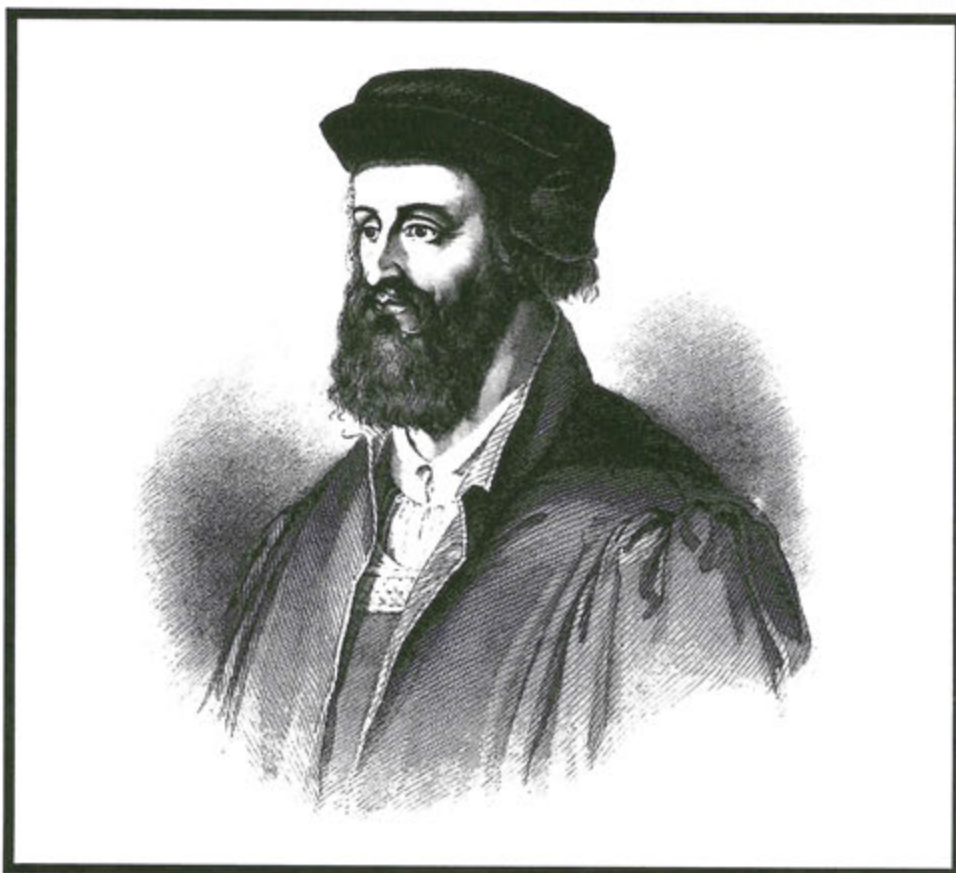


# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

*A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine*

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**John Wycliffe (? - 1384)**  
"Morning Star of the Reformation"  
see: "A Cloud of Witnesses" — p. 177

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*Vol. 68, No. 8  
January 15, 1992*

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## In This Issue ...

Featured on the cover of this issue is one of the men who in the providence of God served as a forerunner of the great 16th century Reformation. Prof. Hanko, in "A Cloud of Witnesses," has already shared with his readers, in the January 1 issue, highlights of the early work of John Wycliffe as an antagonist of the Pope and opponent of Romish hierarchy. Wycliffe, you will remember, had risen to great scholarly distinction in the University of Oxford. He was, in fact, widely esteemed as the ablest theologian of its faculty. His reformatory activities began, according to Prof. Hanko, in connection with the political problems of the day. England was being drained of its financial resources by grasping, unscrupulous popes. Wycliffe's opposition to the wealth of the church and to clerical interference in politics brought upon himself the wrath of the Roman Catholic Church, but it gained for him at the same time support from other quarters. His insistence that clergy, by their unfaithfulness, not only lose all claim to their office but forfeit the right to their temporal possessions appealed to the nobles (like John of Gaunt) who coveted the wealth which was going to the church. It struck a responsive chord also among the common people, who had long been critical of the wealth, the pretensions, and the ungodly character of the clergy. Hence his popular approval. And it was this immense popularity, along with the protection of the nobles, that made it possible for Wycliffe to survive every attempt of the high clergy and of the papacy to bring him down.

In this issue, Prof. Hanko deals with a different emphasis in the work of John Wycliffe. Not anymore political, but doctrinal. Not surprisingly, this change of emphasis cost him some of his support. But it was nevertheless Wycliffe's doctrinal positions which made of him a forerunner of the Reformation nearly 150 years later. As it happened, Wycliffe's main influence was to be, not in England, but in Bohemia. For John Huss was theologically a disciple of Wycliffe. And, in turn, Martin Luther professed agreement in a number of respects with Huss. Not without reason, therefore, Wycliffe has been called the "morning star of the Reformation." We thank the Professor of Church History for sharing with us a little of what he has long taught in the PR seminary.

D.D.

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## Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

# Perfecting Holiness

*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

II Corinthians 7:1

The apostle Paul has exhorted the Corinthian saints not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

To be unequally yoked with unbelievers is to become spiritually one with them through close association and common cause. This was being done by some in the Corinthian church through mixed marriages as well as by attending the idolatrous feasts of the heathen community. Hence they are exhorted, Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

Continuing in the same vein, the apostle exhorts the Corinthian saints to spiritual separation. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing."

To this the apostle even attaches a promise. God promises to those who separate themselves from the uncleanness of this world that He will be as a Father to them, living with them and walking with them.

The apostle now brings these thoughts to a conclusion.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

\* \* \* \* \*

We are called to perfect holiness.

The viewpoint here is that we are holy in Jesus Christ. This holiness implies separation from sin as well as consecration to the living God.

Let us investigate this holiness a little further.

We live in a world corrupted by sin. This is due to the fall of mankind into sin at the beginning of history. This original sin has rendered the human race totally depraved, incapable of doing any good, inclined to all evil. We can see this evil on TV, hear it on radio, read of it in the newspaper, witness it daily as we rub elbows with the world.

By reason of our natural birth we are spiritually no different from the world — corrupt, evil, abominable before God.

By a great work of grace in Jesus Christ, however, God has wonderfully transformed us. He has given us a new heart to love Him and not hate Him. He has enlightened our mind so that we believe in Him and in His Son, Jesus Christ. He has softened our obstinate will so that we yield to His will instead of resisting. He has broken the stranglehold that sin had upon us so that we are free to serve God.

And so we are holy — saints of God. We have been separated by grace from the corruption of this world and consecrated to the service of God.

This holiness we must perfect, i.e., bring to completion.

We must understand that although we have been made holy in Jesus Christ, we are only partially holy. As already noted, we have been delivered from the power of sin in Jesus Christ and renewed in heart, mind, soul, and strength. But this glorious transformation is not yet complete. There still remains within us much that is sinful and corrupt. The Bible calls this our flesh or sinful nature. The result of all this is that the basic direction of our life is toward God. In our deepest heart we hate sin and love God, so that daily we turn away from the evil of this world and press on in the service of our God. But there is something in us that still yearns for the corruption of this world. This evil tendency yet within us daily hinders our service of the Lord, leading us to stumble into sin again and again.

In this context the Word of God speaks of perfecting holiness.

---

*... we must daily strive  
for the perfect holiness  
we will enjoy one day  
in heavenly glory.*

---

To perfect holiness is to complete holiness. One perfects holiness when he fills in that which is lacking, so that he turns from all sin and lives completely in the service of God.

We must understand in all this that holiness will not be perfected in this sense until we reach heavenly glory. For as long as we live here below we will be plagued with our sinful nature which will render our holy living far from perfect.

---

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.



Nevertheless, we must daily strive for the perfect holiness we will enjoy one day in heavenly glory. Daily we must strive to put away the sins that so easily beset us, so that more and more our lives are consecrated to the service of the God of our salvation.

In this sense the Word of God speaks of perfecting holiness. This must be the concern of every true child of God.

\* \* \* \* \*

Perfecting holiness requires that we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. This is evident from the main exhortation of God before us: Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness. Obviously we perfect holiness only when we cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

By the flesh is meant, not our sinful flesh, but our physical flesh, our body. The term "spirit" in the Scriptures is often used interchangeably with the term "soul," as it is here. The spirit or soul is comprised of our mind, will, and emotions. With the flesh and spirit we have the whole being of man.

We have corrupted our flesh and spirit with sin. We do this when we use them as instruments with which to sin. By our evil thoughts, desires, and feelings we corrupt our spirit, rendering it spiritually filthy. With our evil words and actions we corrupt our physical flesh.

The Word of God calls us to cleanse ourselves of all this filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

We cleanse ourselves when we rid our lives of the sins that corrupt us before God. This spiritual cleansing involves cleaning up our lives by turning away from the sins that defile us. It implies that we cease using our flesh and spirit as instruments with which to sin and use them rather as instruments with which to serve God.

This can be done, of course, not in our own strength, but only in the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ's blood alone washes away our sins. Consequently, he who will

cleanse himself of the filthiness of the flesh and spirit must daily fall to his knees in prayer to seek from the hand of God the cleansing power of the cross.

In this way of cleansing ourselves we also perfect holiness.

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness.

\* \* \* \* \*

The fear of God is set before us as the motive to do this.

The work of cleansing ourselves from all spiritual filthiness and thus perfecting holiness is not ultimately our work but God's work in us.

However, when God cleanses us He deals with us not as robots but as the thinking, willing creatures He has made us to be. Hence, He motivates us so that we desire to be cleansed. He places within us such a desire for holy living that we daily flee to the cross to find the power of Christ's blood to cleanse ourselves.

That which God uses so to motivate us is the fear of Him.

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness *in the fear of God*.

By "the fear of God" is not meant the dread of God. Sometimes the Bible speaks of fear in the sense of dread. Many are well filled with this kind of fear of God, for they have trampled under foot God's will. They despise God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Unless they repent, they will fall one day into the hands of an angry God. However, it is not fear in this sense — fear of judgment — of which we now speak. Nor must we ever be motivated (or try to motivate our children) to holiness by this kind of fear.

