

**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

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# THE STANDARD BEARER

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*His death was not necessarily more illustrious than the death of other saints. But he (Polycarp) provides for us an example of faithfulness in martyrdom, a testimony to the power of the grace of Christ in great suffering, and an enduring encouragement for God's saints today who suffer for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

*See Polycarp: Martyr of Christ — page 32*

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## In This Issue . . .

Those of our readers whose subscription to the S.B. dates back some years will know that "A Cloud of Witnesses," which appears in this issue as a new rubric, is not really new. Rev. Bernard Woudenberg wrote under that title from 1958 through 1971. The cloud of witnesses to which that title referred consisted of the saints of the old dispensation, as Rev. Woudenberg devoted his space in the *Standard Bearer* to a study of Old Testament history.

That's a biblical expression, of course, coming as it does from Hebrews 12:1. The reference there is to saints of old whose lives, through the pages of Holy Writ, continue to serve as a testimony to the church of Christ. The term "cloud" suggests a great multitude — a multitude, in fact, which has become even more vast since the time the epistle was written. For, not only does an *Abel*, being dead, yet speak (Heb. 11:1), but so also does an *Ursinus*, an *Augustine* . . . and a *Polycarp* speak. Their lives, their sufferings, and often, their deaths attest most eloquently of their faith, and therefore serve also as a stimulus to ours . . . provided our knowledge of them goes beyond a mere recognition of their names.

Does it? It has been correctly observed that "spiritual amnesia" is "characteristic of so much contemporary Christianity." That ought not to be so, with us. The record of the pilgrimage of the church of Christ across the centuries is available to us in order that the "voices" of so vast a cloud of witnesses, speaking as it were from all sides and in countless ways, may encourage us in our contest of faith.

. . . if we know them. Our hope is that Prof. Hanko's short accounts of the lives of major figures in church history will in themselves be a source of encouragement, and, at the same time, entice us to draw more deeply out of the historical treasures of our Christian heritage. See "Polycarp: Martyr of Christ." □

-D.D.

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## Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

# Peace Through Justification

*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*  
—Romans 5:1

The great Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was sparked by Martin Luther's search for peace with God.

Peace with God is the most precious treasure a man can possess. This peace is enjoyed by those only who are right with God.

The church told Martin Luther that to be right with God and have peace with God he must obey the commandments of God and the church. But try as he might, Martin Luther could find no peace. He did all that the church required. But, for all that, he was convinced in his soul that he had not done enough. He was not right with God and could find no peace.

This drove Martin Luther to the Scriptures, where he rediscovered the great truth of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

We are made right with God not by what we do but by what Jesus has done for us on the cross. We must not stand before God in our own righteousness or obedience, but in the

righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Christ is ours by faith alone in Jesus.

With this truth Martin Luther finally found peace with God. With this truth God used Martin Luther to spark a great reformation in the church.

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

Peace with God!

Peace with God is an inner peace of heart and soul as one stands face to face with God.

Every day we stand face to face with God. This is true because of God's revelation. God reveals Himself to man in His Word, the Bible. Whenever we are confronted with this Word of God, we stand face to face with God.

God also reveals Himself through the creation. The invisible things of God are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (Romans 1:20). The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge (Psalm 19:1, 2). Wherever we look, therefore, we see God and stand face to face with Him.

Through His revelation God makes known to us, first of all, His will. Through ten commandments, which touch upon every

area of our life, God shows to us how we are to serve Him in love.

Furthermore, God makes known to us that He is our Judge, Who judges us according to His law. Those who are able to stand before Him in perfect obedience (righteousness) God will bless with every good thing. Those, however, who stand before Him in sin, having fallen short of His commandments, God will destroy.

This is the revelation of God in holy Writ.

This is also the revelation of God to those who have not the Word, but see God only in creation. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another (Romans 2:14, 15).

We have peace with God only when, standing face to face with God through His revelation, we are confident that God will judge us to be righteous before Him and thus will bless us with His boundless goodness. Should we have doubts about God's judgment upon us, or should we be convinced that God's judgment will be unfavorable, our soul will be tormented day and night.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan.*



Those who seek to stand before God on the basis of their own works will find no peace with God.

There were those in the early Christian church who advocated exactly that: we are to stand before God on the basis of our own achievements. They taught that everyone is able to keep God's law perfectly. And this is exactly what we must do to obtain a favorable judgment of God. We must walk in perfect obedience to God's law. This obedience constitutes our righteousness before God on the basis of which God receives us and blesses us with every good thing. Our righteousness before God is therefore a self-righteousness. We are justified (i.e., declared righteous by God) on the basis of our works.

This same teaching in a somewhat modified form was taken up by the Roman Catholic church later on in history. Rome taught (and still does) that a man is justified, at least in part, by his own works.

In this epistle to the church of Rome the apostle Paul shows the dreadful error of this position. By the direction of the Holy Spirit Paul teaches that when Adam sinned at the very dawn of history the whole human race sinned in and through him. The result of this original sin of mankind is that death came upon the whole race. This death is not just physical but also spiritual. This death deprives man of all the good gifts which he received through creation and which enabled him to serve God in love. This death leaves man evil, corrupt, depraved, capable only of living in sin against God. In that death man is born. Unless he is changed by a new birth in Jesus Christ, man continues in that death throughout his entire

earthly existence, sinking deeper and deeper into the cesspool of sin.

Man, therefore, has no righteousness that he can present before God. The man who stands before God with his own works will surely be condemned by God and will fall under the eternal weight of God's wrath.

By the works of the law is no man justified before God.

Of this truth every man is most keenly aware. For God has not only revealed it in His written Word; He also speaks the same thing to every man through his conscience. So, when Martin Luther sought to be right with God on the basis of his own works as he was taught by his church, he found no peace. His own conscience condemned him. For all his works and efforts he was not right with God. His soul was tormented day and night.

Such is the experience of all who seek peace with God, contrary to the spiritual realities of life.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are justified, not by works which we do, but by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Because of our inability to stand before God in our own righteousness, God graciously provides us with a righteousness that is not our own.

He provides this righteousness in Jesus Christ, His Son. Through His suffering and death on the cross, Christ paid the price of sin. Through His perfect obedience before God, Christ met every obligation of the divine law. And this is the righteousness we need to stand before God and receive a favorable judgment of God.

The glorious reality of justification is that God accounts the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be our righteousness, so that we appear before God righteous in Jesus Christ, heirs to God's eternal blessings.

And the beautiful thing about the justification of God is that it is a free gift of His grace. We need not make ourselves worthy of the righteousness of Christ; we need not do something to merit this righteousness. In fact, we are not able to do so. God provides us with the righteousness of Christ as a free gift of grace. In fact, he grants this gift to all whom He has ordained to eternal life.

Consequently, we are justified not by works but by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Faith is God's gift to His people, that brings them into spiritual connection with Jesus Christ. For through faith we are led, first, to a godly sorrow over our sins. This sorrow in turn leads us to God in prayer to seek the forgiveness of sins. But those who so approach God in faith do not base their plea of forgiveness on what they themselves have done or promise to do. Their trust is in the perfect work of Christ. They rely on the perfect righteousness of Christ. He is the basis for their plea and request.

And so it is that in the way of faith God reckons the righteousness of Christ as ours.

We are justified not by works but by faith alone.

When, therefore, we stand before God our judge, let us cast our works aside and cling by faith to Jesus Christ and His righteousness.

Then we shall be justified!

And then we will have peace with God! □



# A Festive Convocation The Rural, Isolationist, and Deformed PRC

## A Festive Convocation

The evening of September 6, 1989 witnessed a festive gathering at the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan. A goodly number of men and women from Western Michigan responded to the invitation of the Theological School Committee to attend the ceremony of convocation marking the beginning of the school-year of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Members of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois made the trip of over 300 miles to join in the festivities.

The church building was filled to capacity.

Rev. Barrett Gritters, president of the TSC, welcomed the audience and remarked on the reason for coming together. After opening prayer, he read the second chapter of II Timothy, in which the apostle commands Timothy, "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (v. 2).

The Hope Heralds, a male chorus under the direction of Mr. Gerald Kuiper, sang the rousing hymn, "Rise Up O Men of God," and an arrangement of the profound first question of the Heidel-

berg Catechism, "The Song of Comfort."

The address by the most recent addition to the faculty of the Seminary was entitled, "The Task of the PRC with Their Seminary."

The rector, Professor Robert Decker, introduced the seminary students, Mr. Mitchell Dick, a third-year seminarian, and Mr. Leonard Holstege, Jr., a first-year seminarian. Three young men will be taking certain pre-seminary courses at the Seminary, while they attend area colleges. The rector informed the gathering that several young men, most of whom are presently in college, have recently indicated their intention to enter the Seminary. They include men outside the Protestant Reformed denomination, as well as members of these churches.

After singing by the audience of a versification of Psalm 111, "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name" (v. 9), Professor Herman Hanko led in seeking God's blessing upon the work of the Seminary in prayer. A time of fellowship followed in Byron's fellowship hall.

It was an encouraging evening for the work of the churches in our Seminary.

