

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***



Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church

**See "News From Our Churches"
— page 95**

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In This Issue...

Among the several periodicals published within the Protestant Reformed Churches are the seminary's "Journal"; the Teachers' Institute's "Perspectives"; the Young People's "Beacon Lights"; and, of course, the RFPA's "SB." Though no one would ever say that the seminary journal is by and for theologians; "Perspectives" is for teachers and for parents with school-age children; "Beacon Lights" is for young people; and the "SB" is for adult Christians, we wonder sometimes whether that distinction does nevertheless describe pretty accurately the actual readership of the various periodicals.

How about the "Standard Bearer"? Who reads it in your household? Mom and Dad, surely. But what about the teenagers? What do they read? An attraction to the Sports Page in the local newspaper probably comes quite naturally at an early age. Not so, the things which are spiritual. That's the nature of the sanctified life, after all. It's a life-long battle. One must discipline himself to take time daily for the study of God's Word, also through the reading of periodicals like the "SB" and "Beacon Lights."

More often than not, perhaps, that kind of discipline can, and should, begin earlier than it does. With appropriate guidance, young people in their early teens can read, understand, and learn to appreciate such articles, in this issue, as "Forget Not the Lord Thy God" and "The Jealous Love of God." High school students will find a real interest also in articles like "Supreme Court Discovers a Constitutional Right to Die" and "The Reformed Family: Women in the Church." And college students will devour articles like "John Calvin Taught That?"

How about it, Grandpa, do you read the "Beacon Lights"?...teenagers, the "SB"? And, parents, do you by example and precept strive mightily to promote good reading habits in your children? The dividends will last a lifetime. □ – D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

Forget Not the Lord Thy God

When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:

Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses; and dwelt therein;

And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

— Deuteronomy 8:10-14

Moses was addressing Israel in the plains of Moab. He informed them that the land of Canaan into which they were about to enter would be for them a land of plenty. For this reason Moses felt constrained also to warn Israel not to forget the Lord their God in the midst of Canaan's plenty.

This warning is very pertinent for us today. God has placed us also in a land of plenty. Certainly

there are some who must work very hard to provide for their material needs; and others find themselves in financial straits. But for the most part we enjoy great plenty. Never has the church prospered materially so much as the church in our land.

And so, especially as Thanksgiving day draws near, we must hear the same word of God that Moses proclaimed to Israel of old. When you have eaten and are full, then bless the Lord your God for the good land which he has given you. Beware that you forget Him not.

* * * * *

Moses spoke of the great prosperity Israel would enjoy in Canaan. It was a good land into which the Lord would bring Israel. It was a land of brooks of water, a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey...

In this land Israel's possessions would multiply: their flocks, their silver and gold, and all that they had. They would be able to build good homes. They would eat bread without scarceness. They would lack nothing.

This great prosperity that Israel would enjoy in Canaan was part of the covenant blessings of the Lord their God. For, as Moses went on to explain in the rest of this chapter, it was the Lord that brought Israel out of Egypt. The Lord had preserved them in the waste howling wilderness for the past 40 years. And the Lord would now bring Israel into the plenty of Canaan, exactly that He might establish His covenant with them, as He had sworn to their fathers that He would.

It was in Canaan, therefore, that

God would establish His covenant with Israel. There He would live and dwell with Israel as their God, blessing them with every good thing. And the material plenty of Canaan was a part of that covenant blessing. Canaan's prosperity was an outward token of God's favor towards His people, Israel. And it spoke of greater, spiritual blessing yet to come in a heavenly Canaan.

We too enjoy great plenty at the hand of this same covenant God.

As our covenant God the Lord accomplishes for us what He did typically for Israel. He has delivered us from the spiritual Egypt of bondage to sin. He is leading us through the spiritual wilderness of this world. One day He will bring us into the heavenly Canaan, where His covenant will be perfected and we will enjoy the boundless riches of His grace forever.

And as we continue our pilgrims' sojourn toward Canaan in this spiritual wilderness, we find that God has given us a great plenty. Certainly the earthly plenty we enjoy today does not have the same significance that it did for Israel in Canaan. Earthly plenty is no longer a token of God's blessing. However, the material abundance we do enjoy has been given to us by our covenant God in His love and grace to provide for our needs here below that we may reach Canaan's shore.

* * * * *

Beware, however, when you have eaten of your plenty and are full, that you do not forget the Lord your God.

What a great danger this is for God's people in the midst of plenty.

Moses showed Israel how this happens. When God gives us

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

plenty, very easily our hearts are lifted up in pride (vs. 14) so that we say within ourselves, "My power and the might of my hand has gotten me all this gain" (vs. 17).

How different it is when we find ourselves in poverty. When the cupboard is bare and we are not sure where tomorrow's food and rent will come from, we live humbly every day out of God's hand, relying upon Him for everything. And then, when we receive from our heavenly Father our daily bread, we thankfully acknowledge Him as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, even of our daily bread.

Strangely enough, our tendency is quite different in the midst of prosperity. For when we have plenty, we tend not to rely upon the hand of God as we ought. In pride we begin to think that we really do not need God anymore. We can do quite well without Him.

The next step in this process is that we take to ourselves the credit for what God has provided for us. We begin to imagine that our plenty is the result of our work, our ingenuity, our planning, our wisdom, our saving....

Once we have gone this far, God is virtually gone from our thoughts and life. If we have gotten our plenty through the power and might of our own hands, certainly we will not give thanks to the Lord. Neither will we rely upon Him for our needs. Neither will we feel compelled to serve him with our plenty. We will rather use our plenty for a life of pleasure and ease, serving ourselves rather than the living God.

Then we have forgotten the Lord our God!

Israel did this time and time again in her history.

Many today in the church are doing the same thing.

Beware! Pray earnestly for grace not to forget the Lord, your covenant God.

* * * * *

Rather, when you have eaten and are full, bless the Lord your God.

This presupposes that you remember the Lord (vs. 18). Remember that the Lord must supply all your needs, or your needs will go unfulfilled. Remember that it is the Lord that has given you your plenty. Remember that the Lord has given this plenty to you especially as your covenant God that you may continue your pilgrim's journey to Canaan's shore.

Remembering all this, bless the Lord your God in your plenty. Praise and thank Him for all His good gifts.

Do this in prayer and song.

Do this also by using all your plenty in the service of His cause and covenant. □

Editorial

The Approach to Covenant Children (2)

In the November 1, 1990 *Standard Bearer*, two representatives of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) sketch and defend the view of baptized children held by the NRC.

The editorial in that issue describes this view as the view that insists on regarding all the baptized children as unregenerated and outside of Jesus Christ. If, in later years, some of these baptized children experience "inward-working graces" and give evidence of "outward-working fruits," they may be viewed as saved children of God. But this does not take

place until some years after their baptism. It is fair to say that, according to the NRC, this does not as a rule take place until many years after baptism.

All infants, therefore, and all the children in the NRC are regarded as unsaved. All the children are taught to regard themselves as unsaved. And this view of the children determines the approach taken to the children in the rearing of them by parents, church, and Christian school.

In this editorial, I will test this covenant-conception of the NRC by Scripture and the Reformed

confessions, whether it is the Reformed truth.

The reader will appreciate, I trust, that my concern is not to criticize a particular Reformed denomination. Rather, I critically examine a certain doctrine. In addition to the challenge put to the Protestant Reformed Churches' teaching on this matter, there is good reason to examine the position of the NRC in the fact that the view of the NRC is widespread among Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

It is exceedingly strange, on the very face of it, that a Reformed church would respond to God's

promise to be the God also of the children of believers by declaring that all children are unregenerated, outside the kingdom of God, and unsaved. This is as odd as it would be if parents whose children had just been willed a fabulously rich inheritance were solemnly and mournfully to decide to view their children as paupers.

Apart from any detailed interpretation of various passages of Scripture, one would think that God's covenant promise in Genesis 17:7 and Acts 2:39, to be the God of our children, would lead the Reformed church to view the children as saved, not unsaved; as living saints, not dead sinners; as united to Christ, not spiritually separated from Him.

Does not the covenant promise to our children mean anything for them?

Yes, say the NRC, it means that they are outwardly related to the covenant; that they are raised under the sphere of God's covenant; and that someday some of them may have the conversion experience.

But this explanation fails to do justice to the richness and comfort of the covenant promise.

In Question 74, the Heidelberg Catechism explains the covenant promise to mean that the children of believers, in their infancy, are included in the covenant and church of God "as well as the adult." The adult is the adult believer who is in the covenant by regenerating grace and who is in the church as a living member. Exactly in this way, and no differently, are the infants in the covenant and church.

Who would presume to interpret the covenant promise in Genesis 17:7 this way: "...to be a God unto thee (believing parent), by placing thee (believing parent) in the covenant in an inward, spiritual manner, and to thy seed after thee, by placing them in the covenant only in an outward manner"?

The fifth commandment of God's Law conclusively proves that the children in Israel were included in the covenant and church of God in the sense that there was spiritual fellowship between Jehovah and

the children. Jehovah addressed the children as the God of their salvation. He loved them. He had redeemed them too, with their parents, from bondage.

On their part, the children were to honor their parents in thankful love toward Jehovah as the God of their salvation. They were to do this from their tenderest years, as soon as they could understand the command to honor and obey. But this was an utter impossibility unless the children were "in the covenant in an inward manner through personal regeneration and conversion to God," to quote Mr. J. W. Beeke.

The NRC and the other Reformed churches that share the position that our baptized children must be regarded as unsaved will not view their little children as loved and redeemed by God in Christ. They are unable to address them as true, spiritual friends of God. They must deny that the little children are empowered by the Spirit to love God and the neighbor.

But Jehovah regarded the children of believers as His saved people. This was His view of the children from their earliest years. To Jehovah, the children in Israel were not little, lost sinners perishing under His wrath. Rather, they were little sinners who were washed in the blood and Spirit of the Lamb. The children were not little vipers who could only strike out at God and the neighbor. Rather, they were new creatures in Christ who honored their parents because they revered the majesty of their covenant God.

To those who insist on viewing baptized children as unregenerate, spiritually dead, and in reality outside the covenant relation with God, I have this question: "How could Jehovah say to the children under the old covenant that He was their God who had redeemed them and that therefore, as members of the covenant people, they were called to love their neighbors (parents) for God's sake? And how could little children obey the fifth commandment?"

