

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

Jesus or Barabbas!

... In such human contrivances, God has a divine purpose. The whole world must stand before Jesus and Barabbas. Ultimately, this is God's nomination. In a most public way, God is challenging every human being: will you cast your lot with Jesus or with Barabbas?

With one accord, man chooses Barabbas.

See "Barabbas Preferred" -- page 243

Vol. 67, No. 11
March 1, 1991

Contents

March 1, 1991

Meditation – Rev. Jason L. Kortering BARABBAS PREFERRED	243
Editorial – Prof. David J. Engelsma CREATION AND SCIENCE . . . AND COMMON GRACE (2)	245
ALL AROUND US – Prof. Robert D. Decker	247
Decency and Order – Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga THE WORK OF DEACONS	249
In His Fear – Rev. Arie denHartog SPIRITUAL DECLINE (2)	252
Taking Heed to the Doctrine – Rev. Marvin Kamps THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD: THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE	254
Search the Scriptures – Rev. Carl J. Haak THE BOOK OF RUTH (1)	257
A Word Fitly Spoken – Rev. Dale H. Kuiper HOPE	258
The Strength of Youth – Rev. Barrett L. Gritters THE END TIMES (10): THE LAST BATTLE	259
From Holy Writ – Rev. George C. Lubbers EXPOSITION OF PSALM 81:1ff. (1)	261
NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES – Mr. Benjamin Wigger	263

In This Issue...

We are reminded, by this issue's Meditation, that we are once more in the Lenten season, during which we give special consideration to the cross of Christ. The more we do that, warns Rev. Kortering – that is, "the more we gaze upon this Suffering Servant of Jehovah" – "the more we will see the horrible depths of our own depravity."

Ah, yes – such is the lesson in the unanimous choice for Barabbas. For you and I were well represented there when the church and the world together passed judgment on Christ, when they were faced with the choice between God and the world. We do well to remember that, for our inclination is surely to think within ourselves, when we read of the terrible crime of crucifying the Lord of glory, that *we* would never have been partner to it. The cry "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas" would never have passed from *our* lips. We would not have been too ashamed at that moment to confess our faith in Him. But the fact is that *we would* have been partner to it. How do we know? Because we *prove* it every day anew by the sins according to which we choose *for* the world and *against* Christ. For good reason it is therefore that Rev. Kortering warns, "Let us not crucify the Son of God afresh." For good reason Rev. denHartog warns, in this issue, in "Spiritual Decline," against worldimindedness and against materialism.

But, praise God, it doesn't end there. For "God turns the effrontery of man into victory." Victory for Christ ... and, in Him, for us! For on the blood of Jesus is built the new Jerusalem. Read "Barabbas Preferred." □ – D.D.

THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August. Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc. Second Class Postage Paid at Grand Rapids, Mich.

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: Prof. David J. Engelsma

Secretary: Prof. Robert D. Decker

Managing Editor: Mr. Don Doezeema

DEPARTMENT EDITORS

Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Prof. Robert Decker, Rev. Arie denHartog, Rev. Russell Dykstra, Rev. Barry Gritters, Rev. Carl Haak, Prof. Herman Hanko, Rev. John Heys, Rev. Marvin Kamps, Rev. Kenneth Koole, Rev. Jason Kortering, Rev. Dale Kuiper, Mr. James Lanting, Rev. George Lubbers, Mrs. Marybeth Lubbers, Rev. James Slopsema, Rev. Charles Terpstra, Rev. Gise VanBaren, Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, Mr. Benjamin Wigger, Rev. Bernard Woudenberg

EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer

4949 Ivanrest

Grandville, MI 49418

PH: (616) 243-3712

(616) 531-1490

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger

6597 - 40th Ave.

Hudsonville, MI 49426

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks Department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be neatly written or typewritten, and must be signed. Copy deadlines are the first and the fifteenth of the month. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgement is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer

Don Doezeema

P.O. Box 6064

Grand Rapids, MI

49516

PH: (616) 243-3712

(616) 531-1490

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer

c/o Protestant Reformed

Church

B. Van Herk

66 Fraser St.

Wainuiomata, New Zealand

SUBSCRIPTION POLICY

Subscription price: \$12.00 per year in the U.S., \$15.00 elsewhere. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is the 1st and the 15th of the month, previous to publication on the 15th or the 1st respectively.

BOUND VOLUMES

The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume; such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Meditation

Rev. Jason Kortering

Barabbas Preferred

Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. ...

The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

Matthew 27:15-18, 21

Jesus or Barabbas!

Both were nominated for release.

A stranger nomination we could never imagine.

We must put it more strongly: it is an insulting nomination. Insulting to Jesus. How is it that He is placed on the level of one such as Barabbas, and the people are told to vote for one or the other?

Still more, insult soon turns to shame. The people express their choice by shouting their preference for Barabbas.

Oh, the clouds of judgment begin to hover over Jesus.

Pilate tauntingly shouts to the people, "What then shall I do with Jesus?" The blood-curdling cry comes forth from the multitude, "Let him be crucified!"

Come with me as we draw near to Jesus. He must be the focal point of our interest. Be careful, though; for the more we gaze upon this Suffering Servant of Jehovah, the more we will see the horrible depths of our own depravity.

Thus it must be, if we are to glory in the cross of Jesus.

Barabbas represents the kingdom of man, the kingdom of the Antichrist. This conclusion is drawn from the evidence the Bible gives us about this man. In Mark 15:7 we read, "And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection." In Matthew 27:16 he is called a "notable prisoner." In Luke 23:19, 25 we learn that Barabbas was not only associated with men who were guilty of insurrection and murder, but that he did the same. John 18:40 adds that he was also a "robber." Some suggest that we can learn something from his name, Barabbas, a combination of "Bar," meaning son, and "Abba," meaning father. True, every man is a son of a father, but in this instance they suggest that "Father" is also the name for "Rabbi," a Jewish teacher of the law. Since Matthew 27:16 identifies him as a notable prisoner, it is suggested that his notoriety was twofold: first, from the fact that he was from a prominent Jewish family to begin with, and secondly, his efforts at insurrection were much appreciated and, since he played a leading role in this, was held in esteem by the people.

Why would a man, guilt of robbery, murder, and insurrection be held in esteem? The answer lies in the fact that Barabbas may have been involved in terroristic activities that were aimed at overthrow-

ing Roman domination of the Jews, and promoting Jewish nationalism. There must have been a sizable number of such Jewish patriots. The malefactors on the crosses were in all probability connected with these efforts as well. Most of the Jews cheered such efforts. Anything to be free from Publican taxation and Roman oppression. Terrorism had its appeal, already then.

But what does that have to do with the Antichrist? Did not Rome represent the Antichrist? History shows to us that the Antichrist will come forth in the way of political opposition. The only real spiritual antithesis in this world is Christ and antichrist. These Jewish zealots who carried on Jewish nationalism hated Rome; but they were of the same spiritual temperament. Their tactics were the same: plunder, murder, and violence. We see this about us today. The world may be divided even to the point of war, Iraq and America and all the nations may be mortal enemies now; but, given time, all will eventually merge into the one world kingdom of man, the antichristian kingdom.

The only exception is Christ and His kingdom.

And there stands Jesus. His kingdom is not of this world.

To understand this, we must needs look upon Him with the eyes of faith. To be sure, He laid His hands upon the blind man and restored his sight. Repeatedly He was moved with compassion upon the multitudes and gave up quiet time with His disciples in order that He might meet the needs of the people, teaching them and healing them. Who can ever understand that death-defying cry at the tomb, "Lazarus, come forth!" With equal majesty He calmed the storm and

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

soothed the troubled heart. We must not overlook the fact that He could be firm when He spoke to His spiritual enemies -- none with greater force than the Scribes and Pharisees, those whitewashed sepulchers full of dead men's bones.

All this being true, we have not yet addressed His real ministry. Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy, the Messiah, the Lord's Anointed who had come to redeem Israel from all their iniquity. All during His earthly ministry, He set His face toward Jerusalem. More than to teach, more than to keep the Sabbath or other feast days, it was His purpose to die. Only hours before, He groveled in the dust as a worm, with bloody sweat, imploring His Father, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The kingdom of heaven is founded upon perfect righteousness. It requires the death of the guilty sinner. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, was made to be sin for us.

His kingdom is spiritual. It is characterized by the love of God enthroned in the human heart and delivering a people from the dominion of sin and Satan and restoring them unto favor with God.

Days before, He had ridden into Jerusalem upon the colt, the foal of an ass. He must needs enter into His kingdom in the deepest way of humility, the suffering and death of the cross. He is about to bear God's eternal wrath against the sins of His people.

This background helps us understand the nomination.

Pilate set forth this choice.

In a sense, he was manipulated by the Jewish leaders. Annas and Caiaphas, as well as the elders of the people, had gone through a parody of justice, a supposed trial. Jesus' guilt had been decided at the outset. The only thing still to be determined was what formal charge could be brought to Pilate. After much confusion, they latched upon the idea of civil disobedience, a threat to destroy public property, destroy the temple.

Pilate had tried every way possible to get from under the miserable task of conducting a trial for this Je-

sus. He knew that Jesus was innocent of any public crime. He could not, however, afford a confrontation with the Jewish leaders. Past history clearly demonstrated that these feisty Jews could be quite a handful for Roman authority. He could better appease them than be called to give account to Caesar of Rome. Already he had challenged them to judge Jesus in their own court system, asserting from the outset that he did not consider Jesus' "offense" a capital crime. When Pilate learned that Jesus had lived in Nazareth, he forthwith sent Him to Herod, Tetrarch of Galilee. But, He was back. What now?

Pilate was not only a judge, he was a shrewd politician as well. He thought it smart to capitalize on a custom associated with the Jewish Passover, to release a Jewish prisoner. There is no mention of the release of such a prisoner in the entire Old Testament. It appears that it began during the four hundred years separating the old and new testaments. Zionism, or Jewish nationalism, began during this time when Israel was occupied for the most part by Egypt and Syria. From the little evidence one can find, we conclude that the idea of releasing a prisoner at the Passover Feast was maintained along the following lines of thought. Israel was in forced bondage in Egypt. They were freed to take up their place in Canaan, to be a nation. (Notice the secularization of a religious feast.) The Passover was viewed as a feast of freedom from foreign oppression. During these years of Egyptian, Syrian, and Roman oppression, they requested the foreign government to release a prisoner who represented their cause, as a symbol of their future. Eventually they would once again have national independence.

This would explain why the populace would want a robber and murderer released. He committed those crimes while serving the nationalistic cause of the Jews. The objects of these crimes were the hated Romans. Such a criminal became a folk-hero to the Jews. His release would be cause for celebration and hope.

