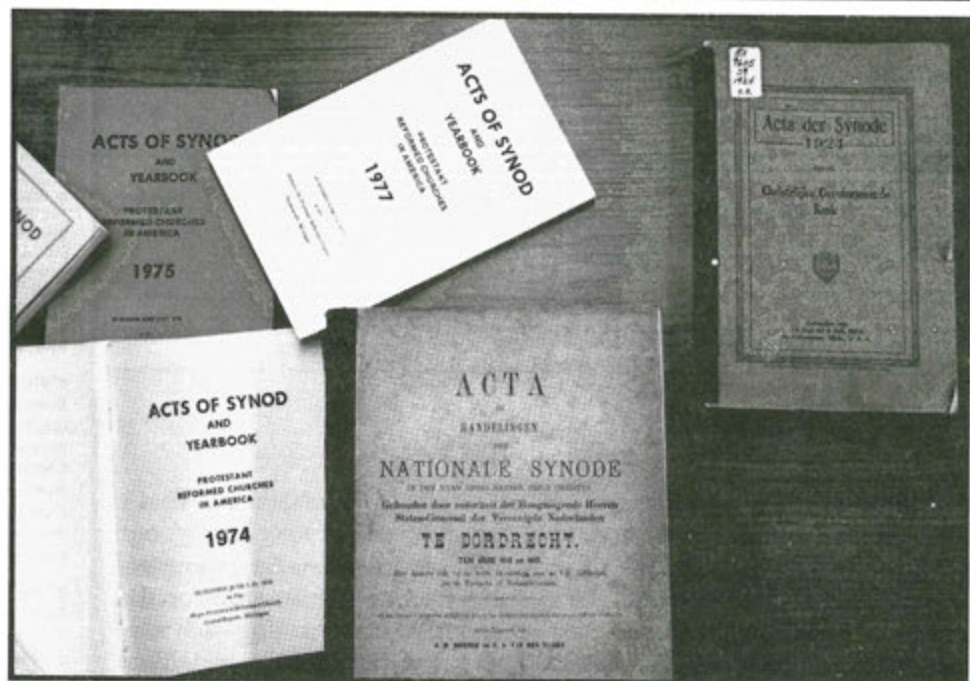


THE STANDARD BEARER

A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine



If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order, as long as they are not changed by a general synod.

Church Order of Dordrecht, Article 31

Vol. 67, No. 17
June 1, 1991

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In This Issue ...

We draw your attention this time to (of all things) the masthead. That's the long column, on this page, directly to the right. More specifically, our concern is the "Advertising Policy." For decades the "deadline for announcements" was "the 1st and the 15th of the month, previous to publication on the 15th or the 1st respectively." Of late, however, we've been mailing each new issue several days prior to the publication date — for the benefit especially of those affected adversely by the time it ordinarily takes for second class mail to make it through the system in some postal areas. But an earlier date for mailing required an earlier date also for submitting copy to the printer. So, back in April we changed the "deadline for announcements" in the masthead to the "10th and 25th of the month, previous to publication on the 1st or the 15th respectively." Our hope was that, though mastheads are not high on anyone else's reading list, at least those who submitted announcements would check there for the due dates. Sometimes that happened. Sometimes not. And we really do feel bad when we receive an announcement which is requested to appear in, say, the May 1 issue, and it's one day too late for that. And "too late" is pretty absolute when we're dealing with camera-ready copy. The only way to add, at that point, is by way of replacement. And rarely does that work.

So ... we thought we should, for one thing, move up the due date another notch, in the masthead, and, for another, draw special attention to it here, in an attempt to prevent some disappointments in the future. We settled on a simple "one month prior to publication date." Admittedly, that's not absolute. We added about a week, for flexibility — purposefully.

D.D.

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

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The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

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

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

Meditation

Rev. Jason Kortering

Casting Your Cares Upon God

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

I Peter 5:6,7

Care!

How destructive cares can be.

How marvelous caring can be.

There is good care; there is bad care.

Our passage under consideration deals with both. Our cares are bad. Hence, get rid of them; cast all your cares upon Him. Why should we do this? Because He, that is, God, cares for you. These words read literally, "Casting all your anxiety (care) upon Him, for it matters to Him (He cares) concerning you."

What a word of encouragement! Cast your anxiety upon God, for it matters to Him.

It is obvious that the things which give rise to our anxieties (cares) are very important to us. In the context, the inspired Peter is writing to saints who had big concerns. In the preceding chapter, I Peter 4:12, he cautions them about fiery trials that are coming upon them. The entire epistle is directed to the "strangers, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." He assures them that they are begotten unto an inheritance which will not fade away, and that they are kept by the power of God unto that day. This

means much to them, since they are now for a season in heaviness, through manifold temptations which try their faith (I Peter 1:1-7). These Christians were suffering for their refusal to worship Caesar. They could not worship Jehovah and Caesar, but only Jehovah; and this brought opposition from the authorities, social conflicts. They were driven from their homes and places of work. Their families were separated and many of them were imprisoned and even slain. They knew poverty and famine as well. No wonder they were anxious and filled with cares.

There are many saints of God in our day who can identify with these early Christians. Persecution rages throughout the world. Some of this is among us as well. When husbands or wives abandon their spouses and families, they leave them hurt and wanting. When trouble disrupts the church, fellow saints can be terribly cruel in the way they treat each other. Besides this, we have the usual concern for our needs. We think of many things which can interfere with our usual pattern of living. The economy, for example, can change, and many of us feel the effects of the recession now. Job security is important to us, for we need money to meet our needs and the needs of our families. We can so quickly be thrown into an emergency situation: our health can change; we may face mounting hospital bills; we can lose loved ones in death. We face the threats of war, the rise of the Antichrist, and all the suffering that that involves as described for us in the Bible. The church today has many things of concern.

These things become cares when

we are affected inside. The word "care" means, literally, to cut to pieces. When the things which take place in our lives cut us to pieces inside, they become cares. We begin to worry, we feel unsettled, and even anxious.

If we allow these cares to stay inside, we will suffer needlessly. Hence Peter says, "Casting all your cares upon him, for he careth for you." To cast is to throw off. The idea is that one consciously analyzes his inner self and comes to terms with worry, identifies it, and throws it heavenward to get rid of it by committing his way to God.

That means that we will give up the control of our lives.

That is the issue!

We worry because we do not want God to have His way with us.

At bottom, that is nothing but perverse PRIDE.

God sees it this way. The Holy Spirit led Peter to write these words, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God." Did you read that correctly? *Humble* yourselves. That is our problem with worry: we worry because we are not humble enough. If we are honest with ourselves, we will understand this clearly. We want things our way, we want a certain job, we want a certain amount of money, we want a certain house, we want certain friends, we want life our way, we want CONTROL! And if we don't get it we cry out, WHY? Why do I have this disease? Why do I have this trouble in my life? Why should I lose my job? When we are really in bad spiritual shape, we even challenge God to explain it clearly or we threaten to abandon Him.

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

No wonder we have so many cares, so much worry.

Humble yourselves. We must see ourselves in relation to our God. To humble ourselves is to admit how finite we are, how sinful, how helpless, how undeserving. To humble ourselves is to empty ourselves of any self-worth. It is to crucify the old man. It is to die to ourselves as the only way that we can live unto the Lord.

In verse 5, the immediately preceding verse, we read, be clothed with humility, wear it like a garment which covers our entire being and life. Our life is not what we want it to be. Our life is one of service to God. The issues of life are not luxury, ease, earthly comforts, but rather obedience, doing the will of our Heavenly Father, delighting in fellowship with Him and with His saints.

Such humility will enable us to face our cares and to get rid of them—not by pushing them deeper inside our own souls and by trying to repress all fear, doubt, and worry. Nor will we try to rid ourselves of them by going to some therapist and talking hours on end about our problems, though this may be helpful in order to identify why we are afraid and worry so much. The divine answer is that we throw them heavenward! We cast all our worries upon God.

How can we let go of our cares?

Listen: He tells us of His "mighty hand," and, "He careth for you." We will never let go and give our worries to God unless we trust Him. The deepest issue here is the strength of our faith.

My beloved reader, you can trust your God.

His hand is mighty. The hand is the part of the human body which functions as the instrument to get things done. The dexterity of the human hand is amazing, from that of the carpenter who wields the hammer, to that of the surgeon who performs delicate nerve surgery. God uses this human language to describe His relationship to us. His hands formed the dry land as the Creator God. His hands uphold the universe in mas-

sive strength. His hand touches every moving vehicle and controls the driver to do exactly what He wants him to do. His hand reaches within our bodies when viruses invade. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord and He turns it whithersoever He will. His hand carries out His sovereign will as He sends forth the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Don't you see, beloved, how wrong worry is? We want control. No, God says, cast your cares upon Me! I have control.

There is more, "I care for you." It isn't enough for us to commit our way to God because He is so powerful. We have to believe that He exercises this power in love for us. What good are mighty hands if the person is a murderer or an evil one. He uses all that strength to destroy. But our God has both mighty hands and a good heart. It matters to Him what is going on in our lives. This is true because He loves us. Don't forget how the inspired Peter described this love in the opening verses of this letter (1:1-7). He elected us according to His foreknowledge. That means that in love He chose us to be His own. He sprinkled the blood of Jesus upon the cross for us. Remember, Jesus is God's own Son. If you ever question God's love, think of the care God showed to us at Calvary. In love He raised Jesus from the dead and set Him at His own right hand so that He now exercises all His divine control through Him. He cares for us by giving to us faith. We are begotten unto a living hope. He cares for us by keeping us in that hope by His own Spirit, "the power of God."

The mighty God cares for us. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Let's cast our worries upon Him. The result will be a worry free life and great peace with God.

How do we actually throw those cares heavenward?

First, it does not mean that we abandon our responsibilities to deal

with the issues of life. If we are worrying about paying bills, we must try to get the best job we possibly can. We must either increase our income or control our spending. That takes wisdom and careful planning in our lives. If we have a disease, we seek good medical advice and help. If we need psychotherapy we will avail ourselves of the best help we can. If we are having marriage problems we will seek our pastor's help.

