

THE STANDARD BEARER

A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine



*"I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the Lord."*

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In This Issue . . .

In a guest article entitled "May Elders Teach?" Rev. Ken Hanko argues from Scripture that the answer to that question is yes — even to this extent that in certain situations the elder may properly be called upon to *preach*. Needless to say, not all of our readers will find themselves in agreement with that. But . . . that's all right. Seems to me that this is a subject which deserves further study; and it may be that our *Standard Bearer* can provide a forum for different points of view regarding it. The editorial staff would welcome that.

I wondered, in reading the article, how many men would be deterred from seeking the office if they believed that it might fall to them to preach even a single sermon. After a moment's reflection however I concluded that a man hardly needs *that* to lead him to wonder about his qualifications for the office. For how true it is, as Samuel Miller wrote more than 150 years ago, that the ruling elder, even though he may never *preach* like a minister, "is called to *live* like a minister of the gospel, in the very atmosphere of prayer and religious conversation. In the chamber of the sick and dying; in conversing with the anxious inquirer, and the perplexed or desponding believer; in the private circle, and in the social meeting for prayer; it must be 'his meat and drink' to be found ministering to the best interests of his fellow men." An awesome responsibility, to say the very least.

Elsewhere in this issue there is advertised a series of classes of instruction to be conducted by Prof. Robert Decker, in the Grand Rapids area. It is of course Christ who qualifies. But that does not exclude means. And this is most emphatically one of these. Men, let's not miss this opportunity! □

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Meditation
Rev. James Slopsema

God: Our Refuge and Strength

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. -Psalm 46:1

This Psalm was written in connection with the destruction of the army of Assyria in the days of Hezekiah. Assyria had laid siege to Jerusalem. But God had destroyed Assyria in one night by the angel of death. What a great salvation this was for Judah!

We have before us the main theme of the Psalm: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. This obviously was the confession of the nation of Judah in response to God's great work of salvation.

It is very fitting that we consider this confession as we begin again another new year.

The situation that Judah faced with Assyria is essentially the same that is faced by the church of all ages. The powers of darkness constantly attack the church of God to destroy her. The church has battled the powers of darkness down through the ages. We can expect the battle to rage also in the new year that lies before us.

It is very important, therefore, that we begin this year with the same confession of the church of the past: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

* * * * *

In the days of Hezekiah the nation of Judah found herself in trouble. Assyria, the world power of the day, had invaded Judah. Her armies had taken the fenced cities of Judah and had laid siege to the holy city itself.

From every earthly point of view the situation of Jerusalem was hopeless. Jerusalem was strategically a very strong city. But Assyria was by far the superior power militarily. Without a doubt Jerusalem would eventually be brought to her knees after a lengthy siege.

In full knowledge of these facts Rabshakeh, the captain of the Assyrian army, taunted the citizens of Jerusalem. Assyria had overcome all her enemies and would also take Jerusalem. Neither must Jerusalem think

that her God could be of any assistance. The gods of the other nations had been powerless against the gods and armies of Assyria. So too would the LORD God of Judah be powerless to help in the time of trouble.

Jerusalem therefore had no alternative but to surrender. Should she do so immediately, her citizens would be treated kindly. They would be transported to another land as lush as Canaan.

This serves as a picture of the desperate situation the church faces in every age.

Judah was the church of God in her day. The Bible portrays her as a picture of the church of all ages. Assyria was the world power of her day. She sought to destroy the church by taking her away from the promised land of Canaan and bringing her into the captivity of another land. This serves as a picture of the attempts of the powers of darkness down through the ages to destroy the church.

The powers of darkness, which consist of the Devil and his host of fallen angels along with the world of the ungodly, constantly assail and lay siege to the church of God to destroy her. Through persecution the powers of darkness seek to remove the church physically from the face of the earth. They also seek through persecution to discourage the saints of God so that they

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turn from God into sin and destruction. The powers of darkness seek to destroy the church by introducing false doctrine into the church which would lead the saints far away from God and His salvation in Jesus Christ. Along with this the forces of Satan attempt to introduce worldliness into the church through the pleasures of sin. Turn the church into the world and the church is no more. The Devil even attacks the saints of God when they suffer adversity. In the face of pain and suffering the Devil tempts the saints to turn against their God in despair and bitterness.

In this manner the powers of darkness have assailed the church and her members down through the ages. We can expect no less in the year ahead of us!

We can add that from an earthly point of view the situation is desperate.

Judah faced a power far superior to her. So also does the church find in the powers of darkness a force much stronger than she. Witness the terrible apostasy that has taken hold of the church world, not only in the past, but also today. Consider the allurements of sin, which at times are well nigh irresistible to the saints. Neither ought we to forget how often the Devil brings us to the point of despair in the face of adversity.

There are times when we feel desperate in our battle against the forces of darkness, and we live in fear of being overwhelmed.

* * * * *

In the face of her enemy, Judah had found her refuge in the LORD God.

A refuge is a place to which one can flee in the time of danger and be safe. A refuge can also be a person to whom one flees and finds protection. Hence, the LORD God is often in Scrip-

ture called a refuge, as also He is here.

The LORD is also called the strength of Judah. This is added to emphasize that the LORD is a strong and mighty refuge, able to provide safety and security even against the most formidable foe.

In harmony with this, the LORD is also called a help. A help is one who surrounds another in order to provide protection.

Judah found the LORD God to be all of this. God was her refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. For in response to the threatenings and tauntings of the Assyrian captain, Hezekiah went to the Temple to seek God's help. That help came immediately. That very night the angel of death stole into the camp of Assyria and killed 185,000 of the Assyrian army. This not only spared Jerusalem from the Assyrian threat; it forever broke the back of the Assyrian power. Assyria never fully recovered from the blow God dealt her that night. She was soon replaced by another as the world power of the day.

Truly, God was Judah's refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble!

God is such a refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, for the church in every age. He is this refuge through Jesus Christ, His Son. God has sent His Son in our flesh. Having accomplished that great wonder through the virgin birth, God proceeded to send His Son to the agonies of the cross, where another wonder of grace was accomplished. Through the death of His Son, God secured the salvation of His church. We enjoy that salvation even now by faith in Jesus Christ.

However, as we have seen, the powers of darkness are striving mightily to rob us of our salvation. They use persecution, false doctrine, the allurements of sin, even our personal tragedies in an attempt to turn us away from that which we have in Jesus Christ.

However, the works of the Devil will ultimately come to nought. For God also preserves the church in the salvation He has given her in Christ.

For the present time, God limits the powers of darkness in their attacks on the church. The Devil can go so far and no further. He can persecute the church, but not to the point of destroying her. He can tempt the saints of God with the allurements of sin, but no more than the saints can withstand.

Besides this, God also strengthens the saints of the church as they are required to do battle with the powers of darkness. When the saints call upon the LORD their God in the name of Jesus Christ, He hears them and strengthens them that they might fight the good fight of faith. In the power of the Lord Jesus Christ the saints are able to overcome the world, going from victory to victory.

Indeed, God is a refuge and strength to the church, a very present help in trouble. He is the One to whom we can flee in the time of trouble and find refuge.

* * * * *

Through the Psalmist, Judah made a confession: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

This was a confession that she had found God to be her refuge and strength. It was also a confession that she would look to God as her refuge and strength in future troubles. In future troubles Judah would not rely upon her own strength. Nor would she seek refuge in the heathen na-

tions round about her or in their gods. She would flee to the LORD God alone for refuge and strength.

This confession we must also make ours.

As we begin this new year we must confess with deep gratitude to God that we have found Him to be our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

But we must also confess that God will be our refuge and strength in the future.

Troubles will continue for the church so long as she finds herself on the earth. Troubles of innumerable sorts will also befall the church here below in this new year. In these troubles we must find our refuge and strength in the living God. Our refuge must not be the wisdom of men.

Our help must not be the inventions of men. By all means we must not rely upon our own strength. We must flee in prayer to the Almighty, who loves us eternally in Jesus Christ.

Then we will be safe and secure, not only for this year but forever.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. □

Editorially Speaking

■ Our readers will be interested in the latest issue (July-October 1988) of *Journey* magazine, a religious periodical published by Presbyterians in the South. This large (56-page) issue is entitled, "North American Reformed Church Issue," and is devoted to a description of many of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America, although several Presbyterian churches in Scotland and Ireland are also included. Particularly interesting to many of our readers will be the account of the history, doctrinal position, and general makeup of the Protestant Reformed Churches and the description (presumably by the Editor of *Journey*) of the Christian Reformed Church. The article on the CRC remarks, "In the Hoeksema case the ecclesiastical evidence (the Protestant Reformed Church has remained orthodox) clearly puts the professor on history's faithful side." But the whole issue is a worthwhile examination of the Reformed landscape in North America. Publisher R.E. Knodel, Jr. has in-

formed me that the issue is proving to be exceedingly popular as a directory of Reformed churches. Single copies are available for \$2.50; orders of 100 copies are priced at \$1.00 per copy. Add 5% for postage. Order from *Journey*, 1021 Federal St., Lynchburg, Virginia 24504; or call (804) 845-8572.