Evidently, the Roman government consented to this request of the Jews and made it an annual event. This still does not explain why Pilate presented a choice to the Jews. Usually, the Jews suggested a person, and the Roman authorities confirmed it. This took place here as well. But in the midst of this process, Pilate suddenly took advantage of the practice and decided to give them a choice, Jesus or Barabbas. He had no problem placing Jesus in the same category as Barabbas. Political expediency was the name of the game for him. He had a twofold motive. First, he wanted to test the popular support that Jesus had. Could he (Pilate) drive a wedge between the leaders of the Jews and the common people? Second, if he could do that, he saw a way out of a difficult situation.

In such human contrivances, God has a divine purpose. The whole world must stand before Jesus and Barabbas. Ultimately, this is God's nomination. In a most public way, God is challenging every human being: will you cast your lot with Jesus or with Barabbas?

With one accord, man chooses Barabbas. The kingdom of man, the glory of man, the hopes of man, are most important, even if it involves breaking the law of God. Such it is with all of us. There is no human exception. The apostate church, the powers of this world, the people at large, even the disciples of Jesus, all forsake Jesus: "Let him be crucified!" We hang our heads as well. The world stands condemned.

But God turns the effrontery of man into victory. Jesus is not a victim. He must suffer and die on that cross. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). He died, but He also arose. Death is swallowed up in victory.

Jesus or Barabbas!

Let us not crucify the Son of God afresh.

Let us now cry out, My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine! □

Creation and Science . . . and Common Grace (2)

Although the report of the study committee to the Christian Reformed Synod of 1991, "Committee on Creation and Science," approves theistic evolution, this is not the main purpose of the report. For the CRC has already approved theistic evolution. The CRC Synod of 1988 received a report from its Board of Trustees informing the Synod of the Board's decision that the writings of three of the Church's professors advocating theistic evolution "fall within the limits set by the synodically adopted guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture and by the doctrinal statements of the Christian Reformed Church" Only then did the Synod appoint the study committee on creation and science.

It was not the mandate of the committee to investigate whether theistic evolution is biblically and creedally Reformed. Rather, the mandate was "to address the relationship between special and general revelation as found in Belgic Confession Article II" The committee was to explore and formulate the basis for the approval of theistic evolution in God's general revelation. Then, significantly, the Synod defeated a motion that would have forbidden the professors from teaching theistic evolution while the study was being made (cf. *Acts of Synod 1988*, pp. 595, 599).

It would be a mistake, therefore, to regard the approval of theistic evolution as the heart of the report. The heart of the report is rather the basis it proposes for the approval of theistic evolution.

This basis is general revelation and common grace.

In keeping with its mandate, the committee on creation and science finds the basis, or ground, for theistic evolution in general revelation. General revelation is God's making Himself known to men in creation and history, in distinction from the revelation of Himself in His Word, Holy Scripture. The committee proposes that general revelation is an authority in the church alongside Scripture. It is an authority equal to Scripture: "The authority of general revelation, no less than that of special revelation, is a divine authority, which must be acknowledged without reservation" (p. 41). General revelation (which for the committee is virtually identical with modern scientific theory) teaches evolution -- not only a world that is billions of years old, but also the development of all things, including man, from the dead matter that resulted from the "Big Bang" (p. 36). This authoritative testimony of general revelation demands a reinterpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 along the lines of theistic evolution.

The report frankly acknowledges that general revelation is responsible for bringing about the new interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 that is essential for the approval of theistic evolution in the church.

Thus this issue concerns the impact of general revelation upon our understanding of special revelation. If we stood in a tradition that instructed us in our reading of Scripture to ignore either general revelation or the results of science, the question of how Genesis

records history would not arise (pp. 14, 15).

These questions (about the doctrine of creation and the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 -- DJE) have arisen because of advances in science (p. 19).

Regarding the question of "the existence of evolutionary forebears of the human race," the majority of the committee cannot rule out animal ancestors of the first man, because they "believe that we are called to somehow take account of both of God's revelations whether we currently know how to do that or not and that traditional conclusions would be compelling on scriptural grounds were it not that nature (general revelation -- DJE) seems to be authoritatively telling us something else" (p. 43).

If the basis of theistic evolution is general revelation, the source and explanation of general revelation is God's common grace. In support of its contention that "the fall into sin neither eroded the content of general revelation nor destroyed its authority," the report appeals, on page 7, to "common grace" as taught by Herman Bavinck, particularly in his address, "*De Algemeene Genade*" ("Common Grace"; for an English translation of this work, cf. *Calvin Theological Journal*, April 1989: 61). The passage appealed to in Bavinck reads as follows:

God has not left sin to its own destructive working. He had a purpose with His creation, and maintained this purpose also after the fall. He has intervened between sin and the creation with His common grace, which, although it does not renew inwardly, nevertheless retards and restrains out-

wardly. Out of this common grace comes all that which is good and true that we will observe among fallen men. The light shines still in the darkness. The Spirit of God dwells and works in all that is created. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma, n.d., pp. 16, 17; my translation of the Dutch.)

For its position that ungodly, evolutionary scientists rightly interpret God's general revelation, the report again appeals to common grace (p. 12). Although it does not quote this passage, the report is adopting the notion that Bavinck expressed in *"De Algemeene Genade"* when he wrote:

And through His revelation in nature and history, He binds them (the unregenerated world -- DJE) to the invisible, supersensual world and arouses in their hearts the desire for worship and virtue. All of that rich life of nature and of the world of humanity is therefore to be ascribed to God's common grace (pp. 26, 27).

We may fairly summarize the CRC "Committee on Creation and Science" as follows. God's common grace testifies in nature that the universe is billions of years old and that all things, man not excepted, evolved from the original, dead matter. God's common grace has been working also in unregenerated, unbelieving scientists, the damned Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley especially included, to receive and interpret the testimony in nature. Evolution is the Word of God in common grace. Reformed believers must, therefore, submit to this authoritative Word of God. In obedience to it, they must at the very least approve theistic evolution as an honorable Christian doctrine. Since special revelation -- Holy Scripture -- teaches something entirely different in Genesis 1 and 2, the Reformed church must sanction and promote a reinterpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 1 and 2 is not historical and, therefore, is not to be understood literally.

At the heart of the report, as at the root of theistic evolution in the CRC, is common grace. The report itself explicitly says so. The title of the report should have been, "Com-

mittee on Creation and Science ... and Common Grace."

In this way, the report satisfies Herman Bavinck's expectation of theology. Bavinck concludes *"De Algemeene Genade"* by describing theology as a mixture of common grace and special grace: "Theology has first arisen in the congregation of Christ when common grace and special grace have flowed together" (p. 32). They have flowed together, however, as the seven lean and ill-favored cows of Pharaoh's dream "flowed together" with the seven fat cows. Common grace has devoured special grace. General revelation has swallowed special revelation. Evolution has consumed creation.

But this theology is not Reformed theology. Indeed, it is not Protestant theology. The raising of general revelation to an authoritative position in the church alongside Scripture (in reality, over Scripture) is denial of the fundamental Protestant principle: *sola Scriptura* -- Scripture as the only authority in the church. To this illicit exaltation of general revelation, the Reformed faith says "no." Article 7 of the Belgic Confession declares it to be "unlawful for any one, though an apostle (much more, a mere scientist -- DJE), to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures." Nothing, insists the Reformed creed, including general revelation, much less, hostile, evolutionary scientists, is "of equal value with the truth of God" which is the Bible. "We reject with all our hearts, whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule," including prevailing scientific opinion concerning the origin of the universe.

Is there then no general revelation, i.e., God's making Himself known to all men through creation? The apostle makes plain, in Romans 1:18ff., that there is. But the sole purpose of God with this revelation of His eternal power and Godhead to the unbelievers is "that they are without excuse" (vs. 20). Why does the report on creation and science omit exactly these crucially important words in its quotation of the passage from Article 2 of the Belgic Confession (p. 6)? In ac-

cordance with this divine purpose, no unbeliever ever possesses or arrives at the true knowledge of God the Creator from general revelation, for he invariably and instantly holds the truth in unrighteousness (vs. 18) and changes the truth of God into a lie (vs. 25). For example, he changes the truth of creation into the lie of evolution. Romans 1:18-32 explicitly teaches that there is in general revelation for the unbeliever no common grace, but only common wrath: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (vs. 18).

With regard to the believer, whose eyes are opened to the wisdom, power, and glory of the Creator in creation by particular, saving grace, general revelation is "a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God" (Belgic Confession, Art. 2). But the believer reads this book strictly in the light shed by Holy Scripture. For the believer, general revelation, like everything else, including angels from heaven, is subject to the authority of the written Word of God (Gal. 1:8, 9).

It is to be expected that the report on creation and science will win adoption by the CRC synod of 1991, opening the Church and the Christian schools of her members to theistic evolution. There can be no radical, effectual resistance to its thinking and argument that refuses to lay the ax to the report's roots in common grace.

This to me is tragedy.

Oh, that the Church of the report, and all Reformed churches everywhere (for theistic evolution and the view of Scripture that permits it now make inroads widely among Reformed and Presbyterian churches), would simply heed what the report on creation and science itself amazingly confesses at one point:

A plain reading of the first chapters of Genesis, as it was almost universally accepted by Christians until the nineteenth century, indicates that God

made the world in six days a few thousand years before Abraham, that the various kinds of plants and animals were created by Him according to their kind, and that Adam and Eve were uniquely created in God's image. Eve was made from Adam's rib, and to-

gether they were the first parents of the human race. Originally they were perfect and holy, but after the fall they and their descendants became corrupt and sinful, desperately in need of redemption (p. 36).

This, says the report, is part of "the problem confronting the church."

The report is wrong.

This is the solution. □ -- DJE

Prof. Robert Decker

All Around Us

■ Foxhole Christians

I recall from childhood days during the Second World War a saying that went like this, "There are no atheists in foxholes." The point of the saying was that the terrors of combat compelled men to believe in and turn to God. It seems we are witnessing the same phenomenon now that our nation is at war in the Middle East. Military chaplains report increased attendance at worship services and Bible Study meetings. Captain James O'Conner, a Lutheran and chief chaplain aboard the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy, notes that chapel attendance increased by 40% since the deployment began. "The majority of our crew are non-affiliated," O'Conner said, "but many are coming to the faith."

What is true of the military is true of the country in general. Churches across the country reported larger than usual crowds on the Sunday preceding the war's outbreak. Many churches scheduled prayer vigils through the week. Faculty and students at several Christian colleges and Universities held prayer convocations. And the news media are urging the people to pray for peace in the Middle East.

According to reports from both the secular and religious press, the

same is true of the leaders of our nation. President Bush turned to prayer and preachers in the hours surrounding the January 16 commencement of hostilities in the Middle East. The president attended worship services at Camp David on both the Sunday before the 16th and the Sunday afterward. As the U. N. deadline was about to expire, he telephoned Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning of the Episcopal Church (Mr. Bush is an Episcopalian) and U. S. Senate Chaplain Richard Halverson and told them he had been praying for peace. Both men prayed with Mr. Bush over the phone. Browning also prayed with Secretary of State James Baker. On Wednesday the president sent a call to his longtime personal friend, the Rev. Billy Graham. The message: "I need you." Graham arrived at the White House at 5:45 that same afternoon. Graham had dinner with the Bushes and prayed with them and other family members four or five times during that evening. He stayed the night. A hastily organized service was held the next morning at Memorial Chapel at Fort Myer, across the Potomac in Virginia. Among the several hundred who attended were: the Vice President, almost all the members of the Cabinet, many of the White House staff, General Colin Powell, assorted military people, and their spouses. During the course of his 17-minute sermon Graham quoted Abraham Lincoln's prayer "that we will be on God's side." Mr. Gra-

ham returned to the White House with the president for lunch and more prayer before leaving town.