The speech will be published in *The Standard Bearer* in two installments, beginning with the November 1 issue. □ -DJE

## The Rural, Isolationist, and Deformed PRC

It seems that the Rev. Steve M. Schlissel, stormy petrel in the Christian Reformed Church, is determined to have a controversy with the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Not long ago, in a public lecture that was intended to deal with evils in his own denomination, this Christian Reformed minister gratuitously threw in the remark that the PRC are "dead wrong" on the issue of common grace. In the September 11, 1989 issue of *Christian Renewal* (a CR religious periodical out of Canada), he informs us that he has since downgraded his adverse judgment upon the PRC to merely "just plain wrong."

It will not shock Rev. Schlissel, I trust, to hear that his magnanimity does not send the PRC into paroxysms of ecstasy. Still less are we inclined to celebrate our redemption from the realm of the "dead wrong" into some more blissful region of the "just plain wrong" in view of Rev. Schlissel's further, even sorer, and (so far as I am aware) entirely unprovoked assault on



the PRC. In the same article in which he snatches the PRC from the company of the "dead wrong," he rails against them as rural, isolationist, obsessed, and deformed:

*... the anti-common-grace error is related to rationalism ... it is interesting that its adherents have been mainly rural and isolationist, far from the biblical example of Christians whose faith could thrive in cities ... they (the PRC - DJE) have become obsessed with one issue to the point of deformity — one can barely find anything any one of them has ever written which fails to mention (harp on?) this issue.*

It will come as something of a surprise to many PR heads of high-powered businesses and corporations, to PR men in virtually all the professions, and to the overwhelming majority of the PR membership, men and women, who live and work in the cities of North America — Chicago; Edmonton; Grand Rapids; Houston; Los Angeles; Philadelphia; and others, to learn that they are rural and isolationist.

Besides, a slur is cast against the farmers and against the inhabitants of the smaller, country towns. A farmer's wife in North-west Iowa can be cosmopolitan in her outlook. Indeed, the Reformed faith gives all its people a concern for the universal church and an interest in world-events. On the other hand, a man may live in the heart of New York city, but be provincial in spirit — an urban bumpkin.

What Rev. Schlissel intends, of course, is to ring the changes on the hoary charge by the advocates of common grace, that the PR denial of common grace and confession of the (spiritual) antithesis between the elect church and the ungodly world amount to an anabaptistic penchant for physical world-flight. As the monks of old fled to their monasteries, the PRC withdraw to the country, there, presum-

ably, to tend some livestock, chant "TULIP," and let the rest of the world go by.

By renewing this charge, the CR pastor declares that the ills of the CRC (many and serious, according to Rev. Schlissel) are unrelated to that church's commitment to the philosophy of common grace as formulated in the synodical decisions of 1924. It is foolish of the PRC to make so much of the issue that resulted in their separate existence. In fact, although no longer "dead wrong," they are "just plain wrong" in their confession of particular, sovereign grace; of the total depravity of the unregenerate; and of the life-and-death seriousness of the call to every believer, to be separate, spiritually, from this present evil world.

That the ecclesiastical warrior from the Bronx falls upon the PRC, hacking and hewing, is unexpected. One would think that he had opportunities enough for his martial energies in his own denomination. One might even put to him as a minister in the CRC and therefore corporately responsible for the decisions and practices of his church the question of our Lord in Matthew 7:4: "how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"

Secretly, a member of the PRC (hope springing eternal in the human breast!) might even have entertained the thought that a Reformed preacher who has expressed his love for the Reformed traditions would have a word of praise for a denomination of Reformed churches that still steadfastly holds the faith and life set forth in the Three Forms of Unity. Instead, the PRC receive a crueler, more cutting, and more contemptuous criticism from this "conservative" than the "liberals" are wont to give.

It is the judgment of Rev. Schlissel that the doctrine of common grace has nothing to do with the woes that he so loudly laments in his own church. It is the judgment of Rev. Schlissel that the PR controversy with common grace as adopted and enthusiastically put into practice by the CRC is an exercise in futility. It is the judgment of Rev. Schlissel that the issue fought out in 1924 in the CRC, resulting in the CR adoption of a doctrine that has God loving all men in the gospel of Jesus, that has the unregenerate only partially depraved and therefore producing good works, and that has the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan fellowshipping and cooperating on the basis of a common, shared blessing and grace of God and resulting in the formation of the PRC, which repudiates this doctrine and confesses the very opposite — it is the judgment of Rev. Schlissel that this issue is insignificant. The controversy over common grace is a theological tempest in a teapot!

The judgment of Rev. Schlissel is overturned by the judgment of history.

Does not Rev. Schlissel know that the doctrine of limited atonement was gutted in his church in the 1960s *with explicit appeal to the doctrine of common grace?*

Is Rev. Schlissel unaware that the doctrine of reprobation (and therefore the creedal doctrine of predestination not only, but also the creedal teaching of the "five points of Calvinism" in their entirety) was repudiated in his denomination in the 1980s *with explicit appeal to the doctrine of common grace?*

Surely, Rev. Schlissel has read, or heard, that virtually every synodical decision from the 1950s to the present that has opened wide the floodgates to allow the world to pour into his church (I



think specifically of the decisions to sanctify the movie and to redeem the dance) has been grounded in an explicit appeal to the doctrine of common grace.

Even the new interpretation of Scripture that now gains ascendancy in his church, unmistakably evident to every member in the interpretation of Genesis 1-11 as unhistorical fiction and myth, with the new doctrine of Scripture itself from which it arises, namely, that the Bible is a human book, which "new hermeneutic" much exercises the "conservatives," defends itself by explicit appeal to the doctrine of common grace. Will Rev. Schlissel read the article, "Hermeneutical Issues Then and Now: the Janssen Case Revisited," in the April 1989 issue of the theological journal of his seminary — *Calvin Theological Journal*? It is argued, not by an "obsessed" PR, but by a rational, thoughtful spokesman of the CRC

that "the doctrine of common grace . . . does provide a perspective that shapes the field on which the hermeneutical game is played. If one rejects common grace, the shape of the field is significantly altered, and the hermeneutical ballgame will be played under a different set of rules" (p. 33). The author draws sharp lines from the common grace controversy in the early 1920s to the "new interpretation" of Scripture in the CRC today.

Contemporary CR historians do not dismiss the common grace struggle of the 1920s as trivial. Rather, they regard it as nothing less than a watershed in the history of the CRC, so that the "mind" that prevails today in the CRC is the "common grace mind" (cf. James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in America*, Eerdmans, 1984, especially pp. 67-119).

If ever a man could get away with dismissing common grace as insignificant, this is not possible today.

If there is a church that is obsessed with common grace (and the language is that of Rev. Schlissel, not mine), that church is not the PRC.

This is simply the judgment of history.

Regarding the curious proposal of Rev. Schlissel that concludes his castigation of the PRC, "How about a joint family conference in 1990?", if he is being flippant, the tag line is unworthy of him, in light of the grave charges he has raised against the PRC. I am tempted then to respond, "We rustics cannot get away from the cows; and even if we could, we do not know how to get to New York. Is that in America?" But if he is serious, he must not propose a family conference, but a theological conference with a definite subject for consideration and debate.

That subject must be common grace. □ -DJE

## Letters

### Home-Schooling

. . . I was surprised and disappointed with the hostility expressed in the September 15 *Standard Bearer* toward home schooling ("Protestant Reformed Christian Schools — Covenantal Cooperation"). Deuteronomy 6:7-9 tells us to teach our children everywhere and whenever we can. I believe parents may delegate this responsibility to the teachers in the P.R. schools; but the Bible certainly doesn't demand this! In fact, throughout the Bible, fathers are held responsible for the children's

upbringing. Some of these verses are Proverbs 1:8, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1.

The slam against programs used by home schoolers may have been valid for some curriculums, but not all. Besides, parents can certainly point out errors in the books and programs used and explain why we believe differently. The teachers do the same thing, don't they? The textbooks used in classrooms certainly aren't all written from a Reformed perspective either . . . .

As to parents being inadequate to raise and teach their children in the modern age — this is not

true. With finances more freed up, parents can afford some of the high tech equipment available. Home computers, word processors, monitors, etc. can be purchased to help teach subjects that parents may be weak in.

The third question of our baptism form asks us whether we will bring up our children in the aforesaid doctrine to the utmost of their ability and power. You can't say home schooling parents don't take this calling seriously . . . . □

Bill Clason  
Zeeland, MI



## PRC and Missions

I am writing to you about something which appeared in *The Standard Bearer* March 15, 1989 issue and was reprinted in the publication of the Reformed Church in the United States (April, 1989). In the article titled "Can a Reformed Church Do Missions?," you say:

*Not long ago, a minister of a Reformed church in the south suburbs of Chicago devoted a Sunday evening sermon to an expose of the PRC. Predictably, the conclusion that would render these churches forever odious to Reformed folk was, "They do not believe in missions." The charge is patently false . . .*

Since the reference is oblique I am not sure if I am the person who is supposed to have said, "They do not believe in missions." However, since the south suburbs are not that large, and I do not know of that many who have "devoted the Sunday evening sermon to an expose of the PRC," I am somewhat suspicious that you have me in mind as the speaker . . .