■ Several book reviews appear in this issue of *The Standard Bearer*. Reviewing religious books has always been, and will continue to be, a regular feature of *The SB*. We take this occasion to urge our general readership not to skip over the reviews (perhaps ministers must be encouraged not to read only the reviews). It will be our policy to review only those books that seem to us to be of real interest to Reformed men, women, and children, usually books that some will want to buy. (It hardly needs to be stated that a review, or even a recommendation, does not imply approval of everything the book teaches.) Even if a reader has no intention of buying the book, he will profit from

reading the review in that he learns what is being published today and in that a reviewer often treats issues raised in the book that are of concern to the reader. But Reformed people ought to read! They ought to be building up good libraries! The beginning of a new year is a fine occasion for resolving to reduce drastically the time spent (wasted?) watching television and to increase greatly the time spent reading solid Christian literature. John Calvin was right in his comment on II Timothy 4:13 ("... bring ... the books ..."):

Still more does this expression refute the madness of those men who — despising books, and condemning all reading — boast of nothing but their own divine inspirations. But let us know that this passage gives to all believers a recommendation of constant reading, as a method appointed by God for profiting. □ —DJE

Whither the PRC?

To ask and answer the question, "Whither the Protestant Reformed Churches?" is not, and may never become, a matter of boasting. God's church goes on her way in history in the humility of her heartfelt conviction that all that she is she owes to God and that her way "was ordered ere (her) days began," as we sing in Psalm 139. Hers is, and must be, the humility of living, working, and considering her way in the future in dependency upon the grace of God only.

Nor may the question, "Whither?" be the occasion for proposing some grandiose program for the denomination in the coming year, or years. The church does not make up her own agenda. Her Lord has given her her marching orders. His commission is not that she see to it that she be successful. Rather, it is that she be faithful even though faithfulness means hatred, ridicule, persecution, scattering, and death, i.e., supreme failure as men count success and failure. We must have nothing of synodically adopted goals for church growth. The reason is not that we despise numerical growth. Every time a minister is installed in office among us, the congregation prays that God will bless his ministry "to the end that

Thy Church under his administration and by his good example, may increase in number and in virtue" — not only in virtue, but also in number. But if the church decides that her business is to grow, she will make herself grow, inevitably at the expense of faithfulness, when she ought to be concerning herself with the task Christ sets her, trusting that the Lord will add to her such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). The church does not *decide* to grow, but *prays* that she may grow — there is a difference. Even then, G.K. Chesterton has far better insight into the mind of a Reformed church than do the gurus of church growth in southern California when he writes of "the thought of the Calvinist that the host of God should be thinned rather than thronged; that Gideon must reject soldiers rather than recruit them."

But "Whither?" may be a reminder of the calling we have from our Lord, who will meet us at the end of the way as our Judge; and it may serve as the occasion for renewal of the resolution to be faithful to our calling, based on the promise of God to go with us on the way.

Whither the PRC?

We will not take one step on the way of theological modernism. This is the way marked out by the denial of the infallible inspiration of Holy Scripture, by the doubt of the cardinal doctrines of the Bible and of the

historic Christian faith (e.g., creation and providence), and by the approval of lawlessness and immorality (e.g., feminism and homosexuality) for the life of churches and of professing Christians. This is the way of death. This way is littered with the corpses of men and churches.

We repudiate out of hand the mystical, emotional, and subjectivistic way of the charismatic movement. It is fraudulent. It is destructive of the peace and assurance of its devotees. It is prone to gross sensuality. It is another religion than the faith of the Word of God, which Christianity is. It is the religion of feeling; and we have learned far too well from Martin Luther than to fall for such a religion:

Faith is such that it feelleth not but droppeth reason, shutteth the eyes and simply surrendereth to the Word, and followeth the same through death and life. But feeling goeth not beyond what can be grasped by reason and the senses Therefore feeling is counter to faith, faith to feeling Whoso then pursueth feeling, he is destroyed, but whoso counter to feeling dependeth heartily upon the Word, he will be brought through. (Sermon on Mark 15:1ff., 1526)

The way of a broad evangelicalism and of fundamentalism holds no attraction for us. This way, although it claims to recognize the authority of the Bible and professes to preach the gospel of salvation by the blood of Jesus, is generally Arminian

(man saves himself by his free will), un-covenantal (opposes God's inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant and church), millennial (Christ will come at any moment to establish an earthly kingdom of Jews for a thousand years in Palestine), and legalistic ("thou shalt not drink alcoholic beverages, or eat red meat, or drink coffee," etc.).

We are resolved to continue to be what God has made us: Reformed according to the confessions, "The Three Forms of Unity," because they are in all points of doctrine in full agreement with the Word of God, Holy Scripture, and because the Christian life set forth in them is the narrow way to eternal life described in the Bible. This way, the way Reformed, is the way of sound doctrine, expository preaching, thorough teaching of the Scriptures and the confessions to the children, faith that holds for truth all that God has revealed in His Word, and disciplined obedience to the law of God in thankfulness. Whoever suggests that this way is without feeling, experience, and life, only betrays his own ignorance. The way of the Word and doctrine is the way of the Spirit, and therefore rich in experience and life, for He is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13).

The way, therefore, will be well defined. There will be difficulties aplenty on the way; but we are spared the impossible hardship of not knowing where we are to go on our ecclesiastical journey towards the Lord. The future is not a trackless waste. We do not stand before the supposedly exciting possibilities of unknown, new leadings of "the Spirit." We are guided by the Lord of the church by means of Reformed confessions, a Reformed church order, and a rich, helpful Reformed tradition, always subject to Scripture, the church's only "infallible rule."

For the PRC, this must mean living and developing out of their own history and tradition, specifically as regards sovereign, particular grace; the sheer, free graciousness of the covenant; and the antithesis (the spiritual separation of church and believer — and believer's child! — from the world that knows not the Lord Jesus). The churches may not live in the past, content to mouth old phrases as against long-dead opponents; but in the contemporary situation, fully aware of the opportunities, dangers, foes, and struggle of the present, they are called to live, confess, and fight in knowledge of and fidelity to this doctrinal and ethical heritage. The reason is not that a denomination is required to maintain its tradition come what may, for also the church's history and tradition must be tested by the Word of God and the creeds. It may be necessary that a church repents and turns, because its tradition has become the giving up of the truth rather than the handing down of the truth. But the reason is that sovereign, particular grace; the unconditionality of the covenant (which is truly the covenant of grace); and the separation of the church and her members from the world, when tested by the confessions, are proved to be genuine Reformed truth, God's own Word.

Whither the PRC? On the way of Reformed orthodoxy.

Before them are battle and struggle. The church in the world cannot maintain purity of doctrine and life without struggle. She must contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. She must resist the pervasive pressure of the world. She must be vigilant against the world's seduction of her children and young people; she must learn again to pray with fervency the old prayer, "Lord, do not cut us off

in our generations." The PRC must not be blind to the internal threat of division and strife born of pride, fanned by wicked tongues, and justified by a zeal that ignores Christian liberty in the area of the adiaphora (I Cor. 8); the demand of the gospel that stronger and weaker brothers live together in peace (Rom. 14, 15); and the apostle's tribute to "charity" (I Cor. 13).

Their strength will be the preaching from the local pulpits; the teaching in the local catechism rooms; the wisdom of the local consistory meetings; the firmness and love of the local bodies of elders; the mercy of the local diaconates; and the worship and fellowship of the local congregations.

There is no reason for pessimism. The Lamb is opening the book and loosing the seals. True, the darkness deepens, not only in the depraved world, but also in the apostatizing churches. But the deeper the darkness of the lie and of filthiness of life, the brighter shines the light of truth and holiness. Besides, the Reformed faith and church are the cause, the precious cause, of the

JESUS STILL LIVES

"When creature comforts fade and die,
Worldlings may weep, but why should I?
Jesus still lives, and still is nigh.
"Though all the flocks and herds were dead,
My soul a famine need not dread,
For Jesus is my living Bread.
"I know not what may soon betide,
Or how my wants shall be supplied;
But Jesus knows and will provide.
"Against me earth and hell combine,
But on my side is power Divine,
Jesus is all, and He is mine."

Son of God. Why then should we be nervous, fearful, suspicious?

The good hope of the PRC for the future is encouraged by God's keeping of them as churches in the way of the truth in the past. There has been no doctrinal deviation, no weakening of the commitment to the Reformed faith. There is no agitation to remove the ancient landmarks.

Sometimes, men outside the fellowship (troubled usually by a bad conscience concerning their own disobedience to the Lord in the matter of church membership) charge that the PRC are "only twenty-five years behind (this or that departing church)." One is tempted to respond that twenty-five more years of faithfulness is no small blessing. Our

Lord may return by then! But there is no proof for the charge. Probably, the wish is father to the thought. We stand ecclesiastically where we have always stood — in the way marked out by the Reformed standards. In this way, we are determined to persevere, God being gracious. □

—DJE

Walking in the Light

Prof. Herman Hanko

Homosexuality (3)

We have been examining the question of the origin of homosexuality in the light of a distinction which is often made between a *tendency* towards this sin and the actual performance of homosexual acts. Many believe that a man is not responsible for his homosexuality because he is born a homosexual and can do nothing about this tendency of his nature. He cannot fight it; he cannot be changed; he is a prisoner of his genes.