Most often the Bible speaks of the fear of God in the sense of deep reverence for and loving adoration of God. This fear fills the heart of every child of God who has tasted the salvation of God in Jesus Christ. To fear God requires that you have come to the true knowledge of your sin. You are a miserable sinner, worthy of God's judgment, without any means of turning away God's wrath, hopelessly lost. But now, to your great

delight, God has come to you in your desperate situation with His free salvation. In Jesus Christ He has freely forgiven you all your sins, He embraces you, He cares for you, He has even reserved a place for you in heaven! Those who have tasted these great mercies of God can only be filled with deep awe and reverence for God. They are overwhelmed with loving adoration. They fear God!

It is this fear that motivates every true saint to live a holy life in the service of God. Moved by that holy zeal they fall to their knees in prayer to find the cleansing power of the cross of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

\* \* \* \* \*

The incentive to do so is the promises of God.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness ... perfecting holiness.

The apostle has set before the saints of the church wonderful promises. God will be their Father. As their Father He will receive them, He will live in them and dwell in them.

What beautiful promises these are! They speak of God's fellowship with His people.

This fellowship is the true joy of man.

This promised fellowship can be realized only in the way of holiness. The apostle has already made that very clear. It was only in connection with the call to spiritual separation from the world that the apostle spoke of God receiving and living with them as a father does with his children. God Himself is a holy God. He cannot receive anyone who is not holy as He is holy. He certainly will not live with those who trample His holy things under their feet.

These promises of God's fellowship with those who are holy are set before us as incentives to perfect holiness.

Already now we, as saints of God, enjoy this promised fellowship. This fellowship is the joy of our lives.



But how this fellowship is marred by our sins, as we daily defile ourselves before God.

How much richer this fellowship becomes as we more and more

learn to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse

ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. □

## Editorials

### ■ Promoting the Reformed Faith in Australia

Included in the student body of the Protestant Reformed Seminary are two men from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPC). They are Mr. Christopher Connors and Mr. David Higgs. Their church has decided to send them for training to the PR Seminary for three years. This is their first year at the seminary.

The EPC has assumed full responsibility for the financial support of these men and their families while they are studying abroad. This is a sizable, almost heroic, undertaking. The EPC is a small denomination of some six congregations and several preaching stations in mainland Australia and in Tasmania. The congregations are located in Brisbane, Rockhampton, and Sydney in mainland Australia and in Burnie, Launceston, and Winnaleah in Tasmania. Members and adherents number about 300.

It is estimated that the amount of money needed for the support of the two families each year is about \$65,000 (Australian), or about \$50,000 (U.S.).

The synod of the PRC has decided to help the EPC in the financial support of their students by way of collections in the churches (cf. "Acts of Synod, 1991," Art. 17). I ask our people to contribute generously when collections are taken in their congregation. There may be readers of the *Standard Bearer* who are not mem-

bers of the PRC who also like to help with this work. They can send a check to the synodical treasurer of the PRC, Mr. Joel Zandstra, 6157 Balsam Dr., Hudsonville, MI 49426. Designate the gift for the support of the Australian seminarians.

This is a worthy cause in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Obviously it is help in the Name of Christ on behalf of the two men and their families who have given up their secular employment, the one as a builder and the other as a teacher, in order to devote themselves to preparing for the ministry of the gospel. At the same time, it is an expression of oneness in the truth of the Reformed faith with the EPC. Such financial help is fellowship in the gospel. It is also an opportunity for members of the PRC to promote the Reformed faith in Australia. The purpose of the

study of these men in the PR Seminary is that they be able preachers of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace in and on behalf of their church in Australia. The collections serve this purpose directly.

Some information about both the EPC and the Australian

seminarians will be helpful to our people in their giving. The EPC is a youthful Presbyterian denomination, having been organized in 1961. It represents reformation in Australia. Many of the members came out of mainline churches that have fallen away into sheer theological liberalism. But the EPC is not content to be conservative or fundamentalist. The Spirit of truth has led the church into the Reformed faith. It confesses sovereign, particular grace, rejecting all Arminian universalism and free willism. Early in her history, already in 1964, the EPC repudiated the "well meant offer of the gospel" as taught by the Presbyterian theologians John Murray and Ned Stonehouse. Rightly, it regarded this teaching as dangerous deviation from the Reformed faith. The small, newly-formed church contended against this error even



Connors family: Angela, Christine, Christopher, James



though the result was painful internal struggle and loss of members.

The opposition of the EPC to Arminianism is not for her a merely academic matter. In a "Brief History" published on the occasion of her 30th anniversary, the EPC speaks of a time in the life of her members when the Arminian teaching to which they were exposed "almost led to atheism, such was the bitter disappointment of what was presented as Biblical Christianity" (p. 2).

The EPC has come to appreciate the covenantal nature of genuine Presbyterianism. Knowledge of the covenant with believers and their children kept her members from turning in the direction of the Baptists.

The creedal basis of the EPC is the Westminster Standards — the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, and the Directory of Public Worship. The church holds to the faith and practice of the historic Reformed church of Scotland.

A paragraph in "The Declaration of Intention" at the church's formation in 1961 indicates that the EPC is not ashamed of a militant defense of the Reformed faith (an utterly rare thing today) and speaks of the determination of the EPC to proclaim the Reformed faith throughout Australia:

It is our earnest desire to co-operate in the promulgation of the Reformed Faith in our land to the fullest possible extent with all who are militant for the Reformed Faith.

Although they are not sister churches, indeed have no official relationship, there has been close contact between the EPC of Australia and the PRC. Professor H.C. Hoeksema and Rev. B. Woudenberg have served the EPC by extended preaching stints in the congregation at Burnie, Tasmania. The PRC Synod 1991 again authorized the loan of a pastor to the Burnie congregation for a period of six months, if this is requested. The EPC sent two of her preachers, Rev. P. Burley and Rev. C. Coleborn, to the International Reformed Conference

sponsored by the PRC in 1990. Both spoke at the conference.

The EPC is open in her expression of respect for the PRC because of the conviction of the PRC that the historic Reformed faith is the most consistent expression of God's Word and because of the PRC's holding to particular and sovereign grace. The confidence that the EPC has in the PRC is evident in the fact that the EPC now sends her sons to the seminary of the PRC to be trained for the ministry of the gospel.

These sons of the EPC are Chris Connors and David Higgs.

Mr. Connors is 34, married to Christine, with two children, Angela (6) and James (4). Before being called to the ministry, he was a self-employed builder for fifteen years. He and his family are members of the Launceston congregation in Launceston, Tasmania. While Chris is studying in the United States, the family attends the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI and are under the care of the Faith Consistory.

Mr. Higgs is 36, married to Sue, with four children, Joshua (5), Rebekah (4), Rachel (20 months), and Katie (5 months). Before being called to the ministry, he was a teacher of

English and social sciences in the secondary schools in Tasmania for twelve years. He and his family are members of the Launceston congregation in Launceston, Tasmania. The family attends the Hope PRC in Walker, MI and are under the care of the Hope Consistory.

It should be a cause of rejoicing to the PRC that our seminary can be useful to other Reformed churches in preparing their men for the ministry. Reformed and Presbyterian churches, as well as men themselves who aspire to the ministry, should know that the PRC are willing to help in the matter of training men for the ministry outside the PRC. They offer a full, four-year seminary program. Their single-minded goal is the preparation of sound, capable Reformed preachers. The instruction is faithfully, confessionally, and uncompromisingly Reformed — exactly the great need of the hour in the Reformed community worldwide. Still the PRC are able and willing to respect and be sensitive to the distinct and different traditions of the churches that may use the seminary.

Whatever use the King of the church may make of the PR Seminary for the training of His servants from



*Higgs family: Rebekah, Sue, Katie, Rachel, David, Joshua*



other churches in the future, at present He is using it on behalf of the EPC. After one full semester, it can be said that the teaching has been profitable for the men of the EPC and that their presence has been beneficial for the seminary.

Remember this cause when collections are taken for the Australian seminarians in your church. Remember it also in prayer.

For the promotion of the Reformed faith in Australia. □

— DJE

## ■ Writings Worth Noting

Several recent publications are worthy of the attention of our readers.

◆ *Beacon Lights*, the Protestant Reformed young people's magazine, has published a number of brief, inexpensive, but profitable books on a variety of subjects. One of the most recent is a reprint of Abraham Kuyper's booklet, *The Implications of Public Confession* (tr. Henry Zylstra, \$2.50). It is the great Dutch Reformed theologian's simple but thorough explanation to covenant young people of their public confession of faith. Parents or consistories should see to it that our young people read this booklet before they make public confession in the church.

The latest *BL* publication is a 187-page paperback entitled *Jesus' Beauty Shining in You*. Three writers, Don Doezema, Marybeth Lubbers, and Rev. R. VanOverloop, have cooperated in an intriguing fashion in this study of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the child of God. The subject, therefore, is the Christian life and experience. Rev. C. Haak writes the introductory and concluding chapters. The price is \$6.50.

Earlier *BL* publications are Rev. R.C. Harbach's treatment of Christian liberty in a book of this title (\$1.50); Rev. C. Hanko's practical instruction on dating and marriage, *Leaving Father and Mother* (\$1.50); and a book on Reformed Christian day school education, *Reformed Education* (\$2.50).

All *BL* publications should be ordered from *BL*,

P. O. Box 375  
Jenison, MI 49428.

◆ The indefatigable Rev. George C. Lubbers, industrious and productive on behalf of His Lord at 82, has just published a 45-page monograph on Romans 11, "The Gifts and the Calling of God without Repentance." With characteristically careful, competent exegesis, Lubbers examines the "Jewish question" in question and answer format. The attractively bound syllabus can be ordered from the author at

2074 Cranbrook Dr. N.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49505.  
The cost is \$5.00.

◆ The fall of 1991 saw the birth of a new journal of Reformed thought, *Contra Mundum: A Reformed Cultural Review*. The title is taken from the well-known description of the church father Athanasius who stood for the truth of the Godhead of Jesus "against the world." The editor promises lively, controversial exploration of a wide range of topics from a Reformed viewpoint. The first issue shed light on the Enlightenment and included a lengthy, sharply critical analysis of Christian Reformed scientist, teacher, and author Howard Van Till's *The Fourth Day*. The Winter 1992 issue will be devoted to the interpretation of history. It is to include a lengthy review of theonomist and reconstructionist Gary North's *Dominion & Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* by the editor of the *Standard Bearer*. At the invitation of *Contra Mundum* the review will present the views of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the aspect of common grace dealt with by North. Christian education will be the theme of the Spring 1992 issue. The subscription price is \$15.00 a year for four issues of the 70-page journal. Individual copies can be bought for \$3.75 plus \$1.00 postage. Order from

*Contra Mundum*  
P.O. Box 32652  
Fridley, MN 55432-0652.

