

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

We and our children stand in awe of the athletic heroes of our day; we have all kinds of honor to bestow on mighty leaders; we marvel at the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains; but where is our fear of the majestic God?!

**See "The Majesty of God" —
page 469**

**Vol. 67, No. 20
September 1, 1991**

Meditation — Rev. Jason L. Kortering	
Wearing the Girdle of Truth	459
Editorially Speaking — Prof. David J. Engelsma	461
Editorial — Prof. David J. Engelsma	
An "Election Theology" of Covenant (6)	461
Letters	463
All Around Us — Prof. Robert D. Decker	464
Guest Article — Rev. Steven R. Key	
Church Membership in an Evil Age (4)	466
Search the Scriptures — Rev. Carl J. Haak	
The Book of Ruth, lesson VI	
"His Name Shall Endure Forever"	468
Taking Heed to the Doctrine — Rev. Charles J. Terpstra	
The Majesty of God (2)	469
Day of Shadows — Rev. John A. Heys	
Made to be Christ's Royal Bride	471
Decency and Order — Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga	
Diaconal Cooperation	473
Book Reviews	475
News From Our Churches - Mr. Benjamin Wigger	479

In This Issue . . .

John Calvin once wrote that "we cannot be said to know God if we have not discovered that there is in Him an incomparable glory and majesty."

Surely we *have* discovered that, for it's written over every page of Holy Writ.

We are quick therefore to give intellectual assent to the concept of God's majesty. But, Calvin continues, "such is the weakness of our minds that we rise with difficulty to the contemplation of His glory in the heavens."

Indeed, how difficult! To *know* the majesty of God is one thing; to *live out* of that knowledge is quite another. And live out of it we must. For, as Rev. Terpstra writes in this issue, in "The Majesty of God," it is a feeble faith, that has lost sight of the majesty of God. We must, he adds, let "a consideration of the majesty of God translate into a life of pure worship, of reverent prayer, and of humble seeking of the grace of God in Christ alone for salvation."

Man, however, is proud. And we live in a day in which also the church seeks, not to elevate God, but to exalt man, and to bring God down to man's level. And how about us? How often in the course of a day do we come, as we may, into the presence of God, in the consciousness of His great, majestic glory and of our abject poverty? If we come in any other way; if, as Calvin wrote, we fail to "conceive of the glory which shines before Him"; if we do not "apprehend His power," then "it is rather a dead than a living God whom we worship."

How does one become more mindful of that majesty? Not merely by piously desiring it. Not merely by praying God to give it. Rather, as Rev. Terpstra writes, "from the Scriptures we must increase in our knowledge of the majesty of our God." A growing apprehension of the majesty of God comes indeed as a fruit of the work of the Spirit — but He works alone through the Word. May not only Rev. Terpstra's but all of the articles in this issue serve to inspire in us a reverence for God, and a greater zeal for a study of the Scriptures.

D.D.

THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

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

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

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: Prof. David J. Engelsma
Secretary: Prof. Robert D. Decker
Managing Editor: Mr. Don Doezema

DEPARTMENT EDITORS

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
BUSINESS OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
Don Doezema
P.O. Box 6064
Grand Rapids, MI
49516
PH: (616) 243-3712
(616) 531-1490
FAX: (616) 531-3033

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6507 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49428
NEW ZEALAND OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed
Church
B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

EDITORIAL POLICY

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

REPRINT POLICY

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

SUBSCRIPTION POLICY

Subscription price: \$12.00 per year in the U.S., \$15.00 elsewhere. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of interrupted delivery. Include your Zip or Postal Code.

ADVERTISING POLICY

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

BOUND VOLUMES

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

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

Meditation

Rev. Jason Kortering

Wearing the Girdle of Truth

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.

Ephesians 6:14a.

Stand!

Not as an idle spectator, but stand as a soldier.

Stand in the heat of battle.

Yes, we are surrounded with an army of evil spirits which fill the air. They are well organized into different ranks of command; their captain is the prince of the powers of the air, Satan himself. Being spirits they are able to infiltrate into our inner being to influence us to commit sin. Satan uses the ungodly world round about us to tempt us day and night. He even appears as an angel of light within the realm of the apostate church. He can use the saints who fall into sin and thereby tempt others to follow and give occasion to the enemy to mock.

The battle is the battle of faith.

Satan and his hosts concentrate upon the believer and the church with the one intention to take faith from the earth. He shoots his fiery darts, seeking to get us to forsake our belief and to stop us from obeying God's will.

The call to stand comes to us from our Captain, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is urgent, for He warns us in the previous verse, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the

evil day." That evil day is the same as the last hour. It includes all the time from Christ's ascension to His return. The urgency is pressed upon us, however, when we realize that within this period of time the evil intensifies the closer we come to the end. Our Lord warned us of this when He said that the influence of Satan would be so great that, unless the days were shortened, there would be no faith on the earth. We are living at the end of these evil days. Satan is concentrating upon us personally as we approach the day of the antichrist. He is shooting his barbs at the Reformed churches who have the spiritual courage to maintain the faith of the fathers.

Stand!

You cry, how?

Take unto you the whole armor of God.

Begin with the girdle of truth.

Obviously, the inspired apostle is drawing a comparison between the Roman soldier and the Christian soldier in the battle of faith. Paul was familiar with the appearance of Roman soldiers in the garrison in Jerusalem and throughout the Roman empire as he traveled about. It may have been that he was chained to such a soldier at the very moment he penned these words, for he was in prison in Rome.

As Paul looked at that soldier who was so well prepared for battle to come to the defense of the Roman empire, the Holy Spirit led him to see an analogy for us in our spiritual battle.

The first part of that armor is the girdle of truth.

What the girdle did for the Roman soldier, so truth does for each

one of us as soldiers in the battle of faith.

What is truth? Indeed, as Pilate asked sarcastically, "What is truth?" The world of the ungodly claim to pursue truth. But truth comes from heaven to earth, not the other way around. The natural man cannot discover truth. He is in the dominion of the lie. This is what the battle is all about. Satan and his legions subject fallen man to the deceitfulness of the lie. They cry out, "There is no god." The gods they do profess to follow are figments of their own imagination. More than anything, they like to say, Man is god. Oh yes, he still has the limitations of his animal past, but evolution holds forth the hope of the future. As man has progressed physically, so now he is progressing socially. All we have to do is believe in ourselves. Man speaks of the new world order. That order will be the lawlessness of the antichrist. Freedom to fallen man is to throw off all conscience of sin and to indulge in every evil pleasure without disrupting society.

How beautiful is truth. "In the beginning, God!" On that foundation, God reveals to us truth concerning His own excellent virtues. He tells us about creation and the beauty of His handiwork. He instructs us concerning the fall into sin and His divine judgment upon all iniquity. We learn that the increase of sin in the world is due to God's righteous judgment upon man's disobedience. In the center of truth is Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the Person of the Son of God in our flesh. He explained to us, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples

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

indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32). In Jesus we are free from the curse of our disobedience, for He paid the penalty on the cross. In Jesus, we are free from the dominion of sin and the devil, for He sends His Spirit to break our stubborn wills and to cause us to find sweet solace in humble obedience to Him. The truth in Jesus is demonstrated in a meaningful life of service. We are children of the King, and our whole being, our very life, our possessions, our labor, our leisure all come under His control as we further the cause of His kingdom. Ultimately, the truth sweeps us from earth into heaven itself.

This truth comes to us in written form. In the old dispensation God revealed His truth to His people in theophany, in dreams, and through prophets. Jesus spoke this truth among us. Eventually it was written down in sixty-six books.

Still more, this truth must be impressed upon our hearts. The same Spirit who wrote the Bible uses that Word, especially by the preaching of the gospel, to write this truth upon our hearts. By the work of salvation, we believe this truth and love this truth.

This truth is our girdle. We are instructed (literally in the Greek), "Stand, having girded your loins with truth."

The girdle was the first part of the armor the Roman soldier would put on. As such it was basic to the "whole armour." It was a thick piece of leather, beautifully engraved. Its function was fourfold. First, it tightened the tunic to the body. The soldier wore a knee length free flowing tunic. This was hardly conducive to hand-to-hand combat, so his girdle would bind this tunic close to his body. Secondly, the girdle bound together the other parts of the armor; e.g., the breastplate was attached to the girdle, and the sheath for the sword was also attached to it. Thirdly, the girdle protected the loins, the abdomen, with the stomach, the kidneys, and the bowels. Finally, the girdle bound up the entire lower region and

Truth gives to us the courage to fight because we are sure of what we are doing.

gave the soldier courage. Hence we read, "Gird up thy loins like a man" (Job 38:3), and in I Peter 1:13, "Gird up the loins of thy mind." These expressions direct us to intense activity and courage.

Truth is such a girdle for the Christian soldier. It functions in much the same way. It binds together all the parts of the armor. Truth is a foundation garment, without which there could be no breastplate of righteousness, no boots of the gospel, no shield of faith, no helmet of salvation, no sword of the Spirit. Secondly, truth functions as a girdle in that, by girding up our loins with truth, we assume the necessary courage to be a soldier. Truth gives to us the courage to fight because we are sure of what we are doing. If we believe and confess the truth we have what it takes to be a soldier.

The history of the Christian church demonstrates this. When Paul girded his loins with truth he could effectively deal with evil that was present in the church. In Galatia he could courageously deal with the evil of legalism which was present in the church. In Corinth he could carefully demonstrate the historical and spiritual necessity to believe in the resurrection over against those who denied it (I Cor. 15). The early church fathers wore the girdle of truth and boldly defended the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the trinity over against those who attacked it. Luther and Calvin had this girdle on when they faced the wiles of Satan which had been entrenched in the apostate church.

Little wonder then that our enemy the devil, *diabolos*, the liar from the beginning, wants to rip off this girdle. He does this throughout history as well. In the pre-reformation days he succeeded in deceiving Christians by the teaching that truth was determined by the decree of the church, even by the Pope when he

spoke *ex cathedra*. He cleverly appealed to human reason as the reaction to this: "Don't trust the church, trust your own reason." This led to the evil of scientism — man's knowledge of the universe is ultimate truth. Many reacted to this by appealing to mystical experience and feelings. Today this explains the tension between rationalism and science over against mysticism and such things as the new age movement. Apart from divine revelation, man believes in himself and man always changes. Hence truth is relative.

Why can we take courage when we wear the girdle of truth? The answer is that such truth is authoritative. We have the authority of God's Word. It bears weight, for we know we are right! Wearing the girdle of truth we can fearlessly oppose the lie because we are sure of ourselves, for our faith is based upon God's infallible and inerrant Word.

The Reformed theologian who wears the girdle of truth does not subject the church to repeated questions of heresy. Such issues as predestination, creation, atonement are settled and thoroughly biblical, as they are expressed in our confessions. The Reformed pastor stands in the pulpit and does not say, "I think this is true." Rather he shouts, "Thus saith the Lord." The Reformed believer confesses and practices this truth with joy and certainty, rejecting all errors.

