

The
**STANDARD
BEARER**

— A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE —

**Wishing You
A Blessed Christmas**

*"For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord."*

—Luke 2:11

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MEDITATION

Cornelius Hanko

Caesar Augustus and Christ

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." Luke 2:1

Strange!

Surprisingly strange, it might seem, that the holy writer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit should begin an account of the birth of the Savior by refer-

ring to a decree from the head of the Roman empire!

Actually Caesar Augustus knew nothing about this Jesus, whose coming had been announced and awaited for four thousand years. And he could not

care less.

Daniel had spoken of the Roman empire as the fourth best arising out of the sea of the nations. He had described it as a beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it; and it had ten horns."

Had Augustus searched through the annals of the past, he might have found the record of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a glamorous image, with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, loins of brass, and legs and feet of iron and clay. He might have discovered the Stone cut without hands from the mountainside, rolling down upon the image that tottered on the unstable legs and feet of the Roman empire, grinding it to powder, so that the wind would carry it away. He still would not have known that the time had come for the great Stone to make its appearance and to begin its task here on earth. These things were hidden from him. Nor did he care.

Caesar Augustus was concerned about the affairs of his great world empire, about the taxation and the revenue, and therefore he had issued a decree that, though he did not know it, would greatly affect the lives of an engaged couple in Nazareth of Galilee!

Marvelous!

How wondrous are the ways of God, unfathomed and unknown!

In His providence God employs a decree issued in Rome to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem!

And that at such a time as this! One would say that the announcement of the decree came at a most inopportune time for Joseph and his espoused wife to make the long journey from Galilee to Judea.

When the report first came to them, their reaction likely was one of consternation. For to be properly enrolled for taxation they would be compelled to go to the city of their father David, since they both were of the house and lineage of David.

But how could they undertake such a difficult journey when Mary was approaching the time for her to have her Baby? Even though they would proceed cautiously along the caravan route, the problem still remained that the Baby would be born while they were away from home!

Gradually God gave them to see that this decree was controlled by a higher Hand than Caesar's. Gradually they realized that the promised Heir to David's throne was to be born in Bethlehem, accord-

ing to the Scriptures! And had not the angel said at the time of the announcement of Jesus' birth, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end?"

Thus they made their plans to leave Nazareth, to take with them their necessary belongings, and to make their future home in David's city.

Perfect timing!

God's clock is never too early nor too late. It is exactly on time, and that without fail!

At the appointed time Joseph and Mary arrived in the little town of Bethlehem. Evening had already settled upon the land. Many other descendants of David had arrived in the city before them. Some had gone to relatives and friends, others had filled the town's inn to capacity. The "no vacancy" sign stared the weary couple in the face. Not far away was a cave that served as a cattle stall, which God had appointed as the birth place for His Son, the promised King! It was there that Joseph and Mary found shelter, and there that Mary's Child was born!

This was most opportune for the shepherds, who had eagerly awaited the coming of their promised Deliverer, even as they watched their sheep, and now waited through the weary night outside of Bethlehem. It was entirely proper that God should send His angel to them to bring the glad tidings that caused heaven to burst forth in jubilant praise, even as many hearts would be filled with "joy unspeakable and full of glory!"

How proper that the wisemen, who saw the star in the East, should come by way of Jerusalem to worship the new-born King. How proper that Herod should be informed and tremble, and that the scribes should hear and turn a deaf ear! They could never say that they did not know!

Deep humiliation!

The vital statistic read: Born, a male, 4 B.C. Legal son of Joseph, Bar-Heli, and of Mary, daughter of Jacob, both formerly of Nazareth, in Galilee. Name: Jesus.

Records show that this Jesus made His first appearance in the temple at twelve years of age, where He amazed the scribes with His intelligent conversation concerning the law and the prophets.

He was a willing subject of the Roman government. The Herodians and Pharisees plotted together to trap Him with the question whether it was legal to pay taxes to Caesar. If He said that they should pay taxes, He would be setting up the

authority of Caesar over against God, and if He said that they should not, He would be guilty of opposing the Roman government. But Jesus escaped their snare by answering. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

At the age of thirty three He was accused of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin, because He declared that He was the Christ, the promised King. Thereupon He was accused before Pilate of treason against the Roman government for trying to establish His own earthly kingdom. The evidence brought against Him was still fresh in many minds, for the Sunday previous to this He had allowed the multitudes to lead Him triumphantly into Jerusalem as their promised King! Herod dressed Him up as a mock King. The mob shouted loudly: "We have no king but Caesar." Pilate condemned Him to be crucified according to the Roman law, placing the accusation over Him: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews!"

Herewith the records of Caesar were closed. Except that there was still a notation that in spite of the fact that His grave was sealed and guarded, the rumor still persisted that He was risen and seen of His followers!

Highly exalted!

The heavenly record carries on!

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. For of a truth against Thy holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done," Acts 4:26-28.

We all, without exception, stood before the choice: Caesar or Christ! With Caesar we associate the treasures and pleasures, the pomp and splendor of this present world! With Jesus we must associate the Man of sorrows, the suffering Servant of God, who declares: "If any man will be My disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me!" Caesar's kingdom is visible, tangible, appealing to the flesh; Christ's Kingdom is spiritual, heavenly, and can be embraced only by a true and living faith! The two stand antithetically opposed to each other! The one excludes the other! It is always: either . . . or; never: both . . . and. By nature you and I always choose the earthly, the tangible, which appeals to our flesh. Only grace can change that!

Truly He has borne *our* griefs and *our* sorrows. He was wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities. The chastisement of *our* peace

was upon Him, and we now experience the healing power of His stripes!

We know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom we have crucified, both Lord and Christ, Acts 2:36.

Wherefore God hath also highly exalted Him with all power in heaven and on earth! He has received a Name which is above all names; before Him every knee must bow and every tongue must confess that He is LORD, to the glory of the Father! He is the eternal King of kings and Lord of lords!

Why do the nations rage, and the modernists, the atheists, the humanists, and the defenders of all kinds of "isms" imagine vain things?

Why should the antichristian world power still try to lift its vile head against the Most High God and His Christ? And why should all the peoples of the earth unite themselves with Satan in a last desperate attempt to wipe out the name of God and of His cause from the face of the earth?

Why should the church of Jesus Christ be filled with fear and anxiety at the thought of this power exalting itself against God and Christ? These are but instruments in the hands of the Almighty to carry out the counsel of His will unto the coming of the kingdom of His dear Son and the glory of His Name!

Why should we stand amazed, as if some strange thing befell us, when the Lord of heaven and earth sends earthquakes, floods, famines, and other forms of judgment, in which we plainly hear the footsteps of our Lord as He hastens to return?

Why should we fear when lawless terrorists carry out their wicked threats, contrary to all law and order, or when rumblings of warfare are heard from every part of the earth? These are the beginnings of birth pangs, whereby God is preparing to make all things new!

Our God has already set His King upon the holy hill of Zion as Lord over all!

He will soon return to judge the nations in righteousness and the people in justice!

He tells us: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

God is for us; nothing can be against us! More than conquerors are we! For He will soon come, and not delay!

And we shall be saved!

*Give a gift of the
Standard Bearer!*

EDITORIAL

“Sex” or Fornication?

In today's world it sometimes becomes very difficult to discern between the world's thoroughly immoral philosophy of life and Christian morality according to the standard of the Word of God. The difficulty lies not in the fact that God's law is not clear or that the Bible does not spell out our Christian calling in clear and unequivocal language. It lies rather in the fact that in our day we are literally bombarded by the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television) with the world's immoral philosophy, and that, too, in language which is apparently — but only apparently — neutral, language which seems by the very frequency of its use to become acceptable, so that we become accustomed to it and so that it can gradually creep into our thinking and our vocabulary. Sometimes before we realize it, it influences our thinking and our speech. Yet if we analyze that language, we discover that it is rooted in and conveys a certain moral outlook — or should I say: immoral outlook? — which is diametrically contrary to our Christian morality, contrary to the law of God and to all that God's Word teaches about the law of God.

This is especially true, though not exclusively by any means, with respect to language and ethics which belong to the category of the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”

There are certain “buzz words” which are more and more commonly bandied about and which for their very commonness find their way into our thinking and speech, gradually become acceptable, begin to be used among us, but at the same time willy-nilly bring with them a moral outlook inimical to our Christian ethics. They are called “buzz words” because, on the one hand, they carry with them in their very usage the connotation of a certain moral outlook, and because, on the other hand, they should ring a bell, or a buzzer, immediately in the minds of those who hear them. They are not mere euphemisms, that is, “inoffen-

sive or mild expressions for those that may offend or suggest something unpleasant,” though they are sometimes used as such. But they are terms which are deliberately employed in order to avoid any reference to *sin*, especially the sin against the seventh commandment. The term *sex* itself is such a term, or is frequently used as such. In itself, of course, it is a perfectly good English term, as in “the male sex” or “the female sex.” But then it comes to be used for “sexual intercourse,” in itself a legitimate connotation of the term. But finally it is used as a substitute for fornication, i.e., sexual intercourse between those who are not married, or for adultery, sexual intercourse between married persons but outside of the marriage bond. But to use “sex” in that sense, you see, is to ignore and to cover up the fact of sin. Thus, for example, I recently read in a syndicated column in *The Grand Rapids Press* which was commenting on the AIDS scare the following lines from the pen of Ellen Goodman (Note: my purpose is not to comment on her column, but merely to illustrate my point.):

In current life patterns, when there is a gap of 10 or even 15 years between puberty and marriage, we no longer expected celibacy or condemned premarital sex. There grew up what has been called conditional approval of sex.