Please take note:

1. I have listened to the tape of the sermon again and cannot find, "They do not believe in missions."
2. I was careful in the discussion of the differences between the CRC and PRC to speak of the "nature" of missions, or about "how" we fulfill the directive of our Lord. I continue to disagree with what I understand the position of the PRC to be, but please recognize the point of disagreement to be the how, and the who, rather than whether the PRC believes in missions. I did not accuse the PRC of not believing in missions.

(The Rev. Dr.) Calvin  
L. Bremer  
Lansing, IL

Reading and re-reading Prof. R. Decker's splendid meditation in *The SB* (8/15/89) has profited me greatly. It has afforded me spiritual blessings and a thorough understanding of the meaning of the text. The Word of our God is indeed powerful and penetrating, as well as encouraging and comforting.

Having been a choir director, through the years we have often sung a choir anthem based on Psalm 48 entitled "Let Mount Zion Rejoice." In today's choir selection it would be considered archaic and is not heard in these times. However, it was very popular in former days, especially for large groups of singers.

There is one noticeable uniqueness about *The SB*; and that is that generally it is written for, and addressed to, the believers. Seldom do we read statements addressed to the elect unbeliever. I was forcefully reminded of this when recently reading through the book of Deuteronomy. Coming to chapter 5 and verse 29, I read, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always . . ."

Nevertheless, I enjoy reading all that is written in *The SB* and am edified by the articles written. May it ever sound the clear trump of the Reformed faith. □

Henry Doorn  
Kentwood, MI

## A Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

## Polycarp: Martyr of Christ

### Introduction

The church of Jesus Christ, while in the world, is always in persecution. It is her lot in this life to suffer for righteousness' sake. We ought not be surprised

by this, for the Scriptures speak of it in countless places; and what Paul told the churches he organized on his first missionary journey is true for all time: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

This incessant persecution has produced a list of heroes of faith,

saints, men, women, and sometimes children, who loved not their lives unto death and who sealed their faith with their blood.

Among all these is the ancient Polycarp, elder and minister in the church of Smyrna. He is not the first of the martyrs. He did not suffer more than many

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



others. His death was not necessarily more illustrious than the death of other saints. But he provides for us an example of faithfulness in martyrdom, a testimony to the power of the grace of Christ in great suffering, and an enduring encouragement for God's saints today who suffer for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **His Early Life**

While the date of his birth is about A.D. 69, near the date of Paul's martyrdom in Rome, Polycarp was not born in a Christian home. In fact, his birthplace is unknown, for he appeared on the scene of the history of the church in a strange and perplexing way, a way that is an evidence of the mysterious ways of God's providence.

It all started in Smyrna. If you will look at your map, you will find Smyrna less than fifty miles north by northwest of Ephesus on the western coast of the province of Asia in Asia Minor. It was a city in which a church had been established early, perhaps by the apostle Paul during those years when he was laboring in Ephesus when "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:10). The Lord Himself wrote a letter from heaven to the church of Smyrna. He had nothing to reprimand the church about; He had only words of encouragement and comfort in her sufferings at the hands of her persecutors (Revelation 2:8-11). It is possible that Polycarp was minister in the church at the time this letter arrived in Smyrna and that he read it to his congregation, little knowing that it spoke of his own martyrdom at the hands of the wicked.

At any rate, some years earlier a man named Strataeas, a brother of Timothy, was either elder or minister in the church at Smyrna. A wealthy woman named Callisto, a member of the

church and one noted for her works of charity, dreamed that she was to go to the gate of the city called the Ephesian Gate and redeem there a young boy who was a slave of two men.<sup>1</sup> This she did and brought Polycarp to her own house where she gave him a Christian home, taught him the ways of the Lord, provided for his education, and adopted him as her son.

Soon after the boy came into Callisto's home he gave evidence of the work of the Spirit of Christ in his heart. He was grave and reserved, kind towards those with whom he associated, much given to the study of Scripture, and diligent in witnessing to others of his faith. An outstanding feature of his conduct was his self-denial, something which undoubtedly was used by the Lord to prepare him for future martyrdom. It is difficult to see how self-indulgent, excessively pampered people, who have much too much of this world's goods and who always crave more can face martyrdom if it should be required of them.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of Polycarp's early manhood is his acquaintance with the apostle John. Twenty years they knew each other, and Polycarp had the privilege of studying at John's feet. It is easy to envy Polycarp. One can imagine listening to Jesus' beloved disciple speak of his years with the Lord and teach what Christ had taught him. All this careful training prepared him for work in the church.

### **His Work In Smyrna**

The work which the Lord called Polycarp to perform in Smyrna was extensive and important. He was first of all a deacon in the church and labored for the care of the poor. This was an especially important work in the early church, for persecution was the lot of the saints and

persecution brought much work to deacons. They had to care for women and children whose husbands and fathers were in prison or had been killed. They had to visit the saints in prison to comfort them and encourage them in faithfulness, while at the same time trying as best they could to ease their sufferings by bringing them food and clothing and salves for their lacerated backs. And they had to gather money from a congregation of people who themselves had very little in this earth's goods.

Because of his learning, however, Polycarp was soon called to be an elder in the church — a presbyter, as Scripture calls those who held this office. And, upon the death of the minister (then already called the bishop), he became pastor and minister in the congregation. An old tradition has it that John the apostle ordained him to the ministry, which, if not true, could at least mean that John was present to witness the event. His fame and influence extended throughout Asia Minor. Not only was he respected because of his close association with the apostle John, but for his own piety he gained a name among the saints in that part of the world.

There were several interesting events in these years of labor in the church.

Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, a city quite distant to the east where Paul had begun his labors in Asia Minor on his first missionary journey, came through Smyrna on his way to Rome and martyrdom there. They spent a few pleasant days together in Smyrna, recalling their past friendship when Ignatius also lived in Smyrna and when they had both studied under the apostle John.

Polycarp also traveled to Rome, somewhat later. A dispute over the date of the commemora-



tion of our Lord's death and resurrection had threatened to tear the church apart. The churches in Asia Minor commemorated these events at the same time of the year as they had taken place; i.e., the commemoration began on the 14th of Nisan, the day of the Passover when the Lord ate the last supper with His disciples. This meant, of course, that these events in the Lord's life were observed each year on different days of the week, and the resurrection was not celebrated on the first day of the week every year. This tradition, according to Polycarp, was apostolic, for both Paul and John had taught these churches this practice. But the other churches, led by Rome, wanted the resurrection of the Lord celebrated on the first day of the week; and so they had instituted the practice of celebrating it on the first Lord's Day after the first day of Spring. The question was a minor one, of course, but it threatened to split the early church into two factions.

Polycarp, in the interests of settling the matter, traveled to Rome to talk with Anicetus, the minister in the congregation there. They discussed the matter at length, but neither could persuade the other. The result was that they decided to allow the churches the liberty of celebrating these events of the Lord's life on the date they chose without rancor, bitterness, or strife. As a gesture of their friendly parting, Anicetus asked Polycarp to preside at the administration of the Lord's Supper in the church of Rome, which Polycarp also did.<sup>2</sup>

### **Polycarp's Martyrdom**

But the threat of persecution always hung over the head of the church in those days. There were times of relative peace and surcease from persecution in its most brutal forms, but there were

times when persecution broke out in fury. The church was hated in the Roman Empire, especially by the Jews and pagan Romans. Every natural calamity, whether flood or earthquake or drought, was blamed on the Christians and on their refusal to worship Caesar as God.

There is something striking about this. The Christians were called atheists and were persecuted for being atheists. It reminds me of a remark made to me by a vice-president of the UAW some years ago. He insisted that the union was truly patriotic and truly Christian because the union tried to help the underdog, while our churches were neither patriotic nor Christian because of our opposition to the union.

When Polycarp was an old man, at least 85 years old, a flurry of persecution broke out in Smyrna, brought on by the mobs who were thirsting for the blood of the Christians. Fourteen Christians were seized and dragged to the public arena where they were fed to wild beasts. All but one died gloriously, one even slapping a wild animal that seemed to be too lazy to attack the Christian who was intended to be its dinner.

The crowd was not placated and began to shout for more. Particularly, they began to shout for Polycarp whom they knew to be minister in the church and who was, at the urgings of his flock, in hiding. The police were sent to find him, and finally did find him, after exacting information of his hiding place from a servant, who was subjected to hideous torture.

The crowd and the local magistrate were present in the arena when Polycarp was apprehended. He was brought before the magistrate in the stands of the arena and immediately tried and convicted while the frenzied crowd shouted for his blood. It

was a most unusual and illegal trial that went something like this, the magistrate speaking first.

"Swear by the fortune of Caesar! Repent! Declare: Death to the atheists!"

Turning to the mob, with a lift of his head and a wave of his hand, Polycarp shouted, "Death to the atheists!"

But the magistrate knew what Polycarp meant. "Apostatize! Swear, and I will set you free at once! You have but to insult Christ."

"I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. Why then should I blaspheme against my King and my Savior?"

"Swear by Caesar's fortune!"

"You flatter yourself if you hope to persuade me. In all truth I solemnly declare to you: I am a Christian."

"I have the lions here, to use as I think fit."

