

# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

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**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

**"So teach us to number our days,  
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."**

*Psalm 90:12*

**... It is surely a monstrous thing that men can measure all distances without themselves, that they know how many feet the moon is distant from the centre of the earth, what space there is between the different planets; and, in short, that they can measure all the dimensions both of heaven and earth; while yet they cannot number threescore and ten years in their own case....**

**John Calvin, *Commentaries***

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**Vol. 68, No. 7  
January 1, 1992**



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## In This Issue ...

Rev. Kortering had intended to continue providing Meditations for the *SB*, though it would mean sending them from the other side of the world. He has however been kept so busy in Singapore that he was compelled to ask for relief. Happily, Rev. Gritters is willing to fill in for his father-in-law. We welcome Rev. Gritters back to the pages of the *SB* therefore, in this issue and in alternating issues hereafter for the next couple of months.

Rev. Cornelius Hanko has at our request submitted a Guest Article for this issue. The end of another calendar year moves Rev. Hanko to "muse," in this article, on the end of all things, particularly the end of a ministry which he sees as coming to a close. In his musing he calls to mind a few of the many occasions in which he ministered to those who were then, as he is now, on the "last stretch" of the road home. That was, incidentally, one of Rev. Hanko's strengths — a counselor-friend to the hurting and the lonely. If ever there was a minister with a shepherd's heart it was he. But his ministry included much more. Having been ordained in 1929, he recalls 1924 well, and his memories of 1953 are vivid. No wonder therefore that the thoughts of this weary warrior turn, at the end of his article, to Revelation 14:13 — "... may they rest from their labors." Fitting, too, that that verse ends with "and their works do follow them." His, by the wonderful grace of God, surely will.

Rev. Moore in this issue concludes his treatment of "Unbelief's Attempt to Dismiss Sin." The article was prompted, you will recall, by correspondence he had had with an acquaintance who decided to "come out of the closet" after having rationalized his sin away, apparently even persuading himself that his life style was the will of, and therefore pleasing to, God Himself. We see again in this second installment that Rev. Moore's purpose is not to focus on this particular man or on this particular sin, but rather to show, from a real-life situation, the terrible progress of sin, of hardening, in the life of the unbeliever. Unmistakable evidence there is that God gives over to his sin one who suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. There is, ultimately, in unbelief, an arrogance that is chilling. But, as Rev. Moore so fittingly reminds us, we should by this example be warned, and be moved to thanksgiving, for it is only of sovereign grace that God's laws are written on the tables of our hearts.

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D.D.



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## Meditation

Rev. Barry Gritters

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# No Greater Love

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*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

(John 15:13)

About to be offered for their sakes, Jesus is giving His last instructions to His disciples, bidding them farewell.

And He wants His last words to stick.

What Jesus wants His disciples to hear is that when He leaves them to go to the Father, they abide in Him. "Abide in me, and I in you" (John 15:4ff.).

Included in abiding in Jesus is abiding in His love: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love: even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (vss. 9,10).

Summing up in verse 12, Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another."

But Jesus wants to make clear to them what it means to love one another. Not a sloppy, sentimental affection for each other, this love is the

love of giving. And, to make that clear to them, Jesus illustrates by the example of His own love: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Of course, Jesus means to show them what kind of love they ought to show each other, a love that goes to the extreme sacrifice, the love of giving one's life for his friends. This is our calling while the Lord tarries.

But the obvious reference is to His own love for His friends, and the laying down of His own life for us.

Sacrificial love!!!

In these words of Jesus, we feel the heart of God beating for us, and understand the passion of God for us. Because the text is speaking of the love of a man for his friends, it is speaking of Jesus' love for us. But because Jesus' love is nothing less than God's love, the text is speaking of God's love. By implication, we could paraphrase the verse in this way, "So great was the love of God for us, that He laid down His life for His friends."

How great was Jesus' love for me? So great that He laid down His life for me! If I ever doubt God's love, ever question how great was God's love, ever have difficulty being amazed at the work of God in my salvation, I must think of this word: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." No greater *need* hath any man than this, that he know the love of God for him!

Jesus laid down His life!

He let go His earthly, physical life. So great was God's love for us that He took to Himself our nature, became a man, for our sakes. As a

man, God gave up life, His own earthly life, for our sakes. Now Paul can say in II Corinthians 5:19, about the ministry of reconciliation that he preached, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them...." The nails of the cross were driven into the hands of God in the flesh. The blood that flowed was the blood of God in the flesh (Acts 20). In the human nature, God went through death for us. So great was the love of God for us that in the human nature He laid down His life for His friends.

So great was the love of Jesus for His friends, that he laid down His heavenly life. And this is what John 15:13 means. What was heavenly life for Jesus but communion and friendship with God, experiencing Father's favor and love? That was life for Him, true life. An echo of that sentiment sounds out of the Old Testament man of God: "The lovingkindness of my God is more than life to me." The Lord Jesus is willing to give up that conscious fellowship with the Father, to know the forsakenness of the Father and forgo the taste of unity through the Spirit. For the few agonizing hours on the cross, Jesus experienced what it means to be forsaken of God!

The loneliness, the dreadfulness, the horror, of what we *ought* to experience eternally, He *did* experience!

Can anyone tell of any greater love?

There are *lesser* loves. There is the love of a friend for a friend — a great love, too — speaking words of encouragement and kindness. There is a love of a friend for a friend, giving up possessions for the sake of his

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



friend's needs. In the life of the church as the poor are cared for, there is a marvelous expression of love. There is the love of parents for their friends, their children, when the parents give of their time and energy — almost all of it! — coming very close to what Jesus refers to when He speaks of a friend giving life for a friend.

But no *greater* love has any man than *this*, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ah, what a love is Jesus' love for His friends!

*Willingly* He laid down His life. No one took it from Him, against His will. Oh, how different that would have been! Then we would always want to put a question mark behind Jesus sacrifice as an expression of love. "Was it really love for me?"

But Jesus "lays it down." With His own hands, as it were, He placed it on the altar. "Therefore doth my father love me, because I lay down my life.... No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17,18).

As a *substitute*, Jesus laid down His life. On behalf of, in the stead of, in their place, as a substitute for His friends, Jesus gave His life. So that they would not have to suffer in that way, lay down their life in that way, Jesus did.

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*Let the whole world hear:  
Jesus laid down His life  
for His friends!*

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And in that little word "for" we have that central of Reformed teachings: substitutionary atonement. Jesus laid down His life as a substitution for His friends. In that truth of substitution is hidden the trio of doctrines: man's guilt, God's strict righteousness, and man's complete inability to satisfy. Man's guilt: why else must a life be given than that guilt was incurred and payment must be made? God's righteousness: because God is who He is, a God who does not overlook offenses, He requires that trans-

gressions be paid for, and in the righteous manner of suffering His wrath in an eternity of hell. Man's inability: is there any sense in this extreme act, the laying down of a life in that gruesome death, if there were any possibility of the friends making reconciliation for themselves? Is there any sense in God's coming into our flesh, suffering the worst agony of body and soul, and then dying our death in the flesh, if it were not for the fact that that was the *only* way for us to escape the eternal wrath and abandonment of God? Jesus laid down His life for us because there was no ability in us to make satisfaction for our own sins.

Greater love hath no man than this!!

Let the whole world hear: Jesus laid down His life for His friends!

Not for the whole world! For His friends!!

Contrary to the teaching of almost everyone today, Jesus did not lay down His life for the whole world of men, all men and women. If one understands the nature of the atonement, he knows that that cannot be. The atonement was the giving of a life, the payment of a debt, the satisfaction of a requirement of God. If Jesus died for all men, one of these things must be true: either Jesus paid the price for the sins of all men, and all those men will be in heaven (a thing unthinkable to any Bible student, even though many today are thinking it); or Jesus actually paid the price for the sins of *no* man, and the actual payment depends on the acceptance of the offer of payment by man (another unthinkable thing to Bible students). There is no other alternative.

When there is a debate regarding the "third point" of Calvinism, and someone claims that the atonement is not limited, but universal, do not be fooled into thinking that the difference is really only as to how many people Jesus died for. The question comes down to this: What was the laying down of Jesus' life? Was it actual payment for the sins of certain men? Or did it only make possible the payment of the sins of every man? The Reformed faith, ac-

cording to the Scripture, is this: *Jesus laid down His life for His friends.*

Let it be proclaimed from the rooftops: Jesus said to His disciples, I lay down my life for my friends!

If you trace this love of Jesus for His friends to its source, you find that it arises out of the eternal heart of God, the eternal friendship of God with His people. In eternity God chose some to be His friends. In eternity, God set His love upon us to make us His people, to come to us, to be our God, to draw us to Himself with cords of everlasting love. This is election — the eternal setting of love upon a people, to be their Friend. Now, in time, friendship can be shown to them and they can be with God.

And if we will only meditate on this for a while, we will know that this — friendship! — was the purpose of God in all His works, in time and in eternity. In eternity our blessed God knew that friendship in the circle of life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Willing to reveal that life outside of Himself, He created the worlds, and the world of men in His image. What was Adam and Eve's life, but friendship with God? What was Abraham's life, but friendship with God? Enoch and Noah walked with God — as friends! And in the end of time, when the tabernacle of God is with men, the friendship of God will go into eternity; God will be with us and be our God, and we will be His people.

Because of that friendship that He established with us in eternity, that is, eternal covenant friendship, He laid down his life, so that we might live, and live with him.

Shall we say it, over and over again? What greater love could there ever be, than that a man lays down his life for his friends!

Oh, what a friendship is God's friendship with us! □



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## Editorial

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# The Standard Bearer: Holding the Traditions (4)

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*(Holding the traditions of the Reformed faith in no way rules out the possibility of further development of the truth. In this concluding installment of the four-part series, I guard against a stagnant view of our calling to hold the traditions and contend for the liberty in the churches that a healthy holding of the traditions requires. — Ed.)*

We are called to hold the traditions. This is the apostle's command in II Thessalonians 2:15. For those who are Reformed at the close of the 20th century, this command takes on urgency from the wholesale abandonment of the historic, creedal Reformed faith by many. But we may not forget that the call to hold the traditions includes the privilege and duty of developing the faith. For, as we have seen, if there is a living holding of the tradition by teaching it from the Scriptures, there will also inevitably be development.

For this, there must be freedom of interpretation of Scripture in the Protestant Reformed Churches. This freedom freely submits to the authority of Scripture and bows to the rule that Scripture interprets Scripture. It also freely limits itself to working within the framework of the Reformed creeds. Still there must be freedom in interpreting the Bible.

