

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

THE STANDARD BEARER

Suicide, like all sin, is not just a matter of an overt act. It begins in the heart; and although it might not be committed outwardly, it is nevertheless very real within. The child of God is not immune to the ravages of this sin

See "Suicide — Self Murder" — page 181

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In This Issue . . .

Some time ago it was suggested to the Editorial Committee that an attempt to involve more lay writers on the pages of *The Standard Bearer* might be appreciated by its readers. We have tried to do that. In fact, this issue carries the work of no fewer than three, in addition to our faithful news editor. For "Church and State," Mr. James Lanting continues to select issues in the courts which have a particular bearing on the well-being of the church. There's also a "Contribution" by Mr. Joel Sugg, an elder in our church in Houston and a Christian school teacher. The cover copy directs our attention to his article, which deals with suicide as it is "radically defined" — i.e., defined as to its root. When viewed in that light, he says, suicide is a sin of which one can be guilty, not only by committing the outward act, but by giving in to "miserable bitterness with any part or all of one's life."

Then there's Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers, who continues to contribute for the rubric she shares with Rev. Koole. She deals again with the woman as wife, this time from the perspective of the last part of Proverbs 31, which has been called appropriately a "full-length portrait of a virtuous woman." Did you know that each of those 22 verses, in the original, begins with one of the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet? That's led some to think that it was by itself a poem, made alphabetical for ease of repetition. And well might it be repeated. For the world looks for something quite different. A graceful form, a pretty face — what are they? Too often sought, but fleeting, little connected with happiness, and no part of Proverbs 31. But . . . a virtuous woman. Priceless, according to verse 10. "Do you know this woman?" asks Mrs. Lubbers. There are, I am sure, in the church of Christ many of them. One such, as I write these lines, sits across the table from me . . . Read "A Virtuous Woman . . . a Crown to Her Husband." □

-D.D.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 6064, Grand Rapids, MI 49516.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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Mr. Benjamin Wigger, Rev. Bernard Woudenberg.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer Mr. Ben Wigger

4949 Ivanrest 6597 - 40th Ave.

Grandville, MI 49418 Hudsonville, MI 49426

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The Standard Bearer The Standard Bearer

Don Doezeema c/o Protestant Reformed

P.O. Box 6064 Church

Grand Rapids, MI B. Van Herk

49516 66 Fraser St.

PH: (616) 243-3712 Wainioma, New Zealand

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Meditation
Rev. Jason Kortering

The Inseparable Love of God

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

Two things strike fear in us when we think about our relationship with God. The first is this: will God as Judge condemn me for my sins? The second is this: will something in my life so affect me that I will make myself unworthy of His love and therefore I will lose it?

To express it a bit differently, do I have a right to God's love, and if I do, can anything snatch me out of the arms of my Heavenly Father?

Rev. Kortering is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Grandville, Michigan.

The thought of condemnation by or separation from Jehovah, the God of my salvation, is overwhelming. By contrast, the guarantee of its impossibility affords for us infinite comfort.

The words of this passage give us such a guarantee.

In verses 33 and 34 the Holy Spirit sets forth the challenge, "Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Just imagine for a moment, can your enemy stand before God and produce evidence that you should be condemned for your sins? Can the old devil, can any man, can your own conscience, which is often smitten with guilt, stand before God as Judge and show to Him that you have done something so wrong that you must be sentenced to everlasting condemnation? The answer is no, a thousand times no! The reason is not that we are innocent, but, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who maketh intercession for us" (vs. 34). God as Judge has declared that we are righteous in Christ, and therefore no evidence can be produced before Him that would occasion a sentence of condemnation for us. The judicial aspect is settled for eternity.

Now the apostle is concerned about God's love for us. Can anything take place in our lives which would occasion a change of heart in God, so that even though we have a right to glory we may never arrive there due

to changes that occur in our lives which affect God's love for us?

It is evident that the burden of the text is God's love for us and not our love for God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? We are 'more than conquerors through him that loved us.' Also, nothing 'shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'"

God's love for us is the heartbeat of the covenant of grace.

Love is the power of the heart which is attracted to another person in such a way so as to form a bond of friendship.

God has said about Himself, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). His very Being partakes of the character of love. Just as God is light, God is truth, God is eternal, so also God is love. Because God is all His attributes, they influence each other and determine the very nature of God. God's love is eternal, infinite, light, etc.

This love of God comes to expression within Himself as the Person of the Father loves the Person of the Son through the Person of the Holy Spirit within the one heart of God. The same is true as the Son loves the Father in the Spirit.

Amazing love.

This love is the love that God has for us.

Nothing is more precious to us than to be an object of the love of God. In that love of God, we have been predestinated: "in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus

Christ" (Eph. 1:4, 5). In that love we have been redeemed, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). In that love we are brought to salvation by the gospel: "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

Who shall separate us from that love? Is there any power on the face of the earth, anything we might experience which could possibly have such an effect on us to cause God to stop loving us?

Such a question is not just interesting and academic; it deals with the only ground for our assurance. If we can possibly be separated from God's love, we are of all creatures the most miserable. What we cherish most might be taken away. If, however, it is impossible to be separated, then we have the greatest delight.

The answer given by the Holy Spirit is that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Look with me how thoroughly the Holy Spirit explores the various possibilities: tribulation (afflictions such as disease, injury), which produces distress (the inner response to pain, the hurt, the fear, the bitterness of soul); persecution (hurt that comes from an enemy who treats us wrongfully, which is so common to the church in the world that Paul quotes Ps. 44:22, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter"); famine and nakedness (the results of poverty, whether as a result of persecution or natural calamity); peril (dangers we face in life — crime, drunk drivers, civil strife); sword (reference to the state, the authority which holds the power of the sword; war, a legal system

which could unjustly imprison or execute).

As if that is not enough, the inspired apostle draws a series of contrasts in verses 38, 39 that are presented as areas of possible threat. We have death-life (circumstances we experience while we are alive — but what about the time we die?); angels; principalities; powers (a reference to different positions among the angels and devils — could the spirit world threaten us?); present-future (one thing to deal with our circumstances now — what about the uncertain future?); height-depth (any force that might come down from heaven or ascend out of hell that would endanger us); and finally any other creature (within the whole realm of creation).

Can any of these powers or persons so affect us that we would act in such a way as to cause God to stop loving us?

The answer is not only, no, but that in all these things we are more than conquerors.

What a thrill, what security for us!

The things we fear most will not separate us from the love of God. They will rather bring about a greater victory.

To conquer an enemy is to be able to subdue him. The enemy desires to separate us from God's love. Even the devil would like to see adversities destroy us so that we give up, we forsake God, we say it's not worth it. The promise is that, "in all these things we shall conquer." We shall deal with all these forces and not allow them to take us from God's love. That is not all, we are *more* than conquerors *in all these things*. We experience that these things turn out for our good, they make us stronger in the bond of God's love. Instead of tearing us away from God, they occasion us to draw nearer to Him.

This is not ivory-tower theology for Paul.

Just read II Corinthians 11:21-28 and learn this is exactly what he experienced.

We experience this as well.

How can that be? The list is fearful. It produces terror in our souls even to think about some of those things mentioned as possible threats.

These words form a doxology of praise which form a conclusion, drawn from the beautiful truths which the Holy Spirit wrote in the preceding verses.

Why will we be more than conquerors and never separated from the love of God?

Two reasons are given.

God will never stop loving us! That is first. This is expressed so beautifully in the golden chain of salvation mentioned in verses 28-30: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate . . . moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." By the chain of predestination, divine calling, justification we are drawn into glory.

And the heart of it all is foreknowledge. To know is to love. Love moved God to predestinate us in Christ Jesus. We are chosen in love, redeemed in love, called in love. That love of God is firmly grounded in Christ Jesus. God will never stop loving us. With that kind of love flowing in us, we will never be separated from God.

There is more. God will enable us to love Him in return. This is expressed earlier in this chapter (vs. 14-17). We have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." By the Holy Spirit He energizes us in our love

for Him so that, no matter what our outward conditions are in life, we continue to love God.

And the bond of covenant fellowship cannot be broken.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God!

I am persuaded. We may not always "feel" that love, but God does not deal with love on the basis of feelings. Persuasion is a process of the mind whereby we confess on the basis of God's promises that we believe they are true.

If God be for us, who can be against us!

In all these things, more than conquerors!

What a doxology of praise to our great God! □

Editorially Speaking . . .

The first month of the new year is a good time to remind the reader of the policy concerning editorial response to letters that appear in *The Standard Bearer*. This policy was stated at the time that the "Letters" column was introduced (*The SB*, Nov. 1, 1988):

The Editor will not feel himself constrained to respond to every letter, whether he agrees or disagrees, since the purpose of the column is not public debate, but to hear from our people.

Response will not be given to every letter, even though the letter is in disagreement with some article in the magazine. The absence of response does not imply agreement with the letter. Neither is it tacit admission that the letter's criticism of something written in *The SB* is in fact correct. When there is no response to a letter that is critical of an article, or of some point in an article, the reader may assume that the writer of the article stands by

what he wrote. The Editor or a writer may, of course, choose to respond in certain instances.

One reason for not responding to every dissenting letter is to encourage our readers to respond to *The SB*.

