisfaction may be merely carnal; contentment is always and truly spiritual. Satisfaction changes into dissatisfaction and grumbling as the external circumstances become less favorable while contentment is constant and enables us to shout triumphantly: I am content in whatsoever state I am.

Hence, contentment, which is a state of the heart and one of the most beautiful of all Christian graces, is never dependent upon external things and circumstances. Let a man possess more than his heart could possibly wish — yet one cannot say that such a man is content. Things do not cause contentment, even though they would satisfy one to the full. On the other hand, let it be said of another that his affliction awaits him every morning, that his condition is that of Lazarus in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and the conclusion would not necessarily be warranted that this poor man is filled with discontentment. Even as things do not cause contentment, so the latter cannot be destroyed by the lack of these external things.

Contentment is the grace of perfect submission — not forced submission, but perfect submission. It is the grace of perfect equilibrium between our inner self and all our outward circumstances. It is the inner quiet and peace of the sea while its surface is tossed by storm and tempest. It is rest and peace and perfect quietness of spirit, never grumbling and complaining. Instead of allowing the lust of the flesh to dominate and the carnal desire to reach out for more possessions and higher glories, contentment always rejoices, because it is the grace whereby the inner self with all its desires and aspirations

is brought into perfect harmony with the outer state.

Now we can understand that, because contentment is exactly such an inner spiritual condition of the heart, the apostle can write: I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Many and various are the states of our life and existence in the midst of the world: high and low estate, riches and poverty, health and sickness, freedom and imprisonment, etc. What an amazing phenomenon it is always to be content! Indeed, this assertion of the apostle is not a vain boast. He had known adversity — see II Corinthians 11:21-30. And notice what we read in the following verse, verse 12. Can we say this with the apostle? Shall we not rather make a very humble confession? Shall we not confess that we have only begun, in a very small measure, to learn this lesson? And shall we pray, "Lord, forgive us our murmurings and grumbings, and teach Thou us to be content?"

* * * * *

This contentment is surely not possible of the natural heart.

Let us look all around us for this grace of contentment. Mind you, we are now searching for an expression of contentment. And this should not be difficult. Nothing should be easier to find, for it is a fact that the peace and joy of a contented soul readily reflects itself in every part of that soul's mirror, the human face.

And what do we find? On the one hand, you will see written upon the faces of some whom you meet the expression of the self-satisfied fool, or traces of long practiced gluttony and self-indulgence, the gratification of ever increasing appetites. Then, you will see the face of a greed that knows no bounds, or the drooping lines of unmistakable weariness and depression of spirit, or also of fear and worry. On the other hand, you will see the faces of those that are deprived of the goods of this world, that witness of worry and anxiety, of bitterness of spirit, dissatisfaction with conditions, or also of stoical indifference or submission to the inevitable. But in vain does one seek for contentment.

And this is not all. We need not look around us in order to discover that the flesh, the natural man does not possess this power of contentment in all conditions of life. All we need do is to inspect ourselves. Fact is, the natural man is enmity against God and therefore foolish, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures. It has departed from and always departs from the Fountain, the overflowing Fountain of all good, in Whom alone our soul and all our deepest needs can be satisfied. And having separated itself from the Highest God, apart from Whom there is neither life nor bliss, it strives vainly

after a satisfaction of the flesh through the treasures and pleasures of this present evil world. It rejects the eternal and seeks the temporal; it refuses the heavenly and seeks the earthly; it despises the things that are above and strives after the things that are below. The conclusion is inevitable. How can the heart of man have peace as long as it has no peace with the living God? How can it find joy in separation from the Fountain of eternal life? How can there be contentment as long as the heart of man deceives him into a vain pursuit of the earthly, leaving him stand in despair upon the hot desert sand of a world that is cursed because of sin? Do not the Scriptures teach, emphatically, that the wicked shall never have peace? God will not be mocked. Apart from Him, in enmity against Him, man can never find peace and rest.

Contentment is a spiritual power that is the fruit of peace with God in our Lord Jesus Christ. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me — this is the secret of this wonderful power. For in Christ we have peace with God. And having peace with God I know that God is for me. And if God be for me, who or what can be against me? All things must work together in whatsoever state I am. Through Christ I am delivered from the foolishness of seeking the things that are below and from having the world with all its pleasures and treasures. And then all the states of my present existence are merely means to prepare me and lead me onward to the state of final glory. The knowledge of His love in Christ Jesus is sufficient to create within my heart the peaceful joy of work together for my everlasting salvation, and all this for one who is deserving of everlasting death and ruin. What wonders of the grace of God open up here for that saved sinner who, because of the eternal and unchangeable love, has been called out of darkness into God's wonderful light! And the result of this grace of God? I am content in whatsoever state I am.

* * * * *

"In whatsoever state I am, I have learned to be content." Even though contentment is a spiritual power, a gift of God's unspeakably rich and abundant grace in Christ Jesus, yet its actual experience and practical application in life is a lesson that must be learned.

Thus it is in the midst of the world. In the world one may meet with the attempt to imitate this practice of contentment. The Epicurean strives to maintain a proper balance between his desires and their gratification by moderate self-indulgence. The stoic makes a desperate attempt to harden himself against all the suffering of this present time and to meet all the evil of his life with profound contempt. But all these attempts must surely fail because the

wicked, without God, shall have no peace.

And God's people? O, the apostle does not say that he is content with all things, that he always was content in whatsoever state he might be; but he writes that he has learned it! It had been a spiritual lesson to him. He was content through the grace of Christ that strengthened him, so that he was able to do all things; through Christ he knew how to abound and how to be abased; yet, also for him life had been a school and he had learned to be content. He had also known the time when he had not been content with the angel that buffeted him; it was only in the way of repeated prayer and bitter experience that he had learned to know that God's grace was always sufficient for him.

Shall it be any different with us? We are delivered, indeed, in principle. We are, to be sure, partakers of the grace of Christ. And through that grace we may indeed fix the eye of faith and hope upon the things eternal, upon the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away. Risen with Christ, we seek the things that are above and not the things that are on the earth. And being justified by faith and having peace with God, we are assured that God is for us and that He will surely give us all things with Christ. But, the flesh is weak, desperately weak. And the child of God is not perfectly delivered from the body of this death and from the power of the flesh.

Hence, we must learn, always learn. We are always in this school. We must learn in watching and in prayer that we may not fall into temptation, and we must learn frequently with bitter experiences and tears of sorrow. We must learn until we shall have reached the end of our earthly pilgrimage. Then contentment shall be perfected in eternal satisfaction. Then we shall receive eternal glory and the liberty of the children of God shall have been realized forever.

O, the wonderful grace of contentment!

Only through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Ever learning, until finally we shall be perfect in the day of Christ Jesus, our mighty Saviour and Lord.

*The Standard Bearer
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EDITORIALS

Prof. H.C. Hoeksema

Society Life in Our Churches

Some weeks ago a brother wrote to me about this subject, and asked me to editorialize about it at a convenient time. He asked me to write about the value of various weekly church meetings, but also to touch on the question why our Church Order "completely ignores this important aspect of the organic church life."

Let me begin by answering the question concerning the Church Order. The answer is really suggested in my correspondent's question. He refers to "the organic church life." It is precisely in the fact that our various Bible study societies belong to the organic aspect of the life of the church that the reason lies why our Church Order does not refer to it. The Church Order is concerned with the *institutional* life of the church: the offices, the lawful calling, the duties of ministers, elders, and deacons, the assemblies (consistory, classis, synod), doctrine, sacraments, and other ceremonies, and censure and ecclesiastical discipline. Nothing whatsoever is said about the organic life of the church. The nearest the Church Order comes to a reference to the organic life is in the article concerning Christian schools, Article 21. But even there, we must remember, the Church Order does not speak to the subject of Christian education as such and attempt to regulate it; that would be strictly beyond the jurisdiction of the church institute. It only speaks of the duty of the consistory with respect to Christian education.

The same is true with respect to our societies. The consistory has nothing to do with their establishment or with the internal affairs of such societies. The only calling of a consistory is supervisory. Any organization within the congregation must submit its constitution to the consistory for approval, but only to see to it that the constitution is Reformed, that the purpose of the society is a proper one, and that the organization being formed does not interfere, for example, with other already existing organizations. Apart from that the consistory usually exercises its supervisory power by

means of a visit or two each year by a committee of elders. For the rest, our societies are *free*.

But — and now I am getting to the meat of my correspondent's request — it is precisely in the area of that free and voluntary character also that the great virtue of these societies lies. For this means that they lie in the area of the exercise of the office of all believers. Because of this office and its anointing, the congregation is not dependent ultimately on minister or elders for instruction in and understanding of the Word of God: "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things . . . But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (I John 2:20, 27) Because of this it is possible and fruitful for a group of believers to meet together, to study God's Word, and mutually to instruct and to be instructed in that Word. Because of this it is possible for believers mutually to edify one another. And this, I take it, is the chief purpose of our societies in the churches, this, and the fellowship of God's people which we may enjoy at such gatherings.