It is interesting to note (though we do it by way of a parenthetical thought) that modern humanism is much more "deterministic" than Calvinism. Calvinism, with its emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God even over sin, is often charged with determinism. Man has no control over what he is or what he does;

he is the object of "fate." God rules supreme in spite of anything which man wants to do or can do.

But nothing is so deterministic as modern humanistic thought and atheistic behavioral psychology. Those who propound these notions make man an absolute slave, either of his genetic structure over which he has no control, or his environment which shapes his behavior and which cannot be altered or modified by anything he does. He is a product of his ancestral genetic heritage and/or of the environment in which he was brought up. All his life long he remains a slave to those forces which shape and mold him in his entire destiny. That is determinism with a vengeance.

But however all that may be, Scripture teaches something quite different, namely, that each man is conceived and born in sin. The result is that he comes into the world with a corrupt and depraved nature which is incapable of doing any good and inclined

to all evil. This depravity, according to Scripture, is complete and total. It is not a partial depravity which leaves man with a free will to choose for the good or for the evil. It is not a partial depravity of every part of his nature so that he remains capable of doing some things good in the sight of God. It is total and complete. The good is foreign to him. He can only sin in everything that he does. He even lacks the ability to will to do good.

We need not belabor this point or enter into it in detail. Everyone who has heard the testimony of Scripture, and who knows the long and solid history of this truth beginning with Augustine, going on through Calvin and Luther, and including all the great Presbyterian and Reformed divines, believes and confesses this fundamental truth. It is one of the key points of Calvinism.

This corrupt and depraved nature is a fountain and source of every evil which man commits.

Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Our Belgic Confession puts it succinctly when it states:

We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature, and as an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind (Art. XV).

Every sin which has been committed in all the history of the world, no matter how detestable and abominable, comes from that depraved nature as a gush of filthy sewage comes from a sewer. Every man who is born with such a nature is inherently capable of committing every sin which man has ever committed. This ought to give every one of us pause. Everyone of us is capable of every sin, including the sin of homosexuality. Perhaps not all men commit this sin, for many are restrained by other sins of pride, self-exaltation, and desire to conform to approved standards by one's peers. One sin, such as pride, keeps another sin from coming to light in overt conduct. Just as fear of being fined keeps one man from running a traffic light, so does fear of sneering looks from one's peers keep one from the sin of homosexuality. But the potential is there — in everyone. Homosexuality, as well as every other sin, has its origin in that depraved nature. There is no other explanation than that.

But one may ask: If sin is rooted in a corrupt nature with which we are conceived and born, is it not, after all, true that sin (including that of homosexuality) is a matter of innate traits and tendencies over which we have no control and for which we cannot be held responsible?

Scripture is very clear on the answer to that question. The corrupt and depraved nature with which we are born is our fault, our responsibility, with which we stand condemned before God. Did you notice the statement in the Belgic Confession which we quoted above? This nature with which we are all born is "so vile and abominable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind." The meaning here is clear. Even if a person dies at birth, he already stands under the condemnation of God because of his corrupt nature. Even if a man never sinned from the moment of birth (something obviously impossible because of his corrupt nature) he would still go to hell because he is responsible for the total depravity of his nature with which he has come into the world.

If you ask once more: How can a man be responsible for his corrupt nature with which he is born? The answer to that question is that he is responsible before God for the sin of his first parents Adam and Eve in Paradise. He is guilty for that sin and held accountable before God for that transgression.

This is, of course, the truth of original guilt, a truth, by the way, not very much believed in the present church — although it was taught by many both in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition. Nor are we interested in arguing the whole subject here, for that is somewhat removed from our main discussion of homosexuality. The interested reader can consult the *locus classicus* in Scripture, Romans 5:12-14 to pursue this matter further; and he can, in connection with the interpretation of this passage, consult the staunchly Reformed and Presbyterian commentators who have held to this view.

That Scripture teaches our responsibility for our corrupt nature goes almost without saying. David prays in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." David is not trying here to find some kind of excuse for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. He is confessing his sin; and among those sins which, with broken heart, he confesses before God is his nature which was sinful from his mother's womb.

The publican in the temple prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Or, even more emphatically, according to the Greek: "God be merciful to me *the* sinner." He does not pray that God will be merciful to him because he sins so very much; he prays for mercy because he is a sinner, because his nature is corrupted and polluted with sin, because he is by and according to his nature a sinner.

The Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes this throughout (cf. e.g., questions and answers 5, 7-10 and others). But one very significant question and answer appears in Lord's Day XXI:

What believest thou concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?

That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long"

The forgiveness of sins includes not only the washing away of all my sins, but also the divine forgetfulness of my corrupt nature. That means that my corrupt nature has also to be forgiven by God. I am guilty for that nature against which I have to struggle. I need forgiveness for that too. And God in His mercy forgives because the blood of Christ was spilled on Calvary not only for my sins, but also for my evil nature. Without that I would still go to hell.

It is not very common anymore in our day to hear prayers uttered for the forgiveness of sins. This is a serious and inexcusable fault. But if one actually does hear prayers for the forgiveness of sins, how often does one hear prayers for the forgiveness of our evil natures? That is rare indeed. And yet it is

essential. All Scripture and our Confessions point us to that great need.

All this needs emphasis, not only because it explains in a Scriptural way the origin of the sin of homosexuality (over which question everyone dealing with the problem is fighting today), but also because it holds out to

the homosexual the hope and promise of deliverance — but then only through the blood of the cross. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the hope of the cross for all homosexuality is just because this sin, as every other sin, has its origin in a sinful and depraved nature. □

In His Fear
Rev. Arie denHartog

The Secret and Revealed Things

You will recognize that the above theme is taken from a familiar passage of Scripture found in Deuteronomy 29:29. The whole verse reads as follows: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." These words are a great statement of Moses, the man of God, spoken by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were a kind of general conclusion and summary application of all that Moses said in his last great farewell discourses to Israel. These words are at the same time a great statement concerning all of God's revelation which has wonderful application and significance for us and our children.

Often the above quoted verse has been misused. There are those who do not like any talk about God's sovereign and eternal counsel. They do not like to hear about God's eternal predestination, His purpose of election and reprobation. On the basis of this verse, these people would claim that all these things belong to the secret things of God. These truths ought not to be preached or talked about. To do so is to pry wrongly into the secret things of God. This is however a false application of this passage of God's Word. What these people claim belongs to the secret things of God are in fact part of the wonderful revelation of God to His people.

The book of Deuteronomy, from which the passage quoted above is taken, as well as the rest of Scripture, makes this abundantly clear. God revealed His eternal counsel to Israel. He told Israel that He had chosen her above all the nations of the earth to set His love upon her and to make her His own special and

peculiar people. God revealed His eternal counsel and purpose concerning Israel. He revealed His covenant promise to Abraham and the other patriarchs to make a great nation of Israel. Hundreds of years beforehand God revealed His promise to Abraham that He would give the land of Canaan to His people Israel as an inheritance. All through the history of Israel God declared what He was going to do with them. Again and again He reiterated His promise to give them the land of Canaan. He foretold that He would destroy Israel's enemies before them and give them a blessed and glorious land to possess.

In connection with the revelation of His covenant promises to Israel God also gave to Israel all of His statutes and ordinances and judgments. At Sinai God revealed Himself as the fearful holy and righteous God. God commanded Israel to love Him with all their hearts and souls and strength and mind and to keep all His commandments. He

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promised Israel great power and blessing and glory as long as they continued in His commandments. He warned them of awful judgments that would come upon them if they forsook the Lord and walked in the abominations of the heathen nations around them.

All these things belonged to the revealed things of God of which Moses spoke. Moses told Israel that there was no nation like Israel in all the earth who had God dwelling in her midst and who saw His great glory and power in signs and wonders. Israel was highly privileged to have such a great revelation of God. This revelation was given to Israel according to the sovereign grace of God because they were His chosen people. It was given for their great good that they might hope in God and serve Him with fear and trembling. This revelation was given to Israel also that they might pass it down from generation to generation that God might keep His covenant with them and that children might learn from their parents of the great salvation of God.

What a great wonder the revelation of God really is. Without that revelation we could know nothing about God or about His great and wonderful purpose of salvation. God is in Himself the unknowable one. He is infinite in His being, transcendent in heavenly majesty. No man has seen God at any time, for God cannot be seen. He is absolutely invisible in His being and purely spiritual in His essence. God can be known only through the wonder of His own self-revelation. He first revealed His own eternal power and godhead in the whole of His creation so that all men might know Him. After the fall the curse of God came upon man. The mind and heart of man was absolutely

darkened. He became utterly foolish and he walks about in darkness. But God, immediately after the fall, began to reveal Himself in a more wonderful way in the promise of the covenant. By the wonder of His grace and Holy Spirit He formed a people anew that could receive and understand this wonderful new revelation.