* * * * *

Our readers will be interested to know that articles published in *The SB* are frequently reprinted in other religious magazines. During the past year, *Christian News* (Lutheran), *Journey* (Presby-

terian), *The Presbyterian* (Presbyterian, in England), *The Pillar and Ground of Truth* (Reformed, in Singapore), and *The Reformed Herald* (Reformed), among others, reprinted articles from *The SB*. We are happy about this. Our witness to the Reformed faith and life reaches more people. Also, *The SB* is helpful to brothers and sisters in their promotion and defense of the faith in other circles.

Our "reprint policy" appears on the masthead. □ -DJE

Editorial

The Task of the PRC with Their Seminary (2)

(Unfortunately, the brief series on the task of the Protestant Reformed Churches with their seminary, begun in the November 15, 1989 issue of The Standard Bearer, had to be interrupted. The first installment contended that the task of the seminary is the training of gifted men to be able Reformed pastors in the congregations, or missionaries. Because of the worth and necessity of the office of pastor, the seminary, though in the background, has an important place in the labor of the denomination. The third installment will follow directly.)

The importance of the task of the seminary derives from the importance of the office of the ministry of the gospel, inasmuch as the seminary prepares men for this work in the churches.

But is this task really necessary?

Does not the Holy Spirit qualify ministers? Is it not sometimes the case that men graduate

from seminary who prove to be poor preachers and blundering overseers? Must a man spend four years in seminary learning Hebrew, Greek, dogmatics, church history, the theory of preaching, the principles and method of counseling, and many more subjects besides? Have not some of the most outstanding preachers been men who never had a day of seminary training?

I am struck by the fact that this question continually comes up in the church. Augustine had to answer this question in his day. He treats it in his work, *On Christian Doctrine*, 16.33:

Now if any one says that we need not direct men how or what they should teach, since the Holy Spirit makes them teachers, he may as well say that we need not pray, since our Lord says, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him" . . .

Pointing to Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus what and how they are to preach, Augustine continues:

What then are we to think? Does the apostle in any way contradict himself, when, though he says that men are made teachers by the operation of the Holy Spirit, he yet himself gives them directions how and what they should teach?

The great African father then concludes with an apt comparison between seminary instruction and the use of medicine to heal:

For as the medicines which men apply to the bodies of their fellow-men are of no avail except God gives them virtue . . . and yet they are applied . . . so the aids of teaching, applied through the instrumentality of man, are of advantage to the soul only when God works to make them of advantage . . .

Augustine answers those who question the necessity of seminary training by asserting that, although it is true that God alone gives teachers to the church and that although seminary training cannot produce a single, genuine pastor unless God gives this training "virtue," still seminary training is necessary because it is the means that God ordinarily uses to give pastors to His church.

In the 19th century, the Presbyterian theologian, Robert L. Dabney, had to face this challenge to seminaries from the ranks of southern Presbyterianism. In 1883, he wrote "A Thoroughly Educated Ministry," in which he argued for keeping the requirement of "a classically learned ministry." This is necessary, he thought, because a trained and learned ministry is "a true source of increased efficiency" (cf. his *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, Vol. 2, pp. 656, 657).

The great champion of orthodox Presbyterianism in the 20th century, J. Gresham

Machen, felt it necessary to justify the seminary training of Presbyterian pastors. In his address in 1929, "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," he insisted:

. . . we believe that a theological seminary is an institution of higher learning whose standards should not be inferior to the highest academic standards that anywhere prevail (What is Christianity?, p. 226).

I would be surprised if some among us did not wonder whether all this time, all this effort, all this money, and all this manpower are really necessary.

We readily acknowledge that only Jesus Christ makes the Reformed pastor. Pastors and teachers are the gift to the church of the risen and exalted Christ. In recognition of this, the Reformed church has always allowed for the possibility that her Head might give a pastor apart from the man's pursuing the regular course of study in preparation for the ministry. Therefore, Article 8 appears in the Church Order of Dordt.

But the question is not whether Jesus or the seminary makes preachers. Rather, the question is, does the Lord give preachers — good, capable, effective preachers — with or without training by the churches in their seminary? Nor is the question whether Jesus is able to prepare a pastor apart from the seminary. Of course He can, just as His omnipotence enables Him to make a man a medical doctor without his going to medical school, or a woman a skilled secretary without her taking courses in typing and shorthand. But the question is whether Jesus prescribes as the rule for His church that we look for His preparation of pastors in the training of the seminary. In short, does Jesus use means to give pastors and teachers?

Scripture must answer this question. There are Biblical precedents. Jesus trained the apostles for some three years in the school in which He Himself was the professor. After the resurrection, there was yet a special, "crash" course in preaching the kingdom that lasted for forty days, as we read in Acts 1:1ff. When Christ called Paul to the apostleship, He did not at once miraculously bestow on His servant the gifts he needed, particularly knowledge of the mystery of the gospel, but sent Paul to Arabia, where He Himself revealed the gospel to the apostle (cf. Gal. 1:11ff.).

Even in the age of special revelation, therefore, men were trained for the ministry after a fashion corresponding to seminary training today.

These precedents are instructive. The mandate is obligatory: In order to have pastors who will teach the congregations the gospel, "the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." This is not the task of committing the Truth to the people of God, but the task of committing the Truth to certain men so that they can teach the saints. Since the church commits the Truth to these men — the future pastors — by instructing them, the mandate is the seminary. To prepare pastors, the church is not simply to pray over men, or to lay hands on them, but to commit by teaching.

The Reformed "Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology" speaks of "the necessity . . . of training youths and men for the holy ministry under the ordinary dispensation of the Spirit by the regular methods of education."

The Reformed and Presbyterian churches, therefore, have always insisted on an educated, indeed a well-educated, ministry. Protestant Reformed pastors

should have a full, solid liberal arts education — four years of learning after high school in an accredited, preferably a Reformed, college. This is especially urgent in our day and in our society. The seminary builds on this, giving a thorough theological education, every aspect of which will help aspiring preachers to teach the Word to others in the congregations. This theological education will include knowledge of the original languages of Scripture; knowledge of the content of Scripture; knowledge of the church's systematic and logical arrangement of the content of Scripture in her theology and dogmas; knowledge, how to interpret the Bible (hermeneutics and exegesis courses); knowledge, how to preach the Bible (homiletics); knowledge of the history of the church whose servants the men will be, which history is replete with warning, instruction, and encouragement; and knowledge of the government of the church. This is only a partial list.

The work of the Reformed pastor is demanding of all this training and knowledge! The ministry is not child's play! The Reformed pastor carries on a many-sided work; and every aspect is grave (in the sense now of the Latin *gravitas*, "weighty, serious") with the solemnity of the glory of Christ in His church and of the salvation of the elect. He is responsible for many duties; he confronts hosts of problems and difficulties; he must answer many questions. Chiefly, he must rightly divide the Word of God, publicly and privately — on the pulpit and in the catechism room, but also in the consistory chambers where men and women are excommunicated from the kingdom of Christ, in the living room of the couple who are about to divorce, in his

study with the young person for whose soul he is wrestling, and on the occasion of his presenting, not so much the Protestant Reformed Churches as the Reformed Faith as held by the Protestant Reformed Churches to people who ought to know and embrace this Faith.

The worth, the difficulties, the demands of the Reformed pastor at the end of the 20th century are not inferior to those of medical doctors who, although they are used only to heal bodies, are rightly required to prepare by a long and rigorous education.

In this connection, I note that the Protestant Reformed ministry is worthy of the ablest sons of these churches. I speak now to you fathers and mothers of bright, gifted, godly boys and young men. The Lord has need of them! Not as though He cannot and will not use lesser talents, for in the ministry as in other vocations fidelity and industry count for much, often for more than superior ability. But the very best minds will not be wasted in the ministry, indeed cannot be put to better use. You may not keep them back because you prefer other, more prestigious or more lucrative occupations for them.

In any case, careful, thorough training is required.

The training given at seminary should not be only academic. It must also be spiritual. Over a period of four years, experienced pastors can caution young men to avoid the pitfalls that attend the ministry. II Timothy 2 refers to some of these threats.

The would-be pastor must not be lazy. A pastor is a workman (v. 15). Since his work is a life-long interpreting and applying of the Word, he must also be a student all his life both of Scripture and of theology. The minister may not stop reading and study-

ing upon graduation from seminary. Who would want to intrust his 1980 model car to a mechanic who stopped learning in 1950?

Ministers may not entangle themselves in various matters of earthly life that are interesting, pleasurable, or financially rewarding, but that detract from the work of the ministry (v. 4). Like the prospect of hanging, war (and the pastor, we remember, is a soldier) has a way of wonderfully concentrating the mind. So is the pastor to devote himself singlemindedly to the ministry.

Seminary will warn the men against crippling their ministry by the rashness, headiness, and eagerness to fight that is a typical weakness of the young preacher. These are the "youthful lusts" of verse 22.

Often these lusts to mix it up in the ecclesiastical arena are due to pride and carnal ambition: the young minister likes to be somebody in the church world — a Martin Luther or a Herman Hoeksema. But the servant of the Lord must not strive (v. 24), must not strive about words to no profit (v. 14). Pastors must exert themselves to show themselves approved unto God (v. 15), rather than to seek the religious limelight.

This kind of instruction too prepares men for the pastorate and is the task of the churches in their seminary.

Next issue: The role of the seminary in the maintenance and development of theology. □ -DJE

Count up thy mercies, child of clay —
 Recount them o'er and o'er;
 Yet canst thou tell, in life's short day,
 The sounds upon the shore, oh child?
 The sounds upon the shore?