◆ Trinitarian Bible Society, publisher, distributor, advocate, and defender of the King James Version of Holy Scripture, has put out a 35-page pamphlet, "New International Version: What Today's Christian Needs to Know about the NIV." The authors subject the NIV to a careful, scholarly examination. They demonstrate why the NIV is unacceptable as a replacement of the KJV. Those who favor the NIV over the KJV because the NIV is easier to understand would do well to read this pamphlet. The pamphlet can be ordered from the Grand Rapids branch of the Trinitarian Bible Society at

1706 Richmond N.W.  
Grand Rapids, MI 49504.  
Request a catalog of TBS's other excellent materials on the KJV and on various matters of Bible translation.

◆ An editor of *Clarion*, magazine of the Canadian Reformed Churches, is responding to the editorials in the *SB* on the difference between the PRC and the Can. RC ("Liberated") over the doctrine of the covenant. The November 22 issue of *Clarion* contains the third installment of this response. Several more articles are to follow. Prof. J. deJong has asked that space be given in the *SB* to his rebuttal of the editorials on the "Liberated" conception of the covenant that appeared in the *SB*. Evidently the issue of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant has not yet been laid to rest.

◆ Twice a year the faculty of the PR Seminary produce a theological journal. The Fall 1991 edition contains articles on the doctrine of Scripture of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, sexual ethics in I Corinthians 6 and 7, and contemporary issues in hermeneutics, as well as a number of book reviews. The journal is available without charge from the

PR Seminary  
4949 Ivanrest Avenue  
Grand Rapids, MI 49418.

□  
— DJE



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## Letters

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### ■ Encouragement

Enclosed is my check for the renewal of your excellent publication.

I can't begin to express my joy and happiness with the receipt of every issue. I safeguard each copy in a binder and return to them often for research and study.

May the Lord continue to richly bless your work with this publication.

Maurice W. Bartlett  
Rio Linda, CA

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## All Around Us

Prof. Robert Decker

---

### The Christian Reformed Alliance

Several years ago a number of conservative ministers and councils, mainly from the Chicago area and the Hamilton, Ontario area, organized "The Christian Reformed Alliance (CRA)." Concerning the most recent decisions of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), women in office (1990) and creation/science (1991), many in the alliance came to the conclusion that these decisions were "symptoms" pointing to a more serious problem in the CRC, *viz.*, "a dangerously weakened view of biblical authority." Many also concluded that they could no longer in good conscience continue in the fellowship of the CRC. As we reported earlier in this column (SB December 1, 1991), several congregations have already withdrawn from the CRC.

The Alliance met in Lynwood, Illinois in November of 1991 and made several important decisions. Concerning the question of withdrawal (secession) from the CRC, the Alliance adopted the following statement:

It is unbiblical to remain in a federation of churches where synod ascribes to itself and to its declarations more power and authority than to the Word of God (Belgic Confession 5, 7, 29, 32). It has now become evident that withdrawal from the CRC should occur. It appears that withdrawal will be a prolonged process or development, rather than an immediate and large-scale event. Some churches are well in advance of others and are prepared to act now — indeed, some have already acted. Other churches are only beginning to consider what action they must take and are far from being ready to act immediately. In the light of this fragmented and variegated situation, we remind everyone individually and all the churches generally of the duty laid upon us all by the apostle Paul: "Keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Church members should exercise all due forbearance in the local congregation, and strive as much as possible to act in concert with fellow believers. Churches that are prepared to act now should not condemn those churches that are not so prepared, and those churches that remain in the CRC for the time being should not condemn or join in condemning those churches that withdraw. In this way the door will remain open to future development of a united Reformed witness and much hurt and harm that might otherwise be inflicted upon like-minded brethren may be prevented.

The above statement makes clear that the question of withdrawal from the CRC among Alliance members is no longer a question of "if" that ought to be done, but is now a question of "when" that ought to be done.

The Alliance also changed its name from: "an association of Christian Reformed councils who are united in an effort to give effective testimony to God's truth within the CRC..." to "an association of churches that are united to give testimony to the truth of the Word of God as it is set forth in the historic Reformed Creeds...." Among the reasons for the change is the desire on the part of the Alliance to stay in contact with and preserve unity among those congregations which have already left the denomination and those who are in the process of leaving. The Alliance also desires closer contacts with other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations.

The Alliance consciously declined to define its identity and purpose in terms of denominational categories. Participants in the Alliance want to avoid unbiblical independentism. Also we are told a "sense developed during the Alliance meeting that member councils and congregations are facing something much larger than a denominational squabble, and therefore that their response should be broader than the

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formation of yet another Reformed denomination." Alliance churches are aware of the fact that the enemies and heresies attacking the Reformed faith are not restricted to one or a few denominations. For this reason the Alliance will be calling together a Confessional Conference of its member churches and other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations for the purpose: "first, to identify those truths that unite us; second, to isolate and discuss those convictions and practices that distinguish us from one another; and third, to forge on the basis of shared biblical conviction a polity and structure flexible enough to span whatever distances remain." Some of the denominations which will be asked to participate in this conference are: Free Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Protestant Reformed, Orthodox Christian Reformed, and Orthodox Presbyterian.

Whether our Synod would accept an invitation to participate in such a Conference remains to be seen. Certainly our churches have always been eager to seek to promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. The Preamble to the constitution of our Committee for Contact With Other Churches in part reads: "The Protes-

tant Reformed Churches in America, in obedience to Scripture as interpreted in our Three Forms of Unity, confess that there is one holy, catholic Church. They believe, further, that it is their sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the Church on earth in as far as that is possible, not only in their denominational fellowship but also in conjunction with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us, both domestic and foreign." (Acts of Synod, 1972; Art. 157, Suppl. XXXVII)

*Mid-America Messenger  
Christian Renewal*

### Homosexuals and the Church

This issue, or rather we should say, the failure to embrace the biblical teaching on this issue, continues to plague many churches. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, who favors the ordination of homosexuals, in spite of the fact that he was running unopposed failed to get the two thirds vote needed for the presidency of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

A fifty-five page document, "Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith," was recently issued by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The document

urges readers to examine with an open mind different views about marriage, promiscuity, and homosexuality. It asks whether heterosexual marriage is the only setting where a healthy sexual relationship can occur. At its core, according to one observer, the document questions biblical passages concerning homosexuality and suggests that scriptural references to same-sex relationships need to be re-interpreted in light of modern theories about sexual orientation. The document also challenges ELCA members to evaluate prejudices against homosexuals, insisting that "what we personally find offensive is not necessarily sinful."

Here is one more glaring example of how the churches of our day accommodate themselves to the changing mores of the world. What the church ought to be doing is preaching the clear truth of Holy Scripture's condemnation of homosexuality, and calling these people and those who support them to repentance from this terrible sin and to faith in Christ Jesus.

*The Church Herald  
National & International Religion  
Report*

## *A Cloud of Witnesses* Prof. Herman Hanko

# John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation (2)

But 1378 proved to be a turning point in Wycliffe's life. Shortly after the convocation of the bishops Wycliffe underwent what was almost

a conversion. He was no longer interested in the politics of the realm, nor in helping promote the cause of the king and the landowners in their battle with the papacy. It seems as if, under God's leading through the Spirit of Christ, he began to see that the evils in the Romish Church were, after all, not primarily evils in practice, but evils rooted in the false doctrines which

Rome had adopted over the years. And so he began to concentrate his labors on the investigation of Scripture and the development of the truths of Scripture. Through strange and remarkable ways, God had preserved him from the fury of the Romish Church and from almost certain death at her hands for yet greater things.

It may be also that another inci-

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dent in his life was used by God to bring about this conversion. About this same time, Wycliffe became desperately ill, ill unto death. The friars and monks were sure he was going to die; and so they sent a delegation to him under a hypocritical pretense of seeking his spiritual welfare — while nothing would have delighted them more than that he die. They attempted to force him to recant all he had written and to make peace with the church. Though desperately ill, in sheer exasperation Wycliffe finally managed, with some help from a servant, to raise himself upon the bed. Glaring at the assorted friars and monks gathered about him, he assured them not only that he was going to recover from his illness, but that the Lord would spare him to do yet more harm to their evil cause. With these words he drove them from the room.

God did spare him. And God did spare him for yet greater things.

To turn his attention to doctrinal matters was no easy thing for Wycliffe to do, for there was a large price to pay for it. Because he refused to involve himself any longer in the affairs of the realm and in the battle to keep England's wealth from flowing into papal coffers, those who were only interested in this controversy with Rome lost interest in Wycliffe. First he lost the popularity of the people. Then the Duke of Gaunt was no longer interested in protecting him. And, finally, even his colleagues in Oxford refused to rise to his defense.

In 1381 the Peasants' Uprising occupied the attention of the nation, and very little effort was made to silence Wycliffe. But on May 17, 1382 a council of bishops met in London under the prodding of the pope to consider what to do with the pestilential teachings of John Wycliffe. Just as the council was beginning its meetings a rare and unusual earthquake struck London, causing many walls to collapse and stones to rain down from buildings on the streets. Wycliffe interpreted this to mean that the judgment of God was upon the council met together to condemn him; but the archbishop assured the assembly that

they should continue with their deliberations because the earthquake was proof that the awful teaching of Wycliffe had seeped into the ground and that now the earth had belched to rid itself of these foul doctrines. This council was, from that time on, known as the Earthquake Council.

The council succeeded in condemning Wycliffe, but did not dare to execute him. It prevailed upon Oxford to expel him, which also Oxford did, though reluctantly. And so John Wycliffe retired to his parish in Lutterworth where he spent the rest of his days preaching, teaching, and developing his theology.

It is really quite amazing how clearly John Wycliffe saw the truth almost 200 years before the Reformation.

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*Wycliffe ... saw clearly  
many truths which  
were not to become fully  
the possession of the church  
until the days of  
Luther and Calvin.*

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One great advantage which he had was access to a Bible in Oxford which, more and more with the passing of the years, attracted his attention and study. Another great advantage was two excellent teachers in his early years of study.

