

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

THE STANDARD BEARER

The covenant of God is not a relatively minor and secondary aspect of God's truth, much less a passing theological fad. Rather, it is one of the most prominent, most important doctrines of Holy Scripture, if not that grand reality which is the very heart of the whole biblical revelation.

See "The Covenant of God and the
Children of Believers" — page 269

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In This Issue...

Prof. Engelsma begins in this issue a four-part series on the doctrine of the covenant. When asked why he decided to do that, the professor indicated that he was motivated especially by four considerations. The first is that we as Protestant Reformed people are well served if we are periodically reminded of the development of this doctrine in our churches. Accordingly, especially our young people ought not to read these four articles as they appear but study them, with a view to learning this doctrine which has become one of the most beautiful and practical of the Protestant Reformed distinctives. We are confident that those who do so will be well rewarded for their effort.

Second, and closely connected to that, is that we are dealing here not with a peripheral matter as far as Reformed doctrine is concerned. Rather, as the quotation on the cover already intimates, a good, solid grasp of and commitment to covenant theology is essential, if one is to be truly Reformed and Calvinistic.

Third, this is not a doctrine concerning which Calvinistic churches find themselves in basic agreement. Differences are in fact significant. Especially is that the case with respect to the churches' understanding of the place of children in the covenant. It is for that reason that Prof. Engelsma intends to place special emphasis on that aspect of the subject.

Fourth, though there are these basic differences concerning a key doctrine of the Reformed faith, very little is made of it. Among the issues concerning which there has been much division, much confusion, in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today, the doctrine of the covenant is conspicuously absent. Little is said about it, either positively or negatively, while at the same time there is much ado about matters not nearly as significant. Our hope is that these articles will serve, in some small way, to demonstrate that that ought not to be so.

With that, we commend, to all of our readers, "The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers." □ —D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

No Bone Broken

The Jews therefore because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.

But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs . . .

For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

John 19:31-33, 36

It was Friday, the day of the Jewish Passover.

It was also the day of Jesus' crucifixion. At 9 o'clock in the morning Jesus had been nailed to a cross at Golgotha, just outside Jerusalem, between two other malefactors.

The Jewish leaders were concerned that the bodies of Jesus and the malefactors not remain on the cross during the Sabbath day, which was rapidly approaching.

And so they went to the Roman governor, Pilate. From Pilate they obtained permission to break the legs of Jesus and the malefactors, thereby hastening their deaths. In this way all three could be disposed of before dark.

The legs of the two malefactors crucified with Jesus were broken. But when the soldiers found Jesus already dead, they thrust a spear into His side, rather than break His legs.

John, who observed all this, saw in this incident a fulfillment of prophecy: "A bone of him shall not be broken."

Being a fulfillment of prophecy, this incident also proclaims to us the gospel of salvation.

* * * * *

It was the day of the Passover feast.

It was also the day of preparation, that is, the day of preparing for the Sabbath day which was to follow. And since this was the week of the Passover feast, this particular Sabbath was "an high day," a special and sacred Sabbath. The Jewish leaders did not want the bodies of Jesus and the malefactors to remain upon the cross over this special day.

We must bear in mind that in this OT era a dead corpse would defile the land. For that reason it was the practice to bury the dead, if at all possible, by sundown. In fact, God had given instructions through Moses that when a corpse was hanged in a tree as an intensification of

capital punishment, the corpse was to be buried by sundown, lest it defile the whole land.

Now it was the concern of the Jewish leaders that the land be not defiled with the corpses of Jesus and the two malefactors. We see here a hypocrisy that is well-nigh unbelievable. The Jewish leaders were all concerned about defiling the land of Canaan with a few dead corpses. But at the same time, however, they saw no trouble with defiling the land by murdering God's Son on the cross.

Be that as it may, the Jewish leaders went to Pilate and obtained permission to break the legs of Jesus and the malefactors. This was a common way to hasten the death of those crucified. One crucified could hang on for several days before death finally came to deliver him from his agony. But when his legs were smashed, shock set in and death came rather quickly. This is what the Jewish leaders requested be done with Jesus and the malefactors so that their bodies could be disposed of by sunset and the land be not defiled. Pilate willingly granted this request.

Evidently the soldiers started with the two malefactors, smashing their legs to bring a quick death.

But when the soldiers turned to Jesus, who was hanging from the middle cross, they found to their amazement that Jesus had already died. And so, instead of

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smashing His legs, they thrust a spear into His side, drawing blood and water. This was done, evidently, to assure that Jesus was in fact dead.

* * * * *

John, who observed all this, was led by the Spirit to see in this a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. These things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken.

The Old Testament passage that John has in mind is obviously Exodus 12:46, which records the instruction of Moses to Israel concerning the original Passover supper. Each family was to slay a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts. That very night the lamb was also to be eaten by every family in its home. Nothing of the lamb was to be carried outside the home. Nor was a bone of the paschal lamb to be broken.

Upon close examination, we discover that this instruction of Moses to Israel was indeed a prophecy.

In fact, the whole Passover feast was a prophecy which looked ahead and pointed Israel to the great salvation of God in Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb and its blood pointed ahead to the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who through the shedding of His own blood would forever deliver us from the power of sin and death. For this reason God required the Passover to be repeated year by year.

In this setting, the fact that no bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken was also a prophecy of what was to come.

And it was fulfilled on the very last Passover day that ever had any significance for the church of God. When the Lamb of God was slain on the cross and His blood was shed, no bone of Him was broken.

* * * * *

The fact that no bone of Jesus was broken is a testimony of Jesus' perfect righteousness.

This is plain from Psalm 34:19 & 20, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken."

Here the Psalmist speaks of the suffering of the righteous. Many are the afflictions of the righteous. However, the Lord delivers the righteous out of all his afflictions so that no bone of him is broken.

This is exactly how God dealt with Jesus. Jesus was afflicted at the hand of His enemies and suffered greatly. He was betrayed and slandered. He was buffeted and spit upon. He was maimed by the soldiers' whips and crucified. Yet the Lord kept all His bones. Not a one of them was broken.

What a wonderful testimony of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ!

This righteousness of Jesus is our salvation.

The righteousness of Jesus attested to through the keeping of His bones is, first of all, the righteousness Jesus possesses as the Son of God. Jesus is God's eternal and only begotten Son! And as the Son of God Jesus possesses the perfect righteousness of God. This righteousness is His even in our flesh. Being the eternal Son of God, Jesus is not guilty of the original sin of mankind. Being divinely conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, Jesus escaped the pollution of sin that has laid hold of the human race. And therefore Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the Father from the cradle to the grave.

But, more importantly, the keeping of Jesus' bones is God's testimony to the righteousness of Jesus Christ as our Mediator.

As our Mediator Jesus lived all His life on the earth under the

heavy burden of sin. No, it was not the burden of His own sin that He bore. For we have just seen that, personally, Jesus was without sin. The burden of sin He bore was the burden of our sin. Being our Mediator, Jesus is personally responsible for the sin of all God's elect people. That sin was placed upon Him from birth.

And for that sin Jesus endured the bitter wrath of God all His life long. He endured the wrath of God as He lived in a world that is under the curse of God. He endured the wrath of God as He was contradicted by wicked men. Especially did He come under the weight of God's wrath when He was nailed to the cross. For that was the accursed death. There, at the cross, Jesus suffered all the agony of hell as the just punishment of God for our sin.

The fact that God preserved all His bones is God's seal and testimony that through His inexpressible anguish, Jesus has completely paid the price of sin and is perfectly righteous before God as our Mediator.

And this is our salvation.

For, the sins for which Jesus paid the penalty at the cross were not His own but ours.

And the perfect righteousness of Jesus, attested to by the keeping of His bones, is a righteousness He has obtained for us that we may be righteous before God.

This righteousness becomes ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Let us therefore cling by faith to Jesus our Savior, putting all our trust in Him alone.

Then we will be righteous before God in Him and heirs to eternal life. □

Editorial

Prof. David Engelsma

The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers (1)

The covenant of God is not a relatively minor and secondary aspect of God's truth, much less a passing theological fad. Rather, it is one of the most prominent, most important doctrines of Holy Scripture, if not that grand reality which is the very heart of the whole biblical revelation.

This is how Reformed theologians have always viewed the truth of the covenant. The German theologian of the 19th century, Heinrich Heppe, who summarized the Reformed tradition from Calvin to his day, wrote, "The doctrine of God's covenant with man is thus the inmost heart and soul of the whole of revealed truth" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, London, 1950, p. 281). He quotes the 17th century Reformed theologian, J.H. Heidegger: "... the marrow and as it were the sort of center of the whole of Holy Scripture is the ... covenant of God, to which ... everything in Scripture must be referred" (p. 281).

Herman Bavinck agreed: *The doctrine of the covenant is of the greatest significance both for dogmatics and for the practice of the Christian life. The Reformed church and theology has understood this, more than the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches and theologies. On the basis of Holy Scripture, the Reformed have conceived the true religion of the Old and New Testaments always as a covenant between God and man (Gereformeerde*

Dogmatiek, Vol. III, Kampen, 1918, p. 220).

