

THE STANDARD BEARER

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

Backsliding is a grievous and ugly thing. When the Christian backslides he loses interest in God and in His blessed Son, Jesus Christ. He no longer makes God the supreme object of his affection and the reason for all his glorying. When the child of God backslides he forgets the blessedness of his salvation.

See "Spiritual Decline" — page 175

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In This Issue...

Jonathan Edwards once wrote that the "religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in His Word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, 'fervent in spirit,' and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion...." And he added that "if we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigour in the actings of our inclinations so requisite as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious."

Rev. denHartog, in this issue, says much the same thing when he calls backsliding a "grievous and ugly thing." He pointedly reminds us too that God's promise that in Christ we are eternally secure does not exempt us from the possibility of falling, of backsliding, of being lukewarm. Not, he continues, is spiritual decline to be attributed to any deficiency in the grace of God, but to the presence of the old man of sin in every child of God.

Even in a David. Even therefore while one is able outwardly to cover a state of spiritual decline with a going through the motions of the life of a Christian. How about us? How much vigor, how much fervor, is there, in our spiritual lives? Do we *pursue* righteousness, as we are admonished to do in Rev. Slopsema's "Meditation"? Are we *running* in the race? Are we *striving* for the mastery? And do we do so, like Paul, by bringing all into subjection to Christ?

Or, will honest introspection reveal rather a state of spiritual lethargy? "We are in a state of spiritual decline," writes Rev. denHartog, "when" For more, read his article under "In His Fear." □

– D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

Pursuing Righteousness Unto Life

As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.
— Proverbs 9:11

In which direction are you headed?

There are only two possibilities. You are either headed in the direction of life, or you are headed in the direction of death. A third possibility there is not.

This becomes apparent from the proverb we consider in this meditation.

We find in this proverb an example of Hebrew parallelism. There are two phrases that run parallel to each other, the second phrase expressing the opposite of the first. To interpret such a parallelism we must explain the first phrase in light of the second.

But notice that the idea of direction is very prevalent in this proverb. It speaks of the fact that righteousness tends to (literally, towards) life. In turn, he who pursues evil pursues it to (literally, towards) his own death.

Two directions there are: life or death.

In which direction are you headed?

* * * * *

Righteousness and evil are contrasted.

The word "evil" is very descriptive. It means to make a tumult. It describes evil as that which turns upside down the established order of God in society.

God has given us His law to regulate our lives both with respect to God and with respect to one another.

Most think that this law is too narrow and restrictive. Most think that this law robs life of its joy, makes life dull and uninteresting.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The law of God is good. For when it is followed, it so structures man's life that he is able to live in peace with God and his fellow man. Obedience to the law enables you to enjoy a wonderful life with God.

Obedience to the law also affords great joy in your marriage, in your home, in your church, and in many other areas of your life.

Evil is viewed as turning upside down the order God has established for man in His law. It emphasizes a trampling underfoot God's law, so that life is thrown into chaos and confusion.

To this evil, mankind is prone. In fact, man is capable of nothing but this evil, unless he is born again in Jesus Christ. Witness how many marriages are ending in divorce. Witness all the broken homes and lives in our society. Witness all

strife between various classes in society and among the nations. Witness all the suffering and misery that results. All this stands as a sure testimony of the evil in which mankind lives.

Over against this evil, this proverb speaks of righteousness.

If evil is a trampling underfoot God's law, righteousness is the keeping of God's law.

The righteousness of which this parable speaks certainly does not find its origins in mankind. Quite obviously, mankind is not able of himself to live in righteousness. Nor is he able to appear before God in righteousness. Since the fall, he has become prone to all evil.

This righteousness finds its origin in God. It was conceived by God in eternity. It was obtained by God for His people through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is freely given to His people through faith in Christ Jesus.

There are two aspects of this righteousness: a legal aspect and a spiritual aspect.

Viewed legally this righteousness places us in God's courtroom. God is our Judge, who passes judgment on our lives every day. Daily we appear in His courtroom to hear His verdict. Were we to stand before God alone, God would declare us guilty of violating His law. For daily we sin. Sometimes we sin horribly. And God, the all-knowing One, sees it all. Hence, should we come into God's courtroom alone, God's verdict would be, guilty.

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But God has provided a righteousness for His people in Jesus Christ. In Christ God has paid for all their sins. He has also provided for them in Christ a perfect obedience. And when His people appear before Him clinging by faith to this righteousness, God accounts the righteousness of Jesus Christ as theirs, so that they appear righteous before Him. And God also declares them to be such.

But there is also a spiritual aspect to this righteousness.

To be declared legally righteous by God does not depend on our righteous living; neither does it change the way we live. Were God simply to declare His people righteous in Jesus Christ and do no more, they would still live in evil, as the rest of mankind.

However, God will not allow this. All those whom He declares righteous in Jesus Christ, God also changed spiritually so that they begin to live righteously. What a glorious change this is! God so changes the lives of His own that spiritually they become new men and women. It is as though they have been born all over again. Whereas before they lived in evil, they now live in obedience to God's law.

Yes, it is true that the transformation is not complete in this life. The works of God to change the way His people live are not complete until they reach heavenly glory. There is still much in them that is sinful. Yet they have been gloriously changed so that they begin to live in obedience to all of God's commandments.

Such is the righteousness of which this proverb speaks.

* * * * *

We find in this proverb a contrast also between life and death.

Following the implications of the parallelism we find in this proverb, we are taught that, whereas righteousness tends to life, so does evil tend to death.

The death referred to here is eternal death, the death of hell. This death consists of suffering the wrath of God on account of sin. Man bears this wrath of God already in this life. We have already

seen that, by trampling underfoot God's good commandments, mankind brings chaos and confusion to life. He destroys his marriage. He destroys his home. He brings trouble and sorrow upon himself. This we must understand to be the judgment of God upon mankind for his great evil.

However, in life God holds back the full manifestation of His wrath upon mankind. In hell there is no holding back. In hell God pours out the fullness of His wrath so that man knows nothing but God's wrath for ever and ever. Hell is the ultimate ruin of man. It is eternal death!

To this death all evil tends. That simply means that evil leads you in the direction of death. Evil eventually results in death.

In contrast to death there is life.

The life referred to in this parable is eternal life. This life consists in the glorious enjoyment of God's friendship and fellowship in Jesus Christ. Many scoff at such an idea. It has been mockingly called "pie in the sky." However, anyone who has at all tasted God's friendship and lived in His fellowship knows the great joy it brings. The pleasures of this world pale in comparison to it.

To this life all righteousness tends. Simply put, this means that the possession of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ will most assuredly bring you into the enjoyment of eternal life. Appearing righteous before God in Jesus Christ in God's courtroom gives you the right to this life. Being righteous in your living through the power of Jesus Christ brings you into the actual enjoyment of this life. As you live righteously in the midst of the world, you begin to enjoy the great blessings of God's friendship and fellowship. One day you will enjoy these things completely and fully in heavenly glory.

* * * * *

He that pursues evil pursues it to his own death.

To pursue evil is to delight in it, so that you follow after it, seek it out, and indulge in it as much as possible.

We are called not to pursue evil. We are warned by God to avoid that which is evil, to flee from it, and to keep ourselves as far away from it as possible.

In spite of this warning, the world in which we live is pursuing evil with all its energy. That is why evil abounds in our society.

Those that are pursuing evil will pursue it to their own death. Of course! We have just seen that evil tends towards death, results in death. From this it only follows that those who pursue this evil throughout life and turn not away from it will pursue it all the way into hell.

Are you pursuing evil?

If you are, by all means repent. Turn from evil and pursue after righteousness.

To pursue righteousness is to seek after the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, that you may obtain it and live in it. One pursues the righteousness of God when he comes to God with his miserable sins, confesses them with godly sorrow, and seeks to be made right with God on the basis of the perfect work of Jesus on the cross.

One pursues the righteousness of God when he comes to God in the hour of temptation, seeking God's help in Jesus' name to stand against the wiles of the devil.

One pursues the righteousness of God when he comes to God daily, seeking God's help for Jesus' sake to live in all godliness.

Those who pursue after righteousness shall find it. The rule of God is this: Seek and ye shall find. This applies also to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

And, having found the righteousness of God, we will taste the unspeakable joys of life. We will begin to enjoy that life now and enjoy it completely in heaven. □

The Approach to Covenant Children (6)

The distinctive approach to covenant children taken by the Protestant Reformed does not involve us in "dormant regeneration" (cf. the editorial in the January 1, 1991 issue of the *Standard Bearer*).

But is the view of the baptized children that underlies this approach in reality the notion of "presumptive regeneration"? This was the question of Mr. Paul Wiersma in a letter in the November 15, 1990 issue of the *SB*. Dr. J. R. Beeke and Elder J. W. Beeke of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) charged that this is indeed the covenant conception of the PRC in a letter that appeared in the November 1, 1990 issue of the *SB*:

The NRC view disagrees with both presumptive and dormant regenerative views which imply regarding children as regenerate before fruits of regeneration are evident.

Presumptive regeneration is an aspect of the covenant conception associated with the Dutch Reformed theologian, Abraham Kuyper. It holds that the ground or basis of infant baptism is an assumption made by the parents and by the Reformed church, that all the natural children of believing parents are regenerated.

The PRC sharply repudiate presumptive regeneration. First, living and acting on the basis of presumption are always dangerous, even in everyday earthly life. The man who presumes will end up with egg on his face. To presume is to assume something without solid warrant. Second, Scripture itself

explodes the presumption that all the natural children of believers are regenerated elect, "for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). We think it foolish to presume what the Word of God declares to be false. Third, and most importantly, in the covenant thinking of the PRC the basis of infant baptism is something altogether different from the assumed regeneration of all the children. Presumptive regeneration makes the assumed regeneration of all the children the basis of infant baptism. For the PRC, however, the regeneration of the infants does not constitute the basis of their baptism. Although these Churches believe (not: presume) that as a rule the Spirit of Christ regenerates the elect infants early in childhood, not even the regeneration of elect infants constitutes the basis of infant baptism.

If we knew by special revelation from God that none of the infants was regenerated at the time of baptism, we would still baptize our children. The basis of infant baptism would not have been destroyed by this revelation.

The basis of infant baptism is the covenant promise of God to be our God not only personally but also in our generations. We baptize our babies because God includes our children with us in the covenant of grace. The covenantal practice of infant baptism, essential to the Reformed faith, does not, therefore, rest on a dubious, indeed false, assumption, but upon the sure promise of God revealed in Holy Scripture. A Protestant Reformed

church presumes nothing when she baptizes a child. Rather, she takes God at His Word that He is the God of believers' children. This is not presumption but faith.