S.B., 1928

Taking Heed to Doctrine

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

"All Men" and the Gospel

The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. II Peter 3:9

Casuistry was once a respected area of Christian study. Among the early Puritans it had to do with the study of the conscience. Those were godly men, dedicated to living in good conscience before God. But they were realistic too, and, being good students of Scripture, realized that difficulties do inevitably arise. Of these cases they made a study and called their study casuistry. The great English Calvinist, William Perkins, in his *Cases of the Conscience* was one of the earliest and greatest practitioners of it.

As it is in this sinful world, however, wherever there is use, there soon arises abuse; and so was it here. Very shortly the pursuit of casuistry became, not a pursuit in purity, but a studied evasion instead. The story is told of a certain catholic friar, named Champion, who came covertly into puritan England with the purpose of promoting the cause of the papacy there. In time he was caught, however, and when asked his name replied, "John Smith," while silently adding

within himself, "which is the name I chose to give should I be captured in this way." Supposedly this then made his falsehood true and left his conscience free. It was casuistry gone awry.

Nor was it just with morality; doctrine was affected as well. Dr. David Wyer of Greenville, SC recently made a study of the entrance of doctrinal perversion into the early American Presbyterian Church. He tells of those who, having affirmed adherence to the confessions, explained that their oath was "declarative" and not "promissory," or, in their words, "We declare our present agreement with it, that is, our agreement with it as a system; but we do not pledge our agreement to that tomorrow." It was a kind of doctrinal casuistry not uncommon to our day.

Moreover, as with morality and doctrine, the interpretation of Scripture has been dealt with the same. Having their minds set on what they think the Bible should say, there are many who search it, not to find what it has to say, but with it to prove what they want to hear; and few passages have been more favored by them than the "all men" texts of Scripture. These people are generally determined that man must be left in charge of his own destiny; and these passages, they feel, provide their strongest proof that predestination, and particularly reprobation, is not actually what God intends. He

would, if He could, save all men. It is well, therefore, for us to examine a few of their favorite verses.

Before doing that, however, we ought to acquaint ourselves with this particular idiom with which we are concerned, and do it apart from the doctrinal problem involved. This we can do nicely by turning to Mark 1:5, "And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." The passage has to do, of course, with John the Baptist and the multitudes who came to hear him preach, and to be baptized by him. But what interests us is the fact that in this passage the word "all" is used twice with three different points of reference. What does it mean? Are we being told that literally every person in Judaea and every last inhabitant of Jerusalem made his way to the Jordan to hear John preach, and that every last one of them bowed to confess his sins and was baptized by him? Of course not. We know that wasn't so, and no one just reading through this passage would come to that conclusion. The only thing this passage says is that there were a large number of people who went from Judaea and Jerusalem to hear John preach; and that of them a goodly number were moved to confess their sins and were baptized. The overall con-

Rev. Woudenberg is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

text of the Gospels makes this plain. It isn't difficult; we often speak the same way today. The word "all" and its equivalents ("every," "everyone," "the world," etc.) are common collectives whose extension, if taken in context, are easily understood in this passage and in those to which we now turn.

The first of these is Romans 5:18: "Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Here we do have, at least in one instance, the word "all" used in a most comprehensive sense. Certainly the "all" upon whom judgment is come includes the broadest possible extension of the term, every human person — with the exception of Jesus — has come under judgment through Adam. But our knowledge of this hardly derives from the use of the word "all" in this text. The fact is that all of Scripture brings this out, and this text is neither needed nor designed for that end. It isn't here to tell us that all men are sinners, but rather that all those who are sinners have come to be that way through Adam. And so, in turn, the rest of the text is not designed to tell us that every person who has come to sin through Adam is now saved in Christ; that we know isn't so. Nor, on the other hand, is it telling us that God really would like to save every human person if only He could. That kind of thinking is altogether foreign to the passage. The design here is simply to teach that, just as *all* who sin came to their sinfulness through Adam, so *all* who are saved come to that salvation through Christ. They are "many" — as the next verse states specifically; and the concern is to emphasize the fact that there is no salvation ex-

cept through Christ. To go beyond that only does violence to the text.

And the same is true with John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." This text is eminently beautiful; but if torn out of context in an effort to prove that God would like to save everyone, its real message is lost.

The text follows, and relates directly to, the touching account of "certain Greeks" who came to Philip seeking to talk to Jesus (12:20, 21). Philip didn't know what to answer. His whole background told him to have as little as possible to do with Gentiles, especially at feast time when contact with them could render one unclean; and the thought of bringing them to the Master was particularly abhorrent to him. But neither, having been with Jesus, did he feel free to ignore them. So he went to consult with Andrew. But Andrew didn't know any better; and thus they brought the problem directly to Jesus. His response, however, was far from what they might have expected (vs. 23). "The hour is come," He exuberantly exclaimed, "that the Son of man should be glorified," and from there He went on to give one of the most glorious expositions on His death found anywhere. In fact, so amazing was it that the heavens themselves were compelled to join in — after which we find our text, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." And what was Jesus seeking to express, some ambitious dream that by his death every individual person in all the world would be drawn to him, even when He knew it wouldn't be — and had once prayed (Matthew 11:25, 26) it shouldn't? Of course not. Jesus had been struck by the coming of these Greeks, for to Him this was the beginning of what all of the

Old Testament had foretold, the gathering of people from all nations into His church (Isaiah 11:11), the breaking down of "the middle wall of partition" which had so long kept them apart (Ephesians 2:14-22). Thus we have our text, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men — men of all nationalities — unto me." The New Testament age was pressing in upon Him; and He rejoiced. This was ultimate encouragement for His death.

Somewhat similar, although with a different focus, is I Timothy 2:3, 4: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Taken by itself it too has a universalistic sound; but in context it says something quite different. All we have to do is to go back a few verses to the beginning of the chapter (vss. 1, 2), "I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Clearly Paul's concern here is with a particular group of people, those in government. Apparently there were Christians who were unwilling to pray for them, which we can understand. Those were days of persecution, and the government was devastating the church. These Christians were more inclined to pray for their destruction than for their salvation. But with this Paul would not agree. God's grace is unconditional, and it always goes forth to those who are enemies of God and His cause (Ephesians 2:1, 5). It isn't because of what he is that anyone is saved. And government officials were no different; they were to be prayed for just as well as anyone else, both that they

should cease their persecution and that they should be saved, "for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men [men of every status in life, including those in government] to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Which brings us to one of the most commonly misconstrued texts of all, II Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Here the context is particularly important. If we go back to the beginning of the chapter, or for that matter into the whole of the epistle, we find that Peter is concerned with the coming of the end of the world; and rather than saying that God is not willing that anyone at all should perish, he tells us (vs. 7), "the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." God is actually very determined that this group of people, the scoffers of the last days, shall perish; and He has reserved a day for that to be. The question is not whether He is willing; the real question is, why does He wait? And it is to this that Peter now addresses himself. In the first place he tells us, in verse 8, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." God can wait because He is eternal; He doesn't see time in the way we do, as Psalm 90:4 tells us, "a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night." That is why He can have patience, and wait with punishing these scoffing wicked. But He also has a reason;

and that is explained in verse 9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." God has made a promise, that which we read in Genesis 17:7, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." He knows who that seed is; and therefore He "is longsuffering to us-ward," that is, He is willing to suffer the blasphemies of the scoffers for a long time until every last one of them [us] has been born, brought to repentance and saved, for God is "not willing that any [of this promised seed] should perish, but that all [of them, the elect] should come to repentance." God can wait and will wait; and when the last one has come to repentance, the end will come, as Jesus once said, John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth to me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I shall in no wise cast out."

And so there are several things we should note.

In the first place, each of these texts has to be understood within the logical flow of the Scriptures. The Bible is not just a conglomerate of true but separate propositions, so that one may go through it picking and patching together passages at his own choosing. There is a current of thought which runs all through the Bible, and each passage must be understood within the flow of logic in which it is found. Apart from that its revelatory power is gone.

In the second place, if these passages have one common message, it is that the salvation of God is unconditional, it is not determined by anyone's race, his status in life, his willingness to cooperate, his works or anything else, Romans 3:23, "All have sinned, and come short of the

glory of God." It is simply the inexplicable goodness of God extended unconditionally which saves.

And so, finally, it is not for us to judge who can be saved and who not, to whom the Gospel should be preached, or from whom it may just as well be withheld, Mark 16:15, "Preach the gospel to every creature, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." □

NEW YEAR *(continued from page 191)*

And through the city streets
Disease runs rampant with
companions Death and Grave.
The desperate teeming masses,
running to and fro, seek one
to save.
His Day draws near. On earth's
horizon dimly shines the light
That hails Christ's glorious rising
with all power and might.
Spirit and Bride, we hungering,
thirsting, would our Bride-
groom's waiting supper taste.
Ev'n so we cry, "Come, our Lord
Jesus. Come with haste!"

—Sue Looyenga

IT CANNOT LAST

Weary now it is, and must be,
All my sky is overcast;
But no cloud can be eternal,
This one cannot always last!
Drearily the storm is beating,
Chilling rain is falling fast;
I am wet, and cold, and cheerless;
But it cannot always last.
Walls of granite, stern forbidding,
Separate me from the past,
That was erst so glad, so joyous; -
But they cannot always last!
And what sorrows lie before me
In the future drear and vast;
Ah! I know not! But it cheers me
That they cannot always last.