Do you wear this girdle? Have you girded your loins? Three things are necessary to do this. We have to know this truth, be convicted of this truth, and love the God who revealed it to us. The battle of faith is one of allegiance to the God of our salvation.

Wearing it we can appreciate the words of the great reformer, "That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours, through Him who with us sideth. Let goods and kindreds go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever."

Girded with such truth leads us to that eternal victory. □

Editorially speaking . . .

In the past year, a great deal of editorial space has been devoted to the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Such a lengthy treatment of the doctrine was not my original intention. Originally I wrote a brief series on the covenant. The lengthy treatment was occasioned by response to this series from those representing, and contending for, different views of a Reformed covenant conception. We gave them their say in *The Standard Bearer*.

Perhaps this has wearied some readers. I hope not. No other doctrine has stronger claim on the mind and heart of the Reformed Christian than the truth of the covenant. No

other doctrine is more deserving of thorough explanation and vigorous defense. It cannot but be helpful to the reader of this magazine, whatever his church affiliation, to compare the various covenant views in light of Holy Scripture and the Reformed creeds.

In any case, this last installment of the section of my treatment of the covenant that deals with the "Liberated" teaching concludes our present consideration of the covenant. I think.

But consideration of the covenant goes out in this issue of the *SB* with a bang, not a whimper. In addition to the editorial, we deliberately

include reviews of two recently published books on the subject of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant. Both of these works show that the truth of the covenant has a central place in the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition; that interest in the doctrine of the covenant is very much alive today on a broad front; and that the issues at the heart of all past and contemporary debate over the covenant are the very issues with which the Protestant Reformed Churches have grappled and on which these churches have taken a distinctive stand. □

—DJE

Editorial

An "Election Theology" of Covenant (6)

An "election theology" of covenant demands a distinction between being in living covenant fellowship with God by covenant grace and merely being in the sphere of the covenant by natural birth. Believers and their genuine children, the elect children of promise, are included in the covenant of grace. Hypocrites and the children of the flesh are not in the covenant in the same way. Dr. DeJong as a faithful defender of "Liberated" covenant theology is extremely critical of this distinction:

Here the truth of his position finally appears. The children of believers are included in the covenant, but actually they are also excluded from

the covenant. What is anyone to make of this reasoning? What does it mean to be included in the sphere of the covenant? Here Engelsma's language suddenly becomes vague. And there is a clear reason for this turn to the vague concept of the "sphere of the covenant." When one closes the door to the simple teaching of Scripture, one begins to reach for whatever might fit the occasion in order to salvage the situation. . . . The sad part of all of this is that the theory of the "sphere of the covenant" as propounded by Engelsma is foreign to the Scriptures (cf. DeJong's letter in the March 15, 1991 issue of *The Standard Bearer*).

He pleads for the only alterna-

tive, namely, that all the children of believers alike are really in the covenant. This is the implication of his criticism of the Protestant Reformed Churches: They "do not *really* (emphasis his — DJE) include all the children of believers in the covenant of grace."

However one may choose to name it, the distinction is biblical. The Old Testament stresses the difference between the remnant that is the true Israel of God and the mass of Israelites among whom the remnant is found (cf. Is. 10:20-23, Jer. 31:7, Joel 2:32, Mic. 2:12; cp. Rom. 9:27 and 11:5). Paul clinches the distinction in

Romans 9:6: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel." Some — the elect children of promise — are "Israel," that is, God's covenant people, sustaining a relationship of friendship and service with God by faith in Jesus Christ. The others — the reprobate children of the flesh — are merely "of Israel," that is, adhering to the outward manifestation of the covenant and belonging to the sphere of the covenant.

This relationship to the covenant is serious enough. Because of it, such children sin as do no others. They violate the covenant, treading under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). They bring upon themselves the wrath of God that avenges contempt for the covenant. Their punishment is the sorest (cf. Matt. 11:20ff.; Heb. 10:26ff.). Nevertheless, their position in relation to the covenant is essentially different from that of the children of promise: They are not included in the bond of love and friendship created by the regenerating Spirit and enjoyed by a true faith in the Son of God. The difference is due to particular, sovereign, covenant grace shown to the elect children and to them only.

I would like to have Dr. DeJong demonstrate that the assertion that all the children of believers are "really" in the covenant, presumably in the same way, does not necessarily involve him in a denial of limited (covenantal) atonement; in a denial of the irresistibility of (covenantal) grace; in a denial of the perseverance of (covenantal) saints; and, ultimately, in a denial of (covenantal) election.

Especially would I like Dr. DeJong to show that the "Liberated" doctrine of a conditional covenant promise to all the children and of a conditional position of all the children in the covenant does not involve the "Liberated" in a denial of election.

Imbedded deeply in the very heart of "Liberated" covenant doctrine is a fatal weakness regarding God's eternal election. This comes out in "Liberated" theologian and

founding father Benne Holwerda's astounding teaching that virtually every New Testament mention of election, including Ephesians 1:4 and Romans 9:11, refers, not to God's eternal decree, but to an act of God in time.

(Holwerda) was of the opinion that whenever the New Testament mentions "election," an act of God in time is usually meant. He was convinced that he, pointing to these matters, could contribute to the discussion on the relation between "election" and Covenant ("election" namely as the historical and divine-sovereign introduction into the Covenant). (Cf. J. Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant*, 1985, pp. 65, 66.)

Holwerda went so far as to suggest this paraphrase of Ephesians 1:4: "He has us now, in time (my emphasis — DJE), chosen in Christ according to his purpose of before (sic) the foundation of the world" (J. Kamphuis, p. 109).

*Whatever have
Reformed churches come to,
that "election theology"
is a term of disgrace,
rather than a banner of glory?*

The "Liberated" problem with election, because of their covenant conception, comes out in their denial that Christ is the Head of the covenant and that the Triune God has established the covenant with Christ as covenant Head. The reason for this denial is simply that viewing Christ as Head of the covenant necessarily implies that God has established the covenant of grace only with the elect who are represented by Christ. The "Liberated," however, are determined to argue that many others besides the elect are really and properly members of the covenant (cf. J. Kamphuis, pp. 70ff.).

This denial involves the "Liberated" in a controversy with Holy Scripture of enormous proportions. Is Christ indeed not Head of the new covenant? What then of Romans 5:12ff.? Has God indeed not established the covenant with Christ as

covenant Head? What then of Psalm 89:3, 19ff.? And what of Galatians 3:16 which explicitly identifies the seed of Abraham that always was the object of the covenant promises as Christ Himself?

By this denial, the "Liberated" take issue with Q. 31 of the Westminster Larger Catechism: "With whom was the covenant of grace made? A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed."

The "Liberated" hostility to election comes out in Canadian Reformed theologian Dr. Jelle Faber's cruel slander of the covenant doctrine of the PRC as "fatalism":

The Protestant Reformed Churches... had chosen in an official declaration for an extra-scriptural binding along approximately the same dogmatic lines as a fatalism grounded in election (quoted in Rudolf Van Reest, *Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, translated by Theodore Plantinga, 1990, p. 428).

Because the covenant doctrine of the PRC is grounded in God's election of sovereign grace, the doctrine of the PRC is "fatalistic," according to Faber. But the enemies of predestination raised this very calumny against the doctrine of predestination confessed by the Synod of Dordt (cf. the "Conclusion" of the Canons). Dr. Faber violates truth, equity, and charity in wishing to persuade the Reformed public that the PR "election theology" of covenant is nothing more than fatalism. As little as election leads to a careless and profane life, so little does an "election theology" of covenant lead to carelessness in instructing the children in the ways of the Lord Jesus; in calling the children to repent, believe, and walk in a holy life; or in warning them of God's anger and judgment upon disobedience.

Is not the "Liberated" weakness regarding election evident in the very fact that Dr. DeJong supposes "election theology" of covenant to be a charge that disqualifies the covenant doctrine of the PRC, rather than the highest praise that commends it to all who

love the truth of sovereign grace?

Whatever have Reformed churches come to, that "election theology" is a term of disgrace, rather than a banner of glory?

The PRC accept the "charge" with humble gratitude to God. It is our boast.

Let Reformed and Presbyterian churches everywhere give heed! Here we stand in the midst of all Christendom! This is our confession

before Christ and the holy angels! Ours is an "election theology" of covenant!

We ask Reformed and Presbyterian Christians to consider carefully this covenant doctrine, since even its enemies publicly testify that it is distinguished by that which has ever been the hallmark of Reformed Christianity: election.

By his charge, Dr. DeJong has come close to describing the heart of

PR doctrine.

He has missed doing so only by a little.

He wrote, "election theology (of covenant)."

He should have written, "covenantal theology of election."

But this is another editorial story. □

— DJE

Letters

A Shift in Protestant Reformed Thinking

I am writing about the editorial, "The Binding Decisions of a Reformed Synod" (*The Standard Bearer*, June 1, 1991).

I have an article from an issue of the *SB* in 1946. It is about Reformed church polity. Are your editorial and this article in full agreement? Or has there been a shift in PR thinking on the matter?

Arie van Zoest
Gore, New Zealand

Response

I suppose that the article referred to appeared in the September 15, 1946 issue of the *SB* under the title, "The Fundamental Principles of Reformed Church Polity" (Volume 22, pp. 514-517).

There is agreement between my editorial and the article in important respects: the binding power of the decisions of broader assemblies as an expression of the unity of the church; the commitment of the consistory to allow itself to be bound by the decisions of the broader assemblies as a necessary aspect of life in the denomination ("with the reservation that these decisions be not in conflict with Holy Writ"); explicit rejection of the church polity of congregationalism;

and even the assertion that the refusal, or inability, of a consistory to acquiesce in the decision of a major assembly means the separating of the consistory from the denomination.

There is disagreement over the interpretation of the phrase in Article 31 of the Church Order of Dordt, "unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God," and over the question, whether the dissenting consistory may agitate throughout the denomination against the decision of the major assembly that it opposes. The 1946 *SB* article takes the position that Article 31 of the Reformed church order means that one proves to himself or that a consistory proves to itself that a decision of classis or synod conflicts with the Word of God. It also justifies the action on the part of an individual or of a consistory of publicly criticizing, even severely, the decisions of major assemblies in order to convince other members and consistories of the error of those decisions.

Does this disagreement between this article and my editorial indicate a shift of thinking in the Protestant Reformed Churches on these matters of church polity? No doubt, it does. In the earlier history of the PRC, understandably, there was a definite tendency to react so strongly against classical and synodical hierarchy that certain expressions did injustice to the real authority of the major assem-

blies and to the order that is necessary for life together in a denomination. Later, this tendency was corrected, partly through the peculiar history of the PRC and partly by virtue of the fundamental determination of the PRC to be Reformed in church polity.

I was alluding to this "shift in thinking" when I wrote, "The PRC may be thankful that the King of the church has preserved us from this reactionary repudiation of synodical authority."