Herman Hoeksema's insistence on this has been muted somewhat among us, I fear. In his seminary manual on "Hermeneutics" (the science of interpreting Scripture), Hoeksema writes:

It is above all things necessary for sound exegesis that the subject of

exegesis — in this case, the interpreter of Holy Scripture — knows himself to be free in the sense that he submits himself to the Word of God only. In this sense it is perfectly true that no church authority nor church doctrine may dominate exegesis (the interpretation of Scripture — DJE).

He complains that, not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but also "in the Protestant churches (there has been) a tendency to interpret Scripture in such a way as to bring it into harmony with the confessions — a tendency which could not but be detrimental to sound and properly free exegesis and the development of hermeneutic principles." Flatly (and for some, surprisingly), Hoeksema asserts, "never may dogmatics dominate exegesis."

With keen insight, Hoeksema attributes the weakness of the post-Reformation Reformed church in this area to fear — fear of losing her heritage:

But there was very little or no development along exegetical and hermeneutical lines. It seemed as if the gigantic struggle of the Reformation period had, on the one hand, filled the church with a certain dread, lest she might once more lose the treasured possession of the truth, which she had sealed with her very blood; and, on the other hand, it had given occasion to a certain reaction, culminating almost in exhaustion and certainly in dead orthodoxy (pp. 42-60).

Writing in the late 1940s, Hoeksema pleaded for "*libertas prophetandi*" ("liberty of prophesying"):

Even on the basis of the Confessions

there is room for the *libertas prophetandi*. If this room is denied, the ecclesiastical walls are made so narrow that none but a certain theological clique can live within them.

He warned that "when theologians attempt to impose their own pet theories, that have nothing to do with the adopted standards, upon the Church, they become the cause of trouble and schism" (*The Standard Bearer*, Vol. 23, p. 245).

This is an admonition to the lazy preacher whose sermon preparation consists of nothing more than digesting Hoeksema's treatment of the Lord's Day in the Heidelberg Catechism, and reading an old *Standard Bearer* article on his text for Sunday evening. It is also an admonition to the preacher who prepares in this way because he is afraid that if he preaches in his own words, formed by his own fresh exegesis (interpretation) of Scripture, and not in the old clichés, members of his congregation will criticize him.

This fear is not unfounded.

Some members are ready to oppose preaching that does not always state the truth in exactly the phrases to which they have become accustomed; that dares to express old truths in new ways; that stresses aspects of the truth that have been neglected before; that develops certain truths further than the preceding generation of preachers have taken them; and that may differ occasionally with accepted (but non-confessional) positions and explanations. In this case, the preacher must not at once meekly and prudently back down, merely to



avoid trouble. He must rather defend the "liberty of prophesying." Liberty is preserved only where men are willing to fight for it. Liberty is worth fighting for. There comes a time in a preacher's ministry when, like the apostle, against the opposition, if not of "false brothers," then of misguided brothers, he takes his stand, that he will not "give place to them by subjection, no, not for an hour," and for the same reason that motivated Paul: "that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Gal. 2:4, 5).

In the Reformation's demand for liberty in interpreting the Bible is a warning to our congregations to allow this liberty to their pastor in his preaching and teaching and to praise God for a man who exercises this liberty.

Freedom of exegesis!

Freedom of interpreting the Bible!

Then the tradition is a *living* truth for us. Then a minister can be enthusiastic in his teaching. Then the preaching does not drop dead from the pulpit. And then, perhaps, we dwarves, standing on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before, may even see a little farther in some areas than they did.

Hold the traditions!

Hold the traditions in *this manner*!

But what, you may ask, has this to do with the *Standard Bearer*? For

the subject is, "The *SB*: Holding the Traditions."

Of course, the *SB* is not the only instrument, or even the chief instrument, by which we hold the traditions.

The chief instrument is the local church — her pulpit and catechism room.

The denomination is also active in holding the traditions by her creeds, her assemblies, and her seminary.

The personal confession of the individual believer, informed by his own study of the Bible, is an important aspect of the church's obedience to Paul's command in II Thessalonians 2:15.

But the *SB* does have a role, indeed a unique role.

Historically, it has had a central role in the holding of the tradition within the PRC. In a speech to the Reformed Free Publishing Association in 1945 (a meeting attended by only a handful of men, it was lamented), Herman Hoeksema said, "This organization (the RFPA as publisher of the *SB* — DJE) is one of the most powerful means to maintain ourselves" (the *SB*, Vol. 22, p. 20).

To a large extent, the tradition of the Reformed faith as held by the PRC has been taught, defended, developed, and passed on to succeeding generations on the pages of the *SB*.

What other religious magazines today are, in fact, holding the Re-

formed traditions? Very few! Many are engines to destroy and bury, once and for all, the traditions of the Reformed faith. Others struggle, futilely as it seems to me, to *recover* the Reformed traditions that have been lost in their churches. Those who do defend the faith once delivered to Reformed saints certainly are not committed to the tradition as developed in the PRC.

The unique role of the *SB* lies also in the fact that it is a paper, a publication (and a *free* publication, i.e., not subject to ecclesiastical control), in which PR people maintain, explain, defend, promote, develop, and hand on the great tradition of the Reformed faith in written form. It instructs the PR denomination. It holds the tradition before the Reformed community. It surveys and debates the wider realm of Christianity. It has a permanent form in bound volumes, which contributes to transmitting the tradition.

The 64 volumes of the *SB* modestly serve the tradition today and will, perhaps, until the day when the tradition reaches its goal in Him who will consume the Great Deceiver with the Spirit of His mouth and who will give us the knowledge of the truth face to face.

Until that day, "Hold the traditions!" □

— DJE

## Letters

### On a Report of Classis East

I request your allowance for a response to and correction of the report by the Stated Clerk on the "cross issue" before Classis East this past September and October (The *Standard Bearer*, Nov. 15, 1991). Reference was made in that report to a decision taken at the May Classis. According to the report, "Classis had decided that ... the consistory had

violated Article 31 of the Church Order by requiring that these brothers remain silent about their position in the churches" (p. 95, first column, second paragraph). I was part of the committee of pre-advice that formulated the advice adopted. I assure you we did not advise, nor did Classis adopt, the position described in the clerk's report, though indeed he may have in all sincerity interpreted it as such.

The matter should not go uncorrected because such a position (i.e., that to require silence in the churches violates the Church Order) is so patently contrary to Article 31 that it would be beyond debate that Classis erred in adopting it. And secondly, the implication of such a decision by Classis, had it indeed been made, would be that henceforth one may feel free to voice public disagreement with settled and binding decisions of



our major assemblies.

There can be no question that Article 31 of the Church Order means that the decisions of our assemblies (including those of Classis East in May and in September/October!) are settled and binding throughout our churches, and those who disagree with them ought not publicly in conversation to voice their opposition to them, no matter what their reaction to them is after having read the report of the stated clerk in the *SB*!

However, if this matter is now to become a matter of open discussion in our churches (which is almost inevitable in light of the rather detailed treatment of it in the *SB*) the "discussors" ought at least to know what the decision of the May Classis actually was.

The pertinent parts of that decision of the May Classis read as follows:

3. We advise the Classis to declare that the Southwest Consistory in its denial of the (appellants') request for transfer erred in interpreting Article 31 of the Church Order to require the (appellants) to be totally silent re their convictions on the cross issue.

a. Evidence that Southwest Consistory's position is that Article 31 of the Church Order does require the (appellants) to be totally silent re their convictions on the cross issue. (I omit here the evidence from the documents which follows in 1) and 2) — KK.)

b. Grounds for this advice:

1) Our churches have always recognized that the binding and settled character of ecclesiastical decisions (cf. Art. 31 of the CO) forbids members of the churches, who disagree with these decisions, to militate against them in the churches. This means that such members may not agitate against, make propaganda against, speak disparagingly of, seek to convince others of the wrongness of such decisions. The Southwest Consistory goes far beyond this requirement in its demand of total silence.

2) This requirement of total silence on the part of those who disagree with binding synodical decisions makes it impossible for such members to:

a) receive instruction re these decisions.

b) answer the legitimate inquiries of a Consistory re their position.

4. We advise Classis to declare that SW Consistory erred in its denying the (appellants) the right of transfer on the ground that the continual insistence of the (appellants) to instruct their children re: their positions is in itself a militating against the decision of the 1990 Synod.

Grounds:

a. The decision of Classis adopted in B., 2. of the advice designating the (appellants) as the weaker brothers in the cross issue and allowing them to live their conscience in the churches gives to the (appellants) the right to instruct their children re: their conviction of conscience.

b. The (appellants) indicate that in the instruction of their children in the cross issue they will not militate against the decision of the 1990 Synod. (Here again I omit the evidence from the documents as quoted in 1) and 2) — KK.)

From the May decisions quoted it should be evident that:

1. The issue was not whether dissenting brothers have the right to talk about their dissenting position throughout the churches (we all agree, this is forbidden), but whether they have the right to instruct their children about their position in the privacy of their home.

2. This right was granted

a. in the context of their consistory's requiring "total silence," and

b. in the context of the reminder that Article 31 forbids all militating against Synodical (all broader assemblies') decisions [3. b. 1) above setting the boundaries].

c. in light of the assurance of the protestants that they would not charge any others with sin in this matter.

I trust this will clarify the decision. I am not convinced that it is either possible or good to avoid all discussion of the issue; but let all be careful in their discussion not to be guilty of agitating against settled and binding decisions (per the requirement of Art. 31).

(Rev.) Kenneth Koole  
Jenison, MI

## Response

I've re-read my report of the proceedings of the September/October meetings of Classis East and find that it can stand as it is. And, in reading Rev. Koole's response to it, I find in his letter a great deal of amplification of the decision but really nothing "corrective." The report quoted nearly verbatim the decision of classis. I find it difficult, further, to sort out whether Rev. Koole is trying to correct facts or impressions. His letter seems to indicate that I have "interpreted" the decisions of classis. Let me lay that issue to rest as quickly as I can. I am in no position to interpret anything that classis decides. Classis speaks for itself. Neither I nor anyone else can speak for her. And, further, your readers ought to know that I bend over backwards not to interpret but rather to report as objectively as I possibly can. That was especially true in this case since I, as a member of Grandville's consistory, was involved in this case.

To comment any further on the matter places me in the position of becoming a commentator on the decision. This I may not do nor, for that matter, may Rev. Koole (whether he was on the committee of pre-advice or not makes no difference — what's in the written documents is what counts).