S.B., 1928

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers

A Virtuous Woman . . . a Crown to Her Husband

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. (Proverbs 31:10)

There it lay. Rich. Rare. A dazzling treasure filled with fire and sparkle. Flawless, it glints and winks dispassionately inside the burglar-proof glass which encases it. The fabled Hope Diamond, now housed in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., continues to hold its myriad visitors in thrall.

Crowns ablaze with pearls and clustered with diamonds, sapphires, and rubies of spectacular size and clarity. Bracelets of thick, shimmering gold. Tiaras studded with priceless opals and topazes. Scepters encrusted with magnificent emeralds. A galaxy of breath-taking and brilliant jewels displays England's Crown Jewels, exhibited and guarded in the Tower of London.

Man's ceaseless quest for rare and priceless stones has lured his steps throughout history. To find, to possess, the rare gem has intrigued him. Even God's Word does not underestimate the timeless value of jewels. Malachi says, "And they shall be mine (those that fear the Lord), saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels . . ." (Malachi 3:17). Jesus, in Matthew 13:45 and 46, speaks of the Pearl of Great

Price. And the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos envisions a city, the New Jerusalem, which is structured with such a glittering array of costly jewels that man's imagination is fired to behold it.

A rare jewel is timeless; the fashion of the day cannot tarnish it nor diminish its value. From antiquity, jewels have served kings and rulers as barter, wages, and ransom. They were and still are today conveniently carried about, easily pawned, and quickly cashed — usually with a marked increase in value. Often jewels of rare and legendary value are bequeathed to museums where they are handsomely displayed. Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23-79) has called jewels, "The most highly valued of human possessions."

So, with a commodity this priceless and precious, is the Bible telling the truth when it says that a virtuous woman is far more priceless? Does the writer of Proverbs in a flowery phrase of chivalry exaggerate a little when he claims that a virtuous woman is of inestimable value?

Jewels, especially diamonds, are regularly classified according to carat, color, cut, and clarity. Jewelers refer to these as the 4 C's which, consequently, determine a gem's worth. Most jewelers also agree that a gem must be both beautiful and durable. And if the jewel is shrouded in mystery and romance, its value is enhanced.

CARAT: THE WEIGHT OF A GEM

The exact Hebrew term for virtuous can be expressed by carat: the virtuous woman is strong, able, solid, and trustworthy. She is principled, standing squarely upon timeless, God-centered mores. She is prudent and of sound judgment. We may think of Abigail, first the wife of foolish Nabal, later the wife of King David, about whom I Samuel 25 says, ". . . she was a woman of good understanding . . ."

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is ambitious, energetic, and resourceful. There is much work to be done in the home, and she tackles homemaking with vigor and efficiency. She is not idle or lazy, and spares little time for chitchat over the fence or phone. She is a woman with fortitude and purpose.

You will ask, does this ideal woman work outside her home? Is she really a thinly-disguised real estate agent? Careful reading of this classic chapter on the woman indicates that she uses resources local and from afar all for the purpose of enhancing and maintaining her household. She does not buy a field and then resell it at a profit to buy more fields. From earliest pastoral times, women have tended gardens and vineyards; they have assisted their husbands in all kinds of manual labor. In the New Testament, for example, the

Mrs. Lubbers is a wife and mother in the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

Book of Acts tells us that Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers (Acts 18:3). Priscilla also assisted her husband Aquila in church work (Acts 18:26), and Paul on one occasion thanks them both for their assistance (Romans 16:3, 4).

However, the God-ordained role for women is homemaking (See Titus 2:5). It is the woman's responsibility to make her home her castle, a retreat from the stress and storms of life, a little fortified city in which her husband and her family delight to live. I, for one, do not believe that Titus intends by "keepers at home" to mean "stayers at home." Rather, I interpret "keepers" to mean managers or caretakers of the home. This, no matter what other duties a woman takes on, must be her primary interest. And each woman must know for herself when she has stepped over those bounds and shoved aside those interests.

Proverbs 31 indicates that the virtuous woman works day and night in order to manage her household. She is industrious and economical. Her hands are working, serving hands as she tends to husband, children, maids (all our modern day conveniences such as washer, dryer, dishwasher, vacuum, micro-oven, etc.). The candle of this woman burns late into the evening, and it is lit early in the morning. This chapter seems to corroborate the saying, "Man's work is from sun to sun; but a woman's work is never done." Her well-run household is the envy of the sluggish woman.

The virtuous woman is like Ruth, about whom the people of Bethlehem said, "The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like

Leah, which two did build the house of Israel . . ." (Ruth 4:11). Truly, a virtuous, noble woman is, as the old adage claims, worth her weight in gold!

COLOR: THE ABILITY OF A GEM TO REFLECT, REFRACT, AND DISPERSE LIGHT

A virtuous woman is a reflection of the church, fair and lovely. As such, her beauty is not reckoned by costly gold, or braiding of hair, but hers is the beauty of one who serves her husband (Christ) and family (fellow saints) because she fears God (I Timothy 2:9, 10). Her work-a-day conduct reflects practical godliness. She is the faithfully submissive woman, totally engaged in practical, loving service to her "lord" husband because she is willingly submissive to Lord Jesus. The husband of this woman is not afraid to leave on a business trip or attend his many church and school meetings because he knows his wife will manage the household well while he is away. The children will be taught their catechism, the toddlers will be trained and disciplined, and the routine of his home will be uninterrupted.

The loving, compassionate service of this woman extends outside her home to include the poor and needy. She is the Dorcas described in Acts 9, immersing herself in good works, alms-deeds, and hospitable acts. She manages her household so efficiently that she still has time and energy for the needy neighbor. What a reflection of Christ's own ministry on earth! ". . . the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister . . ." (Matthew 20:28). We women often fret over ways in which we can be a witness in our homes to the unchurched. Well, here we have an example of a powerful witness from the home front: doing deeds of kindness

and mercy for all the poor and needy with whom we come into contact. We may not minimize the pot of chicken soup, the warm extra coat, the comforting words of encouragement for the sick and distressed fellow saint or unsaved sinner which we women are uniquely able to give. And a woman has to be minding the home front in order to be able to disperse acts of charity.

CUT: FACETS OF A GEM FILLED WITH FIRE AND SPARKLE

The virtuous woman takes some time for herself. Especially after children are included in the family, it becomes important that the wife does not completely neglect herself. She makes sure that she is well-groomed, and she cares for her appearance. Even though the woman in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs is diligent for her husband, children, and household, she finds and makes time for herself. Notice verse 22, "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple." Here we do not see the wife as little more than a drone, beaten down and hunched over her kettles or sewing machine all day. This ideal woman is no slattern. She has what we so often hear about today, "self-worth" — a good, healthy, spiritual kind of self-worth. This woman is carrying out her tasks joyfully and willingly, and so she feels good about herself.

Nor is she a mental dullard. Verse 26 of this chapter informs us that she can hold an intelligent conversation. She speaks with wisdom. She keeps herself informed on theological and political matters. She knows what's happening in the world around her. She's interesting to be with. And although she speaks with wisdom, her tongue is ruled by kindness. Hers is not the cut-down, the back-biting, the

slanderous tongue. For then, who would seek her company and benefit from her wisdom and experience? Neither her husband, nor her children. "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman" (Proverbs 21:19).

CLARITY: THE FLAWLESSNESS OF A GEM

Just as impurities reduce the value of a jewel, so do impurities diminish a woman's worth. The virtuous woman has no visible imperfections. With all her working and serving, it is her husband who is raised to honor in the gates. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband" (Proverbs 12:4). Her husband is raised to

honor because of her being the busy energy behind him. A noble and god-fearing wife will do her husband good all the days of her life — even when they are both aged and gray, and the once fiery passion has died down to a few tender, glowing embers.

She is the glory of her husband (I Corinthians 11:7). And her husband acknowledges this. Proverbs 31:28 says that her husband praises his wife. This is reward enough for the virtuous woman. Husbands, may I gently remind you what a wonderful reward this is for your wife — that you praise her! Praise from you takes the sting out of housework's hard bite; it lightens the

laundry load; it alleviates the wearisome hours of chasing toddlers.

According to studies done, it would cost over \$75,000 a year to pay a wife for all her services rendered. But with the blessings of her children falling on her tired brow like gentle rain, and the praise from her husband ringing in her soul, the virtuous wife feels amply rewarded. She is well-satisfied with her lot in life.

Do you know this woman? I do. I have seen her many beautiful faces throughout the history of the church. She is the many-faceted woman in the church today, too.

She is a ruby, the rarest and costliest of gems. □

Contribution Mr. Joel Sugg

Suicide — Self Murder (1)

(The following essay was originally prepared at the request of a Bible study society in one of our congregations as a guide for an after-recess discussion. The writer attempted an outline but fell into a kind of provocative meditation. This work was not intended for publication, but with this caution, and some minor editing, it is offered here.)

Suicide, like all sin, is not just a matter of an overt act. It begins in the heart; and although it might not be committed outwardly, it is nevertheless very real within. The child of God is not immune to the ravages of this sin and for some this sin may be the very center of that battlefield

within the believer wherein he struggles earnestly to put off the old man, his adversary who deceitfully schemes to wrench the child of God out of the sovereign hands of his Father, were that possible. The burden of these words is to encourage believers to confront radically the sin of suicide, albeit with anguish for some, anxiety for others, and disquiet for us all. It is done in the hope of our spiritual growth whereby we may become better equipped to war against the vicious sin, whether within our own hearts or as manifest in others whom God has placed us near.