To describe the covenant conception of the PRC as "presupposed regeneration" is a mistake. Not only does this ignore that, of all Reformed churches, the PRC insist that the grace of baptism is exclusively for the elect children, but it also overlooks the fact that for the PRC regeneration is not the basis of infant baptism.

Not "presupposed regeneration," but "the believed covenant promise" describes the PR position. Since the covenant promise flows from and carries out the decree of election according to the apostle in Romans 9:6-13, one might explain the PR baptism of infants as "trust in covenantal election." God has His eternal decree of election run in the line of the generations of believers.

It is because of the elect among them that God has all the infants baptized. It is because of the elect among them that God has all the children reared in the truth. And it is election that determines the approach that church and parents are to take to their children in the rearing of them.

The PRC have their eyes wide open to the teaching of the apostle in Romans 9:6ff. that the covenant promise does not extend to all the natural children of believing parents, but to some only. These Churches know very well that the sovereignty of God in salvation and

damnation applies also to the physical children of believing parents. In an age when even Reformed and Presbyterian churches are offended at the apostle's gospel that God hates certain children of believers and loves others before they are born, exclaiming, "Such a God is unrighteous," the PRC honor this sovereign God, submitting to the apostle's "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20). Of all the errors to which the PRC may be prone, this surely is not one of them that they presume that all the children of believers are regenerate.

But the presence of unconverted reprobate among our children does not rule out our viewing and approaching our children as elect, regenerated children in our rearing of them. For the approach is not determined by the carnal seed mixed in among the children, but by the godly seed according to election.

Approaching the baptized children as elect, regenerated children is not a presumption that must function as the basis of their baptism, but the manner of rearing them that arises from faith in the covenant promise.

This is the approach that office-bearers take toward the congregation. Although Reformed office-bearers know that hypocrites are invariably mixed with believers and their children, they view the congregation as the elect, believing, confessing church of Christ. The minister addresses the church, not with a cold, "congregation," or with a secular, "dear friends," or even with an analytical, "beloved saints and cursed sinners," but with the warm, Christian, believing, "beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ." This is the biblical approach. So Paul addressed the congregations (cf. I Cor. 1:2ff.).

This is true to everyday life, which is a parable of heavenly life. The farmer calls his field of ripening grain and rank weeds, "my wheatfield." Even if there are more weeds than grain, he calls it the wheatfield. This is his view of it. And this determines his approach to the field in fertilizing, cultivating, irrigating, and harvesting. The

weeds do not determine his activity in the field, but the wheat. Much less does the farmer allow the admitted presence of weeds to cause him to doubt that the wheat is truly wheat and even to regard the wheat as weeds, until the wheat proves differently.

Herman Hoeksema called this the "organic idea" of the covenant. Believers and their true, spiritual children form the living body of the covenant people of God. In the sphere of the covenant as the covenant takes form historically are also to be found adult hypocrites and the reprobate, carnal seed of believing parents. Their presence is acknowledged and dealt with. But the covenantal election of God "calls the shots."

Such an approach blesses and comforts the elect, regenerated children. This is the main purpose of the covenant Christ: "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15).

For the covenant children it is certainly true, as it is true for every elect believer, that they attain assurance of their election by observing in themselves the fruits of election, chief among which is true faith in Christ (Canons, I/12). This is only to say that one's assurance of salvation is by faith alone in Christ as promised in the Word. We teach our children this.

But this is quite different from asserting that *parents and church* may not view the children as saved children of God until they grow up and have a conversion-experience.

As a Reformed minister and parent, I have no interest whatever in conversion as the basis for viewing baptized children as God's dear children, loved of Him from eternity, redeemed by Jesus, and promised the Holy Spirit, the Author of faith. None!

As a Reformed minister and parent, I oppose a mystical conversion-experience as the basis of my and their own viewing of the children as saved children. Strongly!

God has made a promise.

It is the promise of covenantal friendship with Himself through Christ in the Spirit—real, spiritual, essential, living friendship, which is eternal life.

It comes to me and my wife now as believers.

God makes it also to our children.

On this basis we approach them as God's children in our rearing.

This is creedally Reformed.

This is biblical.

This is covenantal. □ — DJE

Comfort

Sometimes a light surprises
The Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord who rises
With healing in His wings:
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining,
To cheer it after rain.

In holy contemplation,
We sweetly then pursue
The theme of God's salvation,
And find it ever new:
Set free from present sorrow,
We cheerfully can say,
Let the unknown tomorrow
Bring with it what it may.

It can bring with it nothing,
But He will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing,
Will clothe His people too:
Beneath the spreading heavens,
No creature but is fed;
And He who feeds the ravens
Will give His children bread.

Though vine nor fig-tree neither,
Their wonted fruit should bear,
Though all the fields should wither,
Nor flocks nor herds be there:
Yet God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in Him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.

— SB, August 15, 1932

In His Fear
Rev. Arie denHartog

Spiritual Decline

The subject we wish to address is personal spiritual decline in the life of the child of God. Our focus is not on the apostasy that we see today in so many churches and in the lives of many of those who call themselves Christians. This is in itself a very grievous thing and ought to be the cause of greatest concern for every true child of God. It ought always to cause the child of God to walk in the fear of the Lord, being very careful lest he himself also fall. But even before we show concern about the apostasy that we see around us we ought to be concerned about the spiritual decline in our own lives, lest we have great concern about the weeds in another garden while our own garden is overgrown. Our concern must be with the real and constant danger of spiritual decline with which every believer is faced in his or her Christian life.

This decline is often called "backsliding." The greatest of the saints of God have experienced periods of spiritual decline in their lives. This does not mean however that we ought to dismiss this subject lightly, imagining that it is something quite natural and to be expected in the so-called normal Christian life. Decline in our own lives ought to be a matter of greatest concern. The Christian cannot stand still in his life. He either progresses or declines. It is true that

few today are spiritually minded enough to be interested in such subjects. The true child of God, however, is one who daily examines his own spiritual life.

Spiritual decline is a real possibility and we ought to be constantly on our guard against it. When we say this we do not in any way deny the blessed and wonderful truth of the preservation of the saints. God will never allow His saints to fall from His grace. Not one of God's elect shall ever perish. They are in the hands of the Good Shepherd, and no man can pluck them out of those almighty hands. The child of God is born again with an incorruptible life that cannot die. God's covenant with His people is absolutely sure. The work of Christ on their behalf is a perfect work, a work which He Himself will surely bring to perfection. The intercession of Christ for His own cannot fail. Our Lord gives us a beautiful example of this in connection with His prediction of the fall of Peter. After He warned Peter that Satan desired to have him and sift him as wheat, Jesus gave the sure and blessed promise: "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:32).

However, when God in His Word promises to preserve His saints, He does not thereby promise always to keep them from falling. In this too the Lord's sovereign purpose and wisdom in our salvation is fulfilled. Nevertheless, the falls of the saints of God can be very grievous and the consequences of these falls most dreadful. The Canons of Dordt speak of this matter very vividly in the Fifth Head of Doctrine, articles 4 and 5. In order to save space I will ask the reader himself to look up and read these articles in the Canons. Spirit-

tual decline is possible for the child of God, not because of any weakness on the part of the grace of God, but because of the continuing presence of the old man of sin in the child of God and because of the weakness of our faith. Because of our sinfulness the Lord sometimes withdraws in a measure His grace and Holy Spirit from us, so that we suffer such spiritual decline, and in this deep way learn our absolute dependency on the Lord.

Backsliding is a grievous and ugly thing. When the Christian backslides he loses interest in God and in His blessed Son, Jesus Christ. He no longer makes God the supreme object of his affection and the reason for all his glorying. When the child of God backslides he forgets the blessedness of his salvation. His heart has grown cold to the amazing wonder of the love of God toward him according to which he has been adopted as His child and made heir of all the spiritual blessings of God's house and of eternal life. He has little regard anymore for the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and the great price that the Lord paid in His suffering anguish through the sacrifice of His own body to pay for the redemption of His own. Let no child of God say that this is a small thing.

Spiritual decline takes place in varying degrees. It can happen that a Christian for a time in his life entirely departs from the Lord and leads a grossly sinful life. So dreadful is our sinful nature, even after we have been regenerated, that this is possible. During this time the life of such a child of God may be indistinguishable from the life of a worldly and ungodly man. It may seem, both to this child of God himself and to those who observe him, that he no longer is or

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ever was a true child of God, until the Lord by His sovereign grace and faithfulness renews such a one to repentance. Often, however, decline in the Christian's life is less drastic than that, though still very serious. The devil, in seeking to lead God's children away from the Lord, often does that little by little, sometimes in an almost imperceptible way. It is possible for the Christian to be in a state of spiritual decline even though outwardly he seems still to be living the life of a Christian. He may still be faithful in his church attendance and regular in his outward acts of worship and devotion. Spiritual decline begins with decline of the heart. When such decline is allowed to continue it will soon also appear in the outward life.

We are in a state of spiritual decline when the Christian life becomes dull and dry. We are in a state of decline when we have lost our zeal and devotion to the Lord. Prayer seems cold and unanswered and little more than the repetition of stock phrases. There is little interest in the study of the Word and little desire to speak of the truths of God's Word and of the blessings of salvation with others. The Christian in such a state finds the commandments of the Lord grievous and burdensome. He does not seriously and earnestly apply himself any longer to keeping the commandments of the Lord. Slowly at first he begins to make small compromises in his life. What he once condemned on the basis of God's Word he now justifies. He loses the consciousness of the seriousness of sin. He murmurs and complains about the hardships and trials in his life, unable to discern the hand of God and the goodness of God in them. He no longer enjoys the fellowship of God's people. He cannot bear with the weaknesses of his fellow saints, and he becomes critical and judgmental of their every fault.

This is a sad state to be in. The Lord is grieved by those of His children who are in such a condition. Their worship and service of Him, if there is any such at all, is unpleasant to the Lord. The Lord

does not delight in mere outward service, when man's heart is far from the Lord. The backslider will often try to substitute ceremony and ritual and the giving of gifts for the true, loving worship of God, thereby seeking to appease an accusing conscience, or to appear pious before his fellow man. In the book of Isaiah, God says concerning such worship, even though it may be formally correct, this: "Away with it." Such a person may still hold to an outward profession of faith and seem to be orthodox in his doctrine. He may even be able to carry on a great debate on theological questions and vehemently argue for sound doctrine, but the Lord is not pleased with him. Do you recognize yourself in all of this?