God has given the revealed things to His people. He has revealed Himself as the covenant God of His people. He has shown to them His sovereign and almighty power. He has shown to them His awful, perfect righteousness and holiness. He has shown them His faithfulness and loving kindness and tender mercy. God has shown to His people His eternal purpose to choose them as His own and to set His love upon them. He has shown to His people from the beginning of the world His great and glorious purpose to redeem His people and finally bring them to heavenly glory and blessing.

God has revealed the full glory of His revelation in His Son Jesus Christ who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. He has revealed in Jesus Christ His great love for His people by causing Him to die on the cross. He has revealed His almighty power and righteousness to raise up Jesus Christ from the dead and exalt Him at His own right hand. God has made known the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ among all the nations of the earth. God has revealed His purpose to choose His people out of all the nations of the earth. He made known that purpose already to our Father Abraham. God has revealed His glorious purpose to bring all of history to a climax with the blessed return of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. God has revealed the glorious future of the saints in

heavenly glory in the book of Revelation. All these things speak of the eternal counsel and purpose of God. These are not things which God has kept secret but things which He has through the ages revealed to His people for their hope and comfort.

God has revealed to His people His great purpose to make of them a holy and peculiar people in Christ Jesus. Therefore He has also revealed His holy law and righteous judgments. He has shown us again and again the fearful judgments that He sent not only upon the ungodly but even more so upon those who were called His people and who forsook His law and covenant. He has revealed all of this to us to warn us and to make us fear Him as a holy and righteous God. God has revealed to us our own sinfulness and weakness and inability to save ourselves. God has shown us the great need of daily repentance and of fleeing to Christ as the only hope of our salvation.

What a mighty and wonderful revelation is given to us by God. How privileged we are as God's church. We have a far more glorious and sure revelation than Israel of old had. Through this revelation we must learn to fear and to trust our God and to hope in His salvation. We must search His wonderful revelation as it is given to us in the Bible. It is inexhaustible in its greatness and glory. Never does the sincere child of God imagine that he has no more need of studying God's wonderful revelation. Even after many, many years of listening to the preaching of the Word of God and of studying of the Scriptures, we cannot even begin to fathom the depths of God's wonderful revelation to us. And God has given us this wonderful revelation of Himself according to the purpose of His covenant that we might also teach it to our

children. From generation to generation our children must learn the wonderful works of God that they too might learn to walk in godly fear.

There are also things which are secret. They are for the Lord our God. Because God is infinite in His greatness and glory and because our minds are by comparison very, very small, there are many things about the Lord our God that are far beyond our comprehension. There are aspects of His mysterious and wonderful sovereignty that God Himself has kept secret from us. We ought not to seek to pry into these things. We ought not foolishly to reply against God and call Him unjust when He

reprobates the ungodly in severe and perfect righteousness.

We know not why His purpose of reprobation sometimes includes our own children and relatives. God has kept secret from us also what is in store for our future. Sometimes the Lord leads us through deep ways of trouble and sorrow that we do not know. His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. God has kept secret from us the day when we must depart from this world and go on to heavenly glory. God has kept secret from us exactly who each one of His elect children are. He is the Lord God who has a purpose in keeping all these things secret. God has kept secret

also the day of our Lord's return. No man knows the day or the hour of that return. We are exhorted only to watch and to wait.

God's secrets will never disappoint us after we in His purpose come to know them. The secrets of God will never in any way contradict the glorious things He has revealed to us. God has revealed to us all that we need to know for our salvation.

Two things therefore we are to do. Continually we must search and know the wonderful things He has made known to us. And, as far as the secret things are concerned, with quiet trust we must leave them to the Lord our God. □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Clergy Malpractice Case Rejected: Church Has No Duty to Prevent Suicide

"Plaintiffs have failed to persuade us that the duty to prevent suicide (heretofore imposed only on psychiatrists and hospitals) . . . should be extended to a non-therapist counselor who offers counseling to a potentially suicidal person on secular or spiritual matters."

California Supreme Court,
Nally v. Grace Community Church, (Nov. 23, 1988).

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On April 1, 1979, Kenneth Nally, a 24-year-old seminary student suffering from chronic depression, committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun. Soon thereafter his parents filed a "clergy malpractice" suit against Grace Community Church of the Valley, a 10,000 member fundamentalist church near Los Angeles. The suit charged four pastors of the church (including the popular preacher Rev. John Mac Arthur) with negligence and "outrageous conduct" in failing to prevent the

suicide. Nally, a converted Catholic and a member of the church for about five years, had been counseled for some time by Mac Arthur and several of the church's pastors who engaged in spiritual "discipling" of troubled persons by fostering "mentoring" relationships. Church publications advertised that (absent physiological disorders) all emotional problems were caused by sin and were thus spiritual matters within the competence of the church's staff of 30 pastors/counselors. Among the disorders treated

were "drug abuse, alcoholism, phobias, deep depression, suicide, nervous breakdowns and schizophrenia."

Lower Court Imposes Duty to Refer

The *Nally* case caused widespread alarm among churches last year when a California appellate court ruled for the Nallys and imposed a new duty upon pastors (and other "nontherapist counselors") to refer potentially suicidal counselees to certified mental health professionals. The lower court also ruled that there was evidence that the church and her pastors may have engaged in "outrageous conduct" by teaching Nally and others that "suicide was an acceptable and even desirable alternative to living." This ruling shocked and angered the evangelical church world; Grace Church and John Mac Arthur immediately appealed to the California Supreme Court.

California Supreme Court Rejects Duty to Refer

The Supreme Court, in a recent ruling hailed by church leaders nationwide, overruled the lower court and refused to impose upon pastor/counselors such a duty to refer potentially suicidal persons to licensed professionals. The Court reasoned that because foreseeability of suicide is often tenuous, a workable standard of care would be almost impossible. Secondly, "public policy considerations" dictated that such a duty not be imposed. Finally, in a very brief reference to the church's many religious freedom defenses, the Court somewhat casually opined:

"Because of the differing theological views espoused by the myriad of religions in our state and practiced by church members, it could certainly be impractical, and quite possibly unconstitutional, to impose a duty of care on pastoral counselors. Such a duty would necessarily be intertwined with the religious philosophy

of the particular denomination or ecclesiastical teachings of the religious entity."

Outrageous Conduct

But in addition to the breach of the alleged duty to refer, the parents had also contended (and the lower court had agreed) that Grace Church's pastors were possibly guilty of "outrageous conduct" — teaching young Nally that suicide was an "acceptable or even desirable alternative to living."

To prove this unusual (and very serious) charge that the church actually *encouraged* Nally to commit suicide, the parents at trial produced an audio tape recording of a speech given by Pastor Richard Thomson on the "Theology of Suicide." Pastor Thomson, who had counseled Nally prior to his death, apparently stated the following regarding the church's teaching on suicide:

*"So it is very characteristic of the suicidal that it is fear of judgment that drives him into the death after which he will face that judgment, if he's an unbeliever. And after which if he is a believer, he'll go to be with the Lord. Yes, there'll be a loss of reward, but because of the Lord and his grace he'll go to be with the Lord. In fact, suicide is one of the ways that the Lord takes home a disobedient believer. * * * And suicide for a believer is the Lord saying, 'Okay, come on home. Can't use you anymore on earth. If you're not going to deal with those things in your life, come on home.'" [Emphasis added]*

The church argued vigorously that this tape excerpt was taken out of context and that the taped statements were irrelevant since they were uttered at a seminar eighteen months after Nally's death. Again overruling the lower court, the California Supreme Court agreed with the church and held that the taped statements did not establish that the church had engaged in the "outrageous conduct" of en-

couraging Nally's suicide. This court was also dismissed and the church was accordingly exonerated of the charge of contributing to Nally's mental distress and eventual suicide. *The Future of Clergy Malpractice Cases*

In a telephone interview a few days after the *Nally* opinion was released, the church's attorney, Sam Ericsson, announced to this writer that the "chilling effect on church counseling has now been lifted." In the future, claimed the effusive Ericsson, litigious persons will now be "less inclined" to initiate suits against churches and pastors for failure to prevent suicide. Although the California decision is not binding on other states, many believe the *Nally* decision sounds the death knell for suicide prevention cases against pastors who engage in spiritual counseling.

Less definitive, however, was the Court's ruling on the "outrageous conduct" cause of action. This is because the Court largely ignored the church's religious freedom argument that even "outrageous" beliefs are Constitutionally protected, choosing instead to base its decision solely upon the irrelevancy of the Thomson tape recording and the lack of other evidence.

A few "outrageous conduct" suits are still pending in other states for sexual seduction of counselees by pastors or for "invasion of privacy" and "infliction of mental distress" allegedly caused by harsh church discipline procedures. Unfortunately, it may be some time before the church/state and religious freedom issues are comprehensively addressed by the courts or legislatures in this new and alarming area of civil liability of churches and pastors. □

Guest Article

Rev. Kenneth Hanko

May Elders Teach?

