

THE STANDARD BEARER

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*



Theological School of the PRC

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IN THIS ISSUE...

In his "Editorially Speaking" in the September 15 issue, Prof. Engelsma declared his intention to include in the next issue of *The SB* the response from leaders in the Netherlands Reformed Congregations to his series on the Covenant. As it turned out, however, he gave up some of his space (for that lengthy letter and his lengthier reply) to make room in this issue for Prof. Decker's Seminary Convocation address. So, for response relating to our editor's reference to the covenant-conception of the NRC, see instead the November 1 issue of *The SB*.

There was a good-sized gathering in Grandville PRC for the twice-delayed Convocation exercises marking the beginning of another year of work in our Protestant Reformed Seminary. It was the rector's turn to deliver the address. Before doing so, he introduced the seminary students: senior Mitchell Dick (Grandville) and first-year seminarians Patrick Baskwell (South-east), Henry DeJong (South Holland), and Scott Haaksma (Byron Center). He noted too that there are some eight or nine other young men who are currently taking pre-seminary classes at various under-graduate institutions with a view, D.V., to entering the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Four of them, who are attending colleges in the Grand Rapids area, are already taking a class or two also at the pre-sem level in our seminary. Others are quietly pursuing their work at some distance — all the way from Dordt College in Iowa to Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

Considering that there are currently two vacancies in our churches, three outstanding calls to serve as missionary, several rapidly growing congregations, and, shall we say, at least one minister who's getting older, the prospect of a growing student body at our seminary is most gratifying. Surely this is the Lord's answer to fervent prayer that we be supplied with faithful laborers.

For Prof. Decker's Convocation address, see "Earnestly Contending for the Faith." —D.D.

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A Father's Pity

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust"
(Psalm 103:13, 14).

Pity!
Who wants pity?

It seems no one. The handicapped of our day tell us they want respect, not pity. The street people scoff at pity. They want action, they want money, food, places to live. The broken, the wounded of our society want understanding, not pity.

Could it be that a people schooled in the virtues of being independent has lost the sensitivity of compassion? Is pity a violation of self-esteem? Has love grown cold in this world?

It has.

And pity has gone out of the window.

The passage we consider here speaks of the pity of our Heavenly Father and that of an earthly father. "As a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him."

Within the household of faith, pity is not demeaning, it is Divine!

Pity is the heartfelt desire to bridge justice and mercy. Let me explain. In the Psalm before us, God is extolled for His justice. "The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed" (vs. 6). In His justice

He punishes the wicked and requires satisfaction for the sins of His people. That is not all, for man cannot provide that payment. Hence the Psalmist David adds the element of mercy. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (vs. 8). That mercy of God is love in action. In mercy He removes our transgression from us as far as the east is from the west (vss. 11, 12). He does that by the blood of His own Son. What moves God to do this, to give His own Son in payment for the sins of His people? The answer to this question is, pity.

Pity is to feel the pain of others, to weep with those that weep, to be compassionate with the lonely, to share in the burdens of life. A good description of pity is found in Hebrews 4:15, where Jesus is described as our high priest, as one Who can be touched with the *feeling of our infirmities*.

That is pity!

As the Psalmist looks around him for an earthly display of the pity which God has for His children, the Holy Spirit moves him to focus his attention upon an earthly father. As a father pities his children, so Jehovah pities them that fear Him.

An earthly father is the example, *par excellence*, for pity.

That has to say something to fathers. We might argue, why not mothers? They are the ones who nurse the wounds and sing softly as disturbed children try to find sleep. Mothering is the epitome of pity!

The Holy Spirit speaks otherwise: as a *father* pities his children. The most obvious reason is that the analogy drawn here is between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father. Still more, the father repre-

sents headship in the home, and he is responsible for the care of his wife and children. Hence, pity must come from him as father; and the mother is his helpmeet as well. Being the head of the home, he is in a special position to display pity, for in his strength (physical, psychological, and spiritual) he is equipped to provide what is so sorely needed in the family, pity!

Fathers, are you reading this carefully?

The great virtue which God Himself ascribes to every father is, of all things, pity.

And we ascribe pity to weakness. Far too many fathers think their calling as head of the home is toughness. Rule and authority is so abused by so many fathers. They become demanding tyrants. Their will is an iron law in the home. Before long, his dictum is executed with threats and violence. His big hand can thrash the strongest willed child into submission. Wife and children cower before his rage. Pity, that is for wimps! Do not talk love to this man, that is mushy nothingness. Biblical authority is his weapon; his law is God's law, and that is final.

But God says, "as a father pities his children."

A father that pities his child sheds quiet tears when his little one is hurting. Even though he may not be on the front line to soothe and comfort every need of his hurting children, at the end of the day he offers a prayer of thanksgiving for his wife who can so ably nurture and mother the children he loves. He takes time to be with his children. He knows the greatest deterrent to hurting children is to demonstrate his love by spending time with them. On a daily basis these children know that their dad

loves them. When the hurt does come, they can pour out their heart to father, for he will listen, he will understand. When they are sick, he will visit their bed at night. When they are restless, he will pray with them. When they act in ways of rebellion, he will discipline them and afterwards assure them of his love.

The sure test of pity is this: when your child hurts, do you as a father hurt more than he does? Be careful what this means. Do you have more hurt, not for yourself in self-pity, but do you have more hurt for your child than your child does for herself or himself?

Then you have pity.

Such a father is a gift from heaven. Such love and compassion from an earthly father is a reflection of our Heavenly Father.

Children in such a home are spiritually blessed. They can experience firsthand what God is saying here. As a father pities his children, so Jehovah pities them that fear Him.

The urgency is this: If we abuse our children, physically, sexually, psychologically, spiritually, or any other way for that matter, what will our children think of their Heavenly Father? Imagine, that a child slapped across the face by an angry father has to fold his little hands and pray, our Father Who art in heaven. The very thought of God being a father scares him. How will a child who is yelled at and called names by an angry father ever have the courage to look to heaven and believe he is precious to his Heavenly Father?

The Holy Spirit draws a comparison between earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father. Like as a father pities his children, so JEHOVAH pities them that fear him. God intends that the loving security of a Christian home becomes the womb out of which the children of God are born into this world.

And pity is a critical ingredient.

Justice and mercy are joined together by pity.

We may well ask, what does it take for a father to possess such pity? I am sure there are many fa-

thers who read these words with pangs of guilt and deep feelings of inadequacy. Mothers read these words and breathe a prayer to God that the father of her children might be more like this.

In the measure that we fail, we must surely repent of sinful behavior, also within the home. God has given to fathers a wonderful and awesome position in the home. Often times fathers think that authority and love are incompatible, while the very opposite is true. The law which gives to fathers their authority is the law of love. Pity is the application of that law to the special needs of our hurting family. Well may we spend more time on our knees, repenting of our wrongs and asking God for guidance in correcting them.

What assistance does God give to fathers to encourage them in the exercise of this pity?

The purpose of Psalm 103 is to guide us in extolling God's great love to us. The more we consider what God has done for us, what His pity means to us as adults, fathers or mothers, married or single, whatever age we may be, the more we will exercise love and pity to others.

Jehovah pities us! He is our Father Who bestows such pity upon us that we can only respond with the doxology which begins and ends this Psalm, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

It was pity that moved Him to elect us. We are chosen, not because we are better and more noble than others, as if we were distinguished for our great qualities. He

chose us in love unto the adoption of children (Eph. 1:4, 5).

It was pity that reached out to our first parents, Adam and Eve. Our Heavenly Father did not give them a tongue-lashing and beat them physically when they came from behind the bush, trembling. He took from them the leaves of self-righteousness and clothed them with the garments of blood. He told them they would have to bear the consequence of sin, but held out the promise of the seed of the woman, Jesus Christ. The wilderness sojourn confirms that as a Father, Jehovah pitied Israel, and that pity bridges the gap between justice and mercy. He punished them in their sins, and forgave them their transgressions.

What pity Jehovah displays in the death of His own Son. Look at that cross, the blood, the shame, the cries of anguish. Jesus bore that because our Heavenly Father knew that we could never do that. He spared us, but not His own Son.

In His pity for us, Jesus, our exalted Lord, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

When our children see their earthly father exercising pity upon them, they are encouraged to look heavenward. And this passage confirms God's faithfulness to them.

In turn, they learn to fear Jehovah. That fear is not to be scared of Him, but rather the opposite. They learn to reverence their Heavenly Father, to stand in awe of Him, to listen to Him, and to obey Him.

That is what we earthly fathers desire most. □

O Lord, how happy is the time
When in Thy love I rest;
When from my weariness I climb
E'en to Thy tender breast.
The night of sorrow endeth there,
Thy rays outshine the sun;
And in Thy pardon and Thy care
The heaven of heaven is won.

—SB, March 1, 1931

Editorial

■ Staff Meeting ■ Mailing ■ Subscriptions

■ Staff Meeting

At its annual meeting in June, the staff of *The Standard Bearer* (the contributing editors) reappointed all the officers. Most of the rubrics and writers will also remain the same during the coming volume-year.

There will be a few changes. Rev. M. Kamps and Rev. C. Terpstra will write the "Taking Heed to the Doctrine" rubric with Rev. B. Woudenberg. Rev. Kamps and Rev. Terpstra intend to cooperate in writing on Reformed doctrine following the order of the traditional six loci of Reformed theology: doctrine of God; of man; of Christ; of salvation; of the church; and of the last things. Rev. Kamps will lead off with the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Rev. Woudenberg plans to continue his study of the biblical teaching on the call of the gospel. All of these men will be writing for the people, not for the theologians. We intend these to be articles that not only refresh the doctrinal understanding of Reformed men and women, but also can be used to instruct others in the fundamentals of biblical truth. We drop for now the rubric, "Guided into All Truth."