"Give your orders. As for us Christians, when we change it is not from good to bad: it is splendid to pass through evil into God's justice."

"If you do not repent I shall have you burned at the stake, since you are so contemptuous of the lions."

"You threaten me with a fire that burns for an hour and then dies down. But do you know the eternal fire of the justice that is to come? Do you know the punishment that is to devour the ungodly? Come, don't delay! Do what you want with me."<sup>3</sup>

The condemnation was proclaimed; the mob rushed from the seats to gather sticks and faggots, with the Jews gleefully helping along. Polycarp told the soldiers in charge of the execution that they need not fasten him to the stake, for he had no intention of fleeing. The flames leaped high, while from the flames could be heard this prayer



from the lips of Christ's faithful servant:

*Lord God Almighty, Father of Thy beloved and blessed Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the grace of knowing Thee, God of angels and powers, and the whole creation, and of the whole race of the righteous who live in Thy presence; I bless Thee for deigning me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink of the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ . . . I praise Thee for all Thy mercies; I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, with whom to Thyself and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and forever. Amen.*<sup>4</sup>

It is an abiding lesson to us that those who died for their

faith with prayers and songs of praise on their lips were those who knew what they believed, loved that truth, and were prepared to die for it. Polycarp had made his love for the truth clear in a letter he wrote to the church at Philippi, in which he warned them against heresies already appearing in the church. He said:

*Whoever doth not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is antichrist, and whoever doth not confess the mystery of the cross, is of the devil; and he, who wrests the words of the Lord according to his own pleasure, and saith, there is no resurrection and judgment, is the first-born of Satan. Therefore would we forsake the empty babbling of*

*this crowd and their false teachings, and turn to the word which hath been given us from the beginning . . . ."*

Knowing that persecution soon will be upon the church also to-day, ought not we take heed to these things? □

Footnotes:

1. While some of the details of Polycarp's life are uncertain, the evidence for these facts is rather strong. See McLintock & Strong, *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.

2. The controversy was not settled for a long time and it continued to disturb the church. It became the occasion for later bishops of Rome to attempt to extend their authority over the whole church.

3. This material is mainly from *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs* by Henri Daniel-Rops.

4. Quoted from *The History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff.

## Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

# Conditionality and the Gospel

*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. I Timothy 2:5, 6*

Inasmuch as we are called by Christ to proclaim the gospel to every creature — that is, to "offer" it, in the historical Latin sense of the word,<sup>1</sup> but not in the modern colloquial sense<sup>2</sup> — there are a number of questions that arise: How are we expected to bring this gospel? To whom in real and practical terms is it to

be brought? And what are we to say when we bring it? These are questions that call for answers if we are to understand and fulfill Christ's mission in this world.

To begin with, therefore, how? And, particularly, is the gospel to be conditionally or unconditionally brought?

It is now over two hundred fifty years ago, in the early 1700s, that a presbytery in the small village of Auchterarder, Scotland composed what has come to be known as the Auchterarder Creed: "I believe," it said, "that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God."<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this creed was to test young men

seeking entrance into the ministry. The wording may have been awkward, but it was very purposefully devised to keep what the Auchterarder men thought to be a doctrinal perversion out of the churches which they served.

(For those of us in the Protestant Reformed Churches who lived through our controversy in the early 1950s, this might well have a familiar ring. Not only is the subject matter similar, but also the need to pin down some strange and elusive sounds that were being heard. To one who has never lived through such problems, the effort might seem nit-picking and trivial; but for those who care, there are at times necessities that demand be-

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ing met.)

For a good century prior to that time, from the days of the early Puritans on, the churches of England and Scotland had been struggling with the problem of the gospel address. If the gospel is to be preached in this world, it was reasoned, presumably there will always be hearers who are reprobate, those whom God has not ordained unto salvation through faith. Can then the gospel, which is "good news," be properly addressed to such? Is there not something about the very nature of the gospel that, for the sake of honesty to God, limits its proper address to those alone who by it can be blessed? The dangers they saw were various. What if some should presume themselves saved who are not? What if the gospel should be offered to some to whom it does not belong? What if salvation should be promised to those to whom it cannot be given? And, on the other side, what if some of God's elect should think themselves lost because to them the gospel had never been properly brought? Through the years many theologians, some of the most eminent in English history, struggled with these questions; and various answers were tendered.

Through it all, however, regardless of these answers, a common conviction had arisen that in gospel preaching care should be taken to determine whether the person spoken to is elect, and thus able to receive that which is presented. Failure to do so, it was thought, could only lead to all kinds of misconceptions; and there was a way in which it could be done. Before a person is brought the positive promises of the gospel he should first be presented with the covenant of works, or — as we might say — the law with its commandments, warnings, and threats. If

before this he bows, grieving and fleeing from sins, he can properly be called to Christ, to the Lord's Supper, and full acceptance as a member of the church of Christ. In practice, however, what happened was that in many situations an inordinate emphasis was placed on sorrowing and grieving for sins, as the work which had first to be done, while the comforts of the gospel were left unsaid.

It was to this the presbytery at Auchterarder objected. Not only did it limit gospel proclamation, contrary to the command of Christ, but it made it conditional, dependent on something the hearer must do prior to his union with Christ. This they believed was Arminian, and wrong.

But not everyone agreed with that. It wasn't long before a young man who had failed their test appealed his case to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. The matter was heard, the Auchterarder creed rejected, and the presbytery's decision overturned.

But Auchterarder was not without defenders. Among those attending the General Assembly was a group of young ministers — some of whom were to become the most celebrated of their day, men like James Hog, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, and even Thomas Boston — who had sympathy for what Auchterarder was trying to say. In behalf of it they were ready to raise a lance; and they did. They brought forth from the past a book, seventy years out of publication, which they had found and come to love. It was entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, written by a certain Edward Fisher.

As a book it was rather quaint, but effective in its way as well. Dealing with the difference between the law and the gospel, it brought out the dangers of legalism on one hand and of anti-

nomianism on the other, while at the same time placing sanctification, or the keeping of the law, in its proper place after salvation rather than before — much as the Heidelberg Catechism does. Moreover, and important in the Auchterarder matter, it warned:

*In this covenant there is not any condition or law to be performed on man's part, by himself; no, there is no more for him to do, but only to know and believe that Christ hath done all for him.*<sup>4</sup>

This was well said, but, having said that, it went on shortly, in an effort to defend a general proclamation of the gospel, to add:

*I beseech you consider, that God the Father, as he is in his Son Jesus Christ, moved with nothing but with his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all, that whosoever of them all shall believe in this his Son, shall not perish, but have eternal life . . . that is, Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him; and if he will take him, and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him. Wherefore, you having so good a warrant as God's command, and so great an encouragement as his promise, do your duty; and by the doing thereof you may put it out of question, and be sure that you are also one of God's elect.*<sup>5</sup>

Now whether this is what Auchterarder had in mind is hard to say; but upon the thinking of Edward Fisher, and of the Marrow men — as Thomas Boston and his friends have come to be known — it certainly sheds a different light. While rejecting the idea of a conditional covenant on one hand, they were quite ready to receive it on the other; while accusing the General Assembly of Arminianism, they were in much the same frame of mind themselves.

It wasn't, of course, as though they admitted this. In fact, Thomas Boston went on to republish Fisher's book with an extensive series of notes defend-



ing the Reformed validity of *The Marrow's* presentation. His arguments are close knit and often difficult to follow, but they are interesting and worth trying to understand.

On the one hand Boston wanted to defend Fisher's Reformed credentials. He quotes extensively from the historical Reformed confessions (pp. 124, 125); and he speaks of "the elect, the chosen, or believers, whom Christ represented, and obeyed, and suffered for" (p. 129). He argues that Fisher did not mean to tell every person "Christ died for him" (p. 127); and he repudiates "Arminius and other Universalists" (p. 128). But at the same time Boston did not believe that the doctrine of election could be the basis for an evangelical proclamation of the gospel, as he said, "that God hath given eternal life to the elect, can be no such foundation" for "faith, and warrant to all to believe in the Son of God" (p. 119). If we are to expect unsaved people to believe, we must show that they are provided a real "common interest" in Christ (p. 119) based on a real "love for mankind lost." And this can be done because of the "sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ for all" (p. 126) so that it can be said, if "not, 'Tell every man Christ died for him,'" at least, "'Tell every man Christ is dead for him;'" that is, for him to come to, and believe on; a Savior is provided for him . . . the use-making of which he may be saved" (p. 128). Clearly Boston, having rejected the condition of repentance, was seeking simply to substitute another, in this instance that of believing in Christ.

And with that we come perhaps as close as we can to the origin of the "offer of the gospel" in its modern concept. Boston was convinced that, if evangelism is to be done, one has to be able to offer something to everyone,

as motivation for them to fulfill the required condition. If then salvation itself cannot be promised to everyone, at least the conditional offer can; and if the hearer will do his part, God certainly can be relied upon to follow through and provide the grace needed to bring about true saving faith — even though, of course, we know that in the end those who do this will be the elect alone.