Secondly, we will do all this seeking Jehovah. Prayer is the way in which we consciously throw away our worries. By prayer our souls are brought into the exalted presence of the mighty God who loves us. It helps us view our present circumstances in the light of His presence. We will confess our sins to Him, ask for His sustaining presence, make it our specific request that for Jesus' sake He will take away our anxious care, our worry, our doubts and fears. It is so important that we do this with our Bibles open. We approach God in prayer with His promises clearly upon our souls.

Casting our cares is not a once-in-a-lifetime act. It must be our daily activity. The more we worry, the more we need to pray.

The promise is, "He will exalt you in due time."

It may take awhile. The immediate answer is seen in a deeper sense of contentment. We understand that even the difficulties of this present time contribute to our drawing closer to our God. We receive the grace to bear our responsibilities, to continue in our place of service. We know deep within our heart that God is good to us, no matter what our present circumstances may be.

In due time, He exalts us with His presence in glory. Then we will be vindicated of our enemies, we will receive the promised inheritance, and we shall be better able to serve our blessed God.

Do you have cares, worries?

Cast them heavenward ... and be at peace. □

The Binding Decisions of a Reformed Synod

It cannot be said that Protestant Reformed people are wrapped up in the annual meeting of synod. Unless there is a case of special interest to the churches, visitors at synod are few. Seldom is the church building packed at the worship service with which synod begins. It is doubtful that the members wait with bated breath for the decisions of synod in the *Acts*.

Nevertheless, it lives in the congregations that synod is an important part of our church life. There is understanding that synod settles matters of dispute in the churches. The churches carry out the decisions of synod that bear on the denominational life. Consistories and individuals submit to decisions of synod with which they themselves are in disagreement. It is accepted that synod's decisions will be considered settled and binding by all the consistories and by all the members.

This is as it should be. This is healthy. This is Reformed. The broader assembly of the churches, synod now in particular, is the necessary expression of the unity of the church of Christ. In keeping with the purpose of the unity of the church, synod serves for the mutual help of the congregations and represents the cooperative labor of all the churches of the denomination on behalf of Christ their common Head.

The Reformed Church Order

Basic to this unity and essential for this service and cooperative labor is the binding character of synod's (and classis') decisions. Article 31 of the Reformed Church Order of Dordt,

which regulates church life in the PRC, establishes this: "Whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding. . . ." Synodical decisions put an end to debate on controversial issues in the churches. There may not be continued agitation against the decisions. Consistories and members must submit to the decisions and carry them out. This is what they have willingly agreed to do by virtue of their membership in the denomination. Minorities willingly agree to yield to the vote of the majority of delegates.

The binding character of synod's decisions implies real authority. The synod has authority. Synod has authority over consistories. Article 36 of the Church Order of Dordt expressly states the authority of the broader assemblies over the consistory: "The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the particular synod has over the classis and the general synod over the particular." "Jurisdiction" in the original Latin of this article is *auctoritas*, "that is, 'authority.'" The Dutch has *zeggen*, "that is, 'say-so': The synod has 'say-so' over the consistory.

*It is peculiarly, subtly,
and significantly Reformed
to call classis and synod
"broader assemblies,"
not "higher assemblies...."*

This authority of synod is derived from the local churches themselves by way of the churches sending

duly authorized pastors and elders to conduct the business of the churches in common. It is greater than the authority of the individual consistory, not because it is of a higher order than that of the consistory (there is no authority in the churches higher than that of the consistory), but because it represents the authority of all the consistories cumulatively for the oversight, help, and work of all the churches. It is peculiarly, subtly, and significantly Reformed to call classis and synod "broader assemblies," not "higher assemblies," or "higher courts," in order to do justice to their greater authority without jeopardizing Christ's government of the local congregation through the body of elders.

In order to safeguard the rule of the local congregation by the body of elders, the Reformed Church Order sharply restricts the authority of synod to matters that could not be finished in minor assemblies and to matters that pertain to the churches in common (Article 30). Besides, synod does not have the authority to preach, administer the sacraments, or exercise discipline. Christ has given this power to the church; and the church is not synod but the local, instituted congregation.

Nevertheless, synod has ecclesiastical authority—the authority of Christ's church—for the authority of synod is the authority of the churches that assemble in synod. The authority of a Reformed synod is the authority of the risen Christ Himself, for He is the author and source of the authority of His church, as He is the author

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and source of all authority. The binding character of synod's decisions for individual member and local consistory alike expresses this real, ecclesiastical authority. Synod's decisions are not considered settled and binding merely because of a "gentlemen's agreement" on the part of the churches and members of the denomination.

The Reformed Tradition

This is the Reformed tradition. The great Dutch authority on Reformed church government, Dr. H. Bouwman, expresses this tradition when he writes, "The theory of the absolute sovereignty of the individual churches has always been opposed by the Reformed" (*Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, Vol. 2, 1934, p. 15; my translation of the Dutch). Bouwman goes on to assert that the Reformed view of the life together of the churches of Christ is that the local church subjects herself to the decisions of the broader assembly. Bouwman then observes:

Such a subordination is not the introduction of a hierarchy in the church, but a subjecting of itself (on the part of the local church—DJE) to the yoke of Christ, a practising of the unity of the body of Christ, and a seeking of the maintenance of Christ's kingship (*Geref. Kerk*, Vol. 2, p. 66).

It is the independent churches, mostly Baptist, that deny the binding character of the decisions of synods or councils, as Article 26 of their Savoy Declaration states: "These Synods so assembled are not intrusted with any Church Power properly so called, or with any Jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise any Censures, either over any Churches or Persons, or to impose

their determinations on the Churches or Officers."

The Reformed churches held the decisions of the Synod of Dordt to be binding upon all the churches. It was the Arminians who repudiated the idea of denominational authority and of binding synodical decisions.

What Says the Scripture?

This principle of Reformed church order is biblically based. First, it is taught in Scripture's account of the Jerusalem synod in Acts 15. The local church at Antioch appealed to the broader assembly of apostles and elders at Jerusalem a matter that could not be finished in the local church. This doctrinal question was at the same time a matter that pertained to the churches in common. The decision taken by the broader assembly was considered settled and binding. The report that went out to the churches did not speak of advice that the churches were free to accept or to reject at their pleasure. In full consciousness of its authority, the synod declared, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15:28). When the apostles brought the decision to the local churches, "they delivered them the decrees (Greek: *dogmata*) for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4).

Second, the New Testament makes plain that the autonomy of the local churches did not mean that each church could go her own way and do her own thing in disregard for the other churches. There was an authority that bound upon all the churches the common faith, a common order, and a common life. This authority over all the churches was necessary for the unity of the churches. When Paul gives instructions to Corinth concerning marriage matters, he says, "And so ordain I in all churches" (I Cor. 7:17). The apostle is at pains to point out that the order in home and in worship services that he requires of a particular local church holds for all the churches (cf. I Cor. 11:16; 14:33). It

is true that this "denominational" authority was then the office of the apostle, which office is no longer found in the church. But this authority remains inasmuch as the unity of the churches, served by this authority, is still important to the Head of the church. The local churches possess this authority. They express and exercise this authority by banding together in a synod whose decisions are considered settled and binding.

The Controversial Exception

The exception allowed for by Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt, "unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order," does not permit a member or a church to ignore or to agitate against a decision of synod. It recognizes the fallibility of the assemblies. It expresses the infallibility and, therefore, the sole authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. The article grants to the aggrieved member or consistory, not the right of disregarding or agitating against a decision of consistory, classis, or synod, but the right of appeal against the decision to a broader assembly of the churches. The appeal must prove that the decision conflicts with Scripture or with the Church Order. While one is appealing, he may not agitate against the decision, but must submit. His conscience is not bound; but his speech and behavior in the churches are bound.

It must be acknowledged that authorities on Reformed church polity have explained the exception of Article 31 of the Church Order ("unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God . . .") as referring to the person or church that has been wronged by synodical decision. To the question, "To whom must it be proved that the decision is in conflict with the Word of God?" Joh. Jansen answers that Article 31 intends to say "that we are bound by the decisions of the majority unless someone esteems it proved to himself that one or another decision is in conflict with God's Word" (*Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening*, p. 147; my trans-

lation of the Dutch). Decisions of synod are to be considered settled and binding unless the local consistory itself or brother so-and-so himself is convinced that the decision is contrary to Scripture. But even these authorities, rightly fearful of the disorder, uproar, and chaos to which this explanation may lead in the denomination, quickly add that a dissenting consistory or member, rather than raise discord in the denomination, should leave the federation of churches (cf. Van Dellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, p. 146; also, H. Bouwman, *Geref. Kerk*, Vol. 2, pp. 56ff.).

But the exception-clause in Article 31 undoubtedly refers to the broader assembly: "unless it be proved to the broader assembly that the decision being appealed is contrary to the Word of God," etc. This is proved by the article's use of the word, "proved." It must be *proved* that the decision of synod is contrary to the Word of God. One does not prove something to himself. It is the right and duty of a believer or of a consistory wronged by a decision of one of the assemblies to prove that the decision is contrary to the Word or to the Church Order. The appellant must prove this to the synod. Had the intention of Article 31 been that decisions of church assemblies are settled and binding unless members or consistories suppose them to be erroneous, the exception clause would read this way: "unless one is convinced that the decision conflicts with the Word of God."

The main concern of Article 31, after all, is not the freedom of conscience of the individual, but living together in a denomination of churches. Article 31, like Article 36, concerns the unity of the churches as expressed in the ecclesiastical assemblies.

Revolt

Rejection of synodical authority, refusal to consider synodical decisions settled and binding, and agitation against synodical decisions are radically un-Reformed. This think-

ing and behavior are contrary to the Reformed tradition; violation of Articles 31 and 36 of the Reformed Church Order of Dordt; revolt against the authority of Christ; and sin against the unity of the church.

We stand aghast at what we are hearing from Reformed men and churches today. "No decision of synod will be considered settled and binding unless this consistory ratifies the decision!" "We consider ourselves perfectly free publicly to damn synodical decisions as heretical even though we do not appeal these decisions!" "If we are appealing decisions that we consider evil, we are not obligated to submit while we appeal, but may stir up opposition to the decisions throughout the denomination!" "Every church and every member may decide for itself and himself to withhold the money that synod has budgeted for denominational work!" "Synods have no real authority over the local consistory in the Reformed system, and never have had!"