The notion runs something like this: Sex is OK if our children are 18, an age at which they no longer are legally our children. Sex is OK if it's in the context of a caring relationship. Sex is OK if they are responsible, careful to avoid pregnancy. Sex is OK if no one gets hurt.

In these lines, if in every instance you substitute the word “fornication” for the word “sex,” you get the true picture of what is being said. Go back to the quotation, and put it to test. But if you do this, you get at the same time the true moral evaluation of the thinking which is implied here — to the point that it is rather shocking to our Christian moral sensibilities. Fornication is OK if?!

Now there are many such "buzz words." I have casually gathered a few in my reading recently. I will list them, and you can probably add to the list from your own experience:

- sexually active
- alternate lifestyle
- intergenerational sex
- casual sex
- premarital sex
- sexually precocious
- serial sex
- sexually explicit
- safe sex

Now why do I write about this? What is wrong with the thinking which is implied and inherent in this kind of language?

To begin with the latter question, what is wrong is that underlying it is the thoroughly carnal and worldly ethical view that is concerned not with sin, but with the results of sin. It is the view of the natural man, who always strives to enjoy sin and lust, but without suffering the results of sin. As long as he can engage in fornication, in adultery, in incest, and even in all kinds of sins contrary to nature (Romans 1:26, 27), but without suffering the horrible results of such sins, he will do so. Then sin, according to this view, is OK.

That this is a true picture is underscored by the current fears about the AIDS epidemic, which has now invaded the so-called heterosexual community and for which medical science has as yet no solution. There is arising a tremendous hue-and-cry for "sex education" in the schools and by parents themselves. Why? Because men are concerned about the breaking of the law of God? Not at all! Only because they are concerned about the currently unstoppable spread of AIDS, that horrible and incurable disease which is a consequence of the breaking of the seventh commandment.

But it is so easy, so very easy — if for not other reason than that the media constantly drum it into us — for this same kind of thinking to creep into our covenant homes and families, and that, too, through the very language about which I commented above.

However, let me conclude on a positive note.

How ought we to instruct and guide our children and young people in this regard?

My answer is that such instruction should be along the lines of our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 41:

What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

That all uncleanness is accursed of God: and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in

holy wedlock, or in single life.

Doth God forbid in this commandment, only adultery and such like gross sins?

Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy: therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto.

Or, if you wish for something more detailed and explicit, consider Questions 138 and 139 of the Westminster Larger Catechism:

What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?

The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections, words, and behaviour; and the preservation of it in ourselves and others; watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses; temperance, keeping of chaste company, modesty in apparel, marriage by those that have not the gift of continency, conjugal love, and cohabitation; diligent labour in our callings; shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.

What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews (brothels, HCH), and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage, having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.

The Westminster Larger Catechism has sometimes been criticized for a tendency to legalism in its treatment of the Decalogue. However that may be, it will have to be granted that it sounds a note largely foreign to our age, but a note sorely needed!

HCH

*The Standard Bearer
makes a thoughtful gift
for the sick or shut-in!*

SPECIAL FEATURE

Herman C. Hanko

Trip to Singapore

The Synod of 1986 decided to send a delegation to Singapore, at the invitation of the Evangelical Reformed Church, with a three-fold mandate: 1) to participate in the ordination of brother Jaikishin Mahtani's ordination; 2) to lecture at a Reformation Day Rally which the ERCS was planning for the last week in October; 3) and to discuss with the Session of the ERCS and their Contact Committee various matters of mutual interest to their church and ours.

In September the Contact Committee decided to send Rev. Van Baren and Prof. Hanko as delegates from our Churches to the ERCS to perform these labors. Because our readers are interested in the work of our churches, we have prepared an article for *The Standard Bearer*, which is a modification of a report submitted to the Contact Committee upon our return.

During the nine days we spent with the saints in Singapore, we were impressed with the amount of labor going on in the church, with the commitment of the saints to the cause of the gospel, with the love shown to us as delegates from the Protestant Reformed Churches, and with the general progress of the church there. Our stay was extremely enjoyable and we are thankful for the opportunity to spend some time with this sister church.

Because the ERCS had planned the ordination of Jaikishin Mahtani on our first Lord's Day morning in their midst, we were able to participate in the laying-on-of-hands ceremony of our brother as well as the laying-on-of-hands ceremony of a new deacon, brother Mahon. He was a deacon chosen to serve in the new congregation which was instituted and held its first worship service on November 9. For the time being, the new congregation will be under the supervision of the present body of elders.

In this connection, we might add that the present plans are for the new congregation to meet in one worship service, while the work in the Tao Payoh mission is continued. This mission service will be attended by all the members of the new congregation and will be considered, for the present, their second worship service. The new congregation, however, within three to six months, intends to begin two worship services of its own. They have obtained the auditorium of the American School, near the Tao Payoh mission, for a place of meeting. This is a spacious and commodious meeting place, although they have been promised this auditorium for only one year. In the meantime, the Session is looking for another place of worship, as Rev. Den Hartog has reported in his periodic reports to our people.

The new congregation has about 40 people committed to it, which number includes about 5 families, and about ten or fifteen more are expected to join it in the near future.

The ERCS had planned to center the activities of our visit in their fellowship on a commemoration of Reformation Day. To that end, they had planned to emphasize the Reformation in connection with the charismatic movement which has been such a growing force in Singapore. On Sunday evening, October 26, Prof. Hanko preached in their present place of worship on Acts 2:11b in connection with the general subject of the second baptism of the Spirit. While usually no evening service is held by the ERCS, the meeting place was filled because of the presence of many visitors who had come for this occasion.

The ERCS had rented the auditorium of the Bible Presbyterian Church for three nights of meetings in connection with the Reformation Day commemoration. On Wednesday night, Prof. Hanko, as requested by the ERCS, spoke on The Great Truth of

the Reformation — *Sola Scriptura*; on Thursday night, Rev. Van Baren spoke on The Great Truth of the Reformation in Connection with the Charismatic Movement. Both these meetings were unusually well attended. The auditorium was nearly filled with about two thirds of the people visitors. Many new contacts were made. On Friday night, an open forum was held in which questions which had been submitted were answered by a panel of the Reverends Lau, Den Hartog, Van Baren and Hanko, with Pastor Mahtani chairing the panel. While nearly forty questions had been submitted, there was time to answer only about sixteen. This meeting was also well attended, although not as many were present as were at the lectures.

The ERCS had also prepared a questionnaire which the people present were asked to fill out and submit to the ERCS for evaluation. We have not seen the results of this questionnaire. It might be of interest to our readers to know that a minister from a Presbyterian Church in Burma was also present at these meetings, and promised to stay in contact with the ERCS concerning his work in that country.

On the following Lord's Day Prof. Hanko preached at the morning worship service and Rev. Van Baren at the evening worship service. Rev. Van Baren's sermon, on I Corinthians 12:4-6, was also in connection with the general theme of the Reformation and the Charismatic Movement. Both times the meeting place of the ERCS was filled.

The people of the ERCS were very pleased and excited about the number of people who were present for the meetings and the worship services, especially because many new contacts were made.

We were also able to hold a rather lengthy meeting with the Session of the ERCS with the express purpose of discussing various matters concerning our sister-church relations. Our delegates had been given an agenda to be discussed at this meeting, and the ERCS had, in turn, prepared an agenda of their own in which were various matters dealing with problems which they were confronting, especially in the establishment of a federation of Churches.