And in his work on the place of children in the covenant, Herman Hoeksema has written: *The Jachin and Boaz in the temple of the truth of God (the reference is to the two pillars in Solomon's temple mentioned in 1 Kings 7:21 — DJE) are the truth of God's sovereign grace and the truth of God's covenant This doctrine (of the covenant — DJE) is really more characteristically Reformed than the doctrine of election (Believers and Their Seed, Grand Rapids, 1971, pp. 9, 11).*

Scripture itself points out the centrality of the covenant. The history of Israel in the Old Testament is a history of God's covenant with Abraham and Abraham's seed. The goal of that history is Jesus the Christ (Luke 1:72, 73). Jesus appears as Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6; 12:24). The work of Christ, therefore, is the establishment, realization, and perfection of the new covenant (Heb. 13:20).

For this reason, the Bible itself has the names that it does: Its two main divisions are called "Old Testament" and "New Testament." Since "testament" is really "covenant," we rightly refer to the Bible as the book about the old and new covenant.

I readily acknowledge at the outset that the covenant doctrine that I present here is that which has been developed by the Prot-

estant Reformed Churches and that is confessed by the PRC. It is important that the reader knows this. In some Reformed circles there is ignorance of, and confusion about, the truth of the covenant. This is one of the reasons why members can defect to Baptist churches (whether "Calvinistic" or free willist makes no difference), which deny the covenant in one of its essential elements, namely, the inclusion of children in the covenant. In view of the importance of the doctrine of the covenant both in Scripture and in the Reformed tradition, this is intolerable. The PRC have a definite conception of the covenant. We know what we believe about the covenant. If anyone is ignorant or confused, we ask that he give us a hearing.

Besides, there is difference, even sharp difference, among Reformed churches regarding the understanding of the biblical and creedal teaching on the covenant. In view of the importance of the covenant, these differences are not insignificant. Because the truth of the covenant lies at the center of all the teachings of Scripture, error in the doctrine of the covenant will certainly affect other biblical teachings as well, specifically the doctrine of sovereign grace, or "the five points of Calvinism." If some hold a different view than that presented here, we ask only that they give us a good hearing, at-

tempting to learn what the PRC believe, and why, in order then, of course, to compare our view not only with their own but also with Scripture, the only rule of faith.

I must also make clear that my emphasis falls on the place of children in the covenant and on the conversion of the covenant children. This is the area in which some of the sharpest disagreement surfaces. Not only is this the area in which the Reformed part company with all Baptists, but it is also the arena of division within the Reformed community.

Because my emphasis is the place of children in the covenant, I will be very brief in setting forth what the covenant itself is, according to the revelation of the covenant in Scripture. Yet the nature of the covenant must be pointed out, both because this is basic to a consideration of the place of children in the covenant and because there is widespread ignorance, confusion, and error among Reformed people as to what the covenant essentially is.

God's Covenant of Grace

What is the covenant of God?

What is that covenant that was established with Abraham and his seed; that has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ; that now is made with believers and their children; and that will be perfected with the church gathered out of all nations from the beginning to the end of the world at the coming of our Lord?

The covenant is the relationship of friendship between the triune God and His chosen people in Jesus Christ.

That the covenant must be conceived by us as a relationship, as a bond of communion, between God and His people is proved from the following biblical teachings. First, when God establishes His covenant with father Abraham in Genesis

17:7, God Himself describes the covenant this way: "to be a God unto thee . . ." The covenant is this: Jehovah's being Abraham's God and Abraham's being Jehovah's man. It is the relationship — the special, close, loving relationship — between them. This description of the covenant is repeated, again and again, in the Old Testament (Covenant) when the covenant is made or confirmed with Israel. It appears in the significant prophecy of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31ff.: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," Jehovah says; and then He adds, in virtual definition of the covenant, "and will be their God and they shall be My people."

Second, the fundamental earthly analogies to, or symbols of, the covenant are relationships — relationships of the most intimate friendships known to humans. If a person had any doubt whether the covenant is a relationship, these biblical analogies should settle the matter. The Bible requires us to think of the covenant as a marriage and as a father-child relationship. In Ezekiel 16, the prophet describes the LORD's covenant with Jerusalem as a marriage: "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the LORD God, and thou becamest Mine" (v. 8). Judah is Jehovah's wife in the covenant.

At the very beginning of Israel's history as a nation, God made plain that the covenant between Himself and Israel, on account of which He would redeem them from the slavery of Egypt, was nothing other than a Father-child relationship. For Moses must say to Pharaoh, "Thus saith

Jehovah, Israel is My son, even My firstborn" (Ex. 4:22).

Marriage and the parent-child connection are relationships of love and communion. They are simply special forms of friendship. And the covenant is the real marriage and the real Parent-child relationship.

Third, there is the figurative explanation of the covenant as God's tabernacling with His people. In Revelation 21 the vision of the new world and of the perfected church is immediately explained by a great voice that says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with me, and He will dwell with them . . ." (v. 3a). The reference is to that building at the center of Israel in the Old Testament (Covenant): the tabernacle. That holy building was the place where God lived with Israel and Israel lived with God in sweet communion. Heaven will be the real, and gigantic, tabernacle inasmuch as the bliss of heaven will be the life of the covenant: dwelling with God. John immediately applies to this tabernacle-life in the coming world the words that we have seen to be descriptive of the nature of the covenant: ". . . and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (v. 3b).

In this light the church must view the greatest, and central, wonder of salvation, namely, the incarnation of the eternal Son of God. The meaning of it, John gives in John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled (such is the literal translation; the KJV has 'dwelt') among us . . ." In Jesus, the triune God comes close to us for friendship, so close that He becomes one of us. When the Spirit of the crucified and risen Son of God unites us to Jesus Christ by faith, we come close to God, so close that we are God's bride and God's children. □ -DJE

The "Other Side" of Postmillennialism

It is with a touch of sadness that I feel constrained to write a brief response to an article by my friend Prof. H. Hanko which appeared in the January 1, 1990 issue of *The Standard Bearer* ("The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism").

Almost always I find myself being instructed and edified by Prof. Hanko's articles and book reviews, but when he took on the subject of "The Illusory Hope of Postmillennialism" he went seriously astray, in my opinion.

He faults the postmills for having "little patience with anyone who does not agree with them," but his own rigid perspective on the nature of Christ's Kingdom is just as unbending; and there is nothing wrong with having strong convictions!

I find it incredible that Brother Hanko accuses Calvinist postmills, such as the Puritans (some would include Calvin and other Reformers who tried to change the world by the Word of God), practically all Presbyterianism until this century, and present advocates of this eschatological emphasis, of being guilty of all the "heresy" that he attributes to them in his article. Biblical postmills get their view of Christ's growing and conquering Kingdom from the Scriptures. To say that we "fail to reckon properly with the fact of sin," that we do "not take sin seriously," that our view of Christ's Kingdom is really "the Kingdom

of Anti-Christ," that it "tempts the people of God to identify the kingdom of anti-Christ with that of Christ," and that postmillennialism "is a sweet siren song that gradually sings the child of God to sleep" is simply incredible language, coming from an otherwise well-informed theologian.

Further, such an unwarranted attack greatly damages the growing respect that many Calvinists outside your denomination have been developing for you.

Permit me briefly to rebut the article in question with the following points:

1. The Amillennial position of Prof. Hanko leans heavily on the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24) as proof that the New Testament Age is to grow progressively more evil, with all those ominous *signs* to become increasingly more apparent. (But where was the high point from which the decline supposedly began?) Postmillennial expositors, on the other hand, see the Olivet Discourse up to verse 34 as having been fulfilled in the last days of apostate Judaism, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (cf. Matt. 23:36-38; 24:1-2; Lk. 21:6-32). Further, they see many of the "Lord is at hand" passages in the New Testament as also referring to the A.D. 70 vengeance of God.

2. Is the Kingdom of Christ *not* in this world, as Prof. Hanko asserts so boldly? Is this concept simply a mirage? As I read the

following passages I find that Christ's kingdom *in history* (the fifth monarchy of Daniel) is so far from being a mirage that it is the only abiding reality (Psalm 2; 22:27, 28; 37:9-11; 46:8-10; 47; 66:1-4; 72; 86:9; 138:4, 5; 149:59; Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6, 7; 11:9, 10; 65:19-24; Dan. 2:35, 44; 7:13, 14; Heb. 12:26-29; Rev. 11:15). Further, the parables of Matthew 13 clearly teach that Christ's Kingdom in this world is to be a growing kingdom, not a diminishing one — from a mustard seed to a tree. Isaiah 9:7 says that "there will be no end to the *increase* of His government." That one prophecy alone is the death knell to pessimistic Amillennialism! Did not Christ tell His church to make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:18-20), not just individuals? Was He merely expressing a pious wish or was He declaring a prophetic reality based on His powerful reign from the Father's throne? Does not Paul teach that Christ shall reign (in history) *until all His enemies* shall have been put under His feet and He has abolished all (ungodly) rule, authority and power (I Cor. 15:24, 25)? Yes, the Kingdom of Christ is very much in this world, beginning in the regenerate heart and working itself outward to bring all spheres of life under Christ's Lordship (Eph. 21:20-22). The Luke 18:8 passage, on which Prof. Hanko places so much weight for a defeated church at

the end of history, may be better interpreted to mean that when the Son of Man comes to destroy Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 24:30; 26:64) in A.D. 70 He will not find faith in the "land" (of Israel) in that generation (Matt. 24:10-12). If the geography needs to be extended, Paul complained of the same problem of lack of faith on the part of many as he neared death at the end of that same period of time (II Tim. 1:15; 3:13; 4:3, 10, 16).