Rev. C. Haak will share with Rev. G. VanBaren the writing of Bible study outlines for societies and personal use. Following completion of the outlines on Philippians, we will publish outlines on the book of Ruth. We encourage our societies to choose their books for Bible study accordingly. We will do our very best to stay ahead of the society meetings in publishing the outlines.

Rev. R. Dykstra will co-edit "Strength of Youth" with Rev. B. Gritters. Rev. Dykstra will concentrate on issues faced by our college students. No doubt he would appreciate suggestions and questions from college students, as does Rev. Gritters from all our young people. You can send them in care of *The SB*. We remind our readers that we will send *The SB* to college students without charge. Inform the business office of their name and college address.

A new rubric will consist of brief explanations of key biblical words. Rev. D. Kuiper will write the column. Look for the heading, "A Word Fitly Spoken," in this issue.

With regret, the staff accepted the resignation because of age of long-time staff member, Rev. C. Hanko. Rev. Hanko began to write for *The SB* in 1929. He became a member of the staff in 1935 and has been a member since then. We thank him for his significant contribution to the Reformed faith and life as maintained in the PRC through his writing for *The SB*. Replacing Rev. Hanko as editor of "The Reader Asks" will be the editorial committee. We asked Rev. Hanko about the early history of *The SB*. His response is his "Reminiscences on the Early SB" elsewhere in this issue.

These are the plans for *The SB* in the coming year, if the Lord will.

We welcome the new writers. We thank those who have been writing and are willing to continue. Cooperation has been excellent. Deadlines are met. Copy is on hand. May this continue.

■ Mailing

Observant subscribers will have noticed that in the past few months *The SB* has been arriving earlier than before. Previously, the magazine was mailed on the date that appears on the cover. Of late, we have mailed each issue several days prior to the date of the issue so that many, if not most, of our subscribers receive the magazine by the date of the issue. This has required the cooperation of our writers, obligingly given. It is in large part due to the indefatigable efforts of our industrious managing editor, Mr. Don Doezema, to whom a hearty thanks.

A few localities, however, still get the magazine intolerably late. The cause of the delay is the postal service in those areas, not our tardiness in mailing. Alas, we can do nothing about this. The intolerable delay must be tolerated. We trust that the magazine is worth waiting for.

■ Subscriptions

It is gratifying that subscriptions to *The SB* have risen to almost 2200. We are by no means satisfied with this, however. The Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association and the editorial committee of *The SB* are working together closely in order to increase subscriptions. Appearing in this issue is an open letter to our present subscribers. The letter asks the help of our readers by sending the business office of *The SB* the names and addresses of persons who might be interested

in receiving our magazine. We will send all those whose names are submitted a sample copy of *The SB* with an order form offering a year's subscription for only \$6.

I ask our readers to respond to the request of the open letter. By doing so you help us to spread the witness of *The SB* to the Reformed faith among a wider circle. Send us the names of relatives, friends, and acquaintances who might be willing to receive the magazine. We will do the rest. We are especially desirous to make the magazine known to people outside the PRC. The address and telephone number of the business office are found in the masthead.

We are also exploring other avenues of adding to our readership. The Board of the R.F.P.A. has sent a letter to the evangelism committees of the PRC requesting their mailing lists and suggesting that they include promotional material of *The SB* in their own mailings.

Advertising *The SB* in other, selected religious magazines is another means that we are using. We are presently running our first ad in the Presbyterian weekly, *Christian Observer*.

Reaching those members of the PRC who do not subscribe is another goal. The staff recently discussed ways in which our PR consistories can help us with this objective. The editorial committee

will be addressing the consistories on this matter. 100% participation by the membership of the PRC is a reasonable desire. One way to achieve this is that every consistory make a year's subscription their wedding present to newly married couples.

The message of *The SB* is worthy, we think, of the widest possible hearing.

Read the open letter.

Let us hear from you.

If every subscriber sends in five names, we can offer the magazine to 10,000 people. If half would subscribe, our subscription list would more than triple, to 7,000. This would be a good start. □ -DJE

Letters

Infant Baptism — "Unbiblical Tradition"

I must respond to your editorial in the August 1, 1990, issue of *The Standard Bearer*. I am a Baptist who has found your paper quite useful and spiritually profitable. However, the response you wrote to William Oosterman's defense of Baptist doctrine was entirely out of line.

First, I strongly object to your alteration of the sacred Scriptures to prove your point. You quoted Luke 18:16, but you added words not contained in the original text. No doubt you did this to help prove your point and explain your interpretation of the text. However, this is precisely the way the cults defend their false doctrines. I am not saying that belief in infant baptism or infant church membership is cultic. However, the technique you used to prove your point is one used by the false teachers.

Secondly, you mistakenly wrote that *all* Baptists part company with

the Reformed faith by denying the unity of the covenant of grace. It is not the fact of unity but the interpretation of unity which separates us. You would not demand animal sacrifices in our time to prove the unity of the covenants, as dispensationalists do. Can't you see that to demand a ceremonial seal for infants, although required by the Bible in your view, is only one interpretation of what the doctrine of covenantal unity demands?

While certainly there are some Baptists who fail to see the Scriptures as you and I do, there are many Baptists who agree that, both in the Old Testament and the New, there are babes in the Kingdom of God. Where Baptists disagree with you is concerning whether the babes in Christ are physical infants or spiritual ones. (See Hebrews 8:11.) Because the New Covenant is spiritual, *spiritual children* of Christians are the ones invited to the New Testament parallel of circumcision. In your view, this interpretation of Scripture is wrong. However, it is certainly not illegitimate.

Finally, whether we call any Baptists "Reformed" is a matter of semantics. You suggest that it is "unlawful" to do so. Those of us Baptists who adhere to the doctrines of sovereign grace in salvation and love the light which great Protestant Reformers have brought to this world can live without the mere title. However, what we cannot live without is sound Bible teaching (as we understand it), namely, the doctrines of unconditional election, particular redemption, the regulative principle of worship, and, yes, also the necessity of repentance before the administration of baptism (Acts 2:38). The promise of Abraham was for us, and for our children, and for all who are afar off, *even as many as the Lord our God shall call*. Any who the Lord our God has not called are not beneficiaries of the promise and are not to be recipients of the seal of the covenant.

Your editorial states: "If our children are outside the church, they are outside the sphere of salvation." This statement assumes that there is a third state for

mankind, (1) those who are saved, (2) those who are unsaved, and (3) those who are yet unsaved but still within a so-called sphere of salvation. Those who are Christ's children by salvation will certainly be in heaven (John 10:29). Those who are not Christ's elect will never enter heaven and cannot (John 3:3; 6:65). The Bible speaks of no third "sphere of salvation" from which some enter heaven and others become covenant breakers.

Baptists believe that all the children of believers share in many great and precious benefits, just like the Jews of the Old Testament (Romans 3:1-3). Baptists have as much hope for the salvation of their children who die in infancy as those who adhere to the Westminster and Belgic Confessions. However, our hope is based upon the clear promise of the Bible that "the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to those who keep His covenant, and who remember His precepts to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18). It is not based upon unbiblical tradition and sentimentality.

Thomas E. Martin, Jr.
Kennett Square, PA

Response

I made it clear enough that I was giving Luke 18:16, not word-for-word as it stands on the page of Scripture, but in its meaning. As soon as he read, "...by being brought to the baptismal font..." every reader knew that this was Luke 18:16 as interpreted by the editor of *The Standard Bearer*. No one was fooled.

If this is cultic, I at least have fine, orthodox company in my method of teaching the truth. When Martin Luther translated Romans 3:28, he inserted into the text the word, "only" ("a man is justified by faith *only*"), even though the word does not appear in the Greek text. And he "added" this word to the German Bible, whereas I merely added words in an explanation of the text in *The SB*.

In fact, this is not an illegitimate way of teaching Luke 18:16 at all. Luke 18:16, in its context of verses 15 and 17, itself is Christ's Word to the New Testament church, "Allow the infants to come to me by being brought to the baptismal font by their parents, and forbid them not: for the church — the kingdom of God in the present age — is made up of such infants." The children are infants. They are literal, physical infants, not spiritual infants — the parents were carrying real babies of a few months to Jesus. Jesus' touch of blessing of the infants does not differ essentially from the baptism of infants. The basis is that infants of believing parents belong to the kingdom of God, i.e., the church.

Luke 18:16, in its meaning as I gave it (in keeping with the interpretation given by the entire Reformed tradition) is the very Word of Christ. Luke 18:16, recited word-for-word as it lies on the page of the Bible, but understood in such a way as to deny infant baptism, is not the Word of Jesus Christ. — Ed.

Infant Baptism — Theological Detour

I read your recent articles on "Covenant Children" in the July and August, 1990 issues of *The Standard Bearer*. While I certainly appreciate much of the PRC's theology in many, many areas, I am afraid I cannot endorse the unscriptural, if not saccharine, sentimentality which surrounds infant baptism. It amazes me to see so many good men taking this detour in their theology. My suggestion is that you need a bit more Bible, and a bit less of John Calvin on this issue. Infant Baptists, no matter how high sounding their words, will never be truly "Reformed" as long as they cling to that umbilical which leads to Romanism...paedobaptism! Neither you, nor any other paedobaptist is truly able to tell me or other Reformed Baptists what actually occurs during a paedobaptism...in fact, Romanist, Lutheran, Church of Christ, Congregational, Anglican, Presbyte-

rian, etc. theologies differ as to what really happens during a paedobaptism. And what about paedocommunion? Inconsistent, inconsistent, inconsistent, is the watchword. As long as you confuse the church with unsaved members (in this case, children) we won't have much to talk about. The covenant becomes narrower and narrower...those in the covenant are believers only! This is an area where the Westminster Confession is confused as well.