In effect what Boston was doing was bringing into evangelical thinking an equivocal kind of casuistry, the supposition that in good conscience one can confess a certain truth outwardly while maintaining as an inward reservation almost the exact opposite. One may confess the sovereignty of God in all things, including the election and reprobation of men, while at the same time conceiving of a secondary level of grace in which God loves all men and would like to see them all come to Him. It is this latter then that can be used in evangelism, going forth to tell everyone of God's willingness to save each of them if only they will do what He wants — even while we know that God has chosen and will give the grace so to do to only some.

But such reasoning has its consequence; it brings into the church's concept of God an ambivalent kind of duality, almost a split personality. On the one hand it sees God as sovereign Lord foreordaining in quiet greatness and in the uniformity of infinite wisdom all things which come to pass, while on the other it presents Him as standing in uncertainty wishing for much more than ever does come to be, because in the end it finally depends on the will of men. He makes His offer; but, unless man meets the condition, His desire cannot prevail. And lost through it all is that most basic wonder of

God, His oneness and simplicity.

Throughout Scripture this oneness, this harmonious consistency of God, is fundamental in everything, as Moses said, in Deuteronomy 6:4, "*Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD.*" Upon it rested the embryonic moral precept, verse 5, "*And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*" It wasn't new; Moses had met it first already at the burning bush, Ex. 3:14, 15, "*And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you . . . this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.*"

What the Marrow men said is true: the gospel must be preached to all men — and no one should impose conditions to limit this. But neither should conditions be added of a different sort in order supposedly to enhance its universal appeal. And, above all, the oneness, the consistency, and simplicity of our God, must not be compromised or lost, as Paul wrote in I Timothy 2:5, 6, "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*" □

1. "Offero: to bring before, to exhibit, to obtrude" *Classic Latin Dictionary*, Volley Publishing Co., Chicago, 1952
2. "An undertaking to do an act or give something on condition that the party to whom the proposal is made do some specified act or make a return promise." *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, G & G Merriam Company, Springfield, MS 1970
3. *The Great Debate*, Alan P.F. Sell, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 56
4. Fisher, Edward. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity: with note by the Rev. Thomas Boston*, Reiner Publications, Swengel, PA. 1978, p. 116
5. *Ibid*, pp. 126, 127, 132



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## Into All the World

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

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# "Successful" Missions

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Success is described as achieving fame, wealth, or rank, accomplishing one's goal. The notorious "success story" is about someone who began small and insignificant, but became big, rich, and important.

American culture has a carnal fascination with size and success. Our society appreciates everything that is big (except, maybe, the family). Success in business is identified with increased sales, advancement, and growth.

Christians often seem to think in the same terms. "Success" also in the church is defined only in terms of new building programs necessitated by an increase in attendance. The emphasis is on numerical growth, an increase in the number of those who are members of a congregation or mission field. It is invariably the case that when ministers who are meeting for the first time get together, they will talk about the size of their Sunday School attendance or Sunday morning worship service. (Never have I heard any talk about the attendance at the Sunday evening service.) One minister spoke of his denomination as being interested only in the "Three Big Bs," by which he meant "Big Buildings, Big Baptism roles, and Big Budgets." Congregations have month-long competitions to see which can get the most to attend their Sunday School classes. The mis-

sionary who preaches week after week to a few people (enough to sit in a living-room) is considered either as a failure or an object of sympathy. Disparagement is cast upon those who attend the small country church. The most "successful" congregations are the largest and most rapidly growing. They are held up as examples of what a local congregation should be like. Churches send their ministers and leaders to attend conferences which deal only with how they can grow. At these conferences the methods of the mega-churches are examined, not in order to be evaluated in the light of Scripture, but in order to be emulated. The number of books and pamphlets which show "how too" make a church grow inundate book stores and book catalogs. Because success is identified by growth and size, it is thought that the saving of souls and the growth of the local congregation is the supreme goal of the church and of each believer. It is then so easy for one to be inclined to conduct himself as if the only power that can accomplish this work is the strength of man. All are persuaded by the thinking that if the church can be made to grow, any means is legitimate, including puppets, clowns, weightlifters, or monster trucks (I am not making up any of these; they all happened in the communities in which I have lived).

The Reformed believer is not exempt from such thinking. He too is inclined to conclude that

success means a numerical increase. But what is it to be *successful*? And what does it take to be *successful* according to the standard of the Scriptures?

It is most important to remember that Scripture does not define *success* as numerical growth. Size has never been considered one of the marks of the true church. God specifically tells His chosen people, Israel, that they were the fewest of all people (Deut. 7:7). God's people are often described in Scripture as a remnant and as a little flock (Luke 12:32). The history of David's numbering the people (II Samuel 24) warns against any fascination with large numbers. Therefore, we must not be fascinated with size (and the money, which is often associated with size).

Secondly, we must note that the Bible does not allow the believer to dismiss and despise altogether the growth of the local congregation or of a mission field. On the one hand, Scripture urges us to have a proper concern for healthy church growth. We delight to see the Lord adding daily to the church the ones that He is saving. With the angels of heaven we rejoice in seeing the lost found and a sinner brought to repentance. On the other hand, good stewardship of the monies spent for church growth or for a mission field demands a concern for the wisest and best use of these talents.

Thirdly, Scripture places a much higher priority on being

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faithful. To be “effective” and “successful” in God’s eyes is not the performance of some spectacular feat, which deserves God’s praise and the admiration of men. Rather success is “merely” being faithful. Often Scripture describes the believer and the minister of the Word as a servant of the Master, Whose will must be done, and Whose goods must be cared for. As servants of the Master Who has all and Whose we are, we are unprofitable. Therefore, God delights in “faithfulness.” Faithfulness is the diligent performance of one’s God-given calling, using one’s talents and opportunities to the best of one’s ability. God acclaims the good and faithful servant with a “Well done.” Jesus’ work earned Him the name “Faithful” (Rev. 19:11); and He is called the “faithful witness” (Rev. 1:5).

Therefore, the Reformed church and missionary must not be primarily concerned with numerical growth. The supreme object must be the glory of God, not the salvation of souls and the growth of the local congregation. It must be remembered that the only power that can accomplish the growth of the church is the Holy Spirit, not the strength of man. The emphasis must be on

faithfulness to God and to His Word, for the Scriptures are the medium which the Holy Spirit uses to accomplish the growth of the church. Then one is being truly successful.

If being successful is being faithful, then evangelism and missions can be performed with great patience. There is no pressure to cease the work or close a field, just because there is not the kind of positive response that a business man would expect. We learn that God’s timing is often not our timing, for His ways are much higher than our ways. We must be convinced that we are successful when we faithfully sow the seeds of His Word at every opportunity and to every “neighbor.” Often it takes a long time before we are able to see fruit upon the seeds sown. Therefore, Paul writes that one sows, another waters, and still another gathers the harvest. Just because we are not doing any harvesting, does not mean that we are not successful. And James teaches that the chief attribute of the farmer is that he “waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it” (James 4:7). We are successful only by being faithful.

If being successful is being faithful, then we can rest in Him

Who is faithful. His Word does not return unto Him void, but accomplishes that which He pleases (Isaiah 55:11). When we faithfully preach His Word, then we know that He is using it to accomplish His will. We might not be able to see what He is accomplishing, either of a positive or of a negative nature, but our inability to see what He is accomplishing does not make us useless. We are being used by the Master Himself. We can then thank God Who “always causeth us to triumph in Christ . . . . For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish” (II Cor. 2:14, 15).

If being successful is being faithful, then we know that God is using us to bless the church of Christ. The addition of members in our congregation is not the only way in which God blesses positively His church. Often we are used of Him to help a fellow-saint in another congregation or in another denomination. We can be assured that in such a case we are “successful.”

Let us get our thinking straight. Success is not numbers. Success is faithfulness. It is being faithful to God Whose Word must be declared into all the world. □

## Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

# Parity of Officebearers

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“Among the ministers of the Word equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office, and also in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory, and if necessary, of the

classis; which equality shall also be maintained in the case of the elders and deacons.” *Church Order*, Article 17.

### INTRODUCTION

This article concerns what is commonly referred to as parity



of officebearers. Among officebearers there is to be parity or equality. The word for "equality" in the Dutch version of the article is *gelijkheid*, that is, "similarity, likeness, equality."

The article is concerned not with equality of the OFFICES in the church. There is equality among the several offices. While the offices are of three kinds, it is not the case that one of the offices is higher or lower than the others. All the offices possess the same authority, the authority of Jesus Christ, albeit authority in a different sphere.

Nor is the article directly concerned with equality among officebearers of the various congregations within the same denomination. This certainly is true and is a valid implication of the teaching of Article 17. This is something that the *Church Order* states explicitly in Article 84: "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons." But this is not directly the subject of Article 17, as is plain from the reference of the article to "the judgment of the consistory."

Instead the article refers to parity of officebearers within the same congregation. When there is more than one minister in a given congregation there is to be equality between them. This is also to be true in regard to the elders and the deacons.

#### STATEMENTS OF EARLY SYNODS AND OF THE CONFESSIONS

There are several early decisions of the Reformed churches that are forerunners of Article 17. Among them we may sight the following.