The view that God took of believers' children in the Old Testa-

ment is the same in the New Testament. Jesus and the apostles did not view the children as merely outwardly related to the covenant and kingdom of God.

In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus regards the little children as citizens of the kingdom of God. Since one becomes a citizen of the kingdom of heaven by being born again (John 3:3-8), Jesus views them as regenerated. These children receive the kingdom, *in their infancy*, in the only way anyone ever receives it, namely, by a sovereign, gracious, irresistible act of the Holy Spirit within them.

The apostles' view of baptized children is plain in Ephesians 6:1-4. Here Scripture explicitly states that the covenant with Old Testament Israel and the covenant with the New Testament church is one *as regards the inclusion of children in the covenant*.

Believers' children are members of the church with their parents. They are members in the same way that their parents are members, namely, by being "quickened...together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). The children are not only outwardly related to the church but they are "in the Lord" (Eph. 6:1). This is true of the children, not by virtue of some conversion experience years after their baptism, when they are twelve or eighteen or thirty, but by virtue of their being children of believers and baptized, already when they are two or three.

To the children of believers from their earliest years comes the covenant gospel, "You too are in the Lord Jesus! Because you are, you are living members of Jesus' church! As members of the church, you too have a calling from your Lord to live a holy life by honoring your father and mother!"

This view and approach differ radically from the view and approach of the NRC.

Scripture's view of the children as included in the covenant "in an inward manner" is everywhere adopted by our Reformed confessions.

I have already pointed out that Question 74 of the Catechism views newly born infants as members of

the covenant and church of God. That this membership is not merely outward connection with a visible church is evident from what immediately follows: "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult..."

Similar is the teaching of the Belgic Confession in Article 34. With reference to the infants who are to be baptized, the creed states that "Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful, than for adult persons." It is true that the reference is not to regeneration, but to the atonement, although there is allusion to regeneration when the creed speaks of the "washing of the children." But it surely is not less significant to speak of our children's redemption by Jesus' blood than to speak of their new birth by Jesus' Spirit.

The creedal, Reformed view of believers' children, in their infancy, is that they are the redeemed of Jesus Christ. This must be the parents' view of them. This must be the Reformed church's view of them. And this must be their own view of themselves, from their earliest years.

I ask, do the NRC view their infant children as redeemed by the blood of Christ? Do they view them as redeemed, not in their later life and on the basis of a conversion experience, but in the children's in-

fancy and on the basis of God's covenant promise to be a God to these children?

In order not to prolong the discussion unduly, I limit myself to one other confessional statement. This is the "Form for the Administration of Baptism." In the first question to the believing parents (or parent) who present their children for baptism, the form demands that the parents view their children as "sanctified in Christ." This is true of the children already before they are baptized, for it is a reason why they ought to be baptized.

The NRC and the other churches who share their position explain "sanctified in Christ" (and I Cor. 7:14 whence it derives) as referring only to the external, formal setting apart of believers' children from the children of the world. It means only that they will be reared under good teaching in a church. As far as the spiritual condition of the children is concerned, they are dead, just like the children of heathens. And so they must be viewed until they undergo a conversion experience.

This, however, is not what the form has in mind with "sanctified in Christ." For, first, "sanctified in Christ" is contrasted in the first question with the spiritual condition of our children by nature: "our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are sub-

ject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself." The contrast ("yet that they are sanctified in Christ") clearly shows that the form teaches that our children are reborn in holiness and are delivered from all miseries, yes, from condemnation itself.

That the form intends actual, spiritual cleansing is put beyond all doubt in the prayer of thanksgiving after baptism. The Reformed church thanks God, not that He establishes an outward connection between the children and the visible church, but that He forgives them their sins through Jesus' blood and receives them through His Holy Spirit as members of His only begotten Son.

The prayer continues with the request, not that God may someday regenerate them and give them the conversion experience, but that God will always govern them by the Spirit and give them to increase and grow up in the Lord Jesus from their earliest years.

Our form for baptism views our children as regenerated, living, spiritual members of the covenant. With this, the view of the NRC and other Reformed and Presbyterian churches is in conflict.

Viewing the children as unsaved also involves a church in practices that are both indefensible for a Reformed church and injurious to the children. We will look at this in the next issue, God willing. □

Letter

Presumptive Regeneration?

Your series of editorials in *The Standard Bearer* on the covenant has been truly a blessing. It is good to see that there are still those who are faithful to the scriptures and hold to a unilateral, unconditional, and unbreakable covenant. Even

among our Reformed churches the error of "common grace," "the well-meant offer" of the gospel to all people, and "conditional covenantal theology" show the compromises our churches have made with respect to Arminianism.

In your fifth article on the covenant (July 1, 1990) you are quite correct in pointing out that

we must not view our children as being unsaved heathens for this is presumptive unregeneration, that is, presuming our children to be unregenerated unless it shows otherwise in their lives. You are also correct in pointing out that this presumption leads to problems with assurance of salvation and sometimes even mysticism. (I know this first hand since my de-

nomination sometimes leans this way...).

You state in your article that "Viewing their children as God's covenant children, believers must approach them as elect children in their teaching and discipline, even though there may indeed be reprobate and unregenerated children among them," and also, "We do not view them as unsaved heathens.... But we view them as children of

God." Does this perhaps not lean towards presumptive regeneration, that is, an equally dangerous error of presuming our children to be regenerated unless it shows otherwise in their lives? Hasn't the error of presumptive regeneration always been rejected by the Protestant Reformed Churches? The Bible never says that believers are to treat their children as though they were regenerated, but rather, it

commands believers to train their children in the ways of the Lord. It also says that our children are conceived in sin and are spiritually dead and need to be born again by the Holy Spirit applying the finished work of Christ in their lives.

I would be most appreciative if you would clarify your position on this matter. □

Paul Wiersma
Hamilton, Ontario

Taking Heed To The Doctrine

Rev. Marvin Kamps

The Bible Is God's Word

ITS ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

It hardly seems necessary, for members of our Protestant Reformed Churches, to write on the authority of Scripture. We have always enjoyed, as a denomination of Reformed churches, a united commitment to this fundamental understanding of God's Word. It is impossible to find in any of our ministers' writings, of past and present, or in any of our ecclesiastical decisions throughout all the years of our existence, any questioning of the sole authority of the Bible. This is truly an evidence of the blessing and care of Christ Jesus for us as His church. This failure on our part to attack or even question the authority of Scripture is not due to the fact that we have not been exposed to the writings and urging of others who would show us a better way. The opposite has been true. Outside of our churches the church of Jesus Christ has been constantly engaged in a battle over the Bible, its authority, its inerrancy, and its infallible in-

spiration. We have consciously rejected every attempt from without to undermine our heartfelt trust in the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Our faith in the sole and absolute authority of the Bible is to be attributed exclusively to the grace and goodness of God to us. Let us not lift our heads in pride and boast of our strength, for we, as any other body of churches, are ever inclined to reject the Word of God. Unbelief lurks in the breast of every saint. But let us lift our voices in thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, who has preserved us in the faith by His irresistible grace.

Let us be aware that the doctrine of the authority of Scripture is most fundamental to the Christian faith. This is true, of course, from a formal viewpoint. Certainly the doctrines of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ Jesus, and the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, from a material viewpoint are above all fundamental. But from a formal viewpoint the authority of Scripture as the Word of God takes first place. The reason is obvious. We would have no knowledge of God as our Savior and Redeemer by His Son in our flesh if the Scriptures were without authority. All Christian doctrine has its basis in God's

Word. It ought to be plain to any thinking man that, should he lose confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, he then would have no basis whatsoever for any doctrine of the Christian faith. Without the foundational doctrine, from a formal viewpoint, of the absolute authority of Scripture, the whole structure of Christian doctrine falls into a heap. Therefore, when in the individual church or denomination men deny and attack the sole authority of Scripture, they are attacking Calvary itself. They do violence to God and His Christ.

Reformed believers make a beautiful confession in regard to the authority of Scriptures. I call your attention to the fifth article of our *Belgic Confession*: "We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling."

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

The above confession was based upon the Scriptures' own testimony concerning themselves. This is an important and often overlooked principle. The Bible claims for itself this sole authority. The church does not impose upon Scripture a duty and responsibility which it is unwilling to bear. The opposite is true: the Bible demands of the church and of the individual believer that it rule the faith and life of the church. The Scriptures claim for themselves the supreme, no, the exclusive, honor and position of Master over all. Not the human mind or reason is lord; not the church is lord; not the learned doctors of theology and philosophy are the lords. The Bible alone is Lord and Master in all matters of faith and life. In addition, the Bible has, under the blessing of the Spirit of the exalted Christ, fulfilled this position and responsibility of absolute Master in the life of the church most effectively and beautifully. Not one saint given to Christ from all eternity has been lost. Through the means of the Scriptures the saints have been kept from the wiles of the Devil and from perdition through unbelief. The Bible is Lord and Master! And it is such because it is the very Word of God! We believe that all is well when and where the Scriptures rule alone.

What in fact does the Bible say of its own authority? Jesus, when He was tempted by the Devil, answered him with these words: "It is written" (Matt. 4). Jesus thus appealed to the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Scriptures were His Master for they were the Word of His God. Jesus unquestioningly submitted to the Word. When the fearful reality of the shame and suffering on the cross stood before the Lord, did He then reject the authority of the Word of God? No, but He confessed, "Thy will be done." Paul tells us what was the Lord's confession in that moment: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me...Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it

is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:5, 7). Besides, the whole of Psalm 119 is a song of praise to God in regard to the beauty, saving power, goodness, and authority of the Scriptures. In addition, we may be reminded of those classic passages II Timothy 3:16, 17; II Peter 1:16-21; and Revelation 22:18, 19. But I would also call your attention to the instruction Jesus gave indirectly to the authority of Scripture, when He sent out the disciples to preach the gospel to the lost sheep of Israel: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16). And, in Matthew 10:40 we read, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." I believe that no more comforting words could ever be spoken to a preacher of God's Word. The disciples were sent out to preach the gospel that in Jesus of Nazareth all the Old Testament promises were fulfilled. That Word is so authoritative for faith and life that he that believed and received the preacher believed and received God. The converse was and is true for unbelievers.