This statement, however bold it may seem, is made with great trembling, not only because of

the indefinable dread of a thing so appalling and seemingly inexplicable, but also because no sane man stands on a violent battlefield without fear, especially one who justifiably trembles at his own inadequacy for the task. It might be better that we not even talk about it, that we avoid the issue, abandon the field to fight some other battle. Yet, while the Preacher in Ecclesiastes cautions that there is a time to be silent, he also exhorts that there is a time to speak; and this is the time to speak of a sin which is epidemic throughout the world today, and, when radically defined, is causing great harm to the body of Christ. The latter problem is our principal subject here.

Mr. Sugg is a ruling elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Houston, Texas.

Suicide is self murder. But — listen well — it is not the murder *of the self* but the murder *by the self* of the person whom God has created. The self is the very seat of the man of sin within us. That man is so seated within ourselves that, except we be born again, his thoughts are our thoughts, his will is our will, his power is our bondage. The terms *self* and *old man of sin* are used without distinction in this paper.

Now in the believer, the dominating power of the old man has been broken by Jesus' death; and the new man, born from above, is the seat of the power of Christ within him. However, in the counsel of God, the old man retains great strength as long as the believer is in this world. This results in a lifelong struggle between the drive of the self to sin and the desire of the new man to obey God. The outcome of this struggle is as certain as the absolute sovereignty of God, but its course is one of a battle to the death. The self, using weapons of flattering strokes, sympathetic pats, and vicious slashes, is futilely but desperately seeking to re-establish the old chains of Satan and to wreck the new bonds of Christ, or to tear the person apart in the process.

This tearing apart is suicide within the heart when the believer, falling into the black depths of depression, listens to the self and not to God, when his ears hungrily feed upon the siren song of sympathy for his suffering of injustice, or when he inconsolably agrees with the destructive accusations of his own hopeless, sinful condition. This renders the believer as good as dead, a doleful and useless servant of the Lord. In his despair he is deceived into believing God has abandoned him, and he may even seek actual death. He turns away in anguish from God's arresting command, "Thou shalt

not kill," deaf to the law of both mounts, Sinai and Zion. Yet he must bear the responsibility for his personal disintegration, because it is being carried out essentially by words from his own self which he has chosen to listen to.

This is not to ignore that the believer may be under intensive assault from the outside or that he may be experiencing a peculiar physical illness which uniquely produces agonizing depression. When these are present, they must be acknowledged and dealt with. Yet it remains the case that if the self is silenced, these other matters can be handled with only a fraction of the trauma caused when that evil-speaking old man within is allowed to amplify upsetting problems to a deafening roar.

The battle objective of the old man is to keep the believer focused on his own self at all times, and thus frustrating the child of God's steady concentration upon Christ. The old man is constantly encouraging "self-concern" and dulling the life of the new man within. However futilely, he would thwart the inexorable purposes of God, which are to diminish more and more the strength of self and to fill the believer more and more with Christ.

At its heart, suicide is the sinful manifestation of miserable bitterness with any part or all of one's life. Like all sin, its essence lies within the person, and one need not commit this sin outwardly to be guilty of it. Suicide is surrendering to self-induced despair or bitterness and remaining deaf to the sovereign commands and uplifting promises of God. It has as its companion that lying deception that unless the self is served and given place, then the vessel can hold nothing. This evil pair run for their lives — and finally to their deaths —

from the truthful reality that, as the self is more and more emptied out of the child of God, then that vessel begins to experience being filled with true *personal* life, a life not only enlivened and enlightened by the presence of God, but finding its highest *personal* fulfillment in the ultimacy of God in every particle of its being and experience.

The word *suicide* does not appear in Scripture, but the Bible contains at least four instances of its being carried out in the commonly understood meaning, the purposeful taking of one's physical life by one's own hand:

I Samuel 31:4 . . . Saul took a sword and fell upon it.

II Samuel 17:23 . . . Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed . . . and hanged himself and died.

I Kings 16:18 . . . and Zimri burned up the palace and himself.

Matthew 27:5 . . . Judas . . . went and hanged himself.

But the heart of the matter lies not in these occasions, but in the command, "Thou shalt do no murder." And this commandment includes the murder of one's own person. To know this we need only read Ezekiel 18:4, "Behold all souls are mine . . ." and Deuteronomy 32:39, ". . . I kill and I make alive . . ."

This solemn decree of God is specifically explained in the Heidelberg Catechism in part of its answer to question 105:

What does God require in the Sixth Commandment?

. . . that I not harm myself, nor willfully run into any danger.

All creatures and the whole of creation belong to the great Creator, who has brought all things into being and brings them to their end Himself, out of the power and purpose of His sovereign counsel. The dear and foundationally true words at the beginning of the catechism are that my only comfort in life and

death is that I am not my own but belong unto my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Man is not his own, the lie of the world notwithstanding.

This sin is one of peculiar Scriptural gravity. It is the unusual case that there is no account in the Bible of a godly person physically taking his own life in suicide. A study of the lives of Saul, Ahithophel, Zimri, and Judas reveals that they were ungodly men whose wickedness preceded, as well as included, their murders at their own hands.

By contrast, there are at least four instances of godly men who, out of their discouragement in their calling, solitary despondency, excruciating pain, or hatred of life, appealed to God for death, and they were, along with all actual suicides, guilty of the sin of hopelessness in life. Yet they did not take their own lives, and Moses, Elijah, Job, and Jonah were spared from death in the time of their testing, although each one sought it most earnestly:

Moses cried, "... I am not able to bear all this people alone ... kill me if I have found favor in thy sight" (Numbers 11:14-15).

"... It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life," pleaded the lonely and fearful Elijah (I Kings 9:14).

Job muttered in anguish, "... My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than life" (Job 7:15).

... and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished himself to die ... (Jonah 4:8b).

Some might suppose that these passages of Scripture, and others which show God's loving care of His children, tend to support the idea that no godly person can actually take his own life. But nowhere does the Bible present this assumption as incontrovertible truth. It is silent on the specific question.

Also offered in support of this same supposition is the argument that suicide is the unique sin, for

following it there is no opportunity to confess, to repent, and, further, to live in the thankfulness of loving obedience to our merciful God. This idea of uniqueness is greatly weakened when we picture at least the possibility of the drunkard dying in the crash of his ill-controlled vehicle, the glutton choking to death while stuffing himself, the fornicator suffering a fatal stroke in the very midst of his fleshly indulgence, or the gossip experiencing heart failure while giving ear to a poisonous morsel. Few of God's people would be guilty of such gross manifestations of sin, but not one of us is exempt from any of these sins themselves. It would be presumption for a child of God to believe that he would never die with unconfessed sin on his heart. Rather than debate whether taking one's life is unique in this way, we should fall upon trembling knees, beg forgiveness in repentance for our own sins, whatever they are, and then, in God's strength, walk as if we meant it. Only in the way of presumptuous sin can we think for a moment that the great, towering wickedness of another somehow will overshadow our own shortcomings from the just judgment of God.

By grace, we receive this earnest admonition, yet we must admit that the dreadful seriousness of the sin of suicide remains undiminished.

Now the tactic of Satan is to deceive us by leading us to belittle the sin, find the justifying side of it, treat it as a kind of illness, or by causing us to follow a thousand other diverting treacheries. So we are not surprised when the ministers of Satan, "transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (II Corinthians 11:15), suggest some "helpful" questions: "But isn't this a problem that only rarely occurs in the visible church, and most of

those affected are bystanders whose emotional wounds will heal in time? And when this quandary does arise, isn't calling in professional help, before the fact, to remedy the mental or emotional illness, the responsible and practical answer to the problem, much like calling a physician in case of a critical sickness or injury? Why distress the whole church with this problem when they are really not involved?"

Their words are smooth, their reasonableness is persuasive, the alternatives are uncertain. But God sends His light to shine upon our vexation, and we hear the Lord Himself say:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment ... [and] ... that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:21, 22, 28).

In his heart! How could we miss that suicide, like all sin, is foundationally a matter of the heart within:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness — all these evil things come from within and defile the man (Mark 7:21-23).

Is it possible that even a great multitude of God's people now living are guilty of real and damnable suicide, a suicide within their own hearts? How many of us are guilty, and how often are we guilty of this insidious destruction of our own living persons? Is suicide not only physical destruction, but also an inward resentment against some aspect, or the whole of one's own person, whom God made? □

(to be continued)

Four Significant Conferences Headship Report of the CRC The REC Loses Another Member

All Around Us
Prof. Robert Decker

Four Significant Conferences

The Calvin Studies Society (of which our professors are members), an international society which has as its purpose the study of John Calvin and Calvinism is sponsoring the "Fifth Colloquium On Calvin Studies" on January 19 and 20. The Colloquium is hosted this year by Davidson College. Among the subjects to be treated are: "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Gregory of Nazianzen and Calvin," "Heinrich Bullinger's Theology: Thematic, Comprehensive, Schematic," and "Calvin's Doctrine of Eternal Life." Two of our professors, David Engelsma and Herman Hanko, plan to attend.

Christian Observer (December 22, 1989) reports that a Conference on Psalmody will be held this coming summer at the Bonclarken Assembly Conference Grounds near Hendersonville, North Carolina. Prof. Herman Hanko is serving on the planning committee for this conference and will also be one of the lecturers. Prof. Hanko's subject is: "The Psalms: A Christian's Biography." We are told that:

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

The August 1-3 conference will also offer a range of workshops on practical use of the psalms in home and church settings. Copies of the papers presented will be made available The registration, food, and lodging fees have been set low enough to encourage family participation The conference provides a unique opportunity to meet key leaders in many of the groups which participate in the Christian Observer and to catch up on the life of the conservative Reformed community on an informal basis.