You also confuse regeneration with conversion. You blur the distinction between the world and the church by generating a community of baptized heathen. Again, the covenant is not made up of believers and their seed, rather it is made up of those who know the Lord...

Paul K. Christianson
Clarkston, WA

Response

I can tell you what actually happens during the baptism of a child of believing parents: God Himself signifies and seals that He makes His one covenant of grace with believers and their elect children, cleansing them from sin and uniting them with Himself by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ. The result of this divine testimony is that church and parents rear the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:4). The power of the sacrament, by the working of the Holy Spirit, is that the elect children grow up strengthened in faith in Jesus Christ, as a rule from tenderest years. As they learn the meaning of the covenant and infant baptism from the gospel, their own baptism as infants assures them of God's love for them and impels them to love this gracious God in response. Their baptism avails them, as the Belgic Confession teaches in Article 34, through the whole course of their life.

Your basic error is your denial, "The covenant is not made up of believers and their seed." Your quarrel, thus, is not with me, but with Jehovah, Who said to Abraham, father of believers, "I will establish my covenant between me

and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations..." (Gen. 17:7). Your controversy is with Jesus, Who grounded His command that the infants be brought to Him for His blessing in the fact that the kingdom of God is made up of such infants (Luke 18:15-17). You

contradict the Holy Spirit, Who proclaimed the covenant-gospel on Pentecost, "The promise is unto you, and to your children..." (Acts 2:39).

I marvel at the determination of "Calvinistic Baptists" to exclude the children of believers from the

covenant of grace. You contradict the explicit teaching of the Bible; you defy the whole of the glorious Reformed and Presbyterian tradition; and you exclude our children from the mercy of God and the salvation that is in Jesus.

Why? □

— Ed.

Convocation Address

Prof. Robert Decker

Earnestly Contending for the Faith

Our churches and our seminary represent and stand in a glorious tradition. That tradition is called the Reformed faith. It consists of the truth of Holy Scripture as expressed in the great creeds of the church; as restored over against the errors of Rome through the 16th century Reformation, especially under the leadership of God's servants, Martin Luther and, more especially, John Calvin; and as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, our Reformed Confessions. That truth is taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches along the distinctive lines of particular and sovereign grace over against the errors of common grace and along the line of God's unilateral and unconditional covenant of friendship with the elect in Christ Jesus.

I call your attention especially to two things about this tradition. The first is that for it we ought to be profoundly thankful. That we are what we are is not because of our faithfulness or strength but only because of God's faithfulness and

grace! For that we ought to thank Him without ceasing. And, secondly, we ought to be zealous, enthusiastic, eager to preach and teach and to give witness to that great truth! We must never be ashamed of the gospel. We ought not be defensive about it, for, as the inspired apostle wrote in his epistle to the Romans, "It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." And we must thankfully, joyfully preach it from our pulpits and on the mission fields, and teach it to our children.

If we are to do that we must be willing to fight for that great and glorious tradition. From the very beginning of her history the church has been involved in what Scripture calls "the good fight of faith." The truth of Holy Scripture has been under vicious attack all through the ages. And the church has had earnestly to contend (or fight) for the faith.

I need not tell you that that is true in our day as well. The Reformed faith is almost everywhere scorned and denied except by a small remnant. If our churches are to remain faithful in doctrine and in life we will have to heed the urgent exhortation found in the third



Prof. Robert Decker

verse of Jude that we must "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

If my address appears to be cast in the form of a sermon, it is deliberately so. I would like to speak to you on the topic, "Earnestly Contending for the Faith." 1) Contending for What? 2) Contending What? 3) Contending Why?

Contending for what? The answer is: for the faith, which must be understood in the objective sense. This is not faith as the bond which unites us to Christ, through which faith we receive all of the

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blessings of salvation. Nor is it faith as the certain knowledge of God and the assured confidence that He is our Father for Jesus' sake as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism. But it is faith as that truth which Scripture teaches, and that truth which we must believe.

The faith is the truth of Holy Scripture: all the various doctrines revealed in Scripture as they constitute the one great truth of God — God as the sovereign, almighty Creator and sustainer and governor of heaven and earth and all that is in them, the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ!

The faith is the truth of Holy Scripture as set forth in the great creeds of the church. In these ecumenical creeds the church set forth the biblical truths of the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Christ, and others. It is the truth set forth in the Reformed Confessions: The Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dordt. These creeds were formulated for the instruction of the members of the church, especially the children and youth. They were formulated as an apology for the Reformed faith to the civil rulers. And they were formulated as the biblical expression of the doctrines of grace over against the errors of Arminianism.

The faith is the truth of Scripture, summed in the creeds as taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches! If our professors and ministers do not believe that, we may as well close the doors of our seminary and our churches!

The faith includes many truths cherished in our churches. There are, for example, the doctrines of grace, the T U L I P doctrines of the Canons (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints), with emphasis perhaps on double, eternal predestination. The faith includes the doctrine of the church (the marks of the true church which is distinct from the false and from which no one has the right to separate himself; the autonomy of the local congregation; and more); the doctrine of the inspiration, clarity, infallibility, and



Seminarians Haaksma, Dick, Baskwell, and DeJong.

absolute authority of Holy Scripture; and, closely related to this, the doctrine of expository (or exegetical), thematic preaching as the chief means of grace.

But the doctrines of the faith which distinguish our churches from almost all other Reformed churches is our insistence on the truth that God's grace is always particular, that is, for the elect in Christ Jesus; and on the truth that God establishes, maintains, and realizes His unconditional covenant of friendship with believers and their children. It is these truths which are distinctively Protestant Reformed and which must be maintained over against the Arminianism of common grace and especially its well-meant offer of the gospel (the little point of the first point), and the Arminianism of a conditional promise of the covenant to all children of believers.

We should understand well that this faith has to do with our salvation. Jude found it necessary to write about the common salvation, the salvation which all the saints have been given by God in His grace, the salvation which is deliverance from the deepest misery of our sin and death into the highest glory of fellowship with God. That the faith for which we must contend has to do with our salvation means it is a matter of life and death: eternal life and eternal death.

That is the faith, the Reformed faith, the great, glorious tradition in which we stand. If we are to be profoundly grateful for this faith and if we are to preach and then to

live it without shame, then that faith will have to be either directly or indirectly (explicitly or implicitly) the content of all of the instruction given and received in our theological school!

That faith has been "once delivered to the saints." Literally the text says, "once," and that means "once and for all." It never needs to be repeated. And "delivered" means to give into the hands of another, to deliver into another's hands for that one's use or power.

How has the faith been once delivered to the saints? This brings us to the very basics. According to Scripture's own testimony, it was by the miracle of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The whole Scripture, in all its parts and details, is inspired by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ and is therefore infallible, without error, and the only and absolute rule for the faith and life of the Christian.

Scripture reveals the whole counsel of God. That whole body of truth has been delivered once and for all to the saints. All the doctrine of holy Scripture that makes up the one great truth of Jehovah God has been delivered to the saints.

And that has crucial implications. The faith does not change! It is not culturally conditioned in the sense that it meant one thing in Bible times and something else in our culture today. What it meant to the church in Bible times it means for the church of all ages. And while, certainly, the church grows and develops (and must do so) in its understanding of the riches of God's truths revealed in Scripture,



Dogmatics class – Seminarians Baskwell and Haaksma, special student Ben Manring, auditor Rev. Gritters.

God's truth itself never changes. That is because God never changes! The truth of God transcends all peoples, races, and cultures; and it must not be adapted to any time or place or culture. Rather, the demand of the faith is this: it calls for the repentance of all who hear it in every age, race, and culture!

For that faith we must contend earnestly.

The words, "earnestly contend," are one word in the Greek. It means to enter a contest, to compete in the gymnastic games. From this it has the meaning in Scripture: to fight with adversaries, enemies, those who are opposed to the faith of God and to its truth. Hence the Authorized Version captures the meaning nicely, "earnestly contend."

Now, note that this is an exhortation, and an urgent one at that! Jude writes: "I gave all diligence." Literally we could translate, "having interested myself most earnestly" to write unto you! And he adds: "it was needful for me," literally, "it is necessary" for me to write unto you, exhorting, or urging you to contend earnestly for the faith. In other words, Jude, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, considered it his sacred duty to exhort the saints to contend for the faith.

This, therefore, is the calling of the church. The exhortation, you will notice, comes to "the saints." And that means all of the people of God. This is not merely the duty of the seminary and its professors, nor merely of the ministers and elders

and deacons in the church. It is the sacred duty of all the saints of God to fight earnestly for the faith.

Here we have no option. Divine necessity is laid upon us earnestly to contend for this faith. In all our preaching and teaching in the seminary and in the churches, in all our writing, as well as in all our witnessing and daily life, we must be earnestly contending for the faith.

And it demands our all. Just as the athlete had to give all of his time and efforts for the training for the competition, so we must concentrate all our attention to this calling to fight for the faith.

I know, it is not the "in thing" these days. Everyone is so nice, you know! People will ask us why we have to fight all the time. But we must expect sharp criticism for doing this. "Why must you always be so negative? You should be positive." But this must not deter us! God's Word says: earnestly contend for the faith once and for all time delivered to the saints.

The reason for the exhortation is urgent, as stated in verse 4-19. Jude tells us that certain men crept into the church unawares. Ungodly men denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they were very evil men who deliberately and viciously attacked the faith once delivered to the saints. Peter speaks of them in his second epistle, the second chapter, as, "False teachers who privily bring damnable heresies into the church, even denying the Lord that bought them." And, Peter adds, many follow their pernicious ways,

by reason of whom the truth is evil spoken of. Thus the apostolic church already had to contend earnestly for the faith!