Often Amills will appeal to John 18:36 as proving that Christ's Kingdom is not in the world in any external manifestation. But a closer view of the text simply shows that our Lord was referring to the *source* of His Kingdom, not its sphere of operation. His Kingdom comes from heaven, not from the power politics of the Jews. But His Kingdom is here in power; it is not restricted to heaven. Indeed, John declares over and over that the saints rule with Christ *on earth* (Rev. 2:26, 27; 5:10; 11:15-18; 20:4, 6).

3. As far as the Reformed Confessions are concerned, the *original* Article 36 of the Belgic Confession reflected the dominion orientation of the Reformers rather than the vapid "pluralism" of their descendants who put "democracy" ahead of biblical theology and corrupted that article. The Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 124) in explaining the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer certainly teaches that Christ's Kingdom is in this world, that it is a conquering kingdom, and that "every power" (including every society and government) that exalts itself against God and His Christ is to be destroyed! Or in the words of Psalm 2, the *nations* have been given to Christ and He "shall break (rule) them with a sceptre of iron" (vs. 9).

All of this will be accomplished in history, not *after* the Judgment Day, and it will be accomplished by the pure preaching of the Law and the Gospel (Isa. 2:1-4; Matt. 28:18-20; II Cor. 10:3-5).

If this faith and confident expectation sound illusory and "un-

realistic," I can only say that most of Reformed Christianity has believed it fervently for many centuries. To say that postmillists who have led the way in missions and the Christianization of Western culture for centuries (see Iain Murray's *the Puritan Hope*) were really motivated by a false hope and were actually promoting the Kingdom of Anti-Christ is, I say again, simply incredible. I shall refrain from any stronger conclusions.

Thank you, gracious editor, for your patience and willingness to let your readers hear the other side of this subject. May God lead all of us into the riches of His truth through patient study, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and a willingness to learn from *all* the brethren.

(Rev.) Norman Jones
Reformed Church in the U.S.
Pierre, S.D.

Response

Professor Hanko's response to this letter will appear in the next issue of *The SB*. -Ed.

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

The Church, Theology, and Violence in South Africa

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

A Different Gospel in South Africa. The historic Christian church has always been tempted to adopt a political, economic, and social agenda addressing the plight of the oppressed, poor, and powerless in society. This concern emerged in the form of the "social gospel" of theological liberalism in the first half of this

century, and more recently as Marxist-inspired "liberation theology" in the last two decades. Reformed orthodoxy has condemned these movements as a "different gospel," a gospel other "than what ye have received" (Galatians 1:6, 9).

But apparently some in the Dutch Reformed tradition in

South Africa are now developing a "theology" that legitimizes revolutionary counter-violence to "liberate" the economically and politically oppressed in South Africa. Weary with the injustice of apartheid and the alleged exploitation of blacks by the capitalist economy there, South African theologians and intellectuals in the Dutch Reformed churches are suggesting that armed violence is now a political necessity in that country.

This theology of the inevitability and necessity of counter-violence to overthrow repressive and unjust regimes is articulated in a recent significant book, *Theology and Violence: The South African Debate*, edited by Charles Villa-Vicencio (Eerdmans, 1988). This book is a collection of essays by South African intellectuals and church leaders including Allan Boesak (President of World Alliance of Reformed Churches), Desmond Tutu (Archbishop of Cape Town), Dirkie Smit (Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Western Cape), Charles Villa-Vicencio (Professor of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town), and others.

The essays in this book critically examine Western Christianity's (and particularly the Reformed tradition's) posture toward violence and unjust governments. The essayists share some remarkable and controversial conclusions: (1) unjust and repressive governments are guilty of "structural" or "institutional" violence; (2) when non-violent means are exhausted, revolutionary "counter-violence" to overthrow these repressive regimes is justified as an *ultima ratio* (a last resort); (3) the church as "peacemaker" must take a prominent role in the inevitable violent revolution "liberating" the poor and oppressed and

"establish a society which can benefit those who suffer most."

Structural Violence. Critically analyzing the 19th century Dutch Reformed missionary movement in South Africa, the authors conclude that this missionary zeal was "nothing more than an attempt to convert Africans to westernism and imperialism." Dutch missionary motivation was essentially "capitalist expansionism and militarism." The Protestant missionaries preached that "the God of Europe was superior to the Gods [sic] of Africa." This, suggests one writer, was "cultural arrogance" and gave prominence to the "structural violence of imperialism."

Historically, the book insists, the Reformed tradition has "largely supported regimes that promote the Western values of capitalism, colonialism and suppression of the poor." The result was the emergence of a "bourgeois church captive to bourgeois ideology," encrusted with the "cultural and political accretions" of the "ruling class" in the West.

Such is the case, the authors claim, in South Africa today. The South African government's policies of apartheid, detention of dissidents, capital punishment, and capitalism are nothing more than violence — "structural" or "institutional" violence. And the bourgeois church has traditionally endorsed such "structural violence" while inconsistently condemning any use of counter-violence to overthrow such unjust political and economic systems.

Violence as a "last resort." Borrowing from traditional "just war" theory, the essayists suggest that although non-violent means of eradicating such repressive governments are preferable, nonetheless the time comes when revolutionary counter-violence is necessary and justified as an

ultima ratio — the last resort. Violence is justified as a last resort, writes Villa-Vicencio, when it is "goal oriented and purposeful," when it is directed toward the overthrow of a state which is itself guilty of institutional violence, a state which has lost the consent and respect of the governed.

Not only is revolutionary counter-violence justified under such regimes, it is an inevitable political reality, a historical necessity. "History and theology," Villa-Vicencio tells us, "both suggest that the will to liberation is part of what it means to be a human being." Now that all other political alternatives in South Africa are foreclosed, the structural violence of white South Africa has created a society where counter-violence is inevitable, unavoidable, and politically necessary.

The Church and revolution. But what should be the place of the church in this "inevitable" revolution of counter-violence against a repressive capitalistic regime? Villa-Vicencio informs us of the crucial role of the church in the revolution:

The church which is obedient to the gospel of Jesus is compelled to hear the cries of the widows and orphans, the sick and the lame, prisoners and oppressed people — those who are marginalised by the powerful and strong in society. It is the task of the prophetic church to represent those whose interests are not adequately accounted for in the political equations of society. The church knows that peace is not possible until the injustices of society are redressed. Yet . . . justice may not be possible without violence. The task of the Christian, called to be peacemaker, is to diminish the power of the oppressor as a means to eliminate the major source of evil.

A Reformed Response. Needless to say, the Reformed believer is at a loss where to begin to criticize this heretical

book. The authors are unashamedly Marxist in their analysis of history, politics, and economics, borrowing heavily from contemporary liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, and Juan Segundo. Moreover, their ethical philosophy is rudely utilitarian — counter-violence as a means is justifiable as a last resort to achieve the end (goal) of a better society.

But perhaps more telling is the shocking attempt to theologize without ever appealing to Scripture, for the book contains few, if any, attempts to ground this new “theology” of the necessity of counter-violence on biblical

evidence. The reason for this is their almost blasphemous view of the Biblical text, for as one essayist writes:

The Bible, including the prophetic traditions, is, of course, silent about the responses or perspectives of the oppressed and exploited on violence. The reason is simple. The oppressed did not write the Bible. It was the oppressors or their ideologists who wrote the Bible. The biblical text as a discursive practice is a ruling class document.

Another writer argues that there is no “one uniform response” to violence in the New Testament gospels because of the various *Sitze in Leben* of the gospel writers. He concludes:

While the responses of the evangelists may vary, a careful ex-

amination of the relevant gospel passages suggests that Jesus himself never advocated, endorsed nor condoned violence. At least that seems to be how the evangelists presented him. How accurate this portrayal of Jesus is we have no way of establishing beyond a reasonable doubt.

This kind of analysis of the Bible’s teaching on violence is, of course, typical of contemporary theologians who deny the doctrine of infallibility of the Scriptures. Consequently, it must be said that this book regrettably is of little help to the orthodox Reformed believer who is seeking a trustworthy analysis and solution to perennial conflict in South Africa today. □

The Day of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

Enduring Mercy and Everlasting Peace

A truth which we should never forget, and a song which we should sing repeatedly every day, is found in and based on what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 136. There the psalmist ends every verse with the words: “For His mercy endureth for ever.” Yes, that is the way every one of the twenty-six verses ends. In one of our psalter versifications based on this Psalm, each stanza ends with these words: “For His mercy doth endure, Ever faithful, ever sure.”