To all of this we offer just this thought: why in time of national crisis do people turn to God when at other times they feel the need neither for prayer nor for the worship of the Lord and, indeed, have very little or no time at all for God and His Word?

*National & International
Religion Report*

■ Weird And Scandalous Views

A sizable renewal group within the Presbyterian Church (USA) based in Louisville called Presbyterians for Renewal (PR) is charging its church's Special Task Force on Human Sexuality with "opening the floodgates to a fully permissive society of approved consensual adult sex, irrespective of gender," with promoting "weird and scandalous" views on marriage and fidelity, and with planning to recommend ordination of gay and lesbian pastors. PR claims that certain beliefs of the members of the Task Force were made clear at an open meeting last November in Charlotte, NC, where committee members deliberated whether it is wrong for the church to condemn categorically non-marital sex and whether marital fidelity necessarily means marital monogamy. PR is also claiming that the Task Force struck at the church's foundational

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

belief in the authority of the Bible by suggesting that scriptural teachings on sexuality are tainted by patriarchal injustice. "The book in which we find revealed God's grace in Jesus Christ has been tried and found guilty of patriarchalism," PR charges. So far, 721 PCUSA congregations have endorsed "Witness for Biblical Morality," a document that calls for a firm denominational commitment to marriage and traditional sexual values. Interestingly enough a recent survey in the PCUSA found that most of the laity do not want homosexuals in the pulpit even if they are celibate, but 64% of the pastors and 70% of the "specialized clergy," such as seminary professors, endorse the policy.

*National & International
Religion Report*

■ Poignant Betweenness

Such is the phrase coined by Nicholas Wolterstorff at the Partnership in the Gospel Conference, sponsored by the Committee for Women in the Christian Reformed Church and nine West Michigan CR churches. The November conference, the fifth of its kind, attracted some 310 men and women from churches in Canada and the United States. This year's registration was the largest ever. The "poignant betweenness" is more than the period between Synod 1990's decision to open all ecclesiastical offices to women and its proposed ratification in 1992. According to Wolterstorff, the "between-

ness" also means "the time between the collapse of an old way of men and women relating to each other in the church and the emergence of a new way." During this transitional period, he said, we must give thanks for the "disappearance of the old way" and "seek guidance for the shaping of the new way." Conference speakers and panel members included Nick and Rev. Claire Wolterstorff (Nick's wife is an Episcopalian clergywoman), Revs. Bruce and Vicki Menning, Linda Male, Rev. Laura Smit, Claudia Beversluis, Rev. Carl Kammeraad, Annalies Knoppers, and Mary Steward Van Leeuwen. Prof. Wolterstorff concluded the Conference by saying, "The old order in which the voices of women were muffled and always treated as being of second rank—that old order is coming to an end. Slowly, with pain, it is ending, it is really ending. We have seen clear signs of the coming of flourishing and justice."

The Bible clearly forbids women to serve in church office. It takes hermeneutical and exegetical gymnastics to make Scripture say otherwise. But where does the Bible ever teach or condone in any way the "muffling of the voices of godly women" or the "treating of women as being of second rank"?

The Banner

■ What To Do About The Second Service

It's no secret that the second service on the Lord's Day in many

churches which stand in the Reformed tradition is poorly attended. Dr. Louis Lotz writes about this in a recent issue of *The Church Herald*, the official magazine of the Reformed Church in America. He notes that all kinds of gimmicks have been tried but nothing seems to revive the second service. Only a handful attend. In one instance he notes a college choir performed at the second service and there were more in the choir loft than in the pews. No mention is made of the God ordained means of grace, the preaching of the Word, by which means the Son of God gathers the church (*Heidelberg Catechism*, L. D. 21). This is the one means which can restore the second service. Lotz concludes his thoughts on the question with these words, "God does not measure our spirituality by the number of times we worship, but by the integrity of our worship." Maybe so. But, surely, having only one service on the Lord's Day is not obedience to Scripture's exhortation, "... neglect not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is ..." (Hebrews 10:25). Having one service on the Lord's Day is certainly not what our fathers had in mind when they said, among other things, that obedience to the Fourth Commandment involves "diligently frequenting the house of God on the Lord's Day" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, q. 103). □

The Church Herald

Rules For Daily Life

Begin the day with God:

Kneel down to Him in prayer;
Lift up thy heart to His abode,
And seek His love to share.

Open the Book of God,

And read a portion there;
That it may hallow all thy
thoughts,
And sweeten all thy care.

Go through the day with God,

Whate'er thy work may be;
Where'er thou art — at home,
abroad,
He still is near to thee.

Converse in mind with God;

Thy spirit heavenward raise:
Acknowledge every good be-
stowed,
And offer grateful praise.

Conclude the day with God.

Thy sins to Him confess;
Trust in the Lord's atoning blood,
And plead His righteousness.

Lie down at night with God

Who gives His servants sleep;
And if thou tread'st the vale of
death,
He will thee guard and keep.

— SB, December 15, 1932

Decency and Order

Rev. Ron Cammenga

The Work of Deacons

The office peculiar to the deacons is diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity, and after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account in consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such time as the consistory may see fit.

Church Order, Article 25.

Introduction

The concern of Article 25 is with the work of the deacons. Article 24 dealt with the method of their election. Article 25, now, prescribes the labors which are required of those who have been elected to the office of deacon in the church.

The earliest Reformed synod, the Synod of Wezel, 1568, addressed itself to the work of the deacons.

According to the testimony of Scripture it is absolutely certain, that the office of the deacons consists in this that they serve at tables, which is to say, that they come to the help of the poor in their needs and provide them with what is necessary through the gathering of alms.

The Belgic Confession describes the office of deacon in Article 30. The article teaches that there must

be deacons appointed in the church so "... that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities."

The lengthiest description of the deacons' office is found in our "Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons."

From which passage (i.e., I Cor. 12:28) we may easily gather, what the deacon's office is, namely, that they in the first place collect and preserve with the greatest fidelity and diligence, the alms and goods which are given to the poor: yea, to do their utmost endeavors, that many good means be procured for the relief of the poor. The second part of their office consists in distribution, wherein are not only required discretion and prudence to bestow the alms only on objects of charity, but also cheerfulness and simplicity to assist the poor with compassion and hearty affection: as the apostle requires, Romans chapter 12; and II Corinthians chapter 9. For which end it is very beneficial that they do not only administer relief to the poor and indigent with external gifts, but also with comfortable words from Scripture.

Article 25 requires especially four duties of the deacons: collection of the alms, distribution of the alms, preservation of the alms, and accounting and reporting to the consistory and congregation of their collection and distribution.

Collection of the Alms

Article 25 speaks of the deacons' diligently collecting "alms and other contributions of charity." "Alms" refers to money. "Other contributions of charity" refers to such things as food and clothing. The "Form" speaks of "alms and goods" and also urges the deacons

"to do their utmost endeavors, that many good means be procured for the relief of the poor."

Generally the collection of the alms by the deacons ought to take place on the Sabbath Day during the worship services. This is in keeping with the apostle's requirement in I Corinthians 16:1, 2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." The *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 38, makes part of our keeping of the Sabbath Day that we "diligently frequent the church of God, to ... contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian." Part of the regular Sunday worship of the people of God ought to be their contributing to the Benevolent Fund. This is one collection that the Scriptures require to be taken in the church.

This does not mean that God's people may not give to the deacons for the relief of the poor on any other day than Sunday. But it is to say that regular Sunday collections are to be taken for the poor.

Since this is the prescribed method by which the deacons are to obtain the alms, it is forbidden that the deacons resort to the methods employed in our day by other "charitable organizations." The deacons have no business involving themselves in crass money-making schemes, bazaars, socials, lotteries, auctions, and Bingo games. The Scriptures bind the deacons to the free, thankful contributions of the members of the church.

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

In passing it may be noted that it was the custom of the early church to take up a special collection for the poor after the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Very likely this became the substitute for the apostolic love feast. In some of our churches today a similar practice is found in the taking of a "thank offering" for the poor after the Lord's Supper has been administered.

As part of their duty to collect the alms, the deacons ought to inform the congregation of benevolent needs and exhort the members to give their alms. Especially are they to exhort close relatives of their responsibility to come to the aid of the needy, and the poor to seek the assistance of their relatives. This is the teaching of I Timothy 5:4, 16: "But if any widow (i.e., "poor person," RC) have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."

The deacons are also to exhort those who are wealthy in the church of the special responsibility they have in regard to relief of the poor. Scripture speaks of this calling. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (I Tim. 6:17-19). The Synod of Wezel laid this calling upon the deacons: "They ought also to diligently admonish those who can afford it to come to the help of the needy of the church and the want of the poor." Our "Form" makes a point of addressing the rich: "Be charitable, ye rich, give liberally, and contribute willingly." In addition, the Synod of Wezel ruled: "The deacons will also watch for cases in which someone deals

violently or unjustly with the widows and orphans in the church, and if they hear of anything of this nature, they must report it to the consistory"

Distribution of the Alms

Distribution of the alms is to be made to the poor. This means, first of all, the poor members of the congregation itself. The original article in the *Church Order of Dordt* spoke of "both residents and strangers." "Residents" were native members of the local church, while "strangers" were refugees who had fled persecution in their native lands. Besides the poor in the local congregation, the deacons are to stand ready to assist the poor in sister churches within the denomination, and also other Christians of different church affiliation.

There are even circumstances when the deacons may render assistance to poor unbelievers. The apostle exhorts in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Such relief ought to be given, however, not to poor unbelievers generally, but to those who are very deliberately placed across the path of the church, who probably themselves contact the church or pastor. Such relief is not to take precedence to the poor within the congregation; the poor saints come first. And such relief by the deacons must certainly be accompanied by a witness to the gospel and the explanation that the assistance given is rendered in the name of Christ.

The question is often asked: "Should the deacons search out the poor, or should the poor come to the deacons?" The answer to this question is: "Both." Certainly it belongs to the office of deacons that they search out the poor. Compassion for the poor will compel the deacons to do this. But the poor also have the responsibility to make use of the office of deacon. There are often times when the deacons are unaware that a need exists. In such cases the poor must go to the office of Christ in the deacons for help. It is also possible for

concerned members to inform the deacons when they suspect that a need exists.