*The Synod of Embden, 1571: "No church shall lord it over another church, no minister of the Word, no elder or deacon shall lord it over another, but each one shall guard*

*himself against all suspicion and enticement to lord it over others."*

*The Synod of Dordrecht, 1578: "No church shall in any way lord it over or have the upper hand over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons, but rather each one shall be on one's guard against all cause and suspicion of this, although from duty of love one church not only may but also should admonish another, one minister another, etc."*

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, adopted what is essentially our Article 17. The decision of Middelburg was reiterated by the Synod of 's Gravenhage in 1586.

Several confessional statements also express agreement with the principle of Article 17. The Second Helvetic Confession of 1562 states: "To all ministers in one church is given one and the same authority and office." The French or Gallican Confession of Faith of 1559, in Article 30 states:

*We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have the same authority and equal power under one head, one only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ; and that consequently no Church shall claim any authority or dominion over any other.*

Our own Belgic Confession of Faith, in Article 31, states:

*As for the ministers of God's Word, they have equally the same power and authority wheresoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church.*

Two outstanding principles upon which Article 17 is based come out here. First, all the officebearers share equally in the office of Christ. One does not possess 100% of the office, while another has only 85%, and still another only a meager 60%. Every minister possesses ALL of the prophetic office of Christ. Every elder possesses ALL of the kingly office of Christ. And every deacon possesses ALL of the priestly office of Christ. If all the

officebearers share equally the office of Christ, one cannot be above another, one minister over another minister, one elder over other elders, one deacon pre-eminent over his fellow deacons. Is Christ above Christ?

In the second place, it follows from this that if all the officebearers share the whole office, they are all also called to perform all of the duties of the office. All of the deacons are expected to share equally in all of the labors of the deacons. All of the elders are expected to share equally in all of the labors of the eldership. And if there is more than one minister in a given congregation, those ministers together are expected to share equally in the various labors that belong to the ministerial office.

#### PARITY OF AUTHORITY AND DUTIES

The equality referred to in Article 17 has to do with two matters especially: authority and duties.

There is parity of officebearers with respect to their authority. There is to be no lording over another officebearer by a fellow officebearer. In this article the Reformed churches expressly reject the Romish hierarchy and the superintendency of the Lutheran, Episcopal, and Methodist churches. In these systems of church government each rank or office is higher than the preceding and, consequently, vested with higher authority. There is no parity of officebearers.

In the Reformed system matters are radically different. All officebearers are of equal authority. No minister is head over the other ministers. No elder or deacon is head over his fellow elders or deacons.

This does not imply that one minister may not preside as president of the consistory, although even this is to be by rotation (cf.



*Church Order*, Article 37). Nor does this prevent one deacon from serving as the president of the deacons, although this can only be by the majority vote of the other deacons. But serving as president does not imply greater authority. There is still parity among the officebearers. Practically speaking, the vote of one carries as much weight as the vote of another, and none has the power of veto over his fellow officebearers.

Parity of officebearers also applies to the duties of their offices. If their authority is the same, it follows that there ought also to be a sharing of the work that belongs to the office. Generally, the work load ought to be divided equally among the officebearers: preaching, catechism teaching, sick-visiting, family visitation, discipline, and various other committee work.

Article 17 is opposed to the compartmentalizing of the office of the ministry that goes on in Reformed churches today, so that, besides ministers who preach, there are also ministers of education, ministers of visitation, youth ministers, and ministers of music. Parity of of-

ficebearers implies that as much as possible all ministers in a given congregation share equally in the duties of the office. The consequence of not doing this is inevitably hierarchy in the church, a plague abhorred by every truly Reformed congregation. The evidence of this begins to show itself when titles like "senior" pastor and "assistant" pastor are used. The best preventative of hierarchy in the church is the insistence that each officebearer, elders and deacons as well as ministers, perform all the duties belonging to the office. This will also prevent the notion from gaining headway that certain labors are more important than other labors, and that therefore the persons performing those labors are also to be considered more important.

#### **EXTENT OF THIS EQUALITY**

Even though equality among the officebearers includes especially their authority and duties, it extends beyond this. Article 17 says, "... and also in other matters ..." Here the article is warning against partiality and preferment. The application here would be especially to matters of honor, salary, housing,

vacations, fringe benefits, etc. Does this imply that all the ministers must receive equal salaries? Not at all. The needs of each family and special circumstances must be taken into consideration. But one minister must not be given an extravagant salary, while another is paid skimpily. One minister must not be afforded a mansion of a parsonage, while another is forced to live in crowded and unfit quarters. If there is parity among the officebearers, then they must also be treated equally.

There will always be certain exceptions. Article 17 foresees this: "... as far as possible ..." The article is not iron-clad, but wisely allows for some flexibility. Age should always be taken into consideration. Health is often a factor. One's abilities enter into the picture. One may show a certain lack in one area, while another shows a definite strength. A consistory is wise to utilize each man's strengths.

Who decides the exceptions? The consistory: "... according to the judgment of the consistory ..." Appeal to classis is always left open: "... and if necessary, of the classis ..." □

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## Secretary's Annual R.F.P.A. Report

*Mr. Peter Koole*

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September 21, 1989

Dear Board, Association members, and friends of the Reformed Free Publishing Association:

Threescore and five years ago our spiritual forefathers brought forth in this our fair city of churches (Grand Rapids, MI) a

new and much needed magazine named "The Standard Bearer." The need was urgent to explain and defend their scriptural position regarding the Common Grace controversy of that day.

A quote from the original statement of purpose says it best:

"We are concerned to instruct and to help the Reformed child of God in the living of a full, deep, all-sided Christian life for his Lord in every relation, on every plane, and in every sphere. Scripture must teach us; in it God must speak to us; according to it



must be our world and life view." We who are gathered here tonight must rightfully remember the past to be fully appreciative of the present and to prepare and plan properly for the future of the *Standard Bearer*. Before we begin our business at hand, let us pause and be truly thankful that God in His providence raised up men of deep spiritual conviction and stature where and when He did in the history of the church militant.

Now for what took place in Volume Year 65 (October 1, '88 - Sept. 15, '89). First of all, due recognition is to be given to our Editor-in-Chief, Prof. D.J. Engelsma, who completes his first year at the helm of the *Standard Bearer*. God grant him and others of the Editorial Committee and Staff zeal and dedication to continue, as the late Prof. H.C. Hoeksema so fittingly put it, to "hew the line and be on time."

Less than a year after his retirement as Editor-in-Chief of the *S.B.* (24 years), Prof. Hoeksema was, after a short illness, called home to his eternal reward, on July 17, 1989. May the Lord comfort the mourners and give them peace and submission.

Worthy of mention is also the retirement of Henry J. VanderWal, after 21 years of dedicated service as Business Manager of the *S.B.* (1968-1989). We recognize his past services with an inscribed plaque to be presented to him this evening.

Taking complete charge is the conscientious, capable Mr. Don Doezema. Rest assured that Don, with his efficient wife Judi, will give the *Standard Bearer* excellent service. They are that kind of couple. Some people make waves. Don is like an undercurrent who gently pulls and guides without self promotion and fanfare.

For this yearly report, our Business Manager furnished the Secretary with the following information: As of this date 1,956 copies of the *S.B.* are being sent to addresses in the U.S.A., 105 overseas, 62 to Canada, and 150 for Bound Volumes, for a total count of 2,273 per mailing.

Since October 1, 1988, we have gained better than 100 new subscribers. Approximately a third of those were through the return of postcards which we printed, offering a one-year subscription for half-price to first-time subscribers. The remainder of the 100 came by word of mouth, recommendations, and gift subscriptions. Whether they continue their subscriptions remains to be seen.

Our new equipment for mailing of the *S.B.* has served us well during the past year.

The Editorial Staff has adopted several modifications in the format of the magazine, and also introduced a couple of new rubrics and writers. Although the Board is not directly involved in this aspect of the work, the interest and response shown is encouraging to all. We might add that, on September 15, 1988, the Board received a letter from the Editorial Committee, over the signature of Prof. Robert D. Decker, expressing their desire and willingness to cooperate with us in promoting the *Standard Bearer*.

Besides the monies received through subscriptions, we rely heavily on personal gifts and P.R. Church collections to cover our monthly expenses and to maintain still a working balance. We sincerely thank all who support our magazine. Our year-ending balance is \$4,619.20.

We are hoping to reduce our typesetting cost by providing our current typesetters, not with the manuscripts, but with the articles already typed onto a computer

disk. The computer age can benefit us, and we hope to report progress in this area at a later date.

No longer are we paying rental storage fees for the extra *Standard Bearers* — individual copies and volumes accumulated over the years. The undersigned volunteered the use of his basement. All copies and volumes are identified and put either in heavy paper bags or storage boxes on shelves. Thanks, Pete.

The Board raised the subscription price for all Canadian and other foreign country subscribers to \$15.00 per year. This is to help cover the added mailing costs. Research shows this action to be in harmony with the policy of other magazines.

We also informed our P.R. churches that the Board is discontinuing the practice of giving a one-year free subscription of the *S.B.* to newly-married couples. There was a duplication of effort by the Board and some congregations. The Board also sensed that it belonged more in the realm of the local consistories. Besides, our present practice of one-half cost to first-time subscribers is a bargain all by itself and should attract those who desire to give a gift to feed a man's soul.