— Ed.

The Mind of a Monk

It was refreshing for me to read some positive remarks about monasticism in Prof. Hanko's article "Bernard of Clairvaux" (*The Standard Bearer*, June 1, 1991). I will quote some of those remarks. "Yet, at the same time, monasticism represented what was also the best in the church. Monasteries were places of quietness and spiritual retreat.... They were places where men and women gave themselves over to the cultivation of true godliness through prayer, meditation on Scripture, and the discipline of a life of self-denial.... Their reformatory movements often served as dams against the tidal waves of corruption which all but engulfed the church."

Our need to be historically accurate, and to portray to our people a

true understanding of God's purposes in history, demands of us that we present all aspects of events in church history. I have felt that the positive contributions of monastic life have too often been overlooked among us, when we point out the dangers of trying to escape the world, and when we expose the many sinful practices that arose, even in the monasteries.

James 1:27 tells us, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

As Prof. Hanks pointed out, the purposes of monks to do good works, such as when they provided shelter from the persecution and violence of the day, established hospitals and schools, and recorded painstakingly the Scriptures, all were directed toward serving God in a pure and undefiled way. For many of these people, fleeing to the monasteries was almost the only way that they could keep themselves "unspotted from the world."

In Psalter # 213, we sing, "Let children thus learn from history's light...."

What lesson does the history of monasticism teach us today?

I believe our times are rapidly approaching the day of Antichrist, as mentioned in Matthew 24:15-28, and other places. The Dark Ages, when monasticism became widespread, was a period of spiritual darkness, too, and an early type of antichristian dominance....

Christians must more and more be warned to be ready for these things. Too much warning against "world-flight" will lead to complacent people who will little by little take upon their foreheads the mark of the beast, until they are swallowed up by the antichristian world-power. How many of us even today would be willing to give up our televisions, radios, videos, audio systems, credit cards, banking cards, houses and lands, friends, and take residence in a bare cell or cave, suffering the scorn of all that are round about us, and having barely enough of the earthly

necessities to keep us alive?

Let us be honest. We cannot serve God and mammon. Are we too far gone already in our materialism and spiritual compromise with the world, even to recognize the "abomination of desolation" when he appears, let alone being ready to leave all and "flee into the mountains"?

Will we live like monks, for Christ's sake, when He calls us to?

Do we simply say, "It won't happen in our time; don't be crazy"?

Or do we say by faith, "Lord, I am willing and ready; show me the way, when the time comes"?

Or better, do we say, "I hear Thee calling, Lord; I will confess Thy Name before men every day; I will crucify my flesh by renouncing the world in all that I do; make me Thy servant, Lord"?

"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:13).

Let us all have the mind of a faithful monk.

John Hilton
Edgerton, MN

All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

SYNODS AND GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

Summer, especially the month of June, is the time when the General Synods and Assemblies of the various churches all around us meet. As

has been our custom we devote this issue's column to a report on some of these. We will begin with brief reports on some of the larger, mainline, liberal denominations and proceed to bring it closer to home by reporting on some of the smaller, Reformed and Presbyterian denominations.

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST (UCC)

At its General Synod the UCC (1.6 million members):

- ♦ denounced Clarence Thomas, President Bush's nominee for the Supreme Court, as a "severe opponent of civil rights and human rights." Thomas is black.
- ♦ passed a resolution declaring

that seriously ill people have a right to take their own lives, making it the first major, mainline denomination to go on record favoring active euthanasia.

♦ gave South African anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela its Just Peace Award.

♦ quietly passed a resolution to "affirm, celebrate, and embrace the gifts for ministry of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons," and asked the churches to be "open and affirming" of homosexuals. One hears the verbs; "affirm, celebrate, and embrace" used by supporters of women in church office in Presbyterian and Reformed denominations these days. How long will it be before they are used in

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

support of lesbians and homosexuals in these churches? The not too distant future, in the opinion of this reporter.

*National & International
Religion Report*

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH U.S.A.

At its 209th General Assembly this 2.9 million member church voted 534 to 31 to reject the Report on Human Sexuality and to dismiss the committee from any further work. This report recommended a departure from biblical norms for sexual conduct in favor of an ethic based on "justice-love." It called for ordination of homosexuals and lesbians, approved of sex outside of marriage, and approved of homosexual and lesbian "marriages."

But, all is not well in this denomination concerning this issue. Some 42,000 copies of the rejected report have been distributed to the churches and will remain available to the churches. Prof. John Carey, chairman of the dismissed committee, said, "progressive congregations can use it to keep pressuring presbyteries for change until it happens."

The Assembly also sent a pastoral letter to the congregations reaffirming the authority of the Bible, the sanctity of the marriage covenant, and past positions of the church rejecting homosexuality and banning the ordination of practicing homosexuals. After the vote was taken to reject the report on Human Sexuality, Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, an officially recognized caucus in the denomination, led a silent protest on the Assembly floor. They were joined by several hundred commissioners, spectators, and key members of the task force which produced the report.

Assembly actions on this whole question give conservatives in the PCUSA little cause for rejoicing. Sooner or later, but inevitably, the liberals will win this one!

*National & International
Religion Report
Christianity Today*

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Of 39 districts (equivalent to our classes) reporting action this summer on the topic of gay ordination, 31 districts urged that rules barring homosexuals from the ministry be upheld. One district is asking the UMC's General Assembly to cancel all funding of study groups and task forces on homosexuality.

*National & International
Religion Report*

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

The General Assembly of this smaller (225,000 members), conservative denomination which broke away from the mainline Southern Presbyterian Church in 1973 (which denomination recently merged with the Northern Church to form the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.) issued a press statement lamenting the "public confusion" generated by the PCUSA's controversial report on sexuality. The statement said, "The PCA reaffirms that sex is a gift from God which should be expressed only in marriage between a man and a woman." Delegates heard glowing reports of numerical and spiritual growth in the young denomination.

*National & International
Religion Report*

THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

At its 185th annual General Synod, which met at Hope College, the RCA elected Dr. Beth Marcus as vice-president. Since the vice-president is the sole nominee for president, Dr. Marcus will be president of next year's synod.

The Synod, concerned over membership declines in the denomination, passed a recommendation concerning the use of evangelism resources and called upon RCA congregations to equip lay members in personal evangelism. The Synod passed resolutions concerning the Gulf War, ecumenical matters, and women's issues. Concerning the latter the Synod

called for the creation of liturgical materials from a woman's perspective.

The Church Herald

THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

In response to the teachings and writings of several Calvin College professors, particularly Dr. Howard Van Till, the 1988 Synod appointed a study committee on Creation/Science. This committee presented its report to this year's synod as "a helpful presentation of the problems surrounding the creation/science debate." The report was adopted and sent to the churches. A minority report ("Declaration F") was also adopted. It says "The church declares that the clear teaching of Scripture and of our confessions on the uniqueness of human beings as imagebearers of God rules out the espousal of all theorizing that posits the reality of evolutionary forebears of the human race." Does this mean that one can believe there are evolutionary forbears of the human race but not "espouse" the theory? This weak statement was further weakened when the synod also adopted a statement saying "Declaration F is not intended and may not be used to limit further investigation and discussion of the origin of humanity." Thus Van Till and others at the colleges are free to continue teaching and writing just as before.

The CRC also, and this in spite of some 40 overtures on the matter, by a vote of 111-73 decided not to rescind its 1990 decision to open all church offices to women. The Synod of 1992 will vote on the necessary changes to the Church Order. Synod appointed a committee (Revs. Clarence Boomsma, Morris Greidanus, Jacob Eppinga, and Edward Tamminga) to gather biblical evidence for its 1990 decision.

The Synod in other actions:

✦ rejected two overtures calling for Howard Van Till to "declare unambiguously that he believes Adam and Eve to be historical persons, our first parents, made in the image of

God by special creation in a non-evolutionary manner."

✦ reappointed Galen Meyer to a four-year term as Editor of *The Banner*.

✦ approved of Calvin Seminary's choice of Dr. Richard Muller and Dr. Ronald Feenstra to teach Historical Theology and Systematic Theology respectively in its newly established PhD program. Feenstra is currently teaching at Marquette University in Milwaukee; and Muller, a well-known and respected Calvin scholar, is currently teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

The decisions of this year's CRC synod, especially those regarding women in office and creation/science indicate clearly the direction in which our mother church is going. It grieves us to see this. Those who argue for the

clear, unambiguous teachings of Holy Scripture on these matters are labeled "fundamentalists." Let us not forget that except we become as little children we shall in no case enter the Kingdom!

*Christian Renewal
The Banner
Reformed Ecumenical Council
News Exchange*

INTERDENOMINATIONAL CONFERENCE

Finally, the Protestant Reformed Synod approved of our PR Seminary's sponsoring a conference on "The Reformed Doctrine of Holy Scripture." The conference will be held, D.V., Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 1991 at the seminary. The speakers/topics include: Rev. Robert D. Decker — "The Inspiration of Holy Scripture"; Rev.

Herman Hanko — "A Reformed Hermeneutic"; Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman — "Holy Scripture and Ethics"; Rev. David J. Engelsma — "Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?" The topics are designed to demonstrate God's preservation of the treasures given His church through the 16th century Reformation. Those who reverence the Word of God, trusting it with childlike faith, won't want to miss this conference. Open discussion to follow each subject. \$25.00 cost includes conference and 3 meals. Lodging...single \$25.00, double \$30.00. For additional information please contact: The Protestant Reformed Seminary, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. Phone: (616) 531-1490 — Fax: (616) 531-3033. □

Guest Article

Rev. Steven Key

Church Membership in an Evil Age (4)

Our Belgic Confession, on the basis of Scripture, calls everyone to join himself or herself to the true church.

But when I say that only a true church is a proper body to join, that statement does not in itself clarify the matter of church membership.

It is not as easy as saying this one church is true and all others are false.

What an enormous entity is the church-world today! What a bewildering array of denominations and congregations! And in the face of that baffling diversity and the overwhelming apostasy, we must fight against the error seen in the life of God's servant Elijah. You recall, from I Kings 19, that in the face of all the apostasy Elijah despaired of God's church, supposing that he alone was the only survivor of the faith: "I, even I only, am left." God rebuked Elijah for this notion when He said, "I have left me seven thousand in Israel." We must recognize the truth that God preserves His church even in the midst of vast departures from His truth.

In that connection there has been a rather persistent charge leveled at our Protestant Reformed Churches in

past years that has presented us as teaching that there is only one true church from a denominational point of view — and we are it! The accusation has been flung at us from time to time, "You P.R.s think you are the only ones going to heaven." That teaching is not ours. I would not say that there have not been those individuals in years past who may have presented themselves that way. Just about any church has such zealous souls. I know of those in years past who thought such of the church in which I was a member — and it was not Protestant Reformed. Their particular church or denomination was the true church and all others were false.

But if there were those who thought that way, they were in error.

Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin.