So it is in our day! The Holy Scriptures make plain that these false teachers are an ever present danger to the church of Jesus Christ. No denomination is exempt. And the Protestant Reformed Churches must heed this exhortation as well! Scripture makes equally clear that these men are never honest and they are never sincere. They are always deceitful and subtle, immoral. And their false doctrines lead inevitably to ungodly living. I am not saying this; the Bible calls it lasciviousness and pernicious ways. And always, the Scriptures make clear, many, the majority (not a few but many) follow them into destruction.

And that is what is going on in the church today! It has been going on all through history, but especially now. Many articles of the faith are openly denied! Think of the doctrines of creation and double predestination; the sacraments are profaned; women are allowed into the church offices. The direct result of this departure is ungodliness. The Sabbath is no longer observed by many, and so many other practices of the fathers are discarded. There is divorce for any reason, and remarriage. The antithetical Christian life is scorned and worldliness prevails.

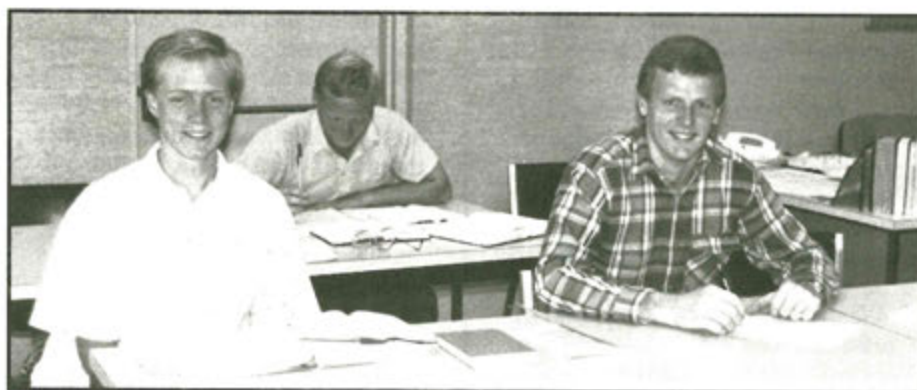
All of these and more are but symptoms of the real problem. The real problem is this: Scripture itself is denied. That is, no longer is the Bible considered to be the inspired, divinely infallible rule for the faith and practice of the church. Higher criticism of the Bible has won the day in the seminaries of this country and in Europe!

Our calling is plain and urgent! Our own seminary must earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints! Our Reformed fathers were keenly aware of this. Article 18 of the Church Order of Dordt (our Church Order!) describes the office (calling) of professors of theology in these terms. Professors must expound the Holy Scriptures and vindicate sound doctrine, no-

tice, against heresies and errors! The Form for the installation of Professors of theology charges them "to expound the mysteries of the faith to the students, instructing and establishing them in the knowledge of God's Word," and "to caution them in regard to the errors and heresies of the old, but especially of the new day." That, brothers, colleagues on the faculty, is our urgent task. To it we must give our all. Only insofar as the seminary is faithful to that task will the churches be enabled to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

And, students, your calling is to receive that instruction in the faith, to give yourselves wholly to your studies, so that you know the faith and become equipped to preach, teach, and defend over against the heresies always plaguing God's church. Let that faith become the burning conviction of your hearts. Your learning must be mixed with faith.

People of God, this is your calling as well. Not only through the synod of our churches and its theological school committee. That too, to be sure! The seminary needs a Theological School Committee that



Greek 201 – pre-seminarians Nathan Brummel, Doug Kuiper, Daniel Kleyn.

will support the school, that will give it proper direction, and that will carefully guard it against unfaithfulness. And it needs a committee that will encourage professors and students, that will admonish them when necessary as well. We are thankful to God for giving us that committee. But do not forget that the exhortation comes to the saints, to the church. The seminary belongs to the churches. It exists for the sake of the churches and never the other way around. Pray for us, will you? Support us and the cause of theological education. Pray that God will give us as semi-

nary and churches professors who are faithful men of God and who will humbly, yet boldly, contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Pray that God will continue to give students who will learn and believe the faith; who will preach and teach it in the churches and catechism classes and on the mission fields as God gives us open doors; who will earnestly contend for that great and precious faith.

May God, in His mercy, grant this in these latter days for the glory of His Name! □

Search The Scriptures

Rev. Gise VanBaren

Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Working Out Your Salvation

Read and study Philippians 2:12-18.

Our study in this short epistle brings us to one of the most remarkable statements of the whole of Scripture: it is the text which addresses the question of the Sovereignty of God vs. the Responsibility of Man. Much debate has taken place about this subject. Often it is presented as though these two truths are in conflict — or at

least appear to be so while we are on this earth (a "double track" theology). Yet the Word of God does not place one at odds with the other, but clearly joins them with the word "for." We must, therefore do that too.

Verse 12 commands us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. To work out our salvation is not to say that we are the origin and instigators of that

salvation. Our salvation is rooted in eternal election, it is accomplished in the cross of Jesus, and it is worked out by the power of the Spirit in our hearts. We work out our salvation by walking a life of sanctification. We are not simply "saved." We are saved that we may do good works which God has ordained for us (Eph. 1:4).

We are to obey the command of Christ to love God and serve Him. We could not obey Christ's command any more than Lazarus could who was in the tomb when he was commanded to come forth. Christ must give the life and the ability to do that which He commands. And then we do it — even as Lazarus did when in response to Christ's command he came out of the tomb.

No doubt there is emphasis here on what has been called "human responsibility." One who is saved from sin and death, adopted as a son of God, must labor daily, continuously, in the matter of his salvation. This is done in the way of prayer, study of the Word, and godly living in our pilgrimage. He who refuses to do so is certainly not saved.

The great responsibility imposed on us is recognized by this Word of God when it reminds that it is to be done with "fear and trembling." This refers not to obedience by compulsion. Young children, slaves, or others under harsh authority, may obey for fear of the consequences of disobedience. But the "fear and trembling" of the Christian is of a godly sort. There is willing obedience. At the same time, there is that conscientious attitude that one must wholly and properly serve God — and a concern lest in any way we fail in this. The apostle even places this phrase first in the text — to emphasize the fact. We must truly tremble if perhaps we offend our great and loving Father in any way.

The church at Philippi must do all of this even when the apostle was not present. At Philippi the church was anxious to please Paul, it appears. When he was present, there was seen a godly walk. But the members of the Philippian church had to remember that their

obedience did not depend on Paul's presence. Even when he was absent they were to obey the commands of their Lord. Not Paul, but the Holy Spirit, must be with them and guide them in their pilgrimage. This was Paul's conviction as expressed in 1:27 as well: "...that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit...."

But, does the working out of our salvation *exclude* the work of God? Verse 13 shows the contrary fact. The word "for" is very significant: it points us to the only possibility of working out our salvation. It is God Who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. It is very remarkable that the Word uses the terms "to will" and "to do." It is not only our "doing" which is of God, but also the very "willing." The Sovereignty of God is such that it governs the entire person. Neither God nor Christ begs or pleads, asking the sinner to submit. God governs both the will and activity of elect sinners. Unless He do so, there will not be a "working out of our salvation."

The text is so remarkable because it contradicts the two most common and most often recurring errors that have arisen from within the bosom of the church. There is the theory of the "free will" of the sinner. This teaches that God gives sufficient grace to enable anyone to obey Him if he will. It is the error of Pelagianism and Arminianism. But another, not dissimilar, error is that which teaches that by our works, at least in part, we can earn salvation. It was the view of the Pharisees. It is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Scripture emphasizes so clearly: God directs the will and the action. Ah, blessed truth!

There is presented here the "good pleasure" of God. One could profitably find in Scripture other references to "good pleasure." The phrase refers to God's Council or Will whereby He governs all things. Eternally He has determined all things — also those things pertaining to our willing and doing.

This truth is difficult for our minds to comprehend. To deny it, however, is to deny Scripture itself. To deny it would be to deny the absolute sovereignty of our God. Perhaps some consideration should be given to the question: how does God work in this way without denying also the responsibility of the sinner?

The work of the child of God is presented in verses 14-18. His every action sets him forth as distinct, different, from the world about him. Here is his thankfulness as a fruit of God's work in him. He does "all things without murmurings and disputings." He must and does maintain the truth of God's Word. However, he does not engage in disputes for his personal honor — nor many disputes which disrupt and cause loss of harmony within the church of Christ. He is blameless and harmless — not aggressive and offensive. The latter situation, of course, is often the cause of troubles within Christ's church. The child of God does nothing in which he becomes the occasion for blame. He does not seek to hurt or to offend the saints of Jesus Christ.

This separates him from the world about him. One sees all manner of corruption, unrest, hatred, envy among the wicked. The Christian is as a "shining light" in that world. He is as the bright star or the light of the moon on a dark night. He is seen as one separated unto God. We can well ask ourselves: is that a description of us as well?

In addition, the child of God "holds forth the Word of life...." Some rather translate this: "holds fast the Word of life." Though the latter is indeed a fact, the former is the proper translation of the passage. The Christian "holds forth," or exhibits, or displays the Word of life. He does that in connection with the work of the church where that Word is proclaimed. He does that also in his daily living when he walks in harmony with his confession. All can see that he belongs to Jesus.

Where that was seen in the Philippians, there the effect and

benefit of the work of the apostle Paul was also seen. Paul had not "run" or "labored" in vain. God had applied the Word proclaimed by the apostle that its fruit was seen in the lives of God's people at Philippi. There is no greater joy for the preacher than to see that the Word preached bears proper fruit.