The Christian in a state of spiritual decline is vulnerable to the temptations of the devil. The classic biblical example of this is that of David. It was when he was in a low spiritual state that he was tempted by the devil to commit the awful sins of adultery and murder. That example ought to be a very serious warning to all of us. How serious it is to be in such a state!

When a Christian continues to live in such a state of spiritual declension, this will have a serious effect on his family. The next generation might depart from the Lord altogether because they have not been nurtured in a spiritually healthy home.

We have an example of the spiritual decline of a whole church among the seven churches addressed by the Lord in the book of Revelation. The church of Ephesus was from many points of view a commendable church. The Lord commends her for her works, her labor and patience, and even her steadfastness. This church must have been doctrinally strong and faithful in exercising Christian discipline, if we understand correctly what the Lord has to say about her. Yet the Lord had to rebuke her because she had lost her first love. Apparently this spiritual decline came to a church made up of members who were recent converts once zealous for the faith of the Gospel

and eager in their service of the Lord. Yet the members of this church were in a state of decline. All spiritual decline is essentially a decline in love for the Lord. The Lord commands us to live out of the principle of love. He Himself has placed the principle of that love in our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit. We are to love the Lord with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. We are always to abound in that love and never to allow it to diminish. Love for God must be the motive out of which we perform all our works before the Lord. In that love we dwell in the communion and fellowship of God and delight to do His commandments. When that love diminishes we begin to decline. The Lord had to warn the church of Ephesus to remember from whence she had fallen and to repent. So serious was the state she was in that if she did not repent the Lord would take the candlestick away from this church.

Spiritual decline is something so serious that it must be repented of before we fall into great sin. In order to repent from that sin we need to know the causes of our decline. We shall consider some of these in our next article. Above all we need to know that God alone by His Holy Spirit is able to restore us from such a spiritual state. □

CONSECRATION

Humbly, Lord, I come to thee,
Hoping thou wilt hear my plea.
This, O God, I ask thee now,
As before thy throne I bow:
That my life may truly be
Less for self and more for thee;
That I might thy grace make known
Thinking, God, of thee alone;
Live for thee and only thee—
This, O Lord, my humble plea.

-S.B., October 15, 1932

Guest Article

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

God's Covenant and Missions

There is a golden link between God's everlasting covenant of grace and mission work. So much so, that it is hard to conceive of any proper mission work being carried on without a deep appreciation of the truth of God's covenant with His people in Christ.

Consider God's covenant: it is His everlasting bond of friendship and fellowship with His chosen people in Christ. It is rooted in the life of fellowship God has within Himself as the triune God; it is decreed from eternity in God's sovereign election; and it is established throughout history with believers and their seed. Consider also that this covenant of God is universal in its scope, that is to say, God establishes it with His elect people out of every nation, race, and language in this world; and that where God does this His church is to be found in this world.

Now consider our calling in mission work: to go out into this world and preach the Gospel to every creature. Without hesitation or discrimination we preach wherever God in His good pleasure leads and directs us. We preach in season and out of season to those who will hear the Gospel and even to those who will not. We preach it at home and abroad; we preach it to the heathen and the unchurched;

and we preach it to those who are wayward. Furthermore, this calling to preach the Gospel to all nations is not merely a labor which a few men perform for the church in a prescribed way. It is a calling that flows out of the very heart and soul of the church and all its members.

And it is in all this that we find the inseparable connection between God's covenant and the labor of missions.

The truth of God's covenant is, first of all, the *impetus* in missions. It gives the church and her members the incentive and the drive to preach the Gospel to others. It generates within the hearts of all God's people a sincere desire to see others brought to faith and repentance. How so? The truth of God's covenant is not simply a *doctrinal distinctive* which we as Reformed believers maintain. It is *life* to us! We have experienced in our own lives what it means to be taken from the corruption and guilt of sin and incorporated into the very household and family of God! Prior to our regeneration we were those who were the enemies of God. Ezekiel tells us that we were polluted in our own blood, naked and bare. We were by nature the children of wrath even as others. We were without hope and without God in this world, being alienated from the household of God and strangers from the covenants of promise. We were destitute, lost, and blinded in unbelief. And although many of us were regenerated before we actually were able to walk in disobedience, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, nevertheless we also were those who in principle were dead

in sins and trespasses and in dire need of salvation. As children of God we are deeply aware of this wretched state which was once ours.

But we are also gratefully aware that God in His grace and according to His divine decree of election did not leave us to die in our sin. While we were yet enemies lost in the pollution of sin, God sent forth His Son who died to deliver us from sin and death. We were, as a result of His work on the cross, freed from our guilt and delivered from the corruption of sin. By means of this great deliverance Christ has reconciled us to God. The offense of our sin is removed, and God no longer will deal with us in His wrath but now has accepted us into His favor and fellowship. Not only has God made us His friends, but He has gone so far as to adopt us as His very own children! We belong to God's family! This is His covenant with us. And more, He promises us that this covenant He will carry on in our generations, with our children and our children's children. That is for us a source of great comfort and joy! In humble gratitude we give praise to God for His unchangeable love toward us who are in Christ Jesus.

In that same heartfelt gratitude, however, we also are moved to consider the sinful condition of others who have not been brought to faith and repentance. We are moved by compassion because we know what a wretched state it is in which they live. We know, of course, that God has not chosen the vast majority of the men and women of this world. We know

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that God has justly condemned many according to His eternal decree of reprobation. But this does not give us reason to shun everyone and to look down our noses on everyone who is not a member of our church. On the contrary, we do not know who "out there" is elect or reprobate. This judgment God alone makes. Therefore it is our sincere desire to preach the Gospel to as many as the Lord places in our paths. We are told that the preaching of the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and we are ready and willing to use this powerful means whenever and wherever the Lord leads us. By means of the preaching of the Gospel, by means of mission work, God uses us, His church to call sinners out of the darkness of sin and into His covenant fellowship! What greater desire is there, then, for us who already bask in the favor and fellowship of God, than to see others of God's chosen brought into this same covenant fellowship of our God.

And since this is the desire of every child of God, the work of missions flows out of the very heart and soul of the church. There is a longing on the part of every member of the church to see all of God's elect who have not yet been regenerated brought to repentance and faith. So much do we appreciate what God has done for us.

The truth of God's covenant also becomes the *content* of our mission labors. There are two points to consider in this respect.

First of all, the truth of God's covenant must be the content of our preaching on the mission field. As we have already noticed, the truth of the covenant is the Gospel — sin, salvation, God's fellowship. God's covenant with His people in Christ therefore must be the message we bring. This in a very real sense provides the missionary with his point of contact. When he is on the mission field (especially among the heathen) the missionary is acutely aware of the need to establish a point of common ground with those to whom he preaches. He cannot come to others in pride and look down on them as if they

are of no value, or of lesser value than he. He will lose his listeners if he does this. The missionary must come to those who will listen with a message that places him on the same level with them. The truth of God's covenant provides him with that message. There is one thing the missionary knows that he shares in common with those who listen: he is a sinner fallen in Adam and liable to punishment. If once he can, by the work of the Spirit in the hearts of his hearers, "convince" them of this, then he can proceed to lay before them the blessed truth of deliverance in Christ. And more, he can tell those who hear him of the blessed privileges which belong to those who are adopted members of God's household! In this way the covenant becomes the content of the mission message.

In the second place, the truth of God's covenant also becomes a gauge which the missionary uses to perform his mission labors. When the missionary comes to a group of people on the mission field he has to gauge his preaching by their level of knowledge and their needs. The truth of God's covenant is an aid in making this determination. For example, perhaps the missionary is called to preach the Gospel to those who have never as yet heard it. The question is: where does he start? At what level? More than likely these heathen among whom he labors do not know the first thing about a covenant home and family, since they have never come under the influence of the Gospel. Then that missionary, while preaching the Gospel, must focus his attention on the practical matter of God's covenant established in the line of generations — and that by means of a good, biblical, Christian family.

On the other hand, perhaps the missionary is called to preach to a nucleus of people who have heard the Gospel but in an Arminian context. Then, having a foundation on which to work, he can point out to his hearers that God's covenant is particular, that it is established only with God's elect who are scattered over the whole earth. So it is that

in this way the truth of God's covenant becomes the content of our mission labors.

Finally, the covenant also is for us the goal of all our mission labors. We are children of our heavenly Father. Together we with all of God's elect belong to God's spiritual family. We are brothers and sisters within the same household. And we are all joint heirs together with Christ to the heavenly kingdom. It is God's purpose to bring all of His children to dwell under the one roof of His heavenly mansion. There each of us has his own individual room in Father's house. Certainly, therefore, there is no greater goal or desire that we can have than by the preaching of the Gospel to call all of God's people home. Our family and home is incomplete if we are missing just one of our fellow saints. It is our goal therefore to gather into the fold of Christ His sheep wherever they may be found in this world. In this way Christ hastens the day of His coming, and brings about the final realization of God's covenant in heaven.

Often the accusation has been leveled against those of Reformed persuasion that the maintenance of the truth of God's covenant established in the line of generations stifles mission work. Such a narrow conception of God's covenant, it is claimed, will only serve to counteract the fervent desire of the church to preach the gospel to those outside the sphere of that covenant. This accusation is unfounded and false. The question rather ought to be asked: how can one perform mission work without this solid, comforting, and encouraging truth of God's holy Word? □

Contribution
Mr. Don Doezema

News From the Domestic Mission Committee

To the Domestic Mission Committee is entrusted the task of implementing the decisions of the Synod of the PRC relative to the labors of this denomination in three declared fields (Florida, Jamaica, Northern Ireland), and of exploring opportunities in other "domestic" areas as they are presented to us by the King of the church. In view of the fact that more than half a year has passed since Synod 1990, we should perhaps give a brief report of the activities of this Synodical Committee.

In consultation with the Mission Committee the three calling churches have extended calls to various of our ministers, to serve as missionaries in the above-mentioned fields. So far, two calls from each of them have been declined: Revs. Kortering and Kamps to Larne, Revs. Miersma and Kortering to Jamaica, and Revs. Key and Dykstra to Venice. Currently Rev. Miersma is considering a call to serve in Larne, and Rev. Haak to serve in Venice.

Though it is true that mission work does not really begin in earnest till a missionary is stationed in the field, it is hardly true that the calling churches and the Mission Committee have nothing to do but bide their time till the

Lord is pleased to provide a man for full-time labor in the field. Especially perhaps is that the case in Jamaica, for which field Synod approved the sending of a minister and an elder or ex-elder co-laborer, for four-week periods, twice a year, for the purpose of giving instruction to leaders and potential leaders in the Jamaican Protestant Reformed Churches, while we have no missionary on the island. By the time this article appears in print, two men will, the Lord willing, be in Jamaica for that purpose. We are very happy that not only the pastor of the calling church, Rev. Joostens, but also an elder from one of our western churches, Mr. Ed Gritters of Redlands PRC, has found it possible to commit himself to this four-week effort.