That has never been the teaching of the Protestant Reformed Churches, nor does such a teaching stand in the light of Scripture and the confessions. If, e.g., Martin Luther or John Calvin took such a position, even with respect to the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation, there would have been no Reformation!

The Belgic Confession gives us some clear direction and counsel in this regard. I encourage you to read Articles 27-29 of that Confession. (And if you do not have a copy of that scriptural confession, please notify *The Standard Bearer* and we will be happy to send you a copy at no charge.) The principle set forth in Article 28 is that I must be joined in the midst of the world to the holy catholic church.

The Belgic Confession considers the subject of true and false church from the viewpoint of the question: "Where must I join myself?" That is an entirely different approach, you see, than identifying that true church by its members. We have no doubt that even within denominations that are falling away from the Word of God, there are yet faithful individuals, faithful pastors and officebearers, and even faithful congregations. But that has nothing to do with the question before us nor with the direction of the Belgic Confession. God has set before us the calling to glorify Him in the truth.

Therefore, the question becomes, "Where is that church in which I must worship and live in active membership?" And in Article 29 the answer is given us: "Here are the distinguishing marks."

The determining factor of church membership must not be family and relatives. The words of Jesus are clear and must be applied by us to our own situation: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). The only thing you must consider in that connection is the spiritual welfare of your loved ones. But your calling is to glorify God in the truth. And in glorifying

God in the truth He assures you that your testimony to your family will not go unheard.

The determining factor of where I must worship as a member of Christ's body comes down to this: Where is the truth of God's Holy Word maintained from a practical point of view? That is, do I in this church and its fellowship of churches hear the pure preaching of the gospel, preaching which trumpets forth the voice of Christ, the clear, fearless blast of "thus saith the Lord," and the unadulterated truth of the Scriptures? Secondly, do I find here the proper administration of the sacraments — again, with the truth of God's Word the determining factor? And finally, is there the scriptural exercise of the love of Christian discipline, without which neither the sacraments nor the pure preaching of the Word can be maintained?

*... church history teaches us
that where the marks
of the church are removed,
so is its candlestick.*

Where any of those marks are gone, removed from an instituted church, your calling is to remove yourself for membership in a church where those marks are maintained. For church history teaches us that where the marks of the church are removed, so is its candlestick. Reformation in that case comes only by way of separation and renewal, to the glory of God.

In conclusion, church membership means nothing unless your heart is right with God. There are thousands of people whose religion consists of little more than social interaction. The glory of God and the worship of Jehovah is far from them. They know nothing of experiential Christianity. They do not separate themselves from the fellowship of the ungodly, they show no interest in the

doctrines of the gospel, and they appear totally indifferent to what is preached, so long as it does not offend. We hear Jesus saying of the church of our day as He did of the church of His own day: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me" (Matt. 15:8).

The outward things of Christianity — baptism, the Lord's Supper, public worship, church membership, and the like — will never take a man to heaven, unless his heart is right with God. So Paul writes in Galatians 5:6: "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." That love is the love of God. If that love lives in your heart, you are called to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

If God in His mercy has placed you in a church and denomination faithful to His Word, fervent in the faith, sound in preaching, sacraments, and Christian discipline, give Him thanks. Take it not for granted. Pray fervently for your pastors and officebearers and for the continued signs of God's grace in your midst. Live in active dedication to your calling as a member of His church.

If in His providence the Lord is trying you, if you find yourself in a church which is departing or has departed from God's Word and its calling as a church, I urge you in the love of Christ not to linger. Neglect not your responsibility toward the church in which you are. Follow the way of Christian discipline. But if that way is gone or not open to you, flee for your life and the lives of your children! For evil men shall wax worse and worse, says the Apostle, deceiving and being deceived. Don't play with fire.

Consider Lot, and the sorrow which was his even in being saved. God saved Lot. But Lot lost his family. Would you feel the testimony of the Spirit with your spirit, know whom you have believed, and walk in the joy of faith? Then do not linger. Hear the Word of God. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

The Book of Ruth

Lesson VI

"His Name Shall Endure Forever"

Ruth 4:11-22

The book of Ruth begins with a sad picture of famine and sin, of death and a door closed on begetting covenant seed. But what a bright and beautiful picture it is with which the book closes. Boaz takes Ruth to be his wife, and she bears a son. And beyond this, God unfolds His purpose to continue the line of Christ. The beauty of the book of Ruth, along with all the Bible, is the salvation which God gives us in Christ, who was born in that line of Boaz, Obed, and David (Lam. 3:22, 23).

In Boaz's marrying Ruth, several great truths are brought to the fore. In the first place, it shows that the Old Testament did not maintain mere legalistic bars against the heathen. Although Ruth was a Moabitess, her faith in Jehovah constituted more than ample credentials for her to be received into the nation of Israel. Although there may well have been naturalistic prejudices which she also met, they were not there in men of faith, such as Boaz. By him she was received as a child of God, and that was sufficient for him. Ruth's confession in chapter one is now sealed in her marriage to Boaz.

Secondly, in the closing verses of the book of Ruth, we see the working of God towards the fulfillment of His covenant promises, especially those given in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 49:10. In the midst of a day when there was much wickedness, and through people who themselves were not faithful (Naomi, Elimelech), God not only preserved a remnant of believers, but preserved the Seed of the woman, who is Christ. (Compare Genesis 3:15 with Galatians 3:16.) God, who knows the end from the beginning, brings Obed, and thus continues the promised line of Christ. This is wondrous in our eyes (Ps. 118:22, 23).

In addition it should be noted:

- 1) How it is emphasized that God gave Ruth conception (vs. 13).
- 2) That Naomi had to experience the truth of Romans 8:28.
- 3) That Ruth is specifically mentioned in the genealogies of Christ given in Matthew 1 (vs. 5). This corresponds to what the women say to Naomi concerning Ruth in verse 15.

Rev. Heys brings his comments on the book of Ruth to a fitting conclusion with these words: "Having promised through Jacob that the sceptre would not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come, God brought Ruth to the promised land and moved Boaz to take her as his wife, so that Christ could and would be born in Bethlehem, and salvation with all its blessings might be given to us. Think

highly of Boaz and Ruth. But think far more highly of God, who gave them the strength to do what He brought them into being to perform, and used them so that our salvation was earned, and will be a blessed reality for us when He sends His Son to bring us into that of which Canaan was only a type and shadow."

May God bless the study of the book of Ruth to our hearts and lives!

Memory Work -- Psalm 72:17-19

:17 His name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

:18 Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.

:19 And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.

Points to Ponder

1. The people at the gate readily and publicly acknowledged themselves as witnesses to the marriage of Boaz and Ruth and went on to bless them (vs. 11, 12). Does this teach that marriages should be publicly witnessed?

a. How do we give our blessing to couples as they marry?

b. Are we giving our blessing by our presence?

c. Outline the blessing given to Ruth and Boaz. What is meant by the

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

reference to Rachel, Leah, and the house of Pharez, in verses 11 and 12?

2. Was Ruth's conception a miracle? (Had she been barren? Was Boaz old?) Discuss this in light of other passages (Ps. 127, e.g.) and in light of our present evil day of abortion, etc.

3. How was Ruth better to Naomi than seven sons (vs. 15)?

4. What is the meaning and significance of the name "Obed"? Why did the neighbors name Obed (vs. 17)?

5. How was Naomi a nurse to Obed (vs. 16)?

6. From Matthew 1, write out the line of Christ from Abraham to Christ, and, from Genesis 5 through 11, from Adam to Abraham.

7. Returning to our introductory lesson and the five points under significance, do you see these and/or others now?

8. Write out the personal benefits you have received from this study.

9. Review your memory work and write it from memory! □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Charles Terpstra

The Majesty of God (2)

Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty.

Isaiah 2:10

The subject of the doctrine of God, with which we are presently dealing, is an exceedingly rich and vast subject. If you look in the index to any major work on systematic theology, you will find that under the doctrine of God (theology) are treated such things as God's being (including proofs for His existence) and nature (His incommunicable and communicable attributes), the Trinity, the eternal counsel of God, and other related subjects.

In our study of God together in these articles, we will be focusing on the nature of God and examining some of His main attributes. And we begin with the *majesty* of God. In answer to the question, What kind of God is the Triune God? the Scripture tells us that

He is the God of infinite majesty and as such we must know Him. Job 37:22 declares that "with God is terrible majesty"; Psalm 93:1 says that Jehovah is "clothed with majesty"; Psalm 96:6 teaches that "honour and majesty are before him"; in Psalm 145:5 the psalmist exclaims, "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty..."; and in Hebrews 1:3 we read that Christ, when He ascended, "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Our God is a majestic God.

God's Majesty Defined

God's majesty is His *greatness* and *dignity* as the sovereign God. The word "majesty" comes from the Latin word for greatness, and this same idea is found in the Hebrew and Greek words for majesty in the Old and New Testaments. God is majestic because He is a great God, indeed the only Great One: "For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible..." (Deut. 10:17). In Psalm 96, before mention is made of God's majesty in verse 6, verse 4 describes His greatness: "For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised" (cf. also Ps. 145:3 in connection with v. 5).

Furthermore, God's majesty speaks of His dignity, His stateliness, His honor. When we think of majesty,

we think of kings and queens, of high rulers and dignitaries. The queen of England is referred to as "Her Majesty" by the citizens of that country. In the U.S. we refer to judges as "Your Honor." But God bears these names supremely because He is the great King and Judge of all the world. Both Psalm 93 and Psalm 145 describe God in His majesty because the psalmists saw God as King (cf. v. 1 in both psalms).

While this is the basic idea of God's majesty, there are several other truths concerning God included in it. First of all, God's majesty includes His *transcendence*. God is majestic because as the sovereign King He is infinitely exalted above all His creation; He is high above all angels and men; His Being transcends heaven and earth. He is the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, who dwells in the high and holy place (Is. 57:15). The heaven is His throne and the earth His footstool (Is. 66:1). His thoughts and ways far surpass our own (Is. 55:8, 9). This too is His majesty. Have we seen God's majestic transcendence and praised Him for it?

Secondly, God's majesty includes His *incomparability*. He is majestic because in His transcendence there is no one and no thing that can

Rev. Terpstra is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

be compared to Him. He is a King like none other, the only Potentate (I Tim. 6:15); He is the sole Creator and the sole Savior of the world (Is. 45:21, 22); He is a God of gods and a Lord of lords (Deut. 10:17). Isaiah 40 sets forth God's majesty in the light of His incomparability with some very practical points. According to this Word of God, we see God's majesty when we understand that no one has been God's counsellor or has taught Him (v. 13, 14); that the nations of the world are as a drop of the bucket to God (v. 15); that all the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers to Him (v. 22); that God calls the stars of the heavens all by name (v. 26); and that God never faints or becomes weary (v. 28). The fact that no one and no thing can be likened to God also belongs to His majesty.