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There are many passages in Holy Writ where we find instances of this truth, so that we have a shadow of this comforting truth cast down upon God’s church throughout the ages. The reality of that mercy and grace is there for us to see in these shadows. In fact, if there is one thing Adam and Eve could have sung, and in their hearts every born-again child of God should sing, it is that although we all in Adam fell into guilt, and deserve the awful punishment of hell, God’s mercy and grace were undeniably revealed to Adam and Eve; and His grace was very evident when He gave them that mother promise of salvation in Christ. To mercy and grace they

had no right in the slightest degree. For they listened to Satan rather than to God, and because of his lie sought to be gods rather than in humility to bow before God and confess Him to be God alone. Yet, in His amazing grace and tender mercy, they were given that wonderful promise of a Savior, and a salvation in Him that would lift them above the glory which they had through creation.

Then too, when the waters of the flood came upon the earth, and wiped off the face of this earth the whole world of unbelievers in God’s holy wrath and sovereign visitation upon them, Noah and his family were saved so that they could sing:

"Give thanks to God, for He is good, His grace abideth ever. To Him all praise and glory be, His mercy faileth never."

And now, when Abraham and Sarah lied about Sarah being Abraham's wife, and in His mercy and grace the almighty God arranged for a harmless return to the promised land, they had reason to sing of God's unfailing mercy and abiding grace. There just is no other way to explain this amazing protection that God gave Abraham and Sarah. Surely here we have a shadow of what is always happening to every elect child of God.

In His mercy toward Abraham and Sarah, God made Pharaoh command Abraham — it was not a request or suggestion — to leave Egypt. In Genesis 12:19 we read, "Now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way." And then in verse 20: "And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away and his wife, and all that he had."

Get that! Not only did Pharaoh command his servants to see to it that Abraham left Egypt, but he allowed Abraham to go with all that he had and all that he gained there in Egypt. He did not impose a fine upon Abraham. He did not take some of his gold and silver, cattle and servants away to punish him. Nor did he assure Abraham that if he came back, he would suffer for his sin. No, in His mercy and grace God protected Abraham and Sarah so that there was no financial or fleshly loss, no flogging or imprisonment. Instead, Abraham is free to go back to what God promised him. We must see Christ here in the full pardon of Abraham's and Sarah's sins, pardon that made it legally possible for them to escape the punishment that they deserved because of their sin. They might safely go to Canaan without the powerful

hand of Pharaoh preventing or making it hard for them, because of the merciful and gracious hand of God that sent His Son to suffer for all the sins of all the elect. His promise to Abraham could be fulfilled because of what He did and not because of what Abraham did.

Note the different here between the world and the church before God's face. Abraham and Sarah safely and conveniently left Egypt to go to the promised land. But Pharaoh and Egypt had been visited by painful plagues. This undoubtedly made Pharaoh afraid of touching Abraham; but it also reveals how God touched Abraham and Sarah in His mercy and grace.

To appreciate God's grace we have to take hold of the awesome truth that it is dealing with one in exactly the opposite way from what that person deserves. We can give gifts to our relatives and friends who have also dealt kindly with us. But God's grace always without exception is dealing with sinners who deserve the everlasting torment of hell. Remember what we already considered, namely, that only *one* sin — remember Adam and Eve's — calls for *everlasting* punishment and denies one anything that is good. Eating one piece of forbidden fruit brought death. One sin, even though it takes only a split second of time to perform it, denies God, tells Him that He is not God and He has no right to demand certain works of us or to deny us the right to this or that work. And God's grace is not simply giving a free gift to someone who does not deserve it. It is God giving everlasting blessedness to those who deserve everlasting punishment. In fact, as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-10, it is God's grace that makes it possible for us to do good works, and that salvation is a gift. Salvation being a

gift means that we are a guilty people in ourselves, a people who deserve punishment, not salvation.

Plainly Abraham had no right to go back to the promised land and to the fulfillment of God's promises. Their lie — Abraham's and Sarah's — called for punishment as surely as Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit called for death. That they were allowed to go back is and could only be because of what God Himself did for them in His Son. That Paul also wrote in his epistle to the Ephesians. In chapter 1:2 we read, "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Likewise Abraham did not deserve to get Sarah back as his wife. Having lied to the king, he could be cast into prison and have his wife taken from him — not merely taken from him by Pharaoh but by God. Let it be clearly understood that Abraham sinned against God before he sinned against Pharaoh. Planning this lie, and not having executed it yet, Abraham and Sarah sinned against God and revealed lack of trust in His promise to them.

And now, having reached that promised land, Abraham continued to taste God's mercy and grace. Not only in His grace and mercy had He given Abraham his wife back, and given to them a safe journey to Canaan with all their possessions, but He also gave *spiritual gifts* which could only come from God in His mercy and grace.

Let us be honest about it. We are quick to enjoy things that please our flesh, and to thank God for them. But how much joy do we find in the spiritual gifts which God gives us? How often do we thank Him for them? Is faith in God a really precious gift to us? Is salvation a most wonderful thing in our judgment? What thrills you the most? Was

winning that chess, scrabble, or ball game a greater thrill than the forgiveness of sins, and the new spiritual life that wants to walk in love before God? That trip you are going to take to Europe, or to some beautiful park in the mountains — is that more exciting than to think that one of these days you will with your soul go to heaven to be with Christ, have a much more intimate covenant fellowship with God through Him, and be delivered completely, one hundred percent, from your sinful, fleshly nature? Do the novels and stories written by men of this world thrill you more than God's word with its heavenly promises, and with these divine stories of how true it is that His mercy faileth never and His grace abideth ever on His elect children, chosen in Christ and justified by His precious blood?

Look now then at Abraham who is back in the promised land, and a struggle arises between him and Lot, because they both had so many cattle, and there was not room for both of them "to dwell together" (Genesis 13:6). And remember that God had promised Abraham that unto his seed He would give that

whole land (Genesis 12:7). What does God's mercy and grace do to Abraham? Does it move him to chase Lot away? Does his flesh lead him to fight for that land God promised him? No, to Lot he said, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we are brethren" (Genesis 13:8). In fact he even tells Lot that if he wants to go to the left, he, Abraham, will go to the right.

Shall we praise Abraham for this? We may thank him for his kindness and marvel at his strong trust in God to fulfill His promises. But the praise must be God's. Do we not in the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 114, read that after our conversion we do not "perfectly keep God's commandments"? In fact there we read that while in this life, and after our conversion, we "have only a small beginning of this obedience." And for that little good work that we do perform we owe God praise. For He made all of it possible.

Behind all of our earthly life is God. He gives us every heartbeat and breath of life. But He also, in His mercy and grace, gives us everything, from the desire and

ability to do that which is spiritually good, to all the things necessary for its performance. Behind our rebirth and faith, and behind every good work which we perform, is God's mercy and grace. That grace sent His Son to go *down* to the torment of hell that we might be lifted *up* to the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. Well may we with the psalmist sing: "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them" (Psalm 139:17).

The more we take hold of that truth, the more we will realize that He must be praised and not man. This truth we must take hold of when we consider what Abraham did. Never may we stop with man. God's mercy and grace are here presented so that we will, by that mercy and grace, praise Him.

Let us then go back and sing the song of praise to God suggested a few moments ago:

*Give thanks to God, for good is
he, His grace abideth ever;
To Him all praise and glory be,
His mercy faileth never.*

*His wondrous works with praise
record, His grace abideth ever,
The only God, the sov'reign Lord,
Whose mercy faileth never.*

Psalter #378, based on Psalm 136:1-4.



Contribution

Prof. Herman Hanko

Psalmody Conference

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

While many Presbyterian and Reformed Churches have moved away from Psalm singing in the worship services, different denominations in this country have remained faithful to this aspect of their heritage and continue to use the Psalms in con-

gregational singing.

In the interests of meeting together to encourage each other and to promote Psalm singing among other churches and denominations, a Psalmody Conference is being planned for next summer in the first part of

August. It is certainly not too late to include this Conference in vacation plans; and it appears as if the Conference will be a good one.

The initiative for such a Conference came from the Presbyterian Reformed Church, a small denomination in the East. Two men from this denomination, Dr. William Young (a minister in the Presbyterian Reformed Church and professor emeritus of philosophy in the University of Rhode Island) and Mr. Arthur Lamoureux (ruling elder in the congregation of Warwick, Rhode Island) sent letters to various men in Presbyterian and Reformed denominations to serve as a steering committee to lay plans for such a Conference.

Undersigned was invited to be a part of this steering committee, which met in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the month of January. Present at the meeting were Dr. Young, Mr. Lamoureux, Rev. John Stodghill from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Rev. Frank Schutz from the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and myself. Rev. Frank Smith from the Presbyterian Church in America was unable to come, but gave the committee the benefit of his ideas and was in telephone contact with the committee during its meetings. The committee met over the course of two days and laid extensive plans for the Conference.