Some of the subjects we discussed were: 1) Their progress as a Reformed Church; 2) The problem they have with mothers working because of the high cost of housing. We might add that they are very much opposed to this in the interest of establishing truly covenant homes. 3) Various questions which arose in connection with the responsibilities of the Session to supervise attendance at the Lord's Supper. 4) The preparation of devotional material to be used on a daily basis. We can add in this connection that the ERCS had requested some time ago that material of this sort be prepared. It

would be on the order of the old "Daily Manna" which some of our readers may recall having seen in the past. A brief devotion would be prepared for every day of the year. This is a large undertaking, but Rev. Heys has consented to work on material for this purpose, and already has a large amount ready. The ERCS would probably be responsible for printing it, since the costs of printing are much lower in Singapore, but when, D.V., the material is ready, it will be available also for our own people. 5) What matters arising in their congregation and in our churches should be called to the attention of our sister churches. This question arose especially in connection with the fact that our last synod decided to adopt some changes in the translation of our Canons. The material itself is in the Acts of the Synod of 1986. But the ERCS, rightly, called our attention to the fact that since this involved a question of our creeds, it should have been submitted to our sister churches for approval. 6) A possible conference which would be held in 1990 between our churches, the ERCS of Singapore, the Bible Presbyterian Church of Larne, North Ireland, and the Protestant Reformed Church of Wellington, N.Z. The synod of 1986 had given qualified approval to this idea and had instructed the Contact Committee to begin making preliminary preparations for it. On various matters which we had no time to discuss, the Contact Committee of the ERCS is going to correspond with our Committee.

In general, our stay in Singapore was an enriching and blessed experience. We believe that our relationships with this sister-church were strengthened by our visit there, and that the fruits of our visit will be evident in the years to come.

The ERCS is very excited about the establishment of a new congregation, for they see this as evidence of the blessing of God upon their work. Pastor Mahtani will, by the time this report appears in *The Standard Bearer*, have taken up his labors in this congregation. In the meantime, Rev. Den Hartog and his family are making preparations for returning to the States. One can imagine that a great sadness fills the hearts of God's people in Singapore at the thought of their beloved missionary and pastor leaving them. And the Den Hartogs also, who have given so much for the cause of the gospel in Singapore, have very mixed feelings about returning.

The ministers in the ERCS graciously took us into their homes (Pastor Mahtani now lives with his wife and twins on the 25th floor of a high rise complex with a magnificent view of the city and the harbor on the west of the island), gave us many opportunities to eat Chinese foods of various sorts, and took us to see many delightful places in the

island. Singapore is a very clean and beautiful city with many islands of greenery tucked away between the crowded buildings. We were even able to spend several hours in Malaysia to enjoy the oil palm plantations, the rubber tree plantations, and some of the spectacular scenery. The saints there were warm in their friendship, and it was but a few days before it seemed to us as if we had known them a very long time. This too is part of the communion of saints in which we are one in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amazingly, the heat bothered us very little, although the time of the year was the beginning of the monsoon season with its rains, which

may have made it just a bit cooler. But we did not sweat as much in preaching and speaking as we often do in our own churches on Lord's Day evenings in the summer.

It is becoming increasingly common for some of our people to travel overseas on vacations. We highly recommend that, if possible, our people consider visiting our fellow saints in Christ half way around the world. It will give you a greater appreciation for the richness and beauty of the catholic church to which we belong.

May God continue to bless our relations with our brethren and sisters in Singapore.

IN HIS FEAR

Barrett L. Gritters

Why Catechism?

That is a good question. Why have Reformed churches always had a high view of catechism? Why are parents spending so much time making sure their children know their catechism, in order that sometime during the week their pastor or possibly an elder can ask them to recite the questions? Or, more basically, why do covenant parents send their children to catechism?

*On evening, while washing dishes after a hard day and looking up against a hectic evening, Mom had an idea. Drying her hands, she went to the dining room desk, opened the drawer, and pulled out New Testament History for Juniors catechism book. This would be the way, she hoped, **Every evening** would have a short period of time when they could go over the lesson for next week's catechism class — while washing and wiping the dishes.*

Why does an idea like this come to the mind of a covenant mother? Why do we send our children to catechism? Thankful that we have this (very proper) tradition, we ought to review why our consistories call parents to send their children to

catechism classes every week for a good part of the year, for 12, 13, and sometimes even 14 years.

* * * * *

Consider that most of our children already receive training in the Christian day schools, a good deal of them with thoroughly Reformed teachers who train them in the Scripture. Consider, too, that many of our children weekly receive instruction from Sunday School teachers. More yet, concerned as well about their children's inner growth as their outer, godly parents spend time at home telling Bible stories, and spend time around the table with family devotions, drawing out Biblical truths that apply to their children's lives.

God forbid that anyone think this to be an excuse for not putting much work into, or not sending their children to, catechism. Nevertheless, the question is, "Why catechism if we have all this already?"

That we have a good reason is critical in this age when almost all Reformed practices are rejected wholesale. When many churches are either eliminating catechism or giving it less time and attention, you and I need to equip ourselves for the

defense of our practice of sending out six (5?) to eighteen (21?) -year-olds an hour a week to be taught by their pastor. Why catechism?

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF DUTY

Why do *you* send your children to catechism? That the Scripture teaches the *parent's* responsibility to teach their children is well known in most Reformed circles. Because we know that well, we have (if possible) our own Christian day schools which are *parental* instead of *parochial* (church run). But why, then, do Reformed believers maintain the *church's* duty to teach Bible truths to the children of believers rather than, or in addition to, the parents and their parental schools?

The background for catechism training *by the church* is the truth of the covenant. Take away this great Bible truth, or distort the covenant into an agreement between God and man, and catechism becomes a work of the mission or evangelism committee rather than the consistory. But understand this truth well, and catechism becomes not only a necessary, but a wonderfully blessed necessity for the church *along with* covenant parents.

We need not show extensive Scriptural proof for *the parental duty* with children's education. None would deny this. To quote only two: "For I (Jehovah) know him (Abraham), that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment . . ." (Genesis 18:17-19). "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house . . ." (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) — not to mention all the others, especially in Proverbs.

The reason the Lord wills that parents teach their children is not first of all that the children might become saved in the narrow sense of the word (although this instruction is part of the *process* of their salvation). Rather, God wills parents to teach their children because these *are* children of the covenant. Our babies are not baptized in order to bring them into the covenant of God. But because they *are* members of the covenant, God calls us to baptize them as a sign of that covenant. Now, since they are members of God's covenant, God wills that parents teach them the truths and obligations of the covenant of grace.

So far the parents' duty.

But this *duty also falls on the church*. When you and I bring our children for the sacrament of baptism, we believe that God has given those children not only to parents, but to the church. The duty to teach is also the church's. That is plain from

especially two things. First, in Matthew 28, the Lord gives the apostles, *as representatives of the church*, the mandate to go into all nations "baptizing . . . and teaching them . . ." (vss. 19, 20). Surely, because of the truth of the covenant, the calling of the church is to teach the children as well as the adults. Second, Deuteronomy 6:6-9, quoted above, which says, "Thou shalt teach them diligently . . ." is addressed *to the nation* of Israel as the church. The singular is used in that passage. The passage is not speaking first of all to parents, but to the nation as a whole (to "Israel," "thou"). The calling of the church is to teach its children the wonderful works of the Lord. This Reformed churches do in catechism.

This does not mean that parents do not have the duty to teach the catechism to their children. No more does catechism at church relieve parents of their duty to teach them *Bible truths* at home, than Christian schooling relieves parents of their duty to teach their children *obedience* at home. The Synod of Dordt was so impressed with this duty that it advised consistories to supervise the catechetical instruction that parents gave to their children at home. The church instructed the parents what they ought to teach their children and supervised this instruction with periodic visits.

Parental instruction in Bible (catechism) lessons is not only necessary, but is a great blessing to the church. The preacher or elder who sees nothing but blank stares when he asks about the present lesson becomes both discouraged and does not get very far in applying the truth to their lives and driving home the great themes of the Bible during the short time he has. But what a blessing for the pastor who can teach the truth to children who have already heard the basics at home from their father or mother. Rather than be disappointed because he feels the parents stole his thunder, the teacher is thrilled to hear little Billy say, "Yes, daddy told us about that already . . ." or, "Mom explained that to us before!"

When both the church and the parents carry their load, children *greatly* profit. The duty is the parents' as well as the church's.

FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE GOAL

Why do we have the practice of sending children to catechism? Because the parents as well as the church have the duty to nurture them spiritually. But there is another way to ask the question: "Why catechism?" That is, "*For what purpose* are parents and the church called to teach the children?" Or, "What is the goal in catechism?"

One danger that parents and consistories face in catechism is having a *wrong* goal — the mere intellectual superiority of their children over children

in other churches, the mental ability to split theological hairs from one end to the other. This is a cold, mechanical approach to God's calling for us and our children.

Our goal for covenant children is their spiritual maturity. This demands increase in mental capacity of Biblical truths, surely. This calls for knowledge of theological terms and controversies. But the goal not to be lost sight of is the *spiritual maturity* of the child, so that he can take his (her) place in the office of believer in the church, so that he truly knows God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (John 17:3). This we long for, pray for, lead our children toward, and rejoice over when it comes. The attainment of spiritual manhood and womanhood of our children is the greatest thrill for covenant parents. No greater joy has any man than this, that his children walk in the truth!