In most of our congregations there are abundant opportunities for such gatherings. There are in some of our churches so many societies that sometimes they can hardly find a slot in the weekly and bi-weekly schedule to meet. There are one or two Young People's Societies, Men's Societies, Ladies' Societies, Junior and Senior Mr. and Mrs. Societies, Adult Bible Study Groups, Choral Societies, and lately in some of our churches midweek Ladies' Bible Study Groups which meet in the morning. There is abundance of opportunity: no one can say: "There is nothing for me in our church life."

And yet some of our organizations suffer from poor attendance.

I will not go into all the alibis for this. Nor will I take the flat position that participation or non-parti-

cipation in society life is necessarily a thermometer of one's spiritual life — though sometimes it is that indeed, in instances in which for no good reason a person simply does not have the interest and spiritual ambition to participate. There is something wrong, for example, when someone prefers to sit in front of the "boob tube" all evening and night after night rather than fellowship with God's people.

I do wish, however, to touch on some of the *reasons*, not *alibis*, which have to do with lack of attendance and participation.

Sometimes people say, "I don't get anything out of it." Now, in the first place, there is a wrong approach implied here. The question should not be what one gets out of it, but what does one *contribute*. And, in the second place, I point out that one "gets out of it" as much as he "puts into it." If you go to society without having prepared or having only given preparation "a lick and a promise," you cannot very well expect to reap much benefit. And surely, this is no proper way to treat the study of God's holy Word!

I also want to caution — no, warn — that we live in a busy world and lead a busy life. And there is a very real danger, both for our family life and our congregational life, that we more and more let our lives become so crowded with mundane things and things which are not necessarily wrong in themselves that we reserve only a small portion of our time — sometimes only the Lord's day — for spiritual things. Sometimes it is our work; other times it is our recreational life and our sports which crowd our time and crowd out the spiritual. This is wrong,

and it must be guarded against. Sometimes I think the problem begins already with the life of our young people. Their church life is no longer in most instances the center of their social life. Young People's society is confined to Sunday. Catechism must preferably be limited to Monday evening. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the basketball schedule. And then suddenly we expect that when they mature, they are going to form good habits of participating in society life in the church, and we are dismayed at the fact that they "have no time." There has been a change in this respect, a change which has come about gradually perhaps — or should I say a change which we ourselves have brought about gradually. I can recall the time in the days of my own youth when our church life was the center of our social life. In fact, it was very well possible — and not at all the exception among young people — to spend no less than three evenings a week at church engaging in non-compulsory activities: choral society on Monday evening, Young Men's Society on Tuesday, Adult Catechism (for confessing members and not mandatory) on Wednesday evening; and then for some there was Sunday school Teachers' meeting on Friday. And we enjoyed it! That was the center of our social life. There we met our boyfriends or girlfriends, often our future mates. Someone will say to me that we cannot bring back those times, and I have no illusions about that possibility. I only mention it to call attention to a trend against which we must guard and to call attention to a tendency of the times which we must fight.

If we do so, we will find that there are benefits to be reaped!

On Being a Shepherdess (A Satire)

(Note: This summer while we were vacationing my wife and I were having a discussion about the general issue of women in office and the more specific issue of women ministers. As we were discussing this subject, the thought occurred to me that it would be possible to write a satire in this connection which would serve to underscore the issues in connection with this subject. This somewhat tongue-in-cheek editorial is the product of our joint efforts. It should be kept in mind that the fictitious names have meaning. Alfred = wise and Sluiks = clever; Patricia = aristocratic and Vlug = quick;

Alan = handsome and Wyatt = leader.)

My friend Alfred Sluiks was saying the other day that whenever he had thought about a shepherdess he imagined a picturesque maiden in quaint cloak and bonnet, resting gracefully on her crooked staff. He fancied her reclining peacefully on a sloping, grassy hillock, surrounded by contentedly grazing sheep.

"Now," he told me, with a look of amazement on his face, "I understand that my assumption is a mere illusion, a myth. Today's shepherdess is any-

thing but quaint, and surely does not live peaceably with her sheep, not with all of them, that is."

"You know how it is in these modern days of enlightenment and liberation," he went on to say, "when we have at last cut through the barriers of a culture that had denied to women, also shepherdesses, the full use of their gifts. Nowadays I understand they may become full-fledged shepherdesses."

"You mean"

"I mean a woman may become a shepherdess, a pastoreess, a ministera, with an *a* as in alumna."

"Elderess, deaconess"

Alfred interrupted again. "I've been looking at it from the point of view of mere terminology. Before our shepherdess can wield her staff as a ministera, she must be called; and that means she will get a call letter — the official form-letter which all ministers get. I was reading it the other day, wondering how a shepherdess would like to be addressed as 'Dear and Esteemed Brother.'"

Alfred wrinkled his freckled nose and read on silently.

"Aha!" he muttered. "Listen to this: 'Convinced that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and to encourage you in the discharge of your duties, and to free you from all worldly cares and avocations' Avocations! Friend, I believe this is one housewife who gets out of housework before she even moves in! Maybe that isn't all bad, friend. No mounds of dirty clothes to launder, no greasy pots to scour, no dust on her furniture to rearrange, no baby — if she has one — to feed and change. Maybe that will be her husband's avocation — or vocation. But I guess that's none of our business how her housework gets done. The big thing is to be ordained, you know, after she accepts the call. So look what happens when we go to the *Form of Ordination of Ministers* — uh, Ministerae, Ministeresses, Ministerines — no, that last one is too much like tangerines."

"Try the first sentence of the Form. What does a person do with it? 'Beloved brethren, it is known unto you that we have at three different times published the name of our brother (make that 'sister') here present, to learn whether any person had ought to offer concerning his (sorry, 'her') doctrine or life.'"

"And that is only the first sentence of the Form. Well, maybe I could wade through the Form and try 'pastoreess,' 'shepherdess,' 'bishopeess,' 'she' and 'her,'" he sighed, mopping his brow. "But that's only the start of the trouble."

"You see," he continued, "the Form is based on

the Bible. It should be, of course; and the Bible's terminology is very precise and clearly written. God chose the exact words He wanted to use. When this shepherdess, let's call her Patricia Vlug, is being ordained, what do we do with the words of the Bible that are quoted in the Form? Change them? Change the Bible a little bit here and there? You know the one that is quoted in the Form from II Timothy, Chapter 2, verse 2. Here, I'll read it and we'll see how we like it that new way. 'And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful women, who shall be able to teach others also.'"

I opened my mouth to react, but Alfred was already going on: "What happens when this shepherdess of her flock reads the Bible? She can't avoid it, you know, being pastoreess and all. She probably won't like Paul's letters to Timothy very well, but she will find them in the Bible. So she comes to I Timothy 3:2 and reads, 'A bishop . . . a bishopeess then must be blameless, the husband . . . the husbandess of one wife'"

"Just a minute," I interrupted, "The term *husband* is masculine."

"So is *bishop*. But I can see your problem, friend, and the Rev. Patricia Vlug's dilemma as well. We'll have to change it around and read 'wife of one husband,' I suppose."

"Is she married?"

Alfred sluiks ignored me. He was reading the next verses in the chapter. "See what happens to the Rev. Vlug? She gets to rule the roost at home, too. Verse 5 here says, 'For if a man — change that to *woman* — know not how to rule his — make that *her* — own house, how shall he — try *she* — take care of the church of God?'"

"I doubt whether she would ever preach on that text," I volunteered.

"If she did, someone would be sure to ask her to preach on Ephesians 5:22 and 23 the next Sunday. You know how it goes: 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife'"

"Or someone will think of I Corinthians 14:34, 'Let you women keep silence in the churches,'" I said.

"That's it!" Alfred roared. "Silent preaching! That's what we need nowadays. She'd *have* to be silent," he added after a moment of reflection, "because she would be too proud to ask her husband at home, like it says in verse 35. And I ask you how our shepherdess would ever get around this one: 'for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.' That would be a silent sermon!"

"There might be problems other than silent sermons in the life of the Rev. Mrs. Vlug practical ones," I commented.

"They are all practical. But I know what you mean: there is more in Rev. Vlug's life than being a preacheress. She must be a true shepherdess and watch for the welfare of her sheep."

"Must she do it all alone?"

"No, I think she would go about it in an orderly way, with the rest of the officebearers. Mainly the elders or elderesses. Committee work, we formerly called it. Team ministry is the term today, I believe. What if the Rev. Vlug teams up with an elder, say an elder such as I am: young, rather good looking, a good conversationalist; and together they make calls to the sick and the troubled."

"No problem so far."

"Until husband Vernon Vlug says, with a hint of an edge in his voice, as he wrestles with the greasy dinner dishes, 'Whom are you teaming up with tonight?' and the reverend says, 'Alan Wyatt.' What can Vernon do? It's all good, legal church work."

"So the Rev. Patricia Vlug and Elder Alan Wyatt are out for the evening, while husband Vernon is keeper at home. At last, toward midnight, he will hear the teaching elder and the ruling elder chatting together on the porch."

"Picture the husband of the shepherdess, my friend, as his reverend wife bursts in. 'Did you have a good evening with your team-mate, dear?' 'Great,' she says, 'Wonderful! We visited two families, then went for a cup of coffee at that cozy little shop on the other side of town and talked about our problems for a couple of hours.'"

I could not help interrupting Alfred. "Problems between the reverend and her elder?"