The distribution to the poor is to be "as their needs may require it." The deacons are to meet the "needs" of the poor (Acts 4:35). The poor should not be made to suffer needlessly because pressing needs are not provided for or not provided for promptly by the deacons. But neither should the benevolence of the church be used to provide unneeded luxuries for the poor or to give them a standard of living comparable to the majority of the other members of the church. The deacons' responsibility extends to the needs, the basic necessities of the poor.

What the "need" of the poor is, the deacons are to determine. Here much discretion and wisdom are required. In order to determine the nature and the extent of the need, there must be openness and cooperation between the deacons and the poor. On the one hand, the poor should be honest and forthright in informing the deacons of their needs. On the other hand, the deacons ought to avoid unnecessary probing and needless invasion of privacy. The deacons should investigate to such a degree that they are convinced of the need and understand the extent of the need.

A question that sometimes arises is whether or not Christian education is to be considered a need. Historically, the Reformed churches have answered this question affirmatively. We have already seen that the Church Order speaks of Christian education as one of "the demands of the covenant" (Church Order, Article 21). If Christian education is a "demand," a necessity, then it certainly is permitted covenant parents to seek the help of the deacons in paying their Christian school tuition.

The deacons are to distribute the alms only "after mutual counsel," Article 25 says. This introduces a safeguard and also provides for it that the deacons act as a body and never independently. This means that the deacons must meet and discuss together the needs of the

poor, taking a formal decision to meet a particular need by a majority vote. The deacons may even consult the consistory in certain cases, seeking the additional advice of the elders and minister. The biblical principle applies: "In the multitude of counselors there is safety."

This does not rule out the possibility of exceptions in emergency cases. Such cases do, from time to time, arise. Even then, one deacon ought never to act on his own. And as soon as possible the whole body of deacons ought to be informed of the emergency action that was taken, seeking their approval, albeit after the fact.

Accompanying this distribution, the deacons are "to visit and comfort the distressed," Article 25 states. The deacons are not simply to relieve the poor in a formal, impersonal way, sending a check, for example, or dropping off some groceries. Any social service or government organization can do that. The deacons must never forget that they distribute the mercies of Christ.

The deacons must "visit" the poor. This means ordinarily a personal visit with the poor in their own home.

Besides, the deacons must "comfort" the poor. They do this by talking to the poor, reading and explaining the Scriptures, and applying the Word of God to the special circumstances of the poor. At bottom, the deacons' office too, like that of the minister and the elder, is the office of bringing Christ's Word to Christ's people. The poor have a special need of hearing the Word of Christ. There are special temptations and peculiar struggles to be faced by the poor of God's people. There is the tendency to become discouraged and despondent. There is the temptation to envy and bitterness. The deacons must address themselves to these temptations and serve as the means of God to protect the poor from these threats. The "Form" speaks of this calling beautifully: "For which end it is very beneficial, that they (the deacons) do not only administer relief to the poor with external gifts,

but also with comfortable words from Scripture."

It may be added that this is the most rewarding part of deacons' work. If all that the deacons do is write and send checks, there is no great satisfaction in doing their work. Then the deacons rob themselves of the joy of their labors. But to meet with God's people, to open the Scriptures to them, to bring them God's promises, and to witness the Spirit at work to comfort, encourage, and strengthen the poor -- that is rewarding!

Preservation of the Alms

Besides collecting and distributing the alms, the deacons are called to exercise care that the alms be preserved and protected against abuse.

The deacons must guard against abuse of the alms by the poor. The alms must be administered only to those who are genuinely needy. The deacons must distribute the alms to the poor only after the poor have contacted their close relatives, so as to avoid unnecessarily burdening the church. And the deacons must see to it that the alms distributed to the poor are not squandered.

The deacons must also preserve the alms against the possibility of abuse by the deacons themselves, as has on occasion happened. One deacon alone should not be left to count the benevolent collections. This should be done in the presence of all the deacons, with an elder present. The "Questions for Church Visitation" require this: "Are the collections counted in the presence of the minister or one or more of the elders?" The benevolent monies should not be kept at the home of one of the deacons, but safely deposited in the bank. At least two sets of Benevolent Fund books should be kept. Benevolent monies should always be distributed by a committee of at least two deacons. And there should be an annual auditing of the Benevolent Fund by the consistory.

Deacons Reports

Deacons reports are prescribed by Article 25: "... of which they

shall render an account in consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such a time as the consistory may see fit."

Regular reports are to be made to the consistory. Ordinarily this ought to be done routinely at the monthly consistory meetings. These reports ought to be sufficiently detailed so that the consistory is able to determine that the deacons are faithfully doing their work. The consistory must be assured that the poor are being provided for and that the deacons are bringing them the comfort of the Word of God.

The principle underlying reports to the consistory is the mutual supervision of the officebearers, *Church Order*, Article 81. Besides this, the elders, as the ruling body in the church, exercise supervision not only over the minister of the Word, but also over the deacons.

Regular reports ought also to be made to the congregation. Usually this is done at the time of the annual congregational meeting or by means of an annual financial report to the congregation. It is also possible for an individual member to meet with the consistory concerning either the collection or the distribution of benevolence. In either case, discretion must be exercised by the consistory, which generally means that names and specific amounts of assistance are not disclosed. The deacons are to give an account to the congregation because the work of mercy which the deacons perform is principally the work of the congregation through the office of deacon. □

Though waves and billows o'er me pass
In whelming floods of ill,
Within the haven of God's love
My soul is anchored still.
And though the strain and stress of life
My thread of faith may break,
The cable of His faithfulness
No storm can ever shake.

—SB, October 15, 1932

In His Fear
Rev. Arie denHartog

Spiritual Decline (2)

In our last article we considered something of the reality and seriousness of spiritual decline in the Christian's life. Such decline is not to be dismissed merely as something quite natural and inevitable because of the normal character of the Christian life. We ought to be on our guard against such decline and be deeply concerned about it. It can have very serious consequences. It makes us vulnerable to the attacks of the devil and endangers us for falling into great sin. The example of David ought to be a fearful warning to us. Decline in the life of the child of God can make him for a time the object of God's anger and displeasure, and make necessary grievous chastisement in his life. Spiritual decline is a sin that the child of God commits by giving way to the working of the Evil One in his life. It is a sin that we ought to know and acknowledge and repent from.

We ought to know the causes of spiritual decline in our lives in order that we might turn again to the Lord. The chief cause of course is sin, sin that arises out of our old depraved nature that we bear with us until the day of our death. We must wage a constant spiritual battle against this sin and guard against its spoiling our Christian life. When that sin is unconfessed and unrepented of it will separate us from God and diminish our spiritual life and strength.

The devil knows how to lead us little by little into sin and away from God. When sin is continued, it will begin to dull our conscience. Perhaps at first when we walk in sin we will have great pangs of

conscience. But slowly man becomes accustomed to sin. He is no longer troubled by it. He succeeds to a measure in silencing the voice of his conscience. He makes more and more compromises in his life. At first perhaps he commits his sin in secret, vainly imagining that even God does not see or know his sin. He lives as a hypocrite among his fellow Christians.

Such secret sin will have devastating effects on our walk with God. It is impossible to experience His grace and fellowship when we live in such secret sin. God is holy. He that walks in darkness and says that he has fellowship with God is a liar and the truth is not in him. If we attempt to continue secretly with sin in our heart, or perhaps in a secret closet, that sin will develop and grow more and more. If such sin is allowed to continue, it will soon happen that a man sins more and more openly and becomes brazen about his sin.

Such is the awful development of sin in the lives of men. James speaks of this in the first chapter of his epistle: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:13-15). When a man gives himself over to sin, he becomes a slave of the sin. He gives himself over to the bondage of the devil, and the devil leads him to spiritual devastation and ruin in his life.

This is something that can and does happen in the lives of God's people. The Word of God warns us that whatsoever a man soweth, that

shall he also reap. God is not mocked. He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. (See Galatians 6:7, 8.) When we give ourselves over to sin, we may become so hardened that it is necessary for God to break us. It may be necessary for God to expose our sin openly and put us to shame, as He did with David after his great sin. When the Lord does this to one of His own, He acts in mercy and lovingkindness to turn a man away from sin and back to Himself, and to save him from complete destruction. But this will for that man be painful and humiliating. We ought greatly to fear the consequences of sin in our lives, so that such dealings of the Lord with us are not necessary.

Closely related to the above mentioned cause of spiritual decline is the great and constant danger of worldliness in our lives. Worldliness is of course just another great sin that we must be on our guard against. The Bible warns us again and again about this. The friendship of the world is enmity against God. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15, 16).

Worldliness does not usually overwhelm the Christian in one day. It is something that happens slowly and gradually. There is a subtle working of the devil in regards to this sin also. He has the ability to influence our minds and hearts when we give way to him. He can convince us that things in the world are not really as bad as they seem. Maybe we should re-

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

evaluate. There is, after all, still a lot of good in this world. There is much we can learn from it. There are in it harmless pleasures that we have a right to enjoy just like anyone else. Soon it happens that we begin to lose our spiritual sensitivities. We lose our abhorrence for the evil of the world. We begin to overlook and tolerate a little evil. And this grows more and more, without our even realizing it sometimes. That is how the devil leads us away from God. It is only by the grace and Spirit of God that we will be alarmed as we look back and consider how far we have fallen. Apostasy is not merely a matter of doctrinal departure in our life. It also involves letting go of the principles of the Word of God in our practical daily Christian lives and making compromise with the world and the devil. How needful it is to stop often in our lives and consider why it is that we are sometimes enjoying worldly things that we once condemned. The church as a whole must do that. Are we living in a manner of life that the church in former days condemned? Do we imagine that the reason for this is that we today are more enlightened, have greater liberty or better understanding of the things of the world as they really are? Or is it because we as individuals and maybe we as church are in a state of spiritual decline?

Materialism is an aspect of worldliness and often a reason for decline in the Christian life. How strongly we are attracted to material things. The love of money is a great danger for all. It is possible even for a poor man to be materialistic. Nevertheless, it is a fact that, as we grow more and more wealthy, the danger of materialism increases. How easy it is for us to imagine that we need more in life. Often young people imagine that they have to have so much nicer cars and houses and furniture than their parents had. And they must have these things almost immediately after they are married. On the other end of the spectrum, those in retirement years imagine they need more and more in order to live lives of ease and luxury; to make

regular visits to expensive restaurants at least once a week; to enjoy lavish vacations to remote and exotic places in the world. Years ago many families did not even think of vacations. Now we imagine that they are a necessity of life. We must have motor homes, campers, boats, and all kinds of expensive sports and recreational equipment. The more we have, the harder we are to satisfy.

Yes, it is true that all these things are not sinful in themselves. We may enjoy the things that God has given us. We may not however set our hearts on these things and demand these things. We may not murmur and complain when we do not have them. Remember that one of the chief sins of Israel in the wilderness was the sin of murmuring and complaining because they could not have the luxuries, ease, and pleasures of life that their hearts lusted after. We may not imagine that we must always have as much as our ungodly neighbors. We may not begin to make compromises in our lives to obtain earthly treasures. We may not allow ourselves to become so busy with work and business to obtain these things that mother has to leave her calling in the home and father is seldom ever at home to instruct and discipline his children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. All of this is materialism, and we had better recognize it as such. Such materialism is one of the chief causes of spiritual decline in the church. Materialism destroys spirituality. Materialism is the sin of making an idol out of the things of this world. It is impossible to serve God and mammon. Idolatry of material things will inevitably lead us away from God.