Perhaps we as parents can examine our own lives here. We honestly desire that our children experience the blessings of salvation and truly have catechism mean something in their own lives. But do we personally know what that means? Does our spiritual maturity bubble over to our children, so that they desire to have the same spiritual joy and maturity that they see we possess? Is it maybe the case that we satisfy ourselves with learning for learning's sake, worshiping for intellectual stimulation, studying for argument's sake? Perhaps parents need to pray that their lives be changed and their maturity be increased so that their children might

learn from and desire what they have.

An outstanding landmark on this (never ending!) road to spiritual maturity is the public confession of faith. Basic in all goals for catechism is this goal. With their hearts young men or women believe unto righteousness and with their mouth confession is made to salvation (Romans 10:10). Would to God that our young people would be impressed with the importance of this great text from Romans. My heart's desire and prayer for the young people of our church is that they might confess their faith to salvation. Here is the first goal of catechism training: confession of the faith God gave them through the *means* of faith. At this happy landmark the "man of God" (I Tim. 6:11) testifies that the truths he has spent years learning are *his* truths to be bought and defended at all costs, that the way of godliness presented in the Scriptures is *his* resolve, that the daily conversion for which his parents have prayed and longed is *his* prayer.

Always catechism sets its sights on this goal, the spiritual growth and maturity of the children which climaxes (though does not stop) in their public confession. Much is involved in this spiritual maturity: the ability to understand and defend truths of the Bible, the desire to assume the duties and privileges of confessing members, and a godly resolve daily to be turned to the life of the new man in Christ. God grant that our catechism might be blessed with this fruit, to His glory and the strength of His Church.

Next time: "Catechism — What do they learn?"

ALL AROUND US

Robert D. Decker

Preaching Passe? The Church in China A Victory in Court

Preaching Passe?:

Many say it is. Preaching, so it is alleged, is a very poor method of communicating the Gospel. There are other and better ways to convey the message of the Gospel. Preaching is an out-moded form of communicating the Good News of salvation by grace through faith, God's gift. At the same

time, it is no secret that there is a great deal of criticism of preaching coming from the pews in many denominations. This is true not only of the more liberal, mainline churches, but of the more conservative churches in the Reformed tradition. It is no secret that there is criticism of and dissatisfaction with preaching in our own churches. Some are saying preaching in our churches "just isn't

what it used to be." For some the preaching is too doctrinal, for others too polemical, for others too practical, for others too deep or too shallow. Some blame the seminary and others blame the preachers and others blame both for this.

Jean Shaw, in a recent issue of the *Presbyterian Journal* (Nov. 2, 1986), has something to say about all of this. Shaw, it must be remembered, writes from a Presbyterian perspective and this means some of what she says may not apply to us. Her point, however, is well taken:

Granted that we expect good preaching every Sunday of the year, do we see it as a priority? Would we vote for the sermon as the single most influential activity of the church? Or are we tempted to see our building as that which will appeal to the world and draw its people to a saving faith? How about all those programs designed to lure recalcitrant fish into our congregational sea? . . . Christ emphasized the message. So did Paul, who speaks over and over again about preaching and proclaiming. If the early church had programs, he must have left them in the hands of Rufus, Tryphena, and Tryphosa . . . Paul preached. There was power in the Word. There is power in the Word today. We can easily concentrate on secondary issues, de-emphasizing preaching, and pressure our pastor to neglect his sermon preparation for all kinds of other worthwhile, but less important things. We can expect him to be present at every meeting in the church and also represent us in the community. We interrupt his studying with phone calls that could easily wait until after lunch. We peck away at the time in the worship service reserved for the sermon with all kinds of announcements and special events, and then chastise the preacher for daring to extend the time to 65 minutes . . . Another part of our problem is the lack of conviction that preaching really is the special way in which the Holy Spirit speaks to us. We need to be refreshed with study of the many New Testament passages which speak forcibly on this subject. Without a strong Biblical defense we fall pray to all the alternatives practiced in the worship services of every church around town. We install twin quadraphonic speakers and a mixer like Baptists. We become liturgical like the Episcopalians. We beg for "openness" like the Pentecostals . . .

Scripture and our Reformed Confessions make clear the fact that preaching is the chief means of grace. Christ gathers, defends, and preserves His church by means of the preaching of the Word. This means: 1) Our preachers must make preaching their chief task. They must spend the time and effort week in and week out to make two good, expository sermons. 2) Consistories must insist on good preaching, and where preaching is deficient the elders must take the necessary steps to rectify the situation even to the point of formal discipline

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of the minister. Consistories must also see to it that the pastor has the necessary time to prepare his sermons. 3) Those in the pew must also insist on good preaching, pray for their pastors, encourage their pastors, and not burden their pastors with unnecessary interruptions or demands. 4) Professors must stress the necessity of good preaching and in all their teaching must strive to train "faithful men who are able to teach others" in the art of preaching. 5) All of us must fervently pray that God will give us men to study and prepare for the ministry of the Word. We must also fervently pray that God will preserve among us the pure, faithful preaching of the Word.

The Church in China:

Are the churches affiliated with China's government-approved China Christian Council (CCC) authentic representatives of Protestant Christianity in that country? There is difference of opinion on this question. *Christianity Today* (Nov. 21, 1986) recently interviewed two "China experts" one of whom answered "yes" and the other of whom answered "no." Ralph Covell, professor of missions at Denver Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary and a former missionary to China was asked:

Why do you maintain the CCC authentically represents Protestantism in China?

CCC churches stand doctrinally in the tradition of orthodox Christianity. They worship and preach the Word, and there is evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence.

But aren't they controlled by the government?

I have seen no proof of that, and I think it's a myth. These churches have a great deal of autonomy. Their leaders are chosen by people in various areas who meet as the church . . .

Are official churches free to carry out the mission of the church — to evangelize, for example?

I can't imagine how the church in China could "be the church" more than it is. But it's not like the church in America. Remember, this is a Marxist society. Christians may not hold open-air meetings or pass out tracts. To be wise as serpents and harmless as doves seems to mean evangelizing within the limitations. There is no lack of freedom to talk with friends or family about Jesus. I visited a church in China last summer and asked the pastors, "Are you able to do evangelism?" They said, "We'll let you judge. In 18 months we baptized 400 people."

But is there freedom to worship outside official churches? Aren't those who do so subject to persecution?

I don't deny there is persecution. But it is a local problem, not a result of government policy. A strong leftist element remains in China from the Cultural Revolution of 1966-77. It is trying to block the innovative policies of the current leadership in the

political, economic, and religious arenas. It's not surprising that leftists give Christians a hard time . . .

This testimony was contradicted by Jonathan Chao, founder and director of the Chinese Church Research Center in Hong Kong, who was asked:

Why do you contend the CCC is not an authentic representative of Protestantism in China?

Most of the personnel of TSPM (Three-self Patriotic Movement, an organization that represents the official church in China to the government) and CCC are the same. In effect, the two organizations are identical. TSPM, by its own definition, is not a church, but a Protestant political movement, organized by the government. The church submits to Christ, not the state, as its Head.

Aren't CCC churches autonomous? Don't they choose their own leaders, for example?

There is not proof of that. Even CCC pastors say they were appointed, not chosen, by local Christians.

Are CCC churches free to carry out the mission of the church?

They are not able to function according to the Bible without interference. Official government policy permits freedom of religious belief, but this means only that people are free to worship in official churches. It does not permit voluntary evangelism outside the church building or by people other than recognized pastors. Pastors are forbidden to preach on certain doctrines, such as Creation and the second coming of Christ. If someone teaches modalism or some other heresy, there is no church court to exercise discipline . . .

Is persecution of the unofficial church a major problem?

Yes, especially in the countryside. In every province in central China there are evangelists in prison. I know of 21 in just one section of a province. Persecution has softened in the last few years because the government is attempting to establish a peaceful environment in order to attract foreign investment. But the government continues to scrutinize any independent Christian activity . . .

We, of course, have no way of knowing officially or by first hand experience which of the above "experts" is correct. We are inclined to believe that Chao gives the better picture of the actual situation of the church in mainland China. Many Christians there are persecuted severely for their faith and many more are underground. They need our prayers.

A Victory in Court:

In the same issue *Christianity Today* reports that: "Fundamentalist Christian parents in Tennessee who objected to some of the textbooks their children were required to read in school have won their federal court case. The parents maintained the books advanced ideas contrary to Christian teaching . . . Federal District Judge Thomas Hull ruled that the parents may allow their children to skip the reading class, provided they learn to read at home . . ." While this is encouraging, public schools ought not be viewed as an option for Christian parents. If we are to be obedient to the Lord's covenantal obligations we need our own parentally controlled Christian Schools.

GUIDED INTO ALL TRUTH

Thomas C. Miersma

Scripture and the Post Reformation Era

With this article we begin to direct our attention to the doctrine of Scripture and its development following the period of the Reformation. There are two basic elements which necessarily shape any consideration of this period in the development of the doctrine of the Word of God.

