

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

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



**Lynden (WA)
Protestant Reformed Church**

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In This Issue . . .

Something new!

Actually, several things new.

First of all, of course, there's the new place of worship for our Lynden PRC, as it is pictured on the cover and described on the last page. We rejoice with that congregation in this milestone in their history.

Then there's the rubric "When Thou Sittest in Thine House. . . ." The rubric itself is not new. But the contents are different — for the *Standard Bearer*. We've long been convinced that our young people could well begin reading, with profit, at an early age, many of the kinds of articles which appear regularly in the *SB*. Well, now there's something also for the young *children* — not just about them, but for them. So, parents, slip this one into the hands of your 8-12 year-olds. Mrs. Lubbers wrote for them, and then tested the article on a couple of them (ages 8 and 10), and found that they not only handled it with ease but also enjoyed it. The title, "Playgrounds and Battlegrounds," suggests that the enjoyment will be spiritual in nature. In fact, the reading of it is surely part of putting on the armor of which Mrs. Lubbers writes so interestingly. We are confident your children will find it to be such. Perhaps we'll see more of this type of writing — so that the *SB* can become truly a family magazine.

And, finally, there's something new with respect to the entire magazine. The *Standard Bearer* has finally caught up to desktop publishing. Thanks to a very generous gift by a group of supporters, there is in the office in which the *SB* also has a home a high-powered laser printer. The capability therefore for in-house composition of every issue is now ours. You're looking at the results of our very first attempt. □ — D.D.

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Meditation

Rev. Jason Kortering

Hope Through the Resurrection

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I Peter 1:3-5

Hope!

A living hope — that's even better!

Without it, we sink into the horrible depths of doubt and depression.

Peter knew something of that as well. Having experienced personally the mighty work of God in Jesus, he had all sorts of hope. His own mother-in-law was healed of a fatal fever. He participated in the mighty catch of fish when Jesus said, "Cast the net on the other side of the boat." He walked on the water to Jesus. He saw the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. He himself had confessed, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God." But then things turned around. At the Passover, Jesus spoke of the shepherd being taken and the sheep scattered. With firm resolve, Peter committed himself to following Jesus. Jesus poured out His soul to the Father, "If it be possible, let this

cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The soldiers came, and, faithful to his commitment, Peter swung the sword and cut off the ear of Malchus. But Jesus reprimanded him: "Put up thy sword. He that uses the sword shall perish with the sword." Peter followed, and soon we hear him say, "THAT MAN I know not." And he went out and wept bitterly.

The saints to whom Peter wrote these words knew something of this dark night. They were scattered throughout Asia Minor at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Others were Christians who fled the persecution at the time when James was beheaded in Jerusalem. For some it meant separation from family, giving up good means of income, not finding their way in a foreign land, the fear of imprisonment. There are times when the night can become very dark.

What about you? Do you know what it is to cry in the night for sins committed and for the consequences they bear? How many of God's saints carry the burdens of afflictions, loneliness, sorrow, pain, and suffering. There are those who suffer separation because of war and the horrible consequences of battle and bloodshed. Many suffer for Jesus' sake. They do good, but suffer evil, even at the hands of unfaithful spouses, parents, or children.

The sunshine that dispels the darkness is nothing less than hope.

Hope is something good, something very precious which we desire very much. As we look to the future, we gaze upon that for which we hope. We do not have it as yet. It is the nature of hope that we look ahead (Rom. 8:24, 25). As we look ahead,

we are sure that we will receive it. There is no doubt about it. Hence we long for it, we openly and unashamedly think about the future when we shall obtain that for which we long.

A living hope ("lively," in the Authorized Version) indicates to us what the content of this hope is, what it is that we treasure for the future. The answer is, life itself. It is nothing else than covenant fellowship with the ever blessed God. As we sing, "to live apart from God is death," so life is "dwelling with God forever." In the context here, Peter describes it as an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, which does not fade away, reserved in heaven.

Our lively hope is to see Jesus, and see in Him a fuller revelation of the glory of God, and then to praise God forever. Imagine, that we can do that without any distraction of sin, suffering, or sorrow. Our hope is unmixed pleasure in God.

To that hope, we are begotten.

Literally, that word means "to be born again." Looking at Peter, that was exactly what it took for him to get hope after the terrible denial of Jesus. Almost immediately God worked in his troubled soul. Even the bitter weeping must be viewed in stark contrast to Judas, who went out and hanged himself. Jesus did not forget Peter the morning of the resurrection: "Go tell my disciples, and Peter!" And witness the breakfast of fish. To whom does Jesus turn, but to Peter. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest me more than these? Three times Peter is forced to examine himself in the presence of Jesus and the other disciples, and each time he says, humbly, "I like thee" (friendship love). He could not say, "I love thee" (divine love). What

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

encouragement: "Feed my sheep!" He was publicly restored to the office of apostle.

This begetting, being born again, is the process of conversion. It begins in the wonderful work of regeneration and extends all through the lifetime of each saint. It is God's work of renewal. He causes our hearts to reach up for God and for the desired fellowship that follows. He opens our eyes to enjoy meaningful purpose in this world, to enjoy serving God in all areas of our lives. He gives to us the vision of the future, a blessed hope that one day we will be perfect in heaven, the salvation ready to be revealed.

Just as important, however, is the phrase, "kept by the power of God through faith." Our future hope is rooted in God's divine beginning, but it also includes God's careful preservation. This was equally important to Peter, to the scattered saints, and to us. There are so many forces of evil that would take this hope away from us. Satan is cunningly devising ways to sow seeds of doubt and temptation. Evil men abound, only too willing to have us join their convivial company, or, if we turn from that, to stab us in the back and work intently to destroy us. Oh, what relief, we are kept by the power of God. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the source of our strength in dealing with all such opposition. The wonder of it is that it is through faith. Our faith is what needs strengthening. The bond that unites us to Jesus must be made stronger and stronger, for it is our lifeline to all the blessings of salvation. The power of God's grace, administered through the Holy Spirit, preserves that union.

No wonder, then, that our hope is sure and steadfast, incorruptible (cannot be contaminated from without), undefiled (cannot be contaminated from within), and cannot fade away (cannot be lost forever).

We ask, why does God do this? What does He find in us that draws the cords of His love to our hearts so as to give us hope in a world of hopelessness?

The answer is, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He hath begotten us according to His abundant mercy by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus left an indelible mark on the soul of Peter. He was one of the first to run to the tomb, to see and believe. He received a personal visit of Jesus the first resurrection Sunday (1 Cor. 15:5). Yes, it took the Holy Spirit of Pentecost to put it all together for Peter: "Ye have taken Jesus and with wicked hands have crucified and slain him, but God raised him from the dead!" (Acts 2:23-32).

Two things make it plain why the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the key to our future hope.

First, the resurrection is the divine certification that the work of Jesus on the cross was acceptable to God. True, with triumphant voice Jesus shouted from the cross, "It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Jesus paid it all. There is reason for hope. Our sins are forgiven

The earth shook, the rocks were rent, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. Yes, God answered the word of the cross. The centurion could rightly say in response to the event, "Surely, this is the Son of God!" Yet, nothing speaks so eloquently of divine approval as does the resurrection. "Who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Jesus paid it all. There is reason for hope. Our sins are forgiven in the blood of Jesus.

Second, who can better keep us in the direction of heaven, our eternal hope, than our Living Lord? We rejoice as Christians, that the One in whom we place our trust for time and eternity is not one who was alive and is now dead. We have more than a memory, we have a Living Lord. He said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even

unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). He is the One who is at the Father's right hand and carries out the details of His eternal good pleasure. He is the One through whom the Father controls the king's heart, and turns it as a river of water, whithersoever He will. In the midst of all our needs of life, our trials and cares, He both controls the forces that seem to hurt us and nurtures us that we may be able to endure unto the end.

Blessed be the God and Father of Jesus!

He is the ultimate source for our hope.

He is the One who has begotten us unto this hope. He is the One who has raised Jesus from the dead. He is the One who keeps us by His power through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed.

This is a doxology, a statement of praise that we lift heavenward. The Greek word is, literally, to eulogize, to speak well to our Heavenly Father. Shall we do that?

There is hope, no matter how dark the moment may appear. While our souls sink into the dark depths of despair, look to Jesus. God raised Him from the dead. No matter how horrible our sins, no matter what punishment they deserve, God forgives us when we come to Him in true repentance.

Are you struggling with the power of sin? Are you addicted to another power that seems to have you under its control: drugs, drinking, smoking, eating too much or not enough, spending money foolishly, illicit sex, political power, or a drive for business success? Look to Jesus. There is hope. It is the power of God, the grace of the Holy Spirit, that is able to deliver us and keep us from such destruction.

Are you afraid, lonely, hurting with your pains or difficulties? Does heaven seem a long way away, and you wonder whether you will ever have the strength to attain?

We are begotten and kept unto a living hope by so great a God.

Blessed be God, now and forever. □

Editorial

An "Election Theology" of Covenant (2)

In the *Standard Bearer* of March 15, 1991 appeared a long letter from Canadian Reformed ("Liberated") theologian Dr. J. DeJong in response to my editorials on the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. The letter defends the "Liberated" teaching on God's covenant with the children of believers against my charge that this teaching "conflicts with the Reformed gospel of salvation by sovereign grace." It also criticizes the covenant doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches as an "election theology" of the covenant. The editorial in that *SB* clarified the issue between the "Liberated" and the PRC. The issue is the "Liberated" doctrine that the promise of God at baptism is made to all the children on the condition of faith.

In this editorial, I begin to respond to Dr. DeJong's defense of the "Liberated" doctrine of a conditional covenant against my charges that this teaching "conflicts with cardinal doctrines of the Word of God, doctrines which are precious to every Reformed man and woman." Although I will be summarizing Dr. DeJong's defense at every point, I can do so only very briefly. The reader, therefore, should refer to DeJong's defense in its entirety in the previous issue of the *SB*.

One charge against the "Liberated" covenant doctrine was that a conditional promise to all the children necessarily makes the saving grace of God dependent upon the work and worth of the child. The fulfillment of the promise in the actual saving of the child depends upon

the child's believing. DeJong supposes that the "Liberated" escape this charge by maintaining that, although faith is a condition, it is not a "meritorious" condition.

Reformed theologians in the past have sometimes referred to faith as a "condition," meaning by this that faith is the necessary means by which God realizes the promise in the elect sinner. The "Liberated" doctrine of a conditional covenant means something radically different. Inasmuch as "Liberated" doctrine maintains that God makes the promise of the covenant to all the children alike, its teaching that faith is the condition necessarily makes of faith a work of the child upon which depends the saving grace of God. To make faith a condition *in the context of a promise to all the children* is to fix faith as an act of man that precedes, grounds, attracts, and renders effectual the grace of God.