"Don't be obtuse, friend. The reverend and her elder get on great. That is what bothers husband

Vernon. So he blurts out, 'Patricia, it seems to me the Bible says that if women, meaning you, too, of course, want to learn anything, they must ask their husband at home. This husband can teach you much about problems. I have plenty of them.'"

"Can't you see the gentle shepherdess bristling at these words of challenge? Don't you hear her saying, 'May not a pastor' — she should have said pastoreess — 'and an elder, both in good standing, discuss their affairs over a cup of coffee? Honestly, Vernon, are you going to hold the big stick of a husband's authority over me forever?'"

"And can't you hear Vernon answering, 'No, I'll only hold I Corinthians 14:35 over you, dear. And probably Titus 2:5, where we read that young women are to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands . . .'"

"It sounds like the beginning of a domestic ruckus," I began. "Maybe she dismissed her team-mate too early. Together they might be able to solve the new problem."

"Not at all. Our shepherdess can shoot her own arrows. She would no doubt retort, 'Am I not an elder? A teaching elder? Then heed I Timothy 5:1, and rebuke not an elder.'"

"But Vernon would be too alert to let his little ministeress stop there. He would continue and quote the rest of the verse: 'but intreat him as a father,' which, adjusted to our own situation would be 'intreat her as a mother.' And he would ask, 'Do you want me to do that, Patricia? Treat you as my mother?'"

My friend Alfred Sluiks sighed. "But quarrels between a shepherdess and one of her household sheep have a way of resolving themselves. The last I think we would hear that evening from the shepherdess's household would be her husband's plaintive query, 'And whom are you going out with tomorrow night, dear?'"

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

Our Order of Worship

Prof. H. Hanko

In our last article we began a discussion of the collections which are taken in the worship services. That such collections are in Scripture described as a part of worship is clear. We mentioned how, in the

Old Testament, offerings made in the tabernacle and temple were commanded by God; we must now quote a few passages from the New Testament to show that this practice was carried over into the

new dispensational church.

It is not surprising that in the days of Jesus such offerings continued to be made. Every Jew was expected to give a half-shekel every year to the support of the temple service. It is this coin which is referred to in Matthew 17:27, in which passage Jesus instructs Peter to catch a fish, in the mouth of which will be found a coin which can be used for this temple tax. There were also seven chests, called "trumpets," in the temple, into which worshippers could put their free offerings. Of these Edersheim says: "These 'trumpets' bore each inscriptions, marking the objects of contribution — whether to make up for past neglect, to pay for certain sacrifices, to provide incense, wood, or for other gifts" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. II, p. 387). This is the background for the incident recorded in Mark 12:42 and Luke 21:2 — the gift of the widow who, although she gave only a "mite," nevertheless gave more than all those who put in great amounts of money.

As was true of all the practices of the Old Testament, so it was true also of this practice: while the form changed, the essential idea was preserved. It was undoubtedly in the consciousness of the fact that offerings were a part of worship in the Old Testament that the apostles continued such offerings in the New Testament church of Christ. There are several passages which refer to this. We know that the office of deacons was instituted in the church for the purpose of caring for the needs of Grecian widows, who were neglected in the daily ministrations (Acts 6). In Romans 12:8 the apostle presupposes giving as a part of the Christian's life when he writes: "He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity (liberality)." Our *Form for the Installation of Elders and Deacons* refers this directly to the office of deacons and in this way makes giving a part of the *institutional* life of the church. This Form does the same with I Corinthians 12:28 where, among the various gifts which the Holy Spirit distributes in the church, is listed also the gift of "helps." Our Form says this refers to "those, who are appointed in the Church to help and assist the poor and indigent in time of need."

There are a number of references to collections which were taken in the churches to assist the poor saints in Jerusalem. In Acts 11:27-30 mention is made of the fact that the church in Antioch sent relief to the saints in Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. There are various references in Paul's epistles to the fact that the churches, especially in Achaia and Macedonia, were urged to take collections for these poor. In this connection, there are two passages which are particularly striking. In I Corinthians 16:1-4 the apostle instructs the

Corinthians to take these collections on the first day of the week. This specific injunction was apparently made because it was on the first day of the week that the New Testament church assembled to worship. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me." In II Corinthians 8 & 9 reference is again made to these collections.

From all these passages, certain conclusions can be drawn.

In the first place, these collections to which the apostle refers in his letter to the Corinthians were to be made on the first day of the week when the saints came together to worship. From this we may conclude that the apostle intended these collections to be a part of the worship service. That is, they were themselves *an act of worship*. From the references we made in this article and in the last to the Jewish practices in the Old Testament, we may conclude that this was also the case before the Spirit was poured out. The Jews worshiped God in the tabernacle and temple. A part of this worship was the giving of gifts, for which provision was made by placing certain chests or boxes in prominent places where the offerings could be placed.

In the second place, while the emphasis in the New Testament certainly falls upon giving to the poor, all the money which was given by the people of God for all the various aspects of the support of the worship of God were considered a part of giving. We ought to be clear on this point. Sometimes a distinction is made between giving to the benevolent fund; giving to support the church, which is usually done by the "budget" — in which are included the pastor's salary, the purchase of mimeograph ink, the paying of the electric bill, the roofing of the church, etc.; and giving for various "kingdom causes" such as the synodical assessments, collections for the *Standard Bearer*, etc. Only the giving for benevolence is really considered *giving* in the true sense of the word, while giving for the other causes of God's kingdom is considered as bills which we are obligated to pay in the same way as we are required to pay for our groceries or car repairs or home repairs. But the Scriptures make no such distinctions. Everything which is contributed for the cause of the gospel and for the purpose of the advancement of the kingdom of Christ as manifested here in the world is considered giving. This is

especially clear in the Old Testament where the tithes which were brought by the people were used for the support of the priests and Levites, for the needed repairs of the temple, for the purchase of sacrifices, etc., as well as for the care of the poor. The practices which were common in the temple in Jesus' day were, apparently, the same (cf. the quote of Edersheim above). While there is no specific reference to this in the New Testament churches, nevertheless, the churches are also admonished more than once to support the ministry of the Word. In Galatians 6:6 Paul writes: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." In I Corinthians 9 Paul commands the Corinthians to do the same thing: "Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care of oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (vss. 8-14).

It is clear from Scripture, therefore, that all giving for the causes of Christ's kingdom are included in the giving which belongs to the worship services.

Before we discuss more precisely how giving is an act of worship, there are two other points which ought briefly to be discussed.

The first has to do with the practice, common in some churches, of a prayer which is brought by the minister before the offerings are taken. Usually this is done in the following way: while the organ is

played, the deacons come forward to stand before the pulpit. When they are assembled before the pulpit, the minister makes a short prayer with some direct reference to this act of worship. On the other hand, if these prayers are omitted, the minister, usually after the congregational prayers, announces the offerings with words similar to these: "Let us worship the Lord in our offerings." Sometimes the minister will quote from Scripture a pertinent passage such as: "God loveth a cheerful giver."

The Scriptures are silent on this point; whether a prayer should precede the taking of the collections is left to the judgment of the Consistory and congregation. No rule can be made.

The second point has to do with a change which has taken place in our churches. When I was a child and even when I was first in the ministry, the collections were taken during the singing of a Psalm. So far as I know, this practice was common throughout the churches. But this has changed so that now almost all, if not all, of our churches have what is called, "Offertory." That is, the collections are taken as a separate part of the worship service; no Psalm is sung while they are being taken; only the organ plays.

Again, no rule or law can be laid down here. Either way is acceptable and the Scriptures do not bind the conscience on this point. However, because we firmly believe that Scripture teaches us to make our giving an act of worship, it is better to separate the collections from the singing. Both are separate acts of worship, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to perform two different acts of worship at the same time and do so from the heart — as the Lord requires us to do. To concentrate on the singing (the words being sung) and to worship through the giving of our gifts seems almost impossible. The only way really to avoid this difficulty is to choose a Psalm to be sung during the collections which relates directly to the worship of giving.

We shall have to wait till our next article to discuss how giving is in fact an act of worship.

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TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

Preservation and Perseverance (6)

Rev. H. Veldman

In our preceding article we were calling attention to the Reformed and scriptural view of this subject: Preservation and Perseverance. In the first place, we noted that the preservation of the people of God is rooted in God's eternal and sovereign election. This is clearly held before us in passages such as Ephesians 1:3-5 and Romans 8:29-30. Secondly, we observed that this preservation of the saints is anchored in Christ's atonement. This is clearly set forth in John 6:39 and 10:15. Thirdly, that the people of God are preserved and therefore persevere (the Arminian held to the heresy that we are preserved because we persevere) is assured because the Holy Spirit abides with them forever. This is literally stated in John 14:16. And, fourthly, that the saints are preserved is because God's covenant is unchangeably firm and sure. This truth is beautifully set forth in that wonderful passage of Hebrews 6:16-18. God, willing to shew more abundantly unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, so that we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. God's unchangeable counsel and His oath-bound promise assure us of this eternal glory. And now we continue with the Reformed and scriptural view of the preservation and perseverance of the saints. We persevere because we are preserved.