In the first place, the Reformation laid down the fundamental principles of sound Biblical interpretation and the doctrine of Scripture. As reformed believers this forms our starting point. The reformed doctrine of Scripture was elicited from Scripture itself. It is Scripture's own doctrine con-

cerning itself, God's Word concerning His Word. We take our stand therefore upon that foundation, for its doctrine and principles are the doctrine and principles of Scripture itself. This does not mean that every aspect of the doctrine of the Word of God was spelled out with perfect clarity by the Reformation. New questions would arise after the Reformation which the reformers had not fully dealt with, as they were not issues which they confronted directly.

The fundamental issue the reformers confronted was that of the authority of God's Word as the only rule for faith and life, over against Rome's elevating the church and *her* decrees and pronouncements to the seat of supreme authority. The reformers, therefore, when speaking of the inspiration of Scripture and while holding the same organic view of inspiration which we hold, also used language which at times appears to reflect a more mechanical conception of inspiration. The doctrines of infallibility and inerrancy were also not direct issues at the time of the Reformation. Thus the reformers, when speaking of Scripture, were free to use language which we would today avoid because these truths are under attack. This freedom of the reformers when speaking of Scripture has also been used repeatedly by the enemies of the reformed doctrine of Scripture to read back into the reformers' writings views which they did not hold and would have repudiated.

In spite of this occasional lack of clarity or precision in the reformers' writings when judged in the light of modern controversy, the reformed doctrine of Scripture may be said to have reached its essential completion with the close of the Reformation era. The Post-Reformation era has been one not so much of development as of refinement and clarification of the doctrine of the Word over against heresy, error and assaults upon the truth of God's Word. The reformers laid down two basic principles concerning God's Word, which are fundamental. The first is *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone as the sole source and standard of authority. The second concerns the interpretation of God's Word, namely that Scripture interprets Scripture. In these two principles is comprehended the whole of the reformed doctrine of the Word of God. They answer the questions concerning Scripture's infallibility, inerrancy, trustworthiness, and also the nature and extent of its authority. Scripture alone as that which possesses sole authority for faith and life, the Word of God and His rule for the church, leaves no room for a Bible which is part man's word and part God's Word, in any form. The prin-

ciple that Scripture interprets Scripture and is its own interpreter answers any questions concerning the means by which Scripture is to be interpreted and eliminates any other standard of interpretation, whether that be philosophy, archaeology, modern psychology, or modern social-political thought.

The period following the Reformation, to the present, to which we will turn our attention in coming articles, can therefore be characterized as one of refinement and defense of the truth on the part of those who held and do hold fast to the heritage of the Reformation. It is at the same time a period of departure from the truth of God's Word, a period of apostasy, of subtle corruption of the truth, and serious error. The assaults upon the reformed truth of God's Word have been many. They have taken on different forms, come from different quarters, and have been directed at different aspects of the truth. The trustworthiness of Scripture has been the object of attack, that is, its accuracy and inerrancy. That it is God's Word and not man's word, that it is a unity, that it is its own reliable and infallible interpreter have all been called into question. Man has sought to place his reason, his emotions, his experiences, and his science above that Word of God.

Therein lies the second element. In many respects also the fundamental issues over which the reformers had to contend with Rome are still the issues over which the battle is currently being waged. The Church of Rome at the time of the Reformation not only sought to maintain its own authority to make the Word of God subject to its decrees, but it had also fostered the climate of philosophy and free thinking which was found in the Renaissance. This might at first appear to be a contradiction, but such is not the case. Rome separated faith and reason as two distinct kinds of revelation. According to Roman Catholic teaching, faith is a matter of revealed theology which itself is a matter of Scripture and tradition, which in turn is a matter of church dogma. Reason however, proceeding from the creation or general revelation, independent of God's Word, produces natural theology by human wisdom, and is found even in the pagan philosophers. Rome maintained that reason or natural theology alone was insufficient of itself, but made it the servant of revealed theology. Rome thus attempted by her tradition to marry the Word of God and the pagan Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Thus we find that although the Church of Rome was rigid and unyielding in church dogma (particularly against the Reformation which represented a threat to the church's wealth, power and worldly influence) during this same period, worldly and dissolute popes fostered the pursuit of the pagan art, culture, and

philosophy which was the preoccupation of the Renaissance. Many of these popes also encouraged the new humanism which was rising in Italy, with its delight in the pleasures and lusts of the flesh.

The reformers however, severed the bond between revealed and natural theology and liberated theology from this false union to bring theology wholly into subjection to the Word of God, and in the light of that Word also to bring all things into subjection to the will of God. The Reformation had no place for a separate natural theology apart from God's Word.

The Reformation however had also this consequence, that the power of the Roman Church over life across Europe and its hold upon the thoughts of men was also weakened. In the breakdown of Rome's power and control over men, the seeds of worldly philosophy which were already present in the Church of Rome were also given room to grow and develop independently as a separate force outside the control of the church and church dogma. The result was that in its development, worldly philosophy and the revived humanism of the Renaissance now became increasingly an open power in opposition to the gospel and the Word of God.

Thus the Reformed Church in its struggle to maintain the truth of God's Word, must contend not only with error within the church, false doctrine and apostasy from within, but also with the rising and powerful influence of modern philosophy. That is especially the case as the world by means of its philosophy seeks to re-enter the church to overthrow it. That means for our consideration of this Post-Reformation period that in

addition to addressing the various errors within the church, we will also have to say something about the history and development of modern philosophy and its effect upon the church.

At the same time the reformed doctrine of the Word had to be and must still be defended against Rome, the influence also of various other sects arose at the time of the Reformation. This means that the struggle to maintain the truth of God's Word is one which has been and is being fought on a number of different fronts at the same time. So often the church, in defending the truth from one foe has been tempted to swing to another extreme, equally in error, which for a time appears as an attractive solution to the problems before her and with which she contends. This is no less true in contending for God's Word.

Nor can the struggle to maintain the doctrine of the Word of God be separated or completely isolated in our consideration from other assaults upon the truths of that Word. Arminianism, to use but one example, by its denial of the sovereignty of God constitutes not only an attack upon the doctrines of grace and salvation but also upon the doctrine of Scripture, for only by human reasoning can the truth of God's sovereign grace, plainly set forth in the Word of God, be resisted and rejected. Arminianism exactly because it sets itself against God's Word in this matter, brings into the study of that Word the principles of worldly wisdom and rationalism. The God Who sovereignly gave His Word, set down in the Scriptures, is the same sovereign God in salvation. Deny the one and the other also is destroyed. To these things then we will turn our attention, D.V., in future articles as we consider Scripture in the Post-Reformation era.

THE DAY OF SHADOWS

John A. Heys

A Timely Warning

When one's earthly life comes to an end, an end comes at once to one's use of this present world and all that it contains. This then brings an end to one's ability to misuse one's time, talents, possessions

and life, so that one's sin here below is terminated in the most absolute sense of the word. This is true for both believer and unbeliever.

But there is another way which God uses, one He uses in His grace and on His elect children, during their pilgrimage here below, that takes from them even the desire to walk according to the lust of their flesh. By His word and Spirit God turns His elect child away from the sin into which he has fallen and is walking. In this instance He does not use physical death but instead instills spiritual life, or quickens a spiritual life that had been implanted in the past and was not asserting itself. Thereby He enables this child to walk in love to God and to the neighbor.

Now Jonah, who had been walking in the sin of refusing to go to Nineveh at God's command, and to preach unto its inhabitants, did not have his earthly life ended in physical death, even though he deserved it, and had come very, very close to it. For not only did God have more work for him to do on this earth, but as an elect child of God, his sins were eternally blotted out by the cross of Christ, which is eternally in God's counsel and in His thoughts. In this instance God used that way of grace, and by His word and Spirit He moved Jonah to rise up and go to Nineveh.

Jonah still did not understand God's way. He understood that God wanted him to preach to these Gentiles in this city that was such a fierce and powerful enemy of the people wherein God was gathering His church. But this time he did not try to flee away from his calling but rose up to go and do what he was bidden to do.

This does not mean that Jonah no longer had to struggle with his flesh. Just read the last chapter in the book of Jonah, and you will see how his flesh again asserts itself. He still had lessons to learn. He must learn to bow before God's will no matter what He decrees. He must cease ascribing folly to God, or questioning God's love. He is indeed in need of a timely warning. He must heed the command to go and preach. But he must also be warned to preach only that which God bids him to preach. He must not speak one word of his own. He must not color the message by his own evil feelings. His eagerness to see Nineveh destroyed must not surface in his preaching.

For Jonah to preach that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed was not difficult for his flesh, even though that flesh would rather preach that the destruction would come in ten days or less. Subsequent history reveals how badly he wanted the whole city destroyed, and how greatly he was disappointed when it was spared of this devastation. Surely Jonah must be warned. All his behavior

since he was called the first time makes it clear that he not only must be reminded of his first call, but also that he must be cautioned and warned not to say as much as one word of his own. He was told to preach "the preaching that I bid thee."