Another aspect of worldliness is worldly friendships. How much we are influenced by our friends and the people we have fellowship with on a day-to-day basis. This is more true than most of us realize. Many a Christian has been led astray through the influence of ungodly friends. This is especially true for young people. Friendship with members of the opposite sex in the world has led many into the

great sin of unequal yokes in marriage. This has always been one of the chief reasons for falling away in the church. Young people, you had better realize the great spiritual danger of this. How many have been brought to spiritual ruin by this and have ended up in marital situations that have caused them to make serious compromise in their lives, even caused them to leave the church of Jesus Christ, or at least to forsake the true church and go to one that is on the road to apostasy. What awful consequences that has had in many families. The true Christian who because of sin and weakness has allowed himself to become attracted to a marriage partner that is wholly unsuitable for a truly Christian marriage and godly home will only suffer great sorrow and grief in later life. Often in such cases the judgment of God comes upon the children from such a marriage, who depart even much further from the Lord than their parents did. The Lord in His judgment cuts off these families in their generations from His covenant of grace. These are the serious consequences of spiritual decline.

Spiritual decline comes when the Christian neglects daily devotion to the Lord through the reading of His Word, through prayer, and through faithful attendance at the house of the Lord and the preaching of His Word. We have communion with God chiefly through His Word and by prayer. These are the means that the Holy Spirit uses to build us up, and to strengthen and encourage us daily in our Christian life. It is impossible to be spiritually strong and to walk with the Lord without these means. Spiritual decline comes when we imagine that going to church once on the Lord's day is sufficient. Spiritual decline comes when we imagine that we know enough of the Word of God, that we need no more earnestly to study the doctrines it contains because we have arrived, and that we have attained to sufficient understanding so that we can get along without this.

I shall write one more time on this subject under the title "Returning to the Lord." □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Marvin Kamps

The Bible Is God's Word The Unity of Scripture

We have all encountered individuals who have no appreciation for the unity of Scripture. They are those who carry a small New Testament, presenting it as the Word of God. They preach and teach only from the New Testament. It is their claim that the New Testament is for the church, while supposedly the Old Testament was for the Jews of the old dispensation. We have the gospel; the Jews had the law. The Christian faith, therefore, is expressed in the New Testament but not in the Old Testament. Some of these people are even so bold as to say that they do not believe in the God of the Old Testament, for He is the God of war and bloodshed. The God of the Old Testament commanded the slaughtering of whole nations. The Old Testament is filled with gruesome stories of vengeance, wrath, judgment, bloodshed, and genocide. Who could possibly enjoy reading or be edified by the tales of Israel's destruction of the Canaanites? Every man, woman, and child, even helpless infants, were cut down with the sword by the servants of the cruel "I am that I am." Who could possibly be edified by the reading and study of the severe laws of Moses? Even in the nations of Israel itself things were not much better. Women were to be stoned to death if they were unfaithful to their husbands. If one neglected or

refused to put his infant son through the agony of circumcision, then he too had to be put to death.

The God of the New Testament is the God of Christianity. He is the God of love. This God we can love and serve. In the Gospels we meet Jesus, who has indeed shown us a better way. The God of Jesus is the God who wants to help and bless all men. The God of Jesus wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. And we have the testimony of the apostle Peter himself that the God of the New Testament is longsuffering ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. And all this is true about the God of the New Testament because He "so loved the world." A man can preach the New Testament with all his heart, and he can call with great compassion the sinner to faith in Jesus and His God. There is no gospel in the Old Testament. It cannot really be preached. And by way of concession to one who would insist upon the unity of Scripture, these individuals would insist that if there is any gospel at all in the Old Testament then it is far inferior to that of the New Testament.

The above is the position of many, if not most, pulpits in this country and throughout the world. The Bible is rent asunder. The God of the New Testament is pitted against the God of the Old Testament. People are taught explicitly or implicitly to ignore the Old Testament.

But all this is so very wrong and unbiblical. It is evil. Satan has de-

ceived men into imagining that humanism is Christianity.

The great reformer of the church, Martin Luther, taught the unity of the Old and New Testaments. Skevington Wood presents Luther's position. He writes:

The gospel is to be found in the Old Testament in terms of the promises, and the law is to be found in the New Testament, as for instance in our Lord's reinterpretation in the Sermon on the Mount. "Thus the books of Moses and the prophets are also gospel (emphasis, MK), since they proclaimed and described in advance what the apostles preached and wrote" (Captivity to the Word, p. 152).

In addition Wood informs us:

He (Luther) dismissed those neo-Marcionites of his day who played down the significance of the Old Testament and tossed it aside as "a book that was given to the Jewish people only and is now out of date, containing only stories of past times." Luther quoted the testimony of Christ Himself, and of the New Testament writers, in order to confute such an erroneous view. The Old Testament is not to be despised but diligently read. The New Testament cannot be understood apart from the Old, Luther insisted ... (page 154).

This was also the position of John Calvin and of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches historically. That the Scriptures are one and that both the Old and New Testaments present the one and the same gospel comes to expression confessionally in the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 6, where we read:

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

Whence knowest thou this (that Jesus is the Mediator, MK)? From the holy gospel, which God himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly has fulfilled it by his only begotten Son.

And the Belgic Confession of Faith states that the

Holy Scriptures are contained in two Books, namely the Old and New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged (Art. 4).

And in Article 6 of the same confession the fathers, in rejecting the apocryphal books, declare that the books of the Old and New Testaments bring us the Christian faith.

Reformed men have always taught that the New Testament must be interpreted in the light of the Old, and that the Old Testament contains the New within itself. They stand in relationship to each other as does promise and fulfillment. The Old Testament is the gospel of Christ Jesus under the forms of types and shadows. The principles of obedience to the gospel of Jehovah God in Christ Jesus are demonstrated to us in the walk and obedience of the saints of the old dispensation. Abraham is the father of all believers. Noah is the preacher of righteousness. And David is the man after God's own heart.

Yet it remains to spell out specifically what is the unifying theme of all Sacred Scripture. It is this: Jehovah God's covenant of friendship with the church of all ages chosen in Christ Jesus, who in the name of the God of Israel redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies His people given Him of the Father from all eternity. Genesis 3:15 is the mother promise and expresses the above truth: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." All the other promises of the Old Testament are but the amplification and unfolding of the particulars of this promise of God to send His Son as the seed of the Woman. And therefore too all

these separate promises to Abraham, Israel, Judah, and David are but aspects of the promise. In this light the Old Testament is replete with the very same gospel as is the New.

It must be underscored that the "covenant of friendship" that God has established with Israel, the church, in Christ Jesus is exclusive, and that because of this fact it becomes realized and manifested historically in an antithetical way. God's wrath, indignation, and judgments fall upon the "seed of the serpent," that is, the reprobate wicked, who are typically portrayed in cursed Canaan's children, the Canaanites (cf. Gen. 3:15, 9:25-27). These Canaanites God commanded His covenant friends, the Israelites, to destroy completely as an expression of God's judgment upon their iniquities and the portrayal of the victory of grace in Christ Jesus over the seed of the serpent. If only men would learn that the New Testament (which declares to us the great victory of Christ Jesus over sin, guilt, death, and Hell, and testifies that this victory was accomplished for the elect of God *alone*), they would have no problem confessing the unity of Scripture. It is because of the rejection of sovereign, unconditional predestination of a church in Christ Jesus that men want to reject the Old Testament. The Old Testament more concretely demonstrates the exclusive character of God's love for His elect people and His eternal rejection, unconditionally, of others. Carnal men are always offended by the truth of God's absolute sovereignty over the affairs of mere men. Herein lies the great "offense" of the Old Testament Scriptures. Arminianism, because of its rejection of sovereign predestination, leads inevitably to Modernism in regard to the doctrine of Scripture.

In addition, the unity of Scripture is predicated upon the truth that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible. It is not so, that there are many authors. It is not so, that there is a Pauline gospel, a gospel of Matthew, a Petrine gospel, and a Johannine gospel, and that all of these are distinct from one another

and even contradict one another on various points, each being only a fallible attempt to present the gospel of Jesus. It is alleged, therefore, that only by comparing and analyzing these conflicting theologies can the church today ever discover what Jesus "really taught." But the fact is that if the books of the Old and New Testaments are not in fact the testimony of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, we will never know what Jesus taught. Higher criticism has shredded Sacred Scripture. All who earnestly hold to the doctrine of divine, infallible inspiration should immediately recognize that the Bible, though made of many different books and written over many centuries, is one Word. It is a unity. For it is the speech of the Spirit of Christ Jesus. Jesus spoke by the Spirit through the prophets of old (Heb. 1:1 and I Pet. 1:10, 11). Besides, "all scripture is given by the God-breathed-forth" activity of God Himself (II Tim. 3:16). Jesus Himself testified to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem that the message of the Old Testament was the very same Word which He preached to them: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). In addition, Jesus insisted upon the unity of the Scriptures, when He taught the people that He and His Father are one: "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye to him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (John 10:35, 36).

Moreover, we should note that the principle of hermeneutics that Scripture interprets Scripture is based upon the fact that the Scriptures are one whole. The Old can be and must be interpreted in the light of the New, and the New must be interpreted upon the background of the Old. The New Testament by itself is not the complete Word of God, and it can never be rightly understood without the Old. How could one ever really understand that Jesus is the stem of Jesse, and the lion of the tribe of Judah, and

the royal seed of David without the testimony of the Old Testament. The covenant of grace remains an unknown entity to those whose eyes are blind to the riches of the Old Testament. It is because of the unity of Scripture that the Reformed and Presbyterian churches have ever held to "infant baptism" of our covenant children. Those who reject infant baptism reveal by this rejection that they do not really understand that all Scripture is a unity. It has one message, which is that God is the God of believers and their seed in Christ Jesus according to His purpose of election. Every Baptist fails to recognize the unity of Scripture on this matter. Rev. H. Hoeksema makes this clear when he writes:

After all, the deepest reason why all Baptists reject the baptism of infants is that they fail to recognize the truth that the people of God are one and the same throughout all ages, and that the same covenant is established with them and with their children throughout their generations, both in the old and in the new dispensations (Reformed Dogmatics, p. 687).

Scripture can interpret Scripture because Scripture is one. In both the old and new dispensations there is but one God, one covenant, one sign of the covenant, and one people of God.