While all the plans for the Conference are not yet firmly in place, we are able to give our readers some previews of what the Conference will be like.

The present plans are to hold the Conference August 1 - 3 at Bonclarken Assembly Conference Grounds in Flat Rock, North Carolina. These facilities will provide for all the needs of those attending. A campground, which includes trailer hookups, belongs

to the conference grounds, for those who wish to camp. Motel and cabin facilities will also be available for those who wish for somewhat more elaborate accommodations. The conference grounds include facilities for eating, for swimming (probably including a pool, which will likely be completed by the time of the conference) and for games. It also includes a meeting hall for the plenary sessions. So the facilities are splendid for a week of vacationing with families; and, indeed, families are urged to attend with their children. A nursery will be provided for children from 1 - 5 years old.

The theme of the Conference is: "Praising God With Psalms," and the theme text is Psalm 149:1: "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of the saints." Because the sessions will include Psalm singing by the audience, a special booklet is being prepared which will contain from 50 to 75 Psalms taken from the Scottish Metrical Psalter, the Book of Psalms used by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and the 1912 Psalter adopted by the Presbyterian Church which is used in our Protestant Reformed Churches. This booklet will also include a conference schedule, biographical notes of the speakers and workshop leaders, and blank sheets for note taking.

The general schedule for the conference will be as follows: 1) three morning sessions will be held which will include devotions and Psalm singing; a speech, a break, a question period and Psalm singing and closing devotions. 2) Two afternoon sessions will follow something of the same pattern, with a workshop also scheduled and free time made available. 3) Two evening sessions will also follow the general pattern of the morning sessions.

The titles of the speeches to be delivered will, I think, quicken the interest of those who might consider attending. While the matter of speakers has not yet been completely settled, the plans are to follow this schedule:

1) Rev. G. I. Williamson: "The Regulative Principle of Worship."

2) Dr. J. Renwick Wright: "The Place of Psalm singing in Public Worship."

3) Dr. William Young: "The History of Psalm Singing."

4) Rev. Malcolm McGinnis: "The Imprecatory Psalms."

5) Rev. Duncan Lowe: "Christ in the Psalms."

6) Prof. Herman Hanko: "The Psalms: A Spiritual Biography of the Christian."

7) Rev. Charles Butler: "The Psalms: Songs of Sanctification."

On the first afternoon a workshop will be held for the entire assembly on the subject of "The Technique of Psalm Singing." On the second afternoon, the assembly will be divided into four sectionals, held concurrently. In one, a video tape will be shown entitled: "Lessons in Precenting." This sectional will be led by Charles McBurnie. In the second, Rev. Frank Smith will lead a discussion on "Psalms in Personal and Family Devotions." In the third, Mr. Mike Bushell will lead the meeting on the subject: "How to Introduce Psalm Singing in a Congregation." And the fourth, led by Alan Wagner, will discuss "The Pitfalls of Hymn Singing in Worship."

A committee was appointed to be in charge of publicity. This committee will also be sending out brochures and registration forms to interested churches and individuals. The registration forms are necessary because a registration fee will be charged which will include the cost of the booklet to be used in the Psalm singing. They can be obtained by writing the Conference Director,

209 Tanner Avenue, Warwick, RI 02886-4410. Our Protestant Reformed readers can obtain them from the clerk of their Consistory, since all of them have recently been supplied with a quantity of the forms, to make for easy availability. The forms will have to be submitted by the first of June, 1990.

It all sounds rather exciting, and it is the hope of the committee that many from various

denominations will attend. It will be a time of fun and relaxation for those who are looking for an unusual vacation. It will give those who attend opportunity to discuss with many others the rich heritage of Psalm singing, still maintained in some parts of the church. It will be good to witness to others who have introduced hymns in the worship services concerning the blessings of Psalm singing in the worship services. And the fellowship ought to be

rich and fruitful as many come together from all parts of the country, united in the joys of singing Scripture's rich and beautiful Psalm book.

May God bless these labors so that the joys and blessedness of singing the Psalms are encouraged among those who seek to remain faithful to this aspect of our Reformation heritage.

Set aside the dates now and plan to attend! □

Into All the World

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

The Spiritual Condition of the Evangelizing Church

The book of Acts shows that there is a most definite relationship between the spiritual health of a congregation and the positive fruits harvested by the evangelism efforts of that church.

God's blessing cannot be expected to be given to a church which is not otherwise faithful! A church that is losing its salt (becoming more worldly) is going to be good for nothing. If a church in its preaching and practice is wiping out the line of demarcation between the church and the world, no amount of evangelism to others will revive that church. If a church is split into factions and there is a great want of brotherly love and con-

cern, no amount of evangelism will make that church attractive to others. Any growth experienced by congregations of this sort will likely be only of a physical nature and not spiritual. *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man (or a church — RJVO) soweth, that shall he (the church — RJVO) also reap"* (Galatians 6:7).

Throughout the book of Acts the Holy Spirit teaches us that the local congregation, from which the Word of the risen Christ spread and to which Christ added those whom He was saving, had certain characteristics. Specifically, when the congregation at Jerusalem daily grew numerically because to it the Lord Jesus was adding the ones He was saving, then it had certain spiritual features. As we consider these characteristics, note well that these are nothing more and nothing less than that which describes a normal, spiritually

healthy congregation. It is these characteristics which each local congregation must emulate.

* * * * *

Of the characteristics of ecclesiastical health, as well as of the church that truly grows, the chief is the faithful preaching of the Word of God. It was the preaching of Peter, Philip, and Paul which pricked the souls and brought people to repentance and to faith in Christ (Acts 2; 4:4; 12:24; 13:48; etc.). In this case it is just as important that we observe what the Bible does not say: it was not gimmicks, crystal cathedrals, charisma, friendliness, or the four spiritual laws which were the means Jesus used to add to the congregations at Jerusalem, Philippi, and Ephesus. The faithful preaching of the good news was the instrument God used to open hearts (Acts 16:14). It is to be understood that this preaching is to be biblical

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(reasoning, opening, and alleging — Acts 17:2, 3) and that it presents the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

The first mentioned characteristic of the congregation at Jerusalem to which Christ added daily was a steadfast continuance in the apostles' doctrine and a joyful reception of the Word (Acts 2:41, 42). This is the first characteristic mentioned because it is the most important. It has this importance because living in the Word of God is fundamental to spiritual health. It also has this importance because such activity on the part of the people of God indicates their deep appreciation for and delight in the faithful preaching. Steadfast continuance in doctrine is the other side of the coin of preaching. The members of the Jerusalem congregation did not depart from or allow that doctrine to be corrupted by heresy or by a sinful walk. They held firmly to the apostles' doctrine in the weekly preaching. The whole congregation manifested their lively interest in the Word by their coming together faithfully for study and for worship. The empty pew is a curse on the witness of the service, a caustic and eloquent message to any visitor. The saints at Jerusalem came together eagerly and expectantly (not reluctantly) for the preaching and teaching of the apostles. During the week they meditated on the Word individually, and discussed it as families and in groups.

In connection with our explanation of the chief characteristic of the preaching, notice that Paul did not make evangelism a particular concern, but it was a part of the total package of his labors. In the record of his labors in the book of Acts, no distinction is made between his preaching and his performing evangelistic labors. And when Paul details the responsibilities of

Timothy in II Timothy 4:1-5, including "do the work of an evangelist," this is not to be understood as something besides preaching the Word in season and out of season. The reason is that preaching is evangelism (even the Greek word shows this). Preaching the whole counsel of God is showing the door of the kingdom to all who believe, and it is giving the assurance that all who come to Christ He will in no wise cast out.

In conclusion, it is obvious that it is vital that the members of the congregation pray the Spirit to bless the preaching, because it is the Spirit of Christ Who makes the preaching effective.

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Another feature of the church which experiences true spiritual health and whose evangelism receives positive fruit is the fellowship of the members among themselves (Acts 2:42, 44-46). The members of the Jerusalem congregation showed Christ's work in loving one another.

Just like the preaching, this was and must be done steadfastly. The implication is that it is most difficult and that it required earnest desire and great effort. There were and are constant and fierce pressures to lose or to corrupt this fellowship.

One common expression of this fellowship of the saints at Jerusalem was their gathering often in worship and for the Lord's Supper.

The fellowship was also expressed by the love shown to the poor members (Acts 2:44, 45). Those who had wealth lovingly and willingly responded to the needs of those who lacked, by giving to the church (placed at the feet of the apostles — Acts 4:37; 5:2). It is evident that the church at Jerusalem lived in the consciousness of being one Body;

they loved and cared for one another.

Later this aspect of the church's fellowship was performed by the deacons. They guided the members of the church in their caring for each other. It is no mistake that, immediately after the Holy Spirit records the institution of the office of the diaconate, it is recorded that the number of the followers of Jesus Christ multiplied greatly (Acts 6:1-7). The Holy Spirit shows us that there is a relationship between the careful and diligent work of the deacons and the growth of the church or the positive fruit of its evangelism. This is true because the proper work of the deacons is vital to the spiritual health of a congregation.