Further information on the conference may be obtained by writing the conference director, Arthur Lamoureux, 209 Tanner Ave., Warwick, Rhode Island 02886.

Classis West of our PR Churches is sponsoring an officebearers conference on March 6 in our South Holland, IL PRC. Prof. Robert Decker will present the opening lecture on the subject, "Preaching in the Reformed Tradition." This will be followed by several sectionals on various aspects of preaching. Among these are: "Preaching from the Old Testament," "Heidelberg Catechism Preaching," and "Applicatory Preaching." While the conference is aimed at preachers and ruling elders, non-officebearers are cordially invited to attend. There will be no fee.

The Synod of the PRC is sponsoring a conference with their sister churches in early June. The

general subject of this conference is: "The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit." Delegates and observers from The Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore, from Australia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, England, the U.S. and Canada will be in attendance, D.V. Further information on the conference, which will be held in our First Church in Grand Rapids, will be forthcoming from the Committee For Contact With Other Churches. The meetings will be open to the public.

Headship Report of the CRC

The long awaited and much anticipated study report on headship was recently sent to church councils throughout the Christian Reformed Church for study and reflection before the June, 1990 meeting of that church's synod. John Van Dyk (*Christian Renewal*, Dec. 11, 1989) observes:

While the committee makes sure to emphasize that it is not a study committee on women's ordination, the implications of their judgments and conclusions speak resoundingly in favor of opening all offices to women "The overall sweep of Scripture is toward Christ's restoration of the original order of men and women living and working side by side, on a par, mutually supporting and ministering to each other in pursuit of their common task. This is the

biblical sweep . . . With Jesus the restoration begins to take place. In Him and through Him the kingdom of God draws near. As a result we see Him live in a remarkable openness toward women, allowing them to join His band of disciples and choosing women to be the first heralds of His resurrection."

According to Van Dyk the thrust of the committee's findings is that "head" or *kephale* in the Greek is primarily translated in two ways. Some lexicons interpret the word to mean "authority" while others interpret it to mean "source of origin." The committee leans toward the meaning "source" or "origin" as opposed to "authority."

It is not difficult to predict where the CRC will go with this report.

The REC Loses Another Member

The Reformed Ecumenical Council lost yet another member denomination.

The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CGKN) formally withdrew its membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Council at its synod meeting in October. The CGKN suspended its membership at the REC synod in Harare. The principal reason given was the CGKN's differences with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), also a member of the REC. The CGKN believes that the GKN should have been requested to resign from the REC, but the REC refused to do so. A secondary reason given for withdrawal was the alleged politicking going on at Harare. Although this charge has been denied, the committee reporting on the Harare synod defended its conclusion. Its chair, Rev. P. den Butter, said they were "fully convinced" of the truth of this charge. The synod further debated the nature of their future relations with the GKN. Several proposals were made, but a full debate and a decision will not come until the synod's November meeting. (Christian Observer, Dec. 8, 1989)

The Christian Reformed Churches (CGKN) in the Netherlands is not to be confused with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The CGKN is the mother church of the Free Reformed Church in North America. Perhaps the reader will recall that some of the younger ministers of this latter denomination received their ministerial training at our seminary.

Perhaps the question of what the REC will do with the GKN will become moot if the latter church withdraws from the REC as one of its leading ministers is advocating.

Another interesting question or questions is, will there be a realignment of the more conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches? If so, will the Protestant Reformed Churches be invited? Only God knows. Our prayer and fervent hope is that the Reformed Faith may be preserved in this sin-darkened world. □

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

Courts Sanction Sunday Work Refusals

"What would Sunday be today if professional football, baseball, basketball and tennis were barred. Today Sunday is not only a day for religion, but for . . . rest, recreation, business, industry and labor. Such a change is not surprising but is dictated by the American way of life."

Frazee v. Illinois

(Illinois Appellate Court, 1987)

Mr. Lanting, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, is a practicing attorney.

Sunday Work. Do Christian employees have the religious freedom to refuse work on Sundays without fear of being fired or of other employer reprisals? The answer is a qualified yes. Two recent court decisions have expanded the Christian's right to refuse Sunday work on the grounds of sincerely held religious beliefs.

In the case of *E.E.O.C. v. Ithaca Industries, Inc.* (1989), employee Dannel Dean had been

working five years for Ithaca when, because of production demands, his supervisor asked him to work on Sunday. Dean refused, stating that he could not work on Sundays because of his religious beliefs. A few weeks later Dean was asked a second time to work a Sunday shift. He again refused and was promptly fired. Dean then filed a religious discrimination claim with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (E.E.O.C.).

On appeal, the federal court ruled that Ithaca's discharge of Dean was unlawful. First, the court held that §703 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, makes it unlawful practice for an employer to discriminate against an employee on the basis of his or her religion.

Employer Accommodation. Secondly, the court held that §701 of the same Act requires an employer to make reasonable accommodations to the religious beliefs and practices of its employees. Moreover, the burden is on the employer to offer such accommodations, so long as this does not result in "undue hardship" for the employer. Ithaca had the duty to offer such accommodation, said the court, even in the face of Dean's absolute refusal to work Sunday shifts.

But what kind of accommodations must an employer offer when confronted by a worker who refuses Sunday work? The court suggested that the employer may look to other shifts to find a substitute worker, advertise for qualified substitutes, permit shift transfers, or encourage the employee to post his own notices at the workplace in an attempt to secure a replacement. The employer's failure to initiate such accommodations constitutes religious discrimination in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Freedom of Religion — First Amendment. In the more recent case of *Frazee v. Illinois* (1989), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Illinois' denial of unemployment benefits to an unemployed person who refused employment requiring Sunday work violated the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. William Frazee refused a temporary retail position offered him because the job required him to work on Sunday. Frazee told the employer that, as a Christian, he could not work

"on the Lord's day." Frazee later applied to the state of Illinois for unemployment benefits. His application was denied because he had "refused an offer for work without good cause." Frazee appealed to Illinois courts.

The Illinois court opinion contained a lengthy discussion of modern Sabbath day observance in America (see quote above), held that "if all Americans were to abstain from working Sunday, chaos would result," and accordingly ruled against Frazee.

But the U.S. Supreme Court, overruling the Illinois court, unequivocally held that the denial of Frazee's unemployment benefits constituted a violation of the free exercise clause of the First Amendment. The Court ruled that "since Frazee unquestionably had a sincere belief that his religion prevented him from doing such work," he could not be denied unemployment benefits.

Personal Religious Beliefs. The Supreme Court's decision to honor Frazee's religious convictions regarding Sunday work is especially noteworthy because Frazee did not belong to a church or sect that opposed Sunday work. In other words, to require protection under the First Amendment a religious belief must be "sincere," but it need not be a "tenet or dogma of an established religious sect." Frazee's *personal* religious belief regarding Sunday work, when "sincerely held," was worthy of protection under the Constitution.

Finally, the Supreme Court was duly unimpressed with the Illinois Court's opinion that ascribed great significance to "America's weekend way of life." Nor was the Supreme Court persuaded of the lower court's fear that "if all Americans were to abstain from working on Sunday, chaos would result." On the contrary, the Supreme Court held that Illinois

clearly had no "state interest sufficiently compelling to override a legitimate claim to the free exercise of religion."

Religious Freedom and Sunday Work. In the past, many conscientious Christians lost their jobs and were denied unemployment benefits thereafter because of their principled refusal to work on Sunday. Surely a believer should always be prepared to make this profound sacrifice rather than to violate the Fourth Commandment. But for now, Christian workers may be pleased to know it is unlawful for an employer to discharge or take any other measures against a Christian because he refuses to work Sundays. On the contrary, the employer has the burden to take specific action short of "undue hardship" to accommodate reasonably an objector's sincerely held religious beliefs regarding work on the Lord's day.

The right to work and the freedom of religion are precious liberties — liberties which people of many countries no longer enjoy today. And perhaps in the not too distant future we will be denied these freedoms also. But meanwhile, as Reformed citizens, we have the right and duty to assert these freedoms which protect our jobs and livelihood. We also should thank God for the liberties we still enjoy and continue praying for our government leaders "that God may rule and guide them in all their ways that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (Art. 23, Belgic Confession). □

In His love I am abiding,
Ev'rything to Him confiding;
'Neath His wing my soul is
hiding, —
He is all in all to me.

S.B., 1928

The Footsteps of Our Lord as Heard in New Zealand

Guest Article

Rev. Rodney Miersma

Christ is coming! This is a truth which every child of God knows, yet so often ignores as he is caught up on the whirlwind of today's fast life. It has been so long ago that He was taken from us in a cloud to heaven that we do not daily live in living hope of His return. However, the Lord will not let us forget. He has given us many signs that show that He will come again in judgment, so destroying the wicked and this present world and thereby bringing about the final realization of God's covenant with His people as He gathers them unto Himself in the new earth and the new heavens where He shall tabernacle with them evermore.