What a timely lesson this is also for us in this day and age! The inclination of our flesh is always to go in one wrong direction or another, or to demand that the preaching on our pulpit go in one wrong direction or another. It is not only the preacher who needs to be warned. Many a preacher comes with that which is contrary to that which God bids His servants to preach, because of pressure from the congregation, the Classis, or the Synod. It is so tempting to say less than God bids us to say, or to say more than He commands us to preach. Certain doctrines go strongly against our flesh, especially at a given moment. These we let go — or insist that they be let go — and on our pulpits they become covered with dust. Philosophies of men, worldly ambitions, social advantages rather than spiritual matters push sin, shame, repentance, the cross, the holy wrath of God, the antithesis, and spiritual values off the pulpit. Often when they are rightly preached, there are violent reactions, not only from the pew but also from other officebearers. Yes it did happen, but not in one of our churches, and for that we may be thankful. In a discourse which we had about the "foolishness of preaching," of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians 1:21, it was stated that, rather than by the preaching, we should gather the church by hospitality. Preaching must be subservient to and take a back seat to hospitality. Condemn no false doctrine, speak not of God's hatred and wrath against sin but only of His love. See and preach some good in the unbeliever. Soft-pedal sin. And even though Paul in II Timothy 3:16, 17 mentions doctrine *first*, as that which makes the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnishing him to all good works, the less doctrine you preach, the less we really know about God and sin, the more hospitable and friendly our church will be; and we will grow! Grow in numbers but not in spiritual life.

No, today there is such a clamoring for entertainment, amusement, a sermon that can make you laugh, not cry about sin. And where today, in what are called Reformed circles, do you hear of total depravity, sovereign, eternal, double predestination, truths which God bids us to preach? Instead of being warned by God to preach what He bids us, men are warned by other men that such preaching is not hospitable and friendly, and that you are with that kind of preaching going to drive men away from your church. Numerical growth means all, and spiritual growth is pushed into the background, if it is considered at all. How timely then for us is

this warning to Jonah!

Now in two ways Jonah had an easier task preaching what God bids than the preacher today. Jonah did not have as many ships to take him to so many places called Tarshish. Today's preacher has within his reach so many ships he can board, and thereby leave behind his task to which he is called. There are the pleasure boats of sports, hobbies, social activities which, with so much pleasure, take him away from determining what it is that God wants him to preach from a particular text. At the last minute he must slap something together, or borrow the words of another, without actually even digesting the truth himself.

Then, too, Jonah had it easier because he had given to him word for word the message that God wanted him to preach. Jonah did not need to exegese a text in a language other than his own native tongue. He did not need to work out carefully a sermon with logical order that the congregation could follow. He did not need to dig, dig, and dig some more, search, search, and search more deeply, delve, delve, and delve still further into a given text and the whole of Scripture, and not be satisfied until he was sure that this was what God wanted preached to this congregation at this time, and until his soul bubbled over with a particular message, so that he could hardly wait for the Sabbath to come, in order that he might share with the congregation what God gave him to preach; and he might send the congregation home with souls that were singing God's praises.

Do you realize that the Old Testament word for prophet comes from a verb that means to boil forth? In the day of shadows God filled the minds of His prophets with a particular message, and He set their souls on fire by the power of His Spirit, so that their souls boiled like a tea kettle on the stove. The result was that even as steam came shooting out of the spout of that tea kettle, so the words came rushing out of the mouth of the prophet. But that tea kettle had to have water in it as well as fire underneath. And today one's mind must get God's message out of Holy Writ and be filled with the truth in a given text, and be set on fire, through such diligent and faithful study, by the Holy Spirit. Then he will preach what God bids him to preach and not just fill in the time, or come each Sunday with the same message he gave last month, or even perhaps last week.

And it is not how loudly we preach, nor how dramatically we present the message, but *what* we preach, and *what* we want preached, that counts. Preaching is not entertaining. It is edifying, that is, building up in the faith and in the truth, leading ever more deeply into the truth, to see it more

richly, that we may be more able to render the praises the God of our salvation has coming to Him.

Indeed, a faithful preacher, whose soul is set on fire by such study and by the Spirit, will come with lively preaching. And that may appeal to the flesh, and make it easier to listen to and follow. But what brings forth spiritual fruit and growth is *what* is preached, when it is what God bids us to preach. We never get the idea of Jesus preaching boisterously. When He preached the sermon on the mount — better called the sermon on the kingdom — He sat down, we read in Matthew 5:1. The power was in the words which He spoke. For He indeed, not only in each word, but in each letter in each word, preached what the triune God bade Him to preach. And we do need to be warned to follow in His footsteps, and want only that which God presents to us in His Holy Word. The philosophies and ideas of man must not only not be our message, but they must be exposed as being the very opposite of what God bids us to preach.

But to return to Jonah, he went because the word of the Lord came to him. And that word was the same as came to him the first time, namely, "Cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me." That was the preaching that God bade him to preach. That is also why Jonah preached, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

How correctly the Heidelberg Catechism presents this preaching when it states that first of all we must be taught our sins and miseries. There just is no true gospel, no real good news for us, no comfort amid all the miseries of the curse under which we lie because of sin, unless we see our sin in all its awfulness. See it as GOD sees it!

Man can preach advances in science, in medicine, and amazing surgical achievements. He can cry out about tremendous social advances and an unheard of higher standard of living, which far exceeds what Solomon knew in all his glory. For Solomon never enjoyed the comforts of air conditioning and of central heating, of electricity and a host of labor saving devices, of automobile and jet plane travel, and of a host of other comforts and conveniences that we just take for granted. But all this, rather than to take us to the cross of Christ, and the assurance of a new creation wherein there will be no sin and curse, will turn us away from that cross and its blessings.

We will have to go into this matter more fully next time. But let it be emphasized that we must preach — and want preached — only what God bids us to preach. And that means that we add nothing of our own, or from the minds of other men; but it also means that what He bids us to preach *must* be preached. We may not add to His word; but we

must not subtract either. We must not think that we are wiser than God and that we can improve upon the Scriptures by eliminating from them the things we do not, because of our sinful flesh, like to read or hear. To be silent in regard to some truths,

to avoid them because they go against the flesh of men is to take a ship to Tarshish, and to be without the assurance that God will in the storm send a fish to bring us safely back to the dry land.

THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH

Ronald L. Cammenga

Living Church Membership (2)

Last time we established the importance and the duty of membership in the visible, instituted church of Jesus Christ. There are many today who disparage church membership. There are many who find it quite sufficient to listen to the wide variety of religious programs broadcast these days over the radio and television. Others are content to read good Christian books or to listen to sermons on tapes. Others will attend worship services, but never actually join a specific church, and often drift from one church to another.

The Scriptures make plain the calling of the believer to be a member of Christ's church in the world. But the responsibility isn't only church membership. The responsibility is LIVING church membership. There are many people who are members of the church. There are not so many people who are living church members. We are called to be lively, active, enthusiastic members of the church.

What is living church membership?

Living church membership, in the first place, is membership in a faithful congregation of Jesus Christ. If I take my church membership seriously, then it is not enough that I simply am a member of any church, but I am a member of a true church of God. That means that I am a member of a church that exhibits the marks of the true church in the world, as those marks are described in the *Belgic Confession*, Article 29. Those marks are three: the pure preaching of the gospel, the proper admin-

istration of the sacraments, the faithful exercise of Christian discipline. This is the criterion of church membership. The criterion is not the people, not the pleasing personality of the preacher, not the beautiful church building, nor the nice-sounding choir. But the criterion is the pure preaching of the gospel, and standing in support of that pure preaching, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of Christian discipline. In such a congregation God is present and God is active by His Spirit and grace. To such a congregation I am called to belong.

In the second place, living church membership is genuine church membership. If we are living church members, we are not members of the church simply because this is socially acceptable. If we are living church members, then we are not members of the church simply because we've been born and raised in the church and probably most of our friends are members of the church. If we are living church members, then we are not members of the church simply to please a husband or a wife, father or mother. But if we are living church members, we are members of the church because we love the church and love Jesus Christ who is worshipped and praised in the church. Our membership in the church is willing, heart-felt, and sincere.

Thirdly, living church membership is diligent church membership. Living church membership means diligent church attendance. If we are living church members, then we are faithful in our presence at the services for divine worship. And then we are not just there bodily, but we're there for the purpose of worship.