Where there is faithfulness, Paul can rejoice. He is imprisoned and threatened even with death. But if his life is offered as a sacrifice, that would be of no concern to him. He would regard the pouring out of his own blood as a kind of libation offered with the sacrifice and service of the Philippians. He could rejoice with that — and they could rejoice in the same thing.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why should the Philippian church need to be reminded that they are to obey in Paul's absence? Is there some danger that we might also obey only when one in authority is present? Why?
2. What must one conclude from Paul's address, "My beloved"? How else in this epistle does he express this tender feeling for the church at Philippi?
3. How is one to work out his own salvation? How can we be told to do this when we know God's people are elect from eternity? If one does not do so, what is the only conclusion that can be drawn? What does I John 2:4 say of this?
4. In what sense is there "fear and trembling" in the church? Why fear? Why trembling? How does this differ from the fear of the wicked at the end of time who cry for the mountains to cover them at Christ's return?
5. What is the connection between verses 12 and 13? What is the significance of the connecting word "for"?
6. How does verse 13 deny the error of Roman Catholicism? How does it deny Arminianism? Is there danger that these errors affect also our thinking?
7. How does God work in us? Does that not make our own working unnecessary? Do we not tell ourselves sometimes that our obedience is not all that essential?

8. What does this passage teach concerning God's "Sovereignty" and man's "responsibility"?

9. What do Canons II-IV, 11-12 and Ephesians 3:14-19 say about the work of God in us?

10. What is God's "good pleasure"? What other Scriptural terms are used to describe this same thing? Check what the *Canons* have to say of this.

11. Why the warning against "murmurings" and "disputings"? Is there any danger that this be present with us?

12. How is the Christian "blameless," "harmless," "without rebuke"?

13. How are we "sons of God"?

14. What is meant by a "crooked and perverse nation"? Can that be said of our nation as well? If so, how?

15. How do we shine as lights in the world? What did Jesus teach of this in the sermon on the mount?

16. How do we "hold forth the Word of life"?

17. What is it to "run in vain"? Is this ever possible for the Christian?

18. In what sense could Paul have "labored in vain"?

19. What is Paul's "offering" in verse 17?

20. Why should Paul be happy about such sacrifice?

21. Why should the church at Philippi rejoice about this? □

The Standard Bearer

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OPEN LETTER FROM THE RFP

Dear Subscribers,

The Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association has given during the last several years special attention to gaining new subscribers. Perhaps it would be better to say that we have attended to the matter of expanding our readership. For the truth is that our first concern in gaining subscribers is to share with others, through the articles written by our editor-in-chief and our Department Editors and Guest Writers, the distinctives of the Reformed faith as we have been privileged to maintain them in the Protestant Reformed Churches for better than 65 years. Only secondarily is our interest in increased revenue — and that with a view to being able to publish at a more reasonable cost to our subscribers. The writers of *The SB* are motivated by a love of the truth of the Word of God, and desire themselves in their writing to be sound in doctrine, and sensitive to the spiritual needs of the church of Christ.

At any rate, it occurred to us that our subscribers might be able to help us in gaining new readers. If you will send us the names of people who, in your opinion, might be interested in our magazine, we will send them a sample copy, along with a card offering a year's subscription at half the regular price, for first-time subscribers. Send your suggestions, if you will, to the Business Manager, whose address can be found on the inside of the front cover.

Yours sincerely,
The RFP Board
Peter Koole, Secretary

RECONCILIATION

The two great passages that set forth the concept of reconciliation are Romans 5:10 and II Corinthians 5:18-21. The word translated reconciliation, a word used only by Paul, sets forth our salvation in a very rich, broad way. Three ideas are implied in reconciliation: 1) There is a relationship between persons that has brought them very close. 2) This relationship is disturbed so that the persons have become alienated. 3) The cause of alienation has been removed, so that the relationship is restored, and peaceful harmony is once again enjoyed. These points make clear that reconciliation can never occur between strangers, but always between those who have formerly enjoyed a close relationship. (See I Cor. 7:11 where the apostle speaks of a wife being reconciled to her husband.)

The original relationship between God and Adam, and hence between God and mankind, was the covenant of friendship. God created man good and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him (L.D. III). This relationship was disturbed by the fall and disobedience of our first parents, and the resulting fall into sin and death of the entire human race. Man became the enemy of God (Rom. 5:10); he became dead, living unto himself (II Cor. 5:14, 15). In His great love for the world, God has reconciled the church (the new humanity) unto Himself by the death of His Son, "to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. 5:19). Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God in one body, by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:16). Thus the cause of estrangement is removed! Christ is made sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Once more we are the friends of God, we are saved by His life, and may enjoy God's friendship now and forever!

Strikingly, the Scriptures speak uniformly of our being reconciled *to God*. Although in human relationships there is usually mutual reconciliation, in the matter of salvation God does not reconcile Himself to us or to the world. Why should He? How could He? What would there be to know and enjoy forever, if the only good God changed in any respect? The unchangeable God brings to pass His immutable promise by making us new creatures and conforming us unto Himself in Christ!

Because God was in Christ reconciling the *world* unto Himself, reconciliation will continue until the end of the world. The entire church, known unto God from eternity, must be brought into His gracious covenant of friendship. Accordingly God has committed the word of reconciliation unto the church. Through her ministry ambassadors for Christ speak in Christ's stead. Through the official ministry it is as though God Himself did call you to His side, "Be ye reconciled to God!"

Is man active or passive in reconciliation? The answer is that he is made active. Through the efficacious preaching of the gospel, God makes man active, giving him the right and the power to be reconciled. Thus the child of God repents, believes, is consciously justified, and has peace with his God. □

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

Special Article
Rev. C. Hanko

Reminiscences on the Early SB

*Rev. Hanko is a minister emeritus in
the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

"Rev. Hoeksema, if only you had
never published that *Standard
Bearer*!"

The remark was made on Classis
Grand Rapids East by Rev. Veld-
kamp. This was approximately

two months after *The Standard
Bearer* had made its first appear-
ance. The classis was about to sus-
pend Rev. Herman Hoeksema and
his consistory from office in the
Christian Reformed Church be-



Rev. Cornelius Hanko.

cause of his refusal to sign the three points of common grace adopted by the synod of 1924.

The impression was left that publishing *The Standard Bearer* was an act of rebellion, which deserved being put out of office in the church. The facts were quite different. Although the synod of 1924 had adopted the three points of common grace, they did not require that all the office bearers in the church express their agreement by signing them. On the contrary, the synod had clearly stated that the last word was by no means spoken in regard to this matter, but the office bearers should make a thorough study of the matter and express themselves in writing.

Yet what had happened was that Rev. H. Hoeksema and others were no longer allowed to write in *The Banner*, the church periodical of the Christian Reformed Church. This meant that those in agreement with the three points could express themselves freely, but those most intimately involved could not defend themselves by instructing the church in regard to the Scriptural teachings on this subject.

It was for that reason that the "Reformed Free Publishing Association" was organized and began to publish *The Standard Bearer*, the first issue of which appeared in October of 1924. Had Rev. Hoeksema and the others not sought a means to express themselves they would have allowed themselves to be condemned without being able publicly to defend themselves.

That is when and how *The Standard Bearer* came into existence.

Since I was only seventeen years old at the time, I was nothing more than an observer, be it an interested observer.

Not long after this the Reformed Free Publishing Association met regularly once a year to decide on whatever matters might be brought to them from the editors of *The Standard Bearer*. I can well remember that the large classroom, which held more than a hundred people,

was packed to capacity at every meeting. There was a great enthusiasm for the cause. All the churches strove to have all their families receive this periodical. Although our churches in the vicinity of Grand Rapids were much smaller than they are today, the attendance at the annual meeting of *The Standard Bearer* was much better.

A little personal note. When I was minister in Oaklawn the finances did not allow me to make a trip to Grand Rapids for *The Standard Bearer* meeting, as much as I would have liked to have gone. But someone on *The Standard Bearer* board must have thought that I attended these meetings on a regular basis. One morning at two o'clock the police siren sent forth a shrill blast in front of my house.

Aroused from a deep sleep I dashed to the front door to hear a voice calling, "Rev. Hanko, the police!" Wide awake and my curiosity fully aroused, along with fears and trembling, I answered the call, only to find out that a telegraph boy was delivering a telegram, which read: "*The Standard Bearer* meeting for tonight has been called off. Do not come." In that suburb of Chicago no one delivered a message at night unless accompanied by the police. □

Taking Heed To The Doctrine

Rev. Marvin Kamps

Rev. Kamps is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Bible is the Word of God

Introduction

The Reformed believer makes a most profound confession. He confesses what God has said. The Reformed believer is in agreement with the living God. Most men find themselves at odds with the living God over this book, the Bible. The

men of this world cannot say from the heart that they believe "without any doubt, all things contained" in the divine Scriptures (Belgic Confession, Art. V). But the Lord always preserves to Himself a few who enter in at the strait gate and joyfully confess what He has

declared to be the truth. "Thy Word is Truth" (John 17:17).

To say that the Bible is the Word of God is to confess its exclusive character. It is not the Word of man, even though men may indeed have penned the words upon parchment and paper. Scripture owes its "becoming" and "existence" as the written record of divine revelation to Jehovah God alone. The Lord asks through the prophet: "Is not *my* Word...?" (Jer. 23:29). God claims Scripture to be His Word alone. The Lord God never attributes to man the source of the Word whereby He reveals Himself.