The report, by its very nature, gives a summary of the decisions of the classis. If anyone has questions about the decisions, he/she may write for the full, complete decisions of the classis. This is true, I believe, for all decisions of classis taken in public session. That approach would be far more advisable, in my opinion, than writing and responding to letters of "correction." What we still don't have, even after Rev. Koole's letter, is a complete transcript of the decision.

Jon J. Huiskens

Stated Clerk, Classis East



## *A Cloud of Witnesses*

Prof. Herman Hanko

# John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation (1)

The great Protestant Reformation of the 16th century did not burst upon Europe as something entirely new and without preparation. The work of God through Luther and Calvin was built upon the work of God in men who preceded them and paved the way. Two such men were John Wycliffe in England and John Huss in Bohemia.

On December 31, the last day of 1991, the church commemorates the 607th anniversary of the death of John Wycliffe. It is fitting that we devote this article to him.

England was a difficult place to live in the years of Wycliffe's life. Although a great deal of emphasis was placed on education, and the road to success was through the colleges, very few had the means to go to college, and the lot of the peasant was difficult and spiritually empty. One description is graphic:

The peasant could not expect any preaching from the resident priest, but he would get it from the preaching friar, and from the travelling pardoner, with his wallet "bret full of pardons, come from Rome all hot." Besides these religious roundsmen there were others who would travel through the winding, muddy roads and green lanes of England: minstrels, tumblers, jugglers, beggars and charlatans of every kind, living off the poor peasants. The peasant knew something of the sayings of Christ and Bible stories, but they were so

embellished by the friar's sensational and entertaining sermons that he would not know truth from error. He never saw a Bible in English, and if he could have seen one he would not have been able to read it.<sup>1</sup>

Nor were the times peaceful and quiet. They were unusually turbulent. During Wycliffe's short lifetime the black death struck Europe and England and carried away one third of the population. Also during his lifetime the Peasant's War left parts of England devastated and brought about major economic upheaval. In the church as well confusion and unrest reigned. It was the time when the papacy was not in Rome, the eternal city, but in Avignon under the control of the French. And, although during Wycliffe's days the so-called Babylonian Captivity of the Church<sup>2</sup> came to an end, the end was the papal schism during which there were two popes, and sometimes three, bellowing away at each other like mad bulls and hurling back and forth anathemas and excommunications.

Very little is known of Wycliffe's early life — not even the date of his birth. Some argue for 1324; others for 1330. He was born near West Riding in Yorkshire in a small village called "Wycliffe," which would seem to in-

dicate that his parents were lords of the manor in the area, wealthy and respectable. Little more is known of them, other than the possibility that they totally repudiated their son when he began to teach biblical ideas.

At about 15 or 16 he went off to Oxford to study. The years of study were long and difficult: one who went through the entire program could not expect to complete his studies until 33 years of age under ordinary circumstances. Wycliffe spent much of his life in Oxford: he gained his BA in 1356, his BD in 1369, and his DD in 1372 — although his studies were interrupted for two years by official business. Not even much is known about these years. He was probably in Merton College; was master of Balliol College from 1359-1360; and had some dealings with Christ's College.

Oxford was composed at this time of six colleges. It had about 75 members, all of whom were of the clergy, and it served about 1,500 undergraduates. It was surrounded by priories and halls which were full of monks and friars and were a constant source of irritation to the members of the university. It was the best university in all of Europe, surpassing even the great universities of France.

In 1361 Wycliffe became rector in the church of Fillingham, in Lincolnshire, which meant technically that he was its pastor, but which meant in fact (as was the custom in those days) that he received the income from that parish while he could continue his studies and work in Oxford. This did not mean that he totally neglected his parish, for he preached

1 David Fountain, *John Wycliffe: The Dawn of the Reformation* (Southampton: Mayflower Christian Books, 1984), p. 4. This and another book by Douglas C. Wood, *The Evangelical Doctor* (Weylands: Evangelical Press, 1984) are excellent biographies.

2 It was so called because the papacy was in Avignon seventy years.

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there from time to time; and it did make him an ordained minister in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1368 he was transferred to Lutterworth, a parish in which he spent the last years of his life.

Oxford was, however, the seat of his labors. During his studies, and for years after he had completed them, he was a teacher at Oxford. Much of his reformatory work was done within those halls. He was always and pre-eminently a professor and not, in the first place, a preacher.

The friars who lived on Oxford's premises, and who caused the university untold grief, were to become the first objects of Wycliffe's anger. He wrote a book, *Objections to the Friars*, which really sounded the trumpet blast of reform.

But the crucial issues came up in Wycliffe's life in connection with political problems. And, as is so often true of the affairs of men and nations, the bottom line was money. The trouble was that much of England's wealth was flowing out of the country and to the papacy. While this had been more or less true from the time that England had come under Roman Catholic control, it was most emphatically true after King John delivered England to the pope as the pope's kingdom and had received it back as a papal fief more than 200 years earlier. This was humiliating and intolerable to good Englishmen. The charge levied by the pope was 1,000 marks a year — an almost impossible burden. But money moved out of England in other ways: ecclesiastical offices were sold to the highest bidder, with the money going to the pope. Many offices in England were held by foreigners who never saw the land in which they held office. Some of those officers were nothing but children, but they reaped the income of the offices — after the pope had been paid off. The pope often moved bishops from one see to another and received one year's salary as his part of the transaction. Much money for the forgiveness of sins was funneled out of England to the papal coffers. In fact the pope received five times more

money than the king. To add insult to injury, the money was going to a French pope and eventually found its way into French hands; and France was at war with England. England was thus supporting its enemy in the wars.

So intolerable did this become that Parliament passed a Bill of Indictment against the pope which read in part:

God hath given his sheep to the Pope to be pastored and not shorn and shaven ... therefore it would be good to renew all the statutes against provisions from Rome .... No papal collector should remain in England upon pain of life and limb, and no Englishman, on the like pain, should become such collector or remain at the court of Rome.<sup>3</sup>

Into this issue Wycliffe was thrust. He not only became involved in the problem as a writer of pamphlets and treatises, but he also served on a committee of the king to meet in Bruges of The Netherlands with papal representatives to arbitrate, if possible, the issues. With patriotic zeal, he defended the rights of England against the papacy.

It was in Bruges that two important things took place which were to have influence on Wycliffe's later life. The first was the fact that, in dealing with papal representatives, he learned that they were a treacherous and deceitful lot and that they represented a papacy which was wholly secular, covetous, immoral, corrupt, and a tool of French kings. He so completely lost his confidence in the papacy and hierarchy of the church that he had nothing but contempt and scorn for it from that day on.

The second event of importance was that he met the Duke of Gaunt, who was in Bruges for other business, and who was probably the most powerful man in England after the king. The two became friends and it was due only to the friendship of the Duke of Gaunt that Wycliffe was not killed by the Romish Church.

Wycliffe's defense of England's rights to keep its revenues within its own borders was courageous and bold. The deeper he entered into this defense, the more clearly he wrote against the corruptions of the Romish hierarchy. He was the first to call the pope Antichrist — a name later echoed by the Westminster divines and incorporated into the Westminster Confession. He denied the pope supreme power in the church, denied the temporal rule of the pope in the nations, denied the power of the pope to forgive sins, and, in fact, denied that anyone but a godly pope had any authority whatsoever. An old chronicler speaks of Wycliffe as running about from place to place barking against the church. The pope, in Wycliffe's own words, was "the antichrist, the proud, worldly priest of Rome, and the most cursed of clippers and cut-purses."

It is no wonder that the church did not take too kindly to all this. From the pope on down, notice was taken of Wycliffe, and the orders went out from the highest levels of ecclesiastical hierarchy to silence the blasphemer.

The first effort made to silence him was a summons from the Archbishop of Canterbury to appear before this highest ecclesiastic in England for trial. It was an interesting meeting. The Duke of Gaunt was there with some of his soldiers, as well as a large number of people from the monied classes, many of whom supported Wycliffe. Before the Archbishop could get on with any kind of a trial, he got involved in a heated discussion with the Duke over the question of whether Wycliffe should sit down — the Archbishop insisting he ought to stand as a measure of respect; the Duke insisting he should sit down since the Archbishop did not really amount to that much. The whole meeting ended in a brawl and nothing could be done against Wycliffe. This was on February 19, 1377.

In April of 1378 Wycliffe was once again summoned to the courts of the church, but this time to an assem-

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3 Quoted from Fountain, p. 26.



bly of bishops. The bishops were almost sure that this time they would succeed in sentencing Wycliffe to the stake and be rid, once and for all, of his critical writings and preaching which were such an embarrassment

to the church. But this effort also proved unsuccessful, for not only did Wycliffe enjoy the favor of the people, but the queen mother sent word to the bishops that, although they could try Wycliffe as much as they pleased,

they had better not condemn him, on peril of their lives. This so filled them with fear and consternation that they immediately disbanded the meeting. God used strange ways and strange people to protect His servant. □

## All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

### Anno Domini 1991

By the time this article is read, the year of our Lord 1991 will have slipped into history. As Christians we are comforted by the fact that it was indeed the year of our Lord! Time and history belong to Almighty God. Significant events, very significant events, occurred in 1991, events we would not have believed possible one year ago. And all of these events affect God's church and people because they are decreed and providentially governed by God for the sake of Jesus Christ and His body, the church. All these events, as well as everything that occurred in 1991, and in all of history for that matter, serve God's purpose to manifest His glory in Christ and in the multitude which no man can number out of every nation which shall appear in the new heavens and earth (Revelation 7:9-17).

Number one on *Christianity Today's* list of "1991's top ten stories" is the War in the Gulf. Operation Desert Storm enjoyed wide support among the American people. The war was opposed by only a few ardent pacifists and mainline church leaders. While the large National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) took no official position on the war, the director of its Office of Public Affairs, Robert Dugan, stated publicly that he supported the use of force

in the region, arguing that Desert Storm met the criteria for a just war. Many, especially in fundamentalist churches, viewed the war as a possible sign of the end times. The war created a bull market for apocalyptic books.

We know from the teaching of Jesus that war belongs to the signs that herald the nearness of the end of the world. But when we hear of wars and rumors of wars we are not troubled, because we know that "all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6).