Men today, though they claim faith in Christ Jesus and demand of us that we receive them as brethren, refuse to confess with us that the Bible is in its entirety the Word of God. Some reject the historicity of Adam and Eve and of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. For them this portion of Scripture is myth. Be sure, they assure us, it has gospel value; but what it records really never happened. Others claim that revelation is a dynamic reality, not to be considered something "static" and limited to the pages of a book, not even The Book. The Bible, they claim, is the word of men, of the ancient Hebrew people. It is, therefore, only the ancient church's response to the Word. The Word of God is not written. It does not have an objective, tangible form. We are not to equate the Bible with God's Word. They assure us too that they believe in Jesus and have faith in God. But

God's Word is something we encounter subjectively. This "Word" of God one cannot just pick up and read. The church and believers must ever recognize that that "Word of God" is different for every culture and age. Others, in the same vein of thought, boast and rejoice in the movement of the Spirit of Christ, His leading and guiding of the church, *even then* when the Bible is contradicted by their and the church's pronouncements and decisions.

What a blessing for God's people it would be if Christian discipline could be exercised in the churches of our land and throughout the world. But all too often the particular churches have lost the spiritual strength to discipline those who rend and pervert God's Holy Word.

It should not escape us that our confession of the sole authority of God's Word, the Bible, is of utmost significance for us as Protestant Reformed Churches and as individual believers. Our Reformed Creeds have a subordinate and only formal authority in the life of the churches. They may never have supreme authority. Sometimes it is said that we are to preach God's Word in the light of the Heidelberg Catechism. Those who speak thus do not know what they are saying. It must be just the other way around. In addition, how could there be in the church a "creedal consciousness" unless it be that we believe that the Scriptures demand of us a definite and exclusive confession of our faith. The authority of the Scriptures demands confession of the truth. This conscious awareness of the authority of Scripture will not allow us to tolerate the lie and the perversion of God's Word. But where the authority of God's Word is no longer operative in the congregation, one can believe and teach whatever he pleases.

Besides, it is the authority of Scripture as our living confession that motivates the church to provide a trained ministry, insists upon exegetical preaching in the pulpit on the Lord's day, and thus moves the preacher of the Word to declare uncompromisingly, "Thus saith the Lord." Good, lively

preaching cannot be found where men have undermined the authority of the Bible. It is spiritually and psychologically impossible. Where the authority of the Bible is denied, all that the people can get is one "preacher" after another who offers his suggestions and opinions to the people for their consideration and reflection. The preaching then has lost its power.

What made the Reformers of the church, Calvin and Luther, great men of God? Their deep and profound conviction of the sole and absolute authority of God's Word. That this is true, a thousand different writers give testimony to the fact. What has made the Reformed church a powerful witness to the gospel in ages gone by? Preaching that was permeated with and arose out of a commitment to the sole authority of the Bible. What then must we say for the future, for our children and grandchildren and for the church in coming generations?

Let the children be taught the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Let their catechism and Christian school training ring with the authority of the Scriptures. And believe, dear saints, that God will bless that instruction to your children and grandchildren.

The doctrine of the authority of Scripture must not be left simply in the realm of theory. Far too often this is done, it would seem. The authority of Scripture must have a concrete and definite application in the individual believer's life and in the corporate life of the churches. Especially in our day of lawlessness and fierce individualism is this above all necessary. Elders must not let their pastor go to the pulpit to preach the authoritative Word of God while they themselves as officebearers are unwilling to enforce the authority of the Word in the congregation's life. Then the minister in effect has no consistory. If the elders will not discipline for public

violation of God's Word, sinful lifestyle, neglect of the means of grace, rebellion against the State, and whatever else may call for discipline, they in effect undermine the authority of the Bible in the life of the congregation. Let all heartily acknowledge that the authority of the Scriptures demands the exercise of Christian discipline in the church of Jesus Christ.

If the doctrine of the sole authority of Scripture is not upheld concretely in the Reformed church by the exercise of Christian discipline, then that church must join those who debate ceaselessly the theory of the authority of the Bible. If we would fail to exercise the authority of the Bible, we would lose its power. Only by a constant and concrete application of the authority of Scripture can we silence those who will not acknowledge its sole authority and right to rule in all matters of faith and life. □

In His Fear
Rev. Arie denHartog

The Jealous Love of God

Fearful and wonderful is the love of God. It is absolutely sovereign. It has all its reason and cause in God Himself alone. It is not dependent upon nor determined by any creature. It is perfectly holy, never in any way defiled or corrupted by evil passions or affections. It is unchangeable, the same from eternity to eternity. It is full of compassion and tender affection. It is faithful. Never does God forsake those who are the objects of His affection and loving kindness. It ever seeks only the

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highest good for those whom God loves. God loves His people with such sovereign, infinite, holy, perfect, and unchangeable love. From eternity He has chosen them to be the objects of His love. He is full of personal tender compassion and affection towards them. He delights in His people. He loves His people with a covenant love. He would be their God and have His people to be His own special people, distinct from all the people of the earth. He desires to make Himself known to them as the God of infinite goodness and glory. He ever longs to draw His people to Himself to enjoy His favor and goodness and to live in commu-

nion with Him. God Himself makes His people so that they are the proper objects of His love and so that they can dwell with Him. His people are of themselves sinful and corrupt and could not be the objects of the holy love of God. But God in love makes His people holy as He is holy. The ultimate purpose of the love of God for His people is that He might have a people who dwell with Him forever in heaven, ever enjoying His goodness and worshiping and praising His glorious name.

God has revealed the sovereignty, faithfulness, perfect holiness, and covenant-keeping character of His love in His Son Jesus

Christ. God so loved His people that He determined from eternity to give His Son for their salvation. In His Son Jesus Christ, God kept His covenant promise to His people and revealed the wonderful faithfulness of His love. In Jesus Christ God revealed that His love is a perfect and holy love. Therefore He sent Jesus to the cross to atone for the sins of His people and to satisfy His wrath and justice. Through Jesus Christ God took up His dwelling with His people, He set up His tabernacle among them. Through Jesus He makes His glory, goodness, and truth known to His people. Through the Spirit of Jesus Christ God came to live in the hearts of His people and abides with them and they with Him. Through Jesus Christ God will live with His people in the most blessed intimate covenant communion and fellowship possible.

One of the amazing and wonderful attributes of the love of God is that it is a jealous love. When we first consider this aspect of the love of God it may trouble us. We might imagine that jealousy is entirely out of character with a holy and perfect love. Jealousy among men is an awful vice, an evil that God hates in man. The wise Solomon says in the book of Proverbs that jealousy is the rage of man and that therefore he shall not spare in the day of vengeance (see Prov. 6:34). Jealousy causes man to devise and commit great evil against his neighbor. If a man continues in jealousy it will consume and destroy him. How then can jealousy be a perfection in God?

The Bible speaks often of God's jealousy. In the decalogue it is spoken of in connection with the first and second commandments. Because God is a jealous God, He will visit iniquity upon them that hate Him to the third and fourth generation, and He loves the thousands who keep His commandments. In Exodus 34:14 God commands His people to worship no other God, "for the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God." The name of God reveals the nature and character of God. The Lord revealed this name to Moses in the wonderful

revelation of Himself on Mount Sinai, after Israel had committed the great sin of making and worshipping the golden calf, and when Moses was pleading for the salvation of Israel. In one of the amazing visions that God gave to Zechariah we read that the prophet heard the angel of the Lord say, "O Lord of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?" Then we read the answer of the Lord: "And the Lord answered the angel and talked with me with good words and comfortable words." After this the angel speaks again. "So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy" (see Zechariah 1:12-14).

It is evident from Scripture that jealousy is a perfection of the love of God. We can understand this when we realize that God first of all loves Himself. God loves Himself as the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father loves the Son with perfect love. The Son and the Spirit love the Father and one another in perfect knowledge and delight and fellowship with one another. God seeks Himself and delights in Himself as the only and highest good. He glories in Himself alone. It is evil for man to seek himself and glory in himself because he is not God. He was created by God and receives all things from God. Therefore man must seek only God and not himself. He must glory in God alone and not in himself. It is good and holy for God to love Himself because He is Himself the source and standard of all good and perfection. God loves His own perfect goodness and seeks His own glory in all things as the sovereign God.

Because God loves Himself with a jealous love He has made all things for Himself and for His own glory. He created the heavens and earth and all creatures in them to serve His purpose and to bring glory to His name. The Lord formed and redeemed His people

with jealous love. He called them out of this ungodly world and separated them unto Himself in jealous love. He reveals Himself unto His people and makes known to them His sovereign goodness and the glory of His name in order that His people might acknowledge Him as God and worship and glorify and praise Him as their Creator, Lord, and Redeemer.

The jealous love of God is a fearful thing for ungodly, disobedient, and rebellious men. God burns in jealous love for His own honor and glory against those that forsake Him and refuse to acknowledge Him as God and rebel against His holy commandments. In jealousy for the honor and glory of His own name He will pursue the ungodly in His anger and will finally destroy them in His wrath.

Because God loves His people with jealousy He will redeem them from their enemies and destroy those who seek to make war with His beloved people. In jealous love He guards His elect people as the apple of His eye and will not let anyone hurt them. Sometimes God will use the ungodly nations to chasten and to purify His people, but after this loving purpose has been accomplished God will bring His people out from among their enemies and in His holy wrath destroy their persecutors.

That God loves His people with jealous love means that He demands of them all their love and devotion. He commands them to love Him with all their heart and soul and strength and mind. God requires that His people live and exist only for Him. Most often in Scripture the jealousy of God is spoken of in connection with the great evil of idolatry in Israel. When Israel lived in idolatry God was filled with jealous anger against them. God was jealous for the love that His people owed to Him because He was their Lord and Redeemer. When man today is filled with pride, when he loves and seeks himself rather than God, when he glories in himself and seeks to make himself great in the earth, God is filled with jealous anger against him. When man

lives in materialism, covetousness, and worldliness and God is not in his thoughts and heart then God is filled with jealous wrath against him. But God's people must be different from the world. They must love only the Lord their God and live their whole life in devotion to Him and for His glory.