Let us remind ourselves Who this God is, Whose Word we call the Bible. He is Jehovah God. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. This God alone upholds and governs all His creatures. Man and beast were formed by His hand. Even His enemies, wicked men and devils, receive their daily needs from His almighty hand. He is the eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly just and good God over all. All His works are done in righteousness. He cannot lie. In Him is no darkness at all. He is the truth. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is Israel's God, the friend of His people, and the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the sovereign God, Who is "Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). No one can contradict the living God and live. He is GOD. The attribute of perfect justice is His alone, and yet He is infinitely merciful. God is Love. In Him are the fountains of grace and goodness. He is the unchangeably faithful friend of His people in Christ Jesus. He hath decreed that not one whom He hath given to Christ should perish. He is longsuffering to usward (II Pet. 3:8, 9). He lovingly but firmly holds all His own in His almighty hand (John 10:29). He is the one Who hath redeemed us to Himself by the blood of His Son out of every kindred and tongue and nation. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to

be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness" (Ps. 48:1). Through the power of His irresistible grace unto faith in Christ Jesus, His dear Son, we can shout triumphantly, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?" (I Cor. 15:55). Over the believer the second death hath no power.

Therefore, let us come reverently, humbly, and thankfully before Him and His eternal Word.

We must recognize that the Bible is the written record of God's living Word. For before the Bible was written the Word of God was known. Adam in paradise received the Word of God's grace in the mother promise of Genesis 3:15. We know it as Genesis 3:15 penned by Moses; but our first father heard this blessed promise fall from the lips of his Maker. And before the fall Adam had God's Word, for he walked with God in that fellowship of perfect righteousness. But the Word precedes not only Moses and Adam but time itself, for "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word is the eternal, only begotten Son of God, which is in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18). By this Word were "the heavens made and all the host of them..." (Ps. 33:6). By this Word, the second Person of the divine trinity, were the light and the firmament called into being. By that same Word God shall create a new heavens and earth wherein righteousness shall dwell. In the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), the "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus is the Word. And wherever the text of Scripture is opened, there is the life-blood of our Lord Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and life." This Word become flesh is the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the Word, and the Word is Jesus. All that confess Jesus, must confess with the Reformed believer, "I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in

his Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 7). There is no salvation from sin and guilt except through faith in God's Word. He that rejects the Word in whole or in part cannot be saved. God will take away his part out of the book of life (Rev. 22:18, 19). We may not add to the Word, nor may we subtract from the Word. To declare the Word not true is to gainsay the Messiah and to call God a liar (I John 1:10).

The Bible is God's Word. This is our confession from the depths of our hearts. We live by this Word. It governs, rules, directs, nourishes, comforts, and strengthens the believer in all his life. He has peace with God through this life-giving Word. This Word in Christ Jesus justifies the believer. It sanctifies him and will glorify him. The Word of God is to him the water and bread of life. This Word is written upon his heart. He takes the Word with him wherever he goes. He fellowships in covenant friendship with the living God through the Word. He worships through the Word. He prays to God for the blessings of salvation on the basis of the promises of the Word. The Bible is his life. Take the Word from the believer and he has no comfort, no peace of soul, no joy, no blessedness. The Word is everything to him, for it is the love letter of Christ to him and to all the church. By that love letter Christ Jesus assures him that all is well, comforts him and all the church with the Word that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, and declares that it is His Father's good pleasure to give unto us the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Bible is God's Word. The Bible does not have this lofty position because men have so declared it to be. Nor is that our confession because this is the testimony of the church. It is rather our confession because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that the Bible is God's Word. But the Spirit of God does not make this testimony apart from the Scriptures. Rather He gives this confession to us through the Word. We do not have the abiding testimony of the Spirit apart from the Word but through the Word. The

Word is God's Word, and only God Himself can identify His own Word. The Bible is self-authenticating: "All scripture is given by inspiration (God-breathed forth) of God..." (II Tim. 3:16). And we read in II Peter 2:21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Word itself declares it to be the Word of God. The Holy Spirit does not make a testimony in regard to the Scriptures apart from those Scriptures, then to have us discover that the Word bears this same self testimony; rather, the Spirit of Christ, Who dwells in all those who belong to Christ, when He works faith in us and calls us to the light, also causes us to be con-

victed of the truth of Scripture and enables us, amidst all the denials of fallen men, to confess that the Bible is God's written record of His self revelation in Christ Jesus.

"The only authority, which can declare upon the earth, that the Scripture is God's Word, is God Himself, the Christ, the Holy Ghost, and therefore, the Scriptures themselves, which is God's Word. Therefore, the Bible also makes this testimony. It stands in this regard above all men, above the writers themselves, above all the prophets and apostles, yes even above the angels of God" (J.C. Sikkell, *De Heilige Schrift en Haar Verklaring*, p. 22).

Remember the warning of the apostle Paul: "But though we, or

an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). Oh, how heretics like to clothe themselves in the angelic vestures of love and kindness as they deceive the people of God with their high sounding words, by which they reason away the Word of God.

Let us all pray that the Lord may give us the faith to believe His Word and to walk in its light. Let the Word of praise resound in the church of Christ Jesus: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.... Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart" (Ps. 119:105, 111). □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

The Work of Elders

The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion. Church Order, Art. 23.

Several articles in the *Church Order* describe the duties of elders.

Article 16 calls the elders "...to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order." Article 55 speaks of the elders' calling to "...ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings...." Article 64 refers to the calling of the elders to supervise the administration of the Lord's Supper. Article 81 speaks of the elders' involvement in *censura morum*.

Of all these articles, Article 23 is intended to be a brief description of the work to which God calls elders. The article speaks of the calling of the elders in the government and discipline of the church. Mention is made of the supervision by the elders of their fellow office-bearers. The role of the elders in conducting family visitation is referred to. (We will treat this in a separate article in the near future.)

The work of the elders in "evangelism" is also mentioned: "...and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion." Not mentioned but worth noting is the pastoral work in which the elders ought also to be involved.

GOVERNMENT AND DISCIPLINE

The first duty of the elders referred to in Article 23 is "...what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word...." The duty enjoined jointly to the ministers and the elders by Article 16 is "...to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order." The very first duty of the elders, therefore, is the government and discipline of the church.

It is the plain teaching of Scripture, and a foundation stone of Reformed church government, that

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the office of the elders is the rule of the congregation. One of the common Greek words used in the New Testament to refer to the office of elder makes this clear. That word is *episkopos* and means "overseer" or "superintendent," and is commonly translated as "bishop" (cf. Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7). An elder is an "overseer," that is, one who watches over the lives and souls of the members of the church.

That the work of the elders is the rule of the congregation is also plain from many passages of Scripture which describe this office. The following are a sampling:

I Timothy 3:5, "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?"

I Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine."

Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood."

Hebrews 13:7, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."

Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves...."

I Thessalonians 5:12, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord...."

The government of the church is listed in the Reformed "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons" as the first duty of elders.

Therefore, in the first place, the office of the elders is, together with the ministers of the Word, to take the oversight of the Church, which is committed to them, and diligently to look, whether every one properly deports himself in his confession and conversation; to admonish those who behave disorderly, and to prevent, as much as possible, the sacraments from being profaned: also to act (according to the Christian discipline) against the impenitent, and to receive the penitent again into the bosom of the Church....

The government of the elders is twofold.

First, the elders are to have supervision over the material goods of the church. This includes several things. It includes that the elders have supervision over what we commonly refer to as the "General Fund." It includes that the elders have supervision over the property of the church, especially the church building and grounds. It includes oversight of the official records and archives of the congregation.

This does not mean that the consistory may not appoint committees and helpers out of the congregation to assist in this work. This is not only permitted, but often desirable. Even then, however, such persons and committees remain responsible to the consistory.

Secondly, the supervision of the elders applies especially to the spiritual life of the congregation. Generally, the elders are to see to it that "...everything is done decently and in good order." Specifically, the elders are to exercise Christian discipline. (More will be said about the elders' main work of Christian discipline in Articles 71-85, which deal with "Censure and Ecclesiastical Admonition.")

SUPERVISION OF FELLOW OFFICEBEARERS

The second main duty of the elders is "...to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office...."

Not only do the elders have supervision over the congregation, but they are also to take heed to their fellow-elders, as well as to the minister and the deacons. What is referred to here is the mutual supervision officebearers are called to exercise among themselves. This was mentioned as part of the calling of the minister in Article 16. This is also referred to in the "Questions for Church Visitation." It is this duty of mutual supervision that underlies the practice of *censura morum*, outlined in Article 81.

Particularly are the elders to assume supervision of the office of the ministry. The minister is not a law unto himself in the congrega-

tion. Nor ought the elders to be intimidated by the minister. Before God and for the benefit of the church they are to have oversight of the minister's walk of life, as well as his public teaching and preaching in the congregation. All of his ministerial labors are subject to the oversight of the elders.

Not only is this brought out in Article 23, but this is also pointed out in the "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons."

It is also the duty (of the elders) particularly to have regard unto the doctrine and conversation of the ministers of the Word, to the end that all things may be directed to the edification of the Church; and that no strange doctrine be taught....

This same supervision also includes the walk of life and official labors of the other elders and of the deacons.

EVANGELISM

Article 23 also mentions as one of the duties of the elders that they "...exhort others in respect to the Christian religion." By "others" the reference is to those who are non-church members. The reference, therefore, is to church extension work or local evangelism.

The elders have a responsibility here. Just because this is a vital aspect of the work of the local church, it belongs to their supervision of the church. The elders must be active in this work. They must promote this work and themselves participate in it.

One of the questions asked of the consistory at the annual church visitation touches this aspect of the work of the elders: "Is the congregation busy in the extension of God's kingdom, especially in the promotion of missions, to the best of its ability?"

Usually this work will be carried on by a Church Extension Committee or an Evangelism Committee. The work of such a committee is under the supervision of the consistory. It is advisable that the eldership be represented among the membership of such a committee.

PASTORAL WORK

It also belongs to the work of the elders that they be involved in the pastoral work of visiting the sick

and shut-ins, and providing counsel to those struggling with various spiritual problems.

Although our present article speaks only in passing of the elders' calling "to comfort" the members of the church, this aspect of their work ought not to be slighted. Certainly the minister and the deacons have a calling here, as we have noticed in the past. But, very clearly, so do the elders.