Thirdly, God's majesty includes His *glory*. God is majestic because He is a glorious God, a God whose nature radiates with infinite perfections. He is majestic in His power and strength (Ps. 93:1); He is majestic in His holiness, as Isaiah saw in his vision (Is. 6); He is majestic in His grace and mercy and compassion (Ps. 145:8). Moses saw the majesty of God when God caused His glory to pass before him in the mount (Ex. 33:19ff.). Do we acknowledge the majesty of God's glorious Being and nature as revealed to us too?

God's Majesty Displayed

While God is majestic in Himself and by Himself, He displays His majesty outside of Himself for all to see. God will have His greatness and dignity acknowledged by all His creatures, in order that He might be glorified and honored as the supreme King of the universe.

God's majesty is displayed first of all in His works of *creation* and *providence*. Psalm 8 speaks of the excellence (majesty) of God as that is displayed in the glory of creation, in the fact that God's fingers have made the heavens with its moon and stars (v. 3), in the fact that God created man and gave him such an honorable position in His world (vss. 4ff.). Psalm

145 sets forth God's majesty in the fact that God by His universal dominion opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing, giving them their food in due season (vss. 15, 16). Psalm 29 describes God's majesty in terms of His power displayed in thunder and lightning and rain. God's majesty is literally displayed all around us, if only we will open our eyes to behold it — in the intricate design of the human body, in the beauty of a summer sunrise or sunset, in the endless variety of animals and insects, in the storm and tempest. As Gerard M. Hopkins wrote in his poem "God's Grandeur," "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

Furthermore, God's majesty is displayed in *Christ*. Because God's Son is the image of the invisible God, He is the perfect reflection of God's greatness and dignity as sovereign King. It is true that when Christ came in the flesh in the state of humiliation that majesty was veiled. Yet John tells us that when the Word was made flesh His people beheld His glory (Jn. 1:14). That majesty of God was revealed in Christ's sinless and holy walk among men; it was revealed in Christ's miracles, in His power over nature, over sickness and death, over Satan and his devils; it was revealed in Christ's gracious and powerful words which He spoke. God's majesty was revealed in Christ in His transfiguration, as Peter states in II Peter 1:16. It was set forth in the cross and resurrection and ascension of Christ, as the witnesses of these events readily testified to. And still today God's majesty is displayed in Christ, for though He is now in heaven, He is the exalted King at God's right hand, governing all things in the world for the final kingdom of God. Wherever and whenever we see the signs of the end, we are seeing God's majesty in Christ.

Finally, God's majesty is displayed in the *church*, that assembly of all His elect people saved by His grace. In her His greatness shines in the power of His grace to take them out of sin and death and bring them into His favor and fellowship. In her His maj-

esty radiates in the members' walk of holiness and obedience in the midst of the world. In her His grandeur shows forth in the amazing diversity and unity of her members. In her His dignity and honor are displayed in her preaching of the Word, administering of the sacraments, and exercising of Christian discipline. In her God's transcendent glory is seen in her worship in spirit and in truth. Are our eyes open to this majesty of God in creation, in Christ, and in the church?

*The majesty of God
is rarely thought of
or spoken about
in our day.*

God's Majesty Defined

The majesty of God is rarely thought of or spoken about in our day. In fact, in many cases it is under outright attack. Not only do Christians in general have a low view of God, but in some cases there is a blatant denial of God's supreme greatness and honor as the sovereign King. This is reflected in the proud and perverted way professing Christians speak of their salvation; this is displayed in the careless, frivolous, even blasphemous way church-goers worship and pray; this is evident in the carnal, hedonistic way confessing people of God conduct themselves in the world. Ours is the day of the abasement of God and the exaltation of man.

And we Reformed Christians are not free from sinning against the majesty of God. As J.I. Packer has written, also our faith is feeble and our worship flabby, because we have lost sight of the majesty of God. We and our children stand in awe of the athletic heroes of our day; we have all kinds of honor to bestow on mighty leaders; we marvel at the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains; but where is our fear of the majestic God?!

We must defend this glorious characteristic of our God, defend it

with our words but also with our daily living. From the Scriptures we must increase in our knowledge of the majesty of our God, and then with this knowledge we must become more convicted of our own smallness and insignificance before the awesome greatness of God. We must learn more and more to put down all our pride and self-glorification, and seek to live in godly fear and humility. (May I suggest for a starting point the

reading of Isaiah 2:10-22?)

And then let such a consideration of the majesty of God translate into a life of pure worship, of reverent prayer, and of humble seeking of the grace of God in Christ alone for salvation. Let the praises and prayers of the psalmists be ours, so that we give unto the LORD the glory due unto His name (Ps. 96:7, 8). (Read also Psalm 145.) □

*The lofty looks of man
shall be humbled,
and the haughtiness
of man
shall be bowed down,
and the Lord alone
shall be exalted
in that day.
Isaiah 2:11*

Day of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

Made to be Christ's Royal Bride

After he offered up Isaac, and was taught by our God that He would provide a sacrifice for our sins, Abraham, assured that in Isaac his seed would be called, did all in his power to get a believing wife for his son Isaac. Abraham was nearing the day of his death, and Sarah his wife and mother of Isaac had died many years before. By God's grace Abraham wanted to help Isaac get a believing wife. He sent his faithful servant to the place from which he, Abraham, had come, knowing that there his servant would find a child of God for his son to marry (Gen. 24:4).

We do not do that today, that is, seek a wife or husband for our children from our relatives. Physically that is not wise. But Abraham is very concerned and eager to find a child of

God for Isaac as his wife. Abraham was concerned about the church's future, even as our solemn calling is to do all we can to keep our covenant seed spiritually strong, and as free from temptations and sin as we can.

Abraham did not want his son himself to go back to where he lived before God called him to go to the land of Canaan. God had promised Abraham and his seed that land of Canaan, and there they must settle and live. Abraham told his faithful servant that the Lord God of heaven had brought him out of his father's house, and from the land of his kindred. That servant, according to Genesis 24:5, had said to Abraham, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?" Abraham pointed out that God had promised him that unto his seed, which means Isaac and his descendants, He would give this land of Canaan.

Abraham even assured his servant that God "shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence" (Gen. 24:7).

What a faith and trust in God! Abraham was sure that God would keep His promise. That servant of Abraham also showed a tremendously strong faith in God. He prayed, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham" (vs. 12).

In God's grace, and by His almighty power, this servant did succeed in getting a believing wife for Isaac. He went to Mesopotamia where Abraham had lived before God called him out of that region and came into the land of Canaan. It was quite a trip for this servant, and he took ten camels with all the goods he needed for that trip. We today can go directly in the air by an airplane and get there in a short period of time. But this was for that servant a slow and long journey, first north, and then around that desert, which they could not in those days safely cross, south to the city of Nahor.

Coming there to a well, this servant knew that daughters of the men of the city would come here to draw water. (How different is that situation from that wherein we find our-

Rev. Heys is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

selves today, having only to turn on a faucet inside our home to get water to drink.) This servant is indeed seeking a woman that would make a good, believing wife for Isaac. He would ask her for a drink of water. He, a man this woman had never seen before, and he, a man, not a child or a helpless woman, would ask her for help.

Surely this servant revealed a tremendously strong faith in God, in looking for a woman who would become a proper wife of Isaac. This servant had an idea of what kind of woman he should bring back with him to Isaac. But the important element we must not overlook is that he sought help from God. All things work together for good to those that love God (Rom. 8:28). But what we must not overlook is that our God worked that good.

Still more, Abraham knew a woman in his relation, and living far away in Mesopotamia, who was the kind of woman he wanted as the wife of his son Isaac. In fact, in Genesis 22:20-23 we read that it was told Abraham that his brother Nahor had begotten a son called Bethuel, and that Bethuel had begotten a daughter named Rebekah. And although Abraham did not tell his servant that he should go and get Rebekah to be Isaac's wife, that is what he strongly desired as a believing father concerned with the spiritual life of his son. He did not know whether Rebekah was now married.

When that servant of Abraham, Eliezer, whose name means "God is help," and who surely was a believing child of God, came to the well, the first woman to arrive, sent by God in His providence and grace, was this Rebekah. She came to draw water. And she was unmarried, though a woman very fair to look upon. Here then came a young woman whom God caused to fulfill what Eliezer had in his prayer requested. In that providence and grace our God did bring Rebekah there before any other unmarried young woman came to draw water. She was the one God had in His counsel decreed to be there and to do what Eliezer prayed for as a sign

that she was the one He chose to be Isaac's wife.

Here we have, as already suggested, God's providence and His grace. There can be no doubt about it that Rebekah, being a woman fair to look upon, was desired by other young men there in Mesopotamia. But God kept her as a virgin and brought her to the well at the right time, and with the willingness to help Eliezer, and do what he had prayed for in concern for both Abraham and his son Isaac.

What is more, we have here in the day of shadows a very striking and beautiful shadow of what is coming to pass and will be finished perfectly. Take note of the fact that here in this incident we have four persons involved in a marvelous work. There is Abraham, his son Isaac, Eliezer his servant, and Rebekah who was gathered from far away and brought to be Isaac's wife. Here we have a shadow of a wonderful, most blessed truth concerning what still lies ahead and will most assuredly come to pass. There are four persons, namely our almighty, sovereign God, His Son Jesus Christ, His bride (the church), and the servants our God uses, namely, the prophets and ministers of His word, which is the gospel. Our God, having eternally decreed a bride for His Son in our flesh, is realizing the day when the church, as Christ's bride, will dwell with Him in everlasting glory; and He does use His servants in the realization of His own work. The blessed truth here is that as Abraham succeeded in getting Rebekah for Isaac through his servant, we have a shadow of how absolutely sure the promise of our God is that every elect child of God, presented as a member of Christ's body, His church, will most assuredly be united with Him in the bond of covenant fellowship.

How beautiful we have in this incident the truth which our God preached through Isaiah. He declared, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Isa. 43:21). And so correctly we sing, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." It was not Isaac's work of

seeking Rebekah, nor even of seeking any woman to be his wife. It was not Abraham's work of sending his servant to realize a blessed union between Isaac and Rebekah. Abraham's servant did not by his own power and ingenuity succeed in getting the right woman. Our God gave Isaac this wife and fulfilled Abraham's desire, in fact a desire that He had placed in Abraham. Our God brought Rebekah to the well at the right time and with the willingness to do what Eliezer requested. He kept all other women from coming there the moment that Eliezer arrived. Yes, all things work together for good to those that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28), as pointed out a moment ago.

And get this truth, as pointed out before, that the name Isaac means laughter. We who live in this vale of tears and sorrows, in this world of sin and death, most assuredly will be laughing and rejoicing when we are brought to live with Christ in the new Jerusalem. Our God most assuredly in this picture promises us that we will enjoy being Christ's royal bride. And Rebekah's leaving of Mesopotamia and being brought to the *promised* land pictures to us that we will not only be taken out of this vale of tears and sorrows, but shall laugh with abiding joy in the Kingdom of Heaven as Christ's bride. Our God reveals to us here what He did and will do to its perfection.