Fifthly, and finally, God does not permit the elect to be tempted above what they are able (I Cor. 10:13). He confirms and finishes the work begun in them (I Cor. 1:9 and Phil. 1:6), and keeps them for the coming of Christ to receive the heavenly inheritance (I Thess. 5:23 and I Pet. 1:4 and 5). Quoting these passages, we read:

I Cor. 10:13: There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; But God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

I Cor. 1:9: God is faithful, by Whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Phil. 1:6: Being confident of this very thing, that

He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

I Thess. 5:23: And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Pet. 1:4, 5: To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

From all this we may conclude that this perseverance is certainly rooted in divine preservation. We are not preserved because and as we persevere, as the Arminians would have us believe, but we persevere because we are preserved.

Besides, because we are preserved we *must* persevere. This divine preservation of the elect sinner does not take place, as it were, round about him but in him and through him. We are not stocks and blocks and treated as such; the power of God's irresistible grace does not ignore or cancel our moral-rational nature, but it operates in our heart and out of the heart in our mind and will. It is for this reason, as also our Confessions clearly teach, that the grace of God does not make us careless, profane, or licentious, but it renders us active, gives us an understanding heart, opens our eyes and we see, our ears and we hear, etc., enlightens our mind and inclines our, by nature, perverted will. And when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts we fight, must fight, holding fast unto that which God has given unto us and which we have therefore learned to treasure above all the riches of this present time. Indeed, God's irresistible grace makes us very active in the things of God's covenant.

And so we persevere through prayer and the Word of God. The question may be asked: but is not our fighting and our struggling a condition, at least for the conscious enjoyment of salvation? To this we answer: if, by condition, one means that we must fight and struggle to obtain the crown, then we have no objection to the use of the term. If, by

condition, one means that something must happen before something else can follow, then it is surely true that the battle precedes the obtaining of the crown. And yet, also our conscious enjoyment of salvation is strictly unconditional. Why must we pray and watch? Because salvation is completely and wholly of the Lord! As soon as we imagine that we can stand, that something must proceed from us, we will surely fall. Salvation is never dependent upon the will of the sinner. This applies also to our enjoyment of salvation. Hence, because we persevere through and because of divine preservation, we stand only when we watch and pray.

Our assurance is *the* blessed fruit of this unspeakably precious doctrine. I suppose we can attach this idea of assurance as a blessed fruit to any doctrine of the Christian's faith. It certainly follows from the doctrine of sovereign election, from the truth of particular atonement, and also from the doctrine of God's irresistible grace. However, it belongs peculiarly to the doctrine of the certain perseverance of the saints. This is held before us, for example, in II Peter 1:10, 11: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." In Hebrews 11:1 we read: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." And throughout the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews the power of faith is set forth as revealed in the lives of the saints throughout the old dispensation. This chapter is often called the chapter focusing the attention upon the heroes of faith. It might be better to say that Hebrews 11 lays emphasis upon the power of faith, not upon what we are able to do, but upon that which faith can and does accomplish in the life of the child of God in the midst of the world. And then we have that beautiful passage of Hebrews 6:18-19: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Indeed, what a tremendously assuring word we have in this particular Scripture, assuring the child of God of everlasting life and glory.

This assurance, however, we experience and enjoy only in the way of perseverance. This is true, first of all, objectively. We must fight the good fight of faith, run the race, cling to the Captain of our salvation, the Finisher of the faith, forsake the world, seek the holy city of the New Jerusalem that is above. That this is true, objectively, is obviously

because this is the only way in which the Lord leads His own into everlasting glory. We must be in that way. There simply is no other way. It is only the way of the cross that leads home. And that means that we must always walk and conduct ourselves as pilgrims and strangers in the midst of the world. The cross of Calvary was erected outside of the holy city, outside of Jerusalem. Clinging to that cross, we, too, must be outcasts, strangers in the midst of the world. But, that we experience this assurance only in the way of perseverance is also true subjectively. If we are to rejoice in the hope that is set before us, in the gaining of the victory over all the powers of sin and of darkness, then we, also subjectively, must stand in that hope; then we must flee from sin and the enticements of this world, for otherwise the hope that is set before us will in that measure mean nothing to us. Only, all our struggle must be in the power of God and of His might, through prayer and watching, having put on the whole armor of God, for no flesh may and shall ever boast; whosoever glorieth, must always glory in the Lord.

This concludes our series of articles on the subject: Preservation and Perseverance. How important it is that we, as churches, and also individually, maintain the glorious truth that our salvation is solely of the Lord. The Arminian can be very clever and subtle in this denial of the truth. Indeed, he will claim that he maintains the Word of God. He will even emphasize that salvation is all of God, that we are saved solely by grace, that to God must be ascribed all the praise and all the glory. Salvation, he will assert, is of the Lord, only of the Lord. He must bestow upon us all the blessings of salvation. We can never fight this good fight in our own strength; we can never run the race in and of ourselves. We must put on the whole armor of God, fight by His grace and power. All this the Arminian will concede. However, the difference between him and the Reformed believer is exactly that the former causes everything to revolve about the free will of the sinner. Only the grace of God can save a sinner, he will concede, but whether that grace will operate in a sinner's life depends upon that sinner's free will. Only the Spirit must operate within a sinner, but the sinner will and must determine whether that Spirit will work in him to will and to do. Grace only can save us, but I must allow the Spirit and His grace entrance into my heart. And this does not merely apply to my salvation as far as its beginning is concerned; it applies throughout my life. I must will to be saved to the very end. The Arminian may say in the fifth point of his Five Points of the Remonstrance that he cannot as yet declare whether the saint will persevere to the very end, and that this must still be determined from

Holy Writ. All this, however, is double-talk on his part. He certainly does not believe in the sure perseverance of the saints. His heresy is devastating. It destroys the very heart and foundation of the church of God. Indeed, we shall persevere because we are being preserved. Let us hold fast to this truth, that no man may take our crown. Our very salvation is at stake here. And, what is of even greater significance than our salvation, the glory of the living God is at stake here! That is primarily *the* issue. The Lord is Jehovah. He is unchangeably faithful. The work He has once begun shall by His grace be fully done. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. May we

conclude by quoting once more that wonderful passage in the Word of God of Romans 8:35-39: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

The Nicene Creed

Rev. James Slopsema

Article 8 (cont'd.)

We have already discussed most of the eighth article of the Nicene Creed. We have thus far treated the confession of the early church that the Holy Spirit is "the Lord and Giver of Life; Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." And we have seen that all these expressions serve to demonstrate the true divinity of the Holy Spirit.

The same is true of the next phrase of this article, which we now discuss: "Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified."

When the early church confessed that the Holy Spirit "with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified" she was describing first of all her own practice as the church. The church at this time worshipped and glorified the Holy Spirit along with the Father and the Son. In her worship she made no distinction between the Father and the Son on the one hand and the Holy Spirit on the other hand. All three were worshipped by her. The same was true of her adulations of praise. She praised and glorified not just the Father and the Son but also the Spirit.

This the church did because of the example and injunctions she found in the Scriptures. The Scriptures certainly indicate that the Holy Spirit is to be honored and glorified with the Father and the Son and thus also worshipped.

Thus, for example, Christ Himself charged that the church is to baptize her members in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (cf. Matt. 28:19). Baptism is not to be administered in the name of the Father and Son only. The same honor extended to the Father and the Son is also to be given to the Holy Spirit. We are to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The same is to be said for the blessing that is pronounced on the church. The closing benediction of Paul in his second epistle to the church of Corinth was, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, Amen" (cf. II Cor. 13:14). This benediction is commonly used even today by the church in her worship. And in this benediction the Holy Spirit is honored along with the Father and the Son as the source and author of all the blessings of the church.

The Scriptures glorify the Holy Spirit with other divine honors. The Scriptures, for example, warn us against blaspheming or speaking evil against the Holy Spirit. So heinous a sin it is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit that it can not be forgiven (cf. Matt. 12:31, 32). We may also call upon the Holy Spirit in our oaths to confirm the truth of what we say. This the apostle Paul did by divine inspiration as he wrote to the church of Rome, "I say the truth in

Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost" (cf. Romans 9:1). Finally, we are charged to flee fornication and its defilement, for our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. I Cor. 6:15-19).

Here again we find very clear proof of the true divinity of the Holy Spirit. The divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be demonstrated by the fact that divine names, works, attributes, and honors are ascribed to each of them in the Scriptures. Already in this eighth article the early church sought to demonstrate the true divinity of the Spirit by ascribing to him divine works. On the basis of Holy Writ she confessed that the Holy Spirit is the "Giver of Life." Now she acknowledged that on the basis of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit "with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified" by her. In so doing she confessed that divine honors also are due the Holy Spirit and that, therefore, He is truly divine.

Finally, the early church confessed in this eighth article of her creed that the Holy Spirit was the One "Who spake by the prophets."

By this the church meant that Spirit Who was poured out on Pentecost as the Spirit of Christ and Who resides in the church of the new dispensation is the same Spirit that filled the prophets of the Old Testament and moved them to prophecy.

This certainly is the testimony of the Bible. In II Peter 1:21 we read, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The same truth is found in I Peter 1:10, 11: "Of which salvation the prophets had inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

The early Christian church asserted this very obvious truth of the Scriptures in her creed to denounce the error of Marcion.