We might add that, for the first year (i.e., from Synod 1990 to Synod 1991) only one four-week session will be held in Jamaica. First Church did however send Rev. Joostens and their Jamaica-committee chairman, Dan Pastoor, to Jamaica for one week in October to investigate the feasibility of the contemplated four-week effort and to make necessary preparations for it. The two men left for Jamaica, according to their own testimony, with some "fear and trepidation," apprehensive of what they might find to be the state of affairs in the churches after a year and a half of being on their own. They were delighted however, and thankful to God, to find a stable situation. The four pastors (Revs. Brydson, Tomlinson, Williams, and Wilson) were

faithful in their own congregations; and the three who were given by Rev. Bruinsma a pulpit-supply schedule for the vacant Waterworks Church were still, after a year and a half, adhering to that schedule. Membership in the congregations was steady. And the good spirit which prevailed at a special meeting held to consider the matter of the planned conferences convinced the emissaries of the truth of the report that previous meetings of Classis were "orderly and fruitful in making various decisions that affected the churches as a whole." The various congregations had also maintained their respective church buildings and even, in some instances, improved them.

Preparations for the conferences included of course the securing of a meeting place. Arrangements were made to rent facilities near Savannah-La-Mar, centrally located with respect to the largest cluster of Protestant Reformed Churches in Jamaica. Looking into possibilities for transportation, the two men discovered that the cost of car rental had escalated significantly — to the point where the expense involved in renting a vehicle for just four weeks at a time, for the seven remaining sessions during a projected four-year period, would total no less than \$15,000 US. No wonder, therefore, that First Church began to ponder the advisability of buying a car with the money recovered in the sale of the two vehicles which we owned while Rev. Bruinsma was on the island. Though we do not at this point know how

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everything will eventually fall in place, it does seem to us that our churches will be financially better served by far if we take the buy-use-store-use-resell approach.

Cars and buildings demand what seems almost to be an inordinate amount of time and energy on the part of working committees. But attention to these details is necessary, in order to facilitate the labor which constitutes our real purpose for being there at all, namely, the giving of instruction. The instruction, as we have already mentioned, is intended for the leaders and prospective leaders, with a view to strengthening their hold on the Reformed truth, so that, as they work in their respective congregations, the churches will in turn also be built up in the faith. And, incidentally, the instruction is being given by both of the men who are now on the island. Rev. Joostens is teaching the theology, and Elder Gritters the practical implications of that theology. No little task is this. Our prayer for them, surely, is that the Lord will richly prosper their efforts. The Mission Committee eagerly awaits their report when they return from Jamaica.

So much for the interim labor in Jamaica. Hudsonville, meanwhile, is equally active in providing for the needs of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship in Larne, Northern Ireland. Unable to secure adequate provision for the pulpit in Larne through the "volunteer" method, Hudsonville requested Classis East to make Classical appointments for the mission field. The first to go to Larne on these terms was Rev. Ken Hanks, who had himself labored there for several months, a year ago. He was followed by Rev. Gritters, who in turn will be followed, D.V., by Rev. Kamps. Rev. Gritters, who is also a member of the Mission Committee, reports that there is serious consideration being given in Larne to renting or building a place of worship in Ballymena, where the interest is great. He reports too that the Fellowship is very happy with the manner in which "Rev. VanBaren and Hudsonville consistory are handling the field. They feel they

know what is going on, and appreciate the regular contact by telephone, as well as the prompt response to their requests for information and help." Hudsonville decided, by the way, to purchase a VCR, for taping sermons in several of our churches, in order to use them in Larne on those Sundays when no minister from the States is present to preach for them in person. Hudsonville is funding the purchase through collections taken in their own congregation. And, as was reported in News From Our Churches last time, Hudsonville decided also to sponsor radio broadcasts of the Reformed Witness Hour over Trans World Radio (shortwave) in Europe.

Kalamazoo, another first-time calling church, has been assigned the task of overseeing the work in the newly-declared field of Venice, Florida. While they await the sending of a man to labor there full time, they too must do what they can to provide for preaching and teaching on the field. And they too are being helped in that regard by Classical appointments. In their attempt to provide regular preaching in this field, Kalamazoo has the added advantage of the presence of Rev. C. Hanks, who, in spite of obvious infirmities connected with advanced age, is willing still to preach and teach as the need arises.

We currently rent not only a chapel for the services in Venice, but also a house for the use of ministers who go there to preach, or for the missionary should the Lord lead a man to accept that call. The men in the Venice group were able to rent for that purpose a nice, fifteen-month old, three-bedroom home in South Venice. The members in this group too, according to Rev. Koole, who recently spent a couple of weeks in Venice, "eagerly await a missionary and seem to enjoy each other's company."

Mission fields for our denomination have often been born out of work initiated by energetic evangelism committees of individual congregations in it. Currently the efforts of several such have been brought to our attention: Lynden, in different areas in the Northwest;

South Holland, in Fort Wayne, IN, and Boise, ID; and Redlands in Santa Cruz. Perhaps we will have opportunity to expand on these in a future newsletter; but permit us to say just a little about the contacts which Redlands has had with a group of interested people in Santa Cruz beginning already last spring. A visit by Rev. den Hartog and Elder Everett VanVoorthuysen, followed by continued correspondence over the next several months, led finally to a decision on the part of Redlands to provide preaching there on the last two Sundays of October. Both the number of families in the group and their very obvious enthusiasm encouraged Redlands to make an all-out effort to continue providing preaching. Finding the Mission Committee unable to help with manpower from the east, Redlands worked hard to provide from the west. Rev. Cammenga, Rev. Kuiper, and Rev. DeVries were granted permission by their consistory to spend a week or two in Santa Cruz. Since these men reported a continued enthusiastic response to the preaching, Redlands' desire to maintain a presence there remained strong. They found the Mission Committee able and willing to give financial assistance, to help them pay for the rental of facilities, for advertising, and, especially, for travel expenses of ministers. But, that was the easy part. The critical need was for manpower.

At the time of this writing, it is uncertain whether continued provision can be made to meet the needs of these families. Perhaps having to say "no" is a natural part of doing one's best with the God-given resources currently available to us. But it grieves the Mission Committee, and surely the local Consistory, to see this kind of thing happen. We have been entrusted with a rich heritage of the truth. We have been given, especially of late, many places to proclaim it at home and abroad. And we don't have the men to do it. (Young men ... do you hear this?)

Two vacancies among our own pulpits ... three mission fields cry-

ing for missionaries ... and calls for help from other directions. Our need for more ministers goes without saying. Our need for consistories willing to "share" their pastor in times like these perhaps needs saying. Our need for two mission committees with the necessary vi-

sion to evaluate wisely various calls for help in order best to focus our energies as a denomination is here said.

By all means, let us pray the Lord of the harvest that He send forth reapers. The fields we have already been given, the inquiries

and cries for help which continue to arise in other places — these are not *burdens*. They are *gifts*. May we by the grace of God press these opportunities with a zeal commensurate with the cause. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Gise VanBaren

Specific Instruction to the Beloved

Read and study Philippians 4:1-9.

This final chapter of the short epistle to the Philippians contains a moving address and important instructions. Note the great love of the apostle as expressed in the first verse: "...My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown ... my dearly beloved." They are "loved" with that high, intense love which is not mere attraction, but a tie because of the perfections of Christ in them. They are as well Paul's "joy and crown." Paul did not measure the success of his life in terms of wealth or power, but rather in terms of faithfulness in preaching of the gospel. Under his preaching many in Philippi had been converted. They are the cause of his rejoicing now — especially as he thinks about this while yet languishing in prison.

Paul also is insistent upon the command: "Stand fast in the Lord." As church, they must continue in the faith in spite of any opposition. They do so, of course, in the consciousness that it is "in the Lord" that they stand. Only Christ

can sustain and keep them by His Word and Spirit.

However, Paul is aware also of some lack of harmony in the church — a lack which requires correction. There was lack of harmony between two of the women in the church: Euodias and Syntyche. The problem was very likely not of a doctrinal nature — for otherwise Paul would surely have corrected it. Clearly he was also greatly indebted to both of these women who had assisted him a great deal while he labored in Philippi. He deeply appreciated their efforts. But these two had a falling out. We do not know what the problem was — but it was such that Paul does not condemn either one. He encourages them to be of one mind in the Lord. The manner of treatment of this problem is instructive. Paul treats both women fairly and equally. (He uses "I beseech" in addressing each in turn.) And Paul tells them the importance of being "of the same mind." Both served the same Lord. Both were concerned with the Kingdom of heaven. Should not this also affect their attitude towards each other? And should not the fact that each in the church claims to serve the Lord cause them to seek to remove all the petty grievances which often disrupt life in the church?

Paul solicits the help of the "true yokefellow." Some translations as well as commentators take "yokefellow" to be the name of the individual: in Greek that would be Syzygus. Paul appears to make a play upon the individual's name. He is truly what his name implies: a yokefellow. He is one who "pulled" with the apostle in assisting with the labors. Now Paul asks for his help again in resolving the differences between the women mentioned in verse 2.

Paul recalls too those others in Philippi who were likewise very helpful to him. There was Clement and other unnamed individuals. Though unnamed, God knew them — for their names were written in the book of life. That too is a beautiful commentary on God's people. Though one's name is not listed among the noble on this earth, still God knows each of His own by name.

Verses 4 through 7 express beautiful exhortations to the church. The command given first is to rejoice always! The apostle repeats the command for emphasis. It is a truth so often forgotten. Who would rejoice in trying times? Who rejoices in suffering and pain? Yet there must be a proper form of rejoicing, not only when all seems to go well, but also in trials. Does not Scripture emphatically teach that

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all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28)? Then joy is possible even when one must cry. It is the Christian's response to God's work in and for him.

We are also to "let our moderation be known unto all men." The word "moderation" has been translated also as "big-heartedness" or "forbearance." It is the attitude of heart and mind which the child of God has over against others. Not only does he rejoice with respect to himself, but his spiritual life is reflected also in his attitude towards others. He is not mean spirited and vindictive. Rather would he suffer at the hands of others than inflict suffering or pain on another. This is not to say that he can condone heresy or any distortion of God's infallible revelation. But he does not walk about with a "chip on his shoulder." In meekness he continues his pilgrimage.