Yes, that servant of Abraham gave Rebekah a golden earring and two bracelets. But this was not to bribe her and entice her to come for more worldly goods where Abraham and Isaac dwelt. He gave these because he understood that God had fulfilled his promise and brought to him a woman that Abraham wanted for his son. He was thankful that God had heard his and Abraham's prayers.

Take note then also of what we read in verse 44. This servant of Abraham told Laban, Rebekah's brother, when they arrived away from that well and to where Rebekah lived, that he had prayed to God that if a virgin came and would draw water

not only for him, but also for his camels, this was the woman GOD had in mind for Isaac as his wife.

What a faith did that servant of Abraham reveal! What a wonder work of God's grace He reveals in this incident! Give no credit to men or women. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. And all this work of God's grace was possible only be-

cause God had sent His own Son to blot out our guilt and make us to be believers. Abraham, Isaac, Eliezer, and Rebekah were believers by God's grace. And that we, together with the other believers, are Christ's royal bride is because of what God did in us and for us. For us He sent His Son to earn this glorious relationship with him; and in us by the Spirit of His Son He

works that faith. Beautifully and correctly we sing, "All that I am I owe to Thee, Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me; I give my Maker thankful praise, Whose wondrous works my soul amaze."

Thank God for the salvation He has wrought through His Son. Thank Him for making us Christ's royal bride. □

Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Diaconal Cooperation

In the places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have the greatest need. Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them. It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions.

Church Order, Article 26.

Background

This article has its origin in the history of the Reformed Churches in

The Netherlands. Originally the article had only one provision dealing with contact between deacons and government agencies for the relief of the poor. Our present article can be traced back to the Church Order adopted by the Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1586:

In places where there are charity workers or other distributors of alms the deacons shall seek to keep in close correspondence with them to the end that the alms may better be distributed among those who have the greatest need.

The original article reflected the state-church relationship that prevailed in The Netherlands in the years following the Reformation. Under this arrangement, the Dutch government involved itself in the administration of benevolence. The church was forced to recognize this and cooperate with the government.

Our present Article 26 reflects a major revision by the Christian Reformed Church in 1914. At that time this article was updated and expanded. Our present article provides for diaconal cooperation in three areas. First, in those cases "where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor." Second, between diaconates and institutions of mercy. And third, between different diaconates.

Cooperation with Other Relief Organizations

The primary reference of Article 26 is to government relief agencies. In The Netherlands the government did not in every case turn over monies and properties confiscated from the Roman Catholic Church to the Reformation churches, but administered these funds itself. A large portion of these funds went into the public coffers for the relief of the poor. Article 26 requires the deacons to "seek a mutual understanding" with government relief agencies so that duplication of relief may be avoided and so that those with the greatest need are helped.

It would be a mistake to interpret Article 26 to be promoting the principle of government relief of the poor, as if the church is here encouraging her poor to seek the help of the government rather than the church. This is often done today. Rather than to go to the deacons and seek the "mercies of Christ," the poor betake themselves to this government agency or that humanitarian organization. It becomes a temptation to over-burdened diaconates to recommend that the poor seek the help of the government, which help is only too readily available.

Article 26 is not so much encour-

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

aging the practice of government relief as it is simply recognizing the fact that this was being done. It would be a serious misreading of the article to interpret it as promoting government relief, when the fact of the matter is that it was exactly the Reformation that restored the office of deacon to its rightful place in the church. Our *Church Order* stands not outside of but within that Reformation tradition.

*Relief of the poor
is the right and duty of the
church,
not the government.*

Our *Church Order* derives much from the *Church Order* drafted by the Synod of Dordrecht, 1578. A question was put to that synod:

What a church must do which is hindered by the authorities in the ministry of mercy. Answer: All diligence shall be followed that the church again be given her right in the best possible way, which first the consistory and after that also the classis if necessary shall take care of, requesting the same from the government if necessary.

This is the Reformed position on the relief of the poor. Relief of the poor is the right and duty of the church, not the government. The church is to insist on this right and is not to allow the government to infringe on it. It is to the church, not to the government, that the people of God are to look in their time of need.

Cooperation with Institutions of Mercy

Article 26 requires the deacons to "make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them." These "institutions of mercy" are hospitals, homes for the aged, institutions for the mentally and physically handicapped, and the like. If the poor cannot afford the use of these institu-

tions, but they or a member of their family must have the care provided by these institutions, the deacons are to make such care available and provide for the payments. Such institutions are business enterprises, operated on sound business principles. The admission of the poor is not the responsibility of these institutions. To give the poor a "free ride" would be to jeopardize the financial stability of the institutions. Therefore, each congregation must make provision for the care of its poor in these institutions through the office of deacon.

The institutions referred to in Article 26 are not ecclesiastical institutions. On the basis of this article, some have argued for church-built and church-run institutions of mercy. Both H. Bavinck and William Heyns were in favor of this. In *The Church Order Commentary*, VanDellen and Monsma argue for ecclesiastical institutions of mercy (cf. p. 121ff.). Many denominations establish and operate their own hospitals, homes for the aged, mental institutions, and the like.

There are, however, serious objections to such an understanding of Article 26. Among the many practical difficulties that might be encountered in building and supporting such institutions, the main principle objection is that it simply is outside of the church of Jesus Christ. The calling of the church is to preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise Christian discipline. It is not the calling of the church to build and maintain institutions for the care of the sick, aged, and handicapped.

The institutions of mercy referred to are not institutions of an ecclesiastical nature, but institutions which may or may not be operated by organizations of believers, institutions which the members of the church may avail themselves of.

Although the article provides for the support of those who make use of these institutions, it is implied that it is proper for the churches to support these institutions. In our churches collections are regularly taken for such institutions as: Pine Rest, Elim, Bethesda, Society for Prot-

estant Reformed Secondary Education, and the like. These collections are necessary because usually the regular income does not cover the actual operating costs of such institutions.

Cooperating Between Deacons of Various Congregations

The third area of cooperation is between different diaconates: "It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another. ..." The article refers to mutual consultation and assistance between local diaconates. The basis for such cooperation is the bond of unity between congregations in the same denomination. To be sure, one diaconate may not intrude upon the labors of another diaconate. But that does not preclude a "bearing of one another's burdens." One congregation may be "burdened" with a large number of poor, while another is not and experiences a surplus in their benevolent fund. In this situation there may be assistance extended from one diaconate to another.

The pattern for this is set in the New Testament. The members of the congregation at Antioch assisted the saints in Jerusalem in the time of drought (Acts 11:27-30). During the course of his missionary labors, the apostle Paul took up collections for the poor (II Cor. 9; Rom. 15:25-27; I Cor. 16:1-3; Gal. 2:10).

In our own churches this has often been done. Then a diaconate, with the approval of its consistory, makes request of the other diaconates or a particular diaconate for assistance. The diaconates contacted may come to the aid of their fellow diaconate either by forwarding a certain amount of money from their Benevolent Funds or by scheduling a special benevolent collection in their congregation. It has even happened on occasion that diaconates with a surplus have contacted their fellow diaconates to inform them of this and encourage them to contact them if the need arises. □

BOOK REVIEWS

The Thousand Generation Covenant: Dutch Reformed Covenant Theology and Group Identity in Colonial South Africa, 1652-1814, by Jonathan Neil Gerstner. Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991. 280 pages. Hardcover. 135 gulden (about \$70). (Reviewed by the Editor.)

It is the contention of Reformed theologian Dr. Jonathan Gerstner that an erroneous doctrine of the covenant on the part of many early Dutch Reformed theologians contributed significantly to the "heresy" of apartheid in South Africa. This erroneous covenant doctrine is the belief and teaching that the inclusion of the children of believers in the covenant, which is the basis of infant baptism, refers to a living, spiritual union of the children with Christ by the renewing of the Holy Spirit already in infancy. Gerstner calls this "the internal holiness" view. This "dangerous misunderstanding of covenant theology" was a theological cause of the evil of apartheid inasmuch as it "identified the entire community as redeemed from their earliest days while those outside were evil from their birth" (p. 262).

Gerstner's own covenant conception is that of the "*nadere reformatie*" ("continuing reformation"), sometimes called "Dutch Puritanism." Inclusion in the covenant for the children of the godly, signified by infant baptism, merely means that the children have an external relationship to the church institute and to the means of grace. Because of this formal relationship, it is more likely that they will be converted when they grow up

than is the case with the children of unbelievers. The children are merely set apart from all other children outwardly. Gerstner calls this the "external holiness" view. This covenant doctrine, we are assured, would have worked against the development of apartheid in South Africa.

Only a covenantal view which acknowledges that children of believers, though set apart for God, are still born dead in trespasses (and) in sins together with all humanity and equally in need of converting grace which God alone can sovereignly bestow in his time, can safely maintain the worship of the God of Scripture in all his awe without degenerating into viewing grace as a birthright (p. 262).

A prominent purpose of the book, therefore, is that "zeal for Continuing Reformation may be reborn" (p. 262).

A large and valuable part of the book is the author's thorough investigation into the covenant doctrine of the early Reformed theologians, particularly the Dutch theologians. The specific question that Gerstner wants to answer is, "What was their conception of the place of the children of believers in the covenant?" Or, to put it differently, "What did they understand by the assertion in the Reformed baptism form, that the children of believers are 'sanctified in Christ'?"

Gerstner frankly acknowledges that, almost without exception, the view of the early Dutch theologians, like that of the early Reformed theologians generally, was that of "the internal holiness" of the infants of the godly. Among those who held that the children of believers were (to use Gerstner's term) "redeemed" already in infancy, that is, regenerated, were Bullinger; Ursinus; Olevianus; Beza; DeBres; Voetius; Bastignius; DeWitte; and others. This is no insignificant cloud of witnesses for the covenant doctrine that Gerstner rates so

roundly as a "misunderstanding" of the covenant teaching of the Bible.

The early theologians are instructive. But the Reformed creeds are authoritative for the faith of the Reformed churches. Gerstner examines the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, and the Reformed baptism form and concludes that they too teach that the children of believers are included in the covenant in the sense that they are regenerated in infancy.

Concerning the Belgic Confession, Gerstner writes:

One sees that the Belgic Confession was clearly composed from an internal holiness view of covenantal holiness. The baptism of infants of believers rested on assumed election and assumed internal holiness. The children of believers were separate from the children of the world internally as well as externally (p. 16).

Although Gerstner finds the Heidelberg Catechism less clear on the point in the all-important 74th question and answer ("Are infants also to be baptized?"), he judges that it is "more likely that the Catechism... (teaches) that the children of believers already possess the Holy Spirit in a regenerating sense ... (pp. 18, 19). Since, as Gerstner notes, the only possibility of explaining the 74th answer of the Catechism differently is to take the promise of God to the children as a *conditional* promise, those who believe the covenant promise to be unconditional cannot understand the Catechism in any other way than as teaching that infants are redeemed by Christ and renewed by the Spirit already in infancy.