Often in Scripture the jealousy of the love of God is illustrated by marital love between a husband and wife. This is the central figure, for example, in the book of Hosea. While most of the jealousy of man is condemned by Scripture, the jealousy that exists between a husband and wife in marriage is holy. Their relationship is an exclusive relationship. God made it to be that way. If a husband is not jealous of his wife when another man seeks to come between him and his wife, or when an adulterer comes into his house to sleep with his wife, then he does not truly love his wife. It is right that the godly wife desires that her husband think only of her, that he is attracted only to her, and does not look on another woman. She has a right to expect that her

husband in love takes her into account in all of his plans and purposes in life. She will feel hurt and offended when she is left out of major things in her husband's life.

All of this aptly illustrates the jealous love of God for His people. He loves His people with such a great love that He wants His people always to think of Him in all their thoughts. They are to desire Him alone. They are to exist and live for Him alone. They are to delight in Him and glory in Him alone. They are not to worship idols; they are not to seek themselves and their own glory; they are not to live in materialism and covetousness and worldliness. When the Lord's people do that, they commit spiritual adultery and whoredom. God is grieved, God is offended by all of this. His perfect love to His people is slighted. The more holy and perfect love is, the more grieved that love is when it is violated and spurned. That is infinitely more true with God than it ever could be with man. God knows the lives and hearts of His people. It might be possible for a

man to keep secret his unfaithfulness from his wife. He might be able to hide the fact from his wife that he is thinking about and desiring another woman. God's people cannot do this in God's sight, for He knows all that is in their heart and is offended if even their thoughts and desires exclude Him. He wants His people to think of Him in all their plans and purposes and in everything they do in life. He wants their joy and glorying to be only in the Lord their God.

Are we troubled by the jealousy of God's love? Remember that God, our Lord and Redeemer, loves us with a love by which He would draw us unto Himself in covenant fellowship and communion. The Lord in jealous love seeks our highest good. To think and live only for God, to desire always in all things His praise and glory, will bring the greatest imaginable joy and satisfaction to the child of God. God alone is good, and to know and love Him perfectly, to dwell with Him in eternity, is the great good and highest glory to which man can attain. It is heaven. □

Church And State

Mr. James Lanting

Supreme Court Discovers a Constitutional Right to Die

We assume that the United States Constitution would grant a competent person a constitutionally protected right to refuse lifesaving hydration and nutrition. [Majority opinion, Cruzan v. Missouri Department of Health (1990)]

I would have preferred that we announce, clearly and promptly, that the

federal courts have no business in this field; that American law has always accorded to the States the power to prevent, by force if necessary, suicide — including suicide by refusing to take appropriate measures necessary to preserve one's life.... [Judge Scalia (concurring opinion), Cruzan v. Missouri Dept. of Health (1990)]

Because I believe that Nancy Cruzan has a fundamental right to be free from unwanted artificial nutrition and hydration, which right is not outweighed by any State interest, I re-

spectfully dissent. Nancy Cruzan is entitled to choose to die with dignity. [Justice Brennan (dissent), Cruzan v. Missouri Dept. of Health (1990)]

Recent advances in medical technology have enabled hospitals "to keep the human body alive for longer than any reasonable person would want to inhabit it," as Justice Scalia has wryly put it. As many as 10,000 patients are being maintained in persistent vegetative states in the U.S. Respirators developed over the past two decades

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are capable of resuscitating people long after they have stopped breathing and suffered irreversible brain damage. Moreover, whereas in the past people inevitably died when they were unable to swallow and digest food, there now exist various methods of artificial feeding that maintain patients metabolically for years, even decades.

Although numerous state courts have been deciding right-to-refuse-treatment cases since the well-known Karen Quinlan case in 1975, the U.S. Supreme Court confronted its first such case this summer. At issue was the parents' right to withdraw food and water from their daughter who had been in a "persistent vegetative state" for seven years.

The Cruzan Case

On a cold January night in 1983, Nancy Beth Cruzan lost control of the car she was driving. She was found lying face-down in a ditch, not breathing and without a pulse. Paramedics on the scene, after managing to restore her breathing and heartbeat, transported her to a hospital in an unconscious state. It was estimated that she was without oxygen for 12 to 14 minutes.

Subsequent rehabilitative efforts proved unsuccessful. It was determined that Nancy suffered massive irreversible brain damage; she retained no cognitive or reflexive ability to swallow food or water to maintain her daily essential needs. She was diagnosed as being in a "persistent vegetative state," a condition in which a person can live for years and years, exhibiting some natural reflexes but no significant mental function. To ease feeding, the hospital implanted an abdominal tube through which she was fed food and water.

After a number of years her parents were informed that she had virtually no chance of regaining her mental awareness. They then requested the hospital to withdraw all nutrition and hydration. The state hospital refused, and Nancy's parents petitioned a Missouri court for permission to remove her feeding tubes.

The trial court granted their request, but the state appealed to the

Missouri Supreme Court which reversed, holding that the parents had not proved by "clear and convincing" evidence that Nancy herself would have desired to refuse food and water under these conditions.

On appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed, holding that Missouri's requirement of "clear and convincing" evidence in such cases involving incompetent persons was not unconstitutional.

Incompetent Persons and Withdrawal of Medical Treatment

At issue was Missouri's procedural requirement that before an incompetent person can be denied lifesaving food and water, the guardians must prove by "clear and convincing evidence" that such deprivation of nutrition and hydration would be the desire and wish of the incompetent.

Although the Cruzans introduced evidence that several years prior to her accident Nancy had casually remarked to an acquaintance that she would not want to live should she face life as a "vegetable," the Court held that this was not "clear and convincing" evidence of her wish regarding withdrawal of food and water. Furthermore, stated the Court, this evidentiary requirement is not an unconstitutional deprivation of Nancy's "liberty," as the parents contended.

The parents also argued alternatively that even if Nancy had not clearly expressed her wishes regarding refusal of medical treatment (in a "living will"), the courts should nonetheless heed the "substitutional judgment" of the family. The Court disagreed. Even though in this case the Cruzans' motives were perhaps honorable, there is no "automatic assurance" that family members will always have the same view of refusal of treatment as would the incompetent person.

Competent Persons and Refusal of Medical Treatment

Although the Supreme Court denied the Cruzans' request because of the absence of clear evidence of Nancy's wishes, the Court nonetheless affirmed a *competent* person's constitutional right to refuse medical treatment, including life-sus-

taining nutrition and water, even when that person is *not* confronting imminent death from a terminal illness (see majority opinion quote above).

This alleged constitutional right-to-die is very troublesome for various reasons. First, since a majority of states consider the taking of one's life as a criminal felony, how can we then distinguish a competent person's refusal of nutrition and water from suicide? As Justice Scalia properly noted in his concurring opinion, we cannot differentiate suicide from refusal of life-saving medical attention merely because the patient is permanently incapacitated and suffering. Suicide cannot be sanctioned just because the patient or family does not have the patience or fortitude to endure the suffering contemplated.

Secondly, we cannot rely on the false distinction between "action" and "inaction" resulting in death, saying, for example, that suicide is always an affirmative act, whereas refusing nutrition and water is passive. Starving oneself, suggests Justice Scalia correctly, is no different from putting a gun to one's head.

Finally, it cannot be argued that unwanted (artificial or natural) feeding is an unlawful and unconstitutional violation of one's "liberty, self-determination, or bodily integrity," as the right-to-die advocates argue. This is because the state has a recognized interest in preventing suicide — an interest which arguably includes the right and duty of hospitals or medical authorities to invade and pump out the stomach of a person who has, for example, overdosed on barbiturates, *despite that person's contrary wishes*.

Accordingly, the Court's blanket affirmation of a competent person's alleged constitutional "liberty" to refuse even nutrition and water when death is not otherwise imminent, seriously threatens the state's historical interest in preserving life and forbidding suicide.

Self Determination and Death With Dignity

From a Christian perspective, the Court's treatment of death from re-

fusal of medical treatment is fundamentally flawed. This is because the Court's reasoning for allowing refusal of essential life sustaining medical treatment is boldly humanistic. The dissent in *Cruzan* wrote:

Anglo-American law starts with the premise of thorough-going self-determination. It follows that each man is considered to be a master of his own body, and he may, if he be of sound mind expressly prohibit...medical treatment. The State has no legitimate general interest in someone's life, com-

pletely abstracted from the interest of the person living that life....

The philosophical and moral irony of such "thorough-going" humanism is that, as in the case of abortion, humanistic arguments are employed to sanction the very taking of human life.

This is not to say, of course, that a Christian patient must endure all heroic and extraordinary medical procedures calculated to prolong life for a few days or weeks. But surely the deliberate withdrawal or

refusal of food and water when death is not imminent is essentially suicide or death by starvation, and accordingly is ethically and morally suspect. But healthy and unhealthy Christians should be guided, not by principles of "thorough-going self-determination," "quality" of life, or the desire for a "dignified" death, but by a prayerful search to discover and submit to the will of the sovereign Giver of Life. □

Strength of Youth

Rev. Russ Dykstra

John Calvin Taught That?

**Or . . . How to get a great Reformer,
dead 400 years, to support an
un-Reformed position**

The title of this article points to a very real and common trial for college students. The Reformed young person enters college grounded by years of solid biblical instruction from the home, Christian school, and catechism. Some Reformed truths are firm convictions, distinctly etched into his mind and soul. Other doctrines and practices may be less familiar and somewhat vague. But in the mind of most, one thing is certain, namely, that John Calvin is Reformed! Calvin is a writer we can trust. He is not, of course, infallible; but he is reliable. His works set the standard for what is Reformed. It can be a severe shock, then, to learn from a professor or a fellow student that Calvin taught this or that, contrary to what you

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INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of the column "The Strength of Youth" is to encourage and instruct you, the youth of Christ's church. Because young, Reformed believers face a host of temptations and spiritual struggles in this ungodly age, we seek to help you with the doctrinal and practical problems with which you must grapple. Many of these articles will focus on some issues faced primarily by college students — both in the classroom and in everyday life. Some of the same issues affect high school students as well, particularly those not privileged to attend a solidly Reformed high school. Nearly all the topics have been dealt with before in *The Standard Bearer*, and in greater detail. But it is our prayer that the articles will aid you — by refreshing your memory, by giving references, or by exhorting you to stand fast in the line of the Reformed faith.

have been taught for years! Typically, students react to such news in either of two different ways. The great majority of students in class seem unperturbed by it. Others, however, refuse to believe it and begin to search Calvin's writings for the truth of the matter.