The "Liberated" cannot escape this charge by merely denying that faith is "meritorious." For there is another way to compromise the sovereignty of grace in salvation besides teaching that faith *earns* salvation. This other way is to teach that man by his act of faith *distinguishes* himself from others as a worthy recipient of grace and that man by his act of faith *makes the offered grace of God effectual* in his soul. A man's marital love for a woman is not gracious if the woman bought it with a large amount of money. But neither is it gracious if she attracted it by her irresistible loveliness. Jehovah's covenant love for Jerusalem was gracious, not only because Jerusalem did not earn that

love, but also because that loathsome girl, daughter of an Amorite and a Hittite, polluted in her own blood, neither attracted the love of Jehovah nor did anything to make His love effectual in her salvation (Ezek. 16:1ff.).

The Canons of Dordt defend the sovereignty of grace in salvation, not only by repudiating the profane notion of merit, but also by condemning the more subtle error that maintains that faith is man's act of distinguishing himself from others as a worthy recipient of grace and man's act of "appropriating" grace.

The Synod (of Dordt) rejects the errors of those . . . who teach . . . that (God) chose out of all possible conditions . . . the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving . . . as a condition of salvation (I, Rejection of Errors/ 3).

The Synod (of Dordt) rejects the errors of those . . . who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception (II, Rejection of Errors/ 6).

To the charge that a conditional promise to all the children is a denial of the graciousness of salvation within the sphere of the covenant, the "Liberated" respond by affirming that it is God who enables certain children (the elect) to fulfill the condition. Dr.

DeJong writes, "We also confess that such faith is a work and gift of the LORD, according to His sovereign good pleasure and electing love."

This response fails for four reasons.

First, it commits the "Liberated" to the very same "election theology of covenant" that they criticize in the PRC. If this response is seriously meant, it teaches that God all along intended the promise for the elect children alone and that God realizes the promise in the elect children alone. But this is exactly the doctrine of the covenant so vigorously rejected by the "Liberated."

Second, this response plays fast and loose with language. "Condition" means an act of one party upon which depends the act of another party. Everyone understands perfectly well that a nation's offer of a cease-fire on the condition that the enemy lay down its arms means that peace depends upon an act of that enemy. The act of the enemy is decisive in the matter, regardless of the overwhelming superiority of the nation that stipulates the condition. It is precisely in order to express this that one speaks of a "condition." From the point of view of the integrity of language alone, one may not defend his deliberate use of "condition" by insisting, when "condition" is challenged, that it is after all God who fulfills the condition.

Third, even the explanation that God fulfills the condition in the child fails to rescue the "Liberated" doctrine of the covenant from its teaching that the grace of God depends upon the act of the child. For now it is only asserted that the work of the child upon which the grace of God (the covenant promise) depends is a work that the child is enabled to do by the help of God. But the grace of God still depends upon the work of the child!

I remind Dr. DeJong that also the Roman Catholic Church is willing to acknowledge that the works of the sinner upon which, according to Rome, depends his justification are performed by the sinner with the help of the

grace of God. But this in no way relieves Rome of the heresy of teaching that righteousness depends upon the works of man himself.

Fourth, although the "Liberated" are ready to ascribe the fulfilling of the condition to God in controversy, this is strikingly lacking when they are developing and applying their doctrine of the covenant among themselves.

This is seen in the September 15, 1990 issue of *Una Sancta*, magazine of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The editor, Rev. C. Bouwman, presents the "Liberated" view of the covenant in an article entitled, "Not Saved by the Covenant." He writes, "We and our children do not receive the content of the promises God gives in the covenant unless (his emphasis—DJE) we answer to the obligation of that covenant." Editor Bouwman then refers to the covenant demand in the Reformed baptism form, namely, that "we cleave to this one God," etc., and describes it as "a demand for regeneration, for being born again." Thus he teaches, as "Liberated" doctrine, that reception of the content of the covenant promise, i.e., salvation, depends upon the baptized child's regenerating himself.

That Rev. Bouwman means exactly what he says is plain when he immediately adds:

Here we may recall such biblical figures as Esau, Saul and Judas Iscariot. Though all three were equally as much covenant children as were, say, Jacob, David and Peter, these did not obtain the goods promised to them at their circumcision. For they evidently did not respond to the obligation of the covenant.

The "Liberated" minister becomes exceedingly bold:

Not a single one of us, though he be a covenant child a hundred times over, shall receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal simply by virtue of the promises of the covenant and no more. In the covenant the Lord has been pleased to make us all *responsible* (his emphasis—DJE); He demands our response, demands faith and conversion, and does not impart

the contents of His promises unless these obligations have been met.

This is the "Liberated" doctrine of the covenant in practical application. So frightened is the "Liberated" theologian by the specter of "presumptive regeneration" that, rather

Regeneration is God the Holy Spirit's part in the covenant.

than gratefully confess regeneration to be the work of God that is signified and sealed by baptism, he makes regeneration the demand of God upon the baptized child. The truth is that the demand which our baptism form calls our part in the covenant *presupposes* the regeneration of the child. The "new obedience" that consists of cleaving to the triune God is not the act of regeneration, but the life of good works that flows out of regeneration. Regeneration is not our part in the covenant. Regeneration is God the Holy Spirit's part in the covenant. This is the teaching of the baptism form: "In like manner, when we are baptized in the name of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost assures us, by this holy sacrament, that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ."

But our concern here is that when the "Liberated" apply their covenant conception practically, "condition" keeps its real meaning. The salvation of the baptized child depends squarely, exclusively, and emphatically upon the child's complying with the condition demanded of him. Astounding to relate, this condition is nothing less than that he give birth to himself spiritually! Nothing is said about God's fulfilling the condition. The closest that the "Liberated" minister comes to suggesting that God has something to do with the realizing of the covenant promise in the child is a statement later in the editorial that parents are entitled to "implore God to work regeneration in the children He has given us." Whatever force this might have for ascribing the actual salvation of the child to God is blunted by the sentence that immedi-

ately follows: "But we are not to think that our children will one day be saved just because God was pleased to establish His covenant with them."

Dr. DeJong is correct when he closes his letter to the *SB* with the words, "The crux of this debate is ultimately very practical. . . . How are we to approach (our children) in teaching and instruction?"

Dare a Reformed parent approach his child as the doctrine of a conditional covenant requires him to do? *Dare* he convince his child that the covenant promise of God and the whole of God's covenant salvation depend upon the act of the child? *Dare* he teach the child to regard his faith, repentance, and holy life as a condition unto salvation? *Dare* he

instruct his child that it is not the covenant promise alone upon which everything depends; that it is not the covenant promise alone that saves him; and that, in fact, a child can be the object of the promise of God and yet perish, because he himself did not fulfill a condition? □

—DJE

Letters

■ The Puritans on Common Grace

Thanks again for all the fine and edifying articles that you publish in the *Standard Bearer*. Very recently in my reading of a great Puritan classic *Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* by Robert Bolton (originally published 1626; reprint edition 1991—Soli Deo Gloria), I fastened on a passage that is clearly indicative of the Puritan's firm grasp of the diametric differentiation that exists between the elect and the reprobate, delineating forcefully what the Puritan and Reformed attitude would be towards the chimerical notion of "common grace":

If thou be not justified by faith, and accepted through CHRIST, all thy actions, natural, moral, recreative, religious, *whatsoever* is within thee or without thee, the use of the creatures, all thy courses, ways, and passages, are turned into sins and pollutions unto thee, *enlarge and aggravate* thy woe and damnation: even "the sacrifice" and whole "way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 15:8, 9) (p. 175 — emphasis added).

As this is the defining issue that standardizes the authenticity of a Reformed church or individual and is the measure that gives the most accurate assessment of their doctrinal and creedal integrity, I was constrained to share with the readers of the *SB* and all PRC brethren, that the noble Puritans almost to a man were classic "Dortian" Calvinists and the PRC's stance on the common grace issue

has a rich historical legacy as well as being eminently Scriptural.

Greg Fields
Hamilton, Ohio

■ The Death of the Wicked and the Pleasure of God

The December 15, 1990 issue of the *Standard Bearer* includes an article by Rev. Woudenberg entitled, "The Pleasure of God." The article is, in part, a response to a question regarding the correct understanding of Ezekiel 33:11. The article raises a few questions in my mind.

First, I do not think that I would refer to Arminius as "a troubled young minister." Calling him troubled implies that he had a troubled conscience. This tends to convey the idea that Arminius was sincere and struggled to understand the Scripture, but developed some wrong ideas. I view Arminius as a wolf in sheep's clothing, who lay in wait to deceive God's people. This man was a false teacher who privily and deliberately brought in a damnable heresy.

My main question, however, pertains to Rev. Woudenberg's explanation of Ezekiel 33:11. I understand the main point of the article to be the truth that reprobation must serve election. I agree that the highest purpose in the counsel of God is the realization of His eternal covenant of grace. Reprobation is therefore not an end in itself, but is a means for the realization of God's purpose of election. Rev. Woudenberg demonstrates this idea by referring to

Ezekiel 33:11. He writes, "In spite of the fact God hates the workers of iniquity, and has no pleasure in their death, He gives them a place in His plan. They all serve as means for the salvation of God's elect...." In other words, God's pleasure is not the death of the wicked, but rather the salvation of the elect.

Although I agree with the author's conclusion, I think he has chosen an inappropriate proof text. By using Ezekiel 33:11 to support the truth that reprobation must serve election, I feel that the author has misinterpreted the text. The way the author uses the passage indicates that he regards the "wicked" mentioned in the text to refer to the reprobate wicked. This is not only shown by his use of the text noted above, but is also confirmed when he writes that these wicked are to be equated with the vessels of wrath mentioned in Romans 9:22.

I am not comfortable with this interpretation for several reasons. First, the death of the reprobate is surely in harmony with God's good pleasure (Rom. 9:22, 23; Ps. 2:4). God delights in maintaining His holiness against those who were sovereignly appointed to be damned in the way of their sin. Also, Ezekiel 33:10 speaks of those who saw the horror of their transgressions and sins. They feared that their sin was so great that God's mercy was no longer able to reach them. They cry out, "our sins be upon us" and ask, "how should we then live?" This is never the cry of the

reprobate. Finally, I would note that the text does not address the wicked in general, but is limited to the house of Israel, that is, the church.