Several things may be included in diligent church membership besides our faithful attendance at the worship services. Diligent church membership includes our taking seriously the financial support of the church, paying the budget for the support of the ministry and contributing to the relief of the poor. Anyone who neglects this aspect of church membership, who fails to carry out his financial obligations towards the church, is not a living member of the church. Living church membership means that when a meeting of the church is called, such as the congregational meeting, we're present. The congregational meetings are official meetings of the church. We ought to take seriously our responsibility to participate in these meetings. This diligence in church membership shows itself in submission, willing, joyful submission to the rule of Christ in the church through the officebearers. For the young people especially, included in diligent church membership is the responsibility of full membership in the church by way of confession of faith, and in that way participation at the Lord's Supper. Diligent church membership will also manifest itself in involvement in the organic life of the congregation. That member of the church who only attends the church services on Sunday, but who has no other contact with the members of the church the rest of the week, and doesn't care to have any other contact with the members of the church, displays a serious weakness in church membership. It is a striking testimony to the good condition of the early church that we read not simply that the believers continued to gather regularly for weekly worship, but that they had daily contact with each other, Acts 2:46, 47. There ought to be the contact with one another that takes the form of our visiting with one another in our homes, then not with just a certain few, but with the members of the church generally. The fellowship of the Bible study societies of the congregation afford the members an excellent opportunity during the week to meet with one another. This is living church membership.

Finally, it is characteristic of the living church member that he shows himself to be interested in the welfare and advantage of the other members of the church. This is an aspect of church membership that is emphasized by the Heidelberg Catechism in Q.A. 55: ". . . that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members." It is easy for us to forget this aspect of church membership. It is easy for us to become self-centered in the matter of our church membership. Then church membership is a matter of what is in it for me, how am I served by my membership in the church. Living church member-

ship expresses itself in care and concern for the other members of the church.

This care and concern will manifest itself in especially two ways. First, it will show itself by our help of those who are in physical need and physical distress. James says in James 1:27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." We will visit those in the hospital, the shut-ins, the widows and widowers. We will comfort and assist the poor, the downcast, and the despairing. We will encourage those who have experienced disappointment or loss. This is living church membership. This is love and concern for the church herself.

Our care and concern will also manifest itself in our carrying out our responsibility toward those members of the church who have strayed from the fold and are walking in sin. Motivated by the advantage and salvation of the other members of the church, we will seek them out to admonish them, to call them to repentance, and to seek forgiveness along with ourselves at the foot of the cross.

In the way of living, active church membership there will also be joy in our membership in the church. These two go hand in hand. Often there is in our lives a lack of joy over our membership in the church. We take no special delight in our church membership. Our church membership can even become a burden rather than a blessing. At these times we are tempted to withdraw from active life in the church, to go off by ourselves in our own little corner. This is a mistake! This is wrong! At these times more than at any other times we need to remind ourselves of our calling to be living members of the church.

What must motivate us to be living church members is the sense of privilege that church membership is. Membership in the church is a privilege and a blessing. You and I do not deserve to be members of the church. That we are members of the church is due to the grace of God. What a privilege that we who by nature are enemies of God should be brought into the fellowship of His church! What a privilege that we should be made members of the blessed body of Jesus Christ! What a privilege that we should share in the salvation which is enjoyed in the church! We deserve none of this! How good God is to gather us into the membership of His church!

Our greatest motivation to living church membership, however, must be the glory of God. The purpose of the church is the worship and glory of God. That is what the Apostle says in Ephesians 3:21, "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." This

is what church membership and going to church are all about. A man goes to church in order to worship and praise God.

But God is glorified, not by dead, but by living church membership. This is the result of living church membership. When a man hears and believes the preaching of the gospel in the church on the Lord's Day, God is glorified. When a man sings the songs of the church, God is glorified. When a man communes with the saints, God is glorified. When a man supports the ministry and contributes to the relief of the poor, God is glorified. When a man assists his fellow church member and shows himself to be interested in the salvation and advantage of his fellow church member, God is glorified. That is what church membership is all about.

If the church exists for the glory of God, it is

clear to us what our attitude ought to be toward the church and toward our membership in the church. As much as we love God and love the glory of God, we ought to love the church and value our membership in the church. Our attitude toward the church ought to be the attitude expressed in the hymn:

I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode,
The Church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood.

I love Thy Church, O God!
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and cares shall end.

TRANSLATED TREASURES

Dr. A. Kuyper

A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church

In the third place, concerning ecclesiastical assemblies, the thoughts come to us:

1) The consistories ought to be prepared to come to the help of churches of the second group and to work by mission activity in dead churches of the third group.

2) The consistories ought to strive to remove the non-confessing element from their midst and to break off all fellowship with unbelieving ministers.

3) The consistories ought to arouse their churches to a confession of guilt, to penitence and conversion, and to an improvement of life. To do this they must restore discipline.

4) The consistories must extend their church relationships to other churches in order to move these other churches to co-reformation. If this proves to be impossible, then they must break that

church connection by the introduction of their own church order so as to regulate the state of their own church. Further, they must have fellowship with all such aggrieved or non-aggrieved churches who are one with them in confession.

5) Classes ought to refrain from elections of members to unlawful committees in order that these committees may cease to exist. Further, they are to cooperate with other Classes in order to call together from these Classes a lawful, spiritual, national Synod.

6) The Classical and Provincial committees which are not grounded in God's Word and thus lack every divine right of existence ought to dissolve themselves.

7) The Synod of these churches ought to lay aside her assumed sovereign authority; to quit try-

ing to be the crown of Christ; and the Classes ought to issue an invitation to come together by means of delegates on the grounds of the Formulae of Unity in better Synods. Through these Synods the reformation of the church federation as a whole ought to be taken in hand.

* * * * *

In the fourth place, concerning the magistrates:

1) The magistrates ought to retract the royal decisions of 1815 and 1852, so that the fiction disappears that in 1852 the churches were free to regulate their own future; something which is false because the ruling which came into effect in 1852 was entirely governed by influences that resulted from the decisions of 1815 and had penetrated into the church.

2) The magistrate must take the necessary steps to remove from the Constitution Article 168 as soon as possible. This article concerns the financial ties of the government to the local churches. The government ought if possible to pay back to the local churches in one sum or in regular payments what rightfully belongs to these churches.

3) The magistrate ought to grant to those churches which have completely broken with the State Church the privileges promised to them in the law of 1853 which recognized various denominations, i.e., as long as Article 168 is in force in the Constitution.¹

* * * * *

In the fifth place, concerning the separated churches, we observe the following:

1) These churches have to emphasize more emphatically their independence as local churches so that every remnant of the Collegiate system is vanished.

2) They must maintain fellowship with other aggrieved churches which desire this.

3) As soon as the original churches have won back their freedom of action by spiritual reformation, by getting rid of unworthy elements, and by freeing themselves from every wrong church connection, these aggrieved churches have to amalgamate again with these churches into one local church even if that is in separate parishes.

In this entire church political part of reformation our churches will have to put themselves on the basis of God's Word according to the Confession which is found in our Three Forms of Unity. These Formulae can never be equalled to the Scriptures; for that reason gravamina which might be brought against a creed on the ground of Scripture must be brought, not to a particular person, nor to an office bearer, but only to the churches gathered in a legal Synod. This is true because the Synod alone

possesses the right to consider these matters and to decide concerning them in the name of the Lord.

65. Concerning the Matter Of Taking Over The Classical and Provincial Committees.

The way of taking possession of Classical and Provincial committees is something which seems to others to be desirable but is something which I advise against. It is not a preferable way because it is a way of opportunity by means of which principles lose their golden lustre. More importantly, to sit in such a committee under this Church Order is an exercise of a power which belongs, not to us, but to Jesus our King. Further, even if one succeeded with the help of dissenting brothers, and thus without the firm ground of a confession, to take over church committees, he will ultimately have to separate even from these, and he will once again find himself in the same old struggle. Finally, what our brothers do not consider with sufficient seriousness is this: that one who goes through church reformation in such an unspiritual way and replaces the wonderful power of penance before God and the nobility of prayers with political calculation cannot be blessed.

If however, many of our brothers intend to attempt to do this, we do not wish to judge them and we give over the result of the struggle to Him without Whose higher inspiration all reformation fails.

But what other or better way than the one we have suggested is chosen by others for the reformation of our churches, one thing must be avoided by all the brethren of the faith with quiet earnestness and holy urgency. That is this: the spiritual stream which begins in confession of guilt and comes to manifestation and conversion of life must not flow away under the cold ice of church political maneuvering. The impulse for reformation by members or office bearers must never be restrained by an antinomian theory of concentrating on petty differences. It must never rest until all things in the church of God are once again done according to the rule of His Word. Finally, in connection with the zeal for the Name of the Lord, even when one brother must testify against another, a better love must not dry up in any of us but must blossom in every heart on the grave of our own ego.

¹ The matters to which Kuyper refers in these paragraphs are matters that affected the reorganization of the State Church. In 1815 this State Church was reorganized during the time of Napoleon. In 1852 various changes were made in the Constitutions of the Netherlands' government in connection with the Separation which took place under Van Raalte and de Cock.

Read the Standard Bearer!