If you find yourself in the latter position and want to argue your case with the professor, you are, of

course, at a distinct disadvantage which might well crush your original determination. For, in the first place, you have daily assignments to keep up with, papers to write, and tests to study for. Hours of unassigned research in Calvin's *Institutes* will not favorably affect the grades. And secondly, the professor knows the arguments before you raise them. He has probably

heard them every year he has taught the course. When you add to that the reality that the bulk of the class will have little interest in your points, it takes much courage of your convictions to face the issue.

From a practical point of view, I can understand why you probably pass up many opportunities to research and publicly defend Calvin or any Reformed doctrine. But I urge you to do so whenever possible. It will greatly enrich your education and you will leave college settled and grounded in the Reformed faith, not doubting it. Let us examine how men sometimes use Calvin to "support" un-Reformed ideas.

One of the most disturbing aspects of wrongfully appealing to Calvin is the, at best, carelessness, and at worst, dishonesty, of some professors at Christian colleges who quote John Calvin to support their un-Reformed teaching. Three aspects of this practice are particularly troubling.

First, in a discussion of a modern-day controversy some quote Calvin to support their unbiblical position. The problem is that Calvin never faced the issue, at least not in its modern-day form or context. Exactly because it was not an issue in his day, it is dangerous, and even unethical, to quote Calvin as though he were addressing the issue at hand. (Examples: women deacons, the free offer of the gospel, common grace, etc.)

I would compare this to a politician or activist today using Abraham Lincoln to support his pro-abortion stance. He might argue that, after all, Lincoln supported the right of freedom for slaves. Lincoln maintained that no one had the right to own and control another human. Therefore, the pro-abortionist could conclude, Lincoln would never support laws that restricted the freedom of women over their own bodies. Lincoln is (or would be) pro-choice.

But what is wrong here? It is this: Abraham Lincoln (so far as I know) never addressed the issue of abortion, because it was not an issue in his day. It would be ex-

tremely presumptuous to claim Lincoln as a fellow advocate of abortion rights on the basis of his stand on slavery. In fact, it would be unethical to do so.

The same thing is true of using Calvin to support a "side" of a twentieth century controversy. Keep in mind that even meanings of words change over time. Theological controversies have forced the church to clarify and explicitly define doctrines as well as *words*. After a controversy an informed writer may well use a particular word in a more careful and technical sense than before the controversy. Thus when you go back 400 years and read Calvin, remember that he might not (COULD NOT) be as clear on some doctrines as we can (and SHOULD) be today, and that some words he used then have a different, or at least added, meaning today.

A second dangerous practice is that of proving a position is Calvinistic or Reformed by quoting a "Calvinist" of a later age. The argument (usually implied) runs something like this: 1) This position, call it "position A," is historic Calvinism. 2) Proof: "Mr. F.R. Calvinist," in his book, p. 37, writes thus. 3) Because this man is from the Calvinist tradition, this is what Calvinism teaches on this issue, or what Calvin would have taught if he were alive today. This is a *common* tactic of modern writers on Calvin and/or Calvinism. Books on Calvin should be read with careful attention to the sources and references. Take the time to check them out if what the man says sounds un-Reformed.

Once again, you see the problem. "Position A" is not necessarily what Calvin taught. It is rather what Mr. F.R. Calvinist taught, who, it is CLAIMED, is in the tradition of Calvin on this issue. This is, however, exactly the point at issue. Is he or is he not? Only a careful study of Calvin's writings will reveal whether or not this is the place to which Calvin's teaching leads and therefore is consistent with true Calvinism. Calvin was a REFORMER in the true sense of the word. A Reformed man insists on

faithful adherence to the Scriptures. A good rule of thumb is, therefore, that any instruction that contradicts Scripture and/or the Reformed confessions is not the teaching of Calvin.

A third, blatant perversion of Calvin's teaching is accomplished by quoting words out of context. When a man's words or sentences are taken from one context and put into a completely different one, the man can be presented as saying something he never intended. This is what the Heidelberg Catechism calls falsifying a man's words — a violation of the ninth commandment. Check the context whenever in doubt about a quotation. Sometimes you will discover that the quotation — in context — actually REFUTES the very position it supposedly proved!

When you face this improper use of John Calvin, it helps to be aware of a few technical considerations as well. The translation and editing can vary significantly in a given passage. Not only should the translator be concerned about making an *accurate* translation, but he must also be careful not to put Calvin's 16th century writings into words unfamiliar to Calvin just to be more relevant for today's readers. This can change the meaning significantly, as can headings added by the editor.

Finally, please remember that Calvin wrote a staggering amount of material — letters, commentaries, treatises, and catechisms. And when he was not writing, he was preaching, and (Genevan) council-appointed listeners copied down the sermons nearly word-for-word. Obviously some sermons, commentaries, letters, and treatises were written early in his life. Others were composed after Calvin had developed much in his thinking. What is the point? Two things. First, any one who wrote that much was bound to contradict himself at times. And, secondly, because he was so diligent in his studies, Calvin certainly developed in his understanding of the truth over the years. In order to avoid misrepresenting Calvin, be aware of this and be sure you have his

current teaching, that is, not an isolated statement which was contradicted in different places in his writings, but rather the *main line* of his teaching, and, if possible, the more mature (later) works. This requires a fair amount of reading of Calvin. But it is well worth it!

So when you ask or answer the question, What did Calvin teach on...?, be careful! On some doctrines and practices, the answer is obvious. He wrote clearly about the sovereignty of God, about

man's depravity, as well as about election and reprobation, and infant baptism, to name a few. But on others, he was not so plain. What did he say about a democracy as we have it in America? Nothing. About common grace, as we know it? Nothing, directly. We must be very cautious about simply believing that Calvin taught this or Calvin approved of that, when "this and that" contradict Scripture.

We plan, the Lord willing, to examine some concrete examples of

false instruction concerning John Calvin's teaching which college students have faced, beginning with women in church office (did you know that Calvin approved of women deacons?!?). If you have faced this sort of instruction in the past, feel free to write. For the sake of future students, perhaps your particular question should be discussed here. (No names of students, professors, or colleges will be revealed.) □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Family Visitation

One of the main duties enjoined upon the elders in Article 23 of the *Church Order* is family visitation: "The office of the elders (is) ...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."

Family visitation is a distinctively Reformed practice. No other churches that I am aware of regularly and systematically conduct visitation of all the membership by the elders. Family visitation was first introduced into the Reformed churches by John Calvin.

Besides the reference to family visitation in Article 23 of the *Church Order*, there is also reference to the practice in Article 55: "To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation, or warning,

and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting." One of the questions put to the consistory at the time of the annual church visitation is: "Is family visitation conducted faithfully, so that each family receives an official visit once a year?" In the "Ministerial Call Letter," among the duties expected of the minister, mention is made of his participation in family visitation.

Various names have been used to describe the practice of family visitation. The name "consistorial" or "elders' visitation" has been used, the emphasis being on those who conduct the visits. The name "house visitation" has been used. This designation is a carry-over from the Dutch *huisbezoek*, the common name for family visitation in The Netherlands. This is a poor designation because it is not the house, the building, that is being visited, but the home. The best designation is "family visitation." This name reflects the purpose of the visits, and is also the name that is used in the *Church Order*.

There is no specific text of Scripture that mandates annual family

visitation or gives a description of family visitation. Family visitation is rather implied in those passages of Scripture that call the elders to watch over the souls of the people of God, the sheep as well as the lambs: John 21:15-17; Acts 20:20, 23; I Thessalonians 5:12-14; Hebrews 13:17; I Peter 5:1-5.

Anyone who is interested in further reading on the subject of family visitation may refer to the following: *Taking Heed To the Flock*, by P.Y. DeJong; "Visiting the Membership," chapter 7 in *The Elders Handbook*, by Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster; "Family Visitation," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, December, 1972, Vol. VI, No. 1, by Prof. H.C. Hoeksema (copies available through the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418).

HISTORY OF FAMILY VISITATION

The history of family visitation is reflected in the decisions made regarding this practice by various Reformed synods. It is worth quoting the decisions of these bodies, not only for their historical

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value, but also because the decisions express rather clearly what the Reformed intended family visitation to be.

The very first synod of the Reformed churches of The Netherlands, the Synod of Wezel, 1568, called for weekly family visitation by the elders.

No doubt therefore their (the elders') office demands that each diligently keep watch over his own parish or district, and visit the members under their care from house to house at least once a week, and furthermore as often as is the custom according to the regulation of each church. This shall be done especially close to the time of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They shall faithfully investigate whether they (the church members) manifest themselves uprightly in walk and conduct, in the duties of godliness, in the faithful instruction of their households in the matter of family prayers, morning and evening prayers, and such like matters; they shall admonish them to these duties with consideration, but also in all seriousness and according to conditions and circumstances; they shall admonish them to steadfastness, or strengthen them to patience, or spur them on to a serious-minded fear of God; such as need comfort and admonition, and if need be they shall report a matter to their fellow elders, who together with them are appointed to exercise discipline; and besides these matters they shall correct that which can be corrected, according to the gravity of the sin committed; nor shall they neglect, each one in his district, to encourage them to send their children to catechism.

The Synod of Dordrecht, 1574, ruled:

The ministers shall pay careful attention at home visitation of the members of the congregation whether they have detrimental books in their homes so that they may exhort them to get rid of such books.

The Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, decided:

Before the Lord's Supper ministers and elders shall visit the members of the church, especially the weakest ones and those who need it the most, so that they may, as much as in them lies by teaching, admonition, comforting, and removal of difficulties that have arisen,

properly prepare the congregation for this sacred activity.

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, decided:

The office of elder is, besides what is said above that they have in common with the ministers of the Word, to exercise supervision that the ministers together with their other helpers and deacons faithfully exercise their office, and when the celebration of the Lord's Supper is approaching, to visit those who have planned to partake so that they may better prepare themselves for it.

The Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1586, ruled:

The office of elder is...according to the circumstances of time and place to conduct family visiting for the edification of the congregation insofar as this can be done before and after the Lord's Supper, to teach, and also to exhort others to (profess) the Christian religion.

The decision of the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-19, is essentially the same as Article 23 of our Church Order.

PURPOSE OF FAMILY VISITATION

An important question is: "What really is the purpose of family visitation?"

Prof. Hoeksema writes:

We may summarize the purpose (of family visitation) as follows:

- 1) To inquire into the spiritual condition and well-being, the life and walk, of the sheep.
- 2) To inquire into their knowledge of the truth and into their growth in grace and knowledge.
- 3) To give comfort, guidance, admonition, and warning, according to need.
- 4) Thus to render to the individual members, the families, and the congregation as a whole spiritual benefit and upbuilding in the faith and in a sanctified walk ("Family Visitation," PRTJ, Dec., 1972, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 36).

Dr. P.Y. DeJong states a threefold purpose to family visitation in his book *Taking Heed To the Flock*: 1) Encouraging the faith of the individual believer; 2) Pointing out the believer's Christian obligations in home and in society; and 3) Pro-

moting the proper relation between the individual believer and the church.

The Church Order specifies at least four purposes for family visitation. First, family visitation is an important means by which the elders guard the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is often forgotten that this was one of the main reasons for the introduction of the practice in the first place. Still today this ought to be an important purpose of family visitation, that by means of family visitation the elders are assured that the confessing members of the congregation are worthy partakers of the Lord's Table. For this reason, too, family visitation provides an excellent opportunity for the elders to confront the young people with their calling to make public confession of faith and partake of the sacrament.

Article 23 lists two other purposes: "For the edification of the churches," and "to comfort and instruct the members."

Article 55 of the Church Order adds a fourth purpose for family visitation: "To ward off false doctrine and errors."

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT FAMILY VISITATION?

There can be no doubt that primarily family visitation is the work of the elders, the ruling elders. Mention of family visitation is made in Article 23 which describes the office of the elders, not in Article 16 which describes the office of the ministers. In its origins, too, family visitation was primarily the work of the elders.

For this reason the elders ought not to shirk this duty or delegate it to the ministers. Neither ought they to suppose that they are not qualified to do the work of family visitation, or that the ministers are more qualified. This is not at all the case. From a certain point of view the elders are more qualified than the ministers to do this work. For the most part they have lived many years in the congregation, probably grown up in it. They know the weaknesses, problems, and needs of the membership better than the ministers often do.

Besides, there are good benefits for the elders themselves, as well as for the congregation, when the elders conduct family visitation.

Nevertheless, family visitation does also belong to the work of the ministers. As already pointed out, it is mentioned as a duty of the ministers in the "Ministerial Call Letter" and in the questions for Church Visitation. Article 55 of the *Church Order* calls both the elders and the ministers to ward off false doctrines and errors by conducting family visitation.

The ministers ought to assist the elders in family visitation, therefore. The elders must be careful,

however, that the demands of family visitation do not become so great upon the minister that they begin to interfere with the other equally important aspects of his calling. In a congregation of 30 families or fewer the minister may well be able to go out on all the family visits. But in congregations much larger than 30 families, the elders ought to take half of the visits, and in congregations larger than 70 or 80 families the elders ought to take two-thirds of the visits. This way every other year, or at least every third year, each family will have the minister for family visitation.

As far as the frequency of the visits is concerned, strictly speaking, Article 23 calls for as many as eight visits per family per year — one before and one after each celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, the article does add the qualifying phrase, "...as time and circumstances may demand...."

Two questions for Church Visitation speak of at least one official visit of each family of the congregation in the course of the year: "Is family visitation conducted faithfully, so that each family receives an official visit once a year?" This is the practice generally followed in our churches. □ *...to be continued*

*When Thou
Sittest In
Thy House*
Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers

The Reformed Family: Women in the Church

And they remembered his words...It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles (Luke 24).

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen (Mark 16).

There are some things which are very dated. This was made clear to me when my kindergarten class was asked to identify the sound of an alarm clock ringing on a cassette tape. For the past three years now, no student has been able to identify that sound. This is understandable. Today, most of the par-

ents of these children wake up to digitally-controlled, soothing music or to some talk-show host holding forth on Saddam Hussein and the latest gasoline price increase. Some even stir to the sophisticated beeps and whirs of their own wristwatches. The jangle of the alarm clock is an anachronism; it has been relegated to the past along with the rug beater (in antique circles, humorously known as the wife beater), coffee perking over an open flame, the apron, and the soon-to-be-shelved typewriter.

But unlike the antiquated alarm clock, some things are timeless. These are the missives and directives laid down in God's Word. These directives, upon the peril of our soul, may never be stuffed into a musty chest in the attic or tossed carelessly into the trash bin. The closing words in the Book of Revelation warn, "If any man shall add

unto these things....If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy..." certain doom is his.

One of the norms of God's Word which is being viciously attacked today is the place of women in the church. With little concern for the past history of the church, and with even less care for the future, many are determined to breathe new, however deadly, winds of doctrine into the offices of the church. The offices of the church (minister, elder, and deacon), once sacrosanct to men, are being opened to women after years of subjugation and repression. Or so the proponents of women in the church offices would have us believe.

Like the animals in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, we should be suspicious of a Squealer-the-pig "frisking from side to side" (p. 81),

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explaining in obscure double-talk the freshly-painted rules on the barn.

For centuries, the Reformed church has understood a day to mean a day. (A concept which kindergartners understand also.) Today, great and learned scientists "frisking from side to side" tell us that a day doesn't mean a 24-hour stretch of time, but rather, great, extended periods of time, even millions of years.

For centuries men and women in the Reformed church have understood Adam and Eve to be real people, created by God on the sixth day. Today, great and learned theologians "frisking from side to side" tell us that Adam and Eve are no more real than Hansel and Gretel.

For centuries men and women everywhere have pinned their hopes on a God-breathed, infallible Scripture. Today, a species called higher critics "frisking from side to side" tell us that some of The Book is authentic, some isn't. In other words, the entire Book is unreliable.

Is it any wonder then that the place of the woman in the church was destined to be turned upside down? And is it any wonder then that we of the Reformed persuasion will not listen to or believe these "seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1)? For they speak lies in hypocrisy to us; they subvert all the old and simple truths into corruptible heresies. And like Squealer-the-pig, with the women in office issue, these Scripture-tamperers have fallen off the ladder and quite a lot of white paint has splashed onto their faces.

What is our response to such bold and brazen assertions? Has God's mandate, long understood to be silence for women in the church, been misunderstood these 2000 years? Has the Reformed tradition and practice of limiting the offices in the church to men led us up a dead end street? Have we women all unwittingly contented ourselves with being second-rate citizens in the church these many years?

The church of Jesus Christ has always esteemed her women mem-

bers—and highly, too, because Christ esteems them highly. Roger Nicole, professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, says, "No book more appropriately supports the dignity and worth of women than the Bible; no teacher of world repute proves himself more supportive and friendly than the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Women, Authority & The Bible*, edited by Alvera Mickelsen). Women, conversely, have always been deeply religious creatures and eagerly receptive to the Gospel message.

Jesus, in His public ministry on earth, on more than one occasion, extolled the faith and spiritual virtues of specific women. He had compassion on the widow of Nain (Luke 7). He graciously accepted Mary's gift of costly perfume over against the criticism of wanton expense (John 12). In Matthew 21:31,32, Jesus says that the prostitutes will enter the kingdom before Jewish religious leaders because they accepted the preaching of John the Baptist.

Jesus spent much time in Bethany at the home of his friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The Son of God thought it not beneath Him to discuss kingdom matters with these two women. He listened to their concerns; He answered their questions; He even refereed their petty squabbles (Luke 10:38-42). John 11:5 says that Jesus loved these two sisters.

When Jesus was ready to open the doors of salvation to the Samaritans, it was to a woman that He revealed His true identity and Gospel intent. The woman, in turn, ran into the city witnessing to the authority of this soul-searching Rabbi, bringing back her relatives and friends to hear His electrifying message. Scripture tells us that many Samaritans believed on Christ because of the testimony of this woman (John 4:39).

Many women accompanied Jesus during His ministry in Judea. Jesus did not send them back home nor hinder their endeavors in any way (Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40, 41). However, He never appointed one of these God-fearing women to His

select band of twelve disciples. Later, when He named these same men to apostleship, no women were given that distinction; nor were they entrusted with the Great Commission which accompanied the office, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16). Jesus was careful not to do this. This was not an oversight on Christ's part. Later, when a twelfth apostle was named to assume Judas Iscariot's defunct role, what an opportunity was Christ's to name someone, say, Mary Magdalene, to this capacity. Surely, she was one of the highly qualified ones among the 120 believers who huddled in the upper room. What an appointment that would have been! The Magdalene was not just an eye-witness to the resurrection (a requirement for apostleship); she was the FIRST eye-witness of Christ's resurrection. To her Christ had said on that glad resurrection morning, "Mary....Go to my brethren..." (John 20:16,17). What an apostle she would have been to spread the Gospel! But, alas, Christ did not choose women for this task, not even such an illustrious one as Mary Magdalene.

The ready receptivity of women to the Gospel message is also evidenced in the apostle Paul's missionary work. When Paul entered the city of Philippi, he headed for the riverside where the local women were accustomed to pray. Here Lydia, a woman of some importance, was converted and assisted Paul's labor in this city through her hospitality.

Other women, too, assisted Paul in his labors just as women today assist their husband/minister, husband/elder in church work. Women, in the manner of Priscilla, Phebe, Junia, Mary, and Julia (Romans 16), are called upon by their husbands or the local minister or the elders and deacons to assist the needy, explain the godly conduct of mature Christian women to new converts, open their homes to Bible study groups, and counsel and encourage saint and stranger. "Early church evidence indicates that women did much if not all of their teaching in homes, and that they

primarily instructed other women, either prospective converts or catechumens" (Clark, Stephen B., *Man and Woman in Christ*, p.107).

But it is Paul's epistles, even more than the historical account of his missionary work (detailed in the Book of Acts), which are being interpreted under new lamps of scrutiny. Particularly, these accounts on the woman's place in the church are found in I Corinthians 11, I Corinthians 14, and I Timothy 2.