Whether God has made two or three (or even four) offices in the church is an important question. Nevertheless, too great a concentration on this question may sometimes have diverted our attention from a question of greater importance for our times: Has God given to elders (or ruling elders, as they are called among the Presbyterians) authority to teach? Does teaching belong to their office? Are we to distinguish sharply between the offices of teaching and ruling, pastor and elder?

That the elders must teach if the congregation is without a pastor, and even that the elders really cannot do their work without teaching, few would deny. God has ordained that the life and nourishment of His people will be by the Word, and that spoken. A faithful elder cannot avoid teaching. Nevertheless we tend today to limit, beyond Scriptural justification, the authority of the elder to teach.

That the elder has authority to teach is not difficult to prove from Scripture. Consider these three arguments.

First, one of the qualifications for elder is the ability to teach. This teaching is, as I will show later, authoritative teaching of the Word.

Secondly, in Titus 1:9, the Holy Spirit tells us that the elder must be one who holds fast "the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able *by sound doctrine* [or teaching] both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit tells elders to do the work which we normally associate with the office of pastor (or teaching elder). In Acts 20:28 He says that the elders must "feed [shepherd, pastor] the church of God," and in I Peter 5:2 that they must "feed the flock of God." In both cases the word is the same which Jesus used in John 21:16 when He said to Peter, "Feed my sheep." It is the verbal form of the word found in Ephesians 4:11: "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, *pastors* and teachers." It covers everything that belongs to the care of the flock, even teaching.

That the preaching of the gospel and other teaching falls chiefly to the pastor does not mean that the elder must be excluded from this work. It seems to be that there is no Scriptural basis for limiting the elder's work and authority to family visitation, discipline, and an occasional catechism class or reading sermon. The teaching mentioned in Titus 1:9 and I Timothy 3:2 is the exposition and authoritative application of the Word of God to the people of God. The word

teaching (or doctrine), and the words derived from the same root: teach and teacher (frequently translated master), do not suggest any such limitation. They almost always designate teaching of the Word of God, and that according to the authority of an office. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit often uses these words in connection with the office of preacher. See, for some examples, I Timothy 2:7, 5:17, II Timothy 2:2, Titus 2:7, John 13:14, Ephesians 4:11, Matthew 28:20, and all the occurrences of these words in Acts. There is no reason for us to draw a sharp line of distinction between the teaching authority of the pastor and the teaching authority of the elder. It is proper that those trained specifically to preach do it. But, in the absence or for the good of the pastor, the elders may and ought to preach and teach with the authority of Christ.

All this implies that there is much involved in the qualifications "apt to teach."

First, there is knowledge. The elder must be a man who knows the Scriptures and the confessions of the church. He must be a man thoroughly acquainted with Reformed doctrine, and having some knowledge of the history of the church. In addition he ought to be familiar with the current issues and affairs of the church and world.

Secondly, the elder ought to be a man given to study. It is essen-

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tial to good teaching that the teacher be constantly learning. The elder ought to be a man who reads and studies the Scriptures and many other books. He must not rely on others for all his knowledge of the Scriptures. He needs personal acquaintance with them in order to be able to use them effectively. But neither must he rely only on himself for the interpretation of the Scriptures. God has given us a rich heritage for the interpretation of the Scriptures. God has given us a rich heritage of interpretation in the church. It is foolish in the extreme to ignore it. Besides, the elder needs to know how other people think, and what they have said.

Thirdly, the elder must be one who can understand the Scriptures and apply them to the people of God. He may seek help in this area from the pastor or others (there is nothing wrong with that), but he ought not to be completely at a loss if he cannot derive his material from another source.

Finally, he must have some capacity for public speaking and teaching. Excellent oratory and remarkable ability to teach are not necessary, but he must be able to present a subject coherently and in a way understandable and edifying to his audience, whether that audience be one man, a Bible study group, children, or the whole flock.

In order that the elder may be equipped for his work, training classes are necessary. The pastor or a knowledgeable and experienced elder could teach, or some other arrangements could be made, but the elders ought to see to it that training is available for those who want or need it. The classes do not necessarily have to be about the nature of the office, but may be about Reformed doctrine, current issues, public speaking, etc. Such classes ought

to be designed to meet the needs of the trainees. Some elders, though well equipped and experienced in most areas, will recognize weaknesses or ignorance in themselves, and will ask for help. Other elders, who have less experience and education, will need more extensive training. There may be some members of the congregation who "desire the office of bishop." These, too, ought to be instructed with a view to discovering their gifts and qualifications. Furthermore, the elders, in taking heed to themselves (Acts 20:28), will probably suggest to this or that elder that he receive further instruction in one or another aspect of his work. They may also ask a member of the congregation, who appears to them to have the qualifications of an elder, to seek instruction with a view to holding office.

Such things can only be for the good of the church. A strong, active, capable consistory (or session) will, by the grace of God, build a strong church. Weak and ill-equipped elders will tend to weaken the flock. Its spiritual health depends, to a large degree, on the faithfulness of its officers.

It happens far too often today that the pastor becomes the dominant figure in the congregation, and that the well-being of the congregation depends on his ability to do nearly all the work. Far too often the work of the elders is restricted in such a way that they are not visibly and actively the ones caring for the church, feeding the sheep, bringing back the wandering, binding up the broken, assisting the weak, carrying the young, and providing in every way for the needs of the flock. They become assistants to the pastor, and the church is really taught and governed by one man. This is

bad, and, for the good of the church, ought to be corrected.

That sort of situation may be, in part anyway, the fault of the pastor. Some pastors want to be little popes, or do not trust their elders to do the work. This distrust is often misplaced, but, even if it is not, the solution to the problem is not that the pastor take over all the work. It is more urgent than ever, then, that the elders be trained. In other cases the failure of the elders to do their work may be their own fault. Some elders feel inferior to their pastor because they do not have the education or gifts that he does. They will not assert themselves to do the work to which the Good Shepherd calls them. This is a mistake. The elders must rule their pastor, not he them. Besides, God never gives to one man all the gifts necessary for the well-being of His church. He distributes these gifts throughout the congregation so that each has a place and work in the body. Every qualified elder may be sure that he has gifts which are necessary to the well-being of the church. There are also some elders who do not work to equip themselves for the work. They must be admonished and corrected. Elders ought not to see themselves as the assistants of the pastor, but as his co-laborers in God's vineyard. Through their diligent care, Christ makes His branches bring forth abundant fruit. □

*Give a gift of
the Standard
Bearer to a
friend or loved
one today.*

The Day of Shadows

Rev. John A. Heys

A Step Toward the New Jerusalem

It was the devil, who had used the mouth of the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve, whom God addressed in what is called the mother promise of Genesis 3:15. Although by implication it is a rich covenant promise of salvation for the elect children of God, it was not addressed to man, although it was spoken in his hearing. Undeniably it was a gracious promise of complete salvation; and for Satan it was no promise but an announcement of coming punishment for him and his followers. Being called the mother promise it did cast a shadow of the complete and wonderful victory over Satan, over all the fallen angels, and over all the unbelievers who would be conceived and born on this earth.

Why was it not addressed to Adam and Eve? Because it presented that which still had to take place as far as the elect are concerned; and the punishment that falls on the ungodly must not be pushed into the background. God's sovereignty and holiness must be revealed and announced. What is more, Adam and Eve had died spiritually, even as God said that they

would, the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit. That being the case, they could not yet believe and rejoice in this wonderful truth of salvation. They must first be born again, before they could receive and enjoy that mother promise. To Satan God announces His intention to save them from his evil influence and power, make them spiritually alive, and implant in them love for Himself. We may believe, however, that even as He spoke this announcement of punishment upon Satan and his followers, and of putting all his work to naught, He did cause Adam and Eve to be born again and to believe this announcement as a promise to them. To them His word was a lamp unto their feet and a light upon their pathway, exactly because it was the revelation of God's sovereign grace and intent to realize a most wonderful salvation through the cross of His own Son. To Adam and Eve it was the gospel, because it assured them of the crushing of Satan's head through the crushing of the heel of God's Son.

Here also we have a shadow of what will take place in the human race. God will put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Bear in mind that Satan caused the whole human race to become enemies of God, as far as their hearts were concerned. Not only

is every descendant of Adam and Eve — except Christ, Who is the Son of God and was born of a virgin — born with a nature that hates God; but, as every man comes into this world spiritually dead, it is absolutely impossible for one to change himself and cause himself to begin to love God. In fact, every heart hates the very idea of being changed from hatred toward God unto love for Him. And God here promises to these spiritually dead enemies that He will make a complete change, by giving them a new spiritual life. In fact, what God promises here is a spiritual life that will not die, like Adam's and Eve's first spiritual life did die. Here is the shadow; but the reality we read of is in the New Testament in I John 3:9 where we read, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." That which does not exist cannot cast a shadow. Only real objects cast shadows. Here in the mother promise we have presented to us the shadow of what will be seen in the new Jerusalem, when we shall have bodies and souls that love God completely and unceasingly.