In this connection, we must call to your attention that old but valid warning: "every heretic has his text." Even the Devil quoted scripture to the Lord Jesus in order to deceive the Lord if that were possible. So in all ages men quote Scripture out of context, and without regard to the unity of Scripture. In the second paragraph of this article I referred to three different passages that men use to defend an Arminian and Pelagian theology (I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9; and John 3:16). By violating the principle of the unity of God's Word, these passages are given a totally false interpretation which enthrones man and reduces the great God to the status of a beggar. Scripture must and can interpret Scripture, but then we must hold in high regard the principle of the unity of Scripture. The exegete of Scripture must listen to

the testimony of all Scripture, when treating any one text.

Finally there is one more element of the unity of Scripture to which I of necessity must call your attention. Other men today would emphasize the unity of Scripture. But one thing is often lacking in their presentation. And this is not only, to my mind, lamentable, but also very dangerous. They fail to relate the unity of Scripture to God's counsel and to God's self-revelation. Scripture is one whole, a unity of thought and message, declaring the one glorious gospel in Christ Jesus, *ultimately because* God's counsel is *one* and because God is *One*. All that takes place in time, in heaven and on earth, is according to God's sovereign decrees. The unifying principle of that counsel of God, according to Scripture, is the great glory of His Name through the salvation of a people chosen in Christ Jesus. Since the Bible is the infallible record of God's self-revelation, it therefore of necessity shares that same unity and oneness that characterizes God's eternal will and counsel. Scripture teaches us that God has revealed Himself, that is, His eternal thought, holy purpose, and

sovereign will, as the immutable God of infinite love and grace in Jesus Christ. In the beginning of history, under types and shadows, this revelation was made known. In the "fulness" of time (Gal. 4:4) the revelation of God's love of His chosen people reaches its zenith in Jesus, the Christ. Many Reformed preachers seldom, if ever, give instruction in regard to the counsel of God, His eternal decrees of predestination and providence; and yet they claim shock and dismay that the people do not appreciate the concept of the unity of Scripture. Anyone who would maintain the truth of the unity of Scripture must of necessity see this unity as the blessed testimony of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, who "searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10). The deep things of God are His eternal will and counsel in Christ Jesus.

We, mere sinners by nature, have the eternal Word of God in Jesus, by whom God has spoken unto us and to our children of His everlasting and unchangeable love and grace.

The Bible is God's Word.

Believe the Word of God and rejoice in it forevermore! □

Benefits Of Trials

Is not the way to heavenly gain
Through earthly grief and loss?
Rest must be won by toil and pain —
The crown repays the Cross.
As woods, when shaken by the breeze,
Take deeper, firmer root,
As winter's frosts but make the trees
Abound in summer fruit;
So every Heaven-sent pang and throe
That Christian firmness tries,
But nerves us for our work below,
And forms us for the skies.

— SB, December 15, 1932

Search The Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

The Book of Ruth (1)

(Note: The outline of the Book of Ruth, which is begun here and will be carried on in several subsequent issues of the SB, was prepared by Rev. Haak for use in Lynden's Ladies' Bible Study Society. At our request he submitted the outline to us "as is" -- that is, without any revision for a larger readership. It seems to us that it can serve a useful purpose, in that form, in our *Standard Bearer*, for other societies and Bible Study groups which choose to study this book of the Bible.)

Introduction:

The story of Ruth took place at the time "when the judges ruled," and thus is part of the period of the Judges (the time between Joshua and the conquest of Canaan, 1450 BC, and Israel's cry for a king, the first of which was Saul, 1050 BC.) Exactly when did the history of Ruth take place during Judges? There are two major views. Some say that Ruth lived during the days of the Midianite invasions and was thus a contemporary of Gideon (Judges 6). The Midianites would invade Israel during the harvest season, and this would explain the famine that caused Elimelech to leave the country. Others place Ruth near the end of the period of the Judges because of the genealogy given in chapter 4:18-22. If there are no missing links, Boaz would be David's great grandfather, and thus Ruth would have to live at the end of the time of the Judges. This is probably correct.

Rev. Haak is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington.

The human instrument or author (unknown) evidently lived and wrote this history sometime during the reign of David. It appears that David was well known, and the book could conceivably have been written to fill in the history of David's genealogy. That the book was actually written sometime after the life of Ruth herself is also indicated in that the author feels he must explain the custom of ratifying a legal transaction by giving up one's shoe (ch. 4:7). This custom must have been unknown to the readers of the author's time.

Significance of the Book

1. It traces the line of Christ, specifically the line of David, showing David's descent from Ruth the Moabitess. Repeatedly the Old Testament Scriptures show the marvel of God's preserving the line of Christ (seed of the woman, Gen. 3:15) in humanly impossible ways. The Savior comes from God's grace.

2. It shows the universality of Christ's church. Ruth is a type of the gathering of the Gentiles in due time to Christ, even as we are grafted in (Rom. 11).

3. It gives us lessons in true faith, love of God, trust and sincere regard for our Christian duties. That is, it gives us lessons in godliness as those lessons are written by grace in Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

4. It teaches us the working of God's providence as He works all things together for good to them that love Him. Careful study will give us an eye to see God's fatherly providence in our private concerns, and acknowledge God in all our ways (1 Sam. 2:7, 8; Ps. 113:7-9).

5. It teaches us the beautiful idea of redemption. Boaz is the re-

deemer, the "one who acts as a kinsman." The whole idea of redemption seen in Boaz, who redeems Elimelech's inheritance and Ruth, is a picture of our redemption by Jesus Christ.

Outline

Chapter 1 --

Ruth comes to Bethlehem

- A. Vss. 1-7 -- Introduction and setting to the book
- B. Vss. 8-18 -- Ruth's determination to stay with Naomi
- C. Vss. 19-22 -- The return to Bethlehem

Chapter 2 -- Ruth meets Boaz

- A. Vss. 1-7 -- Ruth gleanes in the fields
- B. Vss. 8-16 -- The kindness of Boaz
- C. Vss. 17-23 -- Ruth returns to Naomi

Chapter 3 -- Ruth's appeal to Boaz

- A. Vss. 1-5 -- Naomi's advice
- B. Vss. 6-13 -- Ruth speaks to Boaz
- C. Vss. 14-18 -- Ruth returns to Naomi

Chapter 4 --

The marriage of Boaz and Ruth

- A. Vss. 1-8 -- The kinsman
- B. Vss. 9-12 -- Boaz takes Ruth
- C. Vss. 13-17 -- Ruth bears a son
- D. Vss. 18-22 -- The ancestry of David.

References

A Bible Dictionary
(Smith, Douglas)
Concordance of the Bible
(Young's, Cruden's)
Old Testament Bible History
by Alfred Edersheim
Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible
Standard Bearer articles by
Rev. J. Heys

Points to Ponder

1. Read the entire book of Ruth in one sitting. Do you see in it the five points under "significance"? Do you find other major themes in the book? Why did the Holy Spirit include the book of Ruth in the Bible?

2. Compare the account of Ruth (the spiritual climate of Boaz, Naomi, Ruth) with the account of

Samson (Judges 13-16), or with the story of Micah's image (Judges 17, 18). Both give us a glimpse of life during the time of the Judges. How do they differ?

3. History and Geography
a. What do you know about the period of the Judges? That is, what are its distinguishing characteristics?

b. Where is Moab? Bethlehem? What is an Ephrathite?

c. When did the barley harvest take place? What were the Old Testament laws on gleaning? (See Deut. 24:19-21 and Lev. 19:10.)

d. Research the idea of a "kinsman" or "redeemer" (Deut. 25:5ff. and Lev. 25:25ff.). Also the idea of one's "inheritance" in Canaan. □

A WORD FITLY SPOKEN

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Hope

Hope is the power of the Christian life, when the Christian life is viewed as a pilgrimage, a journey through this present time and place to a better city and country. Hope is the power that keeps the Christian on that pilgrim way and encourages him on that way. The book of I Peter, addressed to pilgrims and strangers scattered throughout the earth, stressing the importance of hope in this present evil world, is uniquely the roadmap, guidebook, or charter for the Christian life.

Hope is always regarding something which is future, which a man does not yet fully possess, and which he cannot see (Rom. 8:24, 25). In Old Testament times, Israel's hope was in God, in His Word, in His mercy, because of the promise of God that He would send the Christ. The New Testament believer's hope rests upon the promise of God that Christ will come again to make all things new; it is the hope of glory, the hope of salvation, the hope that never makes ashamed, the hope that is the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast; it is the *blessed hope*! Because hope is bound up with the coming of Christ and the renewal of all things, it may be defined as *expectation, certainty, and longing*. The Word of God teaches us to expect certain, definite events in the future: when Christ comes, our present, short, light affliction will be replaced by a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The Word of God comforts us with the surety of God's counsel by telling us that God confirmed it with an oath, that with certainty we may lay hold upon the hope that is set before us. The glory of the inheritance is such that with joy, with zeal, with all his being, the child of God reaches forth for the inheritance with a holy impatience.

The Christian's hope is firmly based on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. If Christ be not raised, all is hopeless; but since He is raised, there is hope. In the resurrection of Christ we have an example of what shall happen to the believer: he, too, shall be raised, exalted, and rewarded. In His resurrection we have the legal right for our resurrection to glory, for it is the proof of our justification. And in His resurrection we have the power of regeneration. For we have been "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3).

Hope cannot be hid. Those who live on this earth with the resurrection life of Christ in them cannot and do not melt into the background. Hope, the dominant characteristic of the pilgrim, is manifest daily in every circumstance; is observed in its activity by those round about; is made the subject of inquiry by all manner of men; and is gladly explained by the child of God. Hope loves to do that! Hope is capable of a reasonable defense and a warm, humble explanation. Hope loves to speak of its part in Jesus Christ and the glory that He brings. That which elicits the questions as to our hope is our willingness to suffer for righteousness' sake, our serenity in the midst of upheaval, and a life of holiness in the midst of corruption and perversion. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3).

Hope never ends. Even when we have been glorified and have entered into the enjoyment of heavenly bliss, hope continues forever. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (I Cor. 13:14). Readily can we understand that faith, as the bond that unites us to Christ, and love, as the bond of perfectness, shall continue forever. But hope? How can hope abide when it has received its object? Well, there is always more! Because God is infinite in His perfections, and because the enjoyment of God will never come to an end.

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

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

The End Times (10) The Last Battle

The history of this new dispensation ends in the battle of Armageddon. The last battle, Armageddon, comes *after* the millennium.

The pre-millennialist believes that there will be *two* major battles, one at the end of the great tribulation, the other at the end of Jesus' thousand-year reign on earth. The first battle, they say, is the battle of Armageddon; the second is the battle of Gog and Magog. In the first, Jesus will destroy the Antichrist and begin the millennial kingdom on earth. In the second, Jesus will destroy the forces of Gog and Magog and usher in eternity.

The difficulty with this view is that it believes the battles of Revelation 16 (vs. 14) and Revelation 20 (vss. 7-10) are different battles. But the pre-mill should not stumble at the fact that these battles are separated by several chapters in Revelation. The book of Revelation does not give history in chronological order, but has a series of visions, many explaining the same history but from different viewpoints and with differing emphases. Proof of this is that in chapter 16, John was shown what will take place at the very end, including the battle of Armageddon. In chapter 17, John receives detailed instruction about the great whore and the beast, whose destruction was *already* described in chapter 16. Likewise, in chapter 20 we come back to the

We have been answering the question that the disciples asked in *their* lifetime, the same question that arises in our souls especially as we see more turmoil in the world, "Lord, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?" We are *interested* in these questions.