Marcion was a Gnostic who lived in the second century. We have already discussed the teachings of Gnosticism in this series on the Nicene creed (cf. Vol. 59, pp. 205ff.). Gnosticism was essentially an admixture of Greek philosophy, pagan idolatry, and Christianity. Marcion, however, was not a Gnostic in the traditional sense. He rejected the pagan tenets of the Gnostics and thus also many of the Gnostics' teachings. He also claimed, contrary to traditional Gnosticism, that Christianity is the only true religion. This only served to make Marcion the most dangerous of the Gnostics. The closer false religion comes to resemble the true religion, the more inclined the believer is to be led astray.

This was certainly true with Marcion.

And the religion of Marcion was indeed false. For although Marcion did repudiate many tenets of traditional Gnosticism, he was nevertheless a Gnostic at heart. Along with traditional Gnosticism, Marcion taught the existence of the Demiurge. The Demiurge in Gnostic thought is the world-maker. The Gnostic did not acknowledge God as the Creator. The creation was formed by an intermediary who is finite and is characterized by many imperfections. This Demiurge according to traditional Gnosticism and Marcion is Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament Jews, Who falsely portrayed Himself as the only God.

In harmony with this Gnostic principle, Marcion was led into many other errors.

Marcion, for example, rejected the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament was merely the work of Jehovah, the imposter god of the Jews. Following from this, Marcion also saw all sorts of contradictions between the Old and New Testament. He wrote a book entitled "Antitheses," in which he sought to demonstrate the antithesis he saw between the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament Marcion found the law; in the New Testament the gospel. The God of the Old Testament is harsh, severe, and unmerciful; the God of the New Testament is kind and good. The principle of the Old Testament is, "Love thy neighbor, but hate thine enemy." In like manner the Old Testament teaches, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." On the other hand, the command of the New Testament is "Love thine enemy."

But Marcion did not stop there. According to Marcion, Christ was not born at all but suddenly descended into the city of Capernaum as the revealer of the true God, Who sent him. He is not the Messiah, announced by the Demiurge (Jehovah) in the Old Testament; although he called himself the Messiah to accommodate himself to the expectations of the people. Since he has not a real body but only the appearance of a body, his death was only an illusion. Christ, furthermore, succeeded in casting the Demiurge (Jehovah) into Hades and secured the redemption of man's soul. This he called the apostle Paul to preach. The other apostles were Judaizing corrupters of pure Christianity, and their writings are to be rejected. Consequently, Marcion acknowledged only ten epistles of Paul and an edited Gospel of Luke as the authoritative Word of God.

Small wonder that when Polycarp, the great church father of Smyrna, met Marcion in Rome and was asked by Marcion, "Dost thou know me?" he responded, "I know the first-born of Satan."

Although Marcion was expelled from the Chris-

tian church by his own father, the bishop of Sinope in Pontus, Marcion nevertheless gained a rather large following. The Marcionite sect spread eventually into Italy, Egypt, North Africa, Cyprus, and Syria. Although this sect was forbidden the freedom of worship, it flourished for quite some time so that remnants of Marcionites could be found yet as late as the tenth century.

To contradict this dangerous heresy of Marcion the early church confessed that the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son is Lord of all, Who as the Spirit of Christ is also the Giver of Life is the same Spirit that moved the prophets of old to speak. The implications of this are clear. This means that the authors of the Old and New Testament are the same. The Jehovah of the Old Testament Jews Who through His Spirit moved the prophets to speak in times past is the same God Who later revealed Himself through Christ and His Spirit in the New Testament. The Spirit that moved the apostle Paul to pen his epistles is the same Spirit that moved the proph-

ets to speak and write. The Old and New Testament is all the Word of the one true God. And so is the message the same — it is the one gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is what the early church confessed in this last phrase of the eighth article of her creed.

And the true church of Christ still confesses the same truth today. She does that over against all the modern day children of Marcion who would deny that the Holy Scripture in its entirety is the inspired and therefore infallible, inerrant Word of God. We are being told today that the Bible is no longer trustworthy. It is filled with all sorts of mistakes and antiquated ideas that no longer are valid for today. This is because the Bible is essentially a human document. It is not of divine origin but is basically a work of man. This strikes at the very foundation of the Christian faith. And over against that lie of hell, we with the early church confess that "the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21).

THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH

Cremation

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Increasingly today cremation is being practiced. Cremation is the burning of a dead body to ashes. More and more cremation is becoming accepted instead of the burial of the dead. Often high-society people, movie stars, entertainers, sports figures will that after they die their bodies be cremated.

Is there anything wrong with cremation? Is it an important question what happens to one's body after his death?

Certain reasons are given for the preference of cremation over against burial. It is said that cremation is a better way of disposing of the human body. It is better for the health of the living, especially when a person has died as a result of contagious disease. It is also argued in favor of cremation that it will save a great deal of land, which in some countries is sorely needed because of a large population. This is one reason why cremation has gained such acceptance in a country like the Netherlands.

Besides, there is the economic reason: cremation is cheaper than burial. Today funeral and burial expenses are astronomical. One way to avoid the high costs of burial is cremation.

Besides these arguments in favor of cremation, we are told that the Scriptures do not explicitly forbid the practice of cremation. Nowhere do we read: "Thou shalt not have thy body cremated." And isn't it true that whether our bodies are cremated or buried makes no essential difference as far as the final resurrection is concerned? God is just as able to accomplish the miracle of the resurrection whether the remains of our bodies are in the form of dust or ashes. And isn't it also the case that many of God's people, contrary to their own wishes, have been burned? Think of all the martyrs of God who have been burned at the stake on account of their confession of the gospel. The Reformer John Huss was burned at the stake by the decree of the Coun-

cil of Constance. After his death, the bones of John Wycliff were exhumed and burned by the Roman Catholic Church.

I believe that the Scriptures indicate clearly that cremation is wrong and that ordinarily the Christian ought to be buried and ought to do everything he can to see to it that his dead relatives receive proper burial.

In the first place, the Scriptures demonstrate beyond doubt that it was the practice of God's people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, to bury their dead. In fact, we are given no specific example of the funeral of a child of God in which the cremation of his body took place. On the contrary, we are given many instances of the burying of their dead by believers. We have only to think of the example of Abraham in Genesis 23 that he have a place "to bury his dead out of his sight." In order that he might bury his dead wife, Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth the cave of Machpelah. Although Abraham was forbidden by God to own any of the land of Canaan, and was required by God to be a pilgrim and a stranger, he was permitted to purchase a place for the burial of his wife Sarah. This indicates that the father of believers considered burial proper and necessary.

The fact of the matter is that the Scriptures esteem highly a decent burial. If a king was extremely wicked he would not be buried with his fathers. This was regarded as something shameful and humiliating. It was exactly the judgment of God, for example, on wicked Ahab and Jezebel that they did not receive burial, but that the dogs licked up their blood and the birds ate their flesh. The greatest evil committed on the altar erected by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, according to I Kings 13:2, was that men's bones were burnt upon it. The great judgment of God upon the wicked, Isaiah prophesies in Isaiah 33:12, will be that their bones will be burned to lime.

In the second place, it can easily be shown that cremation has its origin among the heathen nations and cultures. Secular history proves this. But this is even referred to by the Scriptures. According to Amos 2:1 the heathen nation of Moab was guilty of practising cremation. God will judge the Moabites, according to this verse, not first of all because of what they did to God's people Israel, but because the Moabites "burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime."

Historically, cremation has been considered by God's people as a wicked attempt to annihilate the body and prevent the possibility of a future resurrection. The practice rested on the teaching that there is no life hereafter, at least for the body, and that death is the end of man. It was a practice Chris-

tians viewed as an act of defiance and rebellion against God.

Today, too, Christians ought to honor decent burial. Not only was burial the rule in both the Old and New Testaments. But God Himself buried Moses. And our Lord underwent burial, not burning. The reasons that people give today for cremation are materialistic and unbelieving.

We ought to favor Christian burial because of the proper regard that we are to have for our bodies. Our bodies are not our own to do with as we please. But our bodies, along with our souls, belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, to use the language of the first Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism. Our bodies have been made by God. David says in Psalm 139:13 that it was God Who possessed and covered him in his mother's womb. And the apostle Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 6:19, 20 that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so that not only in spirit but also in body we are to glorify God.

We are to respect and take care of our bodies while we live. Explaining the sixth commandment, the commandment which forbids murder, the Heidelberg Catechism says that we are to have a care that we do not hurt ourselves or wilfully expose ourselves to any danger. Out of concern for our bodies, as well as for the glory of God, we are to avoid gluttony and drunkenness and any other excess by which we might harm our bodies.

The same respect that we have for our bodies while we are alive ought to carry over to death and the care of our bodies after death. Even after the life of the body is gone, we ought not to injure or destroy the body unnecessarily.

In the second place, we Christians ought to oppose cremation and favor burial because of our hope of the final resurrection. We have this hope. One of the articles of our faith is that we believe the resurrection of our bodies. This body in which I now live is going to be raised up by Christ in the resurrection of the last day. It's going to be raised up a different body, a glorious body in distinction from the shame of my body presently. It's going to be raised up a body of strength and beauty. It's going to be raised a spiritual body. But the fact is that this my body, this very same body in which I now live, is going to be raised. I'm not going to be given a new body in the resurrection. But the subject of the resurrection is the same body in which I now live.