The question does arise, however, as to why the woman is mentioned and not the man. One might expect the promise to say that God would put enmity between the devil and the man. He

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is the head not only of the human race but also of the family. Some even question whether Adam was changed into a believer. They claim that only Eve was born again and hated the devil and sin, since Adam is not mentioned in this mother promise. Two things, therefore, must be stated. The woman was the first to sin, and she caused the man to sin by her desire to be like God, when Satan came to her with the lie. Assuring her of a spiritual change implies that he whom she deceived will also be changed and be made to hate the devil and sin. Since the promise is to the sinner who first fell, and who was used to get her husband to fall, it certainly includes him whom she induced into sin.

What is more, the word woman is not limited to Eve. It refers to the whole church — even as the words “thy seed,” which refers to all under Satan’s power, include not only the unbelieving world but also all the fallen angels who in a spiritual sense are also Satan’s seed. And do not overlook the fact that the church is the bride of Christ. All belonging to that woman are that true church, that bride of Christ, and are given this promise, whether they be male or female. However, it is given only to the elect in what man calls church. In fact, the very first child born to Adam and Eve, Cain the murderer, did not belong to that seed of the woman. He had enmity against the woman and her seed. In fact, an amazing shadow fell very early in the development of the human race, as we hope to consider next time, a shadow that revealed many descendants of the woman who hate the “seed of the woman.”

Now, having given Adam and Eve this promise, God drove them out of the garden of Eden. This brought a very painful and different life to the flesh of man.

In the sweat of his brow man would now have to work for his bread. But consider the fact that this also was a work of God’s grace, and that “all things work together” in that grace “for good to those that love God.” Take a good hold also on what Paul wrote after those words in Romans 8:28. In Romans 8:38, 39 he wrote, “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul could have said that before Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden. Then too he could have said that neither anything present, nor anything to come, could separate us from the love of God. Every act that God performs for and upon the seed of the woman, the church that is Christ’s bride, is one in love, mercy, and grace.

Yes, driving Adam and Eve out of the garden and into a realm of thorns and thistles was a shadow of what the church would have until Christ returns. We must not for a moment deny that God did this in His grace. Remember, first of all, that even though they were born again, they still had their old evil natures; and the temptation was there to go to that tree of life in an attempt to escape the death that God said would come upon them the day that they ate of that other special tree in the garden. From this sin they must be kept; and in the way of physical death they will go to that more wonderful life in the new Jerusalem, through Christ, The Seed of the Woman. You may be sure that the new temptation of Satan to get them to be like God, by the act of eating of that tree of life, and of putting to naught God’s word

that they would die, was there with tremendous power.

No, Adam and Eve must be driven out of that garden and away from that tree of life for their spiritual well-being. God’s grace keeps us from sin as well as from the punishment of sin. We are so often more — and often only — concerned with the punishment our sins demand, rather than with the sin itself. Satan tempted Adam and Eve and succeeded in getting them to sin. But God drives them away from the temptation of seeking to escape the punishment of that sin by eating of the tree of life. This he did in His love, mercy, and grace. And we do have a shadow of His protecting care upon the seed of the woman. There are sins we must commit because they are in His sovereign, eternal, unchangeable counsel. This sin of Adam and Eve was in that counsel and was therefore necessary, so that we could through the bruising of the heel of The Seed of The Woman reach a higher glory than man had before he fell. And the driving of man out of the garden is a shadow of man being led to the richer covenant fellowship we will have in Christ.

There are sins the seed of the serpent plans and wants to perform which are kept from them, not in a common grace, but in God’s providence. Esau wanted to and planned to kill Jacob. In His grace to His church, and in fulfilling that mother-promise to the seed of the serpent, the sovereign, almighty God kept him from that sin. This was not an act of common grace however. The mother promise clearly and undeniably teaches that God has no grace for the seed of the serpent. Their heads are going to be crushed! Ahab was not successful in his intention to kill Elijah; but his failure was not in any degree of grace toward him on

God's part. God's grace is only upon the seed of the woman. Yea, in that grace to His people God did decree that terrible sin of crucifying His Son for our salvation. That was in grace to the seed of the woman, for God's grace rests only upon them. We ought not confuse His providence with His grace.

God gives many earthly possessions to the seed of the serpent. In fact, He gave Satan life, and has not yet cast him into the lake of fire. He gave and kept in him a crafty, brilliant mind; but all this is not in His grace. God's grace is inseparable from His love and mercy. Call His deeds works of grace and you call them works of love and mercy. But listen to Him then, when in I John 2:15 He tells us not to love the world, and that if any man "love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." No, if there is a common grace of God, He would keep from the seed of the serpent earthly things, and give them a very short life. For then their sins would be less, and their punishment would not be as great as it is going to be. One has to be inseparably united to Christ in order to be dealt with in God's grace. One must be of the

seed of the woman in order to be a recipient of God's love and mercy, and thus also of His grace.

It was an act of God's grace to the seed of the woman that drove them away from that glorious life in the garden of Eden. In the first place, we need to feel the curse which we deserve, in order to be caused to look to God and that Seed of the woman, who will blot out our guilt and realize for us a kingdom far more wonderful, a kingdom of heaven where our covenant fellowship with God will be much richer than it could have been, had Adam not sinned; and much richer than Adam could have enjoyed apart from Christ and His cross.

Our flesh does not like our afflictions, and Adam and Eve suffered a tremendous loss as far as their flesh is concerned. But listen to God as He spoke through Paul in II Corinthians 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And let us go back again to what was quoted from Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good to those that love God." In that light we can see that man, being driven out of that beautiful

garden and away from that tree of life, was in God's grace led by Him in the right way.

And although it may not look that way to our natural eye, being driven out of the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were caused to take a step toward the new Jerusalem, where there will be no sin, and where covenant fellowship with God shall, through His Son and His cross (but also in His love, mercy, and grace) be indescribably greater and more wonderful. That step out of the garden was a shadow of our stepping forward to the new creation and to a life with God that Adam and Eve did not know before they fell.

Adam and Eve were leaving what we call paradise. But, as painful as it was, they were walking to that new Jerusalem. They seemed to be walking downhill; but actually, when we understand God's wisdom and grace in Christ, it was walking uphill to a far more wonderful life. And the death of a saint today is a step upward and not downward. David said that in Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Considering and Accepting Calls

Rev. Cammenga is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

"A minister, or, a lawfully called, may not leave the congregation with which he is connected, to accept a call elsewhere, without the consent of

the consistory, together with the deacons, and knowledge on the part of the classis; likewise no other church may receive him until he has presented a proper

certificate of dismissal from the church and the classis where he served." *Church Order*, Article 10.

INTRODUCTION

There are several articles of the *Church Order* which deal with the calling of a minister. Articles 3 and 4 warn against the evil of men preaching without a call and without proper examination. Article 5 stipulates how a minister serving in one congregation may be called by a vacant congregation. Article 9 warns against the calling of novices. Article 10, now, lays down the stipulations that must be met when a minister accepts a call to a new congregation.

It is worthwhile noticing the original form of Article 10:

A minister, once lawfully called, may not leave the congregation which unconditionally received him, to accept a call elsewhere, without the consent of the consistory and the deacons, and those who previously held the office of elder and deacon, together with the magistrate, nor without the knowledge of the classis; likewise no other church shall be permitted to receive him until he has presented a lawful certificate of dismissal from the church and the classis where he served.

In distinction from our present article, the original article made reference to a minister who was called "unconditionally." In the early history of the Reformed churches it was not uncommon that ministers received "conditional" calls, that is, calls that were not indefinite, but temporary, limited tenure. Conditional calls were extended usually under two circumstances. First, conditional calls were often extended to ministers who had been forced to flee their previous congregation because of persecution. Such a man might be called conditionally by the congregation in the place to which he had fled. He would serve as the pastor of that congregation until conditions made it possible for him to return

to his previous flock, which he would then be free to do. Conditional calls were also sometimes extended when a congregation was unfamiliar with a man. He would be given a period of probation during which his gifts could be examined. If after the probationary period the consistory was satisfied that he possessed the necessary qualifications for the ministry, they would call him unconditionally. If they felt he lacked the necessary qualifications, they would withdraw the call. This practice of "conditional" calls is no longer followed in Reformed churches.

The original article, in distinction from our present article, also calls for the consent to a minister's accepting of a call, not only of the serving elders and deacons, but of those who previously served in these offices. This practice was laid aside in the revision of Article 10.

The original article also makes reference to a consenting role of the magistrate in the matter of a minister's accepting of a call. This was deemed unlawful interference by the magistrate into the affairs of the church and was also dropped from the article in later revisions.

TWO EXTREME POSITIONS

Especially in the early centuries of the Reformation, this article was interpreted in such a way that the power to decide a call was placed almost entirely with the consistory. The judgment of the consistory was considered decisive. Consistories even forced ministers to stay against their will or to appeal to the classis for permission to accept calls.