The Canons of Dordt also teach the "internal holiness" view. Gerstner is critical of the well-known 17th article of the first head of doctrine, on children dying in infancy, but he acknowledges that the article teaches the regeneration of infants.

The Reformed baptism form is,

Books reviewed are not available through the offices of The Standard Bearer. Please contact your favorite bookstore or the publisher if you desire to purchase any of these books.

if anything, even clearer and stronger in affirming the rebirth and sanctification of infants. "The baptism form . . . is clear in its affirmation that children of believers have been redeemed at least by the time of the prayer of thanksgiving after the baptism" (p. 48).

It would seem to be impossible to dispute Gerstner's analysis of the Dutch Reformed tradition and creedal position:

The deeply rooted Dutch Reformed tendency towards internal holiness views of their own children remained central, buttressed so strongly by the baptism form itself. "We thank you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins" (p. 249).

This is no small problem for Gerstner and other Reformed theologians who reject this covenant doctrine for the radically different view of the "*nadere reformatie*." Not only is the "external holiness" conception contrary to the Reformed tradition, but also it conflicts with the creeds, major and minor, which are binding within the Reformed churches.

Gerstner's attempt to hang South Africa's separation of the races on the "internal holiness" doctrine of Dutch Reformed theology is unconvincing. If it is true that an abuse of Reformed theology contributed to apartheid in South Africa, it is by no means evident that the specific doctrine that was applied wrongly was the teaching of the "internal holiness" of covenant children. Nor is it apparent that the covenant view of the "*nadere reformatie*" would have withstood apartheid.

The error of the Dutch Reformed in South Africa was that they transformed the spiritual separation implied in the covenant with themselves and their children into a physical separation. A separation that consists of holiness was made a racial matter. A separation that ought to distinguish church from world was made a policy for organizing national life. A separation that ought to work itself out in everyday life in this way, that the sanctified freely keep themselves from the unholy world spiritually, became an instrument of coer-

cion, to force a certain race—the blacks—to separate themselves from the whites physically. This is a corruption of the truth of the covenant. But it is a corruption to which any Reformed view of the covenant is prone, not only that view that holds the elect children of believers for regenerate.

One evil among the Dutch Reformed both in The Netherlands and in South Africa that Gerstner amply demonstrates was the practice of baptizing the children of parents who plainly showed themselves to be unbelieving and unholy. The fiery Reformed preacher with a most remarkable name, Engelbertus Franciscus Le Boucq, charged that

Holy Baptism is so shamefully abused here that it is an abomination. It is performed on everyone, without distinction, not determining if the mothers or fathers be Christians, or without passing appropriate acts of adoption. Indeed one has good reason to believe, that if the Governor sent a sheep in human clothing to the ministers, that they would have baptized it (p. 232).

Reverend Engelbertus Franciscus Le Boucq spoke of conditions in South Africa. But the same was going on in The Netherlands. A reason for the "abomination" was the close, unholy union between church and state in both countries. But it was an "abomination." The holy signs and seals of the covenant of God are not for everyone, but only for believers and the children of believers.

The same abomination abounds in Reformed churches today. Not only "liberal" churches, but also "conservative" churches knowingly baptize the children of parents who plainly show, and even openly admit, that they are not true believers. This is profanation of the covenant, every bit as much as the admission of unbelievers to the Lord's Table. The consequence is the same: The wrath of God comes down upon the whole congregation (and denomination).

(An expanded version of this review will appear in the Fall 1991 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*.) ■

A View of the Covenant of Grace, by Thomas Boston. Introduction by Rev. Malcolm H. Watts. Lewes, E. Sussex, England: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1990. 232 pages. Paper. About \$12. (Reviewed by the Editor)

Thomas Boston was a Presbyterian minister in the Church of Scotland from 1699 to 1732. He is well-known for his *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* and for his involvement in the "Marrow Controversy," a doctrinal controversy in the Church of Scotland in the early 1700s.

A View of the Covenant of Grace is his thorough, excellent treatment of the biblical truth of God's covenant with His people in Christ. It is one of the best studies of the covenant to come out of the Presbyterian tradition.

Since Boston was convinced, correctly, that the covenant is the central, unifying truth in Scripture and since he rightly viewed the entire mystery of salvation as covenantal, his "view of the covenant of grace" takes in the whole panorama of biblical revelation. Boston relates all to the covenant of grace. The thoroughness of the study is indicated in the complete title: *A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records wherein the Parties in that Covenant, the Making of it, its Parts, Conditionary and Promissory, and the Administration thereof are Distinctly Considered together with the Trial of a Saving Personal Inbeing in it, and the Way of Instating Sinners therein, unto their Eternal Salvation.*

Writing to the people with God's glory and their salvation as his purposes, Boston uses language which is clear, warm, urgent, and practical. Both the warmth of Boston's style and his relating everything to the covenant are evident in a moving passage on death:

O! but the passage betwixt the two worlds is a dark, dangerous, and gloomy one! Who can without horror think of the Jordan of death, and the darksome region of the grave! But withal, God's covenant-people should remember, that their Lord

hath business in that passage, as well as on either side of it. The line of the covenant is drawn through it, making a path by which the redeemed safely pass. So there also is the scene of Christ's administration of the covenant: he hath the keys of hell and of death, Rev. i.18. It is great weakness, to think that he doth only, as it were, stand on the other side of the river, directing the believer in his passage, and ready to receive him when he comes ashore: nay, it lies on him, as administrator of the covenant, even to go into the water with the passenger, to take him by the arm, and going between him and the stream, to break the force thereof unto him, and to bring him safe ashore: Psalm xxiii.4, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me" (p. 157).

In sharpest contrast with many Presbyterian and Reformed churches and preachers today, Boston contends vigorously that the covenant with Christ's people is unconditional. The sole condition, if one would speak of conditions at all, was the satisfaction that Christ accomplished by His lifelong obedience and by His death.

The covenant of grace is absolute, and not conditional to us. For being made with Christ, as representative of his seed, all the conditions of it were laid on him, and fulfilled by him (p. 26).

In accordance with his view that God has made the covenant with Christ as the head of the covenant and in accordance with his view that the covenant is unconditional, Boston holds that the covenant is made with the elect alone.

Contrary to the contention of some that the traditional Presbyterian view of the place of children in the covenant is that they are merely outwardly set apart for God, without any work of grace in their hearts as infants, Boston insists that elect infants of believing parents are in the covenant in the sense that the Holy Spirit indwells them, that is, that they are regenerated in infancy.

And hence it is, that infants, not capable of actual believing, nor of knowing what the covenant is, yet having the Spirit of faith, are person-

ally entered into it, and instated in it; forasmuch as that Spirit of faith is effectual in them, to a real uniting them with Christ (p. 209).

It is cause for sorrow that Boston spoils this beautiful piece of work on the covenant by introducing the error of the "Marrow" doctrine (pp. 151-155; pp. 168ff.). Basically, the "Marrow" doctrine as applied by Boston to the covenant is the teaching that Christ wills to realize the covenant personally with every human without exception. Boston puts it this way: "The object of the administration of the covenant is sinners of mankind indefinitely" (p. 151). The promises of the covenant are for all. God well-meaningly offers the covenant and its blessings to all without exception. A man's inclusion in the covenant and reception of the promised blessings depend upon his acceptance of God's offer by believing.

Basic to the "Marrow" doctrine is a deceptive, but distinct, form of universal atonement: God has made a grant of Christ crucified for the salvation of all sinners without exception (cf. pp. 151, 152, 222). Boston enlarges on this familiar theme by asserting that Jesus Christ, the Testator of the new covenant, has named as legatees in His testament (the biblical reference is Heb. 9:15-17) all human beings without exception. Named as beneficiaries of Christ's death, intended recipients of the covenant and its benefits, are all men (cf. pp. 168, 169).

The effect of this intrusion of the "Marrow" doctrine upon Boston's view of the covenant of grace is that conditionality, once banished, reappears; the grace of the covenant, formerly so vehemently defended, is sacrificed; and Boston, ardent champion of free grace, plunges willy-nilly into free will.

The end of this road is the heresy of free will. And Boston takes the road to the very end. In support of his contention that Christ intends the covenant for all, offers it to all, and promises its blessings to all by "conditional phrases," Boston appeals to Revelation 22:17: "And whosoever

will, let him take the water of life freely." He writes:

Finally, as for the willingness which you are afraid you are defective in, surely, in all other cases, he that saith, Whosoever will, let him take such a thing, will, according to the common sense and understanding of such words amongst mankind, be reckoned to offer that thing unto all, and to exclude none from it; however it may bear an intimation, that it is not to be forced on any. Why then should this manner of speech, Rev. xxi.17, be thought to limit the gospel-offer to a certain set of men? (p. 219)

If Revelation 22:17 is Christ's offer of salvation to all men, inasmuch as all men are supposedly willing to drink the water of life, or are supposedly able to will to drink the water of life, the text teaches that the unregenerated sinner does after all have the spiritual ability to will, or desire, Christ and eternal life. Luther, Calvin, the Reformation, the Canons of Dordt, and the Westminster Confession were wrong. Erasmus, Pighius, Rome, and the Arminians were right.

The obvious answer to Boston's question, "Why then should this manner of speech . . . be thought to limit the gospel-offer to a certain set of men?" is, "because only a certain set of men ever will, or can will, that is, desire, the water of life, namely, those whom the Spirit of Christ regenerates as He wills" (cf. John 3:8). However, his question should be rephrased, "Why should the call of Revelation 22:17 be thought to be addressed to a certain set of men?" There is a call of the gospel that is addressed to all who hear the preaching, elect and reprobate alike (cf. Matt. 22:14). But this is emphatically not the call of Revelation 22:17. The call of Revelation 22:17 is the gracious, particular call to the spiritually thirsty and to the spiritually willing.

At bottom, Boston's error is his denial that the administration of the covenant is determined by election. Boston rejects an election theology of the covenant, at least as regards the realizing of the covenant with particular persons. He should have been

warned off from this error by the biblical figure that he makes use of, the figure of the last will and testament. No human testator leaves it indefinite in his will who his heirs are and who the beneficiaries shall be. When we make our will, the one thing that we are concerned about more than any other is to specify definitely the precise persons to whom our estate shall come upon our death.

And are we then to think that the Christ of God left it indefinite in His testament who should receive the inheritance of the covenant? Are we to suppose that, having come to earth to do the Father's will of saving the elect (John 6:37ff) and having gone to the cross to give eternal life to the elect (John 17:1, 2), Jesus made out His testament to sinners of mankind universally and indefinitely? The notion is not only wicked, but absurd.