Earlier church orders spelled this duty out more carefully.

Synod of Wezel, 1568: "The elders furthermore should remember that it also pertains to their office to visit and comfort the sick in accordance with their calling...that they not only uplift the sick with the things that are necessary for the sustenance of their lives, but also cheer them up by comforting them."

Synod of Dordrecht, 1574: "Visiting the sick belongs to the office of the ministers of the Word, and it is risky to assign other persons to that task. Therefore, the ministers shall request the elders and deacons to help them with their task. They shall do so because their office in comparison with other Christians requires more with respect to visiting, comforting, and strengthening the sick, the poor, and members in need of comfort."

One of the questions asked at the annual church visitation is: "Do

the elders visit the sick and others in agreement with the calling of their office?"

One passage of Scripture that clearly brings out this aspect of the calling of the elders is James 5:13, 14: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."¹

VARIA

The question is sometimes raised whether or not it is proper that an elder be paid for his services. Generally elders and deacons carry out the duties of their office without being paid. However, in special cases, as for example in a large congregation where an elder may be appointed by the consistory to be especially devoted to sick visitation, an elder may be paid for his work. In this case he is unable to pursue an ordinary living. The consistory then may compensate him for his work.

Article 23 must not be understood as providing an exhaustive list of the duties of the elders. Besides the duties mentioned in the article, these may be added: visiting and supervising catechism

classes, teaching catechism, leading worship services when necessary, conducting consistory and congregational meetings when necessary, attending classis and synod, and serving on classical and synodical committees.

There are several good books that deal with the work of elders. Unfortunately, many of the best are in the Dutch language. The following is a list of the better books available in English.

The Elders' Handbook, by Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster.

The Elders of the Church, by Lawrence R. Eyres.

The Ruling Elder, by Samuel Miller.

Handbook for Elders and Deacons, by William Heyns.

The Ruling Elder, by Cleland Boyd McAfee.

Unto Every Good Work: A Manual for Elders, by Ronald W. Nickerson. □

1. There is disagreement concerning whether the sickness referred to in this passage is spiritual or physical. For those interested in a sermon on this passage which explains "sick" as physically sick, write to: Loveland Protestant Reformed Church, 705 E. 57th St., Loveland, CO 80538. Ask for the sermon entitled, "The Elders' Visitation of the Sick." Please enclose \$2.00 to cover cost.

"As Thou Goest, Step by Step I Will Open up the Way Before Thee"

Proverbs 4:12

Child of My love, fear not the unknown morrow,
Dread not the new demand life makes of thee;
Thy ignorance doth hold no cause for sorrow
Since what thou knowest not is known to Me.

Thou canst not see today the hidden meaning
Of My command, but thou the light shall gain;
Walk on in faith, upon My promise leaning,
And as thou goest all shall be made plain.

One step thou seest — then go forward boldly,
One step is far enough for faith to see;
Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee,
For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.

Stand not in fear thy adversaries counting,
Dare every peril, save to disobey;
Thou shalt march on, all obstacles surmounting,
For I, the Strong, will open up the way.

Wherefore go gladly to the task assigned thee,
Having My promise, needing nothing more
Than just to know, where'er the future find thee,
In all thy journeying I go before.

— Author Unknown

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

The End Times (6):

World Calamities, Signs of the End

Earthquakes!
Famines!
Disease!
War!

Even young people in America who do not know very much by experience about war and famine shake at the thought of them as much as they tremble when they consider earthquakes and diseases, about which they know a little. Our natural reaction to all of these is fear, even terror. Our natural reaction is also that we hope and we pray that they will all be taken away from us because we question how they will actually be "good" for us.

Are they necessary? Should we entertain the hope that they will be removed? In Matthew 24:6-8, Jesus puts a different perspective on it. "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING

Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and the rest are signs of the coming of Jesus Christ. They are signs that Jesus is near and coming soon.

REVIEW

In response to the questions of the disciples about His second coming, Jesus taught that there will be a great apostasy against which the church must fight; the Antichrist will arise as the pinnacle of this false teaching; and the saints will be persecuted in a way no one has ever seen before. Before this persecution comes, the church is called to be active in preaching the gospel to all nations (Matt. 24:14), for when the persecution comes, the gospel will be silenced: "the two witnesses" will be killed and their dead bodies will lie in the streets for three and a half days.

There are other signs of the coming of Christ besides the apostasy that will exist in the church. One group of these, "world calamities," is mentioned in Matthew 24:6-8.

Maybe you object and say that these signs have been in the world since Jesus' ascension. And you would be right. But all that that means is that Jesus' coming has been near for 2,000 years already. It has been "the last hour" for that whole time. What has changed is the intensity and frequency of these signs — wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, and diseases are on the rise.

WHY CALAMITIES?

Many of these are the result of the wickedness of our human race. Famines may result from man's carelessness and greed, war and revolution, rape of the land and spoiling of the air. Wars spring from pride and lust for power, to say nothing of greed. Diseases, some of them at least, come in large part through man's own wicked behavior. Sexually transmitted diseases are at epidemic levels in many areas of the world, in large part because of the vile behavior of the people. And since the wickedness of man develops as Scripture

says it will, it is understandable that the tempo of these devastating signs picks up as we come closer to the end.

But these signs are also sent as the judgment of God on this wicked world. That this is true is seen not only from the fact that man can do nothing to prevent earthquakes, and that most diseases are not the direct result of specific sins today, but also from the plain teaching of the Bible in Revelation.

Revelation 6 teaches that Christ sends out four horses into the earth, each bringing something different with him. The first horse is the white horse of the victorious gospel preaching. The second is the red horse of sword and war; the third, the black horse of great lack and unreal riches; the fourth, the pale horse of death — pestilence and earthquakes and other "natural" disasters. Who opens the seals to release these horses is the Lamb. He sends forth not only the gospel, but also these calamities!

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These signs must come. "All these things *must* come to pass." Jesus says that plainly in Matthew 24:6.

Why are these things necessary? What do they have to do with the coming of Jesus?

WORLD CALAMITIES HINDER THE PREMATURE RISE OF ANTICHRIST

When Revelation says that Satan is bound for a thousand years and will be released at the very end for a short period of time, it refers to something that hinders him from deceiving the nations (see Revelation 20, especially verses 3, 7, 8). Satan is not able to gather the nations together under one head against Jesus Christ. Satan is active presently, working furiously to accomplish his purpose. He is not banished from the earth. But he cannot bring about his Antichristian kingdom fully because he is "bound" from doing it.

Binding him are the world calamities! How? The Lord Jesus frustrates the purposes of Satan to bring the world into one military power by sending wars and rumors of wars. By doing so, he throws a wrench into the peace talks. As long as Jesus sends the black horse to bring social strife — extreme division between rich and poor, different philosophies of government and economics — there will not be one world power. When pestilence and plague and famine prevail through the riding forth of the pale horse, the world puts its shoulder to the wheel to solve *these* problems, and there is little time or energy to bring the world into one great power. Even though the world leaders may love to hold hands and even speak of "marrying" some day, the Lord will prevent this worldwide union by the world calamities.

Why does He do this? The gospel must go forth and God's chosen children brought in! If God has chosen your children, not yet born, He will hinder the Antichristian kingdom from developing fully by these catastrophes until they are born or brought to faith. Until the gospel has been preached to all nations, God will not allow

the Antichrist to come, since the Antichrist will silence the witness of the church.

"All these things *must* come to pass." "But the end is not yet."
**WORLD CALAMITIES PREPARE
THE WAY FOR THE COMING OF
THE ANTICHRIST**

This may seem to contradict what was just said. But the very means that God uses to prevent the Antichrist from rising prepare the way for him when the time is ripe.

In the world today there is a dissatisfaction with the state of affairs. Who is happy with wars? Who wants the skirmishes to develop into full scale battles in which we are involved, our husbands or our sons? What person would not want to see the social conflicts resolved, the diseases cured, the famines eliminated, the earthquakes predicted or prevented? Glory to that man that could circumvent their damage or prevent these things altogether!

Exactly in *this* way, the hearts of the wicked anticipate and long for the coming of a man to give them deliverance from these evils (Antichrist). When that Man of Sin comes to bring nations together in peace, with a world vision that embraces the nations, eliminating wars and their ominous echoes, men will be filled with wonder and say, "Who is like unto the beast, and who can make war with the beast?" (Rev. 13). When he comes with grandiose plans for economic and social prosperity, they will think to themselves, "Why did it take so long for us to bring forth such a marvelous man?"

* * * * *

WHAT A GRAND, COMFORTING, VIEW OF HISTORY!

This gives the child of God the ability to stand back and understand what is going on in the world today, what has gone on since time began.

Remember that, young people, when there are earthquakes and death, when wars rage and rumors of war echo across the land, when your loved ones die because of diseases for which there is no cure. The Lord Jesus Christ, in His infi-

nite wisdom and love for His people, sovereignly controls every event. His timetable is being kept. His plan is perfected. His gospel will go forth. His elect will be saved!

"Be not troubled," Jesus says. Or, as He said in Luke 21, "Be not *terrified*." Now you know why. Our first reaction to all this is fear. All these calamities seem horrible for us, too. Our friends die, our homes are destroyed, our lives are threatened. But we are not terrified, because we know these calamities serve the coming of Jesus Christ and the end of the world.

These signs mean that the end is not yet. As long as the world is filled with wars and their rumors, the end will not come at once. Do you know that? Much must happen before Jesus will return. So the critical behavior for us is not looking to the clouds (although see the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 52), but *enduring* through all these calamities, faithful to Jesus Christ.