Positively, I take the text to mean that God, with an oath, declares to the repentant wicked in spiritual Israel, that He does not desire their death. With an urgent and efficacious demand, Jehovah God calls them to turn from their way and live. Those who are truly sorry for their sin, find much comfort in the truth that God will abundantly pardon.

Although I agree with the main point of the article, I feel the author misinterprets Ezekiel 33:11 when he uses the passage to support the truth that reprobation is subordinate to election. Using the text in this manner implies that God has no pleasure in the death of the reprobate. I contend that the text cannot refer to the reprobate. The "wicked" mentioned in the passage must be limited to the repentant wicked — the elect.

I refer the interested party to Volume 44, #1 of the *Standard Bearer* for a meditation on this text. If I have misunderstood Rev. Woudenberg, I will gladly stand corrected.

Gordon Schipper
Grandville, Michigan

■ RESPONSE:

I appreciate the letter both for its tone and for the fact that it brings to the fore what is to me an important matter, the proper presentation of the Gospel to those who walk in the way of death.

To begin with, I would like to make a few comments about my designation of Arminius as "a troubled young minister." That such he was is certainly so. The youngest of the ministers in Amsterdam in the late sixteenth century, his life was spent in troubled debates about his views on predestination. At the same time, however, he was doing his pastoral work well and was well received by his fellow pastors, including even Peter Plancius, his strongest opponent on the matter of predestination.

The question is whether we

should not consider him "a wolf in sheep's clothing." I suppose it depends on what is meant by that. It is true, of course, that he was the chief means of introducing into Dutch Reformed theology an error which has never ceased to trouble God's church. In doing so he has certainly worried the sheep of God; and this must be recognized.

On the other hand, whether we are to conclude that thereby he was insincere and a purposeful enemy of God, is another thing. After all, those who worked with him, men like Plancius and even Gomarus, as disgusted as they could become with his theology, never accused him of that. To be sure, his exegesis was often faulty, and his arguments more philosophical than theological; but that was not uncommon in those days, and his ideas were hardly original with him, even if they have become identified with his name. For the most part they were carried over from that segment of Dutch society to which he belonged and which had come into the Reformation under the influence of Philip Melancthon, the cohort and lifelong friend not only of Luther but also of Calvin and most of the other first generation Reformers, but an enemy of the Reformed concept of predestination. The Reformers disagreed with Melancthon in his theology on this point, but they never questioned the sincerity of his Christianity. And I do not know if it is for us to do so with his follower, James Arminius, as unhappy as his influences may have become. Considering our own frequent errors and sins, all of which hurt the church too, is it not better to leave such judgment to God? (Matt. 7:1-5; Rom. 12:19.)

More important, however, is our understanding of Ezekiel 33:11: "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

The first thing that we must always consider in interpreting a passage of Scripture is the context in

which it is found. (In fact, we may note, this is the rule most frequently abused in almost every Arminian misinterpretation of Scripture.) And in this instance the context is rather simple.

The basic figure upon which our text is built is that of a watchman on the walls of a city, laid out in verses 1-6. His is a most serious duty, upon which the well-being of the city rests. When danger approaches he is to give warning, and he is to do this regardless of whether he thinks anyone will listen or not. By giving the warning, the watchman leaves the responsibility to the people of the city; but should he fail to do so, and the city be destroyed, the responsibility becomes his.

So Ezekiel was told that he was the watchman of Israel (vs. 7), and his duty was to warn them of their impending doom. Just exactly how important this was is brought out next (vss. 8, 9). Israel was headed in the way of death, and Ezekiel was to tell them, "O wicked man, thou shalt surely die." Indeed, given the history of Israel, there was little reason to expect them to listen; but this was not his judgment to make. Should he not give warning, the guilt for their death would be his. But, should he warn them, even if they did not listen, he would be free, and the responsibility would lie only on those who refused to repent. They would die in their sin.

Clearly, at this point we can hardly suppose that Ezekiel's next remarks (vss. 10, 11) were to be directed only to part of the people, the elect remnant of promise (Rom. 9:6-9). It was exactly this he had just been told not to do. He was to warn everyone, those who would not listen as well as those who would. (The danger of "Hyper-Calvinism," the tendency to speak only to those who willingly listen, was as real then as now.)

And so we come to verse 10: "Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in

them, how should we then live?" The thought here is not the easiest, but clearly it is a part of a string of cynical arguments to which Ezekiel must reply, going something like this, "If we pine away because of our transgressions and sins, is it not because God is pleased to have us die? And, how should we then live? or, what chance do we then have?" and continues (vss. 17, 18), "The way of the Lord is not equal." After the manner of Satan, they were accusing God of being cruel and unfair.

Anyone who has ever been called to warn those who live in sin knows how real such accusations can be. One need only tell such that their miseries (of which there are usually plenty) are God's warning to them to repent, to bring forth the heated response that, if that be so, God would be most unfair. In a God who would think to punish them, they cannot believe — as though thereby to excuse their continued living in sin.

Of just such, Ezekiel was told (vs. 11), "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And that gives rise to our question: what does this text mean?

If, as is suggested, the expression "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" is indeed an affirmation of grace, and, as we have seen, it is to be addressed to all Israel, to those who would reject the Lord's warning as well as to those who would not, the implications are rather serious. In the first place, it would indicate a kind of common grace, an assurance of divine favor to all, including those who refuse His Word. It might be a grace within the sphere of the covenant, as some might have it, but a grace common to elect and reprobate nonetheless. Secondly, it would seem to suggest that an affirmation of divine love is the appropriate incentive for repentance, rather than a pointing out of the seriousness of sin — a favored view of the Armin-

ian evangelists, to be sure, but not according to Scripture, and hardly Reformed. And finally, it would leave little meaning to the expression, "For why will ye die, O house of Israel?" other than to suggest that some are to be offered grace who may in the end go lost.

Far preferable, is it not, to find in this a simple affirmation of fact over against the cynical distortion of those who would excuse their own sin? No one may caricature God as a cruel tyrant who punishes people simply because He delights in seeing them die. He does punish them, to be sure, but for the sake of maintaining his justice (Rom. 9:22) and because in his infinite wisdom it serves to save his elect (vs. 23), but not because He enjoys seeing people perish. The delight of God is rather only in that men turn from their sin and live (Lk. 15:7), which all who sincerely seek what is pleasing to God will certainly do. While in turn the searching question goes forth, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" To which all who reject His warning can only ever answer — because they have themselves chosen the way of death.

Rev. B. Woudenberg

■ Amen

Amen! Perhaps this is too strong a use of language, but it does signify how I feel in response to your February 1, 1991 special article by Rev. C. Haak entitled, "Applicatory Preaching," in particular, and to your magazine in general.

The article by Rev. Haak was of special interest to me because I am currently a student at Covenant Theological Seminary (Presbyterian Church in America) in St. Louis, Missouri. Rev. Haak's article sounded like my first semester of Homiletics boiled down in one article....

I also want to thank you for your excellent publication. As a member of a congregation in the Reformed Church of America (my wife's background in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), enrolled in a Presbyterian Church in America Seminary, currently attending a Christian Reformed

Church here in St. Louis, and a graduate of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL, I have experienced an entire spectrum of Reformed thought. I just wanted to tell you that your magazine has served in an excellent way for me as a source of good solid Reformed and Calvinistic work. It is very refreshing to me to find such a publication amidst wishy-washy periodicals from all different directions. I admit that my subscription has been a gift from my brother Andrew, a member at the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, and because it is difficult to find time to read it between studies I almost let my subscription run out. I have decided, however, to renew my subscription (enclosed) if for no other reason, to read the special feature articles and to have current Calvinistic thought *par excellence* in our home.

John Owen Birkett
St. Louis, MO

■ Response:

Good reasons for subscribing.
Thanks to Andrew.

— Ed.

■ Grandparents

The article, "The Reformed Family: Grandparents," by Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers (the *SB*, February 1, 1991) brought tears to my eyes. I wholeheartedly agree with Mrs. Lubbers. It is my prayer that God may grant us the privilege of becoming grandparents one day and that we may be *this* blessing to them and our children.

Carole Faber
Grand Rapids, MI

■ Interest in Amillennialism

It was with considerable interest that I read your good response to Mr. Cole's letter in the February 1, 1991 *Standard Bearer*. I would indeed like to suggest a book that you will find most interesting: *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century*, by Douglas W. Frank, Eerdmans, 1986. The book traces the origins of dispensationalism and Finney-style revival-

ism and shows how these phenomena, although relatively recent in church history, have deeply penetrated twentieth century American

evangelicalism. The author is properly quite critical of the doctrines of Scofield, Finney, Billy Sunday, and

their modern-day successors.... □

Robert A. Caldwell
Jackson, TN

A Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

Alcuin, Educator

In the 8th century, the time in which Alcuin lived, Europe was in a sorry state. In the 5th century the Roman Empire had fallen before the barbarian hordes that swept over Europe, and the old Graeco-Roman culture of the Roman Empire had ceased to exist. In its place, the roving and militant tribes of uncivilized barbarians had inhabited Europe and a great darkness had settled on the continent. Although by the 8th century a great deal of missionary work had been done, Europe remained for the most part under the control of illiterate and superstitious pagans who had obliterated all learning and reduced Europe to chaos.

Europe's most powerful kings were to be found in what is now France. The Merovingian Dynasty ruled there, not powerful by today's standards, but nevertheless the strongest among all the barbarians. While national boundaries had not yet been formed, the power of France's kings was expanded throughout much of present-day France and into Germany. This dynasty had been forced out of power by papal intrigue and the connivance of high officials in the realm. The Carolingian Dynasty had taken its place.

The first and greatest ruler of the Carolingians was Charles the Great,

better known as Charlemagne. He was the founder and first ruler of the Holy Roman Empire — which some waggish historian has characterized as neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. But it was important, for it was the realization of papal dreams: a political empire under the rule and control of the bishop of Rome, the pope.

Alcuin was the educator of this kingdom during the time of Charlemagne.

Alcuin was born in England in the year 735, in the shire of York, now known as Yorkshire, and near the city of York, where now stands one of England's great cathedrals, Yorkminster. He was born of royal blood, but was left an orphan while still an infant, although he was heir to many possessions of his parents. Because of the untimely death of his parents, he was given over to the monastery in York, known then already as Yorkminster. Here he was well cared for by the abbot, Ethelbert, who was also his teacher.

Alcuin soon showed signs of great ability and became a favorite of the abbot. He was given perhaps the best education available in England at the time, for the monastery in York possessed one of the greatest libraries in the whole kingdom. It contained manuscripts from the church fathers and from ancient Roman authors, and it gave Alcuin access to classical Roman thought as well as church theology. Alcuin found himself in a literary paradise, and he eagerly devoured every scroll he could find.