I wonder whether consistories now encouraging members to disregard synodical authority, if only the members judge the decisions of synod in error, will be just as supportive when presently these members show the same contempt for the decisions of the consistory. Will these consistories allow their members to run through the congregation agitating against consistorial authority, if only the members prove to their own satisfaction that a decision of the consistory is contrary to the Word of God?

The members now enthusiastically joining in the work of tearing down synodical authority as the Great Tyranny might well stop for a moment to remember that one important purpose of the broader assemblies is to serve as a check against the tyranny of the local church and of the local pastor. Hierarchy is not a temptation only of synods. Local consistories have tyrannized their members. Some of the worst despots in the church are lordly pastors whose will is law in the church and who brook no opposition. It now becomes fashionable in Re-

formed circles to revile synodical authority with the barbarous epithet, "synodocracy." But let Reformed people keep in mind that there is also a "dominie-ocracy" and a "consistocracy." Classes and synods have been salvation for the people of God from the hierarchy and tyranny of consistories and pastors.

Often synods have themselves to blame for the violent reaction against synodical authority and for the disregard of synodical decisions. They infringe upon the authority that Christ has given to the consistory. They ride roughshod over the church order. Worst of all, they make decisions that conflict with Scripture and deviate from the confessions. These decisions they then attempt to bind upon the congregations. Thus synods, intended to express and safeguard the unity of the churches, destroy the unity of the churches. But the reaction against this abuse of authority that consists of rejecting synodical authority altogether is no better. It also is destructive of the unity of the church of Christ.

The Better Way

The PRC may be thankful that the King of the church has preserved us from this reactionary repudiation of synodical authority. The churches came into existence through the hierarchy of the broader assemblies. A synod adopted doctrines that conflict with the teaching of Scripture and of the Reformed creeds that the grace of God is sovereign and particular. Classes then tried to bind these doctrines upon the consciences and ministries of Reformed preachers. When this failed, the classes took to them

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selves power that belongs to the consistory and deposed both the preachers and their consistories. The synod approved the exercise of discipline by a classis and promptly dispossessed consistories and the overwhelming majority of the congregations of their physical properties.

If any group of churches had reason to renounce all synodical and classical authority as hierarchy, it was the PRC.

But there is a better way than the

hierarchy of the broader assemblies on the one hand or the independency of the local churches on the other hand.

This is the Reformed way: the autonomy of the local congregation as the church and at the same time the binding character of the decisions of synod as the authoritative assembly of churches.

May the synod of the PRC 1991 decide on all matters rightfully coming before it in accordance with Scrip-

ture and the Church Order of Dordt. May it consciously do so as servant of Christ and the congregations.

May the consistories and members consider synod's decisions settled and binding in recognition of synod's authority and in regard for the peace of the churches.

That is to say, may the PRC continue to express and enjoy the precious unity of the church of Jesus Christ. ■

— DJE

PRC Synod 1991

The annual synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, although hosted by the Hope Church of Walker, Michigan, will meet in the church building of the Southwest PRC because of remodeling work being done on the Hope building. The pre-synodical worship service will be held on Monday, June 10, at 7:30 PM. Synod will convene on Tuesday morning, June 11, at 9:00 AM, the Lord willing.

One important aspect of the work of this synod will be the examination of seminary graduate Mitchell Dick.

The Theological School Committee (TSC) reports that the other three seminarians are expected to return in the fall for their second year. Two new students will enter seminary in the fall for a total of five. In addition, there is the likelihood that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia will send two men for training in our theological school, subject to the approval of our synod.

The TSC is overturing synod to reconsider decisions of previous synods establishing a pre-seminary program in the seminary. The overture recommends that synod decide to discontinue teaching all pre-seminary courses in the seminary, with the exception of Greek grammar and reading and Dutch grammar and reading.

The TSC also proposes the expansion of the seminary building, es-

pecially because of the needs of the library, and informs synod about the conference on Holy Scripture that the seminary will sponsor in October, 1991.

The Mission Committee reports on the work that has been done during the past year in Jamaica; in Venice, Florida; and in Northern Ireland. No one accepted any of the calls to these mission fields. The PRC are without a missionary at present.

The Foreign Mission Committee is asking the approval of synod on its decision to send a minister and an elder to Ghana, Africa before the end of 1991 in order to investigate the possibility of doing mission work there.

The Contact Committee (CC) reports on its activities the past year. Prof. R. Decker attended the meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) in Atlanta, Georgia. Although Prof. Decker advises that the PRC continue to send observers to NAPARC, the CC makes no recommendation to synod. Rev. B. Woudenberg served the Burnie, Tasmania congregation from December, 1990 through April, 1991 on behalf of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Rev. R. Dykstra and Prof. H. Hanko visited and worked with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of

Singapore (ERCS) for about six weeks. The CC proposes that synod approve calling "a senior pastor" to be loaned to the Singapore churches for a period of three years. The Singapore churches have requested this help from the PRC, especially in order to assist them with missions and with the establishment of a theological school. The CC is also recommending that synod approve immediate help for the ERCS by asking consistories to release their minister for work in Singapore for several months.

The synodical committee appointed in 1989 to study the overture of Southeast PRC, Grand Rapids, that the denominational structure of the PRC be reorganized into three classes (instead of the present two), recommends that synod reject the overture of Southeast.

Synod is again informed of the steady numerical growth of the Protestant Reformed denomination. The Lord added 52 families to the churches in the past year.

There is no matter of appeal on the agenda this year.

May the King of the church guide the synod by His Spirit for the good of the churches and for the advancement of the Reformed faith. □

— DJE

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Marvin Kamps

The Purpose of Sacred Scripture (2)

This is the second of two installments through which we share with our readers the lecture of Rev. Kamps on the above subject, in Southwest Church on April 18, 1991.

What is the purpose of Scripture? The answer to this question is given by the apostle Paul in II Timothy 3:16, 17, where we read: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." In order to understand the significance of this passage for the church, we must note carefully the circumstances under which it was written. Paul was in prison a second time in Rome. He was about to lose his life at the hand of wicked Nero, the Roman emperor. Chapter 4:6 makes this plain. But one thing was all-important to the apostle. Timothy must preach the Word in season and out of season. Paul declares, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the Word" Paul therefore reminded Timothy of the great significance and source of the Word he was enjoined to preach. All Scripture is inspired of God. God is its author and source. Its great purpose is that the "man of God may be perfect."

And this perfection is defined as being "thoroughly furnished unto good works."

The purpose of Scripture, then, is to give the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus that the church, the believers in an evil world, may be enabled to live a life that is God glorifying. Through the Word of the gospel we are enabled to live as the friends of God. We are to keep His commandments. We are to confess the truth of His Word. We are to be jealous for God's honor. We are to hate all sin and flee from temptation. Through the Word we are enabled to repent of our sin and cleave in faith to Christ Jesus.

*Without right doctrine
one cannot live
the Christian life.*

Please note carefully that this is God's purpose. For this purpose God gave the Word. God so formed the Word that it is profitable for doctrine. Its purpose is to give doctrine. Doctrine is the truth of Scripture set forth by the church as biblical dogma. Doctrine is teachings and instruction in spiritual truths. Doctrine is the truth concerning God's Being and world, truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and the truth about the fallen sinner. Doctrine is placed first by the apostle because doctrine is basic to life and forms the foundation of Christian living. Without right doctrine one cannot live the Christian life. It is that basic.

In our day the church more and more refuses to give instruction in biblical doctrine. People clamor for

the satisfaction of their "feelings" and "emotions." Our age despises doctrine. And yet that is exactly the great need of the day, as it is in every age. Doctrine is the chief means to make "the man of God perfect."

In addition, the apostle writes that the Scriptures are profitable for *reproof*. That is, the authority of Scripture is both prescriptive and proscriptive. On the one hand the Bible tells us what we are to believe as the truth in Christ Jesus. On the other hand the Bible tells us what is the lie of the Devil and what we may not believe. Scripture always exposes error.

Further, the Bible is given for the purpose of correction and instruction in righteousness. When a believer has been deceived and led into error, then the Word of God alone is the means to work correction and to lead him into the way of repentance. And, finally, the Bible is God-given that we may have instruction in righteousness. How can one know the way if he does not know God's Word? How can the youth of the church be expected to walk in the old paths if they are not instructed in what constitutes those paths well pleasing to God? The people of God perish because of a lack of knowledge in our day. Instruction in righteousness is withheld. The Bible was given in order that we and our children may have that instruction. We must have instruction in righteousness in regard to marriage, the home, entertainment, work, and our responsibilities in the communion of the saints. Without this instruction we and our children go lost.

I would summarize the message of this text as being that the Scriptures are given us in order that we may be

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enabled to walk as God's friends in the world. And remember, he that is God's friend is an enemy of all unrighteousness. He is an enemy of false doctrine. He is offended by those who would lead the church into the path of false doctrine. He refuses to walk with those who will not heed correction and reproof. The psalmist confessed in Psalm 119:63, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts." This confession must be our confession.