All of this is with the assurance that his Lord shall soon come. That coming could be in the way of his death, when Jesus receives him into those mansions of glory. Or the Lord's coming will be at the end of the age when He returns on the clouds of glory. Regardless, that coming is at hand. Though some 2,000 years have passed since Paul wrote this, that final return of Christ was also at hand in the sense that the next "hour" on the "time clock" of God is Christ's return.

Another important exhortation is that of verse 6: "Be careful for nothing." Literally, this would teach, "Be not anxious about anything." That is not merely a fine theory; it is the principle which guides the Christian. One is inclined to worry about many things. And many events generate worries. Yet, why be filled with cares — knowing that even our light affliction works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (II Cor. 4:17)? The solution to all anxiety is, of course, prayer and supplication. There is no more effective and certain cure for worry than that. "Prayer" is the more general term; "supplication" is the part of prayer which brings before God our specific needs. All prayer must be "with thanksgiving." One

is to acknowledge ever before God that goodness which He bestows through Jesus Christ our Lord. In this way, the requests come before God. That there are requests indicates that specific things are brought before His throne. One does not just make some sort of general prayer for "whatever we need." Rather, he presents to God definite petitions.

The fruit of all this is the "peace of God" (vs. 7). Peace is not simply the absence of war, but a blessed relationship with God. Peace exists when the cause for division, sin, is removed. That peace floods the soul of the child of God. That peace "passeth all understanding." No human understanding is able to comprehend fully what God has done to accomplish this. We know that God must send His own Son into our flesh to deliver us. But how can one ever understand the infinite plan of God that accomplished all of this?

It is this peace of God which preserves the church through every trial. Our "hearts and minds" are established in the knowledge that all is well. Who need fear when peace is guaranteed through Christ's cross?

Finally, in verses 8 and 9, the apostle presents the portrait of the beautiful Christian. He is a thinking (meditating) Christian. What he thinks of is not that which is worldly and sensual, but spiritual and heavenly. He is ever considering what is "true," that is, in harmony with the absolute standard of all right: God Himself. He discovers this in the revelation God has given: Holy Scripture. He thinks about what is honest (right, dignified) before God and in relationship with other people. How can he cheat another or walk in dishonesty when he belongs to Christ? He is mindful of what is just; that is, he considers what is righteous before God and treats those about him in righteousness as well. He meditates on that which is pure: morally and ethically correct. The Philippians were converts from heathendom, in which idolatry was prevalent — and with it, often, adultery. Even within the

churches there were those who distorted the doctrine of God — saying even: Let us do evil that grace may abound (Rom. 6). The beautiful Christian must rather be mindful of the "lovely," that which shows perfection and holiness — which must be the basis of all love. And finally, he must be concerned with that which is of "good report" (well spoken of).

These are the things of "virtue." Virtue, says the commentator Hendriksen, is the "fruit which grows on the tree of salvation. The trunk of this tree is faith, and its roots are imbedded in the soil of God's sovereign, saving grace." Such is also worthy of proper praise.

The picture is striking. The question we face, of course, is: how do we really measure up to this "model" Christian? Paul reminds the church that they have Paul himself as their example. He gave to them good instruction in the Word of God. He showed in his own life and walk the fact that Christ and His cross were of utmost concern to him. Those who walk in this way surely enjoy the peace of God upon them.

QUESTIONS:

1. One could profitably check again how many times Paul uses the word "brethren" in the epistle. Why this frequent use of the word?
2. How were the Philippians Paul's "joy and crown"?
3. Can you conceive of circumstances which would give rise to the sort of situation which existed between the two women (vs. 2) in Philippi?
4. What is the "mind" which we must have?
5. What is the "book of life"? Why is it so important?
6. What is a "yokefellow" (vs. 3)? Could this be a man's name?
7. Do we "rejoice always in the Lord"? Why or why not?
8. Why does Paul repeat himself in verse 4?
9. What does Paul mean in declaring the "Lord is at hand" — while some 2,000 years have since passed?
10. Why is the Christian often "full of cares"? What is the answer to these cares?

11. What is the difference between "prayer" and "supplication"?

12. How often must we make our supplications to God? How can we know what to ask for?

13. What are necessary things we are to think on? How often do we do this?

14. Are we merely to think on these things — or also to carry them out? Explain.

15. What effect ought this activity have upon the temptation of worldly amusements?

16. How do we develop in these blessed fruits of righteousness? □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Marvin Kamps

The Bible is God's Word: Perspicuity

The biblical truth of the clarity of Scripture was vigorously set forth by the Reformers of the sixteenth century over against the teaching of Rome. The term "perspicuity," as applied to Scripture, means that the Bible is of such a nature that its meaning is clear, transparent, and penetrable to the believer. Not the impenitent, spiritually dead in sin sinner so finds God's Word; for to him it speaks only of wrath and of judgment. But the man of God, regenerated, indwelt by the illuminating Spirit of Christ, and placed thereby in the office of all believers, can see through to the saving meaning of Scripture.

Rome had taught that the Bible is far too difficult for the so-called lay people to understand. Roman Catholicism has always viewed the Bible as a dark, obscure book. The laity, therefore, were never encouraged or even allowed to read the Bible. The people could not, according to Rome, properly understand the Bible. Giving them permission to read and interpret it would only lead to all manner of error and endless controversy and

division. The unity of the church would be destroyed!

Rome had no conception of the "office of all believers" or any real understanding of the "illumination of the Spirit of Christ" in the life of the individual believer. In fact, Rome insisted upon the exclusive prerogative of the church to interpret the Bible. This meant that ultimately only Peter's successor, the Pope in Rome, could accurately interpret God's Word. As far as the people were concerned the Bible was a "closed book." Only the clergy, as beneficiaries of the alleged "sacrament of ordination," could be entrusted with the duty and privilege to read, study, and proclaim the Word of God in the light of the authoritative interpretation of the Romish Church. Roman Catholicism is the intruding of a mere human mediator between God and His people in Christ Jesus. This mere human mediator is the infallible Pope in Rome. He is the one man who alone can rightly interpret Scripture. All must acknowledge his office and the Romish Church's "magisterium."

The Reformation is to be remembered in part under the figure of an open Bible. In many Protestant churches there is displayed the symbol of the "open Bible." The Bible is open in the sense that it is readable, and subject to interpretation by the ordinary believer under the guidance and leading of the

Spirit of Christ. Skevington Wood informs us of the position of Martin Luther:

Luther's conception of the place occupied by Scripture in revelation was allied to his unremitting emphasis on what he called its perspicuity. He held that the Bible is luminously clear in its meaning as befits the chosen medium of God's own self-disclosure. He rebuked Erasmus for inclining to "that impudent and blasphemous saying, 'the Scriptures are obscure.'" "They who deny the all-clearness and all-plainness of the Scriptures leave us nothing else but darkness," he complained. "Moreover I declare against you concerning the whole of the Scripture that I will have no one part of it called obscure," he continued; "and to support me stands that which I have brought forth out of Peter, that the Word of God is to us a 'lamp shining in a dark place' (II Pet. 1:19). But if any part of this lamp does not shine, it is rather a part of the dark place than the lamp itself. For Christ has not so illuminated us, as to wish that any part of His Word should remain obscure, even while He commands us to attend to it: for if it be not shining plain, His commanding us to attend to it is in vain" (Captive To the Word, p. 135).

Our confidence that the Scriptures are perspicuous must not be viewed as a mere Protestant assertion without biblical warrant. In other words, does the Bible itself teach that it is clear and subject to interpretation by the believing stu-

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dent of Scripture? Surely, the Scriptures everywhere call themselves "light." Not only do we have the passage above from II Peter, but also Psalm 119:105: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." But even more importantly the idea of perspicuity is implied in the concept of "revelation." The apostle John was instructed to record "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:1-11). The prophet Daniel confessed to Nebuchadnezzar, "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets..." (Daniel 2:28). And the apostle Paul confessed, "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:3-5). To reveal is to uncover, and, by uncovering, to display and present for all to see. The very concept of revelation precludes depicting the Scriptures as dark, obscure, and impenetrable to the believing mind.

I believe it most necessary to warn against a *misuse* within Reformed churches of the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. Right principles are subject to abuse and misuse. This is, of course, true with respect to other doctrines of Scripture. We need only be reminded how men have twisted beyond recognition the doctrines of election and justification in order to foist an antinomian conception of life upon an unsuspecting church. The Heidelberg asks the question: "But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?" (Lord's Day 24, Q. 64). The fathers are instructing us in the truth that we are justified by faith alone without works. It ought to be observed very carefully that biblical doctrine *never* makes men careless and profane; but it should also be pointed out that careless and profane men *ever* abuse sound doctrine.

So too with the doctrine of perspicuity. Many men in the past have insisted upon their erroneous views, interpretations, and applica-

tions of God's Word, to the point of rejecting the fellowship of the saints and forsaking the church. They have exalted individualism, independency, and personal determination, to the point where they will not hear the church, or the offices of Christ, or the testimony of the saints in common. Their fierce individualism is the manifestation of their failure to understand that the Spirit dwells in and leads the church organically into all the truth. The unity of the church institute has no meaning for them and they acknowledge no necessity to preserve that unity. Their opinions are so highly esteemed by themselves that all other doctrines which they may hold in common with the church must be set aside as not nearly as important as their own peculiar opinions.

Such a perversion of the perspicuity principle of Scripture and the "office of all believers" is not the way to the reformation of the church! Often it is so presented. The individual is then personally convinced, not only of the correctness of his position, the great significance of his insights, and the absolute necessity of, if need be, separation from the church, but he is convinced also that the failure of others to agree with him and to stand with him is to be explained by the alleged unfaithfulness of the believers, and the apostasy of the church institute.

In that light, it *might be tempting* to deny the doctrine of perspicuity and give more credence to Rome's errors; for such misuse of the office of all believers and the doctrine of perspicuity is the cause of endless division and turmoil in the church institute. But in regard to this temptation we must demand, "Get thee behind me, Satan." The doctrine of perspicuity is biblical. It is an aspect of the doctrine of revelation. God has spoken, and His Word to us is clear and understandable. God has not mumbled! His Word has not been distorted, wittingly or unwittingly, for it is given to us by holy men moved and inspired by the Spirit of Christ. The truth of revelation and inspiration *guarantees* perspicuity. To reject

perspicuity is to deny that God has spoken to His people in Christ Jesus. The believer, therefore, can and must be permitted to interpret Scripture for himself.