And now Christian burial is expressive of that hope and expectation of the resurrection. As a seed that is sown, with a view to an abundant harvest, the dead body of the Christian is laid to rest in the bosom of the earth. As the seed must die and be

planted in the earth in order for it to sprout forth, grow, and produce its fruit, so it is with the bodies of believers.

With a view to the glorious harvest of the final resurrection, we Christians bury our dead. We do that not as those who are without hope. For we have a hope. That hope will be realized when our

Lord Jesus Christ comes again. Then that which has been sown in corruption will be raised in power; that which is sown in dishonor will be raised in glory; that which is sown in weakness will be raised in power; that which is sown a natural body will be raised a spiritual body (I Cor. 15:42-44).

IN HIS FEAR

God Is a Covenant God (continued)

Rev. Ronald Hanko

Because the Sabbath both in the Old and New Testaments is a revelation of God's covenant of grace, the Christian, who loves that covenant and rejoices in its blessings, is very careful about the Sabbath day. And because God's work of grace in his heart is the beginning of his rest from the heavy burden of his sin, he cannot be one who willingly profanes or disregards the weekly day of rest that God has appointed.

It is exactly in this connection that legalism is such a great danger to Sabbath observance. Legalism does not disregard the Sabbath, but it destroys the joy of the Sabbath by making Sabbath observance a matter of endless rules and regulations. We have only to remember the example of the Pharisees to see this. They were exceedingly careful about the Sabbath, and Jesus did not fault them for it, but they erred in finding the true meaning of the Sabbath in various regulations, usually of their own making. We all know how they even counted their steps on the Sabbath, and accused the disciples of Sabbath desecration when they picked and ate a few ears of corn. They were so diligent in adding precept to precept and law to law, that finally they themselves had to devise all sorts of ways to get around their own rules, and thus they showed the utter joylessness of their Sabbath observance.

This is what Jesus condemned when He told them (and us) that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). Never was it the case that men existed simply to keep various Sabbath regulations, but man existed for the glory of God, and God had made the Sabbath for man as a great gift, through the use of which

man had the opportunity to show and declare God's glory. The Sabbath was not meant to be a burden to man, but his servant; and Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, came to make that possible for His people after man had fallen into sin (Mark 2:28).

In the Old Testament there were many Sabbath regulations which God Himself gave, but even then the keeping of the Sabbath was far more than the observance of those regulations, as God reminded Israel time and again (Ps. 51:16, 17, Is. 1:10-17). Those many regulations were necessary because the church was in its childhood (Gal. 4:1-3), and even as our children need many rules to teach them and to govern them in their immaturity, so the Old Testament church needed the many Sabbath regulations of the Old Testament laws.

But just as in the lives of our own children there comes a time when they have learned obedience, and the laws of the home and of life in the world are written in their hearts so that they no longer need to be governed by the external code of our precepts, so spiritual maturity comes for the church through the coming of Christ and the sending of the Spirit (Jer. 31:31-34, Gal. 4:4-7). That spiritual maturity of the New Testament church is the liberty of God's people to obey God and serve Him, not under the yoke of an external code of precepts, but out of the law as it is written upon their hearts.

That we condemn all legalism, then, does not mean that we discard the Commandments, or even just the Fourth Commandment. Nor does it mean that there are no rules for Sabbath observance in the New Testament, nor that God's people do not

pay attention to what Scripture teaches about the Sabbath. Rather it means that through the coming and work of Christ they are able to understand the true meaning and purpose of the Sabbath in a way that was not possible in the Old Testament. They know the Sabbath as a sign of God's covenant of friendship *through Christ* in Whom they have the closest possible friendship with the living God. They know what rest is, not any more through the pictures and shadows of the law, but through Christ, the great Rest-giver, and thus they willingly and joyfully keep the Sabbath and find in all the Sabbath ordinances and regulations a guide for doing this.

As a gift of God, therefore, the Sabbath is not to be despised or cast aside. Just as much as legalism constitutes a great threat to the Sabbath, so also does the disregard of the Sabbath that is so common today. Such disregard is a falling away from our liberty in Christ, a despising of God's sign of His friendship with His people, a repudiation of their rest that they have for their souls in Him, and so also, a failure to confess the God of the covenant.

There are those who complain that Jesus never specifically commands the keeping of the Sabbath in the New Testament, and also that He never commands its observance on the first day of the week. The fact is that this matter of Sabbath observance in the New Testament was too important for God's people to be left to mere command, and its importance and observance on the first day are confirmed and taught not so much by command, but by all the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who revealed Himself to the church as her risen Lord only on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1, Jn. 20:19, 26, Rev. 1:10) and Who chose to pour out all the blessings of His finished work on that same day. And even before He, as the Lord of Sabbath, changed its observance from the seventh to the first day, He condemned all disregard of the Sabbath by His example, for we read in Luke 4:16, "As His custom was, He went up into the synagogue on the sabbath." As His disciples, it is our calling to follow Him.

At the very heart of joyful Sabbath observance, then, is the weekly worship of the church. Not merely because it is commanded, but because we have a great High Priest, Who has consecrated and opened for us a new and living way into the very presence of God, do we heed the exhortation not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:19-25). That assembling of the saints is the chief means of covenant friendship with our God, since it is the communion of the body of Christ. Only as members of Christ's body and in the fellowship of His body do we have fellowship with Christ Himself as the One in Whom all the fulness of our cove-

nant God dwells bodily. Also, it is in that fellowship of the saints that we are able to fulfil our covenant calling to consider one another to provoke one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). And that too is of utmost importance, for our responsibility toward the saints is nothing less than our responsibility to Christ (Matt. 25:40).

That this involves more than the ordinary fellowship of the saints is also clear from Scripture. At the very center of this fellowship is the *preaching* of the Gospel by the ordained officebearers of the church. That is why we read in Acts 2:42 that the early church "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." Receiving that preaching of the Gospel in the public worship of the church is part of our Sabbath duty, because, as Isaiah says in Isaiah 28:9-13, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing." His reference is to the Gospel as the means which God uses to teach His people, knowledge and doctrine (vs. 9). Just as Israel, the people of God often will not hear the Word of rest and refreshing, and grow weary of it; but it still remains the chief means of causing the weary to rest. This is also the reason why the exhortation of Hebrews 4:11 to labor to enter the rest is given in close connection with the description of the Word of God as a sharp two-edged sword. That sharp sword of the Word is God's instrument to cut away our sins and corruption, that we may rest in Him. And our calling to labor to enter the rest involves our submitting to its living and powerful influence.

Sabbath observance is not easy on account of this. The ways of the flesh are easy, for they are the ways of doing our own pleasure on the Sabbath. Proper Sabbath observance requires great diligence in prayer, and in knowing and believing the Word of God. It is such a great work that it is possible only when we set aside our daily cares and cease from our everyday labors for that one day. The command to refrain from work on the Sabbath, therefore, is not a command to be idle, but to give ourselves with all our hearts and soul and mind *and strength* to the remembering of God's covenant of grace with us.

That work is very highly blessed by God, difficult though it may be. Those who have experienced the blessedness of faithful and careful Sabbath observance can agree with the Psalmist: "Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. 92:13, 14). The blessings of keeping the Sabbath are so great that our hearts grow faint to think of them (Ps. 84:1, 2). They are above all the blessings of a place and name in God's house and within His walls, better than of sons and

daughters, and of an everlasting name that shall not be cut off (Is. 56:5).

Nevertheless, the highest purpose of Sabbath observance is not that we ourselves may be blessed, but that our covenant-making and covenant-keeping God may be honored. He has given us the Sabbath as a sign of His covenant, so that in keeping it we may confess His glory, as the God of the covenant, in word and deed. When our worship is directed to the Father, when it is through the Son and His Word to us, and by the Holy Spirit who enables and helps us, then God is known among His people as the triune, covenant God, Who has no need of them, Who has perfect fellowship and life in Himself, but Who in the greatness of His grace and mercy has taken us into the fellowship and friendship of that life. In other words, our worship must be Trinitarian, so that the Triune God is praised. It must be covenant worship, that is, the worship of fellowship with Him, that He may be known as the great covenant God.

Our attitude toward the Sabbath, then, must be a very positive attitude. We must not look at the

duties of the Sabbath as a burden, but as a privilege. Practically this means that we must not always be asking whether this is wrong on the Sabbath, but we must ask ourselves what is right and fitting for the Sabbath. Then we will find that there is so much that is fitting and right — so much which glorifies our covenant God, that there will not even be time for things about which we or others may have some difference of opinion as to their propriety.

Our children also must be taught this. Certainly, because they are young, they must have rules for the Sabbath, but they too must be constantly reminded that the purpose of these rules is only to teach them to fill the whole Sabbath with the great works of God's covenant, works of prayer and study of Scripture, works of charity and kindness toward the saints and all those who are afflicted, but above all the works of hearing and believing the voice of Christ in the Gospel.

Let us, with our children, keep God's Sabbaths, choose the things that please Him, and take hold of His covenant (Is. 56:4).