*We not only reject
the theory of evolution,
but even abhor it
as God-dishonoring,
man-exalting,
unbiblical,
and as the lie
of the Devil himself.*

If we may apply the above to our present situation in the Reformed church community, then let it be known that we as Protestant Reformed Churches reject the very idea of women officebearers in the church. We do so because God's Word forbids it. Our women do not clamor to be officebearers, because they have been instructed in what is their God-given place in the church and in the home. We honor our sisters in Christ. We recognize their talents and gifts even as God has richly blessed them; but their place in the church is defined for them not by haughty men, as the church has been wrongly accused, but by God Himself. In the second place, we not only reject the theory of evolution, but even *abhor* it as God-dishonoring, man-exalting, unbiblical, and as the lie of the Devil himself. That a Synodical Study Committee of our mother church should recommend that the highest ecclesiastical body of this church in 1991 adopt and defend this unbelieving theory is truly a grief to us. Thirdly, we reject as contrary to God's Holy Word the entertainment provided by the dance halls and theaters of this world. Our

world is drowning in a maelstrom of immorality and impurity that is greatly stimulated and excited by these two means. And yet our mother church has not the spiritual strength to condemn these forms of entertainment. Scripture itself proclaims: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (I John 2:15, 16). The Protestant Reformed Churches reject membership in the labor unions that have committed themselves to the "labor strike," on the grounds that this is rebellion against authority and, therefore, a violation of the fifth commandment. And, finally, we reject as principally Arminian and Pelagian the so-called well-meant offer of the gospel to all who hear the preaching of the Word. Our mother church has developed in this error of Arminianism to the point where many claim that the doctrines of election and reprobation have lost in her midst any significant place in the preaching of the Word on the Lord's day. As Reformed congregations we hold to the absolute sovereignty of God and to the particularity of His grace in Christ Jesus. We reject free-willism and proclaim the necessity of regeneration of the elect dead-in-sin sinner, whom God calls irresistibly by His Word unto faith in Christ Jesus. Our preaching is ruled by the biblical doctrines of unconditional election and reprobation. That is as it should be in Reformed churches.

*The theory of Common Grace
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I want in this article to inform you of the essential ground of the Synodical Study Committee that is

now defending the theory of evolution adopted by the CRC in 1989. What, do you imagine, is the main ground presented by this committee in their report, for their defense and propagation of evolution? The answer: the erroneous doctrine of Common Grace. It is common grace, according to the report, that makes it possible for ungodly scientists rightly to interpret God's general revelation. This is not surprising to me. Nor should it be to you. The theory of Common Grace is a pernicious error that offers an iron-clad justification for the church's adoption of the theory of evolution. That the theory of Common Grace should serve as the ground for the decision to declare that the theory of evolution is not contrary to God's Holy Word should surprise no one. Why not? Because false principles allowed to grow and develop in the mind and will of the church impel that same church to further error and departure from the faith. We must ever remember that false doctrine works through, given time, to pollute the whole of the Christian faith.

Further, I want to say something to you about the conservative movement today within our mother church. They with us *reject* their church's position on women in office and the theory of evolution. Let no one misunderstand! They do emphatically reject these unbiblical positions. For that we may be and *are* thankful to God in heaven. But one thing is painfully disappointing. If I may judge by printed critiques of the Synodical study committee's report to the CRC Synod of 1991, they all fail even to address the committee's central ground for its position. The issue of Common Grace is not even mentioned. How is it possible to offer a critique of another's work and not even treat the issue of his main ground, especially when one takes great exception to the proposition of the report.

In this connection I wish to make an observation that may also serve as a warning. If the conservative element will not lead God's people in

their midst to reject the root of this, and other errors, in the church, the reformation they wish to bring about is doomed to failure. Let me demonstrate by way of example. At the end of my driveway, in the ditches on either side of the drive, grow shrub willow trees. These obscure my view of traffic on Ivanrest. Thus these willows occasion a terrible traffic hazard. I have cut them down two or three times, but they keep growing back. For a short time I feel safe and secure because my view of the traffic is not obscured. But then in a few months they grow back, filled with foliage, and threaten my and my family's safety once more. The root has to be killed or removed. The source of the plants' life must be cut off. Then my view of traffic on Ivanrest will not be obscured by those willows.

The same is true spiritually. False doctrine must be rooted out and cast away. Then its evil manifestations will be removed with the root. The error of Common Grace must be repudiated. Then the source of evil is rooted out. The Protestant Reformed Churches rejected this error in 1924

and are, therefore, free of its evil manifestations in the life of the church institute.

However, let me be quick to add, lest there be misunderstanding, that our faithfulness to God's Word is of God Himself. Let us not boast in men. Heeding the Word, without regard to the cost, is the way of discipleship and the Lord's blessing.

In conclusion, how is the purpose of Scripture achieved in our lives and the lives of our children? We must always be reminded of our responsibilities to our children. If we as parents minimize error and departure from Scripture, then our children will run in that error. That is God's judgment upon the minimizing of His most holy Word. We are ever called to lead our children in the way of truth. This will be to their blessing.

*Can we
set the Bible aside
and not experience
the wrath of God upon us?*

In answer to the question of how
we can achieve the purpose of Sacred

Scripture in our lives, let me say that we must recognize the urgency of obedience to the Bible. Can we set the Bible aside and not experience the wrath of God upon us? Further, we must ask ourselves the question, may we go to the Lord's table with those *whom we know live in sin*, who promote the lie in the church of Christ? The answer of the Bible is an emphatic NO!

Positively, one must be encouraged and instructed to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation, the temptation being once more to compromise the truth of Scripture and make peace with those who walk impenitently. That is the temptation. Watch and pray, Jesus commanded us in Luke 21:36: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Finally, prayer and the study of God's Word give one the spiritual strength necessary to overcome and flee from all evil. We want to stand with those who will keep God's Word and commandments. Do you desire before God to do the same? □

In His Fear
Rev. Arie den Hartog

The Importance of a Doctrinal Christianity

One of the main characteristic features of modern-day liberal Christianity is its aversion to doctrine. It not only rejects almost all the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith but it wants to go even

further than this. It wants to do away with doctrine altogether. According to its teachers, doctrine is not important for Christianity. The historic creeds of the church are set aside as not being relevant for our age. These creeds are at best interesting historical documents. They may be considered interesting expressions of the faith of the church of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But today

the church expresses her faith in a different way. When the church insists on maintaining certain doctrines, she only causes offense and division. The church must rather be united on certain vague general principles of religion such as the love of God for all men, the universal fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men, and a few broad moral principles. On the basis of these general principles the

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church must be united in the cause of evangelism and social action and in seeking to change the world.

Even these general principles are not to be too carefully defined, because then some in the church will be offended. Really almost everyone is to be recognized as a Christian, no matter what he believes or how he lives. We need a simple Christian faith without theological pronouncements. This, it is claimed, is the religion that Jesus taught. This is the religion of the Sermon on the Mount and of the golden rule. This religion is supposedly inspired only by the person of Jesus. He is the inspiring example for all men to follow. Jesus, as a person, lives on today through the words that He spoke when on earth (though much of what the church has commonly believed to be the words of Jesus were not actually spoken by Him) and through the example He left us. The essence of Christianity is to follow the moral ethical principles that Jesus taught.

That is how you become and are a Christian, nothing more than that. That is how you re-live the life of Jesus. We do not need all that theology about the Trinity, the natures and offices of Christ, the atonement of Christ, predestination, justification and sanctification, etc. All of that is nothing but scholasticism. Insistence on sound doctrine produces useless debate and causes unnecessary divisions. The more radical proponents of this philosophy suggest that we must limit ourselves strictly to the words and example of Jesus. The apostle Paul and some of the other apostles really introduced a new form of religion when they wrote all their doctrinal treatises (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, etc.). These might have had value for the church at that time; but now we are advanced beyond the need of all this. We can follow the example of Jesus directly.

To the serious Christian reader, all of this might sound so far out that it is hardly considered to be a threat to the church. However, we had better realize that this whole way of thinking, whether explicitly or implicitly,

is much more prevalent in the church today than we might imagine. In many churches today there is less and less emphasis on doctrine in the preaching. Preaching is little more than teaching on human psychology. It deals with all kinds of human problems, problems man faces in marriage, in raising children, in human relationships, and his life in society. It might even address supposedly Christian principles on money management, maintaining good health in exercising regularly, and all sorts of other things. Just listen to the subjects dealt with by modern-day radio preachers and you will realize how far this whole line of thinking has taken hold in the church today. Try to find a preacher that today still talks about the doctrines of God and salvation and you will find them to be very scarce, almost unheard of. The vast majority of professing Christians today are doctrinally ignorant and have little interest in discussion and debate on the great doctrines of the Word of God. There is little instruction of the youth in the church. Even many Reformed churches have dropped catechism programs, or at least greatly reduced or simplified them. If there is still instruction of the children it is by means of Sunday School rather than catechism; and there is a distinct difference between these two if properly understood. Some churches still have several "Bible studies" that a number of people attend; but, in these, doctrinal discussion of any sort is avoided like a plague. Churches have no interest in being distinctive. They have long forgotten their creeds. There is little or nothing that makes them different from other churches except that one has a "more active ministry" than another and the members of one church are "more friendly" than others. What denomination you belong to is of very little consequence. People change denominations with very little consideration. Un-denominational churches flourish and boast membership in the thousands. Many laud the "tolerance" their church has for all sorts of different viewpoints and the "brotherly love" that exists

among her members.

Those who advocate a non-doctrinal Christianity often sound pious and convincing. They speak much about a living, personal relationship with the Lord as being the most important thing. Doctrine is not important. Too much emphasis on doctrine will kill the spirit and lead to arid scholastic debate. We must allow the spirit to be free. And by the freedom of the spirit is often meant the "freedom" for everyone to think and act independently and to express religious feelings and emotions and ideas as he or she pleases. Those who insist on sound doctrine are considered unloving and uncaring, cold and formal. Love, vaguely defined, is more important than doctrinal soundness. When doctrinal differences are forgotten, people will be more warm, personal, and friendly, which is more important than everything else. On the basis of such "love" we can consider all men to be brethren.

*The church that forsakes
or neglects
the doctrine
of the Scriptures
will come to ruin.*

When we are in a church that seeks by the grace of God to maintain sound doctrine we can at times become discouraged. Maintaining sound doctrine will involve a great spiritual battle. There will be strife in that battle. There will be those who are offended. There might even be loved ones, relatives and friends, that leave the church. All of this is not pleasant to experience. We would much rather see peace and harmony in the church. There is always a real temptation to give up the fight. But sound doctrine is important. The above way of thinking is grievously in error. The church that forsakes or neglects the doctrine of the Scriptures will come to ruin. The evil one will destroy that church. The fact of the matter is that even those who say that doctrine is not important will nevertheless teach a doctrine of their own.

When the doctrine of the Scripture is rejected, it is replaced by an evil and false doctrine devised by man. That is inevitable. The most radical liberal has a doctrine that he teaches and seeks to propagate. He will deceive the church by putting on a front of being a friendly and pleasant person, and he will pretend that he seeks the peace and unity of the church. But for all of that he will lead the church away from God and from the hope of her salvation.