In this article we will take note of these signs, these footsteps of Christ, as they are heard in New Zealand. In this way you will learn a little more about our little country on the other side of the world while at the same time we might create within all of us an awareness of the nearness of our redemption for "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

As you read these words we will be living in a new year. We will have left another decade, the 80's, behind us, the new decade of the 90's having been ushered in. In another ten years, in A.D. 2000, we begin another century, and another millennium. Almost two thousand years have elapsed since Christ ascended to glory. Scoffers have therefore risen in these last days to say, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (II Peter 3:4).

O, but they are ignorant, willingly ignorant; for all things have not continued as they were from the beginning of time. No, the first world perished, being overflowed with water. That was the first judgment, the typical judgment of the final judgment. In that final judgment the heavens and the earth shall be destroyed, not by water, but by fire. "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Pet. 3:7, 10).

Whereas in the days of Noah, even though surrounded by water, the ungodly scoffed at the idea of a flood whereby they would be destroyed, so also today, even though surrounded by fire, men scoff at the truth that by fire will God destroy the present creation. Here in New Zealand we have ample testimony of the nearness of fire, destructive fire. We are quite aware that deep within the earth the earth's core consists of molten rock. When under tremendous pressure this molten rock finds a weak spot in the earth's crust it breaks forth in volcanic fury. The central part of the northern island of New Zealand is such a weak spot. Auckland, the largest city, has hills, mountains, and craters caused by some 48 volcanoes. Midway between Auckland and the capital city of Wellington are large mountains formed by volcanoes, mountains which are expected to erupt again, even now periodically smoking and steaming. "On a world scale, New Zealand's volcanoes rank as some of the most devastating. Of the 53 biggest known eruptions in the earth's history, one quarter have been in New Zealand" (The Evening Post, Oct. 28, 1989).

This same area is also known for its many geysers, hot springs, and hot, bubbling mud pools much like the ones in Yellow-

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand.

stone National Park. Huge underground pools of superheated water are tapped as geothermal energy for the production of electricity.

What causes these weak spots through which molten magma can burst through and which explains why whole areas are covered by geysers and hot pools? The surface of the whole world is divided into vast and moving plates. The lines that divide these plates are the weak points. Such a line you have running the length of California, along which line is San Francisco which was recently shaken by an earthquake. New Zealand is a chain of islands thrust up from the ocean bed along such a line. The fault surrounds the Pacific Ocean where the continental blocks press against the plate which holds the sea. Because of its volcanic nature, this boundary is sometimes called the Pacific Ring of Fire. Thus in New Zealand one is literally living on top of a very powerful sign and significant footstep of our Lord.

It is along these same fault lines that one hears yet another footstep of Christ in the form of earthquakes. Volcanoes and earthquakes go hand in hand. In New Zealand there are in an average year about 60 to 100 earthquakes of Richter magnitudes 4 to 5, 10 to 20 with magnitudes of 5 to 6, and 1 of magnitude 6 or more. In comparison San Francisco experienced one of 6.9.

Since arriving in this country we have felt numerous quakes, since the fault runs but a few miles from our house. One feels the tremendous power of the Almighty while at the same time experiencing utter helplessness to do anything about the shaking. *Terra firma* does not seem so firm and indestructible anymore. What comfort to be able to turn to the Scriptures and be re-

assured that "all these things must come to pass" (Matt. 24:6). Whereas the ungodly are filled with fear, yea, even terrified, the child of God recognizes the hand of his Savior shaking the nations as a precursory sign of judgment upon the wicked. These are signs of assurance confirming Christ's promise to come again to judge the quick and the dead. Fearful judgment, this will be, for the ungodly reprobate, but salvation, redemption, public justification and vindication of Christ and His people.

This has been the Word of God to His people all through history. That fact is driven into our minds and hearts presently as we study the Minor Prophets in our Bible Study. Over and over the people of God would turn away from their Maker so that God would chastise them by sending oppressing enemies. But God always sent His Word by His prophets who promised salvation which would come by way of judgment upon their enemies. Many times this announcement of judgment would include the "shaking of the nations" pointing to the final shaking of the whole creation in the final judgment.

These prophets would also point out the sins of the people and call them to repentance. Many times the sins of those in high places stood out. How true that is also today, all over the world, including the little country of New Zealand. The locals call New Zealand "Godzone" because of its incomparable beauty; but that is far from the truth with respect to the populace as a whole and with respect to those in high places in particular. In this we are no different than any other country. We live in days when "iniquity shall abound" (Matt. 24:12) because "the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16).

Each time that I have written an article in *The STANDARD*

BEARER I have included an invitation to come over and meet your fellow saints on the other side of the world. After reading about earthquakes and volcanoes your zeal and enthusiasm to do so may be correspondingly dampened. However, as we live and visit in the way of the Lord we are assured that we are always in the hand of our covenant God and Father. It is truly exciting to see and feel these unmistakable signs of Christ's coming again, to hear His footsteps loudly and clearly.

It is our prayer that this little insight to New Zealand will not only provide you with some information, but that in the light of God's holy Word it may fill you with comfort in that you are not your own but belong unto your faithful Savior Who shakes the earth unto the salvation of all of His own Who have been purchased by His precious blood. As a little congregation we experienced this comforting and strengthening truth in a very particular way when in October the Lord took unto glory our fellow saint and officebearer, Elder Anton Vooy. Even though we feel this loss keenly, yet we go forward in faith knowing that our faithful Savior will be with us even unto His return. May you continue to remember us before His throne of grace. □

THEN SHALL I KNOW

(1 Cor. 13:12)

Not till the loom is silent,
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas,
And explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful,
In the Weaver's skilful hand.
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.

S.B., 1930

The Day Of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

A Small Beginning of the New Obedience

When Adam and Eve ate a piece of fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it may have looked to us as a minor sin. It may even look strange that a "little sin" like this should call for death and everlasting punishment in the lake of fire. But if we realize that it was an act of hatred against God; a denial of His right to forbid man to do this or that; an act whereby man sought to dethrone God; and, as the devil told them through the serpent, an act whereby they sought to become gods; we can then see that "little sin" as a shadow of all the godlessness, violence, and cruelty that is in the world today. We can also see that this sin was a shadow of what the man of sin, the coming antichrist, will bring into this world.

Consider also the fact that they did not make fig-leaf aprons because they felt the shame of having sinned against God, or because they still loved Him. They did not fall into partial but into total depravity. They died spiritually that day, and did not simply become seriously sick spiritually. They were deeply concerned about getting away from the punishment of that sin, but not from sin itself. Making fig-leaf aprons was not a confession of sin or even a partial con-

fession of sin. Running away from God when they heard Him coming into the garden was not an evidence of remorse and hatred of their sinful deed. In all this they showed absolutely no love for God but only for self. In no way did their actions reveal that they now realized that what they called good was spiritually evil, and that the tree was God's word as to what is spiritually good and evil for man.

Yes, Adam and Eve were only adding to their sin, not striving to get away from sin. They sought to get away from God. Cornered by God, and finding out that they could not hide from Him, Adam did say, "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." This was not a confession of sin. Hatred of the punishment that sin calls for is to be found also in the devil and in all the fallen angels and in the seed of the serpent. That hatred in no way and to no degree proves a partial depravity, but instead reveals a total depravity. It reveals spiritual death and not merely spiritual weakness.

Shall we call Paul a liar when he wrote in Ephesians 2:1 and 5 that not only the Ephesians but *we* — himself included — are spiritually dead in sins and not simply weak in them? When God moved David and led him to write in Psalm 51:5 that he was shapen in iniquity, and that in sin his mother conceived him, did

He make a mistake? Was He misinterpreting His word to Adam, when He told him that the day he sinned he would die?

Then, too, instead of running to God to express sorrow for their sins, Adam and Eve ran away and were trying to defend themselves in their sins. They made fig-leaf aprons to try to escape the punishment of sin, but not to escape acting as sinners. They were not trying to run away from the devil. In fact, they did not run to the devil to rebuke him and to tell him that they hated him for leading them into this sin. They even dared to talk back to the almighty, sovereign God, rather than point out to the devil what a liar and deceiver he is. They ran to hide from God but not to hide from Satan so that he could lead them no further into sin.

And let us not water down and twist God's words when He told the devil that He, get that, HE, and not man, would put enmity in the heart of the woman and her seed. The awesome truth here is that man did not have any of that hatred against sin and the seed of the serpent. Thus the truth that he did become spiritually dead is found in God's words to the devil. God promised to put into man that which he no longer had: love for God and hatred for sin. And we sin today when we deny God's word that man died *spiritually* the day Adam sinned, and that we all

Rev. Heys is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

come into this world completely incapable of doing anything pleasing in God's sight. Go back to Ephesians 2:1. Paul, and God through him, states that we were dead in trespasses and sins. He does not say "dead because of trespasses and sins." They were not physically dead when Paul wrote to them, but they were certainly spiritually dead. And God promised spiritual life, when He promised to put enmity in them over against the devil and his host.

But what we are coming to, and should take hold of us as the truth that our holy God presents to us in Scripture, is that when Adam and Eve fell into sin, we have a shadow of the world of sin into which even the elect, born again children of God, will time and again fall because of their old, sinful nature which they received from Adam.

As we considered last time, Abraham is presented to us in Genesis 12 as a reborn child of God who was called, that is, commanded, by God to leave his country, kinsmen and father, and that he obeyed Him and went from Haran to the land of Canaan. Now, leaving his country is one thing. Leaving his kinsmen can be much harder. But leaving his father was far more difficult, even though he did have a wife to take along, and did take the son of his brother with him. Not only did he go to a far away country, but he did that when he knew absolutely nothing about where God wanted him to go. It turned out to be a land where the seed of the serpent far outnumbered the seed of the woman. But he trusted completely in God. He was sure that he would be brought to the right place, and that God would fulfill His promise.