* * * * *

Thirdly, the church to which Christ added daily was a spiritual church, for "fear" for God was in every soul (43; also 5:14; 9:31). Does not the presence of the fear of God also indicate a congregation's spiritual health?

Their continuing in doctrine was not dead orthodoxy or formalism, and their continuing in fellowship was not superficiality. In the "fear" of God, they loved Him and His people. Seeking only God's glory, they walked humbly before God, before each other, and before their unbelieving neighbors.

This fear of God implies that there was a great reverence for holy things and for the holy people of God. In worship and in life they showed honor for God and for His church. They loved the church and did everything they could for the well-being of the church. When each member labors actively in the fear of God, then the church will be spiritually healthy, and then the church will grow. It is most important that each member, young and old, walk in the fear of God for their

own sakes, but also for the sake of the church of God.

If the church is rooted and grounded in the truth of the gospel and motivated by the fear of God, then it will be most natural for the members of the congregation to manifest this daily. Thus, evangelism has its place naturally (the church cannot help but stand out in the world).

The work of a congregation's Evangelism Committee does not make unnecessary the witnessing of the members. We read that all (except the apostles) were scattered and "preached" (Acts 8:1-8 & 10:21). The pastor may faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God, including a calling to repentance, but the members must bring other people into the worship services. Are you shy about asking a friend to go to a game, fishing, shopping? Look at it this way: from a certain

perspective, speaking about the gospel is no more than one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.

* * * * *

The evangelism work of a congregation which has these characteristics will be as blessed of God as the congregations mentioned in Acts.

If the church is spiritually healthy and if God has His people in that area, then that church will grow.

However, if there is no steadfast continuing in the Word, then you cannot expect anyone outside to pay attention to our confession. If others see that our confession is mere formality, then why would they want to join us?

From the same perspective, if others see that we do not love each other and that we do not

live in fellowship, then why would they want to join us?

Remember that our individual congregations and our evangelism are nothing. We do nothing in ourselves, and we deserve nothing (unprofitable servants). We are completely dependent upon the Lord. Not every spiritually healthy church will grow numerically — though it certainly will spiritually.

Let us rejoice in the ability to be active in the work of evangelism and in doing our calling toward the spiritual health of our congregations, rather than looking for positive and numerical fruit. Remember that the Lord counts faithfulness as fruit. Look at your efforts as sowing seeds, which requires much patience.

Pray for God's blessing upon your congregation. Be diligent to do your part in keeping or making her healthy. □

Taking Heed to Doctrine

Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

God's Purpose in the Gospel

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

If the proclamation of the gospel is to go forth to all men, is it God's desire that all men should be saved? And if not, why does God send His word to them? This question concerns the purpose of God; and it is important for us to seek to understand it.

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We find it dealt with somewhat negatively in the well-known text, Ezekiel 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

We are told here of that in which God has no pleasure, the death of the wicked. God is not a sadist who sends people to death and destruction because He enjoys seeing them suffer. It hap-

pens; God does send people to hell. That the Scriptures clearly tell, as in Hebrews 10:26: "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries," and II Peter 3:7, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved into fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." But God does not

send them there because He has pleasure in their suffering; He has a higher purpose than that.

Ezekiel brings that out as he goes on with his text, "But that the wicked turn from his way and live." This is God's positive pleasure; He is pleased when sinners repent from their sins. Of that we read also in the rest of Scripture, as in Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise," or as Jesus put it so impressively, Luke 15:7: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." And so that it may be, God sends his gospel into all the world, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Many, of course, don't care; it's meaningless to them. They know not God, and will die. But there is the Israel of God who do; and to them by this the strongest motivation for repentance is given.

But perhaps we see this more positively if we turn to the even better-known text, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Here we have a text which is known by many, but understood by very few. And the reason is that they read it out of context, they don't follow the thought of Jesus through.

The thought of the passage has its roots back in the preceding chapter, 2:23-25, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should

testify of man: for he knew what was in man." This was one of the great wonders of Jesus; no one ever fooled Him. He had just performed some miracles, and as a result a number of people came desiring to be disciples. It would seem to have been a wonderful thing, but apparently Jesus did nothing to encourage them; and John explains why. Jesus was able to tell if people were sincere; and apparently these weren't. They were interested in His miracles, but not in His word.

As it was, however, there stood in His audience that day a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, named Nicodemus. He too was impressed — until, that is, that last move of Jesus. That he couldn't understand. He was himself a leader of people; and he knew, after all, how difficult it could be to gain a following. How could a prospective leader turn people so ready to follow Him away? To him it just didn't make sense.

That night as he went home he couldn't get it off his mind. There was something about Jesus he couldn't ignore; but how could a leader deal with prospective followers like that? Perhaps he went to bed but couldn't sleep. In any case, he couldn't wait. Regardless of the hour, he had to find Jesus and lay out his problem directly before Him. This he did.

Finding Him at His residing place, and still awake, Nicodemus approached Him politely, John 3:2: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him . . ."

But Jesus didn't allow him as much as to finish. Perhaps He had seen Nicodemus in the crowd; and perhaps He had marked him as one who would certainly come to Him some day. In any instance, He knew what

was on Nicodemus' mind, and interrupting him said, vs. 3, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Unless people understand what the kingdom of God is, they can have no part. But that requires a new and different outlook on life, one for which a person must be "born again." Nicodemus, and all who would follow Jesus, must understand this. And that was what those who had wanted to follow Him that day did not. They weren't interested in His message, and in what He was seeking to illustrate with His miracles. Their only concern was with the crowd; and that didn't interest Jesus at all. To His kingdom they did not belong.

But Nicodemus didn't understand any more than they. He sensed that Jesus knew what He meant; but he didn't. "Born again?" . . . "Born again?" It sounded strange and bizarre, so that impulsively he blurted back, vs. 4, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" And sarcasm hung heavy over what he said.

But Jesus, as short as He had been with the inquirers of the day, now was patient and kind. Carefully He explained, 3:5, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Here was the heart of the matter: spirit and flesh are not the same, even as are not the

kingdom of God and the world. It was something Nicodemus should have known, for the whole of the Old Testament was built on it, as in I Samuel 16:7, "The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." But he also had to realize that this was not something a person does simply by himself; it takes a miracle of God, a miracle of newness which only God's Spirit can bring about. It's like the wind. We know it's there; but we can't explain from where it comes, or where it goes, nor can we tell it what to do. It's a work of God, the breathing of His Spirit.

But to Nicodemus it made no sense, and he snapped back, vs. 9, "How can these things be?"

And gently but firmly Jesus answered back, vs. 10, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" This, after all, was one of the basic teachings of the law; should not one as well studied as Nicodemus know that?

And so He went on to add, vss. 11, 12, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" Nicodemus' failure was crucial. If he could not grasp the difference between the flesh and the spirit, that which was written all through the history of Israel, how could he possibly grasp those things which Jesus was about to bring down from the Father above.

After all, vs. 13, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." Here was the basic truth that had to be received. He, Jesus, was not just a miracle worker; He was not just "a teacher come from God"; He is

the Son of God who came from God and is at the same time with God. He is God; or as Peter was later to express it, Matthew 16:16, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is a confession which comes from God, and a truth only God can give [Mt. 16:17].

And it was for such that Jesus laid out the greatest wonder of all, vs. 14: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Here was the wonder of it all, the highest fulfillment of divine love. God's own Son would be lifted up on an accursed cross, like the wretched snake of the wilderness curse. No earthly understanding, short of a new birth from God, could ever receive that. And it is for them, the "whosoever believeth" — literally "those believing in him" — that God has given His most precious Son, that they may live.

This brings us to 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So often bantered about, it is a text to be read slowly, carefully, and with reverence.

"For . . . so." That is the emphasis of the text. The original Greek sentence is so laid out that the full emphasis falls on the little word *so*. Usually it is interpreted to mean, *so greatly*, or *to so great an extent*; but that isn't actually what it says. The word properly translated means, *in this manner*, or *in this way*. Thus the meaning of the text is, "For *in this way* God loved the world."

The word "world" too is worthy of note. In the Greek it is *kosmos*, or as we would say, *cosmos*. It literally means, *a harmonious arrangement*, or *universe*. By derivation it has

often come to indicate *the world of men*; but the difference is indifferently. The point is that God shows His love in a very specific way.

God has given His Son, to be raised upon the accursed tree, so that "whosoever believeth in him" — that is, those who have been born again by the Spirit to believe — "should not perish but have everlasting life." This is the purpose of God. His is not a universal love which would like to save everyone, but cannot do so by itself. God, like Jesus that day on the streets of Jerusalem, has a very particular people to whom His love is directed, and whom He will surely save.

This is God's purpose; and this is the goal for which all things serve, as vs. 17 goes on to say, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved," which brings us right back to Ezekiel 33. God's purpose is not condemnation; He has no pleasure in that. His purpose is to save His people; and also the condemnation of the wicked must be there for that, as the remainder of Jesus' discourse goes on to bring out, vs. 18-21, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God . . . But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." It is the dividing force of the Gospel, Jesus separating His people from the world that they may live.

Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O people of God? □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Student Preaching

"Students who have received permission according to the rule in this matter, and persons who have according to Article 8 been judged competent for the ministry of the Word, shall, for their own training, and for the sake of becoming known to the congregations, be allowed to speak a word of edification in the meeting for public worship." *Church Order*, Article 20.

HISTORY OF STUDENT PREACHING

The history of student preaching shows that there have been two distinct viewpoints concerning this practice. There have been those who have favored it, but there have also been those who opposed it.

In 1568 the Synod of Wezel decided that ministers with exceptional abilities should take young men under their wing who desired training for the ministry, giving them opportunity, as part of their training, to preach privately before the minister or the minister and his consistory.

The Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1586, ruled that students for the ministry might teach in the public assemblies for worship, but only after they had passed an examination and been judged competent.

The Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19, disapproved the practice of student preaching in the public worship services, and returned to the practice favored by the Synod of Wezel. The original Article 20 of our *Church Order* as drafted by the Synod of Dordt read:

In churches where there are more competent ministers, the use of propositions shall be instituted, that by such practices some may be prepared for the ministry of the Word according to the rule of this matter established by this particular Synod.

The use of "propositions" was a return to private practice-preaching before the ministers and consistories.

The decision of Dordt is to be understood in light of the Arminian controversy raging at that time. The faculties of the universities were responsible for examining and licensing students for preaching in the churches. But many faculty members were sympathetic to the Arminian position. It was largely because the Synod of Dordt no longer trusted the university professors properly to supervise student preaching that they did away with student preaching in the churches. In addition, Gomarus and Thysius, professors at this time at the University of Leyden, objected to student preaching in the churches on the ground that preaching belongs to the official work of the ministry, to which students have not yet been ordained.

In 1834 the churches of the secession known as the

"Afscheiding" re-introduced student preaching in the public worship services of the church. In part this was due to the severe shortage of ministers and the large number of vacant churches. (By 1836 there were 128 congregations, but only 6 ministers.) It was felt that student preaching in the congregations was also useful practical training for the ministry.

The churches of the "Doleantie," 1886, the reform movement led by Dr. A. Kuyper, did not favor student preaching.

This controversy over student preaching continued with later synods. The Synod of Amsterdam, 1892, the Synod of Middelburg, 1896, and the Synod of Groningen, 1899, all favored the practice. But the Synod of Amsterdam, 1908, the Synod of Zwolle, 1911, and the Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1914, expressed disapproval of the practice.

THE PRACTICE IN OUR CHURCHES

The *Church Order* of our Protestant Reformed Churches makes provision for student preaching. Our present Article 20, therefore, is not the product of the Synod of Dordt, but the revision of the *Church Order* by the Christian Reformed Church in 1914.

Before graduation from our Theological School, every student must complete six credit hours of practice preaching. Two sermons are required for one hour's credit. These practice preaching sermons are delivered before the faculty and the rest of the stu-

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

dent body. After delivery these sermons are "criticized" by the faculty and by assigned students. Attention is given to exegesis (Biblical interpretation), homiletics (sermon organization), and delivery.

At the discretion of the faculty, competent students are licensed to preach in the public worship services of the churches. Article XIII of the "Constitution of the Theological School" reads: "The Faculty shall license a student to speak a word of edification in the meetings of public worship when it deems him ready." This student preaching is then monitored by the faculty and all preaching assignments are made through the faculty.

SPEAKING A WORD OF EDIFICATION

Although Article 20 favors the practice of student preaching, it is careful to distinguish student preaching from the official proclamation of the gospel.

This distinction is made when the article refers to student preaching as speaking "a word of edification." The original speaks of a *stichtelijk woord*, that is, an edifying word. There is a difference, a difference that this article of our *Church Order* forces us to recognize, between the preaching of a minister and the preaching of a student.

That difference is NOT that the one is edifying and the other is not. The difference is not something that concerns the actual content of the word that is brought.

But the difference concerns the authority of the one who brings the Word. The student has not been ordained, and therefore does not bring the Word as an officebearer who has been sent out by Christ and through the church. The minister brings the Word always in the capacity of an ordained officebearer. Ordination means something! Because

he lacks ordination the student, although he may speak a work of edification, does not, cannot, preach the Word as a minister. This is also why the student may not officially pronounce the benediction or administer the sacraments.

BENEFITS OF STUDENT PREACHING

The article mentions two benefits of student preaching that lend support to the practice: "... for their own training, and for the sake of becoming known to the congregations . . ."

Student preaching certainly serves a good purpose in the practical training for the ministry. It gives the student the opportunity to "preach" in the actual worship situation, hands-on experience, so that by the time of his ordination he has gained some valuable training in this most important aspect of his work. This points up the need for practical training for the ministry that gives students experience in various aspects of the work of the minister: teaching catechism, visiting the sick, leading societies, conducting consistory meetings, attending classis and synod meetings.

There is also good benefit for the churches in this practice. The one benefit mentioned in the article is that the congregations become acquainted with the students. The reference is not so much to personal acquaintance, but acquaintance with their abilities, especially with a view to calling them later. The benefit is also that the vacant congregations are able to have pulpit supply, rather than reading or tape sermons.

SUPERVISION OF STUDENT PREACHING

In the Christian Reformed Church supervision of preaching by Calvin Seminary students is directly under the control of the Board of Trustees of Calvin Col-

lege and Seminary. It is worth noting the procedure followed in this denomination.

- a. The Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary may grant licensure to conduct religious services in our churches only to such as:
 - 1) Are enrolled as regular students in our seminary.
 - 2) Have successfully passed the final examinations of the junior year in the seminary.
- b. The board shall not grant licensure to such students till it has made sure of the following with respect to each applicant:
 - 1) That he is a member in good standing in our churches.
 - 2) That he has spiritual qualifications necessary for the ministry, and that he considers himself called of God to prepare himself for the office of ministering the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - 3) That he intends to enter the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.
 - 4) That he has sufficient knowledge of the Bible, and especially of our Reformed principles to act as a guide to others.
 - 5) That he speaks acceptably and to the edification of the churches. It is left to the discretion of the board, however, whether it will obtain this information by consulting the seminary faculty or by examining the applicants.
- c. The board has the right to extend the licensure of those who want to take post-graduate work, but with the understanding:
 - 1) That this privilege is to be granted only to such who are taking post-graduate work in theology, and

declare that it is their definite intention to enter the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.

- 2) That this extension is valid for no more than one year.
- 3) That further extension may be given at the end of the first year in case the applicant makes his request in writing, and at the end of the second year if he appears in person and is willing to submit to another examination (the latter part of rule 3c does not apply to those who are taking post-graduate work in

theology outside of the United States or Canada).

- d. The board is obliged to revoke the licensure:

- 1) Of those who have completed their theological studies but have failed to take steps to enter the sacred ministry of the Word.
- 2) Of those undergraduate students who either discontinue their studies or fail to enroll again at the seminary.

In our churches, the seminary faculty exercise supervision over student preaching. This usually takes place after the first year of seminary instruction and after

the student has successfully passed such courses as homiletics (principles of sermon-making) and hermeneutics (principles of Biblical interpretation), and done commendably well in "Practice Preaching" before the faculty and student body. Only faculty-approved sermons may be used by the students in their preaching in the churches.

It may be worth considering giving the Theological School Committee (roughly equivalent to the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary) a more active role in granting licensure and supervising student preaching. □

In His Fear
Rev. Arie denHartog

The Conscience of the Christian

In our last article we considered the idea of conscience. Conscience is an inner sense, a function of the mind and heart that God has created in every man. According to his conscience every man has a certain knowledge of the ethical value of his actions. He knows what is good and what is evil in the absolute sense of the word. The conscience of man is the voice within that condemns man when he does evil and justifies him when he does that which is good. The function of man's conscience is based on the works of the law that God has written in the heart of man. Because of this testimony

of the law the natural man stands condemned in his conscience before God who is the judge of all men. He is left without excuse. The condemnation of the conscience of the evil man is predictive of the final judgment of God to come in the great day of judgment.

There is a great difference between the conscience of the Christian and the conscience of the natural man. That great difference was made first of all when God justified the Christian by imputing to him the perfect righteousness of Christ Jesus. God has declared in the gospel the blessed truth of justification by grace and through faith alone. The Christian is one who has heard and received this gospel in his heart. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our heart we

are assured of our own personal righteousness in Christ before God. This is the basis of the Christian conscience. The conscience of the Christian witnesses within him that he is without condemnation before God. By the operation of the Holy Spirit within us our conscience testifies that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the blessed and wonderful reality of justification by faith as it is consciously experienced by the child of God.

Though the Christian is, according to the gospel, righteous in Christ he still also has within him the voice of the conscience of the natural man. This conscience daily accuses him because of his remaining sinful nature, and whenever he through weakness falls again into sin.

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands, California.