Because William Tyndale's desire to put the Holy Scriptures in the hand of every "plow girl" was fulfilled, this is what I read in these passages: "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak...for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." And if this is not to one's liking, I Timothy 2:11 states: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection." Furthermore, according to Titus, all the teaching that women do is of the younger women. And what they teach has to do with domestic matters.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt as to Paul's commitment to marriage and homemaking as the proper vocation for women (I Timothy 2:15; I Timothy 4:1-5). If Paul had one important message for women, it seems to me that it is plainly spelled out in I Timothy 5:14: "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."

I do not know why women are prohibited from preaching or occupying the elders' or deacons' bench. Some students of Scripture maintain that since Eve was deceived first in the fall, God has forever restricted her church activities (I Timothy 2:11-14). We may not question the reason God has not allowed the offices in the church to be exercised by women. Just as Naaman the leper might not question why the waters of Damascus were not as effective as the waters of the Jordan River to heal leprosy; just as Abraham might not question why he had to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah — a three-

day journey from his home — rather than behind his own tent in the back yard. When Jehovah speaks, we have only one duty — listen. Listen well, and obey.

So, what is a woman's calling in the church?

In Hebrews 11, the soul-stirring passage on the heroes of faith, there are two, only two, women mentioned by name. (Strikingly, Deborah, often cited as a church leader in Old Testament history, is not mentioned, although Barak, her captain, is.) The first woman mentioned by name is Sarah, and the second is Rahab, Jericho's harlot. And why were these two women included in this honored list? For the two most important virtues which any God-fearing woman in the church should covet: Sarah, for conceiving a child; Rahab, for her gracious act of hospitality in receiving the spies.

It is as true today as it was thousands of years ago that women in the church, including wives of bishops and deacons, must be hospitable. How life in the church would cripple along without the warmth and loving service of her women in opening heart and home to saint and stranger. The woman has always excelled at this high calling because God has uniquely gifted her with the necessary virtues. And in so doing she has greatly assisted in keeping peace and harmony and the closest fel-

lowship among believers. Rahab's hospitality was literally her salvation. Receiving and hiding the Hebrew spies was the difference between physical as well as spiritual life and death for her. Like Rahab, we women are "not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

And what more can be said about the supremely high calling of the woman in the church to be a Sarah, conceiving by faith the priceless wealth of the church, her sons and daughters. It is a calling second to none. Martin Luther says: "The most important vocation any man or woman can have is raising a family. Married people should know that they can perform no better and no more useful work for God, Christianity, the world, themselves, and their children, than by bringing up their children well...."

A woman's role in the church, with or without a hat on (I Corinthians 11:13), has not changed all that much through the years. Older women still teach the younger women in the home context how to be good Christian wives and mothers (Titus 2:3-5). And obedient women from every walk of life keep silent in the church, not because men have clapped a hand over their mouths, but willingly, for God's sake. □

Christ Is All

We are dust, and God rememb'reth,
Yea, our frame He knoweth well.
But His mercy's everlasting,
Like a deep exhaustless well.

When we know our utter weakness
Full dependence on the Lord,
Trusting to the Spirit's guidance,
And are feeding on His Word.

Then it is we're safe from stumbling,
Leaning on His own strong arm,
And if thus we cross the desert,
He will shield us from all harm.

— SB, April 1, 1932

Guest Article

Prof. Herman Hanko

News From the Contact Committee

Many events have taken place in the work of the Committee for Contact With Foreign Churches, and it is time to report to our people on some of these activities.

In the latter part of August and the first part of September, Prof. David Engelsma traveled with his wife to England to speak at a Family Conference in Wales on August 31 to September 2. On the Sunday of August 26 Professor Engelsma preached for the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Larne, Northern Ireland. While there he baptized two children of members of the Fellowship. The Conference itself, held at a beautiful Conference Grounds near Abergele, Wales, was sponsored by the British Reformed Fellowship. Prof. Engelsma spoke five times from Ephesians 5:22-6:4 on the Reformed view of marriage and the family. Twenty-five to thirty adults were present at the Conference along with some children. Most of the people from Larne also attended. Prof. Engelsma reported to the Contact Committee that his addresses were well received and much interest in the Reformed faith was generated. During times of fellowship between the speeches and sermons many different subjects were discussed, not the least important of which was the relation of the Christian to civil government. The British Reformed Fellowship is an organization formed for the promotion of the Reformed faith in the British Isles and will be

an important organization for the work of a missionary when the Lord provides us with such a man.

While Prof. Engelsma was in England, he spoke also for a group of about 20 people in Bristol on the sovereignty of God in salvation and genuine Reformed missions. This group was hastily assembled and the turnout was encouraging to those in Bristol who have long worked and prayed for a Reformed congregation to be established there. Mr. Tony Horne arranged the meeting. Those who attended the International Conference held in First Church last June will remember Mr. Horne, who was present at the Conference. He is the publisher of a small paper called *The Presbyterian*. If any of our readers are interested in learning of events in the British Isles, they ought to subscribe to this paper.

This will probably be the last work of the Committee for Contact in Great Britain for some time. The work there has been transferred to the Domestic Mission Committee, which committee is working with Hudsonville congregation in the calling of a missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland and the British Isles.

On November 8 and 9 a meeting was held in Atlanta, Georgia of NAPARC (The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). Our churches have been invited to send an observer to this meeting, and the Contact Committee appointed Prof. Robert Decker to attend. The member churches of this organization are the following: Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Christian Reformed Church, Korean American Presbyterian Church, Orthodox Presbyte-

rian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. Eighteen other churches, including our own denomination, will be sending observers. At the date of this writing, Prof. Decker has not yet left for this meeting. We will have opportunity to report to you on his trip in a later issue of *The Standard Bearer*.

Last June Rev. Bernard Woudenberg made a trip to Romania and Hungary. Although he went for other purposes than as a representative of our churches, he discussed his trip with the Committee for Contact, and, upon his return, submitted a detailed report of his trip. He informed us that he had opportunity to visit with some of the key leaders in the Reformed churches in these countries to discuss with them their own heritage and problems. He also visited two Seminaries in Hungary and one in Romania. He found churches which had held up well, spiritually, under the adversities of communist rule, and who are now struggling with problems which arise out of their newly acquired freedom. He found a people who have clung throughout their history to the Heidelberg Catechism as their creedal basis, and he was able to distribute several copies of *The Triple Knowledge* among the leaders. In reporting to our Committee on his trip, Rev. Woudenberg opened up several lines of contact which the Contact Committee is now in the process of pursuing.

Preparations have also been made for Rev. Woudenberg to go to Burnie, Tasmania for four months. As our readers know, the Contact Committee has been trying to ob-

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tain supply for Burnie since the time Prof. H.C. Hoeksema returned to this country. The Lord has now given us the opportunity to send Rev. Woudenberg. He will be leaving, the Lord willing, December 4 and will be staying till the first of April. Needless to say, the saints in Burnie are eagerly looking forward to his coming. For the most part, they listen to tapes of sermons in their worship services which are prepared in our various congregations here in the states. We commend Rev. Woudenberg's work in Tasmania to the prayers of God's people.

In the meantime, the contacts between us and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church continue. Two of the ministers of the EPC, Revs. Chris Coleborn and Philip Burley, were present at our Conference last June and also attended our Synod meetings. In a meeting with representatives of our Contact Committee, these two brethren gave some suggestions on how we could make our contacts more significant. Various matters relating to their plans to send their students to our Seminary for instruction were also discussed. While, for the present, it is

impossible to have full sister-church relations with the EPC of Australia, we are exploring what precisely our Constitution means by "less than sister-church relations." Their Contact Committee and our Contact Committee are also discussing the whole question of purity of worship, one of the differences between us. Both Contact Committees have submitted papers outlining their respective positions. The original papers are being published in our Acts of Synod, 1990.

The Synod of our churches which met in June, 1990 decided to send one delegate from the Contact Committee and one delegate from the Foreign Mission Committee to Singapore to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern. Decisions were made in our Contact Committee and Foreign Mission Committee to send Rev. Russ Dykstra and Prof. Herman Hanko. They are making plans to go from December 18 to January 14.

At a meeting between the Contact Committee and Revs. Lau Chin Kwee and Jaikishin Mahtani, held at the time of Synod, our two brethren from Singapore explained to us the work that is being done in

Singapore. Particularly, they discussed with us the opportunities they have to do mission work, especially in India, and the pressing need for the establishment of a Reformed Theological School in Singapore for the training of ministers. Rev. Mahtani has twice visited India and finds there an open door to the gospel. A Committee has also been formed by the Classis of the ERCS to oversee theological instruction. These two matters especially have a high priority, and this is the reason why one delegate is going from our Theological School and one from our Foreign Mission Committee. While there are a number of problems which have to be worked out, the labors of the ERCS are exciting. Not only is a door to the spread of the gospel standing open in India, but a theological school in Singapore could, under God's blessing, be a powerful tool in the spread of the gospel in Southeast Asia. A report will be given to you after the return of the delegates.

Money has been collected in our churches for needy causes throughout the world which warrant our help. Recently a check for \$2,000.00 was sent to the Measbro Dyke congregation of Barnsley, England of which Rev. Philip Rawson is pastor. Rev. Rawson was also present at our Conference in June and many of our people were able to meet him and speak with him. Rev. Rawson distributes Protestant Reformed literature throughout England and defends vigorously the doctrines of sovereign grace.

These are some of the more important activities with which the Committee has been busy since Synod met last June. As apostasy spreads rapidly in so many of the churches in the world, God preserves groups, often small, of saints whose desire it is to maintain the truth of Scripture. Some of these groups we have the privilege of knowing. With them we desire greater and closer contact. We earnestly seek the prayers of God's people as we struggle with the work, for we know that without God's blessing, all our labors are in vain. □

Father's Care

Is this the way, my Father? 'Tis, my child.
Thou must pass through the tangled, dreary wild,
If thou wouldst reach the city undefiled —
Thy peaceful home above.

But enemies are round. Yes, child, I know
That where thou least expect'st thou'lt find a foe;
But victor thou shalt prove o'er all below —
Only, seek strength above.