Not only was the library the best in England, but Ethelbert was himself a great lover of books. Periodically he traveled to the monasteries of Europe and to other centers as far south as Italy to search for books. He had the financial resources available to him to spend vast sums of money in the acquisition of such books as, in his opinion, would enhance the value of his library. When Alcuin was a bit older he accompanied his master on these trips and gained additional respect for his broad knowledge and learning and unerring instinct for good books.

In 766 Ethelbert became Archbishop of York, and Alcuin became headmaster of the monastery school, responsible for the education offered there. He served with distinction in this capacity for 15 years.

In 780 Ethelbert was awarded the "pallium"¹ and Alcuin was sent to Rome to fetch it. While in Rome he met Charlemagne, a meeting which was to change his entire life.

It is at this point that Charlemagne enters the story.

Charlemagne was one of Europe's great kings.² He was a monstrous man, seven feet tall, and so huge that he needed a special horse to carry him. He was a mighty man of war who waged many campaigns against the Saxons of Germany and finally subdued them, forcing them to become Christians under penalty of death. He gave 2,000 Saxons the choice of being baptized or losing their heads. It is not difficult to surmise what option the Saxons preferred.

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

Charlemagne was a strange man of complex character. He was a friend of the church and, outwardly, a pious and faithful member. One of his "capitularies"³ reads: "It is necessary that every man should seek to the best of his strength and ability to serve God and walk in the ways of His precepts; for the Lord Emperor cannot watch over every man in personal discipline." But his private life left much to be desired. He combined in his character a generous disposition with murderous and brutal hatred of his enemies. He had four wives and numerous concubines and lived immoderately. He was himself never completely literate, although he strove mightily to learn to read and write. In his kingdom he opened roads, gave his attention to the smallest details of the empire, introduced a settled order in the realm, and welded many different barbarian tribes into a political and economic unity. But his main interest was in education. He gathered about him the ablest scholars of Europe and enjoined education on all males within his realm.

It was in connection with this latter that he persuaded Alcuin to come to France and help him in his educational enterprises.

Charlemagne established what we can probably call a court school, over which Alcuin was the head. To this school came Charlemagne himself, plus the members of the royal family and court. Here Alcuin began his important work of bringing education to barbarian France.

The court of Charlemagne was a migratory court, moving about from place to place as Charlemagne waged his wars against the Saxons and sought to bring effective rule to his empire. This gave Alcuin the opportunity to work at the establishment of schools throughout France and parts of Germany, something at which he was very successful. From 781 to 790 he busied himself in this work. Because his interest had always been in books, he was instrumental in building libraries wherever he went and bringing to his schools valuable and important works from all over Europe.

In 790 Alcuin returned to England, but came back to France in 796, settling in Tours, where he established a famous abbey school and built an extensive library. While heading this school, he not only developed educational theories, but also supervised the copying of ancient manuscripts, including those of the Bible. These latter became part of the great body of manuscripts which form the basis for our King James Version of Scripture. Here he died peacefully in 804.

Charlemagne so thoroughly trusted him that all kinds of difficult and wearisome responsibilities were laid upon him. He took part in various doctrinal controversies, was constantly sought for advice on all sorts of political questions, was given responsibilities for supervision of various imperial enterprises, and was called upon to engage in almost constant preaching. All these activities were more than he could perform, and his health was almost completely undermined. This may very well have been one reason why he retreated to England, and returned again to France only when he could enjoy the relatively peaceful life of the abbey in Tours.

Not only was he the heir of his father's fortune, but Charlemagne, in appreciation for all his labors, gave him additional estates. Most of his vast fortunes were used in the paying of the expenses of the schools he established and in the acquisition of manuscripts (books) to fill the libraries. He was a moral reformer of no little ability and was instrumental in bringing morality and piety to the monasteries and churches of Charlemagne's empire.

He was a man of gentle disposition, willing, patient, and humble, and an unwearied student. He mastered Greek, Latin, and Hebrew as well as his native language and the barbaric "French" of Charlemagne's empire. He constantly protested Charlemagne's determination to force Christianity on the conquered, but with little success. Charlemagne was too drunk with the notion that to Christianize the pagans (even at the

point of the sword) was faithfulness to the church.

Many of Alcuin's works are extant. He wrote widely in the fields of exegesis, theology, liturgy, ethics, biography, and education. Nearly 300 of his letters are still available, letters which are enormously important for an understanding of the times in which he lived.

... even today much of education owes its ideas to Alcuin, the educator of France.

His educational theories included a stress on the mastery of the ancient classics of Rome, along with a study of the church fathers and various theological works. This labor was to have great influence on education in Europe. Alcuin is really the father of Europe's educational system. He began the famous monastery schools, schools which later developed into France's famous universities. His theories of education and his development of the curriculum were to be continued in Europe for hundreds of years, and even today much of education owes its ideas to Alcuin, the educator of France.

As Europe was gradually Christianized under the efforts of the Romish church, education became a part of this process. It is true that, after Charlemagne, the Renaissance of France disappeared and France too sunk back into intellectual darkness. Charlemagne's empire was divided among his three sons, and the great work of Charlemagne did not long endure. Yet Alcuin's work was preserved in the monasteries, and the time of its full blossoming came when Europe emerged from the "Dark Ages."

As Rome worked her will on Europe, it was through education that Europe became Christian. The spread of the gospel brought the principles of Christianity to barbarians. Along with this gospel went the forces of education, for Christianity is always vitally interested in education and considers education an integral part

of her calling. When Europe was civilized through education, it was also Christianized, and the principles of Christianity were woven into the warp and woof of all the institutions of society. Thus Europe (and America, settled by Europeans) became the Christian nations that they are. But, over the ages, this Christianity becomes antichristianity and the nations out of which Antichrist himself emerges. In God's eternal purpose,

this was brought about through education. In this Alcuin played a major role. □

Endnotes:

1 The Pallium was a yoke-like garment worn over the shoulders, and indicated that the wearer had a share in the pontifical office. In more recent times, all archbishops petition for and receive it as a condition of office, but in the days of Alcuin it was a distinction of honor. Alcuin's errand was a high privilege. For

this information, see *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. by John D. Woodbridge; Moody Press, 1988, p. 122.

2 Perhaps our readers are acquainted with the legends of Roland, legends which many children read in their grade-school days. These legends concern events which purportedly took place during the time of Charlemagne.

3. Laws, answers to queries, questions to officials, moral counsels, etc.

Church and State

Mr. James Lanting

U.S. Supreme Court Overturns Tax Protester's Convictions

It was therefore error for the trial judge to instruct the jury to disregard evidence of Cheek's understanding that ... he was not a person required to file a return or to pay income taxes and that wages are not taxable income, as incredible as such misunderstandings of and beliefs about the law might be.

Cheek v. U.S., Supreme Court
(1991)

Tax Protesters

The tax protest movement is a loosely organized group of Americans who refuse to file income tax returns and pay income tax. Leaders of the movement conduct seminars and distribute tapes, books, and "legal opinions" contending that the U.S.

tax laws are invalid and unconstitutional. In the last decade, many of the movement's leaders themselves have been convicted of tax evasion, conspiracy, and fraud, chiefly due to their failure to report the prodigious income generated from their lucrative seminars and publications.

Some evangelical Christians, understandably distressed by the government's perennial squandering and abuse of our tax dollars, have been persuaded by these charlatans to entertain the notion that federal income taxes are voluntary. Tragically enough, many of them are now languishing in federal penitentiaries and are insolvent following the government's seizure of their bank accounts and real estate to satisfy their delinquent taxes, accumulated interest, and heavy penalties.

Cheek Convicted by Jury

A 47-year old veteran airline pilot, described by his lawyer as a "gullible victim of the tax protest movement," recently had his tax

evasion conviction overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. John Cheek joined the tax protest movement in the late '70s and refused to file tax returns or pay taxes on his pilot's wages from 1980-1983. Moreover, by the mid-1980s, he was claiming over 60 exemptions on his W-4 forms.

Federal law provides that any person who "willfully attempts in any manner to evade or defeat any tax" is guilty of a felony. Mr. Cheek was indicted and tried on three counts of willfully attempting to evade his income taxes.

Although Cheek admitted at trial that he did not file returns or pay any tax for the years in question, his defense was that his actions were not "willful" evasion. Cheek testified that he was indoctrinated at tax protest seminars and consequently sincerely (albeit mistakenly) believed that (1) his wages were not "income" and that he was not a "taxpayer" within the meaning of the tax laws; and (2) that the tax laws were unconstitutional. He therefore argued that he

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acted without the willfulness required for conviction.

The trial judge ruled that these unusual beliefs were not "objectively reasonable" and essentially instructed the jury to ignore these purported defenses. After lengthy deliberations, the jury convicted Cheek on all counts. He was sentenced to one year in jail and five years probation.

Good-faith Misunderstanding Negates Willfulness

Cheek appealed his conviction, arguing that it was error for the trial court to instruct the jury to disregard his admittedly mistaken beliefs about the tax laws just because they were not, in the judge's opinion, "objectively reasonable."

The U.S. Supreme Court, confronting its first tax protester case, partially agreed with Cheek and remanded his case for a new trial. The Court held that the trial judge erred in condemning as unreasonable Cheek's mistaken belief that he was not a "taxpayer" and that his pilot's wages were not "income." The Court ruled that it should have been a jury determination whether or not these beliefs were good-faith misunderstandings of his duty to pay taxes. In other words, the Court held that it was the jury's function, not the judge's, to decide whether these beliefs negated the requisite criminal intent.

Unconstitutionality No Defense

However, in a second part of its opinion, the Court unequivocally stated that his belief in the *unconstitutionality* of the tax laws is *not* a defense. Should Cheek have thought the tax laws unconstitutional, said the Court, he should have paid the tax and then filed for a refund. In that legal way, he could have challenged the constitutionality of the tax laws. Thus the Court held that a defendant's belief in the invalidity or unconstitutionality of the tax laws is irrelevant and inadmissible, since it smacks of mere *disagreement* with the laws — which is never a defense.

Accordingly, the Court remanded the case for a retrial, instruct-

ing the judge to exclude Cheek's unconstitutionality defense but to permit a jury to determine whether Cheek's unusual notions regarding the definition of "income" and "taxpayer" were sincerely-held misunderstandings which may have negated his criminal intent. "Of course," said the Court, "the more unreasonable the asserted beliefs or misunderstandings are, the more likely the jury will consider them to be nothing more than disagreement with known legal duties."