One of these teachers was a man by the name of Grosseteste, who hated and fought bitterly against the corruption of the church. At one time he wrote prophetically: "To follow a pope who rebels against the will of Christ is to separate from Christ and his body; and if ever the time should come when all men follow an erring pontiff, then will be the great apostasy ... and Rome will be the cause of an unprecedented schism." When the powerful Pope Innocent ordered Grosseteste to make his infant nephew a canon of Lincoln cathedral, Grosseteste flatly refused, with words which ring today in every church:

"After the sin of Lucifer there is none more opposed to the gospel than that which ruins souls by giving them a faithless minister. Bad pastors are the cause of unbelief, heresy and disorder."

Another excellent teacher which Wycliffe was given was Thomas Bradwardine, who because of his brilliance was called "Doctor Profundus" (the profound doctor). While able in philosophy and mathematics, he was above all a student of the Scriptures. It was Bradwardine who led Wycliffe to know the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God in grace over against all the Pelagianism in the Romish church. Bradwardine taught his students the grace of God as determinative in salvation, and he opposed fiercely the doctrine of the free will of man. In fact, he taught these doctrines as they applied also to election and predestination.

As Wycliffe developed his theology, he saw clearly many truths which were not to become fully the possession of the church until the days of Luther and Calvin. Some of the more important ones are worthwhile to list. Wycliffe was the first in centuries to teach the absolute authority of the Scriptures, over against the Romish error of the authority of the church. Wycliffe did battle too with Rome's doctrine that the church was the Romish hierarchy and institute. He taught instead (in a major breakthrough) that the church was the body of Christ and was composed only of the elect. It was in this connection that he also taught the truths of sovereign election and reprobation. Wycliffe opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation (something which particularly aroused the fury of Rome). He taught a spiritual presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper — although he was not very clear on what this meant. He repudiated the practices of Rome such as indulgences, the merit of pilgrimages, penance, etc. He denied that the church had the power to forgive sins and insisted that forgiveness came only from Christ. These were doctrines which, almost 200 years later,



became the foundation of the Reformation.

Wycliffe also put his teachings into practice. Beginning at Oxford, but continuing especially after he left Oxford for Lutterworth, Wycliffe began a translation of Scripture which he completed before his death. Although he did not know Scripture in its original languages, and translated Scripture from the Latin Vulgate, he gave a remarkably accurate translation which enabled the common people to hear the Scriptures in their language. We include here a few verses of his translation of Genesis 1—in the old English which he used.

In the firste made God of nougt heuene and erthe. The erthe forsothe was veyn with ynee and void, and derknessis weren vpon the face of the see; and the Spiryte of God was born vpon the watrys. And God seide, Be maad light; and maad is light. And God saw light, that it was good, and deuydid [divided] light fro derknessis; an clepide [called] light, day and derknessis, nygt. And maad is euen and moru [morn], o day. Seide forsothe God, Be maad a firmament in the myddel of watres, and duyde it watres from watrys.

It is difficult for us to imagine how these simple and familiar words must have thrilled the hearts of thousands when they heard them for the first time.

The translating of the Scriptures was also extremely dangerous, because the church had forbidden that the Scriptures be put into the language of the common people. Nevertheless, even though printing had not been invented, many copies must have been made laboriously by hand, for there are still nearly 170 hand-copied Wycliffe Bibles extant.

Wycliffe believed strongly in the importance of preaching, something almost unheard of in his times in the decay of the Romish Church. He not only preached in his parish, but already in Oxford he began to train preachers to go out among the people with the gospel. He continued this while in Lutterworth and, arming them with a copy of Scripture or a part of it, taught them to expound the

Word of God to the people. These traveling preachers became known as Lollards. While they were severely persecuted, they continued after Wycliffe's death and preserved his teachings until the Reformation finally broke upon England in the mid-1500s.

Although Wycliffe suffered a stroke when about 50 years old, he partially recovered from it and continued his writing, preaching, teaching, and the training of his beloved Lollards.

Finally, because the prelates in England seemed unable to do anything about Wycliffe, the pope himself summoned Wycliffe to Rome for trial. But Wycliffe had suffered his stroke and wrote a letter of decline. He suffered two more strokes, the last one in the pulpit, and finally left this life on December 31, 1384.

Schaff includes this description of Wycliffe in his *History of the Christian Church*:

Wyclif was spare, and probably never of robust health, but he was not an ascetic. He was fond of a good meal. In temper he was quick, in mind clear, in moral character unblemished. Towards his enemies he was sharp, but never coarse or ribald. William Thorpe, a young contemporary standing in the court of Archbishop Arundel, bore testimony that "he was emaciated in body and well-nigh destitute of strength, and in conduct most innocent. Very many of the chief men in England conferred with him, loved him dearly, wrote down his sayings and followed his manner of life."<sup>1</sup>

Chaucer wrote his famous "Canterbury Tales" about this time and included a section about Wycliffe. It is all the more forcible because Chaucer, a good Roman Catholic, had some biting words to say about friars and monks. We include this again in Old English.

A good man was ther of religioun  
And was a poure persoun of a  
toun

1 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. V, p. 324.

But riche he was of holy thought and werk.

He was also a lerned man, a clerk  
That Cristes gospel trewly wolde preche:

His parisshe devoutly wolde he teche.

Benygne he was and wonder diligent

And in adversitee ful pacient ...  
Wyd was his parisshe and houses  
fer asonder,

[the people to whom he ministered were widely scattered]

But he ne left nat for reyn ne thonder,

In siknesse nor in meschief to visite

the ferreste [furthest] in his parisshe,

muche and lite [rich and poor],  
Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf.

This noble ensample to his sheep  
he yaf [gave]

That first he wroghte and afterward he taughte;

Out of the gospel he those wordes caughte [took].

John Wycliffe was a great man of God. In the all-wise providence of God the Reformation of the 16th century would have been impossible without his work. He is the morning star indeed.

So hated was he by Rome that, although Rome was restrained in his lifetime from harming him, the church could not let his bones rest in peace. On October 9, 1427, on order of the Council of Constance (the same Council that burned John Huss at the stake), Wycliffe's body was exhumed, his bones burned, and the ashes strewn on the River Swift.

A later chronicler described this event in eloquent words.

They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus the brook conveyed his ashes into the Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas and they into the main ocean. And so the ashes of Wyclif are symbolic of his doctrine, which is now spread throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> □

2 Quoted from Schaff, p. 325.



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## Guest Article

# Report from the Contact Committee

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Since the Synod of 1991 finished its work, the Contact Committee has been busy implementing Synod's decisions and carrying out the normal work of the Committee. It is time that we report concerning our work.

The work which has occupied most of the Committee's time is the work in Singapore. The Synod of 1991 made some important and far-reaching decisions concerning our sister-church relations with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. One of these decisions involved appointing Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan to be the calling church for the calling of a minister-on-loan to labor in Singapore over an extended period of time. Another decision was to send a minister, if possible, for a period of four to six months to labor there as soon after Synod as possible.

In consultation with the Consistory of Hope Church, the Contact Committee decided to wait a few months with calling a minister-on-loan. The chief reason for this was: it seemed best to wait until we had secured someone to go to Singapore for four to six months to evaluate the work there before actually calling someone for an extended period of time.

God graciously granted us a man to go for six months. The Council of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church consented to release Rev. Kortering. The Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the Council and congregation of Grandville for releasing their minister for this important denominational work. Rev. Kortering is using the pastoral heart and the wisdom of experience which God has given him, to do the impor-

tant work that needed to be done to help with the problems which these new churches face.

Rev. and Mrs. Kortering are living in an apartment building which is almost exclusively Chinese. They have the opportunity to learn firsthand the Chinese culture, and, from what they report, they are enjoying this learning process for the most part. Rev. Kortering was stricken with a stomach problem for a while, a problem brought on more than likely by the diet of spicy foods which are so characteristic of some Oriental cuisine. But God restored him again, for which we are thankful.

The life of the Korterings is a very busy one. Rev. Kortering is preaching twice on the Lord's day, is serving as advisor on various committees, is doing his own share of visiting and pastoral work; he gave two Reformation Day lectures and conducted a six-week course dealing with some Reformed principles of church polity that are involved in the making of decisions by ecclesiastical assemblies.

Rev. Kortering and his wife are expected back in the States some time in the early part of March.

Plans are being made in the ERCS to prepare a student for coming to our country in order that he may acquire Seminary training with us. While the hope of the ERCS is to establish a Seminary in Singapore in the future, the time is not yet ripe for this.

We take this opportunity also to remind our people that the Synod of 1991 authorized our churches to take two collections for First Evangelical Reformed Church to assist them in their building project. So far as the committee knows, the actual work of

the erection of a new place of worship has not yet begun. The congregation has encountered several delays brought about by the government bureaucracy. But the congregation is sure that work will be able to begin shortly. The building will cost in excess of \$1,000,000.00 Singapore money (about half that in U.S. money). This is a great financial burden for the church there to take upon itself. Our churches willingly and eagerly assisted Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church when that congregation was purchasing a place of worship. And now we have the privilege and opportunity to assist First Church.

Synod also authorized the Contact Committee to secure, if possible, ministerial help for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Specifically, a request was made for ministerial help for the congregations in Launceston and Burnie. The Contact Committee has written to all of our consistories, asking them to release their minister for a period of time, but so far no supply has been obtained for these churches. In the meantime, the saints in Burnie are using video tapes for their worship services, something which they are enjoying more than audio tapes. It gives them an opportunity to "see" some of our ministers.

Two students from the EPC of Australia are presently in the Seminary. Their presence in Seminary gives a dimension to the classroom work which is appreciated by all the students and professors.

In November, Rev. Marvin Kamps was sent by our churches through the Contact Committee to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as an observer to the annual meeting of



NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). While he could not participate in the decision-making processes, he had opportunity to address the assembly, give some information about our churches, and speak with various delegates. One interesting aspect of NAPARC's work is its decision to ask the Christian Reformed Church (also a member) to reconsider its decisions on women in ecclesiastical office.

The Contact Committee received an invitation to send observers to the November meeting of the Christian Reformed Alliance, held in Lynwood, Illinois. This organization is an orga-

nization of Christian Reformed conservatives formed to assist, give direction to, and coordinate the activities of churches who are considering leaving the Christian Reformed Church. The Committee decided not to send such observers, believing that the decision was weighty enough that Synod ought first to speak on the matter.