My Father, it is dark. Child, take my hand;
Cling close to me, — I'll lead thee through the land;
Trust my all-seeing care, — so shalt thou stand
'Mid glory bright above.

My footsteps seem to slide. Child, only raise
Thine eye to me, then in these slippery ways,
I will hold up thy goings; thou shalt praise
Me for each step above.

Father, I'm weary! Child, then lean thy head
Upon my breast; it was my love that spread
Thy rugged path; hope on, till I have said,
Rest, rest for aye, above!

— SB, September 15, 1932

All Around Us

■ The Continuing Decline of the GKN

Evidence of the continuing decline of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), in which most of us have our spiritual roots, is evident from two decisions of its latest synod. With only nine delegates voting against the motion, the synod passed a decision making the second worship service on the Lord's day optional. The synod changed Article 70 of its Church Order so that it now reads: "On the Lord's Day, the consistory shall call the congregation together for worship, if possible twice, but at least once, and further, at least once on Christmas, Good Friday, and Ascension Day." Given the fact that so few attend second services in Reformed churches in our country it probably will not be long before these too are considered optional.

The GKN also decided that the Church Order reference to "mission to the Jews," is no longer acceptable. The reason? Each religion, including Judaism, has its own legitimate way to God. Jews, therefore, are no longer to be considered subjects for conversion. Rather Christians and Jews ought to dialogue with one another.

Unconverted Jews deny that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). There is nothing to dialogue about with the unconverted Jew (or Gentile, for that matter!). All that the church can and must say to the unconverted is:

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"Repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!"

*Centraal Weekblad
The Banner*

■ Westminster May Lose Accreditation

The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, one of six regional accrediting agencies in the country, gave Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia until September 15 to "show cause why its accreditation should not be removed because the school has no women on its 24-member board of trustees." Westminster has replied that the threat is a violation of religious rights. We hope Westminster will stand fast on this issue.

Christianity Today

■ Book Claims Woman Wrote Part of the Bible

Liberal higher critics of the Bible have long ago denied that Moses was the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to write the Pentateuch. Rather, they say, there are four different human authors. A recent publication, called *The Book of J*, now claims that one of these authors was a woman. The author argues that J was probably a woman "because the most striking characters in J's early writings were women, not men, and that much of the writing is from a feminine perspective."

We guess we can expect such nonsense in our day. May God give us grace to hold fast to the Bible's own testimony as to its authorship.

The Detroit News

■ Korean CR Churches Disturbed

The women-in-office issue is so critical to them that an emergency meeting of the Korean Church Council, which represents all the Korean churches within the CRC, was called in mid-September in Cerritos, California. The Rev. John E. Kim, considered to be the titular head of the Korean churches, said that his council at Los Angeles Korean Christian Reformed Church has already decided to leave the CRC if the Synod's 1990 decision on women in office is ratified in 1992. There are some 44 congregations with 7,000 members in the Korean Church Council. Some estimate that about half of these churches and members are so disturbed by this issue that they will leave the CRC.

The Banner

■ Thoughts Worth Pondering

Commenting on the hermeneutics and higher criticism of the Bible some fifty years ago, Dr. J. Gresham Machen said, "I verily believe that the new Reformation, for which we long, will be like the Reformation of the 16th century in that it will mean a return to plain common honesty and common sense. At the end of the middle ages the Bible had become a book with seven seals; it had been covered with the rubbish of the fourfold sense of Scripture and all that. The Reformation brushed all that rubbish away. So again today the Bible has been covered with an elaborate business of 'interpretation' that is worse in some respects than anything that the middle ages

could produce. The new Reformation will brush all that away. There will be a re-discovery of the great Reformation doctrine of the perspicuity (clarity, RDD) of Scripture; men will make the astonishing discovery that the Bible is a plain book addressed to plain men, and that it means exactly what it says."

Calvin Miller, in his book, *The Taste of Joy*, makes this comment: "Many Christians are only 'Christaholics' and not disciples at all. Disciples are cross-bearers; they seek Christ. Christaholics seek happiness. Disciples dare to discipline themselves, and the demands they place on themselves leave them enjoying the happiness of their growth. Christaholics are es-

capists looking for a shortcut to nirvana. Like drug addicts, they are trying to 'bomb out' of their depressing world. There is no automatic joy. Christ is not a happiness capsule; he is the way to the Father. But the way to the Father is not a carnival ride in which we sit and do nothing while we are whisked through the various spiritual sensations." □

Repentance

On bended knees, replete with godly grief,
See where the mourner kneels to seek relief,
No "God, I thank Thee," freezes on his tongue,
For works of merit that to Him belong;
Deep in his soul conviction's ploughshare rings,
And to the surface his corruption brings;
He loathes himself, in lowest dust he lies,
And all abased "Unclean, unclean," he cries,
From his full heart pours forth the gushing plea,
"God of the lost, be merciful to me!"
The light of life descends in heavenly rays,
And angels shout, and sing, "Behold, he prays."

— SB, August 15, 1932

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

How time flies. It has been over ten months since our last church profile. Well, this issue seems like a slow news month, so let's include a profile of the Hudsonville PRC.

July 26, 1926 is a date which brings pleasant thoughts to the members of the Hudsonville PRC in Michigan. It was on that date that about 25 families banding together decided to organize as a congregation.

The first service was held in what was known as Spoelman's barn. Cold weather forced the congregation to abandon that place, and services were then held in the house which later served as Hudsonville's first parsonage. Realizing the need for a more suitable edifice,

the congregation decided to build a church of their own.

A budget of \$25.00 per week, amounting to \$1.00 per family, was adopted, and their first house of worship was dedicated on April 1, 1927.

Hudsonville now had a church, but as yet no pastor was available to lead them. Almost three years passed before the Lord answered the prayers of the congregation. On October 3, 1929, Rev. Gerrit Vos was installed as their first pastor. In 1932 Rev. DeJong became their next pastor. He remained until 1941 when Rev. Bernard Kok occupied the pulpit. Soon after Rev. Kok left in 1947 for the Holland congregation, Rev. Gerrit Vos returned for the second time. He remained until sickness forced his retirement in 1965. His pastorate was followed by that of Rev. H. Veldman and of Rev. C. Hanko. And in 1977 Rev. G. VanBaren became

Hudsonville's 7th and present pastor.

In 1975 the congregation decided to build a larger house of worship. Ground-breaking ceremonies took place in the spring of 1976, with dedication coming the following January.

The congregation now numbers around 160 families with a total membership of 600.

Among the activities the membership supports is the "Reformed Book Outlet," a small Christian bookstore located in a plaza in Hudsonville. This store opened in 1985 and continues to serve as an excellent bridge between the church and community.

The congregation is also presently busy with the work of calling a man to serve as missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland.

Hudsonville's make-up has changed over the years from a mostly rural congregation to one

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

which still includes farmers, but also builders, teachers, doctors, and factory workers. One thing has remained constant however: the close communion of the saints. Despite its size, Hudsonville remains a close church; and by God's grace she will go into the 90s as a faithful witness.

EVANGELISM NEWS

The Council of the South Holland PRC in South Holland, IL made a decision to send their pastor, Rev. C. Terpstra, and Mr. Ed Stouwie, Sr. to Boise, Idaho for a weekend to do investigative work among a group of people who are seeking affiliation with a Reformed denomination. This request came through South Holland's Evangelism Committee which has had contact with these people for close to a year.

CONGREGATIONAL NEWS

The Congregation of the PRC in Hull, IA adopted a proposal to purchase the Andy Scholten property that was adjacent to the property of the Hull PR Christian School. This property was purchased with the view to building a new church on that site, the Lord willing.

MINISTERIAL CALLS

The Congregation of our Kalamazoo PRC in Kalamazoo, MI, the calling church for a missionary to Venice, FL, has called Rev. R. Dykstra to serve in that capacity.

On Sunday evening, October 21, the congregation of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI met after the service and extended a call to Rev. Kortering to serve as missionary to the island of Jamaica.

And on that same night the congregation of our Hudsonville, MI PRC met to call a missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland. A call was extended to Rev. M. Kamps. □

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 2, 1990 our parents, MR. and MRS. BERNIE LUBBERS, celebrated their 40th Wedding Anniversary. We thank our gracious Lord for blessing us with faithful, God-fearing parents. We pray that our heavenly Father will continue to strengthen them in their way and give them joy in Him.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His covenant and to those that remember His commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17, 18).

Jerry and Bonnie Lubbers

Scott, Jeremy, Eric, Jessica, Melissa
Linda Lubbers

Bruce and Deb Lubbers

Jonathan, Joshua, Joseph, Carmen,
Carrie

Gord and Sue Lubbers

Ed and Melanie Hekstra

Amanda, Amy, Jared, Laura

Ken and Machele Elzinga

Jason, Hollie, Rachel, Nicholas

Brad and Heather Lubbers

Doug Lubbers Hudsonville, Michigan

NOTICE!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 1991 at the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by December 10, 1990.

Jon J. Huiskens

Stated Clerk

NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS:

Are you moving soon? Changes of addresses should be sent to our business office at least two weeks before the change becomes effective to assure receiving *The Standard Bearer* without interruption.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice in God's covenant faithfulness shown to our dear parents and grandparents UILKE and JOANNE TOLSMA as they celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary, the Lord willing, on December 6, 1990. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for giving us God-fearing parents and for the Christian love and instruction we have received from them in these many years. It is our prayer and hope that the Lord will continue to keep and bless them in the years that He may give them. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9).

Art and Helen Tolsma (Edmonton)

Tracy, Philip, Ryan, Jason,
Benjamin, Travis, Loralie

Fred and Netty Tolsma (Edmonton)

Russell, Rachel, and one child in
glory

Rick and Sharon Tolsma (Loveland, CO)

Kimberly, Jennifer, Michelle,
Stephanie

Brian and Carolyn Tolsma (Lacombe)

Derek, Cindy, Curtis, Justin, Julie

Irwin and Yvonne Tolsma (Lacombe)

Melissa, Steven
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of the Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Theresa Lenting and family in the death of MR. WILLIAM LENTING on October 10, 1990.

May they be comforted by the words of the Lord in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Rev. C. Terpstra, President
Gil F. VanBaren, Clerk