A Caveat

Although the tax protest movement will undoubtedly consider the Cheek opinion to be a favorable ruling, a careful reading reveals otherwise, for several reasons.

First, the Cheek decision is very limited; it merely held that jury may consider the defense that a sincerely-held misunderstanding of the tax laws negates criminal intent. That is not to say that any jury anywhere is going to "buy" such a defense. The Supreme Court itself ventured an opinion that such a defense appears to be "incredible."

... disagreement with the tax laws or a belief they are unconstitutional is not a defense.

Secondly, the Court clearly held that a defendant's belief in the invalidity or unconstitutionality of the tax laws is simply *disagreement*, not a *misunderstanding* of the laws. Under the Cheek decision, disagreement with the tax laws or a belief they are unconstitutional is *not* a defense. By far the majority of tax protesters do not misunderstand the tax laws, they simply disagree with them. Such a purported defense is now clearly illegal and improper.

Thirdly, Cheek has not yet won

his case; it was merely remanded for a new trial. Cheek now faces the expense, risk, and burden of a re-trial and perhaps even years of appeals or incarceration if he is convicted again.

Fourth, although a good-faith misunderstanding may be a defense to criminal charges, the Cheek decision in no way shields one from civil liability for all back taxes plus interest and onerous penalties. (In Cheek's case, he eventually paid over \$150,000 in delinquent taxes, interest, and penalties in addition to \$40,000 for attorney's fees during his years of appeal.)

Finally, Cheek prevailed on appeal only because his attorney argued that Cheek had been victimized and indoctrinated by unscrupulous tax protest leaders who had duped him into believing the mistaken notion that his wages were not "income." The Cheek decision can hardly be championed now by tax protest leaders.

Justice Blackmun, in his dissent, voiced some realistic warnings about the Cheek decision:

It is incomprehensible to me how, in this day ... any taxpayer of competent mentality can assert as his defense to statutory willfulness the proposition that the wage he receives for his labor is not income, irrespective of the cult that says otherwise and advises the gullible to resist income tax collections. The Court's opinion today, I fear, will encourage taxpayers to cling to frivolous views of the law in the hope of convincing a jury of their sincerity.

Accordingly, Reformed Christians must again be reminded that our Supreme Court still considers income tax payment a legal duty of all citizens and a willful evasion to be a felony in our land. And perhaps even more seriously, such unlawful activity consequently is also a violation of God's Word which commands us to obey our magistrates and unconditionally to render "taxes to whom taxes are due" (Rom. 13:7; 1 Pet. 2:13; Matt. 22:21; Belgic Confession, Art. 36). □

Prof. Robert D. Decker

All Around Us

The World Council of Churches

Thousands of observers, guests, advisors, and visitors joined the 811 official delegates to the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Canberra, Australia, February 7 - 20. The theme of the Assembly was "Come Holy Spirit, Renew The Whole Creation." Most of the issues, we are told, were not at all related to the theme. The issues which most excited the participants dealt with politics, racism, feminism, and ecology.

The host country, Australia, was the object of a scathing indictment concerning its treatment of the Aboriginal peoples on its continent. "The impact of racism by Australians on the Aboriginal peoples in this nation is not just horrific, but genocidal.... How can this society justify the destruction of an indigenous culture, language and spirituality?" Needless to say, the Aussies were outraged, not merely by the hyperbole of the above criticism, but by the failure of the WCC critics to concede that Australia did not seek justification but had long been attempting conscientiously to find solutions. Noteworthy too is the fact that the WCC put forth no solutions of its own, but only condemned the Australians.

The Assembly struggled long with the issue of the War in the Persian Gulf. After hours of debate it finally voted on a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, without Iraq first having to leave Kuwait.

On the second day of the Assembly, a young Korean woman, Prof. Chung Hyun-Kyung, made a dramatic

presentation in dance and voice to one of the plenary sessions. She called on the spirits of all those who had suffered and died unjustly to be present at the Assembly. These included victims in biblical history as well as contemporary victims, such as those in the Bhopal tragedy. Finally she called on the spirit of Jesus. All of these together, said she, are "icons of the Holy Spirit who became tangible and visible to us." Later in her speech she suggested that the Buddhist Bodhisattva Kwan In (or "Kuan Yin" in Chinese) might be the feminine image of Christ. Human survival, she claimed, depends on putting all life, including trees, and people of all faiths or none, at the center of belief. Indigenous people of the world, she said, believed nature WAS "sacred, purposeful, and full of meaning." The "old culture of death," exemplified by the Gulf War, should be replaced by such a "culture of life."

Chung's presentation was ended with a vigorous dancing troop with Korean instruments. The presentation brought the delegates to their feet, cheering and applauding. Some participants said it was the point in the Assembly where the Holy Spirit was most present. Other delegates called it "syncretism" (a combination of heathen and Christian practices) or "paganism." We agree with the latter. Chung may be a member of a Presbyterian Church in Korea, but her "theology" is a blatant form of pantheism.

The WCC also took ecumenism to its farthest limits — suggesting that Muslims, Hindus, and others achieve salvation in the same way as Christians, and warning the latter against "narrow" thinking. The Council's Director of Inter-Faith

dialogue, Dr. Wesley Ariarajah, said it was inconceivable to him that God listened to Christian prayers but ignored those praying to their particular versions of God. "As a Sri Lankan Christian who has read the Hindu writings and the scriptures of the Hindu saints I simply cannot believe that there have not been other people (than Christians) who are familiar with God," he said. "It is beyond belief that other people have no access to God or that God has no access to other people.... My understanding of God's love is too broad for me to believe that only this narrow segment called the Christian church will be saved. If you are a Christian you must be open and broad, not narrow and exclusive."

Several thoughts come to mind. Scripture teaches that the heathen change the glory of God into an image made like to corruptible man (Rom. 1:18ff.). Holy Scripture also teaches that there is, besides the Name of Jesus, no other Name under heaven,

The WCC is not worthy of the name church.

given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). And we are reminded of what the inspired Apostle John wrote to the church, "... even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). The WCC is not worthy of the name church. Nor is it difficult to understand that it will not be that long before those who by grace through faith believe in the Lord Jesus will be persecuted for their faith.

New York Times Service
REC News Exchange
Time

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

Muslims Torture Christians

Some Muslims at least are not as friendly to Christians as the WCC is to them, according to recent reports. Three Muslim converts to Christianity have been tortured repeatedly since their arrest and subsequent trial last November on charges of crimes against the government of Egypt, reports Amnesty International. The three, according to AI, were in "bad physical condition" when they appeared at a mid-December hearing, "suffering from hunger and the effects of continuing torture, including electric shocks." The three men all converted from Islam to Christianity within the past six years. They were declared innocent of the charge of having conducted "actions against a heavenly religion [Islam]," last Novem-

ber. This ruling was appealed and they were rearrested. They now face newly created charges and a possible sentence of up to eight years in prison. They have been released on condition that they promise to leave the country. The church of which the three are members is under increasing pressure from the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior to reduce the profile of its ministry to Muslims.

The WCC refuses to acknowledge the fact that Islam and other heathen religions are false and that their adherents are enemies of the Christian faith. But Muslims know this and certainly regard Christianity as their enemy and a threat to their religion.

Christianity Today

Famine Again

Parts of Africa are facing starvation equal to or greater than the famine in the mid-1980s. About twenty million people in the nations of Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia, Angola, and Mozambique face starvation without immediate aid. The famine is caused by failing crops, low rainfall, and civil war.

This too is a sign of the times. Scripture tells us we shall hear of famines and earthquakes, in divers places, as well as of wars and rumors of wars (Matt. 24). Let us not fear these things, but let us be a people who live in joyful anticipation of the coming of the Lord Jesus. □

Christianity Today

Taking Heed to the Doctrine Rev. Marvin Kamps

The Bible is God's Word Sufficiency of Scripture

(Correction: An error in editing in Rev. Kamps' article in the March 1 issue not only confused the meaning of a sentence, but also left it not a sentence. The correct reading of the sentence in the middle of the center column on page 255 should be as follows: "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, testifies that this victory was accomplished for the elect of God *alone*, they would have no problem confessing the unity of Scripture." Our apologies to Rev. Kamps.)

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The Reformed church manifests itself as the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, above all other manifestations of itself, by its earnest confession of the sufficiency of sacred Scripture. This is no little matter. Any "church" that would question or deny the sufficiency of Scripture would by that very fact forfeit its claim to be the church of Jesus Christ. Every "church" that claims the necessity of revelations of God in addition to that recorded for us in sacred Scripture is really a sect and therefore a false church. Many thousands and even millions of people hold for truth, given by God, the so-called revelations claimed by various persons who were the founders of new religions. Every sect is identified by its insistence upon extra-biblical revelations. The sects do not consider the Bible as sufficient

for the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus unto salvation. It is one of the outstanding characteristics of sectarian groups that, with a great show of piety and religious zeal, they claim direct revelations of God by means of dreams and visions. On the basis of these so-called revelations of God they enslave millions of persons to the control of charlatans, who themselves are enslaved by the lust for filthy lucre.

The apostle Paul condemns all these deceivers in Titus 1:11: "Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things that they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." Paul describes these false prophets and their end as those who "through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long

time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (II Pet. 2:3). The love of money and all that wealth brings motivates men to corrupt the Scriptures and deny the sufficiency of the Bible.

But the Reformed church is committed to the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. The Presbyterian fathers confessed this truth: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men..." (Westminster Confession, I, 6). Consider also the confession of the Reformed saints of Europe in the sixteenth century: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein..." (Belgic Confession, Art. 7). Read those confessional statements over again and take special notice how absolutely our fathers expressed their confidence in the Bible. Nothing may ever be added to these Scriptures. They do fully contain the will of God. And "whatsoever" ought to be believed, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein.

The Reformed church, of course, makes this confession on the basis of God's Word. Paul called down the curse of God upon anyone who would bring another gospel than he had preached: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

What does the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture imply positively? Scripture is all we need in order to know God in Christ Jesus as

The Bible is the book of salvation. There is no other.

the God of our salvation. The Bible is

the book of salvation. There is no other. When our fathers figuratively designated God's revelation in nature "as a most elegant book" to the believer, they did not intend that we should see this book alongside of and altogether separate from Scripture, nor as something whereby men may challenge the testimony of Scripture. But, rather, as a book subordinate to Scripture and one that can only be properly "read" in the light of Scripture (Art. 2, Belgic Confession). Revelation is one, and the sacred Scriptures reign supreme in the Kingdom of God. Theology is the queen of all sciences.