Material is also being sent out in the hopes that this will result in additional contacts. Six subscriptions to the *Standard Bearer* were sent to ministers in Hungary and Romania. Rev. Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* and *Triple Knowledge* were

sent to a minister in Prague.

There is always a great deal of work to be done, as many in this land and abroad are concerned about the apostasy that prevails in so many denominations. As the Contact Committee works in these areas to establish relationships with faithful people of God, the members see their need of wisdom from on high to serve the churches in this important work. We seek the prayers of our fellow saints.

Fraternally in Christ,  
Contact Committee,  
H. Hanko, Secretary

## Contribution

# Developments in the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland

Since the last report regarding the Covenant Reformed Fellowship appeared in the *Standard Bearer*, we have moved our worship services from Larne to Ballymena. The reason for our move was the greater interest shown in that area, both in our special midweek meetings and in responses to our newspaper adverts for free booklets.

Our decision to move to Ballymena has been vindicated by the increasing number of visitors who are attending our worship services. We now have two new families and four individuals who are regularly attending our evening worship service. There is a great appreciation amongst our visitors for the preaching which they hear and an understandable resentment of the fact that their own ministers who claim to be Calvinistic and Reformed have so abjectly failed to declare the whole counsel of God to them.

Apart from our worship services on a Sunday, we continue with our midweek Bible study on the Belgic Confession. We also have five catechism classes for our children and young people. As part of our outreach work we frequently hold special public midweek meetings at which one of the visiting Protestant Reformed ministers preaches a sermon on a subject of special interest. We advertise these meetings widely and send out letters of invitation to those on our mailing list. Our last special meeting was held during the month of November when Rev. Cammenga was with us. His subject was "Biblical Amillennialism." We were pleased to have eighteen visitors in attendance at this meeting.

We have commenced over the past year to place brief articles in the newspapers. Subjects dealt with have been, "What Is the Battle For the Presbyterian Church?", "May a Presbyte-

rian Church Refuse to Baptize Infants?", and "What It Means to be Reformed." At the end of the article we offer a free booklet which deals with the subject in greater detail. The number of requests resulting from these three adverts is in excess of one hundred.

Apart from the collective outreach work of the Fellowship, each member is involved in the work of evangelism through the distribution of sermons on tapes, free booklets, and the sale of R.F.P.A. books to friends and relatives.

Alongside the numerical growth of our Fellowship and the encouraging results from our outreach work, we are conscious that under the faithful ministry of various Protestant Reformed ministers, we ourselves have grown spiritually both in our knowledge of and love for God and for one another.

We feel a deep sense of gratitude



to our gracious, sovereign God that, while many of our brethren and sisters in Christ remain in churches where the glorious truth of God's sovereignty is not proclaimed, it has pleased Him through the means of the Protestant Reformed Churches to give unto us preaching that is thoroughly biblical and therefore distinctively Reformed.

We would like to take this opportunity publicly to thank the Protestant Reformed Churches for all the help they have given us over the past four years. We are, as far as the church world is concerned, a small group of insignificant people, hardly worthy, many would think, of the sacrifices you have made on our behalf. We should especially like to thank the Mission Committee, Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Rev. VanBaren, and those ministers who have been willing to come over and help us.

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*Our growth<sup>and</sup>  
and establishment  
as a congregation depends on  
our securing a man  
to work among us.*

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While it is true that many good things can be said about the work here, we must together face up to the fact that all is not well. One thing we lack. Despite being designated a mission field in June, 1990 and the call to labor here being issued to eight different ministers, we do not yet have a missionary. This is a matter of great concern for us, as it must also be for the Protestant Reformed Churches if they are serious about doing mission work. Much has been done to secure a minister for this field. More can be done. We make this plea. To the members of the calling church: make

the matter of whom you should call the subject of serious consideration and prayer.

To the ministers who are called: consider the greatness of our need. Our growth and establishment as a congregation depends on our securing a man to work among us.

To the members of churches whose ministers are called: consider the possibility that our need may be greater than yours. If that is the case, it is your duty to encourage your minister to accept the call to labor in our fellowship. Such self-sacrifice will not go unrewarded (Luke 18:29, 30).

To all members of the Protestant Reformed Churches and all who love the Bride of Christ, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:38). □

*John Clarke, Sec'y.*  
Covenant Reformed Fellowship

## Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Bernard  
Woudenberg

# Conditional Theology

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

*Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Ephesians 2:8-10

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Rev. Woudenberg is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The days following Dr. Klaas Schilder's visit to the United States were exciting days. A new sense of enthusiasm seemed to fill the churches. After all, being visited by Dr. Schilder, a man who so recently had been the most noted theologian in The Netherlands, gave to our churches a degree of recognition which we had long been denied. And even more, with the promise of a new flood of post-war immigration, it seemed altogether likely that those who came from the Liberated churches would be joining ours. Then at last we might have that kind of growth for which we had long hoped but had never known. All of this was stimulating, and a resurgence of in-

terest in church and theology began to take place.

But not everything was as positive as it might have seemed. Some of what was happening, at least to the more discerning, did not forebode good, and that for a number of reasons.

Perhaps the most evident of these was the rise of voices within our churches in defense of conditional theology.

In many ways this was surprising. After all, our churches had been built on a foundation of particular and sovereign grace. The difference between those who are children of God and those who are not is due not to their own superiority or initiative,



but purely to the grace of God. It is the grace of an unconditional election which summons, maintains, and consummates the salvation of God's people, so that when all is done the Christian can only say that it is not his doing but the grace of God which works in him [I Cor 15:10]. This exalting of divine grace, rather than emphasis upon the importance of human effort, had always marked our churches. It had been taught by Rev. Hoeksema to all of his students; and was expected to be preached from every pulpit.

Now, however, a different sound was being heard. In spite of all that had been said in the past, it was being suggested that this grace of God can quite properly be spoken of as conditional, and that on a number of different levels. To begin with, the covenant itself can be looked upon as being essentially bilateral, or two-sided. On the one side is the promise of God; but on the other must be found an emphasis upon the responsibility of man. In turn, the same can be said of the Gospel which calls men into the covenant of grace. The church is called to proclaim that Gospel to all men; and, if so, it must be done conditionally. Every person must be called by the Gospel, but it is a call which must be conditionally expressed. Each must be told he will be saved *if he will believe*; and that "if" is the important thing. The promise of salvation is for all, suspended upon a condition which man must fulfill. Otherwise one really can't do mission work at all. It is necessary to encourage some to conversion, and to leave others responsible for their unbelief. And then, finally, there was the matter of sanctification. How else can covenant people be encouraged to turn from the ways of the world and live Christian lives? It can only be, the claim was made, if we lay before each one the conditions of the covenant, but with promises for those who obey and a curse for those who do not. Each must be warned to keep the conditions of the covenant, or he will become a covenant-breaker.

These were strange sounds, quite

different from those which had been heard in our churches through the years. In many ways they seemed to stand in contradiction to what had before been taught; but this was denied. Only the emphasis was different, it was said. It was just that new elements were being seen that had not been recognized before. Sovereign grace and conditionality could both be maintained together. And so the argument went on.

That was not all. Perhaps not so evident, but even more ominous, was the sound of complaint beginning to be heard against the preaching of predestination.

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*Rev. Hoeksema ... set forth  
predestination as a  
warm and tender  
relationship of love  
rather than a cold, legalistic  
arrangement of power.*

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Possibly it is a natural thing, always to be expected. Throughout the history of the church, predestination has not been well accepted. Even Paul, in the book of Romans, had to take great pains to defend it. But, nevertheless, Reformed theology generally, as in the Canons of Dordt, and the Protestant Reformed churches in particular, have always maintained these truths with strength. This, after all, was what the origin of the Protestant Reformed churches was about. Common Grace was an effort to escape the restrictions of predestination, and we protested against it, calling ourselves, at first, the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches because of this.

In turn, Rev. Hoeksema particularly went on to develop the positive side of this doctrine. By combining predestination with the doctrine of the covenant, and defining the covenant in terms of the relationship of friendship which God through election establishes with His people, he was able to set forth predestination as

a warm and tender relationship of love rather than a cold, legalistic arrangement of power. For years these truths had sounded forth forcefully from the pulpits of our churches and had served to establish a rich and satisfying life where it was heard.

Now, however, it was being called inadequate. People were tired, it was said, of hearing about election and reprobation. They wanted something different. It wasn't that they disagreed; they just didn't want to hear it anymore. They wanted something more.

And that led, in effect, to what was perhaps the least evident, but possibly the most serious problem of all, a call for practical preaching.

This was in itself hardly new. Already in 1924 Rev. Hoeksema had warned concerning the danger of worldliness which would come with Common Grace. And, although the Christian Reformed Church had adopted this doctrine anyway, in 1928 they tried to stem what was becoming a growing tide of worldliness by drawing up regulations forbidding people to engage in worldly activities, such as card playing, dancing, and movies. The result was that there was soon to be heard within their churches numerous thundering sermons designed to warn people against doing those things which their synod forbade. In many instances these sermons were quite popular; and requests were soon heard in our churches for sermons of like kind. But Rev. Hoeksema would have nothing of it. For deep, principle reasons, which not everyone understood, he saw such to be contrary and counter-active to the true working of sanctification and grace.

It went back to what he believed to be the biblical warning against legalism. Sanctification can not be brought about by laying down laws for people to follow, or by telling them to do this and not that. It might seem to provide short-term results, but in the end it can only have a deadening effect. (In fact, one can go back through the hundreds of extant transcripts of Rev. Hoeksema's sermons, extending from the late twen-



ties to the mid-forties, and find little if any direct practical instruction of this kind.) He was a firm believer in the power of exegetical/doctrinal preaching. The people of God do not have to be told what is right and what is wrong; they know that. The need is in the motivation and incentive to do it; and that does not come from putting people under law. It must be planted by grace into the heart, by feeding them on the teachings (doctrines) of the Word of God. When people know

their Scriptures and love them, they will know to do the right and turn from doing wrong.

For years this had gone well. But now the objections were coming in. Again and again it was to be heard that people were tired of all of this doctrinal preaching. They needed something practical. For the first time in all of his years of extraordinary preaching, Rev. Hoeksema was being dealt with as uninteresting and dull. He wasn't practical enough.