However, through faith in Christ and in the way of true repentance the Christian also daily apprehends the righteousness that is his in Christ. This blessed apprehension triumphs over the accusing voice of the natural conscience of the Christian. It silences this voice, it destroys it altogether, it says to the voice of our accusing conscience that there is no basis whatsoever on which we can be condemned because we are perfectly righteous in Christ in spite of our sin and guilt before God. One of the nicest statements of this reality in the Christian is the one found in Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

How art thou righteous before God? Only through faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all of the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

Notice among other things the reference to our conscience in this beautiful statement of our confession.

The conscience of the Christian performs a very important function. It serves a good function when it convinces us of our sin, for when the Christian is convinced in his heart of the awfulness of his sin he is led by the Holy Spirit to Christ. We have a classic example of this in the life of David after he had committed the grievous sin of numbering the people of Israel. We read in this connection in II Samuel 24:10, "And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people. And David said unto the

Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly." Though this verse does not expressly speak of the conscience, it nevertheless speaks of the function of David's conscience. David's conscience convinced him of the greatness of his sin before God. This was good and necessary. This brought David to his senses. The conscience of the Christian in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit in him does the same for him. The Christian's conscience is able to do this in a better way than the conscience of the natural man. The regenerated child of God has the Holy Spirit in his heart Who makes the law of God plain to him in all of its perfect demands and implications. By the working of the Holy Spirit the Christian has a more profound understanding of the awfulness of his sin. When he sins against the law of God his "heart smites him." He is tormented by the condemnation of his conscience. He becomes conscious of the heavy hand of the Lord upon him. David describes this experience in Psalm 32, a Psalm that he wrote soon after confessing his great sin with Bathsheba. Through the work of the Holy Spirit within him the Christian with smitten conscience is led to God and to Christ to plead for mercy and forgiveness.

The law of God must be strictly preached in the church that our conscience may function properly to convince us of our sin before God and drive us to Christ. In the midst of this ungodly world it is possible for the conscience of the Christian to become dull. We can easily grow accustomed to the sin and wickedness of the world. We can easily go along with the "every-one is doing it so it must not be

so bad" philosophy of the world. Furthermore there is in this ungodly world much evil teaching, both within and without the church, that minimizes the seriousness of sin. What was once considered to be shameful wickedness even by the world is today condoned in many churches. This is going to get worse and worse as the end of this age approaches and the world becomes ripe for judgment. All of this can easily have an effect on the true Christian so that his conscience too becomes dulled. We must keep our conscience sharp by sitting under the faithful preaching of the Word and the strict preaching of the law and by constantly maintaining the seriousness of separation from the world.

We must be guided by our conscience and not act contrary to it. The judgment of our conscience, however, can be our guide only if it is constantly compared with the objective testimony of the Word of God found in the scriptures. Again, the best way to keep a good conscience before God is through faithful attention to the preaching of the Word of God. I am reminded in this connection of the famous words of the great reformer Martin Luther when he was asked by the Diet of Worms to recant his teachings and he answered: "Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the scriptures I have quoted and MY CONSCIENCE IS CAPTIVE TO THE WORD OF GOD. I CANNOT AND I WILL NOT RETRACT

ANYTHING, SINCE IT IS NEITHER SAFE NOR RIGHT TO GO AGAINST THE CONSCIENCE" (emphasis added AdH). Our conscience must be bound by the Word of God both in our confession of the truth of the Word of God over against all the apostasy of our day, and also in our life of good works and holiness before God.

The Christian must hold faith and a good conscience before God as Paul also exhorts Timothy in I Timothy 1:19. A good conscience is a conscience that testifies of the approval and blessing of God upon a life of sanctification. Our conscience is defiled through the corruption of sin. Then our conscience will again condemn us. We must live out of a free and good conscience before God. This is important for our whole walk before the Lord and our testimony in the world. If we walk in ungodliness and practice the same evil things that the world does while at the same time professing ourselves to be Christians, then our conscience will accuse us that we are hypocrites. God will condemn us in our hearts. The world will be able to accuse us and justly to find fault with us. The world will have occasion

also to blaspheme the name of the God that we claim to worship and serve. If on the other hand we, by the grace and Holy Spirit of God, strive to live in obedience to God's law in true holiness and love for God, then our conscience will testify of God's approval and we will be assured of the blessing and favor of God. The testimony of our conscience in connection with the Word of God will give us peace with God even though the whole world accuses us. The testimony of a good conscience will enable us to give a faithful witness before the world that will ultimately put to silence the accusations of evil men, and bring glory to God. A good conscience before God will give us strength to endure the false accusations and persecutions of the world. If God be for us, who shall be against us.

The good conscience of the Christian apprehends the righteousness that is his in Christ and assures him of the hope of glory that God has set before him in His blessed Word. □

God's Grace To The Redeemed

Grace is the sweetest sound
That ever reached our ear;
When conscience charged and
justice frowned,
'Twas grace removed our
fears.

'Tis freedom to the slave,
'Tis light and liberty;
It takes its terror from the grave,
From death its victory.

Grace is a mine of wealth
Laid open to the poor;
Grace is the sov'reign spring of
health;
'Tis LIFE for EVERMORE.

Of grace, then, let us sing!
(A joyful, wondrous theme!)
Who grace has brought shall
glory bring,
And we shall reign with Him.

Then shall we see His face
With all the saints above,
And sing forever of His grace,
Forever of His love.

—S.B., 1928

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

March 15, 1990

MISSION ACTIVITIES

In mid-February, Rev. B. Gritters, along with Elder Pete Koole, spent ten days in Venice, Florida on behalf of our churches' Mission Committee. They went there to try and answer the question as

to the advisability of establishing a mission field in the area.

Rev. and Mrs. J. Kortering, who were in Northern Ireland the first two months of this year, sent back letters to their congregation in Grandville, Michigan, telling them of some of

their experiences. In one letter Rev. Kortering writes, "We have all the conveniences of home, including a microwave, washer, and dryer, so we have more than heart can desire. It sounded good to hear the vacuum running this morning, even sounds like home. We even have "mastered" the driving, with a stick shift. It will take all the nerve I have to have Mrs. Kortering behind the wheel, but we shall try, one at a time."

And, in another letter, "It is a joy to see the Holy Spirit work in the lives of the people here.

There are five families that are really committed to the Reformed faith, and that form the heart of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship. But outside interest is limited, so we are discussing ways by which we can reach out to others. Lectures seem to be the chief way. So . . . every Friday evening, lecture we do!"

And, as reported here one month ago, Alice Hanco did indeed have surgery last month. From a letter from Florida, I learned that this surgery found no cancer.

MINISTERIAL CALLS

Rev. S. Key has declined the call he was considering from the Hope P.R.C. in Isabel, S.D.

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

On February 4, Rev. S. Houck preached his inaugural sermon as pastor of the Peace P.R.C. in Lynwood, IL. He chose as a scripture text, Romans 1:15-16, and entitled his sermon, "Ready to Preach."

By the way, Rev. and Mrs. Houck's address in Lynwood, IL is 20128 Catalpha Ave., 60411; phone (708) 474-6064.

In a letter dated February 4, the New Church Building Committee of the Grandville P.R.C. in Grandville, MI informed their fellow church members that their new sanctuary is almost ready. The trim is up and most of it is stained and lacquered; the beams have been stripped of their protective coat of paper; and the walls have been given an initial coat of paint. What this all leads to is that, the Lord willing, the congregation in Grandville has been given a probable occupancy date of March 9.

The congregation and all visitors of the Immanuel P.R.C. in Lacombe, AB were invited to a light supper in the social hall after the second service (their second service is 4 PM). Following the supper, there was a short song service sponsored by the young people. An offering was taken for the convention this summer in Redlands, California.

In mid-February the soon-to-be-married couples of the Byron Center P.R.C. in Byron Center, MI were invited to attend a series of Pre-Marriage classes sponsored by their church. Those who planned to attend were asked to read chapters 1 & 2 of Prof. Engelsma's book, *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and the Church*.

As part of a physical exam, Rev. G. Van Baren, pastor of the Hudsonville P.R.C. in Hudsonville, MI had a stress test and later a heart catheterization. This revealed "substantial" blockage in two coronary arteries. However, after another test given the following week it was determined that the partial blockage of his arteries did not require by-

pass surgery at this time. Medication, diet, and later testing were advised.

We express our congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. Dykstra of the Doon P.R.C., Doon, IA on the occasion of the birth of a baby girl, Courtney Jae, born January 17. □

ATTENTION STUDENTS!

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is taking applications for scholarships to be awarded to future Protestant Reformed ministers and teachers for the 1990-91 school year. Each applicant must also submit an essay of at least three hundred words, answering this question: "What's the responsibility of the teacher/minister in relationship to the parents in covenant instruction?" For an application, contact:

Mr. Jim Holstege

1637 Sylvan Ave. S.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49506

The application, accompanied by the essay, must be returned by June 1, 1990.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to our fellow office bearer, deacon Randal Vander Veen, and his family in the loss of his father, MR. ITSE VANDERVEEN, whom the Lord in His mercy and grace recently took home to glory.

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." (Psalm 37:37)

Rev. M. Kamps, President
Bill DeKraker, Vice-Clerk