The second of the "top ten stories" cited by *Christianity Today* is "Reforms in the USSR and Eastern Europe." Who just a year ago would have imagined that the Soviet Union and Communism would collapse? And this indeed has had a tremendous impact on the church. Now, for the first time in decades, these peoples are open for the preaching of the gospel. Bibles are being widely and freely distributed throughout these countries. We are reminded of Jesus' words, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations (the nations of the Soviet Union too, RDD); and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

The fact that several denominations addressed issues of sexuality is the third item on *Christianity Today's* list. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A., the Episcopal Church, and the United Methodists all dealt with these issues. A report to the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. General Assembly calling for

approval of homosexual unions was defeated by a large majority. The Episcopal Church decided that "sexual expression is appropriate only in the context of monogamous marriage." This church had to admit, however, that this position was "at odds with the experience of many church members." A study committee of the United Methodist Church is urging the church to abandon its condemnation of homosexual practice.

Our Lord's warning that many false prophets would arise, deceiving many, and His warning concerning abounding iniquity or lawlessness are so evident in our times (Matthew 24:11-12).

The remaining items on the list include: Euthanasia, Religious Liberty, Operation Rescue in Wichita, the rising influence of the moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention, the rise of Protestantism in Latin America, the Recession, and Israel's granting full access to the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Pondering these events of 1991 and more, we would despair were it not for the great truth of the gospel, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

*Christianity Today*

### No More Women Preachers

The Presbyterian Church of Australia (PCA) decided at its General Assembly that it will no longer ordain women as ministers. The Triennial Assembly, meeting September

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9-13, 1991, voted 116-65 to amend the church's articles so that only men will be ordained as ministers in the future. This decision does not affect the five women already serving as ministers and the one woman candidate for the ministry.

Not surprisingly, the debate centered on the interpretation of Scripture. Some commissioners (delegates) argued for a creational order in human relationships, by which only males have the office of teacher. They argued that New Testament passages about men having authority over women have a timeless authority; commissioners on the other side argued that there are many examples of women exercising authority in Scripture as judges, prophets, and teachers. Passages that appear to disqualify women from ministry must be read in this light. They need not be binding in every succeeding generation.

This is indeed an unexpected turn of events. In most churches this issue has already been decided and women are in the office of the ministry. This is the first denomination of which we are aware that has reversed itself on the issue.

*REC News Exchange*

### **The Back To God Hour In The Soviet Union**

The Russian-language programming of the Back To God Hour began airing on the Soviet National Radio and TV on November 1. The Back To God Hour is the radio program of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Radio broadcasts will be carried weekly, while TV programs will be shown twice per month.

The significance of this will be appreciated when one realizes that this is the first time any Christian

broadcast from the West is being carried by the Soviet media. Sixteen organizations submitted programs to the Soviets. Soviet officials said the Back To God Hour had the highest quality spiritual message and literary style. Mikhail Morgulis, the minister of the program, said it was a critical time, and a time to be bold. He said his mission was to reawaken the Soviet people spiritually.

Morgulis and Joel Nederhoed, the director of The Back To God Hour, were part of an American Evangelical delegation to Moscow. This group met with USSR President Gorbachev, at his invitation. The delegation also met with other leaders to discuss the role of religion and the place of missionaries in Soviet society. □

*Calvinist Contact  
REC News Exchange*

## **Guest Article**

*Rev. Cornelius Hanko*

# **Musings at the Close of the Year**

There are a number of firsts in life. The baby's first smile, its first step, its first "mama" or "dada."

There are also firsts in the life of a minister. His first sermon in public, his first baptism, his first administration of the Lord's Supper. It is all so new, and such a thrilling experience.

Then the time comes when he performs his last baptism, serves his last Lord's Supper, and preaches his last sermon. Should that last sermon be something special, if he were to

know that it was his last?

For some time the aged pilgrim is aware that he is on the last stretch of the road to his eternal Home. He has gradually been easing his backpack by dropping non-essentials along the way. His workdays grow shorter, since he wearies readily. He stops more often to lay aside his pilgrim's staff to rest.

He turns to musings.

Solomon teaches us that "it is better to go into the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart." He adds: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (Eccles. 7:2, 8).

The end is the period of transition for the believer, leaving his earthly

house to take on the heavenly. How varied are the experiences!

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I recall a member of our churches who had a fearful dread of dying. When anyone asked him whether he was not feeling well, he would turn pale and respond, "You do not think that I will die, do you?" When the pastor called on him, prayed with him, and concluded his prayer with the petition, "Thy kingdom come," the man asked, "How dare you pray that?"

"But why? The Lord teaches us to pray that."

"But then I must die."

One day the doctor stopped in at the parsonage to inform the pastor, "For years Bill has been afraid that he

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would die, but now his time has come. He has cancer."

When the hour of his departure came, a peace of God that passes all understanding came over him.

God's grace is sufficient. How often we question it.

\* \* \* \* \*

A man advanced in years ended up in the rest home. All his life his sole interest was his business. He attended church on Sunday, but was far too busy to involve himself in church activities. Family visitation was a painful experience for the elders, since he talked, and could talk, only of his business.

The best years of his life were the last, spent in a rest home. There his accumulated wealth meant nothing to him. Humbly he asked his wife for a dollar for a newspaper. Dutifully she handed over a dollar. When the minister called on him, for the first time in his life this man showed real interest in the things spiritual and heavenly.

God has His own wise purpose in His dealings with each of us.

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There was a man lying in the hospital next to a parishioner of one of our churches. The pastor came to visit the parishioner, hardly noticing his neighbor.

While he was praying, giving no thought whatever to the man in the next bed, his prayer was disrupted by a sudden outcry: "You mean me! You mean me!"

The pastor then asked the parishioner in an undertone, "What does he mean? What did I say that upset him?"

The only response he received was a shrug of the shoulders.

Turning to the disturbed neighbor, the pastor asked, "What seems to be the trouble?"

The only reply he received was, "You mean me."

The man then went into a heart attack and further conversation proved impossible. But the next day, when the minister appeared in the doorway, he was told in no uncertain terms: "I don't need you. Get going."

God works in a mysterious way His purpose to fulfill.

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And then there was the woman who called the "preacher man" to her bedside, asking whether she should allow the doctor to remove her gangrenous leg. The minister informed her that there was a far more serious problem confronting her, because before long she must die.

She heartily agreed, and responded, "But I did live a pretty good life."

"Pretty good?"

"Not good enough, is it? I have a son who goes to church." Grasping at straws.

"You never went to church?"

"No, but my son prays for me."

"You never pray? It's time you start, isn't it?"

In an anxious voice, "I don't know how to pray."

Then, having taught her a simple prayer, pleading for forgiveness through the blood of the cross, the minister departed.

The next day, curious about the outcome, he once more went to that ward. As he passed the service station the nurse in attendance informed him, "She died already."

Don't you wonder?

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And then there was the woman in the rest home whose grand-daughter made her a plaque on which was inscribed: "We have here no abiding city."

As she pointed to it she said, "I don't like that plaque."

"You don't? Why not?"

"Anybody, even a heathen, can say that."

"What would you want it to say?"

"We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come."

"Yes, that is much better."

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When this pious soul heard the footsteps of her pastor coming through the hall of her rest home she would stand in the doorway to be sure that he did not pass her by.

Little did she realize that she

was one whom he would never pass by, no matter how busy he was.

This elderly woman lacked the assurance of faith. Her godly walk was sufficient to convince anyone that she was a sincere child of God. Yet she needed to be assured of that over and over again.

She took great pleasure in listening to the promises of the gospel, always cherishing the hope that somehow these promises were meant for her.

Jesus speaks of lambs carried in His bosom.

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Never will I forget the elderly woman who most certainly could be branded as "old fashioned." She wore here dresses tight to the neck and long enough that they touched the sidewalk as she walked. She would never dare to expose as much as an ankle in public, but bitterly complained of those low necks of the women in the church. She was known for her piety.

Yet in her old age she found no peace for her soul. Any reminder of the riches of salvation or the hope of eternal life would meet with the sad response, "It is not for me."

"You believe the Bible is God's infallible Word?"

"Of course."

"You believe that Christ died for sinners?"

"Yes."

"Scripture says that though your sins be as scarlet, I will make you white as snow."

"I know that. But it is not for me."

You ask, Did she find peace before she died? She may have, but not that we know.

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There was an elderly man in the Holland Home, who carefully took his clothing from the drawer and laid them out on his bed.

When the nurse entered, she asked, "Are you going away?"

"Yes, the angels are coming today to take me home."

When evening shadows fell on his room he quietly put away the clothing.



"Didn't the angels come today?"  
"No, my place is not quite ready.  
I have to wait until tomorrow."

Precious in the sight of the Lord  
is the death of His saints (Psalm  
116:15).

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Then there was the mother who

sat in her rocker in the corner of her  
room with a smile of contentment on  
her face as she looked to the opposite  
corner.

"What do you see, mother?"

"Don't you see them? Angels at  
heaven's gate watching over me.  
When I cannot sleep at night I sit here

and the angels come to keep me com-  
pany."

"Blessed are the dead who die in  
the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith  
the Spirit, that they may rest from  
their labors: and their works do fol-  
low them" (Rev. 14:13). May my end  
be as hers. □

## Guest Article

Rev. Richard Moore

# Unbelief's Attempt to Dismiss Sin (2)

In the last article on this topic (see December 1, 1991 issue) we saw the attempt of the sinner to excuse his sin, before man and really also before God. When anyone desires to continue a walk of sin, it is necessary to try to justify such a walk. By grace only shall one confess that sin, repent, and receive the forgiving grace of God.

Having received a letter from a sinner trying to justify his walk in sin as an active homosexual, I responded with a letter of three pages wherein I pointed the person to his sin. This was a clear testimony, taken from the Scripture, that showed the person that his life as a homosexual constituted a willful walk in sin. It pointed out that one may not blame God for a walk in that which the Scripture clearly teaches is sin. I drew his attention to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah exactly because of this sin, and showed his walk to be sin also from Romans 1:26-32, etc. Further, the letter to this sinner pointed out that in his defense of his sin he had committed an even greater sin, and

that was the sin of unbelief, demonstrated by his denial of the authority and infallibility of the Scripture, as well as by the doubts he expressed, in the course of his attempts to justify himself, as to the divinity of God and of the Mediator. Finally, I called him to repent of this sin, and pointed out that all men have sinned and there is a way of deliverance possible, when one repents and by the grace of God clings to the cross of Calvary.

We should be reminded that this is the way of true love. It is necessary to call the sinner to repentance, and to do so with the prayer to God that He bring the sinner to repentance and salvation. But even as one undertakes this course, he must also realize that the Lord may use this means for the hardening of the sinner in his sin even unto destruction. But this also is, then, the will of God, which is always good. And it appears at this time that it is this latter that is the fruit of my letter.