Book Review

EVERYTHING IS POLITICS BUT POLITICS IS NOT EVERYTHING, A Theological Perspective on Faith and Politics, by H.M. Kuitert (translated by John Bowden); Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986; 183 pp., \$8.95 (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

This is a very strange book. It is strange, first of all, because it just does not seem right for a book on politics to emerge from the pen of a systematic theologian — Prof. Kuitert is professor of Systematic Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam; although this may simply be indicative of the theological trends in the Gereformeerde Kerken. It is a strange book, in the second place, because Kuitert is, according to his own testimony, backing off a previously held position and now advocating that the church does wrong when she becomes involved in politics.

It must be clearly understood that Kuitert means by this, not a denunciation of individual Christians getting involved in politics, but the church as church, i.e., as institute. It must also be understood that by politics he means not only involvement in the political processes of a nation, but he means participation in seeking peace on earth, aiding the hungry and poor, fighting alongside those who seek deliverance from economic and political oppression, etc. In these things the church ought not to involve herself; this is a realm only for the individual Christian.

One could, at least in some respects, hail this change of mind on Kuitert's part, especially because he pleads for the church to limit herself to her calling to preach the gospel of peace and reconciliation. His defense of this position is convincing and sometimes even eloquent.

The difficulty is that Kuitert takes this position for the wrong reasons and on the wrong basis. We cannot go into the whole matter in this book review, but a few points ought to be made. The real basis for his position lies in what he calls his two-kingdom theory. The church has to do with the kingdom of heaven; but this world is also a kingdom. In that latter kingdom is to be found an abundant measure of the grace of God, even to the extent that salvation is found in this latter kingdom — although such salvation is "well-being." It is in this kingdom in the world that the individual Chris-

tian works for salvation, cooperates with the world in its endeavors, and does all he can to secure the salvation of "well-being."

Furthermore, when he gets around to talking about the business of the church, i.e., the kingdom of heaven, he is extremely vague and dissatisfying. If you would ask me what Kuitert's view of the kingdom of heaven is, I would have to respond: I simply do not know. Sometimes he seems to be speaking of a second coming of Christ and the establishment of that kingdom when a new order is introduced. Other times he seems to think also of the kingdom of heaven in some kind of earthly terms. There are even points at which he seems to shrug his shoulders as if to say that he has no idea of what the kingdom of heaven is all about. And this latter may be closest to the truth, because he gives far greater priority to laboring in the kingdom of this world than "seeking the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness." By this means the church is almost shoved into a dark and useless corner — although Kuitert is at some pains to disavow his intent to rob the church of her significance. But reading the book, this is really the only conclusion one can come to. All of this leaves no room for the true antithesis and the calling of God's people as citizens here and now of the kingdom of heaven, while walking as pilgrims and strangers in the earth.

There are other things in the book which are bad. For example, here and there his obvious denial of Scripture's divine origin comes through loud and clear. He will even make an exception to his general principle, that the church ought not to involve itself in politics, in the case of an emergency — as is now true in South Africa. And it is a bit silly and hardly worthy of a theologian to make an obvious bow to the feminist movement by speaking repeatedly of "the sisterhood of mankind." (It seems to me that "sisterhood" is as discriminatory and sexist as "brotherhood" and that Kuitert, in the interests of being fair, ought to speak of "the neuterhood of all mankind.")

The book is hard going. I would suggest that unless someone is rather thoroughly acquainted with political and economic theory, it would be better to skip the first three sections of the book and start with Section IV. Chapter XIII is the key chapter, although the chapters which follow this one are also more or less important.

Report of Classis West

November 24, 1986

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met in special session on November 19, 1986 in South Holland, Illinois, to examine Mr. Charles Terpstra, according to the requirement of Article 4 of the Church Order. The examination was requested by the Pella, Iowa Protestant Reformed Church, whose call Mr. Terpstra had accepted. Mr. Terpstra successfully sustained the examination. Classis advised Pella to proceed with Mr. Terpstra's ordination into the office of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

Classis also approved the "Ministerial Certificate of Dismissal and Testimonial" of Rev. James Slopsema, of Randolph, Wisconsin, who has accepted the call to Hope, Walker, Michigan. Classis

thanked Rev. Slopsema for his work in the Classis the past twelve years, and wished him God's blessing in his new pastorate.

Rev. David Engelsma, Stated Clerk
Classis West

*Take the time
to read and study
the Standard Bearer
this busy holiday season!*

News From Our Churches

Ben Wigger

December 15, 1986

Candidate Charles Terpstra very successfully passed his examination at Classis West on Wednesday, November 19; and then on Friday the 21st he was ordained and installed into the office of minister of God's Word at Pella, Iowa. May God richly bless Rev. Terpstra and the congregation at Pella as he begins his labours.

Rev. Arie den Hartog writes that as the time of their departure draws nearer, everyone is asking them over for one last time. It looks as if they are going to be kept very busy for all the rest of the time they still have in Singapore as missionary and family. The den Hartogs intend to return to the United States on December 23, the Lord willing.

Rev. and Mrs. Engelsma were blessed with the birth of a daughter and Rev. and Mrs. Slopsema were blessed with the birth of a son, Gerrit James.

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

"With arrows is his quiver stored who joys in children of his youth. And blest the man whose age is cheered by stalwart sons and daughters fair." Psalter #359.

The congregation of Randolph scheduled a farewell program for Rev. Slopsema and his family for November 28.

Tentative plans were for the Slopsemas to arrive at Hope Church in Walker, Michigan the first week in December, and for Rev. Slopsema to be installed, the Lord willing, December 7 during the evening service.

Rev. Lubbers was hospitalized recently at Ferguson Hospital in Grand Rapids for two surgeries. The first, an exploratory surgery, revealed scar tissue on the prostate gland. A second surgery on the prostate was successful. He covets your prayers that God will give him grace to be patient in this affliction and, if possible, return to work in the churches. We can surely add to that the

prayer that all of God's suffering saints may find their daily strength in the all-sufficient power of God's grace.

Rev. David Engelsma was the featured speaker at the Fall Lecture Series recently sponsored by the Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Rev. Engelsma spoke on the subject "The Reformed View of Church Unity" at the First Christian Reformed Church of Rock Valley, Iowa. While he was there he also spoke at the Mid-America Seminary, giving three lectures on some aspects of the life and work of Martin Bucer, the important reformer in Strassburg, Germany.

Adams St. School in Grand Rapids held what looked like an interesting Fall P.T.A. meeting. The evening's topic was centered around children and drugs. A very informative speech entitled "Drug Awareness" was given.

The Free Christian School in Edgerton held their Fall P.T.A. recently as well with Rev. DeVries speaking on the topic "Parent - Teacher Cooperation."

Although the 1987 Protestant Reformed Young Peoples Convention to be held in Loveland, Colorado seems like a long way off, some young peoples' societies are already busy raising funds to help defray the expenses of that convention.

The young people in Edmonton, Alberta, recently sponsored their second annual Remembrance Day Car Rally. The rally started at 11:30 in the morning at church and ended in the late afternoon with a supper of soup and buns.

The young people of Edgerton, Minnesota, recently invited their congregation to enjoy a hearty soup and Bar-B-Q supper and a time of good fellowship.

Hope School in Walker, Michigan presented their annual All School Program the night of November 21. The theme for this year was "The Singing Church."

A new society was recently organized in Doon, Iowa, under the name "Christian Fellowship Society" for the purpose of studying Scripture. Anyone single and under the age of thirty-five or couples

with a combined age of sixty or less were both eligible and welcome to join.

The Fund Raisers of Heritage School in Hudsonville, Michigan sponsored a travelogue on Canada by Karl Van Oostenbrugge. This was the first time anyone had seen this newest of Karl's travelogues, and he presented it free of charge. Those who filled Heritage's gym enjoyed traveling from Ottawa to Vancouver B.C., seeing the Changing of the Guards, Niagara Falls, the Algoma Train, the Canadian Rockies, Butchart Gardens, and much much more.

Rev. Van Overloop writes that the Northwest Mission has conducted a futile search for another meeting place so that the group there can worship at more "normal hours". After an exhaustive search it was decided to stay put. They are now able to worship at 12:00 noon and 6:00 P.M. This is working out well.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On December 19, the Lord willing, PROF. AND MRS. HOMER C. HOEKSEMA will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We their children thank our heavenly Father for our parents and for the covenant heritage we have received through them. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to prosper them in their way and to give them joy in Thee.

Mark and Ruth Hoeksema
Stephen, Michael, Sarah, and Philip
Ken and Eunice Kuiper
Jonathan and David
Carey and Lois Kamps
Matthew, Timothy, Kyle, and Anna Lynn
Candace

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Aid Society of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to Mrs. Joanne Van Baren and family in the death of her mother, MRS. AGNES DE VRIES, at the age of 79 years.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."
(Psalm 116:15)

President - Rev. George Lanting
Secretary - Elaine Van Der Noord

NOTICE!!!

TO ALL TREASURERS OF OUR PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES AND THEIR SOCIETIES

All collections taken and gifts given to the Mission Committee for the Jamaican Mission Field should be sent to: MRS. CLARE PRINCE, 7435 PINE GROVE, JENISON, MI 49428.