The signs that Jesus showed His disciples do not point out the day and the hour of Jesus' coming, but they do help us understand the times and the seasons so that, as the Lord said to His disciples, no man might *deceive* us. We must *expect* lawlessness, natural calamities, pleasure-mindedness, apostasy, the Antichrist, persecution (opposing most in whatever ways we can and may); and we must be *active* in the spread of Jesus' gospel into all nations. But we must not be deceived.

Nor may we be deceived by false interpretations of the millennium, which teach that there will be a universal reign of peace and prosperity for a thousand years at the end of human history, either with Christ present on earth (pre-millennialism) or without Christ present on earth (post-millennialism). Our view (a-millennialism) holds that there will be *no* literal thousand-year reign of peace on earth, but that Christ will return to a horribly wicked world to end earthly history and usher in the eternal reign of His kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. (The *millennium* is the present, new dispensation. See the last article.)

great battle referred to in Revelation 16.

The second difficulty with this view, as with almost all pre-millennialism, is that it interprets *literally* an obviously *symbolic* book.

Third, pre-millennialism has the mistaken notion that permeates all its teachings, that the *nation* of Israel will again be restored as the kingdom of God, separately and in distinction from the church.

The a-millennial position differs radically from this view.

The battle of Armageddon spells the end of Antichrist's kingdom. His kingdom will be a great political, universal world power, under one head, the man of sin (II Thessalonians 2). This political power will be served by the false prophet (Rev. 13, 17), the united forces of religion, especially Christianity. At the height of his kingdom, the

world will experience a great prosperity; the church will suffer. And now the battle of Armageddon brings to an end this devilish kingdom. This is the *last* battle.

This is how it will come about: Revelation 20 tells us that at the end of the 1,000 years (this present dispensation), Satan will be loosed so that he can deceive the nations (vs. 4), something that he was unable to do during *this* dispensation. The result is that Antichrist rises to power and unites the world into one. The second result is that the nations are gathered together for war, encircling the "camp of the saints" and "the beloved city." While they are in the middle of the most horrible war the world has known, fire from heaven devours them, the devil is cast into hell, and the last judgment takes place (vss. 7ff.).

Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

Gog and Magog

Gog and Magog are involved in this last battle.

The names, Gog and Magog, come from Ezekiel 38 and 39, which means that the Revelation of John is a fulfillment of prophecy made by Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, Gog is a leader in the land of Magog. Gog leads a huge armed force from the north down against the nation of Israel, which is once more living in Canaan after the captivity in Babylon. Gog's motive is loot, but God's purpose is the judgment of Israel (see Ezekiel 38:4, 16). Then, after Gog arrives in Israel, God destroys his hosts with an awesome slaughter, which Ezekiel 39 describes in gory detail and which Revelation 19 says ends in a carrion feast for buzzards.

The fact that there are slight differences between John's vision and Ezekiel's prophecy should not hinder us. Gog and Magog, essentially, are the pagan nations, the ungodly peoples that desire to destroy the people of God. In Revelation 20 they are seen to be the pagan peoples from the four corners of the earth who hate God's saints and war against them.

You may ask the question, "How does this fit with the view that Antichrist will be from the 'Christianized' western nations, though you say that these *pagan* nations will fight against 'the beloved city'?"

The explanation is this: Antichrist is the *beast* which will have universal sway. All nations will be united under him — one kingdom, one government, one world. This is the "one hour" that Revelation 17 speaks of. But the beast does not have this power all of himself, because Revelation 17 says that there are 10 kings that give *their power* to the beast. Revelation 16 also talks about the beast receiving help from the "kings of the east."

These 10 kings, or the kings of the east, that give their power to Antichrist, are Gog and Magog.

This fits with the prophecy of Daniel. In Daniel 7, the little horn, which represents Antichrist, arises from the fourth beast, which is the old Roman empire. (If anyone is interested, he may read E.J. Young's

strong defense of this position in the appendix at the back of his commentary on Daniel.) The Roman empire broke up into the "Western" nations: the "Christian" nations of Europe and the Americas (and a few others). From these nations the Antichrist will arise.

But there are *other* nations in the world, the people of whom are "as the sand of the sea": China, Japan, India, Africa, the Soviet Union. And the one great difference between these nations and the rest is that these nations have never been "Christianized," while the others have. China, India, etc., are pagan nations, hostile to Christianity. Also, since they have never been that much of an influence on world history, they have been "on the four corners of the earth."

At the end of time, these nations will be marshalled by the devil to the last battle against the beloved city.

The Beloved City

The "beloved city" in Revelation 20:9 is Jerusalem. But we do not mean the earthly city by that name. Gog and Magog do not fight against the Jews in Israel.

Jerusalem is symbolic and represents the church of Christ. The "camp of the saints" in verse 9 is not the tents of Israelites pitched again in the desert over there, but the gathering of believers and their children. And the proof of this is not far to be found. Believers and their children, now, are Jews, according to Romans 2:29. New Testament believers are called the "Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16. Old Jerusalem has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ; its reality is the New Testament church.

So the New Testament warns us, Christian believers, that before the end of time there will be a great battle, the last battle, a full-scale battle, between the world and the "church." All the nations of the world will turn on the people of God to persecute and destroy her. (Can you see, then, why so many today are watching with bated breath what's happening in the Middle East? They believe that this prophecy refers to the *earthly* na-

tion of Israel. And with the threat of Israel entering the war, which has not happened yet at this writing, the battle of Armageddon, for them, looms near! But the battle will not be against earthly Israel; so their fear is misdirected.)

But in the eyes of Gog and Magog, the "church" at that time will be true Christianity! Looking at the "Christian world" (which really will be the *antichristian* world!), the nations of Gog and Magog will say, "Let us go up to Jerusalem; let Zion be defiled: let our eye look upon Zion." Really, then, the battle will pit the antichristian kingdom under the power of the devil, over against all the pagan nations which the devil himself has deceived to join up with him. It is the world fighting against itself!

This will be the battle to end all battles. We see a little bit of the horror of what that war will be when we see the weapons of modern warfare that are used in Iraq and Kuwait. At the end, all the powerful weapons of mass destruction will be unleashed.

In the middle of that battle, Jesus will return to end earth's history, render judgment, and begin eternity. (to be concluded next time)

Questions for discussion:

1. How would you try to convince a pre-millennialist of the error of his position? Be specific.
2. Why are the pre-millennialists so concerned that the battle of Armageddon not start *immediately*? According to them, what is supposed to happen *before* this battle begins?
3. Why would God want the world to end in the way described in Revelation 20? □

No chance has brought this ill to me,
'Tis God's sweet will, so let it be;
He seeth what I cannot see.
There is a need be for each pain,
And He will make it one day plain
That earthly loss is heavenly gain.

— SB, October 1, 1932

From Holy Writ
Rev. George Lubbers

Exposition of Psalm 81:1ff. (1)

*Sing aloud to God our strength:
make a joyful noise to the God of
Jacob. Take a psalm, and bring
hither the timbrel, the pleasant
harp with the psaltery. ...*

*I am the LORD thy God,
which brought thee out of the
land of Egypt: open thy mouth
wide, and I will fill it. ... But my
people would not hearken to my
voice; and Israel would none of
me. ... Psalm 81:1, 2, 10, 11*

We have quoted only a representative part of the Psalm. However, in those verses we hear the very keynote. Particularly this is true of verse 10, where we read the exact covenant words of Jehovah which He spoke directly to Israel from out of the secret place of thunder. It expresses the sum-total of all the lovingkindnesses, the tender mercies, the unique faithful covenant made to Abraham and to his children. These are words to the Israel of God. And this Israel is such that it includes both Jew and Greek, Barbarian, bond and free. It is God's everlasting covenant of mercy which He will not take from His beloved people (Ex. 20:1ff.; Jer. 31:31-34; Isa. 59:20, 21).

Such is the solid basis for God's abiding claim on Israel. It is also the solid rock of His just complaint against Israel as uttered in verses 11 and 12 of this Psalm. Implied in this complaint is God's yearning love. It is as of a mother bird who faithfully feeds her young in their nest. These infant birds open their

mouths wide when they hear their mother approaching with a morsel of food for them. Thus they are fed.

But there was an "Israel" of which God says they "would none of me!" They would none of God's great and holy Name which God proclaimed to Moses as he stands in a place prepared for him in "the cleft of the rock." And the Lord put His hand over Moses to cover him as He passed by in His "glory." Of this "glory" Israel wanted nothing. They did not desire the glory of a God who is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..." (Ex. 33:18-23; 34:4-7).

But there was also an Israel which is not the true Israel of God who came to the temple to confess their sins, received forgiveness when God "saw the blood," and heard the trumpet-blast of the priest over the sacrifice (Ex. 12:11-17; Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1). This was the Israel which drew nigh with their mouth and honored God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. They are very religious zealots who willed to be saved by the "works of the law." Always and anon they were a people who were ignorant of God's righteousness, and went about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteous God (Rom. 9:31-33; 10:1-4). These could not see, they did not understand, that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. Theirs was not merely the sin of transgressing God's commandments by reason of

their "infirmities," but it was the sin of "unbelief." They rejected the counsel of God against themselves (Luke 7:27-35; Matt. 11:20-24).

Of this Israel, and of their total unbelief, Jehovah speaks when He says in Psalm 81:12, "But my people would not hearken to my voice and Israel would none of me." We see this already in Exodus 32:4b: "... and they said: These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And Stephen says to this Israel which would none of God, "Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets ... yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon" (Amos 5:25, 26; and all the prophets before the Captivity of both Israel and Judah).

But the Lord will have His instituted feast days kept in Israel, the appointed Sabbaths in the land, as they culminated each year in the seventh month in the great "feast of trumpets" (Num. 29:1ff.; Lev. 23:23, 24). If this feast of trumpets was kept, then the other two appointed great feasts would also be honored in spirit and in truth: to wit the feast of the Passover in the first month, and feast of the firstfruits of the full harvest seven weeks later. And this ended in the feast of tabernacles, the feast with the "great day" (John 7:37ff.).

To understand the poet, one must needs have lived in the land of the Poet, Jehovah God! Ever the call of the Lord was to Israel, through the prophets: "Sing aloud to God our strength; make a joyful

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

noise to the God of Jacob." It must be a joyful song of faith in the promises, the covenants, the law-giving, as from a people who know that they are the sons of Jacob.

They must know that Jacob is in the class with Abraham and Isaac, that God has prepared for them and for their spiritual children a city which has eternal foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God (Rom. 9:4, 5; Heb. 11:8-10; 14-16). Yes, this God of Jacob is our strength. He is not ashamed of us, because He has prepared for us a city. And this city was portrayed in the Old Testament in the earthly Jerusalem, when the tribes went up to the temple to worship their God.