Dr. H. Bouwman in his *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*, vol. I, pp. 444, 445 cites several examples. In 1601 a Rev. Vosculus of Epe wanted to accept a call from Steenwijk, but the classis

ruled that he should stay at Epe. In 1604 a Rev. William Crynsz, preacher at Maasland, accepted a call from Den Briel. The consistory of Maasland and the Classis of Delft ruled that he should stay. It was only after the Synod of South Holland reversed the decision of his consistory and classis that Crynsz was permitted to go to Den Briel. In 1620 a Rev. Hanecopius of Breda accepted a call from Gouda. Contrary to the advice of the Synod of South Holland, the consistory of Breda insisted that their pastor should stay. In the end, Hanecopius honored the decision of his consistory.

Later the pendulum swung in the other direction, and the decision with respect to a call came to rest almost entirely with the minister. More and more the consent of the consistory became merely a formality. In our day, it cannot be denied that the consistory plays little active part in the matter of their pastor's calls, unless there is some very serious reason to prevent him from considering a call. In our own churches this is often the case. The consistory has little input into the decision that is finally made, but for the most part simply acquiesces to the decision of the minister.

PRINCIPLES IMPLIED IN ARTICLE 10

The first important principle implied in Article 10 is that the "connection" between a minister and a congregation is established by Christ Himself. The exalted Christ gives pastors and teachers to His church (Eph. 4:11, 12). This is true not only of the church generally, but of each church in particular. Since it is Christ Himself who establishes the bond between a minister and his congregation, this bond must not be easily broken. Both the minister and the consistory must be sure that it is Christ Himself

who breaks the existing bond in order to establish a new one.

The second principle that is implied in this article is that, since the bond that unites a minister to his congregation is not of his own doing, it is not either entirely a matter of his own doing to break that bond. Christ called him to that particular congregation. The congregation voted to extend a call to him. The consistory approved his being called and, on behalf of the congregation, actually issued the call. Since the minister did not all on his own establish himself as the pastor of the congregation in which he is serving, he may not all on his own leave the ministry of that particular congregation for another.

Thirdly, the office of the ministry is under the supervision of the consistory. This is stated explicitly in Article 23 of the *Church Order*: "The office of the elders . . . is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and deacons, faithfully discharge their office" The fact that the elders have supervision over the minister implies an active role in the calls which their minister receives.

In the fourth place, the minister himself is responsible prayerfully to determine before the face of God whether his work is finished in his current charge and God calls him to take up labor elsewhere. The minister must discern the Lord's will with respect to every call that he receives. It is through prayer that he is able to learn God's will and is thus able also to make a proper decision on each call.

MINISTER'S DECISION DECISIVE

Even though the consistory ought to be involved in the calls that their minister receives, the right to decide a call conclusively belongs to the minister, not to the consistory. He is the one

called, and he is the one required to make a decision ultimately on that call. Rev. G.M. Ophoff writes:

In fine, the only one to conclusively decide whether the call should be accepted or declined is the minister called. From the very nature of things, the right in question belongs to him alone. He must choose which of the two churches he will now continue to serve. What his choice ought to be is a matter to be settled between him and the Lord. (Standard Bearer, vol. 9, p. 308)

The Synod of Vriesland took the following decision to guard ministers against the encroachment of consistories on their consideration of calls:

A minister shall be at liberty to specify the conditions under which he can accept a call extended to him, provided he has any that are in agreement with God's will and with His Word, and in all such instances he shall be allowed to follow the voice of conscience if the reasons he advances for deciding to depart are fair and cogent.

This does not conflict with the role given the consistory by Article 10. The article speaks of "consent" of the consistory. This is not the same as "to decide." One can give consent or agree with a matter that has already been decided upon. The act of deciding precedes the act of giving consent. The very fact that the consistory is called upon to give its consent implies that the decision with respect to the call rests with the minister. It would be foolish to state that a consistory must give consent to its own decision.

Nor does this minimize the role of the consistory in the matter of the calls received by its minister. Although the minister must make the ultimate decision, he must obtain the "consent" of the consistory. Rev. Ophoff also writes:

But we believe that the consistory . . . should in conjunction with its pastor weigh the call and reach a definite conclusion respecting it, which conclusion it should lay before the pastor not with a view to setting itself up as an overruling factor that takes no account of solemn convictions, but with a view to aiding the pastor in choosing the right course. (Standard Bearer, vol. 9, p. 308)

In conclusion, we may make a threefold distinction with respect to the calls received by a minister. First, there is an active and decisive role belonging to the minister himself. Second, there is an advisory and consenting role belonging to the consistory. It stands to reason that the question for the consistory members is not whether personally they like the minister and want him to stay or not. But the question is whether there are weighty grounds for the consistory to judge that the minister either should accept or should decline a call. There may be reasons why the consistory should judge that he must decline the call, or not even consider it. There may be reason in the minister himself, some charge pending before the consistory concerning the minister's doctrine or life. Or there may be reasons in the congregation, such as some trouble which demands the presence and help of the minister. Or there may be reasons for the consistory to judge that the minister's work is finished in the congregation and he ought to accept the call to labor elsewhere. Third, there is a supervisory role belonging to the churches in common and exercised by the classis. The article speaks of "knowledge on the part of the classis." This does not simply mean that the classis takes cognizance of a minister's decision to accept a call to some new congregation. But the classis too must give its consent. It does this by approving a document

known as a "Ministerial Certificate Of Dismissal And Testimonial." This may be done by the classis itself or, if the classis is not in session, by the classical committee on behalf of the classis.

PROCEDURE FOR CONSIDERING CALLS

Proper procedure for considering calls is that, after he has received a call, a minister ask permission of his consistory to consider the call. Permission may be granted, or permission may be denied for weighty reasons. If the consistory grants the minister permission to consider the call, he considers the call, usually for a period of three weeks, during which time the consistory gives the minister its advice with respect to the call. At the end of

the three weeks, the minister reaches a decision and informs his consistory. The consistory then must acquiesce to the decision of the minister, or disapprove his decision. If there is disagreement between the minister and his consistory, the way of appeal to classis and even to synod, if need be, is left open. If the minister accepts the call, and his consistory acquiesces to his decision, he is granted the necessary certificate of dismissal, which must receive the approval of the classis he is leaving as well as the classis he is entering before he can be installed in his new congregation.

Two decisions have been appended by our churches in Article 10. The first is:

When a minister accepts a call he shall ask of the consistory dismissing him to grant him a fitting testimonial bearing witness of faithful service performed, according to Article 5 of the Church Order, and expressing acquiescence in his departure, according to Article 10 of the Church Order. This testimonial shall be sent to the classical committee for examination and approval; thereupon it shall be delivered to the counselor who, upon finding it in good order, shall only thereupon proceed with the installation."

The second decision is:

A minister who moves to another congregation becomes the charge of that congregation (for salary, etc.) immediately after he has preached his farewell to the congregation he is leaving (unless other arrangements have been made, e.g. for the taking of a vacation). □

Book Reviews

COMMENTARY ON JUDE, by Thomas Manton (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988; 384 pp.; \$13.95; paper). Reviewed by Professor David J. Engelsma.

Thomas Manton was a Presbyterian preacher in London, England in the 17th century. His *Commentary on Jude* was first published in 1658. It richly deserves its fortune of being republished down through the years.

Manton has correctly grasped the thrust of Jude: the command to the church to contend for the Christian Faith against those enemies within, whom we would call antinomians but whom Man-

ton calls the "fanatical and libertine party" (p. 14). The error of such church members was that "in the gospel chiefly they abused the doctrine of Christian liberty and free justification by Christ" (p. 152). This makes a commentary on Jude especially useful in our own day, when the churches miserably fail to contend earnestly for the faith, by sharp, antithetical preaching and resolute discipline, and when the grossest iniquities are resting comfortably upon the pillow of free grace, in the churches.

The commentary is full of solid, sound doctrine. Explaining the words of verse 4, "who were

before of old ordained to this condemnation," Manton "opens," proves, vindicates, and applies the doctrine of reprobation, explaining that reprobation "is an eternal decree"; that "there is a decree and pre-ordination, not only a naked foresight of those that perish"; that "this decree of God is founded in His own goodwill and pleasure"; and more (pp. 136ff.).

But the special power and appeal of the commentary lie in the application of sound doctrine. Manton himself calls it "a practical commentary" (p. 6). This was a gift in which the Puritans (to whom Manton belonged)

abounded, and one from the exercise of which we can learn. Commenting on Jude's statement that the ungodly men "crept in unawares," Manton comes to application:

Learn hence to be more watchful in admissions to the church: no perils so great as those occasioned by false brethren. We think to fill the church, but we do but fill the house with thieves: wicked men ever prove a trouble. It is an easy matter to fill the church by remitting the rigour and severity of discipline; but heaven is never the fuller, but the emptier, for wicked men are hardened and confirmed in their own security; and the church never fareth the better, it loseth in strength what it gets in breadth, as a river doth, and zeal is lessened the more the number is increased: yea, wicked men usually prove a trouble, and we come to wish afterward we had been more strict . . . when the church keep a strait hand, hypocrites dare not join, but sound believers will the sooner, and then the church, though it be a lesser body, it is more sound, healthy, and active (p. 130).