We must be careful to point out that the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture must not be used as a basis to deprecate the church's task to *preach* the Word. This has often been done. But it is rooted in a misunderstanding. Romans 10:14-17 makes very plain that salvation is ours upon the wings of the preaching of the gospel by one sent of God to stand in the service of the living Christ. The Bible is sufficient as it forms the content of the preaching of the Word.

In close connection with the above we must not lose sight of the fact that the Scriptures receive their saving power through the operation of the Spirit of Christ Jesus (and not apart from Him). This is not to demean the Scriptures in themselves, but only to emphasize that the Scriptures are the Word of the Spirit of Christ. Apart from the *gracious* operation of the Spirit of the exalted Christ in the heart of the reader, Scripture does not save, but kills. Calvin writes: "The letter, therefore, is dead, and the law of the Lord slays its readers where it both is cut off from Christ's grace (II Cor. 3:6) and, leaving the heart untouched, sounds in the ears alone" (*Institutes*, I, 9, 3). The sufficiency of sacred Scripture for our salvation, therefore, must be understood in the context of the truth that Scripture forms the content of the message of the Spirit of Christ and is His means to the salvation of the elect of God. Calvin concludes this section on the Word and Spirit in the *Institutes* with a most

beautiful declaration: "For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, the Word."

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has ever led the Reformed church to disallow the attempts of vain men to supplant the preaching of the Word by intruding their vaunted opinions and theories. One dear aged brother in our congregation in Redlands often expressed this conviction with these words: "Man's word goes six feet under."

Nor may we ever claim a spiritual necessity for the use of Christian symbols, other than the Sacraments, in the worship of the church. The demand for Christian symbols as a part of the worship of the people of God is rooted in a lack of appreciation for the truth of the sufficiency of Scripture and the centrality of the preaching of the Word.

In faithfulness to its confession of the sufficiency of Scripture, the Reformed church is compelled to reject the many evil innovations which men would introduce as new and entertaining ways to present the Word of God. I have in mind the so-called liturgical dance and Christian movies, among other innovations, which are used to supplant the preaching of the Word of God. The Bible calls for preaching alone, whenever men would stand in His service to *bring* the Word. God in His Word has given to *preaching* the exclusive right to be the conveyance of the gospel. This is not to deny the proper place of songs of praise and prayers in the church; but these serve only as a response to the glorious presence of God, who comes to us through the Word preached.

We must note carefully that our confessions limit this sufficiency of Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture is limited to matters of salvation and sanctification of life, that is, to

faith in Christ to the glory of God. Some wish today to pervert this doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture by claiming that when Scripture makes various statements supposedly not

Never is Scripture to be corrected!

directly related to matters of salvation, then the Bible sometimes gives "misinformation." Supposedly in these areas the record of Scripture stands in need of the "light" of secular luminaries. Unbelieving men, who allegedly have been informed by God's general revelation through the operation of the Spirit of grace common to all men, can shed light upon the pages of Scripture. We reject this theory as false doctrine. Never is Scripture to be corrected!

Besides, it is false to assert that certain portions of Scripture have *nothing* to do with salvation. What portion would that be? Some of the accounts of Jesus' miracles? One or two of the accounts of God's works? Has the account of creation nothing to do with our salvation? Paul declares that we know the origin of all things by faith. That is the only way one can know this reality. I believe that everything recorded in Scripture has something to do with the salvation of God's people. I cannot think of one event, person, or circumstance recorded that could be considered incidental, irrelevant, insignificant, and totally unrelated to the church's faith. There are, of course, a multitude of facts recorded in the historical sections of Scripture concerning, for example, various kings and soldiers, both of Israel and of heathen nations; there are chronologies, genealogies, and numerical facts; and many of these facts may have little to do with our salvation. But that is not the same as saying they had nothing to do with the salvation of the saints of the old dispensation, for all the facts of Scripture stand inseparably related to the salvation of the church of Christ. These facts have more to do undoubtedly with the salvation of individual

saints of the old dispensation than directly with us of the new dispensation, but they are not for that reason unimportant or insignificant to us in regard to our faith in Christ Jesus. God's redemptive work is the redemption of a church. We must not be individualistic and say that if it had nothing to do with *my* redemption, then it is of no spiritual significance. What was inseparably a part of the redemption and salvation of other saints, of the old dispensation according to Scripture, is a part of *my* redemption.

By way of example, Howard VanTill takes the position that certain facts recorded in the Bible are, indeed, irrelevant to his redemption. He writes: "And finally it must be noted that *much* (emphasis, MK) of what we find in *many parts* (emphasis, MK) of the Bible is merely incidental information of little importance or relevance to its gospel message. I open my Bible randomly and happen on I Chronicles 20:6, for instance, in which I am informed that there was a man from Gath who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four digits in all. Now that's interesting, but not particularly important or relevant to my redemption" (*The Fourth Day*, p. 7). Please be careful to note that according to VanTill (and presumably many others who approve of "his reading of scripture") much of what we find in many parts of the Bible is irrelevant to his redemption. In itself this may appear to be a very innocent observation on the part of the professor. But he is setting up his readers and students to accept the idea that the creation narrative of Genesis 1 "makes little or no impact on our experience of redemption." Allow me to quote the professor fully that I may do him justice: "Such information is incidental to the principle themes of Scripture and is drawn solely from human experience. This includes information about the persons, (such as the man from Gath who had twenty-four digits), information about events, information about the material world expressed in the pre-scientific lan-

guage of the day. Such information may be relevant for academic study of one sort or another but makes little or no impact on our experience of redemption. Taking the Bible seriously does not require us to treat such matters as the product of divine revelation; on the contrary, taking the Bible seriously requires, I believe, giving such incidental information the lesser status that I have suggested" (p. 13). Note carefully the progression in thought. To say first that the narrative re the man of Gath is irrelevant to redemption, and then to proceed to the narrative of creation and draw the same conclusion, is calculated to get the student/reader to accept VanTill's rejection of the historic Christian doctrine of creation. Besides, note the progression from *my* redemption to *our* experience of redemption.

I wonder if Pilate's having the tomb of Jesus sealed shut with the Roman seal and the stone placed before the tomb opening was a similar incidental element of the narrative and not particularly significant for my redemption experience.

Can we divorce the redemption-gospel themes of Scripture from the historical circumstances of God's revelation, when the historical circumstances were ordained and determined by God to serve as the background for the revelation of Himself? The answer is an emphatic No! Let no one be deceived!

But men are determined today to drive a wedge between the gospel (matters of salvation) and the events and circumstances by which the gospel of God is revealed to us in Christ Jesus. This is an evil work, for by it they violate the apostle's warning not to take from sacred Scripture (Rev. 22:19). The apostle John, in his gospel narrative, records many historical facts in connection with the ministry of Jesus. Are any of these unimportant and insignificant so that we may regard some of them to be "inaccurate" or non-factual? Is the account of John in need of correction by means of the discoveries of various scholars? John declares with regard to his whole

narrative that "... these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30).

We must receive the Scriptures in their entirety believing that they are alone sufficient to give us the knowledge of God's will and of our salvation. We have the testimony of

Jesus Himself, in that most significant passage on the sufficiency of Scripture, Luke 16:29: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." If one will not hear God speaking in the Scriptures, which alone are sufficient to give the knowledge of salvation, he lies under the wrath of God.

One can defend the sufficiency of Scripture in regard to the church's redemption and salvation only by holding to the truth that the historical facts recorded in Scripture as background to God's revelatory works are essential to the infallible record of revelation. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

The Book of Ruth

Lesson II

"Naomi-Mara: Jehovah — Plenteous in Mercy"

In a sense we can call Naomi a prodigal daughter (Luke 15:11ff.). She left her spiritual Father's house and lived for ten years in a place where He did not reveal Himself in His love in Christ. And she did return to Bethlehem-Judah, even as the prodigal son returned to his father's house. She returned because she realized that there was no other place on earth where she could find blessedness. By God's grace her return was in the way of acknowledging her sin and her Lord's faithful chastening of her (Ruth 1:20, 21). Naomi's bitterness was not a resentment towards God. Nor when she says, "the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me," does she accuse God of cruelty. Rather her bitterness is the knowledge of sin and its effects. She sees her afflictions as the loving rod of God (Heb. 12:6). In all her actions and words she shows a spirit of humbleness before God and of submission to the afflictions she received (I Pet. 5:5, 6). This contains many lessons for us.

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Jehovah is plenteous in mercy (Ps. 103:8; 86:5, 15). Already in Naomi's return, and then in the material provisions God supplies, we begin to see the hand of God's grace. This was not a bitter deed of God, but a most pleasant work of God, and both Ruth and Naomi begin to see that God is taking care of them in His grace. The Lord had not forsaken Elimelech's family because of their unbelief, but in His mercy would restore. What if there were no mercy with God? We would all lose our portion in His covenant due to our faithlessness. But God maintains our lot and inheritance (Ps. 16).

Rev. J. Heys makes an important observation at this point. "What is striking is the fact that Naomi with her husband and sons left Bethlehem-Judah, for earthly bread during a famine, and came back with a Moabitess who was seeking spiritual bread. This daughter-in-law, Ruth, sought the bread of life. Ruth came for spiritual reasons."

Ruth displays that indeed she was a true child of God in her care for her mother-in-law, her humility (to glean was to beg, Luke 16:1-12), her

industry, and in her trust in God's providence to lead her. Boaz recognizes this in his words of blessing to her in chapter 2:12: "under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Boaz is a man who honors the covenant of God. His faith in God hallowed his life as a master towards his servants, and as a man among God's people. Ruth's love for God's covenant touched Boaz, and he promises her freedom and protection in his fields.

Truly, those who wait upon the Lord shall not be ashamed. Bitterness over sin leads to the wondrous joy in the covenant mercy of God, who not only puts away our sin and restores us again, but also gives us to trust in His mercy to make straight our way.

Points to Ponder

Memorize Ruth 2:12

1. Why did Naomi's return cause such a stir in the city? What do you think is meant by the question, "Is this Naomi?" (Lack of recognition, surprise, contempt, compassion on her poverty, or _____?)

2. Though Naomi calls herself "Mara," we do not see bitterness expressed. What spirit do we see expressed toward God and her present condition? (Note in vs. 20, 21 that she refers to God twice as Almighty and twice as Lord [Jehovah]. Any significance?)

3. When Naomi speaks of being full and empty, is she speaking in earthly or spiritual terms?

In light of your answer:

- a. Is it often the case when earthly needs are abundantly satisfied that we are spiritually lacking, and vice versa? Why?
- b. Can you give examples from Scripture, or your own life?