It is perfectly clear that the doctrine of the "Marrow" that Boston here applies to the truth of the covenant is the 18th century equivalent of the theory of the "well-meant gospel offer" so popular with Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the 20th century. This too makes *A View of the Covenant of Grace* important reading for Presbyterian and Reformed Christians. Although one makes a good beginning and has the best intentions, to introduce into the doctrine of salvation the element of a love of God for all and a desire to save all is to ruin all.

(An expanded version of this book review will appear in the Fall, 1991 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*.) ■

All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture, by Kenneth A. Myers. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989. 213 pp. Paper. \$8.95. (Reviewed by the Editor.)

An odd title; an easy, witty style; but an urgent subject and a useful, interesting book.

The subject is the "popular culture" of the United States — where it has come from; what it is; and how it

is influencing professing Christians. Showing familiarity with many aspects of American popular culture, the author gives the reader a good, hard look at pop art, rock music, and television, among other things.

The chapter on television, entitled, "Popular Culture's Medium: The Entertainment Appliance," is disquieting in the extreme. Television is "not simply the dominant medium of popular culture, it is the single most significant shared reality in our entire society" (p. 160). Television is the entity that unifies our culture. "In television, we live and move and have our being" (p. 160). The author is not being blasphemous. He charges that television is serving a role once reserved for God: "the role of defining reality" (p. 161). Apart from the unholy content of most of its programs, it forms a people who are crazed for entertainment. The very form of the medium — visual and dramatic — "encourages the aversion to abstraction, analysis, and reflection that characterizes our culture at all levels" (p. 171).

In a "light-handed" manner, *All God's Children* calls professing Christians to recognize the peril of conformity to the world by their openness to popular culture. Essentially, it raises the basic biblical warning to the children of light that they keep themselves separate from the world's works of darkness. It identifies some of these works of darkness at the end of the 20th century. We Reformed preach the warning as the "antithesis."

There is vigorous condemnation of the typical evangelical and charismatic church in the United States today in that "the church has a virtually uncritical attitude toward the form of popular culture" (p. 181). In fact, the churches have adopted the tactics of our culture: entertainment over instruction; what seems to work over the truth of the gospel; and shepherds of the sheep becoming "entrepreneurs of emotional stimulation" (p. 182).

After our young people read the book, they should give it to their parents. And then discuss it together. ■

David: His Life and Times, by Ivor Powell. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990. 448 pages, \$12.95 (paper). [Reviewed by Rev. Ron Cammenga.]

The author is of Scottish, presumably Presbyterian, extraction. His book is intended to be a "biographical commentary" on the life of King David. This is a noble endeavor. More space is devoted to the life of David in the Old Testament than to any other figure. In all the Old Testament there is hardly a more colorful figure than David. Undoubtedly we have all heard sermons and series of sermons on the life of David — his slaying of the giant, his narrow escapes from Saul, his coronation as king, his entanglement with Bathsheba, his flight from Absalom, and more. A study of the life of this outstanding Old Testament type of our Lord Jesus Christ will certainly yield rich returns for the individual Christian, as well as for whole congregations.

Powell's aim is to provide a commentary that will be of special use to ministers. "If I have written as a minister with alliterated headings, understand that such expression has been my style for over sixty years. It is my prayer that others will be helped as they prepare their sermons" (Preface). Although written with ministers in view, this commentary never enters into a tedious discussion of textual or linguistic matters. This will appeal to the ordinary believer since such diversions are often a distraction. For this reason Powell's commentary also serves as good devotional material. He does an excellent job of relating what David has written in the Psalms to events that took place in his life.

However, the Reformed reader will likely be somewhat disappointed in the book's contents.

The reason for this is that, although generally Reformed, it is not distinctively so. One evidence of this is the author's view of reprobation, a view that is obviously not the historic Reformed view but really the

Arminian position. This becomes plain from various statements made in reference to Saul. "There is reason to believe that God never ceases to love people. He may remove them from office when they are no longer fit for service, but His love is eternal. It is worthy of attention that during the years that followed, the Lord was extremely patient with the petulant king, but unfortunately, Saul was so self-centered and sinful that God could do nothing for him" (p. 35). Later he writes, "Although Saul appeared at intervals to be repentant, the continuation of his hatred of David proved that he had *become* (emphasis mine, RC) a reprobate" (p. 53). He also states that "Even though He sees the end from the beginning, it is incumbent upon the Almighty to 'go

the extra mile' so that guilty people would never say: 'If you had tried once more, we might have repented.' God never abandons anyone until further effort is useless" (p. 63).

The main weakness of the commentary is the author's failure specifically to point out how David is a type of Christ. He makes David a type of every Christian, an example to us in his moments of strength and victory as well as weakness and distress. And that certainly is valid. But he fails to see David as a type of Christ. There is no indication that at his greatest moments David is a picture of the great King, the Lord Jesus Christ. In David's failings there is no indication of his imperfection as a type, and of the superiority of Christ,

the anti-type. The result is that we look too much at David and never at Christ.

This is a serious weakness, as it is in preaching on the Old Testament in this way. The seriousness is that ultimately the gospel is removed from the Old Testament. There is a warning here that is worth sounding. We ministers ought to preach on the Old Testament, probably more than we do. But when we preach the Old Testament we must preach Christ and the cross of Christ. That's the challenge, if you will, of preaching on the Old Testament, especially the historical material.

We recommend this commentary to our readers, therefore, with reservations. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

CONGREGATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Just a little driving around should be enough to convince anyone that summer is the time when road construction and/or repairs are made. You can drive hardly anywhere without running into some road work. Well, the same can be said of many of our churches. In the summer their outside projects also get done.

First, we want to inform our readers that the congregation of our Byron Center, MI PRC completed their new parsonage, which is located right alongside and slightly behind the church. Rev. and Mrs. Gritters, along with their family, moved in the last week in June. Their new address is: 1947 84th St., Byron Center, MI 49315.

However, a new parsonage is

not in the immediate future for the First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI. A proposal to build a new parsonage at this time was rejected by their congregation.

A congregational meeting held in late spring resulted in a decision by the congregation of the Pella, IA PRC to put siding over the brick exterior of their church. We assume this was also done this summer.

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA decided that residing the exterior of their church building was not yet necessary. Instead, they decided to restrain the outside of their sanctuary.

And, after receiving a proposal from the Building Committee, the Consistory of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada decided to go ahead with repairs to the sidewalks of the church, the parsonage, and their parking lot.

We can add here that the congregation of our Byron Center PRC also found time this summer to invite their community to a special evening wor-

ship service. On Sunday evening, June 16, Rev. Gritters preached from Jude 3, emphasizing the call in the text, "earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

You may be interested to know that last summer the Sunday School collections taken at the Pella, IA PRC were designated for Reformed theological books to be sent to Reformed pastors and students of the Hungarian Reformed Churches in Romania. Pella sent their money and in turn received a letter of thanks and information from the committee with the following note: "We have since shipped over \$1,750.00 worth of books to Romania including works of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, which they chose from our suggested list."

The second annual Sunday evening of Fellowship was held on July 21 immediately after the evening service of our First, Grand Rapids, MI PRC. A light supper was served, followed by singing.

There was also a note in First's bulletin reminding the congregation

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

THE STANDARD BEARER

P.O. Box 6064
Grand Rapids, MI 49516

SECOND CLASS
Postage Paid at
Grand Rapids, Michigan

of the need for light, summer-weight clothing, shoes, glasses, and bed linens for Jamaica. Although it didn't say, we assume that these items would be sent to Jamaica to correspond with the arrival of Revs. Joostens and denHartog, who would aid in its distribution.

While Rev. denHartog is away from his pulpit in Redlands, CA, Rev. M. Kamps, a former pastor in Redlands, agreed to spend his family vacation in Redlands, thereby supplying the congregation with the lively preaching of God's Word for three Sundays.

DENOMINATIONAL NEWS

Many of our readers know that the month of August means the annual PR Young People's Convention. This year's version, sponsored by the

young people of the Byron Center, MI PRC, was held from August 5-9 at Grand Valley State University. The theme, "Reformed Young People Living in the Last Times," was broken down into three different addresses to the conventioners. Rev. Gise VanBaren spoke on Tuesday morning on "Knowing About the End." This was followed in turn by Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma speaking on Wednesday morning about "Living With a View to the End." And Rev. Russ Dykstra brought the subject to a close by speaking Thursday evening on the topic of "Experiencing the End."

The text in which this was all centered was I Thessalonians 5:8: "But let us, who are of the day...."

MINISTERIAL CALLS

The congregation of the South-

east PRC of Grand Rapids, MI formed a new trio consisting of the Revs. R. VanOverloop, J. Slopsema, and B. Gritters. And at a congregational meeting, they called Rev. B. Gritters to serve as their pastor.

Rev. C. Haak informed our Hudsonville, MI PRC that he was declining their call to serve as missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland. Consequently Hudsonville formed a new trio of the Revs. R. Cammenga, B. Gritters, and R. Hanco. The congregation was to call on August 12.

Rev. R. VanOverloop declined the call he had been considering to serve as missionary pastor to the island of Jamaica.

And Rev. R. Hanco declined the call he was considering to serve as pastor to the Hope PRC of Isabel, SD. □

NOTICE!!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Edgerton, Minnesota, on Wednesday, September 18, 1991, at 8:30 AM, the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the Clerk of Edgerton's Consistory.

Rev. R. Hanco, Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!!

Bible Study at Dordt College

A group of students dedicated to the historic Reformed faith meets together Monday evenings at 7:00 in the Dordt College library for a Bible study. The meetings are sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Churches in the area. This year we plan to study Genesis 1-11. Any student at Dordt is welcome to attend. If you have any questions, please call Rev. Russ Dykstra (712) 726-3382.

NOTICE!!!

You are invited to attend a CONFERENCE ON CHRISTIAN CHILD-REARING

at Loveland Protestant Reformed Church on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, September 26-28. Prof. Herman Hanco, Rev. Ronald Cammenga, and Mr. Ronald Koole will team up to make presentations on Thursday and Friday evenings and morning and afternoon sessions. A question and answer session will follow each of the speeches. (Between the two sessions on Saturday, a meal will be served.) Everyone is invited to join us for food and fellowship.

NOTICE!!!

The Annual meeting of the R.F.P.A. (Standard Bearer) will be held in Grandville Protestant Reformed Church (40th St.) on Thursday, October 3, at 8 PM.

Election of new board members

will take place from the following nominations: Rich Bos, Bernie Bruining, Tom Bodbyl, Mark Engelsma, Leon Garvelink, and Bill Langerak.

The speaker for the evening will be Rev. Ken Koole, pastor of our Faith Church. Demonstrate your support of the Standard Bearer by your attendance. Men, women, young people — all are warmly encouraged to attend.

Peter Koole, Secretary

NOTICE!!

The annual meeting of the Eastern League of Men's and Ladies' Societies will be held, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, September 17, 1991, at 8:00 PM, in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. Rev. G. VanBaren will speak on "The Development of Mission Efforts in Ireland." All members and others interested in this topic are urged to attend.

Dorothy Decker, Vice-secretary