The word doctrine is the translation of a biblical word which means simply "sound teaching." That is what doctrine is; it is sound teaching about God, about who and what He is, about the Lord Jesus Christ, and about God's great works of creation, providence, and salvation. True doctrine is nothing more than the Bible's teaching about God and salvation. It is the truth of God clearly distinguished from the lie of the devil. Sound doctrine is a clear and systematic presentation of the truth that is found in the Bible. That truth is the same for every age, because it is the unchangeable truth of God Himself. Doctrine, correctly understood, is not first of all the church's subjective expression of her faith in God at a given time and in a given culture. Doctrine is the absolute and unchanging truth of God as He has revealed Himself in His infallible Word, the Bible. Doctrine rightly considered is not what men themselves have devised through abstract scholastic debate among themselves. Doctrine is the living, blessed, and glorious truth of God that He by His Spirit has caused His church to know. That truth may offend carnal man. He may not like it because it condemns man in his sin and destroys all his boasting pride in himself. The true doctrine of the Bible glorifies God.

The church must know and embrace, love and confess the truth of God. She must diligently study the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discover and understand its doctrine. She must defend that doctrine over against all of the attacks of the evil one and of false

prophets. She does not do that by abandoning the historic position of the true Christian church. She does not do that by reducing her faith to the lowest common denominator and to a few vaguely defined supposedly Christian principles so that she can enjoy a "beautiful" unity and brotherhood with all sorts of men. The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth." She grows increasingly rich and strong as she acknowledges and confesses more and more of the wonderful doctrine of the Scriptures. That doctrine is worth fighting and dying for on her part because it is the doctrine of God and His Son Jesus Christ. It is the truth about salvation, the hope and life and joy of the church.

*It is absolutely absurd
to suggest
that Jesus taught
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It is absolutely absurd to suggest that Jesus taught only a "simple" religion of a few moral principles by which man can and will save himself if only he will follow them. Jesus does not merely inspire men by the example of His person. Jesus came to reveal the truth, the truth of God. He declared, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). He declared the truth concerning Himself. He is the embodiment of the true doctrine of God. He insisted on the great truth that He is the eternal and only begotten Son of God. He died because of the confession of the truth. He came to this earth to reveal the true doctrine of God. He performed the perfect work of salvation in His cross and resurrection and exaltation. True doctrine is simply the setting forth of the meaning and great significance of the work of Christ and all the blessed implications of that work. He taught the only way of salvation, which necessarily involves the true doctrine of salvation. He was always ready to condemn severely

the false and carnal doctrines of men, and to distinguish the truth from them. He taught the doctrine of why He came to this earth, and the doctrine of the nature and purpose of His work on the cross. He taught the doctrine of man's sin and depravity and of his absolute need of salvation. He taught the doctrine of election and predestination, and of the sovereign grace of God whereby He infallibly saves all those whom the Father has given to Him. To believe in Jesus necessarily means that we believe and embrace the distinctive doctrines which He taught. Before our Lord left this earth He promised to send the "Spirit of truth" to His church, to lead and guide His church into all truth.

The apostles of the Lord were inspired by the Holy Spirit to know and understand the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. They did not write abstract doctrinal treatises by which they began a new form of religion of human origin. They wrote of the doctrine of Christ, of His person and work, of His great salvation. They were led by the Spirit of God to understand the truth concerning God Himself and concerning the only true doctrine of salvation. This doctrine is unchangeable and glorious. It is inexhaustible in its riches. It is the foundation of the church upon which she must stand. It is the hope of her salvation. It is the truth she must confess to the glory of God.

We shall continue our discussion of this subject in our next article. □

*"Preach the word;
be instant in season,
out of season;
reprove, rebuke,
exhort with all longsuffering
and doctrine. For the time
will come when they will not
endure sound doctrine ...
and they shall
turn away their ears
from the truth"*
II Timothy 4:2-4

A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

Hypocrite

The Old Testament contains the word hypocrite thirteen times. It derives from a word which has the root meaning of moral filth; soiled with sin; impious; hypocrite. The New Testament has twenty-five occurrences of this word, over half of them in the discourses of Jesus. The root meaning is to speak or act under a false part; to act under an assumed character; a stage player; dissembler; pretender. A hypocrite is a man who lives the lie, for he is not what he seems to others to be; there is a significant difference between what he is at heart and what he appears to be overtly and publicly. Israel of Isaiah's day lived a hypocritical national life with her external, religious exactitude, bringing just the right sacrifices at the right times, offering oblations and incense, keeping new moons, sabbaths, and assemblies. But though they drew near to God with their mouths and honored Him with their lips, they removed their heart far from Him and their fear of God was taught by the precepts of men (Isa. 1, 29). The outstanding example of hypocrisy in the New Testament is the Pharisees, whom Jesus called whited sepulchers, appearing beautiful on the outside, but full of dead men's bones and uncleanness within (Matt. 23:27). Examples of hypocrites today are ministers who holler at their congregations for their sins and shortcomings as if they themselves do not take part of the same things; or church members who, when setting out to restore a brother overtaken by a certain fault, act as if they would never commit such sins (Gal. 6:1).

Hypocrites live undiscovered in the church. They cannot be kept from the Lord's Supper by the elders, for they do not declare themselves to be unbelieving and ungodly. They eat and drink judgment to themselves. The hypocrite God will judge (Lord's Day 30). The moment a man shows himself to be what he really is, he ceases being a hypocrite. But God knows and Jesus knows.

God desires truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6). God commands those who live in the Spirit to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:15). He requires those who confess faith in Jesus Christ to manifest that faith with works of charity, otherwise their faith is not faith (James 2:14-20). As the God who has called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of conversation (1 Pet. 1:15). Thus the saint is called to a life of spiritual consistency, to be what he is in Jesus Christ. Otherwise he is a half-baked cake (Hos. 7:8).

The biblical use of the word hypocrite reinforces our church's stand against drama: the opera, the play, and the movie. Our stand is not against imitating that which is worthy; we are called to be imitators of God as dear children (Eph. 5:1), and to be followers together of Paul (Phil. 3:17). But our stand is against impersonation, the act of pretending that we are someone we are not, of speaking and acting under another person's part. The common Greek word for actor, before and at the time of Jesus, was hypocrite. Classical Greek compared human life with the stage, and human conduct with the task of the actor. Almost always this was done in a negative, pejorative sense: the stage is a sham world and the actor is a deceiver. Jesus takes that word and applies it to the duplicity of the Pharisees, pronouncing a sevenfold woe upon them. Let us take heed!

The question may be asked whether the regenerated child of God who sins daily, carrying within him the risen life of Christ, is a hypocrite? Is there not a difference between the inner life and the outer, the new man and the old? The answer is *no*! The child of God does not pretend not to be a sinner, but admits to it readily. He confesses his sin with godly sorrow every day. He strives to overcome the motions of sin that are in him and to be conformed to the image of Christ. No hypocrite he! □

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All Around Us

■ Women in Church Office

It is no secret that the decision of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1990 to open the offices of minister and elder to women has caused no small stir in that denomination. We have deliberately, for a number of reasons, said very little about this in the *Standard Bearer*. Certainly we take no delight in the troubles currently plaguing the CRC. We believe the decision of the 1990 Synod, on women in office, to be in direct opposition to the clear teaching of the sacred Scriptures and our Reformed Confessions and Church Order. We are grieved to see the CRC going in this direction.

But this is also part of what is happening "all around us," and our readers are interested in this issue as well. Reports of the Winter and Spring meetings from 41 of the 46 classes of the CRC indicate that these classes considered some 31 overtures from churches and individuals on this issue. All thirty-one overtures call for the Synod of 1991 to "revise, rescind, reconsider, or provide biblical proof" for the 1990 Synod's decision to open all offices in the church to women. Thirteen of these overtures are being sent to the 1991 Synod with the approval of the various classes. Thirteen are being sent to the upcoming synod with the disapproval of the various classes. Three of the overtures were placed in classical study

committees and two were tabled for discussion at a later meeting of the classis.

Among the stronger statements of opposition to the Synod of 1990 is that coming from Classis Illiana (South suburbs of Chicago and Northwest Indiana). This classis at its January meeting:

- adopted a statement opposing and repudiating Synod '90's decision which opened all ecclesiastical offices to women;

- adopted a communication to be sent to Synod '91 expressing disapproval of the decision of Synod '90;

- adopted an overture asking Synod '91 to revise the decision of Synod '90;

- adopted changes to the Rules of Procedure of Classis Illiana prohibiting women from being seated as delegates to classis, and adopted a rule that classis shall receive as synodical deputies only male office bearers in the CRC;

- adopted an overture asking Synod '91 to appoint a committee to offer pastoral guidance to individuals and churches who become disgruntled parties in the aftermath of Synod '92, whatever the outcome of the vote on ratification of the Church Order.

The thrust of the overtures and statements from this classis is that the decision to open all church offices to women conflicts with Scripture and with the Belgic Confession Article 30 which says that only "faithful men" should be elected to be office bearers in the church. The classis also argues that the Synod offered no convincing or compelling reasons, biblical or otherwise, for making this change in the Church Order. The majority of the

churches in this classis sees this decision as divisive and harmful to the well-being of the denomination.

The councils of fifteen of the twenty-two churches in the classis have adopted statements declaring their opposition to the decision of the '90 Synod.

Classis Niagara rejected two overtures to repudiate the 1990 decision and to dismiss all the denominational officers who approve of women in office. Several congregations in this classis declared that their pulpits would be closed to women and that withdrawal from the denomination would be a serious option.

In addition, there have been several independent congregations formed partly as a result of their opposition to the '90 Synod's decision. A number of families and individuals have also left various CRC congregations over this issue and joined other Reformed denominations.

*The Banner
Christian Renewal
Christian Observer*

■ Gays and the Church

This issue too continues to plague several denominations. In spite of the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, especially in Romans 1 but also elsewhere, churches continue to discuss and compromise on this issue.