Yes, here Israel must use their musical instruments, as they lifted up their voices in a priestly manner at the altar. This was especially so in the time of the "full moon," the solemn feast day. For the full moon always occurred on the fifteenth day of the month in each of the three great feasts in Israel. There is a difference in the translation, found in various Bible versions, concerning the term "in the time appointed." Thus the KJV has it. The American (Revised) Version reads here "at the full moon." The latter is a literal translation of the Hebrew text. The translation of Luther has it (in German) "in our feast of dwelling in tents." The Holland translates the Hebrew term full moon (*bicheseem*) "at the proper, appointed time." Of all the three feasts this was the feast where there was a special symbolism in the number of bullocks that were offered on each day. It was like a count-down: one bullock fewer on each day (Num. 29:17-38). Notice that the count-down of the number of bullocks was from the second to the eighth day of the feast in the seventh month. The number reads as follows: twelve, eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven. Thus the number ends in the covenantal sabbath number of God's completed work. From here on no diminishing is possible. This ends in the eighth day, on the "full moon" day, the appointed day of atonement. It is the only solemn, feast day without festival joy.

The only instruments used were the silver trumpets which were blown by the priests over the sacrifices. Hence, blow up the "trumpet" in the new moon, at the time appointed, the day of atonement for all the sins of Israel. It was the picture of the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God, once in the end of the ages (Heb. 9:23-28). This is the one sacrifice which attempts symbolically-typically to come to finality.

But of course that was not possible. For there was no sacrifice that could cleanse the conscience from sin (Heb. 10:1-7). Nevertheless, in this sacrifice on the "full moon" of the seventh month we see most clearly that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes" (Rom. 10:1-4).

And now in a sense we come to the place where we can understand why this feast was also called the "feast of trumpets." A little study of the use of the trumpet can be beneficial here. I believe that we must bear in mind that basically the trumpet in Scripture is different from all other instruments of music. It is the exceptional instrument, for it is the one instrument which is *blown by God Himself* as He brings Israel to share in His victory over sin and death, hell and the grave, because He calls Himself the "Captain of the LORD'S hosts" to Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15). It is in this Angel of the Lord that the trumpet was first blown by God. It was at the time when God spoke the Ten Words of which the preface is, "I am Jehovah thy God who hath delivered you out of Egypt, the house of bondage." These words were uttered after the "voice of the trumpet" sounded "long" and waxed louder and louder (Ex. 19:19). How this trump, which no mortal man can blow, must have echoed and re-echoed from Mount Paran, being heard clearly by the tens of thousands of the children of Israel. God came forth with thousands of His angels, and a fiery law went forth from His mouth (Deut. 33:1-3).

Shall we say in all truthfulness that this was the "first trump" of God? For Paul speaks of that time in the unfolding of the Mystery of the blessed resurrection when the

dead shall rise, and death shall be swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:51ff.). The glorious changing of those who will then be living shall be performed by God in a "twin-kling of an eye, and at the last trump!" Then the trumpet need no more call the thousands of saints to the battle in the full armor of God (Eph. 6:13ff.).

However, at the time when Israel was addressed in Psalm 81:3 the battle-cry is, "blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the full moon," the 15th of the seventh month. For this exhortation comes to Israel as their religious life and worship is stipulated to them under the tutorship of the God who placed them, as it were, "under tutors and governors until the time appointed." It is the time appointed by our heavenly Father. During this time the children of Israel were children under the elements of the world (Gal. 4:1-3).

Only when Israel obeyed the law of commandments and went three times a year to the great appointed feasts could they receive the blessings of the law as a schoolmaster to Christ. This they had to do in childlike faith. In faith they could see, in picture language, before their very eyes, that there is forgiveness with God for their sins which were red like scarlet. And here in this temple they could look in faith upon the sacrifice of the blood of the slain sheep and bullocks, as this was sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, and trust that the promise of God stands sure. He still is our Redeemer God. He receives the blowing up of the trumpet in the "full moon" as worthy of being remembered. For such was the intent of the blowing of the trumpets. We read in Numbers 10:10, "also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, *ye shall blow with your trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.*"

The question may be asked: what is the implication here of the term "memorial"?

The word is a noun. A memorial is in this case in Numbers 10:10 a record in the court of God, who is most holy and just. Because of this justice of God, not one sin of any of the saints can or may remain unpaid. Satisfaction must be made.

Now, such satisfaction cannot and was not made by any of the animal sacrifices in all the hundreds of thousands of sacrifices that were slain and placed upon the altar. Only a "memorial" was brought before the Lord. The bringing of

these sacrifices was no vain and empty show. It was a legal enactment before the face of God, the Judge of every sinner.

(Of this we will need to write more in another installment.) □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Highlights

The Council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC decided last year that at the installation of officebearers the Formula of Subscription would be read publicly and signed by those who had not previously done so. This added an interesting touch to this year's installation, making it just a little bit more memorable than in the past.

It could also be noted here that First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI has decided to do the same next year.

The Young People's Society of our Loveland, CO PRC sponsored what I think is a unique fundraiser for this year's Young People's Convention. On the evening of January 28, between the hours of 5 and 9 PM, the young people did all the waiting, serving, and busing of tables at the Riverhouse Restaurant in Loveland. Their profit for those four hours included all tips left by patrons, as well as a dollar donated by the owner of the Riverhouse for every plate served. Those who ate there that night not only got a great meal at an affordable price, but they also got the satisfaction of having helped their young people earn money to attend the 1991 P.R.Y.P.'s Convention in Byron Center, MI. And, as if that wasn't enough, they also received a \$5.00 gift certificate to be used on their next visit — compliments of the Riverhouse. Sounds like a good deal.

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

And now that I've mentioned the 1991 P.R.Y.P. Convention, let me just add that plans call for this year's edition to be held August 5-9 at Grand Valley State University, sponsored by our Byron Center, MI PRC and their young people.

The Evangelism Committee of our South Holland, IL PRC sponsored a special lecture at the Summit Christian College in Fort Wayne, IN on January 24. Rev. B. Gritters spoke on the subject of the "Antichrist," the same subject which he dealt with last fall for the annual Reformation Day lecture in Grand Rapids, MI.

The Jr. & Sr. Bible Study Societies of our Byron Center Church asked their pastor, Rev. B. Gritters, to show the slides he and his wife, Lori, had taken while on classical appointment in Larne, Northern Ireland. Rev. Gritters showed these slides on January 29, and related something of the work there in Ireland.

And, directly related to the above bit of news concerning Larne, the Mission Committee of our churches has been concerned with, and has considered, the reported possibility of terrorism in connection with international flights. Their conclusion was that, if there are no government warnings against such flights, and there are no reports of terrorist attacks against Americans in the area of our labor, the appointments would be kept — unless the minister and his consistory considered it unwise to go. May it be the prayer of all our congregations that this work

continue without interruption and the men laboring in Larne may travel in safety.

Ministerial Calls

Rev. Carl Haak declined the call from our Kalamazoo, MI PRC to serve as missionary in Venice, FL.

Rev. Tom Miersma declined the call he was considering from our Hudsonville, MI PRC to serve as missionary to the saints in Larne, Northern Ireland.

* * * * *

And a final parting thought lifted from one of our South Holland, IL PRC's bulletins:

"Peace is the deliberate adjustment of my life to the will of God." □

—Anonymous

NOTICE!!

Hope Christian School of Redlands is in need of a teacher for the combined first and second grades for the 1991-1992 school year. Interested parties, please contact Mr. Ed Karsemeyer at the school, (714) 793-4584, or Mr. Bill Feenstra, (714) 793-3597.

TEACHERS NEEDED

Heritage Christian School of Hudsonville, MI will have openings in the Junior High and Intermediate grades for the 1991-1992 school year. Applicants for these positions may call Gerald Kuiper at school, (616) 669-1773, or at home, (616) 669-5427. Or applications may be sent to the school, 4900 40th Ave., Hudsonville, MI 49426.

TEACHERS NEEDED

Covenant Christian High School is adding one instructor to its faculty. To apply for this teaching position, please write or call Miss Agatha Lubbers, administrator, 1401 Ferndale S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504, (616) 453-5248 (school) or (616) 458-2057 (home).

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies for the 1991-1992 academic year in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches should make application at the March 21, 1991 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, a certificate of health from a reputable physician, and high school and college transcripts must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 21st meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, who will be in need of financial as-

sistance for the coming school year, are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee Secretary, Mr. Larry Meulenberg, 342 Begole S.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504. (Phone 616-453-8466) This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting of March 15, 1991, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Larry Meulenberg, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Board of the RFPA expresses Christian sympathy to its secretary and fellow-member, Mr. Peter Koole, in the death of his father-in-law, MR. LAMMERT LANTING.

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

Cornelius Pastoor, President

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On February 3, 1991 our parents and grandparents, CHARLES and BETTY VAN MEETEREN celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for giving us God-fearing parents, and for the love and Christian instruction we have received from them in these years. May the Lord continue to bless them and keep them in His care in the coming years.

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

Chuck and Beth VanMeeteren
Faith, Curtis, Tarah, and Nathan
Randy and Nancy Hendriks
Sheri, Joel, and Jeffrey
Don and Shelly DeVries
Kari and Daniel
Gary and Mary Gaastra
Scott, Kristina, and Brittany
Steven and Beth Potjer

Redlands, California

NOTICE!!

Covenant Christian School of Lynden, Washington is in need of a

teacher/administrator for the 1991-1992 school year. For more information, please contact: Mr. John Meyer (President), 1255 VanDyk Rd., Lynden, WA 98264 (206) 354-3354; or Mr. Jack Den Hartog (Secretary), 8880 North Pass Rd., Sumas, WA 98295 (206) 988-5402.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies Society of the Hope PR Church of Grand Rapids, MI expresses its Christian love and sympathy to their members, Mrs. Jeanette DeVries, Miss Gertie Lanting, Mrs. Alice Knott, and Mrs. Josie Koole in the death of their father, MR. LAMMERT LANTING.

May they be comforted by the words of the Lord in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Rev. James Slopsema, President
Mrs. Gerald VanDenTop, Secretary

SOUTH HOLLAND PRC PUBLISHES 4-FOLD BROCHURE

This brochure fills a vital, long-awaited need. It can be used anywhere and everywhere. It makes an appeal to Reformed, Presbyterian, and all Bible believers. Features of this Four-Fold are:

1. It briefly informs the reader of 8 lively aspects of our ecclesiastical life
2. It is written in a style that carries the reader along
3. The reader is encouraged to write for more information
4. It can be inserted in a #10 business-size envelope
5. Lacking this size envelope, the brochure can be stapled shut, addressed on the blank, down-side panel, and stamped. It will be accepted by the post office.

For your free sample, write, Evangelism Committee, Protestant Reformed Church, 16511 South Park Avenue, South Holland, IL 60473 or call (708) 596-3113.