And this, 300 years before "church growth" has been exalted into a theological science!

Admittedly, Manton tends to be too expansive in his comments, sometimes preaching the sermon on the text, instead of only interpreting the text. But his doctrinal soundness, his practical wisdom, and his eloquent style — the book is full of pithy, memorable expressions — bless this expansiveness so as to make the book delightful devotional reading for every believer, as well as a help to the preacher. □

REVIVAL, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987. Pp. vi - 316. \$9.95 (paper).

SAVED IN ETERNITY: THE ASSURANCE OF OUR SALVATION, by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988. Pp. 1-187. (Reviewed by Prof. R.D. Decker)

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899 - 1981) was one of the greatest evangelical preachers of the twentieth century. His many volumes of printed sermons continue to inspire and instruct thousands of God's people, preachers, and laypersons alike. Lloyd-Jones gave up a promising career in medicine to become a minister of the gospel. From 1938 he co-pastored the great Westminster Chapel in London with G. Campbell Morgan. Upon the latter's death in 1945, Lloyd-Jones became the pastor of Westminster until he retired in 1968.

Lloyd-Jones was a strong advocate of expository preaching. A sermon must be "exposition moulded into a message." (Cf. his book, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 72.) By exposition Lloyd-Jones meant exegesis. A sermon must be exegetically based. It must explain the meaning of the text. Lloyd-Jones did not approve of what he called "topical preaching with a moral twist" (*Preaching and Preachers*, p. 59). Was his practice consistent with his theory of preaching? We think not, at least not in the two books under review.

Both books are collections of sermons preached in Westminster Chapel. *Revival* contains twenty-four sermons preached on the subject of revival in 1959 upon the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Welsh Revival. *Revival* Lloyd-Jones describes as a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon many. He saw several hindrances to this happening in his day. A denial of the authority of the Bible, a denial of the essential truths about our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fact that society "has become amoral," Lloyd-Jones saw as hindrances to revival. Church history indicates that a rediscovery of the vital truths of Scripture always accompanies periods of revival. For this God's people

must pray fervently, and these great truths must be faithfully preached. By these means God may bring revival to the church once more.

Lloyd-Jones certainly has many good things to say about revival. And who would not like to see a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church? From the point of view of homiletics, however, it must be said that these sermons are not exegetically based, nor are they constructed textually. One cannot call them exposition molded into message. The content is biblical, but is not derived from the text itself. The sermons are topical. This book would make for good devotional reading. It contains interesting insights into the revival of 1859 in Wales.

The same is true of *Saved In Eternity*, though to a lesser extent. This book contains thirteen sermons based on John 17:1-5. The first two are by no means expositions of verse one. They are on the subject of prayer. They do present an excellent summary of the Bible's teaching on this subject. Therein lies the value of the book. The other sermons in the series are more expository. If one is searching for insights into the subject of prayer, as well as for some rather profound insights into our Lord's beautiful prayer recorded in John 17, he will do well to purchase this book and read it carefully. The sermons in both of these books, however, ought not be used as models of what expository (exegetical, textual) preaching ought to be. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

December 15, 1988
HISTORY OF SOUTHWEST

On September 23 of this year, the congregation of our Southwest Church in Grandville, Michigan met to dedicate the sixth building they have used for the worship of our God. Besides worshipping in six different places, Southwest has also had four different names over the years, while the body remained the same.

Southwest P.R.C. (Second P.R.C., Roosevelt Park P.R.C.)



Rev. Kamps behind the pulpit at Southwest's new church.

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

was first organized as the Roosevelt Park Protestant C.R.C. on July 12, 1926 by sixteen families under the sponsorship of Eastern Avenue Protestant C.R.C.

Southwest's first meeting place was above what is now the Jurgens and Holtvluwer Dept. Store on Grandville Ave. in Grand Rapids.

In 1929, Rev. B. Kok, then a candidate from our seminary, accepted the call and became Southwest's first pastor. In that same year the congregation moved into a building on Roosevelt Ave. and thus changed their name to the Roosevelt Park P.R.C.

These were the years of the Great Depression. The pastor was called on the basis of a \$1500.00 a year salary. This amount decreased steadily until in 1936 the salary was reported to be \$1400.00 and the total budget was \$3500.00, or \$1.20 per family per week.

In 1936 Rev. Kok left to become our churches' first Home Missionary, and in 1937 Rev. R. Veldman became Southwest's second pastor.

In 1938 Southwest began to build a new church building at a total completed cost of \$9,000.00.

After Rev. Veldman left, God sent Rev. M. Schipper to take up his labors among the congregation.

In 1942 Southwest again found it necessary to change their name, this time to the Second P.R.C.

In 1945 Rev. Schipper left and Rev. S. Cammenga took up his labors. When he in turn accepted a call, the congregation welcomed Rev. J. Blankespoor in 1949.

In 1953 Southwest faced a difficult time. Only two of their deacons remained faithful to the truth of God as taught in our churches. They left the Blankespoor group to continue the congregation started 27 years earlier. Southwest dropped from 85 families to less than 40. They lost everything but the truth. They began meeting in a Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Rev. M. Schipper returned to become their pastor and lead them through these difficult years.

In 1957 the congregation moved into their fifth place of worship, a building purchased from the Beverly C.R.C., and they changed their name to the Southwest P.R.C.

After Rev. Schipper's departure, God sent next Rev. G. Lubbers. After he became missionary to the island of Jamaica, God sent Rev. H. Veldman.

It was during his pastorate that a committee was organized to investigate the possibility of building. In 1978 construction began on the first phase of this long-range building project.

After Rev. Veldman's retirement in 1978, Candidate M. DeVries was ordained and became Southwest's 9th pastor. In 1985 he left for Minnesota and

Rev. M. Kamps became their next pastor and by God's grace serves there today.

In 1986 the go-ahead was given to make plans to build the final phase of their building project. And in September of this year the new sanctuary, along with a new Rogers organ, was dedicated to the Faithful King of the church.

Today Southwest is made up of over 75 families, with more than 120 young children, and it also has two dozen single adults. Its constituency ranges from many younger couples to a couple in their 90's. Retired couples, widows, and widowers are also counted among their number.

The areas in which their members are employed covers a broad field: salesmen, the building trades, office work, medical fields, factory workers, and over a dozen teachers. There are also several members who are college students.

In other church news for this issue:

CHURCH NEWS

Our congregation in South Holland, Illinois has formed a new trio of the Revs. R. Dykstra, B. Gritters, and M. Kamps.

The congregation in Faith Church in Jenison, Michigan formed a trio which included Revs. Gritters, Joostens, and Van Overloop. The call went to Rev. Gritters.

We also found that our Domestic Mission Committee voted to concur with our Wyckoff, New Jersey church in granting approval of our Covenant P.R. Mission Church in Nor-

ristown, Pennsylvania to organize formally as a Protestant Reformed Church. This request will now be sent on for final approval by Classis East.

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Late news from our Pella Church in Pella, Iowa. On October 21, Prof. Hanko presented a lecture on creation (the same lecture he gave earlier in Grand Rapids). Pella's auditorium was filled to overflowing.

In connection with the above I quote a portion of a letter received by the Evangelism Committee of our Southeast Church, sponsors of that first lecture:

"I praise God when His truth is proclaimed and I thank Him that He raised up men in these last days who are not ashamed to speak, 'Thus saith the Lord.'"

The Hope Young People's Society sponsored a 3-on-3 basketball tournament at Covenant High School in Walker, Michigan. All ages were invited to play. Proceeds were for the 1989 Young People's Convention.

On November 20, our congregation in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada met for the first time in their new church building. □

COURSE OF STUDY FOR ELDERS

Four consecutive Monday evening sessions will take place beginning January 9th, 1989 at 7:30 P.M. Sessions will be held at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Prof. Robert Decker will be the instructor. The

course includes: The idea, the qualifications and the duties of the office. Also, family visitation, visiting the sick and comforting the bereaved. Urged to attend are Elders and Deacons — present and past, plus other men who have an interest in a study of this nature.

ANNIVERSARY ANNOUNCEMENT

On January 14, 1989 our parents and grandparents, **Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Windemuller** will celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

We are thankful to our Heavenly Father for the blessings bestowed on them and us these many years.

We rejoice with them on this happy occasion and pray the Lord will bless them and keep them in His care.

"For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endureth to all generations." (Ps. 100:5)

Their children & grandchildren:

Glen & Judy Windemuller
Steven & Jeanne, Jill
Bob & Mary Windemuller
Ann, Eric, Erin
Ger & Elaine Koop
Jerry Jr. & Pat, Jim, Lisa, Scott

Paul & Kathy Windemuller
Randy, Mike
Bern & Marcia Ten Broeke
Kyle, Seth

Randy & Susan Boeve
Jeanine, Tyson

John & Mary Windemuller
Rachel, Amanda

and two great-grandchildren:
Jaime, Brandon Koop