What a gift of faith that was! What a gift of grace it was for a man, brought up in a house

where an idol was worshiped, to have such implicit trust in Jehovah, the only true God. And here is a man already seventy-five years old and unable thus far to have a son born unto him. Yet he has full confidence in God's promise to make him a great nation, and that in him all families of the earth shall be blessed. He is sure that every letter in the words of God's promise will be fulfilled.

However, that sin of Adam cast a shadow of what Abraham did after arriving in Canaan and after dwelling there briefly. As pointed out, even though a child of God receives the beginning of a new spiritual life, he retains that old man of sin. And in all God's reborn children we are going to find sin. Adam's sin was a shadow of the sin that appears in every human being who comes into this world, with the exception of Christ Whose Father is the almighty and holy God. That old, sinful nature remains in us until we die. That new principle of spiritual life we keep everlastingly by God's grace. And that we find Abraham sinning in Genesis 12 — the same chapter in which we have presented to us his strong and amazing faith — reveals that we do have a constant struggle in this life, and will not get the victory over sin until God separates our souls from our sinful flesh the moment that we die.

We do well, therefore, to take note of the fact also that sin always leads to more sin. What Adam and Eve did may seem mild in comparison with what man has done since — that is, mild in man's eyes, not in God's. Their sin was terrible in light of what it brings all of us, not simply as far as punishment is concerned, but also as far as what it brings forth in us today. What a wicked world this is wherein we live today! With all men's latest inventions and earthly posses-

sions we see what man can do, not simply in breaking the second table of the law in the immorality and adultery of today, in the murder of abortion and in killing to get earthly possessions or in violent anger, in the theft, deceit, and covetousness, but also in disregarding the first table of the law *even in the church world!* What a lot of devilish false doctrines are defended and widely propagated today! And the walk of life of "believers" is allowed in many circles to be no different from that of the most ungodly and immoral persons in the world of entertainment. The church's music, sad to say, must be like the world's. Instead of advocating a walk like that of those who are called "the heroes of faith," presented in Hebrews 11 (a better name would be "The giants of faith"), churches sometimes fail to condemn worshiping the ungodly "heroes of unbelief" and enjoy them in their sins.

Let us not call Adam's sin a "minor misdemeanor." Let us see it as an awesome shadow of all the antichristian godlessness and devilish behavior of man ever since that day. And let us see it as that which tells us what still lies ahead of us.

Look then at Abraham's sin as well as at Adam's. Even as Adam, seeing his nakedness, made himself a fig-leaf apron to hide his sin, and did not try to get rid of the sin by running to God for salvation, so Abraham, instead of coming to God in prayer and asking Him whether he should go to Egypt for food, follows the desires of his flesh. He let go of that promise of God and did not continue to put his trust in Him. How many Canaanites survived that famine? Was that famine so serious, when there is an almighty God, and we have His promise?

This sin made it necessary for him to commit the next sin of ly-

ing about his wife, calling her his sister. Here too, like Adam's and Eve's sin, which brought no physical pain or violence to any other person, it did not seem to be a grievous sin. Yet we do well to take hold of the truth that in God's eyes there is no sin that is not grievous. Did not their sin bring death and a slippery slide into hell? That all comes out of their sin of listening to the devil and of not running away from him in hatred towards him for suggesting to them that they deny and oppose God!

And as far as Abraham was concerned, we have a reborn child of God falling into sin and revealing the truth that the life of God's born-again child still has a constant and difficult struggle with the flesh.

Adam's sin cast a shadow of what all men are going to do — with the exception of Christ, Who came in our flesh with a sinless, holy life as the Second Person of the holy Trinity in our flesh. Abraham's sin was a shadow of what sins we will find in believers as long as they are on this earth.

But do not seek comfort in that shadow. Get out into the light and let the new principle of life show you God's Son as our complete Savior. He is the Light of the World (John 8:12), and in Him is the light of life. Do not try to cover your sins, but run to God and His Son and pray for strength to fight the good fight of faith. In the days that lie ahead we will need that as surely as Adam and Abraham did. For in us also is but a small beginning of that new obedience. □

New Year

Time's page is lifted, torn away,
discarded once again,

And worldlings celebrate the
passing of its grief and pain,
Toasting a better year to come.

He lifts the tattered page and
takes it up,

For it is His, Who numbered all
its days. Beside Him also rests
a cup.

Now nearing fullness, its foul
content foams and churns
And spews a vile stench-until His
anger burns

Hell-hot. God speaks, and winds
of judgment tear away
Life's fragile trappings. Now great
mountains sway

As violent tremors shake Earth
to its very core.

Creation, dying, groans and
trembles for deliverance once
more.

Above the raucous wailing of the
drunkard's song,

The martyred souls 'neath
Heaven's altar cry, "How
long?"

"How long?" we echo, "'til this
weariness, this sin-dark night
is past?"

He answers yet again. Walls that
have long imprisoned men
now fall,

And through all lands the White
Horse rides triumphant. Hear
the Gospel's call.

Many are gathered from all
nations to the Holy Life,
While others, hearing, rise in
enmity and strife

To quench this fire that burns
and purifies.

The increase of a poisoned land
grows smaller. Noxious gases
cloud once azure skies,

(continued on page 178)

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

January 15, 1990

MISSION ACTIVITIES

Rev. Ken Hanko, along with his family, returned home to Norristown, PA in the middle of December. You may remember that Rev. Hanko was on loan to the Covenant Reformed Fellow-

ship in Larne, Northern Ireland for a period of approximately nine months. However, due to difficulties in Norristown, Rev. Hanko returned home earlier than expected.

We can also report that there is a group of about 40 people, including 19 children, which make up the group in Larne. Because of this interest, the Committee for Contact with Other Churches has

asked if there are any consistories in our own churches who would be willing to release their pastors for a period of a month to six weeks between the first of January and Synod meeting in June, to help carry on the work started by Rev. Hanko.

Currently Rev. Kortering has consented to go to Larne, for a period of seven weeks, beginning the middle of January.

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

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

The Choral Society of the Hudsonville P.R.C. in Hudsonville, MI presented their annual Christmas program on December 10 in their church auditorium.

There also seems to be a surge of young people's activities in many of our church bulletins this time of year. The Jr. Young People's Society of the Southwest P.R.C. in Grandville, MI sponsored a pancake breakfast in early December to raise money for this year's convention. The Young People's Society of the Hope P.R.C. in Redlands, CA sponsored a Rummage Sale to cover this year's convention expenses as well. And the Young People's Society of the Doon P.R.C. in Doon, IA had a rather unique idea for a fund raiser. At least it's a project that I had not heard of before. All young people were urged to give of their time to pick up corn.

Being a city boy, I asked one of my fellow members in Hudsonville, who has his roots in Iowa corn, just what that meant, and he told me that a group will get together and glean a picked corn field. They can have all the corn the corn picker "leaves behind." They can then take this corn and sell it at market value and keep the profit. I would also assume that these funds were raised for this year's convention.

And finally, the Young Adult Society of the Southeast P.R.C. in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored an evening of volleyball and pizza at Covenant Chr. High School on December 1.

The Consistory of the Grand-

ville P.R.C. in Grandville, MI distributed a letter to their congregation explaining a project to raise money for a new piano, for their soon-to-be-completed church auditorium.

CONGREGATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Rev. K. Koole was the speaker at the annual Young People's Christmas Mass Meeting held at the Faith P.R.C. in Jenison, MI on December 17.

The Federation Board of our churches' Young People's Societies also invited everyone from congregations in the West Michigan area to join together and participate in a Christmas Singspiration held at the Hudsonville P.R.C. also on December 17.

MINISTERIAL CALLS

The Consistory of the Hope P.R.C. in Isabel, S.D. presented a trio to their congregation consisting of the Revs. Key, Flikkema, and T. Miersma. They were to call a pastor from that group on December 26.

And from a trio of the Revs. R. Dykstra, M. DeVries, and S. Houck, the congregation of the Randolph P.R.C. in Randolph, WI has extended a call to Rev. R. Dykstra.

The congregation of the Peace P.R.C. in Lynwood, IL has extended a call to the Rev. S. Houck, presently serving as home missionary to our churches.

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Covenant Chr. High School presented their annual Christmas Band and Choir Concert on December 14 at the Hudsonville P.R.C.

The following items were taken from an article which ap-

peared in the December issue of the *Heritage Herald*, a publication of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI, written by Gerald Kuiper, administrator.

1. 75% of all the world's information has occurred or been articulated in the past 25 years.
2. Information to man doubles every 2½ years.
3. 90% of information taught to children who entered school in September 1988 and who graduate in 2001, will have been created after 1988.

As we enter the last decade before the 21st century, we have to be aware that the signs of our Lord's return are everywhere, even in man's refusal to give God the praise and honor for the wonder of His creation, and the knowledge that it contains. □

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory and Congregation of the Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church express their heartfelt sympathy to Mrs. Verna Buys, Harley and Marilyn Buys and family, David Buys, Cal Buys, and other relatives, whose husband, father, and grandfather, MR. WILLIAM BUYS, was taken by the Lord to his heavenly home on November 30, 1989.

May they experience the blessed truth that: "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22, 23)

Rev. Michael DeVries, Pres.
Allen Hendriks, Clerk