NEWS FEATURE

Protestant Reformed Teacher Goes to Ulster

On August 14, 1984, Mr. and Mrs. Deane Wassink and their four small children left for Northern Ireland, where Mr. Wassink will teach the 1984-1985 school year in Covenant Christian School of Newtownabbey — about 15 miles from Belfast. The Wassinks arrived safely, by God's providence; and, at the time of this writing (September 29), Mr. Wassink has been teaching for almost a month.

The story behind Mr. Wassink's going to Ulster begins in September, 1983, when a small group of concerned Presbyterians in Northern Ireland started the first parental, Protestant, Christian school in that country. Traditionally, the schools in Ulster have been the parochial schools of the Roman Catholics and the State schools used by the Protestants. Covenant Christian School, as this new

school was named, is governed by an association called "Association for Christian Education in Ireland" (ACEI), operating through a Board. Members of several Presbyterian churches co-operate in the association. One of the association's newsletters speaks of the carefulness of the Board regarding applicants for membership, "in order to maintain the confessionally reformed character of the organization."

In its first year, the school had 14 students; this year, there are 21 students — there is growth.

Because Christian education is new in Ulster, teachers are not available; and the association has needed help from other quarters in the form of a competent, Reformed teacher for the upper "grades." There is a teacher for the lower "grades." Because the group is yet quite small, it needs finan-

cial help in the form of partial support of the teacher obtained from abroad. The association does provide some of the support of this teacher.

In late spring of this year, the association learned that the school would not be receiving a teacher it had counted on for the 1984-1985 school year. Because members of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Larne, Northern Ireland, including her pastor, the Rev. George Hutton, are members of the ACEI and because the Bible Presbyterian Church had recently come into close contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches, through our South Holland Church, the request for help came to the South Holland Church for a Protestant Reformed teacher. Already, in one of his earliest letters to the Evangelism Committee of South Holland, Rev. Hutton had written, "Some of us are very concerned about the schooling of our children and are determined to give them a reformed christian education. I know that the Protestant Reformed Church has years of experience in this field and for this reason I am asking if there is possibly any material specially directed to parents dealing with this particular matter." (By this time, the Bible Presbyterian Church has asked our synodical Committee on Contact to pursue close church-relations with her; and our Synod has sent two ministers to her "in order to explore the possibility of establishing sister church relationships with (her).")

The request was urgent: the school needed a teacher by September.

Several men in different areas of our denomination then undertook to discover whether a teacher was available and whether there was the readiness of our people to support the work financially. The results were gratifying in the extreme. Mr. Deane Wassink of our Holland, Michigan Church became convinced that the Lord called him to this work of

Christian education. However, he had already signed a contract to teach in the Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School, where he had taught the year before. But Hope very graciously agreed to release Mr. Wassink from his contract and, at that late date, to find another teacher, thus co-operating on behalf of the school in Ulster.

No less gratifying was the response to the newsletter distributed throughout the churches of our denomination, asking for financial support. Our committee had hoped for \$5,000 by September. At the present time, \$14,000 has been given, mostly by members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, from all across the United States and Canada, in large amounts and in small. Some from outside our churches have also contributed; and their gifts have been gratefully received. The liberality of our people and their zeal for the cause of God's covenant are nothing short of amazing. May God bless the gifts and the givers! The Diaconate of South Holland is administering this charity.

Several thousand dollars are still needed for the work. Anyone who is willing to give should make his check payable to "Fund for Reformed Education in Ulster" and send it to Jack Lenting, 17014 Wausau Ave., South Holland, IL 60473.

The address of Mr. and Mrs. Wassink is:
28 Hillmount Gardens
Larne, County Antrim
Northern Ireland BT40 1TF

The Wassinks will be encouraged by your letters. They need our prayers — remember them and the cause of Christian education in Ulster in your prayers.

Cordially in Christ,
Committee for Reformed
Education in Ulster
Jack Lenting, Chairman

QUESTION BOX

Women in the Bible

Rev. C. Hanko

The following question appeared in the March 15, 1984 issue of the Standard Bearer:

"I have a second question about women, especially Huldah in II Chron. 34:22 ff. I cannot recall every having either read or heard preaching

about her role as prophetess to Israel other than my own biblical study. We read and hear much about Deborah and Phoebe, but nothing about Huldah. My second question is this: Will you discuss the spiritual and practical implications of Huldah's

ministry for the Old Testament Church as well as for the New Testament Church?" (In a later postcard the writer asks that this question be expanded "to include Anna as well in Galatians 3:28").

Actually we know nothing more about the prophetess Huldah than is recorded in II Kings 22:13-20 and in II Chronicles 34:22-24. She lived at the time of the reign of Josiah, the last good king of Judah, not long before the Babylonian captivity. She had her home in what was known as the new part of Jerusalem and her husband Shallum was keeper of the wardrobe. This may refer to the king's wardrobe or the clothing of the priests in the temple. If it referred to the former, this could account for the fact that both Shallum and Huldah were well known to the king. During the repairing of the temple the book of the law was found. Evidently the books of Moses had been completely neglected in Judah, were not even known by the king, as is evident from the reaction of king Josiah when the law was read to him. For when the king heard the law read, particularly the curses that would fall upon Israel if they forsook the Lord and worshiped idols, as recorded in Deuteronomy 28, he was deeply and alarmingly impressed, to the extent that he rent his clothing. His fear for the judgments of God upon the idol worship of Judah and upon all her other abominations impelled him to send a delegation to the prophetess Huldah to seek the Word of the Lord from her. The Lord also spoke through Huldah, warning the king that the judgments and curses recorded in the law of Moses certainly applied to his time. We read: "And she said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched" (II Kings 22:15-17). But the king would be spared, because he humbled himself before the Lord when he heard these words.

There are very few references to prophetesses in the Old Testament. Miriam is mentioned in Exodus 15:20, Deborah in Judges 4:4, Noadiah, a false prophet, in Nehemiah 6:14, and Huldah in the references mentioned above. This situation is the very opposite of heathen countries, where women were commonly engaged in witchcraft, fortune-telling, and the like. We are all acquainted with Saul's visit to the witch of Endor. In the sphere of the church the special gift of prophecy was entrusted almost entirely to men, even as the office of priest and

king. Wicked Athaliah was the exception among the kings of Judah. When we compare the days of the judges, when Israel departed from the Lord, and God sent Deborah as prophetess to shame the spiritual cowardliness of the men of that time, with the days of king Josiah, when Judah committed every form of abominations before the face of Jehovah, we can well conclude that the Lord once more put Judah to shame by speaking through a prophetess. It was not as if there were no other prophets at that time, for Jeremiah had begun his ministry and Zephaniah is also mentioned as a prophet. Yet the Lord was willing to confirm the words of His law through a prophetess.

It appears to me that the case of Anna, the prophetess at the time of Jesus' presentation in the temple, was entirely different. Scripture informs us that "there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser." She was at least a hundred years old and "departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day." Along with the aged Simeon she met the Christ child in the temple and "gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Israel."

The late Rev. Herman Hoeksema writes of her in *The Mystery of Bethlehem*: "The hope of the promise was her heritage in generations. For she belonged to that tribe of Israel whose women the books of the wise appraised as especially beautiful, the tribe of Aser, one of the ten that had been swallowed up in captivity. Had not her generations in times long gone by, when Ephraim had separated itself from Judah and walked in the ways of Jeroboam who caused Israel to sin, incorporated themselves into Judah, and had they not, turning their backs upon the abominations of the golden calves, always worshipped in Jerusalem and clung to the temple as the symbol of their hope? Had they not, when Judah had followed the way of her adulterous sister, followed her, finally, also into captivity, mourned the lost estate of God's people at the rivers of Babylon, hanging their harps in the willows and refusing to sing one of the songs of Zion as long as Jerusalem was a spectacle and God's house lay in ruins? And had they not obeyed in gladness of heart when the summons was sounded forth to return and to rebuild the walls of the Holy City? The hope that Jehovah would still realize the Promise, would remember His holy covenant with Abraham and the sure mercies of David, would redeem Israel from all his iniquities and troubles, would restore the throne of David to its former glory, yea, exalt the mountain of His house above all the mountains of the earth, had never died in the generations of Phanuel, whose daughter was Anna, and in that hope they had never failed to keep their

genealogies. A blessed distinction, indeed, it was in the days of apostasy and unbelief, of confusion and indifference, that she could be known as Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser."

This true representative of the spiritual remnant of the ten tribes had waited long, like Simeon, for the fulfillment of the promise, the redemption in Jerusalem. Now she could die in peace, for she had seen the promised Savior, and dying she could also represent a nation that no longer would exist as nation, since it had served its purpose in bringing forth the Christ. A beautiful picture — Anna, a widow, at the end of the line of generations, now ready to die in peace, for her hope of the promise had been realized!