Those were in many ways exciting days; but they were not good days. And few were more quickly conscious of this than was the Rev. George Ophoff, Rev. Hoeksema's fellow professor in the theological school. But those weren't good days for him either. With all of his humble quietness, and deep intellectual honesty, he was soon, it seemed, the least accepted of all. □

## Go Ye Into All the World

*Rev. Ronald VanOverloop*

What must the Reformed missionary and layman say when asked about the abounding wickedness in the world?

Sin seems to be unchecked, becoming worse and worse, and becoming increasingly open and blatant.

Before such wickedness the spiritually sensitive believer sometimes shudders. At other times he becomes angry at it all. At still other times he finds himself fearful, especially for his children. The godly parents often would like enough extra hands to cover the ears and eyes of their children.

The language of the store-clerks and stock-boys is becoming more foul. Words which used to be said quietly are now spoken loudly and without concern for those who hear them. Language which would be found only on the lips of hardened sinners (or of

young people trying to be tough) is now coming from the lips of young and innocent-looking children. To overhear some people talk is to hear the name of God misused and abused in every sentence. Language which used to cause ladies to blush is now spoken by women without a trace of shame.

Sexual innuendoes as well as explicit references to sex abound. First amendment rights and so-called truthfulness are appealed to as the basis for the fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh. Homosexuality has marketed itself so much and so well that the mention of it is common-place and it has virtually become accepted as an alternative life-style. The diseases and deaths which are commonly associated with adultery, fornication, and homosexuality abound.

The recent Thomas hearings made obvious both the deceit and guile of those in high places and also the shameless openness in speaking of that which belongs to the quiet of the marriage bedroom.

More and more families in the world are being ravaged by hatred and by the lack of godly love.

Need we detail any more examples to prove what every reader already knows?

Shame and consequent blushing are increasingly rare.

Is it worse now than ever before?

There have been times in history when the moral climate seems to have been just as bad as what it is today. However, it was usually isolated in individual cities or nations. The moral corruption of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the Roman Empire, was very, very great. It was so great that in both cases God brought judgment. In Sodom and Gomorrah the sin was so great that the judgment was swift and absolute, and so destructive that their ruins cannot be located.

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When observing iniquity abounding and becoming increasingly open, the sensitive soul is sometimes heard to ask, "Does God know what is going on? Is He watching? Why does He wait to bring judgment against such flagrant sinfulness?" In light of such sinfulness, the Christian is sometimes asked, "If there is a God, then why does He allow so much sin?"

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Why does He allow shooting sprees like those recently in the restaurant in Texas and on the campus of the University of Iowa? Why does He allow so much crime, adultery, and abortion to take place? Or the Christian hears the statement, "No good God would permit such obvious sinfulness."

We must be ready to give an answer. The missionary certainly will face these questions. Many individual Christians are also asked such questions by their acquaintances.

The answer of the Reformed missionary and believer begins with an acknowledgment of the horror of sin and of sinfulness and with a presentation of the teaching of Romans 1: 18-32. This section of God's Word teaches that it is the wrath of God which causes sin to "prosper" in what it wills.

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*... for sin's seemingly  
unchecked growth  
is God's judicial  
abandonment of man  
unto sin.*

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Contrary to appearances, God is not waiting. He is not reserving judgment upon the wickedness of man. He is not merely standing by watching man sin freely and willingly.

We must realize that the sinner not only does what he pleases, but also he "prosper" more than he planned. He cannot stop! It is as if all sinful men, by nature, make a running jump onto their sleds on the slippery hill of sin. They begin their ride in great excitement, thrilled at the speed of the ride. But the smile becomes frozen and the shouting ceases as they realize that they are going faster and faster, that they are out of control, and that they cannot stop, but will go over a precipice. They had seen the precipice from the beginning, but did not realize that they could go so far and so fast.

The power that pulls man down is the unchangeable operation of the

wrath of God. Romans 1 teaches clearly that sin's development is precisely proof that God is and that He hates sin, for sin's seemingly unchecked growth is God's judicial abandonment of man unto sin. God's wrath corresponds to the organic growth of sin, which can never stop until it destroys man. This is evident most clearly in the world as a whole, and in specific societies corporately, and to varying degrees in individual persons.

In his ride on "Sin's Express" man is without excuse. He cannot blame God. He cannot say that he did not know any better.

Sinners *know* the truth. God (not just anybody) showed it unto them (Romans 1:19). What may be known of God is manifest "in them" (vs. 19). God's power and deity are "clearly seen, being understood" (vs. 21). They know better, for they hold down the truth (vs. 18), and change the truth of God into a lie (vs. 25). They *refuse* to glorify and to thank God. Still more, they *know* that they which commit unrighteousness "are worthy of death" because of "the judgment of God" (vs. 32).

They willingly determine not to acknowledge and to glorify God.

Therefore "the wrath of God is revealed ... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

How is this wrath of God manifested? What does this wrath of God do? First, it causes men to become "vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." God, in His wrath, makes them foolish. They become morally and spiritually frustrated; they become destitute of spiritual understanding, and completely incapable of spiritual insight. Man's folly is evident in his idolatry. He who was made lord of creation is humiliated, as he bows before, trusts in, and expects help from a creature lower than himself. That man actually begins to believe in the idols he makes is the result of God's wrath. If men will not serve their Creator, then God will make them to be fools.

When natural man goes the next step and changes the glory of the

incorruptible God into that of corruptible creatures, then God's wrath "gives them up" to uncleanness.

This Divine giving over (verses 24, 26, 28) does not mean that God simply abandons them after first restraining them. These verses do not teach that God let them go after holding them back. First, the One performing this activity is not a human who has little or no control over another human, but He is the sovereign Lord. Secondly, the word literally means "to push down, to deliver up." This is the word which is used for delivering a prisoner, whom you do not let go to walk to his cell by himself. This word is used to describe the activity of delivering Christ into the hands of wicked men.

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*While increased sin  
is the consequence of  
God's "giving them over,"  
the only cause of this sin  
is human perversity.*

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In His wrath God delivers men unto sin. A natural law of consequence operating in sin is that sin, already present, intensifies. The road of the world is sin, wrath, more sin, more wrath, still more sin, and still more wrath, etc. God's wrath is presently operating in the world with the effect that sin is punished with more sin. The result is that mankind reaps for itself a correspondingly greater toll of Divine vengeance.

How does God give man over to more and worse sin without Himself becoming the Author of sin? While increased sin is the consequence of God's "giving them over," the only cause of this sin is human perversity. God gives them over through "the lusts of their own hearts" (verse 24). Also, man sins willingly, for he *does not want* to know God (vs. 28), and he delights in sin (vs. 32).

What began as corruption in the mind and heart (vs. 21) ends with corruption in the body. This "uncleanness" (vs. 24) to which God gives



them over consists of sexual aberrations, especially homosexuality. However grievous is adultery, the degeneration of homosexuality is a greater degeneracy.

God is not standing idly by, for His wrath is evident in man's greater sinfulness. This is *the* explanation for the growth of sin and immorality seen everywhere today. God brings man as low as possible, in order that man might see the consequences of his sin. Man falls below the beast, making a calf his god. And, sexually, man does things that the beast would never do.

God's wrath upon sin culminates in that unrighteous men "not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them," all the while "knowing the judgment of God that they which commit such things are worthy of death" (verse 32). The depth of evil is reached when sinners, and the society in which they live, are so devoid of shame that they encourage sins in others. Someone who feels shame may still be healed; but when there is no shame, then there is little hope. Jeremiah asks, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush; therefore they shall fall among them that fall" (Jeremiah 6:15). Such a people "rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked" (Proverbs 2:14).

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The Reformed missionary and the Reformed believer do have an answer when they see iniquity abounding, and when they are asked about the seemingly unchecked development of sin. They speak of the wrath of God.

Is there any more the Reformed saint can do or say?

Does the presence of the wrath of God leave us powerless and silent? Does this mean that all evangelistic effort on our part is futile?

It is not realistic to try to reform the world. To try to do so would be to share in the vanity of imagination and foolishness of heart.

Shall we preach damnation and hell-fire and scare men into abandon-

ing their sinful ways? Such would not work, for corporately man has great delight in his own sin and in others' sins. Sinful mankind would rather go to hell than abandon sin.

Should we conclude that it is hopeless and futile because God's wrath is at the bottom of it all?

From the viewpoint of man it is! It is hopeless because man cannot stop the wrath of God. We *must* confess that it is hopeless from man's viewpoint.

But it is not totally hopeless!

The only power that can stop one's slide down the slippery hill of sin and wrath is the Gospel.

The wickedness is so great that only God is able to rescue. This He did in Christ. The righteous, by faith in this work of God in Christ, live.

The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation! It is the power that lifts individuals up and out of harm's way. It is the power to stop the out-of-control slide of the individual elect and to separate them from the mass of falling mankind. This power is exercised both initially in regenerating and repeatedly in the Christian's life. This tremendous power is the only thing that separates me from the mass of fellow-men. In myself I wanted to stay, but God made me to differ. Hallelujah!

The Gospel is this tremendous power because it reveals the righteousness of God in Christ. Christ's righteousness, which is imputed by God's free grace to the elect sinner, is the power to destroy the power of sin and to lift man up into the glory of everlasting life. Just as God takes the testimony of His wrath in creation and carries it into the heart of every man, so He takes the testimony of the Gospel about His Son and applies it into the heart of His elect.

My being not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ means that I have an answer for those who are under the wrath of God. I do not know who among my neighbors, to whom I must witness, is an elect of God. I do not need to know. I am responsible only to obey my God's command to witness of the righteousness of God in

Christ, which is revealed in the Gospel. This I will do unashamedly.

Let us not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, not even in the face of so much sin and sinfulness. And let us give an answer, an explanation, along with a reason to hope. □

## Why

Do you ever stop to wonder why

God placed you where you are in life?

Does it seem as if all things

Reverse themselves from the way you plan?

Your daily chores —

Your heartaches —

Your gropings and fears —

Your sorrows and tears —

Do you wonder why

they've come to *you*?

The Master Builder

smooths each rough-cut stone

And readies it throughout the years

That it may smoothly fit;

Yea, none other could replace it.

My life alone will *me*

prepare

For my place in th' eternal edifice —

The church triumphant, at the crystal sea.

Then I shall know —

The All-wise God will show —

Why each phase of my life was a necessity.