### A Hardening of Heart

This letter brought a ten-page letter in return, as I mentioned before, in which he took me to task with a vengeance and separated himself wholly from the judgment of God, denying the Scriptures as having any value, and revealing a hatred for all that is Christian.

First he expressed an abhorrence of the fact that I dared to speak to him with a tone of authority, pronouncing spiritual judgments with respect to his life. He stated that, "The idea that you seem to think that you have some inside access to God over and above anyone else, I can assure you stops immediately when you leave the presence of your own fear-laden flock(s)." And he went on to say that the "special extra schooling in your seminary, such as it was, was to limit your scope of consideration rather than to expand your knowledge of reality." And then he says, "As to being studied in things spiritual and worldly, I have the better intellect as well as exposure." Therefore, he says, "don't ever deem to think yourself or your interpretation of Scripture worthy of 'advising' me in these matters." Adding, "you are not instructing some unlettered farmer in Iowa."

That which is truly sad about the above is that this sinner was not attacking the writer, as such, but was making mockery of the authority of God's Word. The sin of man cannot stand still, but continues to develop and to lead one deeper into condemnation when it is not checked by the grace of God. It is well that we all recognize this, that we might see the horror of sin, and that we might flee from it.

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It is well that we spend yet a few moments with some of these comments to see where unbelief leads. We shall continue to let this sinner himself speak, that we may see the terrible path of sin as it unfolds in the life of unbelief.

First, he points out that he has peace, more peace than the church is able to give, for he knows he is right. But in the second place, with respect to peace, he says that he believes death to be "a natural extension of life," and that if one can get away from the "anxiety-building baggage of hell thrown at us by 'true believers' of the Bible, we can look forward to death as an adventure." He then points out that no one has brought back physical evidence about the next life. So he does not worry about it.

We notice two things in these statements, the first being that the sinner as he would walk in his sin places himself on a par with God, in reality above God. The sinner says, "I know what is right." The sinner does not need someone else, not even God Himself, to tell him what is right and wrong. The same sin of paradise is met here: Satan said "ye shall be as gods, determining good and evil." This is the vanity of sin!!! May we have grace to see it. Secondly, the sinner must dispatch any concept of hell. He will not believe in an eternal judgment of God. So, foolishly, he attempts to cover the Scripture's teaching of a judgment that surely must be faced. But God says, "The wages of sin is death"; and the Scriptures clearly teach that this death is an eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth in the depths of hell. God is holy, and His Holiness He maintains, also in judgment.

The next point that was made by this one plunging himself deeper into condemnation was the following. He writes, "I guess we should get this little item out of the way once and for all. You, to your credit, seem to have broken the code regarding my opinion of the Bible. That is, I absolutely do not believe it to be the infallible Word of God. Never have (well, not for years, anyway) and never will." It

does exist, he goes on to say, and "it is clearly written, a good piece of literature, written by men and probably (the God of the Protestant Reformed forbid) a few women. It is clear to the objective observer that this is a book of fables, history, legends, conjectures about the future and stories." Continuing, he says, "that modern men still believe some parts of its contents in spite of how far-fetched they are, I really find incredible. Especially in light of science and space." The Bible just does not stand up to the evidence of the times, according to him. And then he goes on to point out that even if the Bible says what you say it says, he knows that it is wrong with respect to his particular walk, for he knows homosexuality to be a beautiful state, and to call it sin is absurd. And again he says that he was created gay. Therefore for him, he says, "whatever the Book says about sin *et. al.* must be discounted or thrown out." And then he points out that "it is really foolish of us to contend that the Bible is the word of God, using the Bible to prove it."

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*The sinner,  
if he wills to walk in his sin,  
must deny the  
infallibly inspired  
Word of God.*

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The next step of sin when confronted with the authoritative Word of God, is to deny the authority of that Word. The sinner, if he wills to walk in his sin, must deny the infallibly inspired Word of God. But, understand, if we do this with any portion of the Scripture, whether it be this man's saying that any part of the Bible that has to do with homosexuality is wrong, or whether we say Genesis 1-11 is a myth, we must necessarily conclude that the Bible is not God's Word at all. Then it becomes merely a book, with stories and moral statements that may or may not be helpful to man's life. But the child of God thankfully confesses with the Belgic

Confession, Article 7, "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein." And indeed we believe this, as the Belgic Confession states in Article 5, "because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves...." To deny this is to testify that the Spirit abides not in your heart. The sinner may indeed call this foolishness, as he does the true preaching of the Word, *but it is the power of God unto salvation, in them that believe, as the called of God.*

There is yet one more step in the hardening process, and that is to deny that there is a living God at all, One who judges the heaven and earth. This unbeliever also takes this step, as do the reprobate of heart always. We will again hear him speak. This unbeliever says, "I have always found it curious that so many people have supported and have defended the idea of a 'Living God' in the total absence of any physical evidence that He or She exists. The God of the Bible has got to be the most lethargic God. No real physical evidence is there since the creation of the earth.... There is no real evidence that Jesus really died; let alone, was resurrected. More likely it is that he was transported Star Trek style into his master's spaceship. Now that I can have faith in...."

It is truly amazing how accurately the Scriptures speak of that which takes place in the end of time, and expresses the way of sin in the midst of the world. Immediately our thoughts go to the passage of God's Word recorded in II Peter 3:3, 4: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." As Peter points out, such scoffers were swallowed up of the flood, and there even now approaches the day of final judgment. It is the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. But God



will not be mocked! To deny the resurrection of Christ is to forsake all possibility of comfort and assurance of salvation.

And so unbelief has come full circle. There is no God, no judgment, no hell, no need of repentance, no heaven, and no responsibility for a

walk in sin. But in this way there is no salvation either.

Finally we must note that there go we, but for the grace of God. But what a comfort that by the grace of God we believe the Scriptures that teach us that, although we have sinned, God is faithful in Christ to

forgive us, and that for Jesus' sake there is reserved in heaven for us a place in His fellowship forever. May He ever give us the grace to see our sin, not to excuse it, but to confess it, and turn from it, that we may receive the blessed testimony of His merciful care for us in Christ Jesus. □

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

# Malachi Lesson 3 Where is my Honor?

(Malachi 1:6-14)

The loving reverence for God, the sincere worship of His holy name, the living service and dedicated life which is alone worthy of God — all these were absent among the people of Malachi's day. This was evident in the manner in which they worshiped God. It was not that the temple was abandoned and the outward rites of religion altogether neglected, but it was all "performed" in a cold, indifferent, and resentful way. This was especially true of the priests, the spiritual leaders, but it characterized also the people as a whole.

The basic instruction of this section of the book of Malachi is well summarized by John Calvin in his commentary: "Nothing is indeed so precious as His worship; and He had instituted under the law sacrifices and other rites, that they might worship Him spiritually. The whole of

religion is despised when one despises the external acts of worship according to the law."

The corruption of the true worship of God came out in three ways:

1. In what was offered. The Old Testament law of sacrifices was very clear (Lev. 22:17ff., Deut. 17:1). The people offered "polluted bread" (vs. 7); "the lame and the sick" (vs. 8); "that which was torn, and the lame and sick" (vs. 13); a female of the flock when they had a male (vs. 14).

2. In the awful attitude they had toward the worship of God. The Lord requires a broken and a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17; 50:7-23; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8). Instead they considered the worship of God a "weariness" and "snuffed at it" (vs. 13).

3. In the crass and hardened impenitence they showed when God reproved them for all of this. When they were confronted by their terrible sins through God's prophet, they had the audacity to deny it (vss. 6, 7). That is pride at its worst.

The prophet brings reproof! He tells them that Jehovah had, in two respects, a just cause against them.

First, "If I be a father, where is my honor?" (vs. 6). The truth that the Almighty God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, is become my Father ought to evoke the deepest honor, respect, reverence, and awe before Him, which will be seen in how we worship Him and how we live before Him. Second, "If I be a master, where is my fear?" Malachi brings out the truth of God's sovereignty when he refers to God as "the LORD of Hosts" (vss. 8, 11, 14). Because He is the master of the heavenly hosts and king of all glory, nothing but the deepest, humblest fear and reverential awe ought to characterize the people who worship Him and call Him their God.

Our study ends with the powerful assertion on the part of our God that He will be worshiped by a people gathered out of all the earth (vs. 11; Zech. 8:23; John 4:21-23). This is a beautiful, powerful, and comforting prophecy of the gathering of the church of Jesus Christ in the new dispensation, the existence of which is for the sole purpose of rendering praise and worship to His name. Why is this so certain? "For I am a great

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King, saith the Lord of Hosts" (vs. 14).

Does this Word of God speak to you? How does it find you in respect to your worshipping God? What about your attendance at the house of God? What about your prayers? ... your Scripture reading? ... your entire life as you are to live it in sincere praise of God? Put yourself before the question: "If I be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear?"

#### Memory Work:

Malachi 1:6, 11

*A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?*

*For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.*

#### Questions for Study

1. Let's begin our study by considering what constitutes true worship of God. We must remember that this is *not* academic; for God, who is a great King and our Sovereign Lord by grace, requires us to worship Him.

a. What is the meaning of the word "worship"? Consult a Bible Dictionary and then find a verse in the Scripture which expresses the idea of worship.

b. Look up the following texts and explain briefly what they teach about worship: Psalm 95:6; Psalm 96:9; Psalm 89:7; Matthew 18:20; Revelation 15:4; Revelation 7:9-12.

c. What is the purpose of worship? (Ps. 84:1-3; Ps. 122:1-4; Ps. 27:4)

d. What is meant by these characteristics of true worship:

1) In spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:24; Is. 1:10-17; 57:15; Ps. 51:15-17)?

2) Reverence (Ps. 89:7)?

3) Humility (Micah 6:6-8; Hos. 6:6)?

4) Joyful, Thankful, Active (Ps. 111:1; Ps. 96:1, 2)?

e. What does the second commandment teach us about the true worship of God? (See Lord's Day 35, Heidelberg Catechism.)

f. For discussion and thought: Worship is not first of all for us, but for God. The question to be asked of any worship service is not first, "What did I get out of it?" but: "Did it bring glory to God?"

2. Now we turn to the shameful abuse of worship in Malachi's day, the spiritual attitude it revealed, the judgment of God upon it, and the warning it gives to us.

a. List the abuses of the worship of God exposed by Malachi.

1) To what does the "polluted bread upon mine altar" refer? Does it refer to the table of shewbread? to all the sacrifices in general?

2) Confer Leviticus 22:17ff. What were the requirements of the animals sacrificed to God? Why were those requirements important? (See I Pet. 1:18-20.)