4. Naomi is a picture of the child of God under affliction, and with patience under it (Phil. 4:11; Rom. 5:3-5, etc.). Discuss this statement: It is not affliction itself, but how affliction is borne, that does us good.

Ruth 2:1-17

1. Study in names: Give the meaning and significance of the name Boaz.

2. Much can be learned in Ruth regarding practical godliness. Identify, explain, and apply these virtues in Ruth.

Humility:

Industry:

Devotion to parents:

Trust in God's providence:

3. How are we to depend upon and live our lives in the light of God's providence?

4. What salutations did Boaz and his servants exchange? (See Ps. 129:7, 8.)

What is the significance?

Should we use such?

Is there a danger in overuse?

5. Why did Boaz show kindness to Ruth? In what ways did he do so? What does this tell us?

6. How are you doing on your memory work?!! ☐

When Thou Sittest in Thine House...

Mrs. Mary Beth Lubbers

The Reformed Family: Playgrounds and Battlegrounds

(for young children)

Far, far away in the country of Denmark there is a wonderful playground for children. This playground is a "junk playground." All kinds of scraps are brought here and children are encouraged to build things out of pieces of wood and other odds and ends with their own tools. A child such as you may go to this playground any time and begin building a cabin or a fort or an airplane or a boat. There is no limit to the things you can do here if you use the available junk and your imagination.

Even though you may never get to Denmark and play and climb and build in this playground, you can enjoy play almost anywhere. In your own home, your back yard, and in

the city parks and playgrounds. I have seen you boys and girls on your ruggedly-built jungle gym sets. These play structures, too, let you "climb mountains," "cross rivers," or "travel through space"—all without leaving your own back yard. I watch you at school as you jump and skip and twirl and balance dangerously on monkey bars and swing sets. Children and play go together like kites and windy days. You bubble over with energy and eagerness when you play. And it seems as if you don't need fancy, expensive toys to have fun either. A few scraps of lumber, some old tiles, a couple of crates or old boxes, and your imagination, and you are busy for a good long time.

And it is good that you children play. It is healthy. It will help you develop into strong young people.

No one should take playtime away from you or discourage your playtime activities. Even the Apostle Paul recognized this when he said in I Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

But, boys and girls, this world is not just one big playground. Even though you are very young, you must soon find out, and perhaps already know, that the world in which you live is a battleground and you are a soldier on it. Even the name of this magazine, *Standard Bearer*, tells you that there is a war going on now and there has been ever since Satan, that wicked serpent, tricked Adam and Eve into disobeying God. Do you know what a standard bearer is? He is the person who carries the army's

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flag, letting everyone know for what country his army is fighting.

Perhaps many of you have seen pictures of the war which the United States fought against Iraq. Maybe you have even been somewhat frightened by the exploding bombs and the rat-a-tat-tat of rapid gunfire. If you are like me, you probably don't like the gas masks which even little children were required to wear during attacks by the enemy, making everyone look like a giant anteater. You don't like war and the confusion and unhappiness which go with it.

However, the battlefield on which you live is not one where you fight a war against the evil man, Saddam Hussein, or any other monstrously wicked person. No, the enemy with whom you are at war on this earth is a spiritual, invisible enemy. He has been fighting God's people for a long, long time; so he is experienced and very crafty. And because you can't see him even as you fight him, he is exceedingly dangerous. In addition, he has a huge army of fallen angels, all invisible, too, who fight fiercely any time and anywhere at his command.

This great enemy is Satan. Do you remember how he started the war with God's people in the Garden of Eden? Can you recall how Satan vexed Job, taking away all his wealth, his children, and finally even his health? Surely you know how Satan tried to kill the baby Jesus when Herod sent his troops into Bethlehem to kill all the young children two years old and younger. Do you remember how he even tempted Jesus three times in the wilderness? And Satan was at the cross, too, trying to prevent Jesus from dying for the sins of His people. He reared up his ugly head to try to devour Jesus once and for all, but Jesus crushed his head. Nevertheless, until Jesus returns once again, Satan and his army are out to wound you — to make you sin, and even to kill you — to drag you down into hell with them, if that were possible.

Because you have such a clever enemy to fight against, God knows that you need superhuman strength

for this battle. So He has prepared divine armor and weapons with which you must wage war (Ephesians 6:11-18). As young children you must already be putting on this armor, even though it seems heavy and awkward. You may not say, "Well, I'll wait until I'm a little older and then when I need it I'll pick up a good stout stick somewhere along the road." Any attempt like this will mean certain death for you. You must be equipped with the whole armor of God. Now! This is your only hope against Satan's tricks and traps.

◆ **Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.**

To be a Christian soldier, you must first put on the girdle or belt of truth. To ward off this enemy, Satan, you children must know and believe the truth about God. Do you listen to your parents and ministers and school teachers as they teach you the truth about God? Knowing God will give you strength when the enemy attacks you.

◆ **And having on the breastplate of righteousness.**

In fighting Satan you must cover your body from the neck to the thighs, front and back, with an armor of righteousness. This righteousness is the obedience and suffering of your Savior, Jesus Christ. It comes to you from God by faith. When Jesus is your righteousness, you have a sure defense against all the thrusts of Satan. He won't even be able to stab you in the back.

◆ **And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.**

Young Christian soldiers, you must have boots for this battle, good sturdy combat boots. Have you ever seen a real soldier's boots? Oh, how he cares for his boots. He painstakingly works soft oils and creams into every crevice of the leather. He spit-polishes those boots. For they not only protect his feet and legs from injuries, but those boots often mean his swift getaway over rugged and rocky ground. So, your feet, young

foot soldier, must be covered with the swiftness which the Gospel of Peace gives, allowing you to pass unhurt over the battlefield and assuring your victory in this spiritual conflict.

◆ **Above all, taking the shield of faith.**

You will need a shield in this battle with Satan. You will need a protection about the size of a door to cover completely your body in this dreadful war. Satan launches sharp and fiery darts at you which burn and kill. The shield of faith which believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God repels all the attacks of the devil. Boys and girls, begin already now to call on Christ for help!

◆ **And take the helmet of salvation.**

Your head must be protected by the very best "hard-hat" available, the hope of salvation. The helmet is also the most ornamental part of your armor. You are *adorned* with God's salvation and *protected* by it. You can hold up your head with confidence and joy knowing that Jesus Christ has died for you. Satan will never crush your head, just as he was not able to crush Christ's head, because you are fitted with the royal helmet of salvation.

◆ **And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

So far, all your armor parts have been provided by God to defend yourself and resist the attacks of Satan. Now, your commander, Jesus Christ, gives the order to use an offensive weapon—something to fight with. You are instructed to use a sword to fight Satan and his hosts.

The Word of God is the great dragon-slayer.

You must go on the attack and thrust through your enemy. Some of you children have read stories about *Excalibur*, the wonderful sword of King Arthur. When he was just a little boy

called "Wart," Arthur pulled the sword out of the stone and ever after used it to slay his enemies. It was a magical sword. The sword which God gives you is not a magical sword, but a powerful sword. It is the very Word of God which the Spirit gives. No one can stand up to this sword and defy it. Not even Satan. When you wield this sword, even though as young children you wield it unsteadily, the great enemy Satan lies bleed-

ing and mortally wounded. He never could stand up to the Word of God and he never will be able to. That powerful Word of God, the Bible, is sharper than any earthly two-edged sword. Boys and girls, do you already *make* time to read the Bible? Do you listen carefully as it is explained and preached to you? Are you trying more and more to understand God's Word? The Word of God is the great dragon-slayer.

This is the armor and weapon which every Christian soldier carries to war with him. Can you remember each of them? But you must also have courage and strength for the battle, so the Apostle Paul tells you, and me, to fight by prayer. Call upon God as your most important battle exercise. Prayer will make you strong. Prayer will make you brave.

Pray always! □

Book Reviews

Jones' Dictionary of Old Testament Proper Names, by Alfred Jones. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990. pages viii-382, paper, \$16.95. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

You are reading the Old Testament Scriptures for family devotions or in preparation for a Bible study class and come across the name, Molech. You wonder what the name means, how it is pronounced, what the idol was, and in what other passages the word appears.

Jones' Dictionary is intended to answer these questions for all students of the Bible, advanced and beginners. It is a dictionary of the proper names in the Old Testament, places as well as persons. There are 3,600 entries in all.

The names are arranged in English alphabetical order. The English name is given first; next, the Hebrew word, with the correct pronunciation in English letters; then, the meaning of the name according to the Hebrew; and finally the occurrences of the name in the Old Testament.

In view of the great importance of names in the Old Testament, this dictionary is very helpful for the understanding of the Bible. Its usefulness is enhanced by the fact that often the explanation of the name includes explanation of passages in which the name or a derivative appears.

The entry, "Molech," can serve as an example:

MOLECH, . . . (pronounced) Molekh . . . and Moloch. "King" The national idol-god of the Ammonites, to which they offered their children in the fire It is difficult to say at what time the Israelites were first addicted to this idolatrous worship; but, from what St. Stephen says, Acts 7:43, about the worship of Moloch and of Chiun, we may conjecture that it commenced before their leaving Egypt; Chiun being the dog-star revered in Egypt, because his heliacal rising marked the regular commencement of the rising of the Nile. There can be no doubt that they were prone to it in the wilderness; but Solomon made it a national sin, by erecting to Moloch high places on the mount of Olives. This idol was of immense size, was of brass gilt, with the human form but with the head of an ox. This monster of a deity was also hollow, and heated from below, and the children to be sacrificed were to be cast into its arms, which were outstretched with a very considerable declination toward the earth; so that the "children rolled and fell . . . into a gulf of fire . . . drums . . . were beaten to prevent the groans and cries of children sacrificed from being heard."

This is only a partial quotation. The preacher will appreciate the Hebrew that follows the English name in every instance. □

Sources of Secession, by Gerrit J. tenZythoff. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. 189 pages, paper, \$12.95. [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Books in English on the history of the Reformed church in The Netherlands between the Synod of Dordt and the Secession of 1834 are few. This Eerdmans paperback is one. Where has it been hiding since its publication in 1987? It is a thorough, but succinct, account of the developments in the Netherlands Reformed Church that led to the Secession (*Afscheiding*) of 1834.