Besides, the truth of the perspicuity of Scripture is precious to us. The Bible calls the believer to read, study, and meditate upon the Word of God. How could we do this if the Bible were closed to us? What great comfort, encouragement, peace, and joy the study of Scripture has brought to the heart of the repentant sinner who in faith clings to Christ Jesus. Growth in sanctification and godliness is, in a measure, dependent upon the truth of the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture. In addition, the right of church reformation is given to *every* believer by the Reformed church. Even though some use this right to "rend the sheepfold of Christ," it is an important responsibility, filled with blessing for the individual and for the church of Christ, when rightly used. Misuse of right doctrine must never be the grounds or occasion for repudiating this doctrine. But let careless and profane men be rebuked sharply for their profanity and carelessness in their abuse of biblical doctrine.

In addition, it cannot escape the reader that the Reformed church in our day is more and more under pressure to deny the perspicuity of Scripture. There is the attitude even among Reformed believers that the Bible is far too difficult to understand. After all, the preachers and seminary professors are not even sure about their understanding of God's Word. Synod "A" takes one position. Synod "B," a year later, takes another which is contradictory of the former decision. This is done repeatedly. The elder looks to his pastor. But the pastor does not know and he imploringly looks to the seminary professor. And the poor seminary professor looks to the experts in the field of study under question. All hope and pray for the leading of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, even if the explicit injunctions of Scripture must be set aside. No one is confident that he can rightly know the

mind of Christ or the will of God. It is no longer perceived that faith is a going forward upon the stepping stones of Christian doctrine, divine commandments, and Scriptural counsel; but that disobedience is going forward without basis or grounds for action in God's Word.

If to confess God's revelation and inspiration is to hold to the doctrine of perspicuity; then to deny the doctrine of revelation and inspiration of the sacred writers is to reject perspicuity. To deny that the Bible is the record of God's revelation is to preclude the possibility of any saving knowledge of God in Christ as our Savior. And to despise the doctrine of infallible inspiration is to deny that the record of God's revelation in Christ Jesus is perspicuous. That this is true should be plain to all, for if the human, imperfect, forgetful, and even sinful writers of Scripture were left to labor in *their own strength alone*, without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then surely their books and epistles would be dark, obscure documents filled with confusion and imperfections of every kind.

The Reformed believer today is led to believe that this is indeed the case. The Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Pentateuch, are explained according to an evolutionistic view of the development of religion. Consequently, Genesis 1-11 does not record actual world history, but some unspecified pre-history. The writers of the Bible were time-bound and culturally conditioned men. Therefore, some precepts which they wrote have no application to us of the twentieth century. Several of the apostolic precepts of the New Testament were only for the first century church and have no significance or application for us today. For example we are urged:

One should first distinguish between the central core of the message of the Bible and what is dependent upon or peripheral to it It is to safeguard the gospel from being turned into law through culture or religious custom, on the one hand, and to keep the gospel itself from changing to reflect every conceivable cultural expression, on the other hand. ...Paul's sinlists, for example, never contain cul-

tural items. ...On the other hand, foot-washing, exchanging the holy kiss, eating marketplace idol food, women having a head covering when praying or prophesying, Paul's personal preference for celibacy, or a woman's teaching in the church are not inherently moral matters (How to Read the Bible For all Its Worth, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, 1982, p. 66).

Besides, certain embellishments unavoidably found their way into the church's witness and response to revelation. These embellishments are to be identified and rejected by our study of secular material. A proper understanding of God's Word is possible only if one first has mastered the pertinent historical, geographical, archaeological, geological, and contemporary religious documents. With such a mandate, the ordinary believer ought not even to imagine that he can properly interpret Scripture.

Scripture has become again a dark and obscure book, which only those who are the experts can rightly interpret. This is the consequence if one denies the doctrine of inspiration. The Reformed community of churches is rapidly returning to a Romish view of Scripture. For many this is a happy occurrence, for it frees them, they think, from the responsibility to study and know the Bible and to work humbly for the continual reformation of the church.

But this is all wrong, for it is dishonoring to our God and spiritually self-destructive of the individual and the institute of the church.

We must believe what the Bible says about itself. Firstly, that God, Jehovah, has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus. Secondly, that God has inspired and moved holy men by His Spirit to write the infallible record of His revelation. Thirdly, that God has regenerated His own, having given to them eyes to see and ears to hear, and has thereby enabled them to receive the things of the Kingdom of Heaven. Fourthly, that believers have the Spirit of Christ in them as members of His Body, the church. Therefore, in the fifth place, that they are able, in spiritual fellowship with the saints of past centuries and with the

saints today, to understand the Bible and personally receive God's revelation. The individual believer stands in organic connection with the saints of all ages. His faith must be in harmony with that of the saints of all ages. Remember: "There is one body, and one Spirit ... One Lord, one faith ..." (Eph. 4:4, 5). The doctrine of perspicuity and "the office of all believers" have as their very purpose, in part, to preserve and manifest, as much as is possible, the invisible, inward, and spiritual oneness of the body of Christ. We do this, above all, by our membership in and unity with the Reformed church institute. The doctrines of the perspicuity of Scripture and the office of all believers must not lead to a rejection of the Reformed church, but to the position "that all men are duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church" (Belgic Confession, article 28). □

I Will Love Him

(John 14:21)

"I will love him," Jesus says it,
Can it be He speaks to me,
In those accents pure and holy,
May I grasp it — He loves me?

"I will love him," earthly love is
Tender as the clinging vine;
But the wondrous love of Jesus
Is a fountain deep, divine.

"I will love him," Lord, reveal it,
Manifest Thyself to me,
Show me more of what Thou art,
More of what I ought to be.

"I will love him," angels cannot
Know the depth of Love Divine,
They can never say with sinners,
I am my Lord's, and He is mine.

"I will love him," blessed promise,
Hold me ever by Thy love,
May I never lose its sweetness
Till Thou welcome me above.

— SB, June 15, 1932

All Around Us

■ Soviets Grant Religious Freedom

Last September 26 the USSR passed a very significant new law on religion, a law which replaces the 1929 code. By a vote of 341-1 the Soviet parliament passed a law which legalizes freedom of worship, proselytizing (evangelism), religious education. This new law also formally ends state support of atheism. This means that the changes of the last several years under the restructuring of Soviet society are now legalized. Religious organizations, including churches, are now recognized as legal entities. The state may not interfere with religious organizations. Interestingly enough, clergy may run for public office. Hotly debated was a clause on the use of public schools for religious instruction after regular school hours. The clause was not adopted but will come up for discussion at a later session.

One of the republics of the USSR passed an even more liberal law than the national law. The Republic of Russia now has a law on its books which mandates the study of comparative religion in public schools and opens the door to voluntary religious instruction during school hours.

For the moment at least, all this bodes well for the church and people of God in the USSR. At least

for now the persecution of the saints will cease and the church will be able freely to worship the Lord and educate the children of God's covenant in His fear. May God bless His saints in the USSR and may Christ by means of the preaching of the Word gather, defend, and preserve His church in that land.

REC News Exchange

■ Dutch Dominies Disco

It is the opinion of Piet Schelling, the new "chairperson" of the Netherlands Center for Reformed Youth Work (a ministry of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands GKN, in which denomination lie the spiritual roots of most of us), that the people who do not like what young people are doing these days generally have not tried it. So Schelling decided to do something about this. He decided to introduce about 40 preachers to a youth activity. He invited them to a disco dance complete with hard-rock music, flickering lights, and a live deejay. We are told the pastors grumbled a bit at first about "the racket," but once they hit the dance floor, they started to have fun. A few of the ministers left the dance floor after a few minutes, but only because dancing was too much work. None left because he thought dancing was nonsense. Schelling said he did the disco experiment because he fears that the church is passing by young people. Instead of listening to teen music and trying to understand it, for example, church leaders offer organ music in worship services and wonder why young people can't relate to it. Schelling doesn't advo-

cate playing disco music in church (given his position, why not?), but he does say the church should search for better ways to attract youth. Schelling claims to be working toward better dialogue between young people and their elders. Says he, "We have to meet each other and get talking. It is as important to talk to youth as it is to hear preaching on Sunday."

So now we have to listen to disco music and participate in disco dancing in order to reach and keep the young people in the church?! What these young people need is not dialogue but the means of grace, the chief of which is, according to the plain teaching of Scripture and our Reformed Confessions, the preaching of the Word (including sound, thorough catechetical instruction). Faithful preaching of the Holy Scriptures would expose the evils of disco and other forms of dancing, call the youth to faith in the Lord Jesus and repentance towards God, and instruct them in the way of godliness. The Bible asks, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" The Bible neither explicitly nor implicitly answers "by dialoguing with his elders about disco dancing and hard-rock music." The Bible's answer to the question is, "by taking heed thereto according to thy (God's) word" (Psalm 119:9).

Centraal Weekblad, The Banner

■ The Reformed Journal Will Be No More

In the December issue of *The Reformed Journal*, Editor-in-Chief Jon Pott announces that the magazine will no longer be published by

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Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. The magazine will merge with *Perspectives*, a theological journal published by the Reformed Church in America and edited by James Van Hoeven and John Stapert. Pott and most of his fellow editors will join the staff of *Perspectives*. The *Reformed Journal* (hereafter RJ) was the voice of the liberal wing of the Christian Reformed Church. Nearly forty years ago it was founded by Harry R. Boer, James Daane, George Stob, Henry Stob, and Henry Zylstra. Boer continued to write for the magazine until the present. It was in the RJ that Prof. Harold Dekker, now emeritus professor of missions of Calvin Seminary, published his "God so loved . . . all men" articles in which he argued for universal atonement. The *Standard Bearer* offered a detailed critique of Dekker's position, as well as a defense of the truth of limited atonement, in a series of editorials by Rev. Herman Hoeksema under the title, "Rank Arminianism at Calvin Seminary."

Interestingly enough, one of the current editors of the RJ, Ronald Wells, has an article in the very last issue of the magazine, "Can There Be A Christmas TULIP," in which he says, "This Christmas I rejoice again with the message of the angels, proclaimed first over a little town, but echoed down the ages. It is a message that God means for all humankind. For Reformed people, I wonder aloud whether, if we are going to celebrate Christmas truly and fully, we don't have to find our TULIP's and knock the "L" out of them. Only then will heaven come clearly into view, and only then will we see the Son of God coming in love for all of us" (RJ, vol. 40, issue 10, p. 8). "TULIP" is the acronym and/or mnemonic for the "five points of Calvinism": total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. RJ has been consistent through the years. In its last issue it still teaches that God loves all men.