But the end is coming. The signs themselves are certain promises of that. Just as a pregnant woman has pains that tell her that the baby is coming, the world experiences these "labor pains" because it is "pregnant" with the end of the world, the coming of Christ! It is coming!

* * * * *

There is something very practical here that young people need to remember. Do you think that war can be eliminated by President Bush and Soviet Premier Gorbachev negotiating at Camp David? Do you think famines and diseases will be eradicated by the great doctors and scientists of the world? Do you suppose that someday we will no longer suffer the devastating effects of earthquakes because of the scientific genius or the amazing power of man to prevent them? Remember, the *world* is always insisting that these things will happen. Following close behind is much of the church today. They both answer "yes" to these questions. But if Jesus were to come today, He would be pushed off the pulpits, driven out of the

churches (and maybe off a cliff), because He preached that all these calamities *must* come to pass, and will.

What should you do? Shall we pray for no earthquakes? Pray for diseases all to be cured and famines eliminated? Pray for peace?

Certainly! Absolutely!

But let us not forget *how* we pray for this and *in what way* we desire it to come. We do not pray for an earthly peace, nor do we *expect* an earthly peace. Of course, we desire all these calamities to be taken away — the beating of swords into plowshares, the elimination of diseases and social strifes. But we hope for this only in the way of the elimination of sin. For it is an attack on God's justice to pray for

peace and safety while the nations go on in their sin.

Also, we look for our prayers to be answered by Jesus Christ at His second coming.

Yes, there will be an elimination of war for a short time just before the end, a certain prosperity during the reign of Antichrist, *on this earth*. But it is not God's peace and God's prosperity. Do you pray for peace? Do you pray for prosperity? Pray for it in the way of the removal of sin. And if you pray for peace on earth, understand that in the way of this peace, the Antichrist will arise soon. Or he will himself be the cause of it.

But fear not, for these pains bring Jesus Christ. We endure them as a mother giving birth, for

we expect our Lord Jesus and the eternal kingdom of our God.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you know of any evidence that these natural calamities are increasing?
2. What is the church's responsibility when some of these terrible events take place? What is yours, personally? (Try to answer this in terms of what we say and in terms of what we do.)
3. Does the above article mean that we should pray for war and disease and famine, since these bring forth the coming of Christ.
4. Discuss some events in history that we can look back on and see that the Lord used them to frustrate attempts to unite the world. □

Book Review

GREAT LEADERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, edited by John D. Woodbridge; Moody Press, 1988; 384 pp., \$24.95, (cloth). (Reviewed by Prof H. Hanko.)

The history of the church, it has been said, is the history of her leaders. Undoubtedly this is true when it is remembered that throughout the church's history from Pentecost to today, God has been pleased to raise up men of outstanding ability, zeal, courage, and faithfulness through whom He has worked mighty deeds for the welfare of Christ's body.

Sometimes these men are relatively obscure men, all but forgotten by the church today. Sometimes they are renowned theologians through whom the Lord has given a great heritage of the truth. Sometimes they were men through whose works the Lord was pleased to give the church altogether new direction and startling reformation. They were men like us, men with many sins and weaknesses, men who struggled with the tempta-

tions of the flesh, men who themselves were amazed at the great work which God was pleased to perform through them (Luther, e.g., once said that through the years of the Reformation, he felt as if he was being carried along on the crest of a tidal wave over which he had no control). But their story is the story of the church.

This book contains biographical sketches of 64 such men. Each short chapter contains information concerning their lives, their work, their place in the history of the church, and how God used them for the welfare of the church and the progress of the truth in the world. As a bonus, there are chapters on the first monks, the crusades, and medieval monasticism. A map of Paul's missionary journeys is included, along with several time charts which enable us to place these men in their own time.

We would probably not agree with all the choices which the editor made. A few medieval mystics are included; a couple of popes;

here and there a man who was a heretic (Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, Francis Xavier, e.g.). Some of the more modern choices also come as something of a surprise. It seems a bit strange to compare Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Billy Graham, and C.S. Lewis with Tertullian, Augustine, and Luther. And some omissions make one wish he had a choice in this list of leaders in the church: Gottschalk, William Tyndale, some of the divines at Dordt and Westminster. But the lines had to be drawn somewhere.

This book is of such worth and value that it ought to have a place in our home and school libraries and ought to be must-reading for every graduate from our high schools. Not only can a great deal be learned from it concerning the history of the church, but the story of these great men in the church of Christ is a constant source of encouragement to us in the battle which we are called to fight. □

Report of Classis East

September 12, 1990
Hudsonville Protestant
Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 12, 1990 at the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. Each church was represented by two delegates.

The majority of the day was spent in deliberating a protest from Norristown regarding a decision made by the May 9/30 classis which instructed them to return to the use of *The Psalter*. Norristown protested that the May decision was arrived at illegally. Classis sustained the protest of Norristown with regard to legality but rejected the advice of its committee of pre-advice to allow Norristown to continue to use its own psalm book. Classis decided instead to sustain the original advice of the special committee sent by classis to Norristown that Norristown return

to the use of *The Psalter*. The grounds for this decision (summarized) were that past synods have always considered *The Psalter* to be the official songbook of the denomination, that the imperfections indicated by Norristown ought to be dealt with by overture, and that the unity of the federation ought to be considered when congregations implement changes.

Classis also dealt with an overture from Hope Church requesting that the minutes of the classis be sent to each consistory. This overture was adopted and the minutes are in the mail.

Hudsonville and Kalamazoo requested classical appointments for Larne, Northern Ireland and Venice, Florida. Kalamazoo also requested appointments for its own congregation while Rev. Woudenberg is in Tasmania. The following schedule was adopted: LARNE: October 7, 14, 21 — M.

Kamps; November 18, 25, and December 2 — B. Gritters; January 6, 13, 20 — K. Hanko; VENICE: September 23, 30 — R. Flikkema; October 7, 14 — J. Slopsema; October 21, 28 — K. Koole; KALAMAZOO: December 9 — W. Bruinsma; December 16 — J. Kortering; December 30 — G. VanBaren; January 13 — W. Bruinsma.

In other business, classis approved the request from Pella to request collections for their Building Fund and received an interim report from its church visitors.

Expenses for this classis were \$1,988.10. Classis will meet next in Byron Center on January 9, 1991. □

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens
Stated Clerk

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

MINISTERIAL CALLS

The "News" should start with calls this time — to make sure that there is enough space to get them all in. There are, after all, five different calls to consider. Here is the

up-to-the-minute status of each one (as of September 8).

First Church in Grand Rapids, MI presented a trio of Pastors B. Gritters, J. Kortering, and T. Miersma, from which their congre-

gation extended a call to Rev. T. Miersma to serve as missionary to Jamaica.

The congregation in our Hudsonville PRC in Hudsonville, MI met on August 27 and extended a call to Rev. J. Kortering to serve as a missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland.

And the Council of the Kalamazoo PRC in Kalamazoo, MI called a congregational meeting in which their church called the Rev. S. Key to serve as missionary to the area around Venice, FL.

You may also remember that two of our churches are without undershepherds. Both the Randolph PRC in Randolph, WI and the Hope PRC in Isabel, SD extended calls to Rev. T. Miersma. Rev. Miersma declined both those calls.

DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Our Protestant Reformed Seminary Convocation was held on September 11 in the Grandville PRC in Grandville, MI. Prof. Decker spoke on the theme, "Contending for the Faith."

MISSION ACTIVITIES

Having read this far in the "News" column you are aware that there is a call extended to Rev. T. Miersma to serve in Jamaica. The Council of First Church, in agreement with Synod 1990, believes that a full-time missionary and co-

worker is the preferred way to go in Jamaica. However, if God does not provide men for this work, the Synod of 1990 also approved an interim plan. These guidelines provide that until a full-time missionary and elder co-worker arrive in Jamaica, a minister and an elder or ex-elder will twice a year hold conference-like educational sessions for the men of the Jamaican churches. The curriculum will focus on the six loci of Dogmatics. The theological instruction will be given by the minister, and the practical implications of this instruction will be under the leadership of the elder. The materials will be in writing, with provisions for homework. Currently Rev. Joostens and Mr. Clare Prince are working on this.

These sessions could continue for up to four years, if the Lord does not provide a resident missionary and elder co-worker.

CONGREGATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

At the same congregational meeting in which First Church called a missionary to Jamaica, they also approved a proposal to build a canopy on the northwest entrance of their church.

A congregational meeting was also held in our Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. There the membership also approved a proposal to erect a canopy at the north entrance

of their church. And a proposal to remove the cross from the chancel wall was defeated. Their chancel wall will remain as it is.

Parting Thought:

"Christ is victorious in all things: war, woes, and death! As teachers we will make it our goal to show the control of Christ in every aspect of the life of our students" (Lamm Lubbers, Administrator of our South Holland PR Christian School). □

O foolishness of God — far wiser
than

Collected wisdom of the ages
known to man!

The more I contemplate what
should have been my end,
The higher must my praise to Him
ascend.

—Suzanne Looyenga, 1990

Grace flows from the cursed tree,
Grace as deep as the sea,
Grace for time and eternity,
Grace enough for me.

—SB, 1930

LYNDEN PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH

The Lynden Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington is offering up to \$330,000 in notes to finance the construction of our sanctuary. (5-years: 8%; 10-years: 8.5%) These notes will be issued in multiples of \$1,000, payable on demand with interest paid semi-annually.

For further information, please call or write:

Albert deBoer
1633 Matz Road
Ferndale, WA 98248
(206) 384-4148

We ask that you give this your prayerful consideration.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 11, 1990, our parents and grandparents, MR. and MRS. JOHN VELDMAN will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to God for the years of covenant instruction, love, and care which they have given us. We pray that God will continue to bless them and strengthen them.

6 children
21 grandchildren

Faith Church, Jenison, Michigan