Thelma Westra

Faith PRC, Jenison, MI



## Decency and Order

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

# Types of Ecclesiastical Assemblies

*Four kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the consistory, the classis, (the particular synod), and the general synod.*

*Church Order, Article 29.*

Article 29 introduces the second main section of the *Church Order* which deals with the ecclesiastical assemblies. By "assemblies" is meant official meetings of duly elected and delegated officebearers in order to conduct the business of the church. These assemblies are of four "kinds." There are not four "ranks" or "orders" of assemblies in the Reformed churches, but four "kinds." The language of the *Church Order* is deliberate. At the very outset of its treatment of the broader assemblies, the *Church Order* is concerned to guard against the danger of hierarchy.

### Historical Development of Ecclesiastical Assemblies

From the beginning, consistory meetings were held in the churches of the Reformation. Under Calvin's leadership, there were weekly consistory meetings in Geneva. This practice was followed by almost all the Reformed churches on the continent. Our own *Church Order*, Article 37, calls for weekly consistory meetings, as a general rule.

The first synodical meetings were attempted by the French Reformed churches. In 1558 a number of French Reformed ministers gathered

at the church of Poitiers in order to discuss the need for regular synodical meetings. In 1559, in the midst of fierce persecution, a synod was convened at St. Germain, a suburb of Paris.

The earliest Dutch Reformed synods were the Walloon Synods (1555-1556). The Walloon churches were in Southern Netherlands and were largely French speaking. These synods were often designated by such names as "The Synod at the Vine," or "The Synod at the Flowerbud." Evidently this was intended to keep the meeting place of the synods a secret due to the threat of persecution. These names were usually associated with the official seal of the church at which they were held.

One of the earliest synods of the Dutch churches was the Synod of Wezel, 1568. This synod met in Wezel, Germany because of the persecution in The Netherlands. The Synod of Wezel convened on November 3, 1568 and was composed of a group of Dutch Reformed leaders from some 20 churches. This synod drew up the first *Church Order* of the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands, advised the immediate creation of classes, and strongly emphasized that the churches must not only be united doctrinally, but also in polity.

The Synod of Embden was convened in 1571. Once again, the meeting place was on the border between Germany and The Netherlands because of the threat of persecution. The Synod of Embden was the first Dutch Reformed synod to be composed of officially delegated ministers and elders. Kasper VanDerHeyden, pastor of the church

in Frankenthal, was the president. Besides adopting a *Church Order*, the synod included in its official minutes a section in which answers were given to specific questions presented by various churches to the synod. The Synod of Embden was also the first synod to draw up classical boundaries.

The Provincial Synod of Dordrecht, 1574, was the first synod to be held on Dutch territory. Although technically it was a particular synod, composed mainly of delegates from the provinces of Holland and Zeeland, it was for all practical purposes a general synod of the Dutch churches. Later synods would recognize its decisions and even appeal to them as precedent in matters of liturgy and church polity. The synod met from June 16, 1574 until June 28. Casper Heijdanus served as president. Classical boundaries were reorganized and it was decided that the classes should meet once a month.

The National Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, was the first truly national synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. A major focus of the synod was the issue of the relationship between church and state. The synod met from June 2-18, 1578. This was the first synod to specify four kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies, as does our present Article 29.

### Kinds of Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The most fundamental of all ecclesiastical assemblies is the consistory. The Latin word "consistorium" refers to a meeting place, and thus to those who gather at this place for a meeting. The consistory

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consists of the ministers and elders, and in small congregations the deacons (cf. *Church Order*, Article 37), of the local congregation. In the Presbyterian tradition the consistory is equivalent to the session. The common Dutch designation of the consistory is *kerkeraad*, that is, "church council." This is perhaps to be preferred to the designation "consistory." It is more descriptive and it is a confessional term: "We believe, that this true Church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in His Word; namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the sacraments; also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the Church ..." (Belgic Confession, Art. 30).

The consistory is the only ecclesiastical assembly specifically mentioned in Scripture. In I Timothy 4:14 the "presbytery" is the council of the ruling elders, the consistory. Other passages speak of the elders as a body: Acts 20:17, 28; I Timothy 5:17; I Peter 5:1-3; Matthew 16:19; Hebrews 13:7, 17.

Besides the consistory, Article 29 refers to the classis. The word "classis" is also a Latin word and refers to a certain class or division of people, as for example in the military or government. In Reformed church polity a classis (plural: classes) refers to a meeting of a group of churches in a certain region. In the Presbyterian tradition the classis is equivalent to the presbytery. The classis is ordinarily composed of a minister and an elder delegated from each consistory that is a member of the classis.

Article 29 also makes reference to the particular synod, sometimes referred to as the provincial or regional synod, since the boundaries of the particular synod usually coincided with the boundaries of the provinces in The Netherlands. The provincial synods were gatherings of delegates from a number of neighboring classes. Because it did not have particular synods, the revision of the *Church Order* by the Christian Reformed

Church in 1914 put the reference to the particular synod in parentheses.. The most recent revision of the *Church Order* by the Christian Reformed Church has dropped all reference to the particular synod and, thus, makes reference to only three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies. The Protestant Reformed Churches do not either have provincial synods.

The last ecclesiastical assembly referred to is the general synod. The word "synod" is derived from the Greek and refers literally to "a coming together, an assembly, a meeting." The general assembly is sometimes referred to as the national synod. In the Presbyterian tradition the general assembly is equivalent to the synod. The synod is the denomination-wide assembly composed of an equal number of minister and elder delegates from each classis. Our general synod meets annually, although the early synods of the Christian Reformed Church met only once every two years.

#### Ecumenical Synod

No mention is made in Article 29 of an ecumenical or universal synod, although the Reformed churches of the 16th and 17th centuries supported the idea of the convening of such a synod.

John Calvin was strongly in favor of an ecumenical synod of Reformed churches. In letters written to the English Reformer, Thomas Cranmer, and the Swiss Reformer, Heinrich Bullinger, he proposed such an ecumenical synod. In one place he wrote, "I would not shrink from crossing ten seas, should that be necessary, for the purpose of attending such a gathering .... I am of the opinion that neither energy nor pains should be spared."

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*Although no ecumenical  
or international synod  
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In Scotland and England the desire to have international meetings of Presbyterian and Reformed churches was expressed in a number of significant documents. "The Second Book of Discipline" of the Church of Scotland, 1578, mentions four ecclesiastical assemblies: one consisting of "particular kirks and congregations," another of a province, a third one of the whole nation, and finally "of all divers nations professing one Jesus Christ." The English "Book of Discipline," 1578, closes with the following statement: "Thus much for particular meetings, the universal followeth, which is called a general or ecumenical council, which is a meeting of the chosen men of every national synod." "The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government," 1645, states under the heading "Of Synodical Assemblies": "Synodical assemblies may lawfully be of several sorts, as provincial, national, and ecumenical."

Although no ecumenical or international synod is mentioned in our *Church Order*, it certainly is something worth considering, especially with our sister churches. Undoubtedly there are questions of the practicality of such a gathering, and of the powers that such a synod would exercise. But the concept itself is something worth discussing.

#### Principles of Church Federation

Article 29 presupposes the principles of church federation. There are at least three such principles fundamental for church federation.

The deepest principle of church federation is the unity of the church. (Cf. John 17:20, 21; Rom. 12:4, 5; I Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:35.) Although this unity is primarily doctrinal, a oneness of faith, it is also expressed institutionally. The Independents have always denied the necessity for manifesting the unity of the church organizationally and have never been in favor of major assemblies with binding authority. But the Reformed churches have always applied the biblical principle of the unity of the church to the calling of the local congregation



to be denominationally federated with likeminded churches. The basis for such unity, then, is the mutual belief in the teachings of the Word of God and the acceptance of the Reformed confessions.

A second fundamental principle of church federation is the autonomy of the local congregation. Within the federation of churches each local congregation remains autonomous, that is, self-governing. Membership in the denomination is not something imposed on the local congregation, but a matter of free and willing choice. VanDellen and Monsma state, "The local congregation is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ, a unit by itself, and is not to be looked upon as a sub-division of a large super-Church ruling with superior power" (*The Church Order Commentary*, p. 133). Steadfast insistence on the autonomy of the local congregation protects against hierarchy. In this section that deals with the ecclesiastical assemblies, the *Church Order* will be at pains to uphold the principle of the autonomy of the local congregation.

It is also a fundamental principle of church federation that major

assemblies exercise a binding authority. Even though congregations freely join the denomination, decisions of the broader assemblies within the denomination are not to be regarded merely as friendly advice "without teeth." By virtue of the church federation, decisions of the broader assemblies are binding. The broader assemblies do exercise authority within the federation. The minor assemblies must honor this authority of the broader assemblies. Consistories, for example, must submit to and implement the decisions of the synod. Refusal to do so not only leads to chaos in the churches, but is rebellion against the authority of Christ. If a consistory and congregation are convinced that a decision of the broader assembly is unbiblical, it has two alternatives: exercise the right of protest and appeal; if ultimately this proves to be of no avail, sever their relationship with the federation.

#### Benefits of Church Federation

Not only is church federation a duty, but it is also of great benefit, practically and spiritually, to the local congregation. These benefits are rea-

son enough to favor church federation. Time and time again history has proved that independentism is a deadend street, ecclesiastical suicide.

What are some of the benefits of church federation? Let me mention just a few. Church federation provides opportunity for the broader building up of the body of Christ and ministering to the needs of fellow saints in other congregations. It provides the ability to carry out aspects of the church's calling that would be well-nigh impossible to carry out alone, such as the training of young men for the ministry and mission work. Denominational federation makes possible the moral and financial assistance of smaller congregations that would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to exist alone. In addition, within the denomination, provision is made for those congregations without ministers. One of the most outstanding benefits of church federation is that the assemblies of the denomination provide the opportunity for the resolution of difficulties that may arise in the local congregation, through the process of protest and appeal. □

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Carl Haak

## Malachi

### Lesson 4

# God's Covenant of Life and Peace

## Malachi 2:1-10

Malachi's method in exposing the sins of his day was to hold those sins up before the light of God's gracious goodness to His people, thus exposing the horribleness of their sin as it is seen against that background. Later in the prophecy he gives a list of the sordid sins being committed (ch. 3:5). Here, however, he expresses the

depth of those sins, not by going into all the details, but by holding them up before the light of the righteousness and goodness of God. This is proper, for sin's horror is not measured by how many people it harms or how far-reaching the consequences might be. Rather, you and I must know the ugliness of sin by seeing it against the

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background of God's holiness and goodness.