Emphasis rightly falls on the doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and church political struggles within the church. Several features stand out, especially for those who care about the corrupting of the Reformed faith in the Reformed churches today. Rejection of the doctrines confessed in the Canons of Dordt was basic to the departure of the Dutch church. A crucial factor after 1816 was the permission of officebearers' signing the Formula of Subscription (to the Reformed confessions) with the understanding that they agreed with the creeds "insofar as" the creeds were in harmony with the Bible, rather than "because" the creeds were biblical. In the early 19th century, theological modernism, exalting reason above Scripture, ravaged the church in The Netherlands. The "Groninger School" was the chief source. Long before this, false broth-

ers and weak sisters promoted the cause of the unbelief called modernism by their shrill advocacy of "tolerance." Always, some react to the apostasy of the instituted church by having recourse to the "conventical" — the little, pure church inside the large, unholy church. Not only is this quite un-churchly behavior un-Reformed, but the history recorded in *Sources of Secession* proves it also to be a failure.

There are incisive descriptions of the main theologians, winds of doctrine, ecclesiastical maneuverings, and controversies. Among them are Coccejus and Voetius; DeLabadie; hymns versus psalms; and the Dutch *Reveil*, associated with Bilderdijk and DaCosta. For the first time, I understand the *Reveil*. To know it, however, is by no means to appreciate it.

Deliverance to God's remnant came through Hendrik DeCock of Ulrum. Thank God for DeCock! The heart of his reformation (as it has been, will be, and must be the heart of every genuine reformation) was the conviction that the Three Forms of Unity are binding. DeCock restored to the Reformed church the gospel of the five heads of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt. With this went the personal courage of the man. As tenZythoff writes, "In view of the opposition he faced, it is to DeCock's credit that he went about his task with an utter lack of fear" (p. 118). As is always the case, "many orthodox believers refused to follow him" (p. 127). The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.

tenZythoff does justice to the role of the state in the decline of the Dutch church. He demonstrates that the state's sanctioning of Dordt's condemnation of the Arminians, obtained by the Synod of Dordt's granting "considerable weight in ecclesiastical matters" to the state, was a "Pyrrhic victory, for the magistrates took advantage of their influential position" (p. 16). The history of the Reformed church in The Netherlands between 1618 and 1834 is proof that the true church must refuse to the civil gov-

ernment all rule in, or influence upon, her life and labor. The sole duty of the state toward the church is the physical protection of her public meetings. When the church asks or accepts more from the state than this, she brings the Trojan horse into the holy city. □

The Canon of Scripture, by F.F. Bruce; Intervarsity Press, 1988. 349pp., hardcover, \$19.95. [Reviewed by Prof. Herman Hanko.]

F.F. Bruce, for many years Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester in England, was a prolific author and well-known Bible scholar especially in the field of New Testament studies. He has produced an important book on the canon of Scripture which ought to be read not only by every minister, but also by everyone interested in this question. While it is scholarly and shows a wide range of learning, it is also written in a clear and easily understandable way.

The greater part of the book is devoted to a discussion of the history of development of the canon of Scripture, first concerning the Old Testament, then the New. That is, the book is concerned chiefly with the long history of the church's decisions (and the opinions of the church fathers) with respect to the question of what books properly belong to the Scriptures and what books do not. In this connection, much attention is paid to the apocryphal books. Thus, the book is chiefly valuable for its historical material.

What is disconcerting about the book is Bruce's obvious commitment to higher criticism. He relies heavily on source criticism in his explanation of the Scriptures (pp. 123, 137, 285ff., etc.), even to the point where he takes the position that the apostles differed among each other in their views on some matters (p. 172), and adopts the position that the Holy Spirit speaks in other ways than the Holy Scriptures (p. 281).

This commitment to higher criti-

cism becomes obvious too in Bruce's questions: What text of Scripture is canonical? Which sources used by the authors are canonical? Thus, his determination of the canon of Scripture becomes very subjective. By "subjective" I mean that Bruce takes the position that the church ultimately decides the Canon. This is not true. Scripture itself decides the Canon, and the church recognizes what Scripture says. Our Belgic Confession discusses this very issue in Article V, which discusses what can be called the grounds for determining the canonicity of Scripture: "We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling" (emphasis is ours).

In an interesting and concluding chapter, Bruce discusses the primary and plenary meaning of Scripture, the former referring to Scripture's meaning in its historical setting, the latter referring to the meaning of the interpreters over the centuries. For example, Bruce affirms, in putting this whole question in the context of literary-historical criticism, that the primary meaning of the evangelists may be different from Jesus' primary meaning in His sermons, which sermons the evangelists report.

The book has a great deal of value because of its abundance of historical material, but must be read carefully and in full awareness of what I consider to be a fatal flaw. □

I want a sober mind,
A self-renouncing will,
That tramples down and casts behind
The baits of pleasing ill;
A spirit still prepared,
And armed with jealous care,
Forever standing on its guard,
And watching unto prayer.
July 1, 1933, *Standard Bearer*

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

News From Our Churches

Ministerial Calls

Rev. Steve Key received the call from the Hudsonville, MI PRC to serve as missionary to the saints in Larne, Northern Ireland.

Evangelism Activities

A few months ago we noted that a group of five families in Boise, ID requested and received a visit from Rev. C. Terpstra and Elder Ed Stouwie, Sr. of our South Holland, IL PRC. Due to the continued interest of this group, the consistory of Loveland, CO PRC has approved the request of the council of South Holland to release their pastor, Rev. R. Cammenga, to labor there for two weeks in March. Rev. Cammenga will preach in Boise on Sunday, March 10 and 17. This will be in place of a scheduled classical appointment.

Mission Activities

A few issues back we also made mention of the plans for work in Jamaica until a resident missionary is found for the field. Rev. Joostens, in a recent issue of *Across the Aisle*, writes about his and Elder Ed Gritters' visit to the island in January on behalf of our churches. He says in part, "Ed and I were in for a pleasant and challenging experience. From 14 to 18 men put in their presence for the continuation of the four-week sessions. Although there were varying abilities, one and all availed themselves of the opportunity to learn and grow in the truth. We can thank the Lord that He continues to open so great a door to preach the Gospel." You may also like to know that Elder Gritters preserved a record of the conference on video. It is possible that this video may be available to interested societies and individuals at a later date.

While on classical appointment to Northern Ireland, Rev. Kortering

wrote his congregation in Grandville, MI concerning some of the activities in Ballymena. The first Sunday Rev. Kortering was there was also the first Sunday the Covenant Reformed Fellowship met in Ballymena, having decided to relocate from Larne. It is more centrally located, a larger-sized city, and it has a good number of people of Presbyterian and Reformed background who are expressing interest in our work. It seems that there is enough spiritual life here that public articles and lectures can generate response.

Congregational Highlights

On Friday, February 22, the congregation of Lynden, WA PRC met to dedicate their new church sanctuary. (A short history, including pictures, provided by Mr. Jim denHartog of our Lynden congregation, follows the "News.") An open house was held from 1 to 4 PM. Invitations were sent to their four closest sister-churches, to the American Reformed Church, and to their former pastors. An hour of fellowship followed the program.

Evidently Sunday, February 17, was the first time that Lynden, under the blessing of God, met in their house of God. To mark that occasion, there

was offered the same dedication prayer which was offered back in 1964 when Lynden dedicated their first church building.

And, finally, we close this issue on a sad note. Kyle Flikkema, 4-year-old son of Rev. and Mrs. R. Flikkema of our Covenant PRC of Wyckoff, NJ, died on February 26. Funeral services were held Saturday, March 2, at the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. We offer our heart-felt sympathy to Rev. Richard and Marcia Flikkema and their three daughters, Tammy, Tricia, and Heidi. May they be comforted with the words of Romans 14:8: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

New Church Building: Lynden (WA) PRC

On February 22, 1991 our new church sanctuary was dedicated under the theme "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth." This was the culmination of approximately a four-year building and fund-raising program, which was brought about by the need for a larger sanctuary in which to worship.



We began our building program by looking at the various options available to us. Our options were: 1. To purchase an existing church building in Lynden that was for sale. 2. Selling our current property and purchasing new property to build on. 3. Using our current property on which to build. As these various ideas were studied, discussed, and voted on, we felt our best choice was to remain on our current site, remove our old church building, and construct a new and larger sanctuary.

Retaining the services of a local architect designer, we began working on the concept of a building plan that would be affordable and meet our present and future needs as a congregation. Once this step was completed, actual building plans were drawn up, approved by the congregation, and a cost assessment made.

Approximately a year was then spent on fund-raising and obtaining the needed financing in a manner that could be afforded by the congregation. In the early spring of 1990 the project was put out for bids.

The contract was awarded to a local construction company, and, after spending a few months obtaining the needed permits and approval, we started construction in August of 1990.

During the construction of our new church, it was necessary to remove our old church building and find another location for worship and for Bible studies and catechism classes. For six months we met for worship at the American Reformed Church (the home church of the contractors of our new building). Our Sunday worship services were held at 11:30 AM and 7:30 PM to accommodate four services per Sunday. Our weekly meetings were held at our own Covenant Christian School.

The construction progressed



smoothly and rapidly during the late summer and early fall. An extremely wet November and cold windy December and January delayed the completion somewhat, but on February 17, 1991 we were able to worship in our new sanctuary for the first time.

Our new church is a very traditional two-story building featuring a partial daylight basement. The exterior consists of wood siding with brick wainscoting, with the brick accenting the entire north face. The entrance features a large pillar-supported portico with a concrete apron. The upper level of the interior consists of a 400-seat sanctuary finished with sheet rock and oak trim with large, arched, tinted windows. Also included is a foyer, bathrooms, storage room, and a library. The basement features a large gathering room, a nursery, kitchen, bathrooms, and a consistory room. The basement has a suspended ceiling, and the church is carpeted throughout with tile or vinyl in some areas.

As we begin our congregational life in our new sanctuary, our hearts are overwhelmed with thankfulness to our faithful covenant God, and our prayer is that we may continue by His grace to glorify Him with our worship and proclaim His truth faithfully in the years to come. □

ATTENTION STUDENTS!

The Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee is taking applications for scholarships to be awarded to future Protestant Reformed ministers and teachers for the 1991-1992 school year. Each applicant must also submit an essay of at least three hundred words, answering this question: "In the light of Jeremiah 6:13-17, with all the false prophets around us saying, 'peace, peace when there is no peace,' how should the old paths spoken of here be preached and taught?" For an application, contact:

Jim Holstege

1459 Spaulding S.E.

Grand Rapids, MI 49546

The application, accompanied by the essay, must be returned by June 1, 1991.

NOTICE!

Southwest Protestant Reformed Church is sponsoring a lecture on April 18 at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. Rev. Kamps will speak on the topic "The Purpose of Sacred Scripture." The lecture begins at 8:00 PM.

TEACHER NEEDED!!

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.

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 8, 1991 at the Holland Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by April 9, 1991.