On its cover RJ claims to be "a periodical of Reformed comment and opinion." Ironically, there is a letter to the editor in this last issue of RJ from Albert Salmon in which he says, ". . . I had subscribed to your magazine, attracted by the title, and have been completely disappointed by each issue. You are nothing more than flaming liberals, and completely anti-Scripture. Please stop publication immediately, or change your name."

We agree with the sentiments of brother Salmon completely. RJ has not been a periodical of Reformed comment and opinion. Though edited and written by very capable people through the years, RJ has consistently opposed the Reformed tradition as that tradition is so profoundly set forth in *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *The Belgic Confession*, and *The Canons of Dordt*. From this point of view we are not sorry that RJ will be no more. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

Appointment of Deacons

The deacons shall be chosen, approved, and installed in the same manner as was stated concerning the elders. Church Order, Article 24.

Introduction

Articles 24-26 of the *Church Order* describe the office and work of the deacons. Article 24 concerns the appointment of the deacons.

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Article 25 describes the work peculiar to the office of the deacons. Article 26 deals with cooperation of the deacons with others who are involved in caring for the poor.

There are other references to the deacons in the *Church Order*. Article 27 concerns the length of term of elders and deacons. Article 37 provides for the addition of the deacons to the consistory where the number of officebearers is small. Article 40 prescribes the time, purpose, and manner in which the deacons' meetings are to be held. Article 83 speaks of the assistance given by the deacons to

the poor who out of necessity are compelled to move from one place to another and lack the financial means to do so.

Some worthwhile reading on the office and work of the deacon would include: *The Deacons Handbook*, by Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster; *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*, by P.Y. DeJong; and *Handbook for Elders and Deacons*, by Wm. Heyns.

Demise of the Office of Deacon

Early in the history of the Roman Catholic Church the office of deacon, like so much else, was corrupted. Several factors com-

bined to bring about the degeneration of this office. For one thing, the giving of alms was no longer regarded as the fruit of thankfulness for salvation and motivated by love for the poor, but was taught to be meritorious. In addition to this, the work of relieving the poor was more and more taken away from the deacons, and the deacons were made the assistants of the priests and bishops. The care of the poor was largely taken over by the nunneries and monasteries. At times there was not a readiness to help the poor, because poverty was regarded as a direct judgment of God, or a life that was itself meritorious. There were even those who took vows of poverty.

Especially harmful was the subordination of the deacons to the priests and bishops. Their calling to "serve tables" (Acts 6:2) was interpreted to mean that they were to render assistance at the celebration of the Mass. Gradually the work of the deacons became the task of maintaining good order in the worship services; removing, before the celebration of the Mass, those who had not yet been admitted to partake of it; arranging the altar for the celebration of the Mass; and taking care of the utensils that were used in its administration. The Romish priests were considered to represent the priests of the Old Testament and the deacons the Levites, who were supposed to assist the priests. In the Roman Catholic Church today this conception of the office of deacon still prevails.

The need for the recovery of the office of deacon was apparent to Martin Luther. Luther expressed the conviction that "... the office of deacons ought to be re-established in such a manner, that it would not be an office for Scripture reading in public worship, as is now the case, but for distributing among the poor necessities of life provided by the church, since it is evident from Acts 6 that for that purpose the diaconate has been installed."

There was a beginning of this in Lutheranism, but in time the Lutheran churches surrendered the care of the poor to the princes and the civil authorities. For all practi-

cal purposes the office of deacon is lost in modern Lutheranism.

The Anabaptists, on the other hand, promptly dispensed with the office of deacon altogether. They rejected the right of private property and attempted to restore the practice of community of goods. In the Anabaptist scheme of things there was no need for the office of deacon.

Calvin's Influence

Only in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition has the office of deacon come to its rightful place.

This is due largely to the influence of John Calvin. Calvin did much to restore to the church the office of deacon, making this office once more a useful office in the church.

Calvin insisted on two fundamental principles. First, he insisted that the work of the deacons was properly the care of the poor. And second, he taught that the office of the deacons was not inferior but equal to the offices of elder and minister.

Peculiar to Calvin's teaching, however, was his notion that there should be two kinds of deacons in the church. He appealed to Romans 12:8: "... he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ... he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." Calvin interpreted this as referring to two different kinds of deacons. There ought to be deacons who care for the poor. These Calvin called "procurers" or "stewards." And there ought to be deacons who care for the sick. These Calvin called "hospitallers." He writes in his *Institutes*:

The care of the poor was entrusted to the deacons. However, two kinds are mentioned in the letter to the Romans: "He that gives, let him do it with simplicity ... he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Since it is certain that Paul is speaking of the public office of the church, there must have been two distinct grades. Unless my judgment deceives me, in the first clause he designates the deacons who distribute the alms. But the second refers to those who devoted themselves to the care of the poor and sick.... If we accept this (as it must be accepted), there will be two kinds of deacons: one to

serve the church in administering the affairs of the poor; the other, in caring for the poor themselves (Institutes IV, 3, 9).

This idea of Calvin did not find general acceptance in the Reformed churches. One synod, the Synod of Wezel, 1568, did speak in favor of this arrangement.

It would, however, be helpful if especially in larger localities two sorts of deacons would be established, one part of which shall apply itself to the gathering and distribution of the alms and at the same time see to it that, in case there are any goods that have been bequeathed to the poor, these will be claimed from the heirs in a lawful way and distributed faithfully to those for whom they had been intended in the bequest. The other kind will in the main care for the sick, the wounded, and the prisoners; these deacons ought to be gifted not only with faithfulness and diligence but also with the gift of comforting and a better than average knowledge of the Word; and they must diligently inquire from the elders if in their district there are perhaps sick or infirm people who are in need of comfort and encouragement.

Later Reformed synods, however, dropped the distinction between two kinds of deacons. Both the care of the poor and the visitation of the sick were made the duty of all the deacons, two aspects of one and the same office.

Method of Appointment

Various methods of appointing deacons have been followed by the Reformed churches in the past.

Worthy of mention is the method outlined by the Polish Reformer, John á Lasco, minister of the refugee churches in London. In his work entitled *Forma ac Ratio Tota Ecclesiastici Ministerii*, written in 1560, in which he described biblical church government, he specified the following procedure for the appointment of deacons.

The consistory would prescribe a special day of fasting and prayer on which the minister was to preach twice, explaining the nature and functions of this holy office. Thereupon the congregation would join in prayers for the wisdom and guidance of God. Within the next week the ballots of the members would be collected at the

homes by the elders. From those designated by the members, the consistory would elect the necessary number. All of those who presented no legitimate objections to their own election would be publicly presented to the congregation on the next Lord's Day in the morning service. If the congregation did not protest against any during the next week, they would then be appropriately installed in their office.

Article 24 prescribes three steps in the appointment of the deacons: election, approbation, and installation.

Election of deacons may take place in one of two ways. The consistory may select the appropriate number of deacons and present its choices to the congregation for approval (Aristocratic Method, cf. Article 22). Or the consistory may present a double slate of nominees to the congregation, from which half are elected (Aristocratic-Democratic Method, cf. Article 22). As in the case of the election of elders, the second method is to be preferred and is generally followed in our churches.

Nominations are to be announced to the congregation on at least two successive Sundays. This provides the members of the congregation the opportunity to register with the consistory any objections against the nominees.

Barring all lawful objections, the election is held, after which those who have been elected are to be duly installed into office. Installation is the actual induction of a man into the office, so that after his installation he begins to function as a deacon. Installation is to take place during a formal worship service and with the use of the "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons."

Deaconesses

In light of the current movement to have women ordained to the special offices, particularly to the office of deacon, it may be well to say a few things about deaconesses.

The Synod of Wezel, 1568, provided for the appointment of worthy women.

In those places where it is convenient we are of the opinion that women

of proven faith and pious walk and who are of an advanced age, according to the example of the Apostles, can also be admitted to this office.

Evidently, however, the Synod of Wezel did not intend that women should be ordained as deaconesses, female deacons, but that they should be appointed to assist the deacons. This is also why the Synod did not require their appointment, but only made it a matter of "convenience."

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, expressed its disapproval of an attempt to re-institute the office of deaconess.

The Christian Reformed Church is one denomination that has in recent years opened up the office of deacon to women. Article 3b of the revised Christian Reformed Church *Church Order* states: "All confessing members of the church who meet the biblical requirements are eligible for the office of deacon." This article deliberately does not restrict the office of deacon to "male" confessing members of the church, but allows "all" confessing members to be eligible for this office, including women.

Without involving ourselves in a lengthy discussion of the ordination of women into the office of deacon, there can be no doubt that this practice is expressly forbidden by Scripture. Anyone who reads Scripture without the "aid" of the tinted spectacles of the women's movement can come to no other conclusion. This certainly is in

keeping with those passages of Scripture which enjoin the women to be silent in the church and forbid them to exercise authority: I Corinthians 14:34, 35; I Timothy 2:11-14. This is also consistent with those passages which set down the qualifications of the deacons, which qualifications themselves make plain that a deacon must be a man, not a woman: Acts 6:1-6; I Timothy 3:8-13.

For a fine defense of the historic Reformed position forbidding women to occupy the office of deacon, and an examination of the Scripture passages often appealed to in support of this practice, the interested reader is referred to the pamphlet "Phebe: An Example For the Christian Woman," by Prof. H. H. Hanks. (This pamphlet can be obtained by writing to the Business Office of *The Standard Bearer* at the address listed in the inside cover.)

Regarding the ordination of deaconesses, VanDellen and Monsma state:

It cannot be proven from Holy Writ that so-called deaconesses were actually called and ordained to office, just as the deacons were. I Tim. 3:11 ... does indicate that women had a share in the work of mercy practiced by the early Churches. But in the absence of any indication that women were ever inducted into office we conclude that these deaconesses were appointed to assist the deacons in an unofficial capacity (The Church Order Commentary, p. 113). □

FAITH

O, for a faith that will not shrink,
Though pressed by many a foe;
That will not tremble on the brink
Of poverty or woe.

That will not murmur nor complain
Beneath the chastening rod,
But in the hour of grief and pain
Will lean upon its God.

A faith that shines more bright and clear
When tempests rage without;
That when in danger knows no fear,
In darkness feels no doubt.

A faith that keeps the narrow way
Till life's last hour is fled,
And with a pure and heavenly ray
Lights up a dying bed.

-S.B., November 15, 1932

Book Reviews

THE MOODY HANDBOOK OF THEOLOGY, by Paul Enns.

Chicago: Moody Press, 1989. Pp. vii-688. Hardcover. \$24.95. (Reviewed by the Editor.)