Thinking of all those who so diligently contribute month after month to make our fine magazine arrive at your address, we recognize and thank such as the Editorial Committee, department editors, guest writers, church news editor, business manager, office help, Board members, and John Veldman who for the last several years has assisted in the mailing of the magazine. We also appreciate the cooperation and workmanship of Commercial Printing Company and Wobbema Litho, for typesetting, printing, and meeting the deadline of the 1st and 15th of



every month. A special word of thanks is in order to our Editor-in-Chief, who shows good ability and sound leadership and judg-

ment in the affairs of the S.B.

Above all else, we thank God, and do say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His

benefits" (Ps. 103:3).

Respectfully submitted,  
Board of the R.F.P.A.  
P. Koole, Secretary □

## The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

## The End Times —

# When Will the End Come?

If there is a subject young people are interested in discussing in Young People's Society, it's the subject of the last times. And if there is an aspect of that subject that spurs more interest than the question, "When will the end come?" I don't know what it is.

Part of the reason we are interested in asking the question, "When will the end come?" is that we have a natural curiosity about these things.

Then some of us are interested in the question because we are terrified at the prospect that the world will end. We fear that we will not be ready. We fear that the return of Christ will be a terrifying coming. We fear that we will not be able to handle the days before that coming. Or, we fear simply because we do not know what the Bible says will happen in the last days. And this last is probably more often the case than not. How much do you remember of your *Essentials* instruction in Lesson 29? How many weeks did you spend learning about the second coming of Christ and the events prior to that coming?

*Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.*

### PARENTS!

*When I was leading discussion groups at the Young People's convention this summer, I asked the young people in my group if they had read a certain article in the Standard Bearer. I was discouraged at the response; not one of them had. In fact, it was almost discouraging enough to conclude that I would not write any more.*

*Parents, if your young people have been reading, thanks! And thanks to you, too, young people! It was all worth the time and effort! But, parents, if your young people have not, please ask them to read at least part of the magazine. This section is designed specially for them, for their encouragement and benefit. Some of the past articles have been, "What Shall I Do After High School?" "Should I Begin To Smoke?" "How Shall I Prepare for Marriage?" "Can I Be Sure I'm A Christian?" "How Do I Handle a Sinning Friend?" and "What Am I Worth?" I hope these subjects were of concern and interest to them. And I hope that the subject of "The Last Times" is of interest to them, for it is vitally important for their Christian walk and faith.*

*Let's get together with our children sometime (perhaps on Sunday afternoons) to read and talk about these matters!! God bless you and your young people!!!*

Let's try to get a good, broad picture of the Reformed view of the end times. Then our unhealthy curiosity or unhealthy fear of the future will be put aside. My prayer is that you will be confident about what Scripture says will happen in these last days.

When will the end come?

By the end, I mean the day when Jesus Christ returns for the judgment of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous. On this

day the world as we know it will come to an end. To this day the Old Testament judgments pointed. The destruction of the world with the flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, both pointed to the day of the Lord when the righteous will be delivered and the ungodly world destroyed. When will this take place?

Don't forget, this is an important issue not only for us, but for Christ! This is *His* return. It's



possible for us to get caught up in the study of the last days, thinking about what will happen to us, where will we be when it happens, how many of God's people will survive the great tribulation, what heaven will look like . . . but forget that the last things have to do with Christ. We must be Christ-centered and God-centered in our thinking of the end of time. In God's decree, Christ was central. In the focal point of history, Christ came, suffered, was crucified, buried, raised, exalted, and then He poured out His Spirit on the Church. Christ will be central in the last day, too, because it is "His day" (see Phil. 1:6, 10). Christ is the meaning and purpose of everything in the past as well as in the future. It is His glory, His honor, His praise that is the issue of "The Day." It will be the day when every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. In our discussions about the last things, keeping that in mind is essential!

When will this day of Christ come?

The answer is, "We don't know!!!"

Even though there are many signs that point to the coming of Christ, we need to remember the words of Jesus to the disciples in Acts 1:7ff: "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." The words of Mark 13:33ff bring this out: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." When the ten virgins in the parable were waiting for the coming of the groom, although they knew he was coming, they didn't know the hour.

Even though we know there are signs of the coming of Christ, in the end of our search for an answer, we have to say, "We do not know when the day will be."

But this we do know about the day: It will be a complete and terrifying surprise FOR THE UNBELIEVER.

More than once in Scripture God describes the second coming of Jesus as a coming like a thief in the night. The key to a thief's success is the element of surprise; he wants to take his prey unaware of his coming. The coming of the Lord will be like that; He will come when the unbeliever is least expecting Him. There is no warning (see I Thessalonians 5:1ff). As a woman first experiencing labor pains, unexpectedly, at any hour of the day or night, in any place, so the coming of the Lord will be for the wicked. "Peace and safety," they say; "then sudden destruction shall come upon them."

Why is this true for the unbeliever? Why will this be true even for the unbeliever in the church who has learned about the coming of the Lord perhaps right beside you in catechism and church? First, because he is spiritually blind, out of touch with things of heaven. You can try to show him things as clear to you as the sun in the heavens; but as a blind man cannot see the sun, he cannot see the approach of Christ. Add to that the spiritual drunkenness of the unbeliever (that is, his spiritually numb senses) and the picture is complete. He cannot understand spiritual things because he's not only totally blind, he's stone drunk. Though his house were on fire, he would not know it.

Now, we apply that to the coming of Jesus Christ. You can hold before the unbeliever's eyes the truth that the Lord is coming, show him the signs of the coming, compare prophecy with

world events; but he's not only blind, so that he cannot see, he's also drunk so that, even if he saw, he would not be able to understand what he saw. Like a warning to a drunken man that he ought not to drive, it doesn't bother him at all . . . until he perishes.

But you, *BELIEVING YOUNG PEOPLE*, are not in darkness (I Thess. 5:4ff). Being born again by the word of God, you are neither deaf nor blind. You can see the things of the kingdom, read the signs of the times, hear the warning signals of the coming of Christ.

This does not mean that we will be able to pinpoint the day or even the year of Christ's coming. I remember well one afternoon as a boy waiting to pick up the papers for my afternoon paper route, that all the people were excited about the supposed moment for the end of the world. Looking into the sky for something, they thought this would be the time. That's not only impossible; it would be spiritually unhealthy if we were to know that in, say, three years and six months, Jesus would return.

But this does mean that the day of the Lord *will not be a surprise for us*. Noah was not surprised when the flood came; nor will believers be when the Lord returns to make all things new.

But I am *waiting*, as a Reformed believer, "with uplifted head . . . for the very same person, who before offered himself for my sake . . . to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 52).

Are you?

*I then saw in my dream that they went on till they came into a certain country, whose air naturally tended*



to make one drowsy, if he came into it a stranger. And here Hopeful began to be very dull, and heavy of sleep; wherefore he said to Christian, I do now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold up mine eyes; let us lie down here and take one nap. CHRISTIAN: By no means, lest sleeping, we never awake more. HOPE: Why, my brother? Sleep is sweet to the laboring man; we may be refreshed if we take a nap. CHRISTIAN: Do you not remember that one of the shepherds bid us beware of the Enchanted Ground? He meant by that, that we should beware of sleeping; wherefore "let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." (from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.)

You may ask, "If the believer will not be surprised at the coming of the Lord, why the warning to watch and be sober? Is there any need?" Let me ask you this, "If God's people will never perish, why the call to a holy life?" Of course there is a need for the warning to watch and be sober, just as there is the constant need for the call for every Christian to a holy life. It is

through that call that God preserves in holiness, and through that call that God preserves in watchfulness.

Are you awake? Are you active in the life of the church? Are you busy in the things of God's kingdom? Do you love the truth and confess the faith? I wish it would work to take each of you by the lapels and with loving concern in my voice say to you, "Wake up, young people, wake up." Charles Spurgeon is said to have taken drastic steps one Sunday when more than a few people were sleeping in church. At his signal, one of the children pulled the fire alarm in the building. And when asked in a panic where the fire was, he said, "In hell, waiting for those who are sleeping, spiritually."

Wake up, young people, wake up! Be sober, young people, be sober!! Put away every ungodly practice and unbelieving confession. Take to yourself the holy life and the Reformed confession. And then comfort one another with these words: "Though we

know not the day and the hour, we will not be taken by surprise when the day of Jesus Christ comes!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Questions to discuss with parents or friends:

1. If the Bible is so plain that we do not and cannot know the precise time of Christ's return, why do so many Christians try to pinpoint it? What type of religion especially does this?

2. Is it possible for a Christian to be "sleeping" when Christ comes?

3. What are some examples of spiritual drunkenness and sleepiness?

4. If a church member is spiritually drunk, or sleeping, is it possible that he would be saved if Christ returned today?

5. If someone has learned about the end times just as you have, but is an unbeliever, how can it be that he will be taken by surprise at the second coming and you will not? □

## Book Reviews

**WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE?: PAEDOCOMMUNION IN LIGHT OF THE PASSOVER**, by Richard Bacon; Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1989; 42 pp.; \$2.75. Available from Presbyterian Heritage Publications, P.O. Box 180922, Dallas, TX 75218. (Reviewed by the Editor)

In recent years, men have introduced into Reformed and Presbyterian worship the novelty of child, and even infant, commu-

nion ("paedocommunion"). Three or four year old children of believers, or even infants in arms according to some, are supposed to be worthy partakers of the Lord's Supper. Advocates of this practice argue that infant communion is required by infant baptism and that participation in the Passover by little children under the old covenant demands participation by little children in the Lord's Supper under the new covenant.