A United Methodist Church's study committee recently voted 17 to 4 to recommend that the church's 18-year-old statement, which says the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching," be changed. It wants the statement to say that the church is "unable to ar-

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rive at a common mind" on the subject. The report acknowledged some support within the church for the current policy, but said others believe homosexuality is acceptable "when practiced in a context of human caring and covenantal faithfulness." A minority of the study committee maintains that the present statement against homosexuality is correct. The report will be considered by the 1992 general conference, the denomination's highest policy making body.

The study committee report of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which report advocates the ordination of homosexuals and blesses sexual relations outside of marriage (a report we commented on in an earlier issue of the *Standard Bearer*), is meeting a good bit of opposition from both clergy and lay members of that denomination. Both conserva-

tives and liberals who have never worked together on church issues gathered at Hilton Head, SC over the March 2 weekend to share their objections to the report and to find ways to blunt its impact. One pastor said that "his members were no longer apathetic, they were angry. And that anger is turning into concern for the welfare of the church."

Closer to home, we have learned that King's College in Edmonton, Alberta recently fired a faculty member when his homosexuality became public knowledge. This is one thing! The other is that the ousted professor has the support of several of the faculty as well as of his church, Fellowship CRC in Edmonton.

A faculty member of the Institute For Christian Studies in Toronto recently participated in a conference at McMaster University. The ques-

tion dealt with at the conference was "Can the homosexual be our neighbor?" The professor is quoted as saying: "Tonight I argue that a careful reading of Scripture may teach us that the Bible cautions us against discrimination.... Churches claiming that sexually active lesbians and gays cannot be fully neighbors may not be churches true to the Bible." Note the language of these statements. It is typical of what comes from those who want to make the Scriptures say something other than what they in fact say: "a careful reading of Scripture may teach us"; "the Bible cautions us against discrimination"; and "may not be churches true to the Bible."

Christianity Today
Christian Observer
Christian Renewal
Calvinist Contact

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Guest Article

Rev. Steven Key

Church Membership in an Evil Age

The truth of the Scriptures and the love of Christ's church is the passion of my heart and the burden God has placed upon my soul. From that point of view, I would long for everyone to come and see the truth of Scripture as we Protestant Reformed Churches have been given to understand and rejoice in it. And then I would also long to fellowship with all our readers in the unity of church membership.

However, I want to state clearly from the start that it is not my intention by this and three following articles to proselytize members and to add to the growing numbers in the Protestant Reformed Churches. To write these articles with the purpose of persuading you to join the PRC would not be to the benefit of anyone. The simple fact is, many of you would need to ask many questions about our churches before even considering such membership. And the motivation for joining another church or denomination of churches ought never be merely to escape the problems in one's own congregation or churches.

Church membership must al-

ways be positive, with the seeking of God's glory as its basis. And it must always be based upon your own convictions of the truth of God's holy inspired Scriptures, as they line up with the confessions of the particular church to which you would join yourself. So I am content in a brief series of articles to open the Scriptures and call your attention to a few scriptural principles, leaving the outcome to the Spirit of Christ and praying only that you will be built up in the most holy faith and exercise your calling as faithful members of Christ's church.

In connection with the theme, "Church Membership in a Evil Age," it is my intention to call your attention first to the scriptural idea and calling

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of church membership. In a second article I will call your attention to the corporate responsibility in which that church membership involves us. It is my purpose in a third article to consider the difficulty God's people in years past have faced with respect to their membership in apostatizing churches. And in a fourth and final article, the Lord willing, I will call your attention to the marks of the church by which we must determine where we are called to serve God as members of His church.

Church membership is something that the Christian church has always taken seriously, because the concept is so thoroughly scriptural. But along with the departure from the teaching of the Scriptures in recent years, there has also been a steady decline in the understanding of the importance of church membership.

Many believe that to be a member of a local congregation is not so important, and that individual believers are at liberty to do as they please. If they want to join, that is fine; and if not, that is fine too. After all, they say, church membership does not make you a Christian. But while we indeed grant that having your name on a church roll will not make you a Christian, there is a confusion in that argument that must be addressed by Scripture.

The Bible speaks of the church from two perspectives, as does also the Belgic Confession, one of the creeds or confessions of the Reformed churches.

In the first place, there is the one holy catholic church. And by that word "catholic" we have no reference whatsoever to the Roman Catholic Church. "Catholic" refers to the universal aspect of the church, the one holy universal church of true believers in many denominations and countries, gathered throughout the ages. The truth of Scripture concerning that holy catholic or universal church is concisely summarized in our Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 54: "What believest thou concerning the holy catholic church of Christ? That the Son of God from the beginning to the

end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to himself by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof." Essentially, therefore, the church is the body of Christ, invisible, an object of faith, not sight.

But besides that truth of the church, Scripture also makes clear that that one holy, universal church comes to manifestation in individual congregations under the leadership of God-appointed officebearers who serve that local body of believers. That is the aspect of church membership and our calling to church membership that we consider in this and subsequent articles. There is a clear relationship between the one who is taken into the church organism, that invisible body of Christ, by regeneration and the bond of faith, and membership in a local church.

The invisible body of Christ and the visible congregation are not two separate entities, but two important aspects of the one church. Although one can distinguish them, they are inseparably related. So inseparably related are they, that one expresses personal unity with the body of Christ when he joins a faithful congregation, and one forsakes the body of Christ when he leaves or stands outside of a faithful congregation. The believer must find fellowship with the other members of Christ's body. He is *compelled* to do such by the Spirit of Christ.

That truth is well attested scripturally. To the New Testament believer, faith in Christ and participation in His church are inseparable.

In Matthew 18:15ff., Jesus teaches us the order to follow in calling an erring brother or sister to repentance and restoring fellowship when a breach has developed between individual members of the church. If the guilty person refuses to listen, Jesus instructs us to bring the matter to the church. That clearly points to believers being recognized as members of a local congregation.

In Acts, chapters 2-5, e.g., many

were brought to faith through the preaching of the apostles. However, they were not left hanging on their own. Instead, they are spoken of as being added to that number who were already a part of the church at Jerusalem.

In Acts 20:28, Paul instructs the elders in the church at Ephesus to take heed to themselves and to all the flock over which God has made them overseers. Those elders were not in doubt as to who were members in their congregation. Taking heed to the flock would be impossible, if there were no recognizable membership. To that same church at Ephesus Paul wrote a letter in which he gave instruction as to the importance of congregational life. Christ blesses His elect through the congregation, to which He gives His Word and Spirit. Out of Christ, that whole body, having been fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth — see how intimate is that fellowship — according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16).

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From those references, which are only a few, it ought to be clear that we may not think of the church institute, that which is visible, as something disassociated from the one invisible body of Christ. You may not put asunder what God has joined together!

Dr. Abraham Kuyper used a fitting illustration (*The Implications of Public Confession*, p. 84), when he spoke of the peas in a pod. If you raise peas in a garden, it is impossible that you tend the peas, but ignore the pod.

"True, when the peas are ripe, and picking time has come, you shell the peas and throw the pod away. Similarly, you remove a scaffolding when once the building has been completed within it. Just so, the Lord God will sometime come to throw away the visible Church. But the present is not yet the season of harvest. The scaffolding is necessary still, and the pod must needs be. Hence, you may not be indifferent about the visible Church, wrongly supposing that the invisible, spiritual Church can mature without her."

For that reason, whoever is indifferent to the church membership or who remains outside the membership of the local church, gives expression to the sin of supposing to be wiser than God. Such a person acts in rebellion against the ordinances of God. For the love of his soul we call him to repentance. Every child of God, by his confession of being a Christian, is obligated to join the true church of God as it comes to expression in a local congregation.

But church membership involves more than being on the membership list of some church and attending the worship services on Sunday.

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There are responsibilities connected with that church membership. Those responsibilities are spelled out throughout the Bible, and the Word of God that I preach comes to me and to His people every Lord's day with a "thus saith the Lord," that places before us responsibilities that are inescapable. Those responsibilities that are yours as a member of Christ's church in whatever place may all be summed up by the calling to glorify

the Lord your God by loving Him with all your heart and mind and soul, and loving your neighbor as yourself. That sums it all.

That implies many things, of course.

In the first place, the necessity of church membership and the calling to glorify God in your church membership immediately places you under the calling to evaluate today's churches, including the one in which you currently have your membership. Only a true church is a proper body to join and in which to remain. As a member of that church, i.e., of a local congregation of believers and their children, you have the calling before the face of God to submit to the teaching ministry and to the discipline of that church.

You are obligated, according to Scripture (I Cor. 9, and many other passages), to care for the poor and to support the ministry of the Word, in its broadest sense, with your money, reflective of what God has given you. You are obligated to support the work of Christ with the various gifts and talents God has given you (Rom. 12, Eph. 4, and many, many other passages) — with your time and prayers, your fellowship and upbuilding words, even your admonitions for the love of the brother or sister who is departing from the way of the Lord.

And for the glory of God, we are also obligated to live lives of separation and holiness. That means that we find no fellowship with the ungodly and unbelievers *and*, as in times of apostasy and reformation, that we come out from among those who manifest themselves as belonging to the false church.

Exercising that responsibility of church membership becomes increasingly difficult in the advancing apostasy in the church today. What a disastrous departure from the truth of God's Word is seen in most denominations today! We live in an evil age. I am assuming, and I hope my assumption is not incorrect, that you have enough spiritual sensitivity to sin to see the evil that has engulfed also the church world today. I only

call your attention to the inspired words Paul wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 3, and ask you: Don't you see this today?

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ... lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, ... ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Those sins do not merely characterize the *world*! Paul speaks about the *church*! For they are also characterized by this: "Having a *form* of godliness, but denying the power thereof." The ungodly are not concerned with having a form of godliness. Paul speaks of those who call themselves Christian, who are church members, who may even be ministers and elders and deacons, who may teach in the schools, and so on. But for all their *form* of godliness, they deny the *power* thereof. And as Paul goes on to point out in that chapter, that power of godliness is the power of the *Scriptures*.

Where there is a departure from the truth of the Scriptures in the pulpit ministry or in the teaching of the church, in the evangelistic outreach of the church or in the lives of its members, there is the increase of apostasy and all the evil characteristics against which Paul warns us.