The author describes this book as "a general introductory work in the entire area of theology that can provide answers to simple, basic questions" (p. xiii). It covers the whole, vast range of Christian theology under the five, major divisions of Biblical Theology; Systematic Theology; Historical Theology; Dogmatic Theology; and Contemporary Theology. The scope of the work necessarily demands brevity of treatment of the various elements. Nevertheless, not only the Sunday School teachers and other lay people who desire to know more about theology, at whom the author aims, but also the seminary student and the preacher can benefit from this compendium of theology.

The Reformed preacher, teacher, or student will benefit particularly from the clear distinctions and relationships, e.g., between Biblical and Systematic Theology; from the brief, pointed descriptions of various theologies and doctrines, e.g., Dispensational Theology and Liberation Theology; and from the lists of sources and references at the end of each chapter.

The work is flawed, although not destroyed, for the Reformed, covenantal student of theology by the pervasive dispensationalism. Enns is an avowed disciple of Pentecost, Walvoord, and Ryrie. Accordingly, he assures the reader that "the ultimate form of God's theocratic kingdom is the millennial kingdom" (p. 27); promotes the rapture (pp. 112, 113, 141); and declares that "the church is a separate entity from Israel and remains distinct from Israel" (p. 351). Usually, he makes a valiant effort to remain

descriptive in controversial areas, giving arguments for and against the conflicting doctrines. One instance is the controversy between Calvinist and Arminian theologies. Another is the issue of the extent of the atonement (pp. 326ff.). Regarding the latter, the author's own conviction compels him to take sides later in the book: "limited atonement is difficult to sustain biblically" (p. 486).

The Protestant Reformed student of theology takes special interest in the description and comparison of Calvinist and Arminian theologies and of covenantal and dispensational theologies. Enns states correctly that "the heart of Reformed Theology may be summarized in the Canons of the Synod of Dort...." (p. 463) The two and a half pages devoted to "Common Grace" also hold our attention. It is worth quoting a lengthy passage from this section in order to show what is being done with the theory of common grace in Protestant theology today:

Necessity of common grace. 1. *It is Preliminary to Efficacious Grace. Before a person can be saved there must be a witness from God; that witness comes first through a knowledge of God. God reveals Himself to people through the avenue of common grace. When people participate in the material blessings of God (Matt. 5:45) it ought to make them reflect on the goodness of God. Additionally, God has revealed something of Himself in nature: His "eternal power and divine nature" are clearly seen by all (Rom. 1:20). All people have an awareness of their accountability to a righteous God, all the while having been participants of His blessings toward them. With that awareness in mankind, the Holy Spirit convicts persons of the righteousness of Jesus Christ who offers the solution to mankind's dilemma (John*

16:8-11). A person cannot receive the efficacious grace of God for salvation without having received and recognized the work of God in common grace. Common grace thus is preparatory for efficacious grace; it brings man to a realization of his sin and of the righteousness of Jesus Christ (pp. 334, 335).

The Protestant Reformed reader is startled thus to be excommunicated summarily from salvation (not having received, and refusing to recognize, the work of God in common grace, he "cannot receive the efficacious grace of God for salvation"). What is worse is that to common grace is ascribed a vital role in the saving work of God in Christ: It prepares for efficacious grace in such a way that efficacious grace is dependent upon common grace. Efficacious grace, therefore, is not efficacious after all. It is a relief to recall that the Canons of Dort—in which is summarized "the heart of Reformed Theology"—explicitly rejects this notion concerning common grace as false doctrine:

The Synod rejects the errors of those who teach: That the corrupt and natural man can so well use the common grace (by which they understand the light of nature), or the gifts still left him after the fall, that he can gradually gain by their good use a greater, viz., the evangelical or saving grace and salvation itself. And that in this way God on His part shows Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men, since He applies to all sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion (III/IV, Rejection of Errors, 5).

A good, helpful glossary of theological terms is included at the end. □

BEFORE BURNOUT: BALANCED LIVING FOR BUSY PEOPLE, by Frank Minirth, Don Hawkins, Paul Meier, Chris Thur-

man. Chicago: Moody Press, 1990. 189 pages. Paperback. \$7.95. (Reviewed by the Editor.)

In this book, the Minirth-Meier Clinic applies the wisdom of its Christian psychology to "burnout" in the Christian. Burnout is defined as "a cluster of symptoms, including emotional and physical exhaustion, depersonalization or a tendency to withdraw from people, and decreased personal and professional performance" (p. 73). Since a major cause of burnout is an "obsessive-compulsive personality," this personality is described, analyzed, and admonished at length.

The psychology is thick. The Christianity is thin. Calvinism takes it on the chin: "obsessive-compulsives...tend to gravitate toward a rather strong Calvinistic position with an emphasis on the sovereignty of God....One of the reasons (they) hold to the all-encompassing sovereignty of God is to give themselves a sense of control in a seemingly uncertain world" (pp. 70,71). (This quotation indicates why I am suspicious of the wisdom of psychology: Whereas Scripture teaches that confession of Divine sovereignty implies the believer's *dependency*, psychology finds in this confession "a sense of control.") Basketball star, Bill Bradley, and baseball manager,

Dick Howser, are held up as outstanding examples of the Christian life, despite their gross transgression of the Fourth Commandment (to say nothing of the utter waste of life in professional sport).

The book is not without helpful insights. The authors note that the most significant factor in burnout is the bitterness that results from holding grudges.

Whatever the place of this "Christian psychology," a book such as this reminds the Reformed minister of his calling to preach the Word in its spiritual-psychological fullness and power. It reminds the believer to hear and read the Word that pierces "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit...and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12) with daily faith and obedience. □

THE ELDER & HIS WORK, by David Dickson. Dallas, Texas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1990. 96 pages. Paperback. \$6.95. (Reviewed by the Editor.)

David Dickson was a ruling elder in the (Presbyterian) Free Church of Scotland in the 19th century. *The Elder & His Work* is a reprint of the book originally published in the 1870s.

The benefit of this short work for Reformed and Presbyterian ruling elders lies in its suggestions and encouragement concerning the practical aspects of the task of elders. Although all of the advice cannot be carried out in North America at the end of the 20th century, the emphasis of the author, born of his own experience, upon a thorough, loving knowledge of the members of the congregation and a wise, faithful visitation of them, especially in their need, is useful for elders today.

If the great ends of our office are, by God's blessing, to be attained, it is plain, in the first place, that the elder must know the people in his district. He must be acquainted with them all, old and young, their history, their occupations, their habits, their ways of thinking. They and their children should be his personal friends, so that they naturally turn to him as to one on whom they can depend as a kind and sympathizing friend and a faithful counselor. He must know them as they are at home....(p. 15)

The office of elder for Dickson was obviously not a formality, but a calling and opportunity to care for Christ's blood-bought people. This it must also be for every Reformed elder. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

Congregational Highlights

The Young People's Society of our Edgerton, MN PRC sponsored a Christmas singspiration on the evening of December 23. Besides inviting members of their own congregation, they also extended invitations to our churches in Doon and Hull, Iowa.

On the evening of December 11, all of the adult societies of our Hudsonville, MI PRC met in their annual combined Christmas Social. The program included a piano-organ duet, some singing of traditional Christmas music, and a short slide program on the Holy Land, given by Mrs. Tim Heemstra.

This was followed by an opportunity to discuss a portion of Matthew 2. After seeing slides of the Holy Land, including Bethlehem and Jerusalem, we find that the study of the wonder of the birth of our Lord takes on new meaning.

In an effort to enjoy the many musical talents that our Southeast PRC seems to have been blessed with, the congregation sponsored a short request program. These requests were sung or played by members, young and not so young. Special numbers consisted of a piano solo, a trumpet solo, a children's musical number, and a quartet, to name just a few.

On consecutive Sunday evenings, the combined choirs of the Hudsonville and Faith PRC's presented their Christmas Concerts, first on December 9 in the auditorium of Hudsonville Church, and then one week later in Southwest PRC. Each performance was before a packed house. And no wonder, for the 101 voices, which also included members from the Holland, Hope, and Byron Center PRC's, presented a truly fine con-

cert, a concert that was sung with praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation.

School News

The Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI presented their annual all-school program, entitled "Songs of Christmas," on December 13 in the First Jenison Christian Reformed Church.

Evangelism News

The Reformed Witness Committee, made up of members of our Doon, Edgerton, and Hull PRC's, support two Bible discussion groups as part of its outreach. Rev. DeVries leads a Bible discussion every other Tuesday in Sioux Falls, IA. Participants in this group include members of the Doon PRC and interested people in Sioux Falls. They are studying the book of Acts. And, for the second year, the R.W.C. is sponsoring a Bible Study on the campus of Dordt College. Rev. Dykstra and Chester Hunter, Jr. lead this group in the study of the book of Mark.

Ministerial Calls

Our congregation in Kalamazoo, MI called Rev. C. Haak to serve as

missionary pastor in the Venice, FL area. Included in that trio with Rev. Haak were the Revs. R. Cammenga and B. Gritters.

The Hudsonville, MI PRC was scheduled to call a missionary after the Christmas morning service to serve in the field of Larne, Northern Ireland, from a duo of Pastors C. Haak and T. Miersma.

The Hope PRC of Isabel, SD was scheduled to call a pastor on the evening of December 27 from a trio of the Revs. C. Haak, R. Hanco, and B. Gritters.

And the Randolph, WI PRC made their ninth call since becoming vacant, this one to Rev. R. Hanco, to serve as their pastor. On the trio with Rev. R. Hanco were the Revs. G. VanBaren and M. DeVries. □

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Study of the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan expresses their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Moelker and family in the death of their father and grandfather MR. JOHN MOELKER.

Psalm 29:11, "The Lord will give strength unto his people, the Lord will bless his people with peace."

June VanDenTop, secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

After nearly eight years in a coma, MR. MARTIN "MARTY" STRAAYER was taken home to be with the Lord. The consistory and congregation of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church express their heartfelt sympathy to Marty's family. May they be comforted by the promises of God's Word and sustained by His grace. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints," Psalm 116:15.

Rev. Ron Cammenga, President
Glen Griess, Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School of Grand Rapids, MI is offering up to \$200,000 in notes to finance the renovation of the school.

5-year notes: 8.0%; 10-year notes: 8.5%

These notes will be issued in multiples of \$1,000, payable on demand with interest paid semi-annually.

For further information, please call or write:

Gordon Schipper
3007 Willow Creek Dr.
Grandville, MI 49418
(616) 531-2322
or the school office:
1545 Wilson Avenue S.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
(616) 453-9717