The effects of this notion have been significant in Presbyterian and Reformed churches. It has caused division. It has occasioned study committees and lengthy reports. Also, it has resulted in church decisions that open up the Table to children. Among others, both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America have taken synodical decisions recently that permit (require?) partaking of the Supper by very young



children. At the synod of the RCA in Grand Rapids in June, 1989, delegates spoke of the partaking by children as young as four years.

Proponents of paedocommunion are sharp in their condemnation of the historic (and creedal!) Presbyterian and Reformed policy that catechizing and a confession of faith are required of the children of believers before they come to the Table. One zealot, writing in *Journey* (November-December 1988, pp. 12ff.), charged that the traditional Reformed position is "spiritual infanticide" and "incipient Arminianism." He called on "those who forbid covenant children to partake of the Lord's Supper" to repent of their sin.

*What Mean Ye by This Service?* addresses this controversial issue. Carefully following the principle that Scripture must interpret Scripture, Richard Bacon, a ruling elder in a Presbyterian church, demonstrates that infants and young children were not permitted to partake of the Passover. (The title of the book is the question that the children asked at the occasion of the Passover according to Exodus 12:26.) Therefore, the requirement of I Corinthians 11, that all who partake of the Supper examine themselves (which requirement excludes infants and little children), is in harmony with the celebration of the Passover in the Old Testament.

Bacon concludes:

*Reformed Churches should continue to fence the table of the Lord as has been done from at least the institution of the Passover. They should continue to encourage their covenant children to inquire into the meaning of the sacrament. And parents and Churches should together continue to catechize their covenant children until such time as they "are of years and ability to examine themselves" (p. 42).*

This little book of 42 pages, another fine offering from Presbyterian Heritage Publications, is a good study for one who finds himself or herself attracted by the position of paedocommunion, as well as for anyone who is interested in the issue. □

**JAMES: THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE**, by James B. Adamson; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989; xxii + 553 pp., \$29.95; (paper). (Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko)

Dr. Adamson is the author of a commentary on the epistle of James which is a part of The New International Commentary on the New Testament. This book is not itself a commentary, but is to be considered a companion volume to be read and studied in connection with the commentary. It does not, therefore, treat James' epistle verse by verse, or even chapter by chapter, but contains material which is intended to serve as the background of the epistle and to help understand the epistle as a whole.

There is no question about it that Dr. Adamson has spent a great deal of time studying this important book of the New Testament. In fact, he did his postgraduate work at Cambridge University, where he was awarded the Ph.D. for a dissertation on this epistle. Undoubtedly, this book is the fruit of such intensive study.

The book has a great deal of background material in it. The author deals not only with questions of authorship, destination, style, etc., but loads the book with information on the history of the early apostolic church; material on the political, economic, social and religious climate of the day in which the book was written; and references to many early Jewish and Christian writings. It lies in the nature

of the case, however, that many conclusions in the area of the history of the early church, the specific circumstances under which the epistle was written, and the influence of the cultural setting of the times upon James are speculative and are to be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, much valuable material can be found in it.

The material in the epistle itself is treated in a topical way and the main themes in the epistle are extensively discussed. While this leads to some repetition and overlapping of material, it does help give one an overall picture of James' epistle.

The major problem with the book is its obvious higher critical approach. Some instances of this we can mention. In my judgment the author is too much given over to what amounts to an almost psychological assessment of James and Paul; and this is done because of his over-emphasis on the human element in Scripture — there is no mention of the divine inspiration by the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's meaning in the book. Paul was sometimes in his writings in a Phariseistic mood (p. 210); Paul was "Hellenized" (p. 226); James had a wrong conception of Christ's second coming (p. 431); James' belief in a personal devil is most probably under the influence of current beliefs and is probably not correct.

The theology of the book is not always sound either. The author shows his Arminian bias in different places (pp. 210, 211, 216). He deals inadequately with the problem of evil in the world because he does not approach the problem from the viewpoint of God's sovereignty. But most serious of all, in dealing with the main theme of the epistle, the relation of justification and works, the author does not understand the relation between



faith, justification, and works, which misunderstanding is rooted in a misconception of faith.

While the book is a scholarly and thorough treatment of the epistle, it is not written from the

viewpoint of a strong commitment to the truth of infallible inspiration. □

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Let's start out this issue of the news with a look at *Ministerial Calls*.

As reported last time, Rev. Kortering declined the invitation to go to help the saints in Burnie, Tasmania for a year. Rev. Arie den Hartog, along with his consistory, is now considering the matter.

Our congregation located in Lynwood, IL, the Peace P.R.C., called Rev. Ron Hanko to be their pastor, from a trio of Pastors A. den Hartog, S. Key, and R. Hanko.

Now a look at *Congregational Highlights*.

On September 18 the Evangelism Society of the Southeast P.R.C. in Grand Rapids, MI held a Dutch Psalm Sing at Fulton Manor, a retirement home with more than a few Dutch residents.

It looks as if the congregation of our Trinity P.R.C. in Houston, TX has been busy these past months with the construction of an addition to their church sanctuary. If I read their bulletins right, this addition included work on the fellowship room and kitchen. Work bees were scheduled for a couple of Saturdays to help

complete the project. For a couple of weeks church services were held in the parsonage, due to the mess and paint fumes in the church. On September 10 the congregation was again able to meet in their church.

The members of the Lynden P.R.C. in Lynden, WA were invited to attend a lecture entitled God's Everlasting Covenant sponsored by their church's Extension Committee. This lecture was held on September 15 at Trinity College in Langley, B.C., and I assume that Rev. Haak was the speaker.

Many of our churches have choirs. Usually these begin practice in September or October with the idea that a concert be presented around the end of the year.

The Hope Heralds, an all male choir from our Hope Church in Walker, MI are an exception to this rule. It must be that they practice during the summer months, since they presented their annual concert at Hope on September 10.

The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center P.R.C. in Byron Center, MI invited all area P.R.'s, along with the community of Byron Center, to attend a mini-series of classes on "The Christian Family." Classes were held on four successive Thursdays in

September and October. Their pastor, Rev. B. Gritters, led these classes. The first, on September 14, dealt with the structure of the Christian family. There was ample time for audience participation, and refreshments were served. My wife and I attended this class. What a worthwhile hour of instruction. We were disappointed that more of our people weren't there.

### DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The annual meeting of the R.F.P.A. was held on September 21 in the Southwest P.R.C. in Grandville, MI. Three new board members were elected. Prof. D. Engelsma spoke on "The Standard Bearer: Holding the Traditions." Several special numbers were given and a plaque was presented to Mr. Henry Vander Wal, retired business manager of the S.B., for his 21 years of faithful service.

One of our churches' "retired" ministers, Rev. J. Heys, submitted to prostate surgery at Holland Hospital. He returned home to Hudsonville, and by God's grace is making a good recovery.

Families, friends, alumni, and all supporters of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI were invited to an open house to view the new and remodeled facilities of the Phase I building plan on September 13. □

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



## CLASSIS WEST REPORT

Classis West met on Wednesday, September 6, 1989 in Doon, Iowa. Classis met in two sessions and finished all its business at about 4:00 Wednesday afternoon. Rev. M. De Vries served as President of the meeting.

This was the first Classis at which delegates from the new Congregation of Bethel, in Elk Grove, Illinois, were present.

Most of the business of Classis was routine. Classical appointments were granted to the congregations of Hope, Redlands, California, Hope, Isabel, South Dakota, and Peace, Lynwood, Illinois, though Classis did decide to ask Classis East for help in supplying Peace's pulpit. A request for additional subsidy for 1989 and 1990 from the Pella, Iowa congregation was also approved.

Classis adopted the report of a committee appointed by the March, 1989 Classis that advised Classis to make a change in its rules of order and in the way it has been dealing with majority and minority reports.

A protest from one of the Consistories against the decision of the last Classis to admonish those Consistories that had not allowed their ministers to keep Classical appointments was rejected by Classis. An overture to Synod concerning the Jamaican mission field, asking that that field be closed, was sent on to Synod without comment.

The next meeting of Classis West will be in South Holland, Illinois, on March 7, 1990.

Rev. R. Hanko  
Stated Clerk ☐

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian love and sympathy to its member, Elaine Van Der Noord, in the passing of her father, MR. PETER A. POORTINGA. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

Rev. George Lanting, president  
Mrs. Arthur De Jong, secretary

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church expresses Christian love and sympathy to its sisters, Tena Bruinsma and Irene Pfau, in the passing of a mother-in-law and grandmother, MRS. ANNA MOREHOUSE. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Psalm 16:11

Rev. George Lanting, president  
Mrs. Arthur De Jong, secretary

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