This is in complete harmony with Galatians 3:28, where we read: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Although it is true that the special office in the church is entrusted to men, even as the authority over the earthly creation was entrusted to Adam in paradise, this does not mean that this distinction holds as men and women in the Body of Christ. True, almost without exception the offices of prophet, priest, and king were entrusted to men in the Old Dispensation. The twelve apostles were men, while the woman is told to be silent in the church (I Timothy 2:11, 12). But in Galatians 3:28 the apostle is speaking of the spiritual likeness and oneness of all those who are in Christ. In God's sight all men are equal in the sense that all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23, 2:11, 3:9-18). Likewise, "the same Lord is Lord over all, and rich to all that call upon Him" (Rom. 10:12). As members of the Body of Christ, united to Christ by the bond of a living faith, all differences of race, color, nationality, or sex fall away. The Jew remains a Jew

and the gentile remains a gentile, yet they are one in Christ. The master retains authority and the slave remains subject to his master, yet they are one in the Lord. The same applies to the sexes. We can put it this way: ministers, elders, and deacons are not *spiritually superior*, but are equal to the other members of the congregation. All are one in Christ.

We meet the same idea when we compare Ephesians 4:4-6 with I Corinthians 11:7-9 and Ephesians 5:22, 23.

Ephesians 4:4-6 reads: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and in you all." Here the emphasis falls on the unity of the various members of the Body of Christ.

I Corinthians 11:7-9 reads: "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." Here distinction is made between *man* and *woman*, between male and female in general, according to God's creation.

Ephesians 5:22 reads: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Here distinction is made between husband and wife. Although the wife submits to her husband, she is still one with him in the Lord.

Each believer is an individual, serving his or her own purpose in the church, yet all are one in Christ.

For further reference, see *Free Born Sons of Sarah* by Rev. G.C. Lubbers, page 111; *Commentary on Galatians* by William Hendriksen, page 150, et al.

Book Review

MARTIN LUTHER, PROPHET TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, by James Atkinson; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983; 224 pp., \$7.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.)

Many books have been published on the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. This book, written by the Professor of Biblical History and Literature at the University of

Sheffield, is, in some respects, an important one. It is in the second chapter that the author sets forth his main thesis. Luther represents true Roman Catholic Christianity. The Romish church rejected him during his own lifetime and in the centuries that have followed, but, especially since Vatican II, the situation has changed dramatically: it has been increasingly inclined to accept him and his

theology. Protestantism, if it is to be truly ecumenical, must return to the true Luther, from which position it had departed; only then will true union be possible.

This thesis is argued throughout the book. The first two chapters demonstrate the change that has taken place in Romish thought in its evaluation of Luther. All this change came to a certain climax in Vatican II, under the leadership of Pope John XXIII, which council opened the way for reunion between Protestants and Catholics. In the chapters which follow, the author examines rather carefully Luther's position on key doctrines, shows how Vatican II, at least in some instances, has adopted Luther's position and argues that if Protestantism would return to Luther, the way would be partially at least opened for union.

A brief examination of some of the chapters will demonstrate how the author argues.

Luther's peculiar relevance, so the author states, lies in his religious experience. Luther's whole theology developed out of this religious experience, and cannot be understood apart from it. In emphasizing this point, the author all but makes Luther a mystic, by divorcing his experience from Scripture and its objective truth. Thus he lays altogether the wrong emphasis on this point, but makes this essential to his argument.

In discussing the question of the priesthood of all believers, the author acknowledges that this point is a central point of the division between these two branches of Christianity, a point of division which remains to this day; but these two views are able to live side by side within one church. Luther would have violently disagreed, and the author all but concedes the primacy of the pope in the church and sacrifices a fundamental principle of the Reformation in doing this.

On the question of justification by faith, the author argues that the Romish church has basically acknowledged the correctness of Luther's position and had conceded this important point to Protestantism — something highly dubious to say the least.

In his conception of the Word of God, the author is basically Barthian and tries to make Luther a Barthian as well. He makes the distinction between Scripture and the Word of God and claims that this was the view of Luther. Again, in Vatican II, he finds the possibility of agreement on this point.

Vatican II also essentially adopted Luther's view of the church, thus opening the way for union on this matter and understanding Luther now as a true ecumenist.

A summary of his argument is to be found on p. 212:

In subsequent (sic) chapters we have considered Luther in his role as a prophetic reformer addressing the Catholic Church that rejected his biblical and evangelical theology and allowed him to maintain them in a confessional position only outside the fellowship. This had the effect both of reducing genuine Catholicism to Roman Catholicism and of rendering the Reformation movement polemical and confessional. (Earlier in the book the author argues that this confessional stance of the Protestant churches is something to be regretted, but brought on by the hard position of the Romish church, H.H.) I have suggested that the work of Luther can only begin to be appreciated properly when it is seen as a reformation of Catholicism — that is to say, Catholicism needs Luther in order to be fully catholic, and Protestantism needs Catholicism to fulfil its *raison d'être*.

Although the argument of the author is interesting, and although it reveals the trends in modern ecumenical thought, it just won't wash. Basically, the author apparently refuses to recognize that Luther's whole position was fundamentally Biblical, a return in the truest sense of the word to Scripture as the only rule of faith and life. It was this position which undercut the whole structure of Roman Catholic sacerdotalism, an elaborate system which hangs together as one imposing structure. Attack one element in it, and the whole system disintegrates. To this system belong the authority of the church and tradition, represented in the pope, justification by faith and works, the denial of the office of all believers, the doctrine of the mass (as well as all the sacraments), the worship of Mary and the saints, purgatory and indulgences, as well as the doctrine of the church. The Romish church, even at Vatican II, has shown no inclination to give up these essential positions, and the union between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism can be accomplished only by way of complete capitulation of Protestantism to Romish thought. Important elements in Protestantism are all but prepared to do this, and this book is a kind of justification for that eventual union — a union which, on this basis, would have made Luther sick.

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The Standard Bearer!*

News From Our Churches

October 30, 1984

Reformation Day Lectures were in abundance in our churches at the end of October. Rev. R. Van Overloop spoke on the "Reformation and the Preached Word," in the Grand Rapids area. Prof. Decker spoke in two places: Kalamazoo and Houston, Texas. In Kalamazoo his topic was "The Reformation and the Offices of the Church." The Texas audience heard him speak on "The Foolishness of Preaching." Rev. K. Hanko spoke on "The Church and the Word," and Rev. R. Hanko spoke on "The Priesthood of Believers."

As I mentioned in an earlier report, this year is the 150th Anniversary of the Secession (The Afscheiding) in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Prof. H.C. Hoeksema gave two lectures on this historical event. They were: "The History of the Secession and the Doctrinal Issues Involved" and "The Significance of the Secession for Reformed Churches Today." These lectures were given in the Chicago, Illinois area.

Lynden congregation has extended a call to Rev. W. Bekkering; Hull Church has called Rev. Haak; and Faith Church has extended a call to Rev. W. Bekkering.

Rev. Bruinsma and his family have arrived in Jamaica safely along with Mr. and Mrs. Wes Koops. They had a good trip. They're presently doing a little house painting. Rev. Bruinsma is looking into the possibility of buying some goats. The container carrying their car and other belongings has been delayed several days. The weather is warm but the cool ocean breezes help them to sleep at night.

A letter from Rev. Arie and Sherry den Hartog reads, in part, as follows: "We are also thankful that there is never any indication of racism even though our children are almost the only Westerners in the whole school. If anything our children seem to be favored too much because they are American. The school year will be over at the beginning of November. One thing we miss very much is that they do not have Christian friends to play with. This becomes more important as they grow older. On the other hand we are thankful for the influence of the members of our church on the children. The zeal and devotion of the church members is a good example to them and a good environment for them to grow up in. They also learn

early about such things as the great importance of Christian marriage and how all of this develops because of all the marriages in our church."

Holland Protestant Reformed Church and our churches have a profound evidence of God's people being gathered from every nation, tongue, and tribe when we see the Koops in Jamaica, the Wassinks in Northern Ireland, Rev. Miersma and family in New Zealand, and Lim Kok Eng here from Singapore. Rev. Miersma's address is #20 Maungaraki Rd., Korokoro Petone, New Zealand. Telephone number 011-64-4-684-540.

In regards to radio, Rev. Bekkering gave a brief meditation concerning the Christian's responsibility in voting, on KGOL. Rev. R. Van Overloop gives a fifteen minute radio program every Sunday on WCFL, 1000 AM in the Chicago area. This station is also heard in Randolph, Wisconsin. Southeast's Evangelism Society is putting sermons on the radio from Southeast Church from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM each Sunday on WMAX, 1480 AM.

Trinity Protestant Reformed Church had this information in regards to their supervised communion: "Note! We recite part of the form for the Lord's Supper together. At the end of the Prayer at the bottom of page 62 we say the Apostles' Creed together and then we conclude the Thanksgiving Prayer at the bottom on page 63 by saying the Lord's Prayer together."

A special program is being arranged for First Church's last Sunday night in their present church building on November 25. Their evening service will begin at 7:00 P.M. on that Sunday to make it more convenient for attendance at the program. While they wait for their new church building, they will meet in the St. Cecilia building beginning on December 2.

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NOTICE!!!

After December 1, 1984, all orders for Catechism Books must be sent to: — MR. ROGER DYKSTRA, 5101 BURTON ST., S.E., GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49506.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses their sympathy to Mrs. John C. Lubbers in the loss of her brothers HENRY SCHUT and CHRIS SCHUT. May the grace of God be with her in this time of sorrow.