3) What was the responsibility of the priest in all of this? What does Malachi mean in verse 10: "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought?"

4) Who is the deceiver (vs. 14)? What is his deception?

b. What attitudes were present among the priests? Explain them over against Isaiah 1:10-17.

c. What is meant by the response of the people in verses 6, 7 to the charges against them of failing to honor and fear God in their worship? Why is this so chilling and dreadful?

d. In what ways do we see the same abuses and temptations to corrupt the worship of God in ourselves? Be specific.

3. Jehovah brings out that this irreverence and apathy is an attack on His Fatherhood and Sovereignty.

a. What does it mean that God is our Father? (See Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:15-17; Matt. 7:7-11; L.D. 9 & 46.) How ought this evoke true honor and reverence for God?

b. What is meant by the name, "the Lord of Hosts"? Consult your

Bible Dictionary.

1) Look up I Corinthians 29:11 and explain what is implied in the sovereignty of God.

2) How ought this to evoke deep reverence and tears of repentance in us?

4. Explain the promise of verse 11 in the light of Psalm 113:3; Zechariah 8:23; John 4:21-23.

5. Let us now, in our own hearts, answer the question of Malachi 1:6.

6. Can you write from memory our verse in Malachi 1:6, 11?

#### For Further Study

on the laws of sacrifices, consult these passages:

1. Sin offering (Lev. 4:1-35; 6:24-30).

2. Guilt offering (Lev. 5:14-6:6).

3. Burnt offering (Lev. 1:3-17; 6:8-13).

4. Grain offering (Lev. 2; 6:14-23).

5. Drink offering (Num. 15:1-10).

6. Peace offering (Lev. 3; 7:11-21).

7. Wave offering (Lev. 21, 23, 24; Num. 13, 15, 21).

8. Thank offering (Lev. 7:12-15; 22:29).

9. Freewill offering (Lev. 7:16; 22:18-23).

10. Ordination offering (Ex. 29:19-34; Lev. 8:22-32).

#### A Prayer

of John Calvin offered after expounding on Malachi 1:6-14:

"Grant, Almighty God, that as thou hast been pleased in thy infinite mercy not only to choose from among us to be priests unto thee, but also to consecrate us all to thyself in thine only begotten Son,—O grant, that we on this day may purely and sincerely serve thee, and so strive to devote ourselves wholly to thee, that we may be pure and chaste in mind, soul, and body, and that thy name may so shine forth in all our performances, that thy worship among us may be holy, and pure, and approved by thee, until we shall at length enjoy that glory to which thou invitest us by thy gospel, and which has been obtained for us by the blood of thine only-begotten Son. Amen. □



# The Term "Conscience" Investigated

*From Holy Writ*  
Rev. George Lubbers

In our investigation of the word "conscience" in the Bible we found that this term does not occur in the Old Testament Scriptures. This term in the Dutch language is *geweten*, even as in the German it is *gewissen*. However this may be, the concept and operation of man's conscience meets us everywhere in the Old Testament, both for the evil conscience of the wicked as well as the good conscience of those who by grace have their sins forgiven them!

In the well-known 19th Psalm we hear the humble believer confess his transgressions and errors. He asks from the depths of his heart: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." He confesses his secret sins. From these, too, his filthy conscience must be cleansed! The psalmist beholds himself in the mirror of the perfect law, which converts the soul, and he speaks of the testimony of the LORD, which makes the simple man wise. And he knows that his heart and conscience must be measured by the good law, precepts, statutes of the Lord. He speaks of the fear of the Lord which endures forever. Yes, he rejoices in the judgments of the LORD which are to be desired more than fine gold, and are sweeter than honey

and the honeycomb (Ps. 19:7-14). Paul echoes these words in I Timothy 1:5: "Now the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned."

And, without mentioning the term "conscience," David speaks of his wounded and accusing conscience, in both of the penitential Psalms (32 and 51), in terms which express a deeply wounded and accusing conscience when he confesses his restless soul's state of mind before God and His holy law when he kept silence. Yes, then his very bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long. In the time of David's unconfessed sins, of both adultery and murder, God's hand was heavy upon him, and his moisture turned into the drought of summer. To be sure, the word "conscience" is not used by David; but by his knowing together with God's judgment, and knowing that it was a just judgment, he experiences something far worse than death. And this voice of his accusing conscience he could not quiet. He could not "restore" his own soul. He experienced that a man can not redeem his own soul. Rest would not come. His soul was like the restless waters of the sea. Yes, this was "until...."

We read this in the Canons, Head of Doctrine V, 5: "...by such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound

their conscience, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor, for a time, until on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them." Beautiful words concerning the Father's dealings with His erring children!

Of this painful yet blessed reality David writes both in Psalm 32:1ff. and in Psalm 51:1ff.

The Old Testament does not use the term "conscience" at all, but the reality of the conscience both of the just and of the wicked is graphically confessed and portrayed everywhere on the pages of Scripture, in Moses, the Psalms, and all the Prophets. And if we may anticipate a bit, this entire activity, both of the enlightened and of the sin-darkened conscience, is referred to in the New Testament in the term "conscience."

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In our study of the biblical concept of the "conscience" in the New Testament we found that the term is employed thirty-two times. It is not found at all in the four Gospels, except once in John 8:9, where we read Jesus' living and penetrating words, which entered into the very marrow and bones, as a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, that the hypocritical Jews were "convicted by their own conscience." The result was that they dared not fulfill the terms of Moses' law that such sinners as this woman, caught in the very act of adultery, should be stoned to death. Someone with great faith in his own



conscience, that he was cleansing the house of the Lord from evil doers, should take the lead and cast the "first stone." Such a man took the word of Moses seriously. Not so these accusing Jews. They were "convicted by their own conscience" and left the presence of Jesus, subdued and cowardly, one by one, from the eldest to the youngest. Yes, this shows that one conscience is more potent than a thousand witnesses!

The books of the New Testament indicate that Paul employs the term in Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians, I and II Timothy, and Titus. Besides those Scriptures written by Paul there is also Hebrews and I Peter. It is my conviction that Paul uses the term quite frequently because he is writing in the *Koine* to a Greek-speaking audience, both Jew and Greek. The term for conscience, *suneidesis*, had been used in classical Greek for at least five centuries already in the Greek empire. Greek had become the universal language. Thus Greek terms were employed in the New Testament preaching and teaching. Jesus did not write any of the Scriptures. But He had taught using also the Greek tongue. And the entire book of Revelation was really revealed in the Greek language. Hence, the term conscience was, so to speak, borrowed. But the content of the Greek term *suneidesis* was filled with biblical meaning of the Spirit. This biblical meaning was revealed in the Old Testament already. And in the New Testament this was filled with a content in which we hear the "mind" of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:16).

Indeed we may investigate the etymology of the terms as employed by various Greek philosophers and teachers. And this study will be of profit, too, provided we do this with a mind which can and does put spiritual things with spiritual (I Cor. 2:13). As enlightened believers we can and must judge all things. We understand why the Greek employed the term as he did; he could do no otherwise, though he was but a natural (psychical) man. He did not understand the things of the Spirit. Socrates

could never understand the height and depth, the length and the breadth of David's spiritual agonizing from his reborn, but wounded conscience, which caused his very bones to dry up. Only the spiritual man, who has received the Spirit of God to know the deep things of God, which the Spirit reveals to those who have received the eye of faith in Christ, can! Unbelief could not know the things of the Spirit; it cannot judge of this lofty reality. But the spiritual man judges all things, also the use of the term "conscience" by a Plato and an Aristotle! And so we can investigate not only the formal use of the term by the pagan Greeks in matters which are called "secular Greek." We search out all things and retain the good.

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Let us attempt to set things a bit in perspective. The question arises, I am sure, in the mind of the observant reader: What has this broader discussion of the term "conscience" to do with the point which Paul makes concerning those in Corinth who have a "conscience that is weak"? That is a good question. Our reply is that only we who see the biblical implication of the concept "conscience" will be able to understand what is meant by having a "conscience that is weak." We will need to understand that man's conscience is never independent of the perfect law of God. Our conscience is never our guide. Our conscience is such that to be a good conscience it must judge with God, according to the law of God. This is true very emphatically also with the Gentiles who "lived without law." They nevertheless are judged by the witness of their conscience. They have the "work of the law engraved in their heart" (Rom. 2:14, 15). And those who have the work of the law, also are judged by the law of Moses.

There will be a day when God shall judge the secrets of men (Jew and Gentile) according to this Gospel of Paul. Both stand in judgment. And the rule will be: did we keep the law of God? There is in this the application of the rule "do this and thou shalt live." For those who by patient con-

tinuance in well-doing are seeking for glory, honor, and peace, the reward is eternal life. That will be the just application of the law. And such ever walk in a good conscience. They knew with God that God's verdict of favor was upon them. However, those who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, upon every such soul that doeth evil God's wrath is revealed. These obey unrighteousness. Upon them God will render "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." On every man that doeth evil, whether Jew or Gentile, God's wrath is poured out in full measure.

What does Paul tell us about the conscience of those who "sinned without law (*anomos*)"? That these always knew that they were accountable before God. Why? Because they had the "work" of the law written in their heart. Proof that they thus shall be accountable? Every Gentile is constantly showing the "work" of the law, that is, the work which the law ever performs, showing what is right and what is wrong, written in their inmost being. Paul sums this up in Romans 3:19: "Now we know that ... every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." In their day in court they lost any possibility ever to be declared innocent by the law of God. □

— to be continued.

O love that  
passeth knowledge,  
thee I need;  
Pour in the heavenly  
sunshine;  
fill my heart;  
Scatter the cloud,  
the doubting,  
and the dread —  
The joy unspeakable  
to me impart.

*The Standard Bearer*  
August, 15, 1933



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*In His Fear*  
Rev. Arie denHartog

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# The Importance of Christian Scholarship

In our churches, catechism classes as well as the various Bible study groups and societies are well into another season. We as God's people devote ourselves with renewed zeal to the study of the great truths of the Word of God. This is good and necessary.

God calls us all to be Christian scholars. It is true that we are that in varying degrees. Not all of us have the same powers and gifts of intellect and understanding. The gift of God determines this. This does not make one better than the other. There have been times in the history of the church when God has used simple, uneducated saints in mighty ways in His church. He sometimes does this to show the real ignorance of proud and foolish men who vainly imagine themselves to be wise. Generally, however, God is pleased to lead His church by men to whom He has given great understanding and knowledge. We believe that the Bible insists on a well-trained, educated ministry. For that reason we now require four years of seminary training for our ministers.