Malachi advances step by step in exposing the sins of the people. His first word, you remember, was, "I have loved you" (ch. 1:1, 2). How awful is spiritual apathy when revealed against the background of God's sovereign love! He continued by holding up the Fatherhood and majesty of God over against the cold, formalistic worship of that day (ch. 1:6, 7). Now, in chapter two, Malachi reveals yet more of God's goodness and holiness. "My covenant was with him of life and peace" (vs. 5). The darkness of the sin of Malachi's day was exactly that the people, and especially the priests, had corrupted the covenant of God, departed out of its way, and caused many to forsake it.

It will be important for us to understand the truth of the covenant as well as the covenant calling set before us in this passage. Briefly the passage points out the following truths on the covenant:

1) The covenant is a living bond of fellowship between God and us in which we walk with God in peace and equity, and God grants us life and peace. The word "covenant" means "bond," "union," and implies the most intimate love and fellowship.

2) The covenant is established (made) by God. This is because it is His covenant: "My covenant was with him." Also, the part of the covenant which is ours, namely to walk with God, is something that God gives to us by grace (vs. 5).

3) God speaks of the covenant with Levi. Galatians 3, Romans 9, and other passages teach that there is one covenant of God in all ages, even as there is one God. The covenant with Levi refers especially to Numbers 25:12, 13, and emphasizes that all the elect, as members of the covenant, are as Levites and priests, that is, dedicated to God and zealous for His glory.

4) In the covenant we have a calling, namely to reverence our God, walk with our God, and teach others the ways of God.

Now the covenant was being

corrupted in the most horrible ways. First, Malachi singles out the priests who, rather than being shining examples of dedication and zeal for God, were instead guilty of dead formalism in their worship (vs. 2), and guilty of injustice in administering the law (vs. 9). Secondly, the entire people profaned the covenant in dealing treacherously with their brothers (vs. 10; see also ch. 3:5). Notice carefully, when God's people are characterized by injustice or deceit in their dealings with one another, it is God's covenant that is profaned. For the covenant does not deal only with our relationship to God, but also with our relationships together as the friends of God.

Jehovah always takes His covenant seriously. Nothing is dearer to His heart. The warnings given are severe and frightening (see vss. 2, 3, 9).

Now we must examine ourselves in the light of these words, "My covenant was with him of life and peace." How does our day-by-day life measure up to the gracious calling to be dedicated and zealous for Jehovah, our sovereign Friend and Savior? How do our lives with one another as covenant members stand before this truth? May the study of the passage increase in us reverence for God's covenant, a closer walk with God, and a faithful life with one another as members of His covenant?

### Memory Work

Malachi 2:5-8

*My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.*

*The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.*

*For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.*

*But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts.*

### Questions for Study

1. We should begin with a brief study of what is meant by "My covenant was with him of life and peace." The profaning of the covenant is the main charge laid against the priests in the chapter, as well as against the people (vss. 11-17). Only when we understand the covenant can we see the horribleness of corrupting the covenant, but also the blessedness of the covenant for our daily lives.

a. Read Genesis 15; Jeremiah 31:31-40; 32:36-44; Hebrews 8:8-13. Then answer the following:

1) What is God's covenant?

2) How were covenants made? (See Gen. 15:9-17; Jer. 34:18.) What significance is found in this?

3) How is God's covenant made with us?

4) What is emphasized when it is added that the covenant is one "of life and peace"?

b. Malachi points out the calling we have in the covenant of God (vss. 5-8). Show from the passage these three elements of our calling and explain them.

1) Reverence for God —

2) Walking with God —

3) Instructing others in the ways of God —

c. Malachi speaks of the "covenant with Levi." Read Numbers 25:1-13.

1) How many covenants of God are there? (See Gen. 17:7; Rom. 4:11, 16; Gal. 3:9, 16.)

2) What does the covenant of Levi emphasize concerning our calling in God's covenant? (See also I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6.)

2. The corruption of the covenant by the priests.

a. After reading the passage make a list of the ways in which the priests profaned God's covenant.

b. What should the priests have done as members of God's covenant? Apply this now to our calling as priests of God.

1) What does this say to officebearers in the church? Ministers? Elders? Etc.

2) What about officebearers in the home?



3. The people dealt treacherously with God's covenant by false dealings with their brothers (vs. 10).

a. Explain the force of the questions of verse 10.

b. How does the truth of the covenant bear on our dealings with one another as fellow members of the

covenant. Be as specific as you can, mentioning different areas of our lives with one another which will bear the stamp of God's covenant.

4. What are the warnings given from Jehovah against the corrupting of His covenant, and what do those warnings mean?

5. Explain what it means to lay these things to our heart and give glory to God's name (vs. 2).

6. "Laying these things to our heart," see now if you can write from memory our verses in Malachi 2:5-8!

□

## Book Review

First Corinthians, by Gordon H. Clark; The Trinity Foundation, 1991 [1975]; 349 pp., \$10.95, (paper). [Reviewed by Prof. H. Hanko.]

Gordon Clark has written a short, but orthodox, commentary on Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. It is a worthwhile work and is helpful in a study of this difficult part of Scripture. It can be used with profit by ministers who are preaching from this book, but also by any of God's people who are studying I Corinthians in their societies, their homes, or their personal Bible study.

It is a typical work of Clark: it is brief and to the point; its emphasis is on the objective thought without much consideration of homiletics or application; it contains an excursus here and there on a subject related to the text (e.g., Clark includes a section on eschatology in connection with his explanation of I Corinthians 15 and a section on wisdom in connection with chapter 2).

When the text is clear as to meaning, Clark offers no comment. When the text is difficult, Clark presents various views, but offers no explanation himself, persuaded that no good

explanation can be made. Usually he does this when, in his judgment, some historical data or allusions are lacking in the text. The reader will find examples of this in his treatment of the difficult passage in I Corinthians 15:29: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" The same is true of I Corinthians 11:4-7.

The reader will find the commentary helpful. □

## News From Our Churches

*Mr. Benjamin Wigger*

First a couple of items from our Christian schools.

Able Sanitation, a west Michigan refuse hauler, informed Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI that for the months July through September, 1991 the school recycled 1,300 pounds of office paper. Doing so, according to Able, saved 11.5 trees, prevented 39 pounds of pollution from entering the atmosphere, and

saved four months worth of electricity consumed by the average home. We can also report here that Heritage continues to advocate recycling, with each classroom having a container designated for recyclable paper.

The Fundraisers of Heritage designated the month of November as their "Mile of Pennies" month. Each class was challenged to bring in as many pennies as possible, with the ultimate goal being enough pennies to stretch one mile if laid end-to-end. Well, Heritage went the mile and then some. Besides the obvious monetary value, many lessons in saving, as well as math, were also learned. For your information, there are 16 pennies per foot, or 84,480 pennies in a mile. And

as of November 30 Heritage had collected \$886.88. (One can not help but wonder who had the responsibility of putting all those pennies into rolls.)

The Bands of Covenant Christian High School and Hope PR Christian School presented a concert at Covenant High on Wednesday, December 18.

### Evangelism Highlights

Rev. M. DeVries, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC led the Sioux Falls Bible Study on December 10, at Calvin Christian School in Sioux Falls, Iowa. A video, "God's of the New Age," was shown in connection with their study of the New Age Movement.

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



# THE STANDARD BEARER

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## Denominational Activities

A special combined Adult Bible Society meeting was held with the Peace PRC of Lynwood, IL and the South Holland PRC of South Holland, IL at Illiana Christian High School, December 10. Plans were to view a video on our churches' mission work in Jamaica.

Sunday evening, December 15th, many members of the west-Michigan churches gathered in the auditorium of the Hudsonville, MI PRC for the annual Young People's Christmas Singspiration. Mr. Gerald Kuiper led the audience in a good mixture of Psalter numbers and traditional Christmas music. The audience was also treated to several songs presented by the choir of Covenant Christian High School.

## Congregational Highlights

As you might imagine, the collection taken at the Singspiration at Hudsonville was for the up-coming

Young People's Convention this summer.

The young people belonging to the First PRC of Edgerton, MN are also busy sponsoring events to serve as fundraisers for this year's convention. In late November they sponsored a Soup Supper for their congregation for that reason. There was also a note in one of Edgerton's bulletins asking all young adults and young married couples to get together to discuss plans for a Young Adults' Bible Study. And a couple of weeks later there was an announcement encouraging all "Young Adults" to meet that night to begin discussing lesson 1 in Rev. Haak's "Studies in Philippians."

The Choral Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented their Christmas Concert in their church auditorium on December 22. An added plus for those who attended the concert was a chance to view Faith's building project firsthand. It's

quite obvious that when next year's concert is given, the auditorium is going to look a lot different.

## Ministerial Calls

The congregation of the Hudsonville, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. VanOverloop to serve as missionary to Northern Ireland.

We end this issue of the news with a quotation lifted from a bulletin from the Loveland, CO PRC:

*"Faith is a lively and powerful thing; it is not merely a drowsy and idle thought; nor does it float somewhere upon the heart as a duck upon water, but it is like water heated through and through by a good hot fire."*

□

## NOTICE!!!

### Bible Study at Dordt College

A group of students dedicated to the historic Reformed faith plans to meet together again the second semester for a Bible study. The meetings, sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Churches in the area, are held on Monday evenings at 7:00 in the Dordt College library. Any student at Dordt is welcome to attend. The discussions last semester on the first three chapters of Genesis were excellent. At the first meeting, January 20, we plan to begin our discussion at Genesis 4. If you have any questions, please call Rev. Russ Dykstra (712) 726-3382.

## RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association expresses its sympathy to its fellow board member, Leon Garvelink, and family in the passing of his mother

**MRS. JOAN GARVELINK.**

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Cornelius Pastoor, President  
Cal Kalsbeek, Secretary

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

January 16, 1992 marks the 35th wedding anniversary of

**MR. and MRS. JIM SCHIPPER.**

Their children and grandchildren give thanks to God for the many gifts He has bestowed on us through them. May our covenant God richly bless them in the coming years.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children" (Psalm 90:16).

Gordon and Nancy Schipper

Dale

Dan and Julie Kaiser

Ross

Randy and Lindy Looyenga

Brent, Jared, Kristin

Nathan and Jill Kamps

Southwest Protestant Reformed Church