And then he writes these profound words: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: *from such turn away!*" Now, he does not mean by that that we immediately run away from those problems as they arise in the church. The church on this earth is filled with sin and imperfections. To our shame some of these sins and imperfections are evident also in our own churches. We may not run away from our problems. Under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, Paul writes clearly and explicitly about the church's calling and the calling of you as an individual member to follow the God-honoring way of exercising Christian discipline—both for love of the church and for the love of those who have

departed from the faith. We must seek their salvation. The church must exercise the key power of Christian discipline.

But, having followed the scriptural way and the church orderly way of the exercise of Christian discipline, when we have followed the scrip-

tural, God-ordained way in attempting to defend the faith once delivered to the saints, and when it becomes evident that that scriptural, God-ordained way works not salvation in those who have departed, it is not our calling to play politics in the church in the attempt to wrest control from

those heretics and evil men and women! Christ says, "From such *turn away!*" There is a reason for that exhortation and calling. That reason is for your own spiritual welfare and salvation as well as the salvation of your children and grandchildren. □

Strength of Youth

Rev. Russ Dykstra

Pilgrims and Strangers on our Way to ... Earth?

What is your hope, your expectation after death? What does the Bible lead us to expect on the other side of the grave? Where will we live after we die, and where will the church live after the return of Christ on the clouds of heaven? Where will this "new heavens and earth" be and what will life be like there? Or, to bring it closer to home, are you a pilgrim and a stranger seeking a heavenly, spiritual city, or are you devoting your attention to the earth, helping to reform this present world and to receive your inheritance here below?

Many readers will be puzzled that these questions should even arise. So was I when I received these questions. From infancy, children of Reformed parents are taught that we are on our way to heaven. This earth is not our home. Pilgrims and strangers

are we, with no abiding place. We live here, serve God as best we can, and look for the day when we can go home, to heaven.

Increasingly, however, both college and high school students are taught that that attitude is *wrong*. They are told to direct their attention and their efforts toward this earth. The argument runs something like this. Because we Christians were created to live on the earth, we have a responsibility to be stewards of it. But sin has twisted and corrupted this world. As Christians, we must set the earth back in the order it had when God created it. We must not therefore, be so concerned about *heaven*. Rather we must get things right here on this *earth*.

This is not, of course, all new. For some time now movements have been afoot within the Reformed camp to improve this world — rebuild homes and fix up buildings in the inner city or in poverty-stricken areas in the south. But with these endeavors, the alleged purpose at least was to witness of Christ. Today, however, instructors are getting bolder. Witnessing is not the main point. The point is that the earth is our home.

Our interests should be in caring for our home *first*. Christians, it is said, should not be longing to *leave* this earth to go home! And if one objects, "But what of the promise of God that we will dwell with Him forever?" the answer of some, incredibly, is that that happened already in the Incarnation. Christ is God in the flesh, God with us, who came DOWN from heaven to live on EARTH. He lives with us now by His Spirit. Some even teach that after Christ returns we will come back to live on this earth.

Incredible? Yes. And yet this contains just enough of Scripture to make one pause, and enough to carry along the student who is not knowledgeable or grounded in the Scriptures. What are we to say about this?

First, we must insist that heaven 1) is real and 2) is the proper hope and desire of the Christian. Heaven is a real place. It is a spiritual (not earthly) place for spiritual beings — the angels, saints who have died, and God. Heaven is God's "holy habitation" (Deut. 26:15); the Lord "sitteth in the heavens" (Ps. 2:4). Jesus taught us to pray to "our Father who art in heaven." He will either confess or deny men before His "Father which is in heaven"

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(Matt. 10:32, 33). And Jesus Himself "was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). It was in heaven that there was fought the war of Michael and the angels against Satan (Rev. 12:7-9). And the saints who have died are there already. Adam and Eve, Abel, Seth, Abraham, Moses, David, the apostles, and our grandparents or parents who died in the Lord are part of the innumerable multitude gathered about the throne of God in heaven right now (Ps. 73:24; Matt. 8:11; John 14:2, 3; Rev. 7:9ff.). Heaven is a real, spiritual place.

Equally important is the fact that heaven is the object of the believer's longing while on the earth. The Old Testament believers understood this well. The psalmist sang, "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for ever more" (16:11). The patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, understood that the earthly Canaan was not their final inheritance. They "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." They were "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" who showed plainly that "they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb. 11:10, 13-16).

Likewise Jesus exhorted us not to lay up treasures upon earth, but in heaven, for, said He, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). He wants — demands — that our hearts be set upon heaven! In no uncertain terms

He informed Pilate that His "kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). In harmony with that, Paul longed "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). And he exhorts us to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

Does the believer long for heaven? Should you look forward to leaving this earth? Of course! How could it be any different? Here is tribulation, sickness, disease, pain, sorrow, SIN, and death. In heaven, all that is gone forever. In its place is joy, love, peace flowing out of covenant life with God — face to face — in Jesus Christ.

But perhaps you wonder, what about our calling towards the creation? This question really deserves a separate article or two because it is very important. But, very briefly, the calling of us Christians is to be good stewards in all our lives, using wisely the possessions and world God gave us for God's glory. Having said that, however, we must remember that this earth is not an end in itself, but it serves its God-appointed function. On this earth is played out the divinely ordained drama of life — the fall of man, the redemption of the elect, and the gathering of the church out of all nations. After the counsel of God is accomplished, and especially after all the elect are gathered, the creation will have served its purpose and will be burned up (II Pet. 3). Thus the earthly creation is not to be the

focus of our attention and labors. To do this is not only utter folly, since all will be destroyed, but is ignoring God's command to seek the heavenly kingdom.

We are, therefore, young saints, pilgrims and strangers here below with no abiding place. We are on our way to *heaven*. Christ *did* come down to earth to save us, but His goal was not an earthly kingdom. It was emphatically a heavenly, spiritual kingdom.

We must recognize and identify these ideas for what they are — fiery darts of the Evil One. Satan would like nothing better than for Reformed young people to turn their thoughts and hopes away from heaven, and set them on this creation instead. He would convince covenant youth to consume their strength on earthly concerns and problems, that there be no time or energy for personal spiritual growth or work for the spiritual kingdom. You recognize that he has been attempting this throughout the history of the church. This is just a new variation of an old lie, a different phase of his attack. What is so deadly about this is that he has instructors in Christian institutions essentially teaching covenant youth to forget about heaven and to get this world straightened out first.

We must be on our guard. We must consider ourselves to be pilgrims and strangers no less than Abraham was. "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). We are to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear, knowing that we were not purchased with corruptible things, as gold and silver, but with the precious blood of Christ (I Pet. 1:17, 18). For this reason we live in the hope of Christ's return, not to dwell with Christ on this sin-cursed world, but to be taken out of this world that it may be burned. And then? Then the promise will be fulfilled of the creation of the new heavens and the new earth and eternal life with our God there. We are pilgrims and strangers on our way ... to heaven. □

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A Cloud of Witnesses Prof. Herman Hanko

Bernard of Clairvaux

It is impossible to understand the history of the church in the Middle Ages without having some idea of monasticism. Monasticism was so common, so much a part of medieval life, so influential in the history of the church in this period, that every aspect of the church's life was shaped and formed in the monasteries.

Although monasticism began very early in the history of the church (it was already present in the third century), it really reached the height of its influence in the Middle Ages. It was through the establishment of monasteries that the gospel was spread throughout barbarian Europe: small groups of monks would enter the thick forests of Europe, establish a small monastic community, and make that community the center of missionary enterprise.

Monasteries were found by the hundreds throughout the continent. As the dreary ages of medieval history ran their course, these monasteries became centers of the life of the church. Thousands were attracted to them and entered them to find a true spiritual life. People from all classes of society took monastic vows—from the very poor to the rich and powerful; from the weak and insignificant to Europe's princes and rulers. Those

who themselves did not join monasteries were often so influenced by them that enormous donations of land, money, gold, silver, and books were donated. It is estimated that at one time monasteries owned one-fifth of the landed property in Europe.

Because monasteries were so popular, they soon became extremely wealthy. It was inevitable that this vast accumulation of wealth also led to spiritual and moral depravity. The result was that the monastic movement went through periods of decay and reformation, which reformation was often brought about by the establishment of new monastic orders. Each new order grew rapidly until it often numbered hundreds of individual monasteries, some composed of men, others of women.

Each monastery had its own order or rule, although all were agreed that the vows of poverty, chastity, and celibacy were the principal vows which initiates had to take to become a part of the monastery.

In these monasteries was to be found the best and the worst of all that characterized the medieval church.

Monasteries represented the worst of all ecclesiastical life when they declined spiritually and the inmates became guilty of every gross sin under heaven. They were sometimes cesspools of iniquity, filled with gluttony and drunkenness, with gross immorality¹ of every kind, and with almost total ignorance and superstition. The monasteries produced a kind of quasi-clergy, men who were neither priests nor laity, but who often interfered with the ecclesiastical

labors of members of the clergy. They were vagabonds who wandered Europe, preaching and administering the sacraments as they saw fit, mesmerizing the people with supposed miracles and filling the people with every sort of superstition. They were wealthy and indolent, influencing affairs in the church by the power of their wealth. Monks were also a sort of standing army of the papacy, for they were invariably loyal to the bishop of Rome and served him with fervor and extreme zeal. Evil popes could use these monks to impose their will upon recalcitrant clerics, kings, nations, and bishoprics. And, of course, monasticism was built upon a totally unbiblical basis, i.e., that true holiness could be attained only in world flight.

Yet, at the same time, monasticism represented what was also the best in the church. Monasteries were places of quietness and spiritual retreat in the confusion and turmoil of Europe as wild barbarians dominated throughout the continent. They were places where men and women gave themselves over to the cultivation of

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¹ It was discovered, e.g., at the time of the beginning of the Reformation in Geneva prior to Calvin's arrival that the male and female monasteries were connected by a secret tunnel through which inhabitants passed for purposes of fornication. Cf. Blackmun's book, *William Farel*.

true godliness through prayer, meditation on Scripture, and the discipline of a life of self-denial. Monasteries were islands of safety and peace in the stormy seas of Europe's life. They provided shelter for the homeless, hospitals for the sick, schools for the uneducated, inns for travelers, places of safety from marauding bands of brigands and warriors. They produced Europe's great universities and cathedrals. They developed the sciences of husbandry and agriculture. They produced many of the arts and crafts which were later to become industries. In them books were preserved and copied, especially the Scriptures. It is due to the painstaking work of scribal monks that we have today correct manuscripts of the original, inspired Scriptures. Their reformatory movements often served as dams against the tidal waves of corruption which all but engulfed the church.