But every Christian is called to be a scholar of the Word of God. We are to use our God-given capacity of intelligence to the fullest unto this end. A scholar is one who labors painstakingly to learn and know and

understand the truth. He devotes his life to acquiring knowledge and understanding. This we must all do in order to know the truth of God. Never will we as Christians know all there is to know. The knowledge of God is infinite and wonderful. We are strong Christians when we rightly know the truth of God. God says through the prophet Jeremiah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me..." (Jer. 9:23, 24). When God's people lack knowledge and understanding they will perish.

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*... every Christian  
is called to be a scholar  
of the Word of God.*

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There is no greater science than the science of the study of God's Word. To understand God's Word correctly requires earnest, diligent, prayerful study and application of ourselves. It cannot be known in any other way. We learn this science through the preaching of God's Word in church. Preaching must faithfully present the truth of the Word of God. It must be doctrinal. Preaching that is nothing more than a relating of human interest stories or the experiences of a man might appeal to the fancies of men and gain large audiences, but such preaching does nothing to build up

God's people in the knowledge of the Word of God. Preaching that is nothing more than the opinions of a man which can be accepted or rejected is without value. True preaching endeavors to impart the true doctrine of God and His salvation in Jesus Christ. God's people must be interested in this sort of preaching. They must labor to receive and understand it.

We must be scholars both in the private study of God's Word and in the corporate study of it with our fellow saints. Such study must endeavor to learn what God's Word really says. That might seem obvious. We need to emphasize that because so many modern day "Bible studies" are really not that at all. They are rather sessions in which people share their own experiences, whether genuinely Christian or not, and where each person in the group gives his own private and subjective interpretation of a passage of Scripture. True Bible study seeks to understand the absolute truth of what God's Word says. It seeks to know true doctrine and the only right and true interpretation of the Bible. The modern church loathes definitions and absolute truth. God's Word reveals it and the truly Christian scholar seeks to know it and maintain it.

The knowledge of God's Word will give us the understanding of all things. Today there are many even in the church who imagine that to be truly scholarly one must reject what the Bible says. One cannot rightly study science, it is said, from the viewpoint of the creation account of Genesis. One cannot know the role of

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women in our modern-day world by following the teaching of the Bible. But how wrong and wicked all of this is. The Bible alone gives the right knowledge of all things. Man can rightly understand the world and his calling in it only in the light of the Bible. "Thy word giveth light" is true for all knowledge and understanding.

As parents we must take a great interest in seeing that our children are well-trained in the doctrine of God's Word. God has given to our churches an unparalleled catechism program. Search high and low in even the modern-day Reformed churches, and one will find no catechism instruction as thorough and biblical as the one God has given our churches. We ought to be profoundly appreciative of this. This program will be effective to catechize our children only if we as parents are diligent in seeing to it that our children are well prepared for the classes. The future strength and spiritual well-being both of our children and our churches depends on this. The greatest danger of apostasy in the future for our churches is the ignorance of our youth.

In order for us to be Christian scholars, we must read good, solid, Christian books and literature. It is lamentable that so few young people in our day do this. We live in an age of a wealth of good Christian books; but how few there are who read them. God has led and guided His church into the development and understanding of His truth over many years. He has led His church through great doctrinal controversies, and preserved and kept His truth. The writings of great men of God have in the Lord's providence preserved for us a heritage of truth that each generation must receive and preserve through scholarly analysis and understanding.

The truth of God's Word is fundamental to all knowledge and understanding. We must be Christian scholars in every area of life. The Christian faith thrives and grows with knowledge, understanding, and discernment in all areas of life. It is not

like heathen religion, which seeks to keep people ignorant and superstitious. The Christian faith has through missionary endeavors promoted Christian scholarship. Many of the first schools in almost all countries were started by Christian missionaries. The Reformation was, among other things, a return to genuine Christian scholarship. The Bible was returned to God's people, to whom it rightly belongs. Preaching was restored in the church — doctrinal preaching. Christian schools and universities were established by the Reformation. Truly Reformed churches have wherever possible established and maintained distinctively Christian day-schools. Our forefathers made great sacrifices to maintain and support such schools. It is urgent that we as Reformed people continue in this tradition. As the world grows increasingly wicked and the church more and more apostate this is increasingly urgent.

Christian scholarship is learning based on, controlled by, and directed by the truth of Scripture. God's truth as revealed in Scripture is absolute and foundational. It lays down the basic principles for all knowledge and learning. Knowledge and learning must be guided by the Scriptures. Knowledge and learning separate from the Word of God are dangerous. It makes sinful man proud, vain, and rebellious.

We need Christian scholarship for the whole of our life. Christian scholarship is scholarship that seeks to know the world we live in as created by God and over which God sovereignly rules. It seeks to understand every creature in the world in its place within the harmony of God's created order. Christian scholarship seeks to know and understand man, who he is as created by God, and the calling God has given him to serve and glorify God. We need Christian scholarship rightly to understand marriage and the home. Every occupation in this world must be rightly understood and defined by Christian scholarship.

We need to prepare ourselves

and our children for our earthly calling. This requires that we apply ourselves to secular learning. As Christians we ought to do this with diligence, using all the gifts God has given us. But let us not forget to spend much time in the study of the biblical principles that must underlie all our study and learning and rightly define our occupation in life. We need leaders in the church who spend great effort on this. Our occupation in life is not only to make money and advance ourselves. We must use our occupation to serve God and glorify Him. Only then will we be genuinely Christian.

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*The knowledge of God's Word  
will give us  
the understanding of all  
things.*

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In study and preparation for our earthly occupation we will necessarily have to study the writings and works of unbelieving and ungodly men. Even though these do not acknowledge God, God still allows them to discover the great mysteries and wonders of His world. Christian scholars receive the benefits of their knowledge, research, and study. This is not in itself evil. All the creatures of God are good. Christian scholarship recognizes that wicked and depraved men use God's creation for sin and wickedness. True Christian scholarship is critical of and antithetical towards the philosophy and life of wicked men. Christian scholarship seeks to set forth the truth of God against the lie of the devil and of wicked men. Its duty and calling is to define rightly how we are to use God's creation and obediently and humbly serve God in our daily occupation.

Christian scholarship understands that all learning is really the understanding of God's creation. In the study of God's world we are led again and again to see the greatness and glory of God and we exclaim with the psalmist: "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" □



## A Word Fitly Spoken

Rev. Dale Kuiper

# Near ... Nigh

The matter of distance, of being near or far off, is of great importance in the Scriptures. Ultimately this adverb tells us whether we are saved or whether we perish. How striking that this little word should be filled with such import! When making these measurements, the Scriptures use God as the starting point, the point of reference. Although *near* and *nigh* may have a temporal connotation ("for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed"), we want only to consider these words as they have a spatial meaning: being near to, or far from, God. To be near to God is life; distance spells death. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off" (Ps. 138:6).

During the old dispensation God kept His people at some distance from Himself. From the burning bush He said to Moses, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). Later, at this same Holy Mount, Jehovah instructed His servant, "And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it" (Ex. 19:12). Still later the purpose of the tabernacle is revealed, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8), so that Israel was a people nigh unto Him (Ps. 148:14). Nevertheless, even with the temple worship, the idea of distance was maintained. Only the Levites might serve in the Holy Place, and only the high priest might enter the Holiest of All where Jehovah dwelled in the Cloud of Glory, and then but once a year, and not without blood. There was a veil. God kept His people at arm's length, for the perfect blood of atonement had not been shed for the remission of sin.

In the new dispensation that which is prefigured in the old is brought one step closer. God comes down to us in Immanuel, His blood is shed, the veil is rent, and Christ is entered into the holy places made without hands, there to appear in the presence of God for us. Today the church is the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), and the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). For we who were aliens and strangers, we who were without hope and without God (oh, dreadful distance), are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13). We are encouraged to draw nigh unto God, then to experience that God draws nigh unto us (James 4:8). We are encouraged to pray, with boldness coming into the Holiest, drawing near with a true heart and in full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22).

Marvelous as being near to God is, He has something still better, even more intimate, in mind to give us. When Jesus' prayer in John 17, "I in thee, and thou in me, that they may be perfect in one" is fully answered, we are taken up into the covenant life of God Himself and as His friends enabled to partake of the divine nature. Then "the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

"It is good for me to draw near unto God."

Immanuel! □

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

## The Day of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

# That Blessed Gain that Cometh

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

As pointed out last time, Abraham set in motion the movement that resulted in Isaac receiving Rebekah as his wife. Neither Isaac nor Rebekah sought each other. They never corresponded. In those days there was no

postal service for exchange of letters by mail, and there were no phones. Isaac most likely knew of the existence of Rebekah through his father, for it had been made known to Abraham that his brother Nahor had got-



ten a son named Bethuel, and that Bethuel begat a daughter named Rebekah (Gen. 22:20-23); but Isaac and Rebekah never dreamed of becoming husband and wife.

Now Eliezer, that servant of Abraham, who was sent to get a wife for Isaac, realized his frailty and lack of knowledge, and wisely and correctly prayed to God that He would bring to the well a virgin who could become the wife of Isaac. He prayed for one to come and agree to draw water for him and for his camels. Plainly and correctly he sought God's help.

Let us therefore take the Scriptural position which this incident sets in motion. For it was the almighty God who was using Abraham and his servant. He caused Rebekah to do exactly what Eliezer had presented in his prayer as the sign of the right woman for Isaac.

There are two basic truths given us here by our God. (1) Through Isaiah He tells us that HE is forming a people for Himself that will show forth His praise (Is. 43:21). Get that! God forms a people and does so FOR HIMSELF, to show forth HIS praise. (2) God always succeeds perfectly and constantly in realizing what He declares He will do. Do not then pat Abraham and his servant on their backs, nor Rebekah for agreeing to go to Isaac to marry him, and Isaac for receiving her as his wife. Instead sing praise to God for what He does. "Sing to the Lord, sing His praise all ye peoples, New be your song as new honor ye pay; Sing of His majesty, bless Him forever, Show His salvation from day to day" (*Psalter #259*, based on Psalm 96).

As pointed out last time, here are four people picturing what we all will do when Christ returns. Already now the saints who are with their souls in heaven and with the holy angels sing God's praise. In Revelation 4:10, 11 we read, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." That same praise we find in Revelation

15:3. The saints sing, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints."