Into this situation Bernard was born. He was born in a castle of Fontaines-les-Dijon in Burgundy, France, in 1090, into a family which belonged to the lesser nobility in France, a family characterized by an unpretentious life-style and what we would probably call an old-fashioned piety. His father, Tescelin, went on the first crusade and was one of the small minority which returned. His mother was to Bernard what Monica was to Augustine, for Alethea was a woman of rare piety.

Trained as a nobleman, he soon left this life and entered the newly organized Cistercian monastery at the age of 22. He entered the monastery with zest, taking with him his five brothers and 30 other men whom he persuaded to enter with him. He was a fanatic monk who gave himself so completely over to self-denial that he permanently ruined his health, something which, in later life, he came to regret. At the age of 25 he was sent by his superior to organize a new monastery in Clairvaux,² which became the center of his activities till his death in 1153 at the age of 63.

Devoting his life to the monastic ideal, he organized 70 additional

monasteries and governed 90 more. His monasteries were not places of idleness, for all the monks under him were required to work hard from dawn till dark, all the while maintaining their monastic vows. His new movement became an instrument to reform monastic life in general and revitalize an institution which had fallen into disrepute.

From his monastery he had tremendous influence upon the entire life of the church. Europe's nobility sought his advice, and the church's prelates, from the highest to the lowest, came to him for counsel. Nor did he fear the popes, one of whom was severely reprimanded by Bernard for his dissolute life.

Although he never sought high office, from his monastery he advised kings and popes and was virtually the uncrowned king of Europe. The fact that a monk who seldom left his monastery could exercise such an influence testifies to the tremendous respect in which spiritual leaders were held. The ability of one man without political office or power to change history solely by his teaching and example is without parallel until the sixteenth century, when Martin Luther would once again transform Europe from his pulpit and professor's chair in a small town in Saxony.³

Bernard was a theologian of no little power. He not only opposed heresy wherever he saw it, but he was also an enemy of several Romish doctrines which have since been incorporated into Roman Catholic thought. He opposed the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary; he fought against justification by faith and works, against purgatory, against all works of supererogation, and against the developing doctrine of transubstantiation.

But Bernard was above all a preacher. His 86 sermons on the Song of Solomon are extant. It was particularly his preaching which had such impact on the church. So godly a man was he that Luther said of him: "If there has ever been a pious monk who feared God, it was St. Bernard; whom alone I hold in much higher esteem

than all other monks and priests throughout the globe." And of Bernard's preaching Luther said: "Bernard is superior to all the doctors in his sermons, even to Augustine himself, because he preaches Christ most excellently." This is high praise indeed, coming as it did from one of the church's greatest preachers and from one who despised monkery. "Bernard," says Luther in another place, "loved Jesus as much as any one can."

That the Song of Solomon appealed to him is not surprising, for Bernard loved God's creation. "Thou wilt find," he wrote, "something greater in the woods than in books. The trees and rocks will teach thee what thou canst not hear from human teachers. And dost thou not think thou canst suck honey from the rocks and oil from the hardest stones!" A man who enjoys God's world cannot be all bad. Yet, at the same time, he could be so lost in his meditations that he could travel a whole day along the shores of the beautiful lake of Geneva and be so oblivious to the scenery that at the end of the day he had to ask what his companions had seen on their journey.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of his life was his commission by the pope to preach the second crusade—those strange "holy wars," launched by the papacy in an effort to wrest the Holy Lands from the hands of the Seljuk Turks. While the first crusade had ended in victory for the church, some years later Edessa in Syria had fallen again to the Moslems. In attempting, through his preaching, to persuade people to go on the new crusade, he influenced so

² He has since been known as Bernard of Clairvaux.

³ John D. Woodbridge, *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, p. 134.

many people in Vitry to join the crusade that he had to cut his own robe into pieces to make crosses for the people.⁴ His efforts in this direction were directed also towards Conrad III, Germany's powerful king. Conrad was reluctant to go, but was finally moved to tears by Bernard's vivid descriptions of eternal torments and by his eloquent reminders to Conrad of all God's goodness to the king. In a passionate outburst, Conrad cried out: "I acknowledge the gifts of the divine mercy, and I will no longer remain ungrateful for them. I am ready for the service which He Himself hath exhorted me."

Bernard felt keenly the humiliation of the failure of this crusade, but ascribed it to the sins of the Crusaders

and of the Christian world. "The judgments of the Lord are just," he wrote, "but this one is an abyss so deep that I dare to pronounce him blessed who is not scandalized by it."

Bernard was also a gifted hymn writer. The well-known hymn, "Oh, Sacred Head Now Wounded," is an adaptation of Bernard's original hymn. And one of his better known hymns has this beautiful stanza:

Jesus, Thou Joy of loving hearts,
Thou Fount of life,
Thou Light of men,
From the best bliss which
earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.

Although Bernard's fanaticism

for the monastic life led him to approve of the persecution of those who opposed the church, he represented, on the whole, the best in monasticism and is evidence of the fact that God sometimes preserved His church during these troubled times behind the walls of Europe's monasteries. He did not think it was possible to live a life pleasing to God in any other place than in the cold grayness of a monastic cell; but perhaps, in his times, this may have been close to the truth. □

⁴ To agree to go on a crusade was "to take the cross." This was literally done by sewing a piece of cloth in the shape of a cross on one's clothing.

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

We begin this issue of the "News" with a followup to our last issue. Concerning the Young Adults' Retreat held in Colorado, Rev. R. Cammenga writes that our Loveland, CO PRC has intentions of holding a similar retreat next spring. If some could not attend this year, they may want to make tentative plans to attend next year.

EVANGELISM ACTIVITIES

Two of our churches, the congregation in Doon, IA, and the congregation in Lynden, WA, extended

special invitations to the members of their communities to come and worship with them. On Sunday afternoon, April 7, Doon invited their neighbors to gather and hear God's Word proclaimed based on Lord's Day 9: "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Advertisements were placed in local papers urging attendance. On April 14, an invitation from Lynden's congregation was extended to their community to gather for an evening worship service to hear the biblical truth of proper Sunday observance explained.

The Evangelism Committee of our Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI sponsored a lecture, with their pastor, Rev. M. Kamps, as speaker. He spoke on April 18 at Southwest on the subject, "The Purpose of Sacred Scripture."

The Consistory of the South Holland, IL PRC has changed the

time of preaching services in Ft. Wayne, IN to 10:00 AM to encourage more visitors from the area.

CONGREGATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

The building committee of the Hull, IA PRC presented to their consistory a preliminary plan for a new church building. Presently the consistory is working to finalize this preliminary plan so that it may be presented to the congregation for their approval, hopefully by June.

The members of the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe and the First PRC of Edmonton, AB, Canada joined together for a sing-song (or singspiration) on April 5. First's choir provided some Easter numbers, and Immanuel also had some special numbers.

On the evening of April 24, an organ concert by Mrs. Fran Lubbers was given in the auditorium of the

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

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Grandville, MI PRC. This provided a wonderful opportunity to enjoy an evening of good music. The committee even arranged to pre-record the numbers, to eliminate audience noise. And the tapes were available the same night.

Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor of the Holland, MI PRC underwent surgery on two herniated disks in his back in late April.

DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES

On April 23rd, Rev. DeVries was the featured speaker at a Spring Ladies' League Meeting in Edgerton, MN. He spoke on the topic "Sound

Doctrine For Women's Lives," from Titus 2:3-5.

The Mr. and Mrs. Society League Mass Meeting was held in the Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on April 16. Rev. Key addressed the couples on "Women Serving God."

And, just a reminder, especially to you young people, that this year's Young People's Convention, sponsored by our Byron Center, MI PRC, is scheduled for August 5-9 at Grand Valley State University, just west of Grand Rapids, MI. Byron Center has chosen for its theme this year, "Reformed Young People Living in the Last Times," based on I Thessalonians 5:8.

MINISTERIAL CALLS

The congregation of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI has extended a call to Rev. R. Dykstra to serve as their next pastor. With Rev. Dykstra on the trio were Revs. Gritters and Kortering.

Our Kalamazoo congregation has extended a call to Rev. T. Miersma to serve as missionary to the area of Venice, FL.

And our last news item for this issue, Rev. B. Gritters has declined the call he was considering to serve as pastor of the Hope PRC of Isabel, SD. □

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 1990 appointed Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan the calling church for the 1991 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 1991 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11th, 1991 at 9:00 AM in the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, 4875 Ivanrest, Grandville, Michigan. (Hope Church will be undergoing extensive renovation in June.)

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held in Southwest Church on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:30 PM. Rev. Gise VanBaren, president of the 1990 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Peter Koole, 554 Kenowa S.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49504. Phone: (616) 453-2524.

Consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church
P. Koole, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the PRC of Hudsonville, MI expresses its Christian sympathy to two of its members, Mr. Henry Boer and Mr. Hilbert Kuiper and their families in the passing of their loved one,

MRS. JEANETTE LEMS.

"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Mr. George Hoekstra, President
Mr. Garrett Jansma, Secretary

Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and He shall bless thy bread and thy water. — Exodus 23:25

What I possess, or what I crave,
Brings no content, great God to me,
If what I would, or what I have,
Be not possessed, and blest, in Thee;
What I enjoy, O make it mine,
In making me that have it, Thine.

Offer up to God all pure affections, desires, regrets, and all the bonds which link us to home, kindred, and friends, together with all our works, purposes, and labors. These things, which are not only lawful, but sacred, become then the matter of thanksgiving and oblation. Memories, plans for the future, wishes, intentions; works just begun, half done, all but completed; emotions, sympathies, affections — all these things throng tumultuously and dangerously in the heart and will. The only way to master them is to offer them up to Him, as once ours, under Him, always His by right.

Standard Bearer, March 15, 1933