Let us then go back to that incident when Abraham's servant and Rebekah came to her home. She ran to her mother with that earring and those bracelets which Eliezer had given her, and told her mother that Eliezer had revealed to her that he was Abraham's servant. A striking truth was manifested there. Laban, Rebekah's brother, seeing that earring and those bracelets, said to Eliezer, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels." Incidentally, there were other servants that came with Eliezer, and there was room also for them. Our God was realizing His eternal plan and working all things together for the cause of His kingdom.

We can be sure that Abraham sent Eliezer, with these ten camels and some servants, in order to bring Isaac a proper wife. What is more, Abraham, sending Eliezer and those servants, was very sure that the almighty God would, in the keeping of His promises, provide a believing wife for Isaac. For although in Hebrews 11 we do not read that by faith Abraham sent Eliezer to get a wife for Isaac, we can be sure that Abraham did all of this work because of his faith in God and in His promises.

Now Laban, Rebekah's brother, and Bethuel, her father, were told by Eliezer why he came there, and that he gave Rebekah that earring and those bracelets because God had fulfilled what he prayed for, namely, a wife for Isaac, one who would draw water for him and his camels. And Rebekah's father, mother, and brother were moved by God to agree with Eliezer that Rebekah should go and become Isaac's wife. In Genesis 24:50 we read that they said, "We cannot speak unto thee good or bad." To speak bad would be to refuse to let him take Rebekah to Isaac. To speak good means that they would enjoy having her go and move to a place where they would never see her again,

or be able to talk to her. They were convinced that it was God's will for her to go to Isaac.

What is so striking and divinely realized is that when the next morning Eliezer said, "Send me away unto my master," Rebekah's mother and brother asked to have him wait ten days. Rebekah, however, was ready to go that day. She manifested not a carnal joy for marriage. She had no reason to fear that no man would seek to marry her. She had been kept from marriage in God's providence. And Abraham did not send Eliezer to get Rebekah. He had no knowledge yet that she had not married someone. Rebekah was willing to go, leaving her father, mother, and brother and NEVER to see them again, because God had planned all this in His sovereign grace and wisdom. In that grace our God made her willing to do what He decreed. And she did not agree to go at once in order to get earthly riches, but to do His will.

Rebekah still had a sinful nature, as we all do. But she plainly was born again, and by that new life wanted to serve God in love. Remember that she had heard Eliezer worship God before her, after she had given him and his camels water. She then ran and told her mother what had happened. Take note also of the fact that in Genesis 24:21 we read that Eliezer, wondering at her, that is, at the fact that she did exactly all that which he had prayed to God as the sign that she was the woman he must take to Isaac, he, Eliezer, "held his peace." He did not yet tell her that God had presented her to him as the one he must bring to Isaac for marriage.

A comforting truth is presented to us in this incident. The name Rebekah means "Cord with a Noose," and that in the sense of that which ensnares. This pointed to her beauty whereby one could be ensnared, that is, caught by a rope with a loop. And the amazing truth here is that although she was so very attractive she did not capture another young man and make a marriage with Isaac illegal. She was God's workmanship, not simply with physical beauty, but also with spiri-



tual beauty and faith in God. She wanted a believing husband. And now she knew that God had provided one for her. For that reason even she was willing to go to Isaac THAT DAY! God had made her spiritually beautiful in Christ, and brought her to Isaac with whom His covenant was established as the son of Abraham.

Let us appreciate what happened in Abraham's life, and see God's grace and almighty power whereby He keeps all His promises. Call again to mind that day when Adam and Eve fell into sin. On that day we received that most wonderful and precious promise. God in His mercy assured Adam and Eve, and us, that He would put enmity between His elect children and Satan and his seed. He promised to bring into being a spiritually beautiful people that His Son would love, and for whom He would die in order to make us His royal bride.

Take note also of the fact that although Bethuel and his wife gave their daughter the name Rebekah, expressing her physical beauty, it was God, not they, who brought into being one who was "very fair to look upon, a virgin" whom no man had known (Gen. 24:16). Parents have no ability to determine how their children are going to look to man's eyes. And Bethuel and his wife gave Rebekah that name after she was born

and they saw what God had given them. They may even have expected and wanted another son. And parents have no power at all to give the smallest part of spiritual life and holiness to their children.

Recall what was quoted last time. 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." It is God who, through Christ and His cross and Spirit, makes us spiritually beautiful, implanting in us the life of Christ.

We ought to see and appreciate the fact that our God prepared and presented Rebekah to be Isaac's bride, and that He caused her willingly to say, "I will go." She expressed here her desire to serve God and not merely Abraham and his servant. Isaac had revealed absolutely no desire so far to have her as his wife. Abraham's servant manifested thankfulness for what God had done; and we may be sure that Abraham, some time later, when they came to Canaan with Isaac's bride, was also thankful. And we should receive all this in thankfulness to our God, as here is pictured His work of making us Christ's royal bride.

Consider also that Rebekah's leaving her father, mother, and brother in effect was as though she had died. For in that day it meant a

complete separation from someone so far away. In that day and age, such a distance meant that fellowship and communication ceased. They had to say a very complete farewell to Rebekah, and she had to do the same to them.

In death we all have that cut-off of fellowship with earthly loved ones. But here in this day of shadows we must look at this event that is presented us in the New Testament, and see the whole picture in the light of God's Son coming and making it possible for us to be His bride in the new Jerusalem. Remember what Paul wrote. He, in faith and peace of mind, declared, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Yes, for us as members of Christ's body, the church, death is necessary for our being His bride and enjoying it fully when He returns.

Separation from her earthly loved ones was gain for Rebekah. She now became the mother of the nation of Israel. Our God not only gave Isaac that wife, but He caused her to be willing to be his wife. Now, Rebekah's separation from her earthly family, and God's bringing her to Isaac is a beautiful picture of what God does in His grace. He has and will fully bring Christ His bride; and we will enjoy everlasting glory with Him as God's gift to us. Truly a blessed gain lies ahead for us. □

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## News from our Churches

*Mr. Benjamin Wigger*

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### News from Singapore

We begin the first "news" column of this new year with some information from Singapore.

First, the Council of the Grandville, MI PRC has granted Rev. Kortering's request for an additional two months in Singapore working

with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church and the First Evangelical Reformed Church. What this means is that the Korterings will be returning to Grandville sometime in early March.

And second, we share here with our readers just a bit of a letter sent by Mrs. Kortering to her home congregation in Grandville. She wrote on November 15th in part, "We have both been feeling well for which we are very thankful. We do enjoy the

large variety of food — many fresh fruits and vegetables. The food in the hawker's stands is good. We have our favorites and not-my-favorites. When I cook a meal of meat, gravy, potatoes, and vegetables, we'll say, 'This really tastes good again, doesn't it?'"

### Congregational Highlights

The Choral Society of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI presented a program of thanksgiving and praise on

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



# THE STANDARD BEARER

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Sunday, December 1, in their church auditorium. We should also add here that the congregation at Hope met for the first time in their newly remodeled church building on Thanksgiving Day. What a fitting way to begin worshiping once more in your own sanctuary. This entire project began around the first of June and included air-conditioning, new lighting in the auditorium, an enlarged narthex (complete with elevator), and more classroom space in the basement. From what I saw on December 1st, it looks very nice.

The Hudsonville, MI PRC's Choral Society presented their annual Thanksgiving-Christmas program on Sunday, December 8. For a special number, a group of eight choir members presented an arrangement of Psalm 103 entitled, "O Come and Bless the Lord." What made this so special was the fact that this particular arrangement was done by Rev. J. Heys, and that evening was its first public rendition.

You may remember that our last issue contained an item concerning the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, IL. We reported that, after March of this year, they would no longer be able to use their present meeting facility. Well, the Council of Bethel was successful in finding an alternative. Beginning the first of January, Bethel begins holding all their meetings in a large room rented from the Children's World Learning Center at 1050 Bonaventure Drive. This location is less than a mile from their old meeting facility. Renting this room does mean that each week considerable equipment has to be moved. It also means that chairs have to be purchased by Bethel as well as either a piano or an organ.

But the room can be used for all church meetings, and at a considerable monetary savings, something

that should not be overlooked.

Several of our churches' Young People's Societies have begun what I think is a very worthwhile practice for the holiday season. They encourage their congregations to remember their church's shut-ins, widows, and widowers with Christmas cards. All the congregation has to do is drop the cards off in a big box somewhere in the narthex. Then, on a designated evening, these cards are hand-delivered by the young people directly to the shut-ins. I know of three churches that are doing this for the holiday season. First Church in Grand Rapids, Byron Center, and our young people in Hudsonville, MI.

Being a member of Hudsonville, I can say that this past December almost 500 cards were given to our young people to distribute.

## Evangelism Activities

The Consistory of the Randolph, WI PRC has given its approval to their Evangelism Society to print 4,000 to 6,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled, "Is the Christian Faith Easy," to be used for mass mailing in the Randolph vicinity.

## Young People's Activities

Rev. B. Gritters was the featured speaker for this year's Thanksgiving/Christmas Young People's Mass Meeting held at the Byron Center, MI PRC on December 8. Rev. Gritters challenged the young people to become sensitive to the needs of others in their congregation. He asked the young people to consider making their Y.P. Society a giving society. He stressed that there has to be more than just Bible study. There must be an active involvement in church life. Constantly ask the question, What can I do for you? He suggested going to the Deacons and asking for ideas on ways to help. And he suggested,

for starters, trying to come up with at least one project per month.

## Ministerial Calls

The Consistory of the Hudsonville, MI PRC received a letter of decline from Rev. R. Cammenga concerning the call to serve as missionary to Northern Ireland. Consequently the Consistory presented a new trio of the Revs. B. Gritters, C. Terpstra, and R. VanOverloop. A brief congregational meeting was to be held on December 22.

The Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI formed a new trio consisting of Cand. M. Dick, Prof. H. Hanko, and Rev. D. Kuiper. On December 9 the congregation extended a call to Prof. H. Hanko to serve as their next pastor. □

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Consistory of the Doon Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, IA, expresses its heartfelt sympathy to its fellow officebearer, elder James Hoogendoorn, in the passing of his mother,

### MRS. HATTIE HOOGENDOORN.

May the comfort of the family be in this, that the death of His saints is, in the sight of the Lord, precious (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Dykstra, President  
Edwin VanGinkel, Clerk

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Ladies' Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to our sister member, Mrs. Marian Kuiper, in the loss of her brother,

### MR. CORNELIUS VANDEWEERD.

May the words of Psalm 28:6, 7 be to her for a robe of comfort.

Rev. G. VanBaren, president  
Mrs. Gertrude Lubbers, secretary